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THE IMPERIAL COMMITMENT

The Singapore Strategy in the Defence of Australia and New Zealand, 1939 - 1942.

by

Ian Hamill

September, 1974

A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts of the Australian National University.
This thesis is the result of my own research and all sources have been acknowledged.

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### Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>A.I.F.</td>
<td>Australian Imperial Force.</td>
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<td>A.L.P.</td>
<td>Australian Labour Party.</td>
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<td>C.I.D.</td>
<td>Committee of Imperial Defence.</td>
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<td>C.O.S.</td>
<td>Chiefs of Staff.</td>
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<td>C.P.D.</td>
<td>Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates.</td>
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<td>C.P.P.</td>
<td>Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers.</td>
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<td>E.A.T.S.</td>
<td>Empire Air Training Scheme.</td>
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<td>GGA</td>
<td>Governor-General of Australia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>GGNZ</td>
<td>Governor-General of New Zealand.</td>
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<tr>
<td>H. of C. Debs</td>
<td>United Kingdom Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, Fifth Series.</td>
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<tr>
<td>N.Z.E.F.</td>
<td>New Zealand Expeditionary Force.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PMA</td>
<td>Prime Minister of Australia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PMNZ</td>
<td>Prime Minister of New Zealand.</td>
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<tr>
<td>R.A.A.F.</td>
<td>Royal Australian Air Force.</td>
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<td>R.A.N.</td>
<td>Royal Australian Navy.</td>
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<td>R.N.</td>
<td>Royal Navy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSC</td>
<td>Secretary of State for the Colonies.</td>
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<td>SSDA</td>
<td>Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.A.P.</td>
<td>United Australia Party.</td>
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<td>U.S.N.</td>
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I alone am responsible for any errors of fact or interpretation.
INTRODUCTION

... whatever steps we may take to procure for this colony an adequate measure of external protection, let it never be forgotten that the first line of defence for every British colony in any part of the world ... is the narrow sea which divides Britain from Europe. That is our most important outwork, the key of our Imperial position, in the defence of which all Englishmen have a primary interest, and for which we must reserve our best ships and our best men. And, if we continue to attach any value to the name and the birthright which we have brought to these distant shores, we shall not grudge any sacrifice which shall insure the safety of that beloved land, which is the citadel of our race and the centre of our power.

Such were the views of a leading Melbourne newspaper, the *Argus*, in 1859. The Australian colonies, having attained self-government and the removal of commercial disabilities, were faced with the imminent withdrawal of British troops and had to consider their own responsibilities for defence. Eighty years later, Victoria, the colony in question, was one of the constituent parts of the Commonwealth of Australia, a fully autonomous dominion within the British Commonwealth of Nations. An enemy now most seriously threatened the key to the imperial position. On 10 May 1940 Nazi Germany launched its blitzkrieg against western Europe. In less than one month the Channel ports fell under German control. On 22 June an armistice provided for the occupation of a large area of France, including the northern and Atlantic coasts, by German troops. During the

1. The Melbourne *Argus*, 10 October, 1859.
anxious and hectic days of the Battle of Britain which followed, an official in the Australian Department of External Affairs took the time and trouble to copy out in longhand the eighty-year old editorial from the *Argus*. He placed the copy on file among papers dealing with the problem of Australia's immediate defence. In New Zealand, too, the government and people were eager to match the United Kingdom's 'Dunkirk spirit' and would have found the extract an equally valuable guide to policy.

The attitude of Australia and New Zealand to the military disasters in Europe in 1940 can be understood only in terms of their commitment to the principles of imperial defence; any threat to the British Isles, it was believed, was a threat to the existence of the whole British Empire and therefore to the security of the Pacific dominions. It was for this reason that the governments of Australia and New Zealand had co-operated fully with the allied war effort from the outbreak of the second world war: their warships were placed under the control of the Admiralty, their troops sent to the Middle East and their air forces employed largely in training crews for operation with the Royal Air Force. In return for their co-operation in this imperial system the dominions had been promised the protection of the Royal Navy. Australia and New Zealand relied for their defence on the Singapore strategy: the notion that in the event of a threat to British interests in the Far East a British

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2. CRS A981 item Defence 59, part 4.
3. See below, p. 105.
fleet would sail out from European waters and, basing itself on modern and efficient naval facilities at the 'impregnable fortress' of Singapore, would assume command of sea communications, thereby eliminating any danger to Anglo-Saxon civilization in the southern Pacific.

The Singapore strategy collapsed as soon as it was challenged by Japan; a British fleet failed to arrive from the West, the two British capital ships in the Pacific were sunk within three days of the opening of the Japanese campaign and Singapore island itself fell two months later, on 15 February, 1942. This thesis examines aspects of the defence policies of Australia and New Zealand in the thirty months from the outbreak of the second world war until this ignominious surrender. It deals with the defence relations between the Pacific dominions and the United Kingdom and concentrates on the place of Singapore in the imperial defence connection. No attempt has been made to treat other aspects of this connection, most notably the Empire Air Training Scheme which has already been the subject of a thorough and scholarly analysis. Even within the limits of the Singapore strategy, the amount of primary source material which has recently become available is vast and the survey of Australia's and New Zealand's policies which follows is necessarily highly selective. Nor will the study

attempt to deal with the military campaign in Malaya which preceded the fall of Singapore, a topic which has already been covered in great detail in many other works. 5

By 1939 Australia and New Zealand had been basing their security upon Singapore for almost twenty years and the first chapter reviews briefly the development of that policy from 1919. Thereafter the study unfolds chronologically, except for the consideration, in Chapter Four, of the American role in the defence of the Pacific. The potential importance of the United States was a continuous theme in British, Australian and New Zealand policy but, perhaps because of the American refusal to enter into any binding obligations until the last moment, I have found it easier to deal with this topic separately.

The commitment by Australia and New Zealand to an imperial scheme of defence which failed has been heavily criticised. One Australian commentator has recently referred to his country's decision to send troops to the Middle East in the following disparaging terms:

Australia was permitted to enjoy the honour of fighting another war away from home.... its battle-hardened veterans experiencing the dubious privilege of earning new laurels in foreign fields.... Europe-minded men had rushed Australian forces to the aid of beleaguered Britain and left Australia to stand naked before her enemies. 6

5 For a list of some of these see below, p. 281, footnote 34.
It is certainly true that traditional loyalties to Britain were an important guide for Australian policy; they were even more important for New Zealand, whose settlement in the nineteenth century had not been marked by that alienation from the 'mother country' which characterised some Australians. The attitudes of Australia and New Zealand would, no doubt, have been very different if they had never been part of the British Empire and had therefore been free from emotional ties to their 'birthright' and 'that beloved land, which is the citadel of our race ...'. But it will be contended that, given the imperial context within which the governments of the Pacific dominions had no choice but to work, their policies were determined at least as much by a self-interested and reasoned assessment of their own national needs as by imperialist sentiments or colonial instincts. A major reason for the opposition by Australia and New Zealand to the development of dominion status in the inter-war years had been a belief that their defence interests were identical with those of the British Empire. But this was not a complacent attitude and this thesis will aim to show that as their doubts about the Singapore strategy began to grow the governments in Australia and New Zealand acted both within and outside the confines of the imperial connection in an effort to find a supplement. In forming their policies, the two dominions

7. See above, p. 1.
8. On this question see below, pp. 29-34.
were always aware of their special regional position and responsibilities in the Pacific.

Although Australia and New Zealand shared basically the same defence problem their solutions were by no means always identical. There were major differences between their views on the Singapore strategy in the inter-war years. And the disparities, as well as the similarities, in the aims and viewpoints of the two governments in the wartime period will, it is hoped, provide useful points of comparison and contrast to illuminate the general themes.

There were, of course, also differences of attitude within each dominion. In New Zealand a Labour government remained in office throughout the war years and a large measure of continuity was therefore automatically achieved.\(^\text{10}\) The political situation in Australia was much more confused. During the first two years of war the country was governed by the most factious administrations in its history. Australia entered the war with a minority government drawn from the United Australia Party and led by R.G. Menzies; it relied for survival on the support of the Country Party. In March 1940 this arrangement gave way to a formal coalition between the U.A.P. and the Country Party with Menzies again Prime Minister. A general election in September 1940 gave an equal number of seats to the

\(^{10}\)In this thesis I refer to the Labour Parties and movements in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand; the official spelling of the name in Australia is, of course, 'Labor' but for the sake of uniformity the English version will be used throughout the work.
coalition and to the Labour Party, the balance of power going to two independents. Menzies failed to persuade Labour to enter a national government and continued to rule with the support of the Country Party, 'a coalition', according to the Official War Historian, 'of pieces rather than parties' which 'rested on a mass of shifting discontents'. Indeed, the events of the next twelve months suggested that the United Australia Party was most inaptly named and Menzies finally resigned on 29 August, 1941. His successor, A.W. Fadden, the leader of the Country Party, retained the same ministry. But the ramshackle coalition was defeated in the House of Representatives only one month later when the two independents changed their allegiance in favour of the Labour Party. The Governor-General then called upon John Curtin, leader of the Australian Labour Party, to form a government and Labour retained office for the remainder of the war. The A.L.P.'s defence policy in the inter-war years had been opposed to the Singapore strategy and antagonistic to the imperial connection. It will be necessary, therefore, to consider the extent to which this change of government led to changes in Australian policy.

This study is based primarily on British and Australian official government papers available in the
Public Record Office, London, and the Commonwealth Archives

Offices, Canberra and Melbourne. As access to the Australian material has been granted to researchers only very recently many of my sources, which are described in a note at the beginning of the bibliography, have not been used before in a work of this kind. Constraints of money and time unfortunately precluded research on the archives in Wellington but this omission is partly offset by the excellent example shown to other governments by the authorities in New Zealand who have published three substantial volumes of their wartime documents. In view of the availability of this source, and the important differences, on occasions, between Australian and New Zealand's policy, I have felt justified in including New Zealand within the scope of this thesis although her policies are not examined in as great a degree of detail as those of Australia, or the United Kingdom.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE SINGAPORE STRATEGY, 1919-1939

Great Britain's policy for the defence of her Empire in the years between the two world wars was based on the doctrine of the 'blue-water school'. This school, which predominated at the Admiralty and in the Committee of Imperial Defence, took its inspiration from Alfred Thayer Mahan, an American naval strategist who wrote extensively on the problem of sea power at the end of the nineteenth century. Applying Mahan's ideas to the protection of British interests, the Admiralty maintained that if an enemy's battle fleet could be defeated or contained, the Royal Navy would proceed to clear the oceans of all other resistance and establish complete control of sea communications. Attempts to defend each outlying part of the Empire locally were superfluous; if the Royal Navy should ever be defeated they would be futile. The theory has been well summed up in the maxim 'cats are more effective and cheaper than mouse-traps'. Moreover, as it was believed that only

1. The Committee of Imperial Defence was the Cabinet's main advisory body on all matters of defence policy from 1904 to 1939. Its chairman was the Prime Minister who had the power to select all other members. See F.A. Johnson, Defence by Committee. The British Committee of Imperial Defence, 1885-1959 (London, 1960).


a battleship could successfully engage another battleship, the blue-water school asserted the primacy of these enormous vessels. The battle fleet was not limited to a particular geographical location providing suitable bases from which it could operate were established at focal points throughout the world. But it was strategic heresy to divide the main fleet; if two enemies had to be encountered the only sound course was to deal with one first and only when his naval power had been destroyed could the whole fleet proceed to engage the other. It was upon these principles of imperial defence that the Singapore strategy was developed during the period from 1919 to 1939.

The Singapore Naval Base

By the end of the first world war a major change had taken place in the international balance of naval power, a change which adversely affected the British Empire. The German navy had been scuttled but at the same time the United States and Japan had emerged as great naval powers. As a result, the world's strategic centre of gravity was moving away from Europe to the Pacific. General Smuts, the Prime Minister of South Africa, summed up the new situation at the first post-war imperial conference in 1921; it was in the Pacific, he explained, that 'Europe, Asia and America are meeting, and there, I believe, the next great chapter in human history will be enacted ...'. During the previous

4 Minute by Captain Larken, director of the local defence division of the naval staff, 14 October, 1919, ADM 1/8570/287.
5 2nd meeting of principal delegates, 21 June, 1921, CAB 32/2.
twenty years the defence of British interests in the Far East had come to depend largely on the Anglo-Japanese alliance which had been concluded in 1902. In 1919 the British government had to reconsider urgently the problem of protecting the eastern Empire. It was forced to conclude that the United Kingdom, already burdened by an enormous war debt, could not afford to maintain a battle fleet permanently in the Pacific.

If it was impossible for Britain to support a large Pacific naval force the only practical alternative was to maintain a fleet in European waters and send it out to the Far East when the need arose. This operation required a base in eastern waters capable of supporting the fleet when it arrived. Singapore was selected as the site for this base because it was less vulnerable than Hong Kong and because its strategic position, commanding the straits between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, was excellent.

The British government decided on the construction of a naval base at Singapore in 1921. But because of the strength of feeling in the country against any large defence spending, a public announcement of the decision was delayed.

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8. 143-C, CAB 5/4; 136th meeting of the C.I.D., 2 May, 1921, and 140th meeting, 10 June, 1921, CAB 2/3. See Map 4 between pp.11 and 12.

Map 1: The Pacific Ocean: showing principal naval bases and distances in nautical miles.
(from S.W. Roskill, Naval Policy between the Wars, Vol. 1)
until 1923. From that moment the project met with determined opposition from the British Labour Party on the grounds of finance and international morality. At a time of shortage of resources for social improvements at home the Party objected, in the words of one Labour member of Parliament, to spending 'our money on buildings and garrisons in that pestilential and immoral cesspool ...'. But it was not the moral standards of the inhabitants of Singapore alone which worried the critics. The British government, in constructing the base, was accused of flouting the spirit of the treaty recently concluded at Washington on naval disarmament and of incurring the risk of sparking off a new arms race, all in an effort to protect capitalist interests which had been acquired by imperialistic conquest.

It is not surprising, therefore, that when the Labour Party came to power in the United Kingdom in 1924 it cancelled the plans for the base. Singapore was from the start, a political shuttlecock. The Conservative Party returned to office at the end of 1924 and immediately promised to resume the work. But even the Conservative government was extremely reluctant to allocate any substantial expenditure.

11. Ibid., Vol. 163, 1 May, 1923, col. 1237.
Accordingly the Admiralty's plans for the base were scaled down and still very little progress was made at Singapore.15

When the Labour Party came into office again in Britain in 1929 it would have liked to repeat its abandonment of the project. But financial factors stood in the way. First, the Tories had, somewhat disobligingly, concluded all the major contracts just before leaving office and these contained large penalty clauses in the event of cancellation.16 Second, of the money which had been spent at Singapore by 1930 less than one-tenth had been provided by the United Kingdom. The remainder came from substantial contributions which had been made by some of the eastern Crown colonies and protectorates and by New Zealand.17 All these contributors would have demanded their money back in the event of cancellation. In effect, therefore, it would have been more expensive in the short-term to cancel the base than to go ahead with it.

The second British Labour government did, however, slow down the work as much as possible. While the completion of the dry dock, which was the most important single item in the scheme, was approved, the equipment to make it operational was not to be installed.18 The result of this

15. 275-C, CAB 5/6; 215th meeting of the C.I.D., 22 July, 1926, CAB 2/4; Cabinet Minute 50(26)1, 3 August, 1926, CAB 23/53.
16. 8th meeting of the C.I.D. Sub-Committee on Singapore, 10 July, 1928, CAB 16/63; CP 162(29), CAB 24/204.
18. Cabinet Minute 45(29)5, 6 November, 1929, CAB 23/62.
arrangement would have been to provide little more than a large hole in the ground.

As a consequence of all these delays the Singapore base was almost totally useless when the Japanese invaded Manchuria and precipitated the Far eastern crisis of 1931-33. This invasion brought an end to a decade of peace and optimism in the Far East. The British Cabinet was at last moved to treat the need for a well-defended naval base at Singapore seriously. The new dry dock was officially opened in February 1938, although the base was not fully operational even at the outbreak of the second world war in September, 1939.

Singapore and the Defence of Australia and New Zealand

The Anglo-Japanese alliance had always been regarded with suspicion in the United States and by the end of the first world war these suspicions threatened Anglo-American relations. In December 1921

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23. See, for example, telegram from Sir A. Geddes, British Ambassador in Washington, to Earl Curzon, the Foreign Secretary, 6 June and 24 June (2 telegrams), 1921, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939 (hereafter D.B.F.P.), (Three Series, London, in progress from 1947), First Series, Vol. 14.
an international conference met in Washington to consider the joint problems of naval disarmament and far eastern affairs. During the course of these meetings the British delegation, in deference to American wishes, agreed to replace the Japanese treaty with a high-sounding but fatuous agreement between the major Pacific powers. It is tempting, therefore, to see the British decision to build the Singapore naval base as the natural outcome of the end of the alliance. But in fact the British Cabinet had decided on the construction of the base at a time when it was expecting the twenty-year old treaty to be renewed for a further term. Its decision had, then, little to do with fear of imminent Japanese hostility. It was, in the short-term, much more related to the concern of Australia and New Zealand that some action would be taken, and be seen to be taken, for their defence.

In the years before and during the Great War Britain had concentrated her navy in the North Sea to contain the German fleet and the southern dominions believed that their security had been neglected. As a result of British naval weakness in the Pacific, Australia and New Zealand had been troubled by enemy raiders and mines in their waters.

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24. Its deliberations may be followed in CRS A981 item Disarmament 1, parts 1-4.
25. There has been much discussion of the factors which influenced the British decision but it seems clear that the size of the British war debt to the United States gave the Americans a decisive influence. See McCarthy, 'Air Power and Australian Defence', pp. 14-15.
26. The Singapore decision was taken on 16 June, 1921, two weeks after a Cabinet meeting on 30 May which decided that the Anglo-Japanese alliance ought to be renewed. Cabinet Minute 50(21)3, 16 June, 1921, CAB 23/26 and Cabinet Minute 43(21)2, 30 May, 1921, CAB 23/25.
in the early months of the war and again in 1917. British warships were not available to protect Australian and New Zealand troopships on the first stage of their journey to the western battlefields; in fact, Japanese vessels had been called upon to provide the escort. Moreover, Japan had been able to establish herself in the former German islands north of the equator. Neither of the Pacific dominions was slow to voice its dissatisfaction with this situation.

The British government, for its part, was keenly aware of the need to demonstrate its ability to defend the southern Pacific. With Canada and South Africa already moving to loosen the links with Great Britain, Whitehall did not want to see the imperial bonds with Australia and New Zealand weakened through further neglect. British


30. See, for example, imperial war conference meetings of 28 March, 1917 and 24 July, 1918, CAB 32/1 and CRS A981 item Defence 350, part 1.

ministers were worried that the Pacific dominions might conclude that the United Kingdom would not, or could not, protect them and turn instead to the United States for support. They were concerned, in the words of the Cabinet meeting which decided on the construction of the Singapore base, that 'the United States were continually suggesting that the American Navy was available for the protection of civilization and the white races of the world'. This is not to suggest that there was any well-supported movement in Australia or New Zealand in favour of an alliance with the United States but, rather, that fears that such a movement might arise had an important influence on British policy.

The Singapore base was, then, to be the symbol of British power and presence in the Far East and of British ability to defend Australia and New Zealand. At the imperial conference in 1921 the United Kingdom's delegation explained the Singapore strategy in detail. Lord Beatty, the First Sea Lord, stated that the object of the fleet after its arrival at Singapore was the destruction of the Japanese navy in a major fleet battle. If Singapore was firmly held there was no danger of an attack on either Australia or New Zealand. So long as a British fleet was liable to enter the Pacific, the enemy would not dare to take the risks involved in mounting an invasion so far from his main islands. Beatty also explained why Singapore was the best site for a far eastern base; it 'stands at the western gateway to the Pacific. It flanks the route from Eastern Asia to Australia.'

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and covers the main entrance to the Indian Ocean from the eastward. A site in Australia would be too remote 'and to station our Naval Forces in those waters would be tantamount to the adoption of a purely defensive naval strategy by which our vital interests to the north and west would be left uncovered ...'.

Beatty's arguments came straight from the blue-water school of thought. In basing the Singapore strategy on this concept the Admiralty made two very large assumptions. A British fleet would, it was presumed, be ready and able to go to Singapore in time of emergency. Immediately after the first world war there were no visible threats to the British Isles and no reasons of international politics to prevent the despatch of the navy to the Far East at short notice. But there could be no guarantee that the European situation would always remain so favourable. Secondly, Mahan had evolved his theories without knowledge of the potentialities of submarines and aircraft. The British naval staff refused to accept that the development of these new weapons had made the battleship obsolete. But their opinion was not shared by a growing number of experts outside the Admiralty.

Nevertheless, on the strength of Beatty's

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33. 14th meeting of principal delegates, 4 July, 1921, CAB 32/2.
34. It would, however, have been very difficult to send a fleet out because of the lack of oil fuel supplies on the eastern route. This deficiency was only gradually made good over the next twenty years.
authoritative briefing in 1921 W.M. Hughes, the Prime Minister of Australia, and W.F. Massey of New Zealand accepted the claims made for Singapore. Henceforth the defence policies of both dominions were to be based on the strategy.

The Defence Policies of Australia and New Zealand

With Singapore as the keystone of their security Australia and New Zealand officially discounted any danger of invasion. Even in the worst circumstances they anticipated a scale of attack consisting of no more than raids and small landing parties. Following the Admiralty's advice, both dominions concentrated their defence resources on naval forces for the protection of maritime trade and for co-operation with the British fleet when it arrived in the Pacific. 36

New Zealand wasted little time in demonstrating her zealous commitment to the Singapore strategy; in July 1923 Massey offered £100,000 towards the cost of the base and hinted that this gesture would be repeated in following years. When announcing the donation the Prime Minister took the opportunity to stress his personal concept of the British Empire in which the emphasis was on unity and the

36 See, for example, memorandum E4, CAB 32/6; 176-C, CAB 5/4; 195-C and 196-C, CAB 5/5; 12th meeting of principal delegates at the 1926 imperial conference, 15 November, 1926, CAB 32/46.

dominions could never be fully sovereign states. But the offer had not been taken up by the time the British Labour government cancelled the scheme. This decision was made without any consultation with the dominions. New Zealand protested in very forthright terms, revealing that she could easily discard the image of the 'dutiful daughter' dominion when her vital interests were placed in question.

After this cancellation New Zealand was, despite pressure from the United Kingdom, less eager to help. It was only after the dominion's new Prime Minister, J.G. Coates, had attended an imperial conference in 1926 and satisfied himself that the work was unlikely to be interrupted again that the offer of financial help was renewed. From 1928 £1 million was to be given in eight annual instalments. But the British Labour government's action in 1924 had clearly affected New Zealand's attitude; Coates dwelt on his country's vulnerability rather than the idea of the dominion as an unequal partner aiding the mother country in her world-wide tasks.

38. GGNZ to SSC, 9 July, 1923, C.O. 532/237.
39. GGNZ to SSC, 11 March, 1924, CP 178(24), CAB 24/165.
42. GGNZ to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs [hereafter SSDA], 22 and 23 April, 1927, D.O. 35/24. The Dominions Office was established as a department separate from the Colonial Office in 1925.
43. GGNZ to SSDA, 23 April, 1927, ibid.
seen as a wise insurance for New Zealand's own security. Underneath the expressions of sentimental loyalty there was 'a solid foundation of national self-interest'\textsuperscript{44} and an awareness of New Zealand's 'regional position far from the centre of Imperial naval strength'.\textsuperscript{45}

Despite frequent and powerful appeals from the British government, Australia refused to follow New Zealand's example. A contribution towards the Singapore base would, in effect, have been a subsidy to the Royal Navy. The Australian colonies had paid such subsidies annually from 1887\textsuperscript{46} but they were always unpopular with nationalist sentiment which demanded that Australia should have her own navy in her own waters.\textsuperscript{47}

This wish was granted with the establishment of a separate Royal Australian Navy in 1909. S.M. Bruce, Australian Prime Minister from 1923 to 1929, has been accused of being 'more British than the British'\textsuperscript{48} but he was often a stalwart defender of Australia's particular interests: a recent judgement based on the official records asserts that he was

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{44} I.C. MacGibbon, 'The Blue-Water Rationale', p. 61.
  \item \textsuperscript{45} Ibid, p. 64.
\end{itemize}
'far more vigorous, assertive and independently Australian than his indolent aristocratic demeanour would suggest ...'.

In 1923, for example, he told his Parliament that

Australia's sentiment is certainly such that she demands that she shall have her own defence policy and her own naval unit. Australia today is determined that her defence shall be a purely Australian function, and she certainly would not accept the idea which some people put forward that the time has come when we should have a great central force for the defence of the whole of the British Empire, and that Australia's contribution should be a monetary one. Australia would not accept that for one moment.

Bruce adhered to this policy at the imperial conferences in 1923 and 1926 and left no doubt that Australian resources would go to the Royal Australian Navy in preference to the Singapore base; there would be no return in any form to the discredited principle of naval subsidies.

Australia, nevertheless, joined New Zealand in lodging a strong protest against the cancellation of the Singapore project in 1924. Noting that the Labour government was continuing to build up British air strength, Bruce complained that the defence interests of the distant dominions were being treated very differently from those of the United Kingdom.

He also belatedly acknowledged an Australian


50. Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates [Hereafter C.P.D.], Vol. 104, 24 July, 1923, p. 1485; see also draft notes for Bruce's speech, CRS A981 item Imperial Relations 113.

51. 8th, 9th and 11th meetings of principal delegates, 15, 17 and 22 October, 1923, CAB 32/9; 12th meeting of principal delegates 15 November, 1926, CAB 32/46; see also C.P.D., Vol. 114, 3 August, 1926, p. 4783.

obligation to contribute towards the base. But it is most unlikely that this obligation would have been admitted if there was any chance of it having to be fulfilled. Bruce was pursuing a devious course; several months later, in June 1924, he announced a new five year Australian defence programme costing £35 million.\textsuperscript{53} The Australian Prime Minister contrived to imply that this scheme resulted necessarily from the abandonment of the Singapore project.\textsuperscript{54} In fact, he had been working on this programme since the previous year.\textsuperscript{55} The British Labour administration's action merely provided a most convenient justification for increased defence spending. The heavy bias towards the navy in the five-year programme\textsuperscript{56} showed that in the last resort Bruce was firmly committed to the principles of imperial defence; but within the terms of this commitment he was intent on pursuing a distinctively Australian defence policy.

The decision of the second British Labour government to slow down the work at Singapore was again taken without consultation with the dominions. It produced another very strong protest from New Zealand.\textsuperscript{57} But the reaction in

\textsuperscript{53}C.P.D. Vol. 107, 27 June, 1924, pp. 1701-10; Bruce gave further details of the programme at the 1926 imperial conference, 12th meeting of principal delegates, 15 November, 1926, CAB 32/46. See also \textit{The Times}, 1 July, 1924.

\textsuperscript{54}The Sydney Morning Herald, 21 and 28 March, 1924; \textit{The Times}, 21 and 28 March and 1 July, 1924.

\textsuperscript{55}GGA to SSC, 11 June, 1924, C.O. 532/271; RS(24) 5th minutes 24 June, 1924, CAB 27/236.

\textsuperscript{56}The main part of the programme provided for the replacement of Australia's two obsolescent cruisers and the building of two ocean-going submarines and a sea-plane carrier. See \textit{The Times}, 1 July, 1924.

\textsuperscript{57}British Cabinet Minute 47(29)7, 13 November, 1929, CAB 23/62; telegram from New Zealand government, received 13 November, 1929, circulated as CP 322(29), CAB 24/207; telegram from New Zealand government, received 15 November, 1929, D.O. 114/23.
Australia was much more acquiescent. As long as Bruce remained in office the Australian government pressed the United Kingdom to make no changes in the Singapore project and it appeared that Canberra and Wellington intended to adopt a united front on the issue. But in October 1929 the Labour Party came to power in Australia itself. James Scullin, the new Prime Minister, was not only more sympathetic to the outlook of the British Labour administration but he had frequently expressed disagreement with the whole Singapore policy while in opposition.

Scullin's objections formed an integral part of the official policy of the Australian Labour Party. The Party opposed the base on much the same grounds as its British counterpart; indeed, the anti-militarist attitudes of the Labour movement and its opposition to measures for the protection of capitalist and imperialist interests were stronger in Australia than in the United Kingdom. Moreover, the bitter dispute over conscription which had shattered Labour's parliamentary ranks during the first world war had left deep scars; the Party refused to contemplate any form of compulsory overseas military service. Those members of

58 Telegrams from Casey, 8 and 17 July, 1929, and to SSDA, 12 July, 1929, CRS A981 item Defence 350, part 3. On Casey's role, see below, pp. 32-33.
59 Telegram to Prime Minister of New Zealand [hereafter PMNZ], 12 July, 1929 and from PMNZ, 16 July, 1929, ibid.
the A.L.P. who took any interest in defence at all therefore advocated a policy designed to avoid involvement in quarrels which were, they considered, no concern of Australia. The defence of Australia, insisted one Labour spokesman in 1923, should be carried on in Australia by Australians. As late as 1937 another Labour member of the House of Representatives was proclaiming:

There is not one atom of proof that our national integrity has ever, for a single moment, been endangered except in so far as it has been endangered by our own war-like operations beyond the confines of Australia.... our first line of defence is that we should not embroil ourselves in national quarrels beyond Australia.

Such involvement, however, appeared likely if the country continued to rely on the traditional principles of imperial defence; with their emphasis on global rather than local strategy these could lead Australia into entanglements in any part of the world.

The A.L.P.'s leadership had, therefore, to find an alternative defence policy which would, at one and the same time, satisfy the isolationist, nationalist, anti-imperialist and pacifist tendencies within the movement. The solution adopted was that Australia should rely for her protection upon aerial and submarine forces. Party spokesmen developed a particular enthusiasm for military aircraft.

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63. Ibid, 31 July, 1923, pp. 1847-49; Mr. Blakeley speaking.
This was based almost entirely on political grounds with little consideration of strategy; the possibilities of air power were uncritically embraced because they appeared to provide an alternative to ocean-going warships and because, with the short range of aeroplanes at this time, they ruled out an imperial commitment. In addition, an air force would be 'small, highly skilled, trained and impossible to conscript'. It was against this background of hostility to imperial schemes of naval defence that the A.L.P.'s opposition to the building of the Singapore naval base emerged and was sustained throughout the nineteen-twenties.

A second line of criticism in Australia was provided by the army and this did concentrate on points of strategy. The annual reports of General Sir Henry Chauvel, the Inspector-General of the Australian Military Forces from 1919 to 1930, were critical of what he termed 'a sublime faith in the powers of the British Navy'. Chauvel pointed out that if Britain should be preoccupied with the European situation when a threat was presented to Australia then the arrival of a fleet at Singapore was likely to be long-delayed. He therefore challenged the Royal Australian Navy's claim that coastal raids constituted the maximum scale of attack with which Australia's defences would have to cope and maintained that the real need was for an army capable of repelling an invasion.


The General suggested that the country's primary responsibility was to provide land defences with naval expenditure coming out of any money which might remain. This case was taken up by a group of younger army staff officers. In various lectures and articles in military journals this group maintained that it was positively foolish to base Australia's defence on the pious expectation that the British government would send a fleet out to Singapore if trouble in the Far East should coincide with difficulties in the western hemisphere. Their case was certainly strengthened by the actions of the British Labour governments in 1924 and 1929 since it was impossible to guarantee that future changes of government in London would not be followed by further reversals of policy.

The objections of the A.L.P. and Australian army to the Singapore strategy sprang from very different motives. But as the international situation grew more menacing in the nineteen-thirties something of an unholy alliance developed between the two groups of critics. Indeed, in 1936 matters reached the stage where John Curtin, the leader of the A.L.P., attacked the government's policy in the House of Representatives on the basis of a brief prepared by one of


the dissenting staff officers.\textsuperscript{71}

The Australian government, however, officially rejected all public questioning of the Singapore strategy. Its rearmament programme was designed to strengthen the imperial commitment; during the five years ending in 1939 expenditure on the navy, army and air force respectively totalled £17 million, £12 million and £7 million and as late as 1939 was in the ratio 5:4:3.\textsuperscript{72} But as the European crisis deepened there were occasional and unmistakable signs of misgivings within the administration. In April 1938 a new three-year defence programme allotted the R.A.A.F. an expenditure exceeding that for the navy.\textsuperscript{73} And after the Munich crisis, when further additional funds were allocated for defence, the largest sum went to the army.\textsuperscript{74} The Australian government was already beginning to hedge against a failure of the Singapore strategy.

In New Zealand there was very little opposition to official defence policy. The Parliamentary Labour Party voted against the contribution to the Singapore base\textsuperscript{75} but the Labour


\textsuperscript{74}C.P.D., Vol. 158, 6 December, 1938, pp. 2754-68, speech by Mr. G.A. Street, Minister of Defence.

movement was not united on the question. The military authorities, for their part, made no attempt to claim that the tiny country would be able to defend itself against a protracted attack.

Neither of the Pacific dominions centred their defence around Singapore solely for reasons of sentimental loyalty to British policy. When the strategy was evolved in the nineteen-twenties the governments of Australia and New Zealand genuinely believed that it was sound. New Zealand made a financial contribution in order to reinforce the scheme upon which her security depended. Australia's efforts were also directed at co-operation with the United Kingdom's programme of imperial defence, although for political, rather than strategic, reasons she preferred to pursue a more independent line than her nearest neighbour. Nevertheless, Australia's policy in particular has been harshly criticised for its attachment to British plans; the Australian government was, it is claimed, 'too ready to make itself captive to the policy of the United Kingdom'.

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77. See, for example, report on the Defence of New Zealand by General W.L.H. Sinclair-Burgess, Officer-Commanding the New Zealand Military Forces, 28 August, 1933, CAB 66/77.

The dilemma which faced Australian governments in the inter-war years may be seen in a more sympathetic light when the alternatives are considered. It was generally accepted, even by the staunchest contemporary critics of official thinking,\(^7^9\) that if Japan hurled herself against an Australia without allies, a policy of self-sufficiency would have been totally inadequate. If Australia was to have allies then such a policy would have been both superfluous and wasteful. The government, moreover, had every reason to question the motives of its opponents. The Labour movement's arguments for air power were not really concerned with the defence of Australia at all but with satisfying the demands of the party's ideology. The claims made for aircraft were far in advance of the technical possibilities; as the leading critic of Australian defence policy in this period has stated, on the evidence available at the time, Labour's proposals were 'not a desirable military policy'.\(^8^0\) The 'invasionist' case as presented by the army was also suspect since its demands for greatly increased land forces at the expense of the other services smacked too much of vested interest. Indeed, this aspect of the dispute should perhaps be seen not in terms of a genuine conflict between the advocates of

\(^7^9\) See, for example, W.C. Wentworth, *Demand for Defence. Being a Plea to Keep Australia White and Free*. (Sydney, 1939).

\(^8^0\) McCarthy, 'The A.L.P. and the Armed Services', p. 67. Nor did the one Labour government of this period, in office from 1929 to 1931, attempt any reorientation of defence policy. It is true that this government's freedom of action was seriously handicapped in many fields by the onset of the depression but as one of the arguments for air power had been its relative cheapness (see, for example, *C.P.D.*, Vol. 104, 1 August, 1923, p. 197) there would seem to have been all the more reason for the adoption of a new policy in the sphere of defence.
imperial defence and those of local defence but as a partisan squabble between the armed services, each desperate to gain a larger share of the very limited defence budget and each prepared to use any convenient argument to support its case. Thus, the Royal Australian Air Force took up a position similar to the navy's in suggesting that the real danger was from raids rather than invasion but went on to claim that these would best be dealt with by aircraft rather than warships. 81

If a solution to the Australasian defence problem was not to be found in isolation or neutrality, the critics frequently turn to the dominions' dealings with the United States. Australia should, it is argued, have sought some sort of protective arrangement with the Americans. 82 Relations between the Pacific dominions and the United States will be considered in a later chapter. 83 It is sufficient here to mention that Australian leaders were certainly aware of the potential role which America could play in their defence and did not ignore the possibility of regional arrangements. The obstacle to closer relations did not come from Australia and New Zealand but from the very strong isolationist sentiment which influenced all American behaviour.

Finally, the authorities in Australia and New

81 Memoranda setting out the position of each of the Australian services are contained in Sir George Pearce, Australian Minister of Defence, to Sir Maurice Hankey, Secretary of the British Cabinet and C.I.D., 3 July, 1934, CAB 63/71.
83 See below, Chapter 4.
Zealand had to pursue policies which were politically practical at the time. No politician who was concerned for his political survival could have advocated severing the ties with the United Kingdom, still less of replacing the imperial connection with an American alliance. None did; but the fear that a Labour victory would mean greater detachment from Britain was a severe handicap for the A.L.P. in the general election of 1937. Even Bruce thought it wise in 1924 to justify his initiative in defence policy on the grounds that Britain had let Australia down by the temporary cancellation of the Singapore base.

The most effective criticism is, then, not that Australia 'continued to ally herself to the United Kingdom but that she did so uncritically'. Even here some defence can be offered. On every suitable occasion Australia, together with New Zealand, urged on the British government the importance which they attached to Singapore. They protested vehemently at the cancellation in 1924. This incident revealed the lack of any effective machinery for imperial consultation and Bruce attempted to remedy this situation by sending R.G. Casey to London to act as Australian

85 See above, pp. 22-23.
87 This may be seen particularly clearly in the minutes of all the imperial conferences in this period. Even Scullin, in agreeing to the slow-down at Singapore in 1930, warned that any proposal for complete abandonment 'would undoubtedly cause alarm' in Australia. Minutes of the Singapore Base Committee of the 1930 imperial conference, 16 October, 1930, CAB 32/91.
Liaison Officer. Casey was given an office in the secretariat of the Committee of Imperial Defence and saw all the papers relevant to Australia, an arrangement which greatly improved the amount and quality of information available to the Australian government on future British intentions. But the cancellation also revealed the nature of the problem facing Australia and New Zealand; they had no real alternative to the Singapore strategy but all decisions on that strategy were taken in London where the dominions could not, in the last resort, have a decisive influence.

On the one hand it is difficult to deny that Australia and New Zealand took too much for granted in their defence relations with the United Kingdom in the inter-war years. On the other, it is not easy to see what more they could have done; if, for example, Australia had attempted to speed the construction of the Singapore naval base by a direct contribution she would have spent less on her own forces and been even more committed to imperial policy. In the event, the Singapore base was almost complete by the outbreak of the second world war. But the success of the strategy depended not only upon the existence of modern and efficient naval facilities on the island but also on the presence of a fleet to operate from the base. The security of Australia

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88 GGA to SSC, 19 November, 1924, CAB 21/469; minute by R.H. Howorth, Assistant Secretary to the British Cabinet, 16 July, 1937, on the activities of the Australian Liaison Officer and the documents to which he had access, CAB 21/487; S.W. Roskill, Hankey. Man of Secrets (3 Vols., London, 1970-1974), Vol. 2, 1919-1931, pp. 400-01. When the second British Labour government came to power, Casey was able to keep his government well-informed about its intentions regarding Singapore, an advantage which New Zealand did not share. See above, p. 24, footnote 58, and also CRS A981 item Defence, 731, parts 1 and 2.
and New Zealand therefore turned on the arrival of a British fleet from European waters.

**British Promises to Send a Fleet**

By the mid-nineteen-thirties there were serious grounds to doubt that a British fleet would be free to sail out to Singapore in the event of a threat to Australia and New Zealand. The ambitions of Hitler and Mussolini presented the possibility of a simultaneous threat to British interests in Europe. Bold concepts such as Beatty's description of a British fleet sailing out to fight a major battle for control of sea communications \(^{89}\) disappeared from the United Kingdom's defence appreciations. But the acceptance by British ministers of an obligation to defend Australia and New Zealand was real \(^{90}\) and tended to have a disabling effect on their policies elsewhere. Those policies often crudely lumped together under the meaningless heading of 'appeasement' become much more explicable in the light of the British necessity to avoid war in the western hemisphere in order that forces would

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89. See above, p. 17.

90. In an assessment of the international situation after the Munich crisis - and therefore at a time when British policymakers might be expected to be preoccupied with European problems - Sir Alexander Cadogan, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, wrote: 'We have inherited responsibilities all over the world, which have become more onerous with the rise to power of other nations such as Japan. In the Far East, we have British interests in China to defend.... It might not be intrinsically vital to protect them, though it might be important from the point of view of our prestige in Asia generally. What involves us vitally in the Far East is the necessity of protecting Australia and New Zealand against possible attack by Japan.' Memorandum by Cadogan on the possibilities of future policy, 14 October, 1938, Cl4471/42/18, F.O. 371/21659; also quoted in D.N. Dilks (editor), The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, O.M., 1938-1945 (London, 1971), p. 116. My emphasis.
be available to deal with possible trouble in the eastern. 91

The British archives record many occasions on which promises of the despatch of a fleet were made to the dominions. In 1935, for example, the Prime Ministers of the self-governing Empire who assembled in London for the Silver Jubilee of George V were assured that the Royal Navy was equal to the task of coping with the European and far eastern situations simultaneously. 92 But this assessment assumed help from the French navy in containing the threat in Europe; it assumed, moreover, that Italy would not be hostile. 93 The naval balance was extremely delicate. It was as part of an effort to preserve this balance that the Anglo-German naval agreement, limiting German strength to 35% of that of Britain, was concluded in June 1935. 94 Again, during the Abyssinian crisis, British policy was largely determined by an unwillingness to risk the loss of any capital ships in an engagement with the Italian navy. 95

92 PM(35)3, Annual Review by the Chiefs of Staff, 29 April, 1935, CAB 32/125.
93 In 1933 the Cabinet had decided that no defence expenditure based solely on the assumption of a war with Italy should be undertaken. It was only in July 1937 that Italy was removed from the list of powers - the others being France and the United States - which were covered by this formula. Cabinet Minute 62(33)5, 15 November, 1933, CAB 23/77 and Cabinet Minute 30(37), 14 July, 1937, CAB 23/89.
At an imperial conference in 1937 the Australian and New Zealand delegations pressed the British government persistently for a definite commitment to the despatch of a fleet. Eventually the British representatives were pushed further than they had intended to go. They pointed out that it was impossible to predict exactly what would happen in wartime conditions: 'the strength of the fleet which would be sent and the time which would elapse before it arrived at Singapore must vary with political and strategical factors'.

But the dominions were also told that

the basis of our strategy will lie in establishing at Singapore at the earliest possible moment after the outbreak of hostilities with Japan, a fleet whose strength at a minimum will enable it to act on the defensive, and to serve as a strong deterrent against any threat to our interests in the Far East.

Moreover, 'no anxieties or risks connected with our interests in the Mediterranean can be allowed to interfere with the despatch of a fleet to the Far East'. Sir Ernle Chatfield, the First Sea Lord, explained that '... the Mediterranean position, even if it were lost, could be recovered. If the position in the Pacific were lost, however, it was doubtful if it could ever be recovered'.

96. 6th and 7th meetings of principal delegates, 25 and 26 May, 1937, CAB 32/128; 209th, 211th and 212th meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, 1 June, 7 June and 21 June, 1937, CAB 53/7.

97. 209th meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, 1 June, 1937, CAB 53/7.

98. 150-c, quoted at British War Cabinet meeting, WMB/1(39)/7, 20 November, 1939, CAB 65/2.


100. 209th meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, 1 June, 1937, CAB 53/7.
These assurances were still based on the assumption of a French alliance and Italian non-belligerence. The British Chiefs of Staff constantly warned the government that 'we cannot foresee the time when our defences will be strong enough to safeguard our territory, trade and vital interests against Germany, Italy and Japan simultaneously'. The British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, therefore attempted to detach Italy from the Axis. But after his abortive visit to Rome in mid-January 1939 Chamberlain had to admit that his Italian policy was unlikely to succeed.

Once they had to take account of a hostile Italy, the Chiefs of Staff urged the strategy of concentrating on the weakest enemy first and trying to eliminate Italy by 'a series of hard blows'. In February 1939 the Chiefs concluded that the strength of the fleet which could be sent to eastern waters 'must depend upon our resources and the state of war in the European theatre'. Chamberlain, beset by rumours that war in Europe was about to be precipitated by a German invasion of Holland, accepted the implication in the appreciation that 'in certain circumstances, the strength of the Fleet which could be sent [to the Far East] might not be adequate'.

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101 CP 296/37, CAB 24/272.
103 1st meeting of the Strategical Appreciation Sub-Committee of the C.I.D., 1 March, 1939, CAB 16/209.
104 DP(P)44, CAB 16/183A.
The Australian government quickly learnt of this strategic reassessment, though by accident rather than through the normal channels. As a result of the incompetence of an official within the C.I.D.'s secretariat some of the relevant papers were delivered directly into the possession of the Australian High Commission in London.  

An urgent phone call from the Australian Prime Minister, J.A. Lyons, was the immediate result. Chamberlain then confirmed his government's revised policy in the following telegram:

> In the event of war with Germany and Italy, should Japan join in against us, it would still be His Majesty's Government's full intention to despatch a fleet to Singapore. If we were fighting against such a combination never envisaged in our earlier plans, the size of that fleet would necessarily be dependent on (a) the moment when Japan entered the war and (b) what losses if any our opponents or ourselves had previously sustained.

By the beginning of 1939, therefore, grave doubts had been thrown on the Singapore strategy. The extent to which Australia and New Zealand had been given specific and binding assurances concerning the despatch of a fleet, assurances which were subsequently repudiated, is necessarily a contentious matter. All the relevant documents suggest that the British government was always reluctant to specify the size of the fleet which would be sent or the timing of its despatch; undertakings were also modified by reference to contingencies which it was not possible to predict.

107. Record of a conversation with Mr. Duncan, acting Australian High Commissioner, by General Ismay, Secretary of the C.I.D., 18 March, 1939, CAB 21/893.

108. Chamberlain to Lyons, 20 March, 1939, PREM 1/309. My emphasis. New Zealand was not informed of the contents of this message until the following month. See below pp. 49-50.
There would, for example, be vitally important differences in the circumstances of a one-front, a two-front and a three-front war. The promise to put far eastern interests before those in the Mediterranean could refer only to simultaneous hostilities in each region; if battles were being fought only in the western hemisphere it was inconceivable that the main British naval strength would be sent away to the other side of the world where no fighting was in progress. Moreover, there was a three-fold distinction to be drawn between the circumstances in which Australia and New Zealand felt menaced by a Japanese threat, the existence of a state of war between Japan and the British Empire and a situation where the Pacific dominions were actually subject to the danger of a Japanese invasion on a large scale. Each predicament could legitimately justify a different reaction on the part of the British government and it was clearly London which would interpret the nature of the threat. Australia and New Zealand may be criticised for having allowed such a situation to arise but it was always implicit in their dependence on a fleet which was controlled from Whitehall.

On 4 September 1939, following blatant violations of Polish territory, the United Kingdom declared war on Germany. One of the uncertainties which had beset the Singapore strategy was resolved; war had come first to the western hemisphere. The chances of a British fleet proceeding to the East were reduced but the situation was by no means desperate for not only was the French fleet available for co-operation
with the Royal Navy but Italy had refused to follow her German ally into the war. Moreover, by this stage Australia and New Zealand had already embarked on important initiatives aimed at supplementing the Singapore strategy.

109. For the naval strengths of the major powers in 1939 see Appendix, p. 316.
CHAPTER TWO

FORWARD DEFENCE AND THE THREAT OF JAPAN
April 1939 - May 1940

Australia and New Zealand considered themselves bound by the British declaration of war against Germany. This was a logical attitude for the two countries in so far as they depended on a scheme of defence directed from London. An obligation to show loyalty to their major ally is a consistent theme in the policy of the Pacific dominions; they would thereby, it was assumed, be assured of the grateful support of that ally in the event of a threat to their own vital interests. This precept had operated before 1939 and, at a time when all senior positions in the Royal Australian Navy were filled by secondment from the Royal Navy, the United Kingdom was easily able to play on the Australian government's feelings of obligation. In 1919, for example, Rear-Admiral Grant, the First Naval Member of the Australian Naval Board, warned that if the dominion did not contribute its fair share towards imperial naval defence, Great Britain might conclude that she was indifferent to the problem:

'This alone would be fatal to any scheme of co-operation and may eventually lead to the Commonwealth policy of a White


Australia having to be altered. Six days before the outbreak of the second world war the Naval Board advised that if Australia did not help to wage the Empire’s struggle in more distant parts of the world, she might forfeit British help when the danger came closer to home.

At the same time the Pacific dominions had, by 1939, developed a degree of regional awareness and were therefore in a position to judge their own particular interests realistically. This is seen in two important events which occurred in April 1939: the meeting of a conference on the defence of the Pacific at Wellington and the Australian announcement of her intention to appoint her own diplomatic representatives. Thereafter, a state of conflict between their obligations to the imperial system and their regional responsibilities provided the atmosphere in which Australia and New Zealand were to work out their wartime policies.

Regional Responsibilities

New Zealand’s attitude towards international affairs had altered drastically when the dominion’s first Labour government took office in 1935. The new Prime Minister, M.J. Savage, spoke on the subject of foreign policy with great sincerity, if not always great insight, and he strongly

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3 Memorandum on Naval Estimates, 1919-1920, by Grant, 22 September, 1919, enclosure No. 6 to letter from Grant to Minister for the Navy, 14 December, 1919, CRS A981 item Defence 350, part 1.
4 Memorandum by Commodore Boucher, acting First Naval Member of the Australian Naval Board and acting Chief of the Naval Staff, on H.M.A. Ship for the Mediterranean, 29 August, 1939, CRS A2671 item 14/1939. See also below, pp. 71-72.
5 Wood, The New Zealand People at War, pp. 49-50.
supported the League of Nations and the concept of collective security. He refused to modify these views even when pressed by every other government in the Empire. By 1938 Savage was no longer content merely to talk about the principles of collective security; he called a conference of British, Australian and New Zealand representatives with the aim of applying these principles to the defence of New Zealand's immediate area of interest. In effect, the smallest dominion was asserting the right to summon, on her own soil, an imperial conference of those parts of the Empire most immediately interested in the western Pacific region.

Savage had originally suggested a conference to deal with American claims to islands in the central and south-western Pacific, some of which were under British sovereignty and others under New Zealand's. The islands had suddenly become important because of their strategic position.


7 At the imperial conference in 1937, for example, Savage was urged to put his name to a resolution commending the Anglo-German naval agreement. It was explained that he was being asked to welcome only the 'measure of success' contained in the agreement. Savage finally gave way on this particular point but his attitude remained that 'one required a microscope to see what the measure of success was'. E(D)(37) 2nd meeting, 11 June, 1937, CAB 32/130.

After the second world war, one British Cabinet Minister, 'reflecting gloomily on Commonwealth policies before the war, concluded more cheerfully: "Thank God for New Zealand"'. Mansergh, Problems of External Policy, 1931-1939, p. 202, footnote 4.
on the developing trans-Pacific air routes. But this question was soon overtaken by fears of a more serious threat to New Zealand's interests. In an appreciation drawn up in October 1938 the dominion's Chiefs of Staff suggested that, in the event of a war with Japan, New Zealand would face a situation where 'for a period which may amount to one of months the Japanese fleet will be unchallenged in the Pacific and in a position to initiate such operations as would best meet her plans'. Savage was alarmed and suggested that the proposed conference 'should now be enlarged to include the whole strategic situation in the western Pacific including discussion on such matters as the arrival of British naval forces at Singapore'.

Savage was also eager to improve liaison between Wellington and Canberra. There was, in fact, very little co-operation between the two dominions. This was partly the result of differing interests; Australia, following the

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9. COS 15, Defence of New Zealand Interests, October, 1938, CRS A816 item 11/301/213.

10. Telegram from PMNZ dated and received 22 December, 1938, ibid.

11. Ibid.

direction of her trade, tended to concentrate her attention on the routes around her south-eastern coast to the Indian Ocean and the Suez Canal while New Zealand was more interested in the routes across the Pacific to the Panama Canal. But because of their geographical position Australia and New Zealand shared basically the same defence problem. The lack of collaboration stemmed mainly from the tendency of each dominion to see imperial relations almost exclusively in terms of its own relations with the United Kingdom. Thus it frequently happened that one learnt of the other's military plans only through the Committee of Imperial Defence or the Dominions Office in London.

Savage's attempt to have matters of high policy discussed outside Whitehall was not appreciated by the British authorities. They wanted to avoid any detailed or restive scrutiny of the Singapore strategy by the dominions. The British Chiefs of Staff deduced, correctly, that New Zealand was trying to arrange 'a miniature Imperial conference' and recommended that if the gathering were to take place at all it should be limited to matters which could be discussed by local representatives, all important issues being referred

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14 Savage to Lyons, 23 September, 1938, M.P. 729/6, Box 30, File 15/401/180; DC 3, Memorandum, by the New Zealand delegation to the Pacific defence conference, on the Co-ordination of Defence Policy in Peace and War, 1 March, 1939, CRS A816 item 11/301/213 and ADM 116/3803. See also Gordon, New Zealand Becomes a Pacific Power, p. 97 and MacGibbon, 'The Blue-Water Rationale', p. 231. This situation was not improved by a feeling which persisted in Australia, and persists to this day, that as New Zealand had chosen not to join the Australian colonies in Federation she would have to continue to live with the consequences.
back to London. Sir Harry Batterbee, who was about to sail for Wellington as the first British High Commissioner to New Zealand, agreed that the dominion's government had 'an exaggerated idea' of the questions which could be considered at such a conference. But the British government was unwilling to 'pour cold water' over Savage's enthusiasm at a time when it was trying to get all the dominions to expand their rearmament programmes. It therefore accepted New Zealand's agenda whilst instructing the British delegation to limit the scope of the discussions as much as possible.

The Australian government shared Britain's doubts about the conference and its Council of Defence agreed that London was the proper place to discuss major problems. Indeed, it seems that the Australian government hoped that the whole idea of a meeting in Wellington would be abandoned; its armed services were, it explained, so involved in work on the rearmament programme that they had no time to waste on

16. Ibid.
17. Ibid; see also 278th meeting, 2 March, 1939, Ibid.
18. The Council of Defence, formed in 1905, chaired by the Prime Minister and composed of senior ministers and the service chiefs, was the nearest Australian equivalent to the Committee of Imperial Defence, though for most of the inter-war period it met infrequently and was largely ignored by the government; it was revamped in the late nineteen-thirties. In the same way the Defence Committee, consisting of the three Chiefs of Staff and a public servant - usually the Secretary - from the Department of Defence, corresponded to the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee in the United Kingdom.
19. Council of Defence meeting, 15/1939, 10 February, 1939, CRS A816 item 11/301/213; G.L. Macandie, Secretary of the Naval Board, to Secretary of the Department of Defence, 3 February, 1939.
preparing for and attending a conference in New Zealand.\textsuperscript{20} But there were other, and perhaps more influential, reasons for Australia's colonial attitude. The Australian Naval Board took a lead in objecting to the conference's proposed terms of reference as 'unwise'.\textsuperscript{21} The Naval Board, with its naval members drawn from the Royal Navy,\textsuperscript{22} was composed of men who were, from training, experience and loyalty, unlikely to question the Admiralty's views. Moreover, the navy's claim to the major role in Australia's defence rested on the credibility of the Singapore strategy.\textsuperscript{23} It was to be expected that the Royal Australian Navy's influence would be used to forestall any critical examination of that strategy. Nor did it require a great deal of persuasion to convince the Australian government that the Naval Board was right; the government itself had no wish to encourage a public debate on the basis of Australian defence policy, a debate which could only cause it acute embarrassment.\textsuperscript{24} Any official admission of misgivings about the Singapore strategy was politically unthinkable for it would bring the government close to the policy of the Labour opposition.\textsuperscript{25}

Despite the discouraging response from Britain and

\textsuperscript{20}Council of Defence meeting 15/1939, 10 February, 1939, ibid.
\textsuperscript{21}Macandie to Secretary of the Department of Defence, 3 February, 1939, ibid.
\textsuperscript{22}See above, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{23}See above, pp. 26-27.
\textsuperscript{24}G.A. Street, Minister of Defence, to Lyons, 27 March, 1939, CRS A816 item 11/301/213.
\textsuperscript{25}McCarthy, 'Air Power and Australian Defence', pp. 94-95.
Australia, New Zealand insisted that the discussions should go ahead and deal with a wide range of topics. When the Australians suggested that the ground had already been fully covered at the imperial conference in 1937, Savage reasonably replied that the situation had changed radically in the meantime. He therefore wanted the meeting at Wellington to undertake a practical investigation firstly of the time during which Australia and New Zealand may expect to be without the assistance of naval reinforcement from the United Kingdom; secondly the scale and direction of attack that may be contemplated during that period, and thirdly, steps which in combination between the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, it would be most desirable to take to meet this eventuality.

Australia, taking her cue from London, did eventually agree to attend the conference. But Lyons refused a specific request from Savage to send a ministerial representative. The Australian delegation was also encumbered with instructions 'to discuss only technical aspects of service plans' and it produced no memoranda of its own for submission to the conference. Of the Australian Chiefs of Staff, only Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin made the journey to New Zealand, the Military and Air Boards being

27. Telegram from PMNZ, dated 17, received 18 February, 1939, ibid.
28. Telegram from PMNZ, dated and received 31 March, 1939, ibid.
29. Telegrams to PMNZ and SSDA, 28 February, 1939, and to PMNZ, 1 April, 1939, ibid.
30. Telegrams to PMNZ and SSDA, 28 February, 1939, ibid.
represented by more junior officers. And Colvin was hardly in a position to present a distinctively Australian case because the Admiralty, with complete faith in his loyalty to British policy, had appointed him to be the main British naval representative as well.

The Wellington conference met from 4 to 26 April. The New Zealand authorities had drawn up seven substantial papers for consideration, each dealing with aspects of the defence problem in the south-west Pacific.\textsuperscript{31} The first of these went straight to the heart of New Zealand's anxieties when it asked for the views of the British delegation 'on the security of Singapore and on the time which, in various circumstances, might elapse before the arrival of the British Fleet in the Far East'.\textsuperscript{32}

The British Chiefs of Staff, anticipating this request, had drawn up an appreciation covering the Singapore strategy for use by the United Kingdom's delegation.\textsuperscript{33} Unfortunately it was prepared before the reassessment of Britain's strategic responsibilities by the Committee of Imperial Defence had got under way late in February 1939, the same reassessment which led to Chamberlain's crucial telegram to Lyons on 20 March.\textsuperscript{34} The appreciation therefore

\textsuperscript{31}Memoranda numbered DC 1 to DC 7, ADM 116/3803; also MP 1049/9, Box 2, Files 1846/4/80 and 1846/4/101.
\textsuperscript{32}DC 1, Defence of the South-West Pacific, 1 March, 1939, ibid and also CRS A816 item 11/301/213.
\textsuperscript{33}COS 832, New Zealand Co-operation in Imperial Defence, 1 February, 1939, CAB 21/496.
\textsuperscript{34}See above, p. 38.
followed closely the promises which had been made in 1937.\textsuperscript{35}

The Chiefs of Staff were able, at the last minute, to insert an extract from Chamberlain's reply to the Australian Prime Minister in their brief for the British delegation.\textsuperscript{36} But it seems that the delegates, twelve thousand miles from the centre of decision, failed to appreciate the full implications of this revision. The United Kingdom's representatives were, moreover, in a difficult position because as Air Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore, the Air Ministry's representative, put it

\begin{quote}
they did not wish to encourage doubts in the minds of New Zealand Ministers of the assurances they had received regarding the despatch of a fleet to the Far East, but on the other hand they did not wish to do anything to prevent the New Zealand government from setting its own local defences in order. They had, therefore, been forced to adopt a half-way position ...
\end{quote}

This was by no means the only difficulty which beset the British delegation; it was also wracked by inter-service rivalries. Major-General Mackesy, the War Office's representative, was unhappy with the Admiralty's case as presented by Colvin and it was only the combined efforts of Batterbee, as head of the delegation, and Longmore which succeeded in reconciling their views, usually no more than five minutes before each session of the conference was due to begin.\textsuperscript{37}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} See above, p. 36.
\item \textsuperscript{36} 284th meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, 27 March, 1939, CAB 53/10.
\item \textsuperscript{37} 298th meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, 25 May, 1939, CAB 53/11.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Interview with Sir Harry Batterbee in London, 24 January, 1973.
\end{itemize}
At these sessions New Zealand's doubts that an adequate fleet would be sent to Singapore in the event of war in both the eastern and western hemispheres were expressed quite bluntly, as were her anxieties about the capacity of Singapore to withstand a long siege. Longmore recorded that the British delegation were subjected to several 'broadside'. It was during one of these exchanges that Walter Nash, the Minister of Finance, asked how Australia and New Zealand were to defend themselves if Singapore fell and the British fleet was defeated in battle. Longmore replied that they would have to 'take to the Waitomo Caves', the only place, interjected Nash sarcastically, 'where we can see anything that is glowing'.

The official reply to New Zealand's questions by the United Kingdom's delegation was contained in the final report of the conference. This asserted that Singapore would resist capture providing the expected reinforcements, including a brigade from India and air squadrons from Iraq and India, arrived. The size of the British fleet which would go out to the base and its date of arrival depended 'on the moment when Japan entered the war, and upon the losses, if any, which our opponents or the United Kingdom had previously sustained in the European theatre of war'. But the report

40. Ibid; see also Gordon, New Zealand Becomes a Pacific Power, p. 113. Nash was here referring to the famous glow-worms which make the Waitomo Caves, on New Zealand's north island, a great tourist attraction.
went on to state that despite these uncertainties, it remained

the intention of the United Kingdom Government to despatch a portion of the British Fleet to the Far East immediately on the entry of Japan into the war, to act on the defensive to an extent sufficient to give a measure of cover to Australia and New Zealand. It was further noted by the Conference that the entry of Italy into the war against the United Kingdom would still not affect this intention.\(^4\)

This was a highly qualified assurance; a very restricted interpretation might be put on the term 'a portion' of the fleet as well as on the meaning of the phrases 'to act on the defensive' and 'a measure of cover'. Even so, events were moving very fast in Europe and by the time the report arrived in the United Kingdom the British Chiefs of Staff felt unable to endorse it completely.\(^4\) The British guarantees to Roumania and Greece, given in April, and a treaty with Turkey, concluded in May, increased the relative importance of the Mediterranean in British strategy, as did the worsening internal situation in Palestine and the need to ensure the loyalty of Britain's allies in Iraq and Egypt.\(^4\)

At the other end of the Mediterranean, Spain had to be discouraged from joining the Axis.\(^4\) France, meanwhile, had insisted that European considerations be placed uppermost and threatened to withdraw all opposition to Hitler's ambitions

\(^{41}\) COS 910, CAB 53/49 and, dated 25 April, 1939, in CRS A816 item 11/301/213.

\(^{42}\) 298th meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, 25 May, 1939, CAB 53/11; COS 937(JP), CAB 53/51.

\(^{43}\) 355th meeting of the C.I.D., 2 May, 1939, CAB 2/8.

\(^{44}\) DP(P)61, CAB 16/183A.
in central and eastern Europe if Britain did not comply.\textsuperscript{45}

On 2 May the Committee of Imperial Defence accepted that

> there are so many variable factors which cannot at present be assessed, that it is not possible to state definitely how soon after Japanese intervention a Fleet could be despatched to the Far East. Neither is it possible to enumerate precisely the size of the Fleet that we could afford to send.\textsuperscript{46}

At the Wellington conference, therefore, New Zealand had been given an inaccurate picture of the state of the Singapore strategy. But this was due to the rapid pace of developments in the international situation rather than deliberate deceit. New Zealand's government had already guessed intelligently at the way matters might develop. The conference's report had repeated Whitehall's claim that the most probable dangers to Australia and New Zealand were from attacks on their sea communications by cruisers and submarines and raids on their territory by bombardment, air attacks and small landing parties. Yet at the same time it was suggested that 'the Governments concerned would be well advised to consider the making of preparations to meet a greater scale of attack'.\textsuperscript{47} New Zealand had, in fact, done exactly this at the conference. As a result of her efforts arrangements were made for the division of responsibilities in the defence of the Pacific; Australia and New Zealand were to co-operate in an aerial reconnaissance system which was to operate along


\textsuperscript{46} 355th meeting of the C.I.D., 2 May, 1939, CAB 2/8.

\textsuperscript{47} COS 910, CAB 53/49. Emphasis in original.
a line linking New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, the New Hebrides, Fiji and Tonga and through which any invading force bound for either of the dominions would have to pass. New Zealand also put forward measures for greater protection of the Pacific islands, especially Fiji. The conference accepted recommendations by the Chiefs of Staff in New Zealand for increases in Fiji's coastal artillery and local defence forces as well as for the construction of two landing grounds, the cost to be shared equally between the United Kingdom and New Zealand. In the event of a war in the Pacific, New Zealand would send a brigade group to Fiji and smaller forces to Tonga and Samoa as well as reinforcing Fanning Island, an important link in the only British trans-Pacific cable.  

The Wellington conference also made recommendations for the establishment of a system of liaison officers between New Zealand and Britain on the model of existing arrangements between London and Canberra. The need for a much freer flow of information between Australia and New Zealand was recognised. The New Zealand government was particularly keen to learn details of Australian supply capacities because, while the dominion would have to rely heavily on its larger neighbour in the event of an emergency, it had no knowledge

48. Ibid, especially Annex 2, part 1; also Batterbee's covering letter to report on conference, 26 April, 1939, ADM 116/3803 and 298th meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Subcommittee, 25 May, 1939, CAB 53/11. See Map 2 between pp. 54 and 55.

49. See above, pp. 32-33. Until 1931 each Australian armed service also had its own Liaison officer in London; from that date the Department of Defence appointed a single Defence Liaison Officer who had an adviser drawn from each service. See M.P. 150, Box 2, File 404/201/159.
Map 2: The South-West Pacific Ocean.
(from S.D. Waters, The Royal New Zealand Navy)
of what would be available. Colvin enthusiastically supported the suggestion that a New Zealand liaison officer be attached to the Department of Defence in Australia.\(^{50}\) Indeed, the Admiral was so impressed by the need for closer contact between the two Pacific dominions that he submitted a separate report to the Australian government urging the importance of steps to achieve this end.\(^{51}\)

Despite Colvin's efforts, co-operation between Australia and New Zealand was one area where the Pacific defence conference achieved little.\(^{52}\) Nevertheless, that the conference took place at all was a tribute to the determination with which New Zealand decided to investigate the defence position in the south-western Pacific. Her government was 'extremely proud' of its 'initiative in calling the Conference,'\(^{53}\) and this pride was well-deserved for the tiny dominion had worked very hard to ensure success in the unaccustomed task of organising an international gathering. Batterbee recorded that the arrangements 'were admirable and reflected great credit on those concerned'.\(^{54}\) Five years after the event the War Cabinet in Wellington referred to the meeting as

\(^{50}\) Colvin to Street, 1 May, 1939, CRS A816 item 14/301/113.

\(^{51}\) Report by Colvin to Secretary, Department of Defence, 31 May, 1939, ibid.

\(^{52}\) See below, p. 266.

\(^{53}\) Batterbee's covering letter to report, 26 April, 1939, ADM II 6/3803.

\(^{54}\) Ibid.
the first real attempt to ensure concerted action by the British Governments concerned in the defence of their common Pacific interests and, had more time been available, there is no doubt that it would have been followed by later meetings and preparations which would perhaps have enabled us to make a more effective contribution in the initial stages of the Pacific war. 55

The conference had, indeed, recommended similar meetings should be held at periodic intervals in the Pacific. 56

Although the European war soon intervened this meeting was, in many respects, the forerunner of the defence conferences which were to be held at Singapore itself in the course of the next two years. 57

After the Pacific defence conference New Zealand still hoped that the Singapore strategy would provide her with effective protection in the event of a war with Japan. But she was also pursuing a definite defence policy of her own; in order to guard against the possible failure of the forward defence concept at Singapore, New Zealand had drawn another advanced line through the Pacific islands, with Fiji as its central point, and would take her stand there against any attempt at invasion.

Australia's attitude towards the Wellington conference may at first sight suggest complete subservience to the view that Whitehall knew best. But the Australian

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56 Batterbee's covering letter to report, 26 April, 1939, ADM 116/3803.
57 See below, Chapters 3 and 4.
government had its own good reasons of domestic politics for not wishing to question the Singapore strategy openly. The conservative administration in Australia may also have entertained suspicions of the motives of the Labour government in New Zealand, suspicions based on its experience of Labour's defence policy in Australia. But privately the Australian government did have grave doubts about the Singapore strategy and these did influence its policy, as the balance of defence spending in the programmes of April and December 1938 revealed.

In Wellington the Australian delegation explained that Australia no longer rejected 'the possibility of invasion and its ultimate aim is to provide an army that would deter a hostile Power from undertaking large-scale operations against Australia'. The strength of the militia force was to be increased to a peace establishment of 70,000 and approval had been given for a regular force to be raised to give cover on mobilisation. Coast defences were being modernised, anti-aircraft protection provided at important ports and a total air force strength of nineteen squadrons comprising 212 first line aircraft was projected by 1941.

In addition to preparations for her local defence, Australia was turning her attention in directions which New Zealand was much more reluctant to consider. On the day of the last formal meeting of the conference in Wellington the newly-appointed Prime Minister of Australia, R.G. Menzies,

58 'See above, pp. 46-47.
59 'See above, p. 28.
60 COS 910, CAB 53/49 and CRS A816 item 11/301/213.
made a radio broadcast in which he said:

In the Pacific we have primary responsibilities and primary risks. Close as our consultation with Great Britain is, and must be, in relation to European affairs, it is still true to say that we must, to a large extent, be guided by her knowledge and affected by her decisions. The problems of the Pacific are different. What Great Britain calls the Far East is to us the near north. Little given as I am to encouraging the exaggerated ideas of Dominion independence and separatism which exist in some minds, I have become convinced that, in the Pacific, Australia must regard herself as a principal providing herself with her own information and maintaining her diplomatic contacts with foreign powers. 61

Menzies took care to add that Australia would not behave in the Pacific as if she were 'a completely separate power; we must, of course, act as an integral part of the British Empire'. But the Prime Minister reminded his listeners that 'the primary risk in the Pacific is borne by New Zealand and ourselves'. 62

Menzies' statement is all the more remarkable in view of his previous attitude towards separate Australian diplomatic representation. At the end of 1938 Professor A.C.V. Melbourne, Professor of History at the University of Queensland and an authority on far eastern affairs, had written to Lyons suggesting the appointment of an Australian Minister to Tokyo. In the Professor's view 'Australian interests are too much subordinated to the interests of the United Kingdom and it is not consistent with Australia's national status that

61. The Sydney Morning Herald, 27 April, 1939.
62. Ibid.
negotiations between the Japanese and Australian governments should be carried on through the Embassy of the United Kingdom. Lyons considered the idea seriously enough to broach it with his Cabinet colleagues. Menzies, as Attorney-General, replied most unfavourably: 'my feeling is that if each Dominion begins separately to accredit diplomatic representatives to foreign powers, grave divisions in our foreign policy will begin to appear and a serious blow will have been delivered at British unity'. Instead, he preferred that Australia should redouble her efforts to influence British policy in London.

As soon as he became Prime Minister, Menzies altered his views radically. He quickly recognised that the situation in the Pacific called for 'increased diplomatic contact between ourselves and the United States, China, and Japan, to say nothing of the Netherlands East Indies and the other countries which fringe the Pacific'. Concern for Australia's security had driven her government to adopt the first necessity for a distinctive Australian foreign policy; that was, the establishment of her own overseas representation and information-gathering facilities. As Sir Henry Gullett, the Minister for External Affairs, later explained, Menzies' speech was a 'declaration by the Prime Minister of the

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63. Melbourne to Lyons, 28 December, 1938, CRS A1608 item B41/1/6.

64. Menzies to Lyons, 5 January, 1939, ibid. Menzies seems to have ignored the numerous diplomatic appointments already made by Canada, South Africa and the Irish Free State. Hancock, Problems of Nationality, 1918-1936, p. 292.

65. The Sydney Morning Herald, 27 April, 1939.
intention to play a main part in the region of the Pacific ...'. The subsequent establishment of legations in Washington, Tokyo and Chungking and the development of direct contacts with the authorities in the Dutch East Indies, all of which were to constitute an important part of Australian wartime foreign policy, followed naturally from this declaration.

By 1939 Australia and New Zealand were both hedging against a possible failure of the Singapore strategy. This policy had its dangers because, in attempting to provide for their local defence while at the same time continuing to subscribe to the principles of imperial defence, the two dominions ran the risk of attending to neither strategy adequately. When war engulfed Europe in September, therefore, the governments of Australia and New Zealand waited anxiously to see whether Japan would, as the critics of the Singapore policy had maintained, take the opportunity to attack the British Empire in the East.

The Threat of Japan

The outbreak of the second world war found the Japanese army heavily committed in China. The British Foreign Office predicted that this preoccupation made it 'highly unlikely that Japan could venture upon any scheme of

66. Agendum on the establishment of Legations and Consulates in Canberra, 30 May, 1939, attached to minutes of Cabinet meeting of 24 August, 1939, CRS A2697 Vol. 2.

67. See below, Chapters 3 and 4. Sir Frederic Eggleston's appointment as Australian Minister to China in 1941 is not dealt with in the present work.
southward expansion ...'. At the same time Japan's friendly relations with Germany had suffered a severe setback with the signing of the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact on 23 August 1939. Japanese troops were actually engaged in fighting Russian forces along the Outer Mongolian border and, in the very month that Hitler concluded his treaty with Stalin, Japan had suffered heavy losses in this campaign. The government in Tokyo fell from power when news of Germany's perfidy reached the Japanese capital. These were encouraging signs for Australia and New Zealand; they would have been even more comforted if they had known the state of Japanese military planning: there were no plans ready for an attack on either of the dominions, nor were any in preparation. On 4 September the new Japanese Prime Minister formally stated that 'Japan will not interfere now that war has broken out in Europe but will proceed exclusively towards a solution of the China incident'.

This announcement came as a great relief to Australia and New Zealand. But in Canberra the Department of External Affairs warned that Japan's neutrality had to be


70. See below, pp. 282-86.

71. Sir Robert Craigie, British Ambassador in Tokyo, to Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, dated and received 9 September, 1939, D.B.F.P., Third Series, Vol. 9.
regarded as 'conditional' and there was 'no reason to believe that if the development of the war presents a favourable opportunity to Japan she will not seize it'. In the early months of the war, therefore, Australia, together with New Zealand, saw a conciliatory diplomacy towards Japanese ambitions in mainland Asia as the best means of warding off any potential menace.

Australia had consistently favoured this policy for the previous twenty years. Immediately after the first world war Major E.L. Piesse, the Australian government's adviser on far eastern affairs, predicted that Japanese expansion was inevitable so long as her population continued to increase; it was, therefore, 'to Australia's interest that Japan should expand on the continent of Asia, rather than to the South'. This attitude was not confined to conservative forces in Australia. In 1923 Matthew Charlton, the leader of the Australian Labour Party, suggested that there would be 'ample room in Manchuria for Japan's millions'. When Japan did, in fact, invade Manchuria in 1931 there was no significant body of opinion in Australia in favour of an attempt to restrain her and many welcomed the Japanese move as a check.

73 Director of the Pacific Branch of the Australian Prime Minister's Department, 1919-1923.
74 Memorandum by Piesse on The Far Eastern Question and Australia, 22 October, 1918, CRS A981 item Far East 9.
to the revolutionary aims of the Soviet Union. In 1935 Lyons told the British government and his fellow dominion Prime Ministers in London that the Japanese had produced order out of chaos in Manchuria and implied that the area ought to be regarded as one of special interest to Japan; otherwise, the Australian Prime Minister asked darkly, 'was there not a fear that the Japanese would turn to the Southern Pacific?'. In June 1939 a crisis in Anglo-Japanese relations developed at the Chinese city of Tientsin and war between the British Empire and Japan seemed imminent. Australia's advice to the British government was to seek a peaceful solution, even if this meant acceding to all Japan's demands.

Finally, Australia was very apprehensive about British and French attempts in the summer of 1939 to secure a treaty with Russia. Tokyo might regard such an agreement, in its far eastern context, as anti-Japanese. For this reason the news of the Nazi-Soviet pact, which destroyed all hopes of a

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76 Harrison-Mattley, 'Australia and the Far Eastern Crisis, 1931-1933', pp. v-vi and passim.
77 3rd meeting of British Commonwealth Prime Ministers, 9 May, 1935, CAB 32/125.
78 Telegram from Bruce, Australian High Commissioner in London, 18 June, 1939, CRS A1606 item SC E12/I, part 1. Tientsin, a port to the south of Pekin, was occupied, except for a foreign concession, by the Japanese. In June 1939 Japan demanded the surrender of the silver reserves held in the concession as backing for the Chinese currency. Another conflict arose over the refusal of the concession's authorities to hand over four Chinese whom the Japanese military alleged to be terrorists. A blockade of the concession followed but a settlement was eventually negotiated by Sir Robert Craigie, the British Ambassador in Tokyo, by which the silver reserves remained in the concession but Britain recognised that the existence of hostilities in China gave Japanese forces the right to take a wide range of measures to safeguard their own security. See R. Craigie, Behind the Japanese Mask (London, 1945), pp. 72-78.
powerful anti-German coalition in Europe, was not entirely 
unwelcome in Australia.  

New Zealand's attitude to Japanese ambitions had been less consistent. In 1931 she had appeared largely indifferent to the Japanese advance into Manchuria. In 1935 her Prime Minister, G.W. Forbes, described the Japanese question as 'not a matter of special concern in New Zealand' and his country's relations with Japan as 'consistently friendly'. This attitude changed with the accession of Labour to power later in the same year. When Japan renewed her attack upon China in 1937, New Zealand was the only member of the British Commonwealth, and almost the only member of the League of Nations, to press for a strong stand against the aggressor. By 1939, however, the obvious weakness of the British Empire in the event of a two-front war and New Zealand's helplessness in such a situation had forced a more circumspect policy; during the Tientsin crises her government returned to the practice of offering no comment. 

Both the Pacific dominions thus entered the second world war prepared to appease Japan. At a meeting of the

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82 3rd meeting of British Commonwealth Prime Ministers, 9 May, 1935, CAB 32/125.
83 Lissington, New Zealand and Japan, pp. 97-108.
Australian Cabinet on 29 August Percy Spender, the Assistant Treasurer, successfully argued that Menzies should urge the British government to take 'all steps ... to persuade Japan ... to a course of action which would be favourable to the Australian position in the Pacific'. Japan's anger at the Russo-German pact provided a suitable opportunity to act on this policy and Australian ministers did not want the British government to miss its chance of exploiting the situation. At a Cabinet meeting on the following day it was again urged 'that everything possible should be done immediately to arrive at an understanding with Japan ...'. It was for this reason that Australia had already given an unenthusiastic reception to the British suggestion that the Anglo-Japanese trade treaty of 1911 might be denounced as part of a show of strength against Japanese aggression. Four days after the outbreak of war Spender took a further opportunity to stress 'the necessity of Cabinet's indicating to the British Government the need for reopening negotiations with Japan' and another telegram relating Australia's anxieties about the Far East was sent to London. Spender's case was supported by Bruce, now the Australian High Commissioner in London, who suggested that, rather than rely on a fundamental divergence between Japan and Russia, the government in Australia 'should pursue an active policy designed to bring about a general understanding with Japan ...'.

86. Cabinet Minute, 30 August, 1939, ibid.
87. Cabinet Minute, 21 August, 1939, ibid.
88. Cabinet Minute, 7 September, 1939, ibid.
89. Telegram from Bruce, dated 5, received 6 December, 1939, CRS A1606 item SC E12/1, part 1.
New Zealand was also eager for conciliation. Immediately on the outbreak of war her government appealed to the nation's press not to print news or articles which could harm relations with Japan.\(^9^0\) Several months later the Deputy Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, made some unguarded comments in a speech which implied that he saw Japan as a potential threat to New Zealand. Rather than being passed over as an essentially trite statement, Fraser's utterance caused an outcry and he was widely criticised for running the risk of converting a 'friendly power' into an enemy.\(^9^1\) New Zealand and Australia together also put up resistance to British proposals for the introduction of an effective contraband control system in the Pacific because they were perturbed by the intention to intercept Japanese ships; the proposals were subsequently abandoned.\(^9^2\)

The conciliatory attitude of Australia and New Zealand towards Japan in 1939 was conditioned by Britain's preoccupation in Europe and her consequent weakness in the Far East. The traditional principles of imperial defence demanded a concentration of strength against the main enemy and so long as he could be contained, and finally defeated, the rest of the Empire would, it was hoped, be secure. At the same time, key points in the eastern hemisphere, most notably Singapore, had to be held. In the first months of

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\(^{91}\) Gordon, New Zealand Becomes a Pacific Power, pp. 115-16.

the Second World War the Pacific dominions faced the choice of concentrating their war efforts on helping the British and allied forces in the West or strengthening the defences of the British Empire in the Pacific.

**Singapore or the Middle East?**

By September 1939 the powerful defences which had been under construction at Singapore from the mid-nineteen-twenties were almost complete.\(^93\) The problem of the island's protection had been studied in detail and debated fiercely between the services in Whitehall\(^94\) but all the arguments had turned on the best method of resisting attack from the sea; the British authorities, thinking of the Singapore strategy in terms of battle fleets roaming around the oceans, imagined that the Japanese intended to operate in the same way. Accordingly, Singapore's massive 15-inch guns were designed to repel a frontal assault from the sea by the enemy's battleships.\(^95\) The possibility of a landward attack on the

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\(^{95}\) The celebrated myth that the gun defences at Singapore could only point out to sea is, however, untrue. Four of the five 15-inch guns could turn through a full 360 degrees. It may be that adjacent concrete emplacements hampered the rotation of the guns but at least some of them were able to turn sufficiently to fire on the enemy in Johore, at the southern end of the Malay peninsula, in February, 1942. Whether their armour-piercing shells were very effective against advancing Japanese infantry is another matter. See L.E. Beavis, 'The Defences of Singapore', *Stand-To* (the Journal of the Canberra Branch of the Returned Services League), Vol. 8 (1963), No. 2, pp. 7-9; *The London Daily Telegraph*, 22 April, 1974, letter from W.G. Daubeny.
island from Malaya was largely ignored. This was partly a result of the War Office's belief in the celebrated myth of the 'impenetrability' of the Malayan jungle but a more important factor was the obsession of British planners with the concept of sea power and the importance of sea communications. Thus, in 1922 the Admiralty had given assurances that 'a landing and attack from the mainland was impossible, as our fleet could prevent the transport oversea of a large military force' by the enemy.

The Admiralty's confidence was strangely inconsistent with the basic premise of the Singapore strategy: that the island would have to hold out until the main fleet could arrive. By July 1939 the estimated 'period before relief' had been extended from sixty to ninety days and in September it was increased to six months. But the land and air forces in Malaya were quite inadequate to resist a major attack. At the end of July 1939 the British Cabinet authorised the reinforcement of Singapore by a brigade group and two bomber squadrons from India. Even with these additions, however, there were only two brigades and eight squadrons of bomber and reconnaissance aircraft in Malaya on
the outbreak of war. Four of the squadrons were obsolescent and there was not a single British fighter stationed anywhere in the Far East.  

The British Chiefs of Staff always assumed that, in the event of hostilities, Australia and New Zealand would be prepared to send reinforcements to Singapore. The possibility that the dominions might provide a peacetime garrison had also been raised on several occasions. But this presented difficulties as the armies of the two Pacific dominions were largely part-time citizen forces lacking units suitable for permanent garrison duty abroad. Nor did the expense involved encourage the dominions to overcome this problem. Moreover, the terrain and climate at Singapore made it unsuitable as a training area for their troops and political reactions could occur if they were called upon to act in aid of the civil power. There were other obstacles

102 See, for example, 1305-B, CAB 32/127.
103 See, for example, 358-C, CAB 5/7; 236th meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, 13 April, 1938, CAB 53/9; Ismay, Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, to E.J. Harding, Permanent Under-Secretary of the Dominions Office, 13 December, 1938, CAB 21/496.
104 See, for example, minutes of meeting of Council of Defence, 30 August, 1923, and General Chauvel to Brigadier Blamey, Australian Army’s Liaison Officer in London, 31 August, 1923, CRS A981 item Defence 330.
105 Hankey to Major-General Dill, Director of Military Operations and Intelligence at the War Office, 2 December 1934, CAB 63/78.
106 Note of an informal meeting between Hankey and representatives of the three service departments, 1 August, 1934, CAB 63/66.
107 236th meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, 11 April, 1938, CAB 53/9.
which discouraged the United Kingdom itself from advancing the idea very enthusiastically; dominion units might not react well to being placed under a British officer and friction would certainly develop over the higher rates of pay received by Australian and New Zealand troops. Finally, as the Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence explained to the Dominions Office towards the end of 1938, 'the Chiefs of Staff did not feel confident (although of course they could not say so) that Australian troops would settle down in peacetime garrison duties alongside United Kingdom and native troops'.

These objections could be overcome in a wartime situation. When war broke out, however, the British government's most immediate interest was in securing naval co-operation from the dominions. The naval forces of Australia and New Zealand were, indeed, meaningless unless they operated in collaboration with the Royal Navy. New Zealand accepted the logic of this situation and quickly complied with the imperial naval plans. Her navy had never constituted an entirely separate force but only a Division of the Royal Navy. On 8 September the United Kingdom

108. Ibid.
109. Ismay to Harding, 13 December, 1938, CAB 21/496. Ismay added: 'This objection would not apply to the same extent to New Zealand forces.'
110. Telegram from SSDA, 8 September, 1939, CRS A2671 item 14/1939 and N.Z. Documents, Vol. 1.
acknowledged that in placing the Achilles, one of her two cruisers, together with two escort vessels under the orders of the Admiralty, New Zealand had 'made the maximum possible strategic contribution at sea under the present circumstances ...'.

The Australian government was far more cautious. At the outbreak of the war one of the Royal Australian Navy's six cruisers was already operating with the Royal Navy in the Caribbean. Towards the end of August the Admiralty had asked for another cruiser to be released for service in the Mediterranean. The Naval Board advised the government to comply with this request. It stressed that the pre-arranged plans which had been drawn up in Whitehall were devised to ensure that all the Empire's vital sea routes were provided with adequate defence. This arrangement would, argued Commodore Boucher in the best traditions of the blue-water school, provide far more effective protection for Australian interests than the retention of all the R.A.N.'s ships in Australian waters. In the event of trouble in the East it was part of this pre-arranged plan that the cruisers would return to the Australia Station. The authorities in New Zealand and India had already complied with the overall

113. Telegram from SSDA, 8 September, 1939, CRS A2671 item 14/1939.
114. Australian Cabinet Minute, 29 August, 1939, CRS A2697 Vol. 2.
115. Admiral Colvin was in Britain at the outbreak of the war. Boucher, the Second Naval Member of the Australian Naval Board, acted as First Naval Member and Chief of the Naval Staff until Colvin's return to Australia in October 1939.
plan and, Boucher implied, Australia would be disrupting the agreed imperial scheme if she did not follow suit. Moreover,

If the threat of an Eastern War develops we should, in addition to the swift recall of our cruisers, certainly expect the British Government to strengthen the Naval Forces in Eastern and Pacific waters in accordance with the pre-arranged plan. Any representations then made by Australia for the United Kingdom to accelerate the despatch of strong R.N. Forces will lose force if we are not now prepared completely to fall in with the strategic plans that have been so carefully laid.\textsuperscript{116}

The implication was clear: Australian help for the Empire was a prerequisite of British help for Australia at a later stage. But this consideration did not have a decisive influence on the Australian government while Japanese intentions remained unclear; permission for the release of any more vessels from Australian waters was refused.\textsuperscript{117} Nor did Australia hurry to fulfil the agreed arrangement by which the R.A.N. was to be placed under the control of the Admiralty in time of war; the necessary Order-in-Council was not issued until 7 November. Unlike the procedure in 1914, the transfer applied for as long as the Australian government wished and not for the duration of the war.\textsuperscript{118}

After the Japanese declaration of neutrality,\textsuperscript{119} the British government repeated its request for a cruiser and added that it would also welcome the help of Australia's

\textsuperscript{116} Memorandum by Boucher on H.M.A. Ship for the Mediterranean, 29 August, 1939, CRS A2671 item 14/1939.

\textsuperscript{117} Australian Cabinet Minute, 29 August, 1939, CRS A2697, Vol. 2.

\textsuperscript{118} Gill, Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942, p. 63.

\textsuperscript{119} See above, p. 61.
five destroyers in the Mediterranean. This time the
Australian government, more confident of the far eastern
situation, agreed. In October the cruiser Hobart joined the
Royal Navy's East Indies Command and at the end of that
month approval was given for the five destroyers to proceed
to Europe. An Australian cruiser did not actually serve
in the Mediterranean until the following year when Sydney
arrived at Alexandria in May, 1940. By this time, however,
only five of the R.A.N.'s sixteen combat units were left in
Australian waters. This policy was seen as serving
Australia's own best interests. As the Australian Chiefs of
Staff argued, the absence of the cruisers was justified
because they played a vital part in the protection of sea
communications to and from Australia. Moreover, the
destroyers, when fitted with Asdic equipment, were a most
effective weapon against submarines: 'It would therefore be
a serious waste of effective anti-submarine facilities to
retain these vessels in Australian waters when Australian
trade is being attacked by submarines in distant waters'.

The United Kingdom's proposals for army co-
operation made some allowance for the dominions' anxieties
about Japanese intentions. If Japan remained neutral and

120. Telegram from SSDA, 8 September, 1939, CRS A2671 item 14/1939.
121. Gill, Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942, pp. 132-34.
122. Australian Cabinet Minute, 31 October, 1939, CRS A2697, Vol. 3A.
124. Ibid., p. 129.
125. Observations and Recommendations of the Australian Chiefs of Staff on SSDA's telegram of 8 September, 1939, CRS A2671 item 14/1939.
adopted 'a friendly attitude towards the democratic countries', the British government hoped that Australia and New Zealand would be able to despatch an expeditionary force. It was for the two dominions to consider whether they would prefer to relieve British troops in such places as Singapore, Burma and India when units of brigade size became available or wait until an entire division could be sent to the main theatre of operations. If, on the other hand, Japan remained neutral but adopted 'an attitude of reserve towards the democratic countries', it would be unwise for either dominion to send troops abroad; they could best help by holding units ready to reinforce important points in the East, especially Singapore.  

As early as 9 September New Zealand informed London that she would raise 'a special military force for service within or beyond New Zealand'.  

If Japan's attitude was uncertain, Wellington would be guided by British advice and would hold formations ready for despatch at short notice to Singapore as well as Fiji and other islands where New Zealand had already accepted obligations. If the Japanese situation were favourable, a division would be ready for war service within eight months and the government would defer to British views on the use of this force.

126. Telegram from SSDA, 8 September, 1939, ibid and N.Z. Documents, Vol. 1.  
128. See above, p. 54.  
The Australian reaction was, once again, much more wary. In fact, the government's failure to match New Zealand's announcement on the raising of forces caused some bitter complaints in the Australian press. The Sydney Morning Herald led the campaign, attacking the 'complacency' with which the authorities were fighting the war and warning that it was 'beginning to arouse more than astonishment among the Australian public'; the time has come', it maintained 'when the nation will not tolerate unnecessary and injurious delays in preparing Australia's armed defences'. On 15 September Menzies announced that a force of one division would be created for service at home or abroad, depending on the circumstances at the time. But in other statements the Prime Minister continued to show opposition to sending large bodies of trained Australian troops overseas.

The government's hesitation reflected advice from the Australian Chiefs of Staff. The Chiefs were unhappy with the British assessment of the far eastern situation. There was a third possibility which they insisted should be borne in mind; that of open Japanese hostility. The Australian Chiefs of Staff certainly would not accept that there was any justification, in the existing circumstances, for the British premise of a neutral but friendly Japan. In

130. The Sydney Morning Herald, 14 September, 1939.
131. Ibid, 19 September, 1939. The Sydney Morning Herald consistently adopted a line critical of Menzies but see also The Bulletin, 4 October, 1939.
132. The Sydney Morning Herald, 16 September, 1939.
the immediate future, therefore, the question of the despatch of Australian troops overseas did not arise and there would even be some difficulty in providing equipment for forces to be despatched at short notice in the event of an immediate threat developing to Singapore or other strategic points in the western Pacific. If it should prove possible to release troops at a later date, the Chiefs of Staff did not favour the idea of relieving British units because Australian soldiers would then be 'relegated' to peace duties, an arrangement which would be most unpopular, both with the troops themselves and throughout Australia generally.\footnote{This appeared to preclude an Australian garrison for Singapore while the Pacific remained peaceful. The Chiefs of Staff had stated a principle which was to have an important influence on Australian policy: if Australian troops were to go abroad, they would have to be employed in an actual theatre of war where the Australian public would be able to see them fulfilling an immediately active and useful role.\footnote{After the first few weeks of the war the United Kingdom was becoming more anxious to secure the help of Australian and New Zealand land forces in the western hemisphere. The War Office estimated that by the next European spring the Germans would be able to field 170 divisions against a French total of 85 and a mere 10 British.}}

\footnote{Observations and Recommendations of the Australian Chiefs of Staff on SSDA's telegram of 8 September, 1939, CRS A2671 item 14/1939.}
\footnote{See below, pp.135-6 and 138.}
France was urging Britain to do more but the general staff considered this impossible without help from the dominions. Nazi propaganda, meanwhile, was making great play of the alleged Australian refusal to send any troops overseas. In November 1939 a meeting of dominion ministers was to take place in London to consider the conduct of the war. The British government attempted to use the occasion to gain a commitment from Australia and New Zealand to send troops to help restore the balance of forces in the West. For her part, Australia emphasised that the despatch of an expeditionary force would depend entirely on the situation vis-à-vis Japan and 'on the British plans for the reinforcing of Singapore by an adequate force of Capital ships. Australia was represented at the meetings in London by High Commissioner Bruce and the Minister for Supply and Development, the ubiquitous R.G. Casey. Neither man was a stranger to the centres of power in Whitehall. As soon as Casey arrived the British government pressed him to say how soon Australia could send a division to the West. It stressed the moral effect of a display of imperial unity as well as the need for additional military strength. At the War Office, General Northcott, the Deputy Chief of the


137. Telegram from Casey, dated 5, received 6 November, 1939, CRS A2671 item 34/1939.

138. Bruce had been High Commissioner in London since 1933; only two years previously Casey had given up the post of Australian Liaison Officer in Whitehall (see above, pp. 32-33) to return to Australia and enter federal politics.

139. Telegram from Casey, dated 5, received 6 November, 1939, CRS A2671 item 34/1939.
Australian General Staff who had accompanied Casey, learnt that the critical period in the military struggle was expected in the northern hemisphere spring of 1940; the implication was that the Australian 6th Division should be ready for operations by that date.\textsuperscript{140} Egypt and Palestine would be suitable locations where it might complete its training.\textsuperscript{141}

At the same time the British authorities set to work to quieten Australia's fears about the far eastern situation and the Singapore strategy. The Foreign Office, with the backing of the British Ambassador in Tokyo, reaffirmed that Japan 'will continue to concentrate all her efforts on the solution of the China incident'.\textsuperscript{142} She was also 'too apprehensive of the United States in its present mood to think seriously of any move involving danger to Australia and New Zealand, or to territories in which those Dominions are interested'.\textsuperscript{143} British policy towards Japan aimed to compose existing differences and restore 'friendly relations'.

At the Admiralty Winston Churchill, the new First Lord, prepared a memorandum on Australian naval defence which was reassuring about the naval situation.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{140}The 6th Division was the first raised in Australia in the second world war. There had been five divisions of the Australian Imperial Force in the first world war.

\textsuperscript{141}Telegram from Casey, for General Squires, Chief of the General Staff, from Northcott, dated 6, received 7 November, 1939, CRS A2671 item 34/1939.

\textsuperscript{142}DMV(39)2, Appreciation of Probable Japanese Policy in the Far East, 13 November, 1939, CAB 99/1; also N.Z. Documents Vol. 3, Appendix 1.

\textsuperscript{143}Ibid. These words were quoted from a despatch sent by Sir Robert Craigie from Tokyo. On the American role generally see below, Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{144}WP(39)125, CAB 66/3.
Churchill freely admitted to his British ministerial colleagues that the purpose of the paper was to show that Australia could comply quite safely with the War Office's request for troops for the Middle East.\textsuperscript{145} The First Lord began by recapitulating the principles of imperial defence on which the war was to be fought:

\textit{The power of the predominant fleet is exercised simultaneously in all quarters of the globe in which it had bases. This is irrespective of the station it occupies at any given moment, providing that it is not permanently tied to that station.}

The Admiralty was, therefore, 'most grateful to the Commonwealth Government for the loyal and clairvoyant strategy which has to the uninstructed eye denuded Australia of naval forces'.

Churchill then moved on to the existing situation. Italy's unexpected neutrality\textsuperscript{146} had given the Royal Navy greater mobility. Even if Italy should turn hostile, however, Australia and Singapore would be defended from a Japanese attack 'on a large-scale'. A fleet 'sufficient to act as a major deterrent on Japanese action' would be placed in far eastern waters 'from the moment that the danger to either Singapore or Australia developed in a manner which made their protection a real and practical war need'. The First Lord was careful to leave vague the exact size of the force which would be sent and the timing of its despatch. But he concluded his review with the bold assurance that

\textsuperscript{145} War Cabinet Minute WM89(39)7, 20 November, 1939, CAB 65/2.

\textsuperscript{146} See above, p. 40.
we regard the defence of Australia, and of Singapore, as a stepping-stone to Australia, as ranking next to the mastering of the principal fleet to which we are opposed and... if the choice were presented of defending Australia against a serious attack, or sacrificing British interests in the Mediterranean, our duty to Australia would take precedence.

It was this promise which brought the memorandum, originally intended by Churchill as a private communication to Casey, before the British War Cabinet on 20 November. Chamberlain protested that Churchill had gone further than any of the discussions held on the matter since February when the government had undertaken its reassessment of British strategic liabilities. The Cabinet had not been prepared to make any advance ruling that the Mediterranean would be abandoned to allow a fleet to proceed to the Far East. The Prime Minister, who was supported by Anthony Eden, the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, feared that the First Lord's words were, in places, 'not free from the danger of being misinterpreted into an announcement of our intention to send a Fleet to Singapore the moment Japan declared war'.

Lord Chatfield, the Minister for Defence Coordination, was much more sympathetic to Churchill's approach. In his view the memorandum left no doubt that the promise of a fleet depended on continued Italian neutrality and applied only to the specific case of an invasion of Australia. He was sure that

147 War Cabinet Minute, WM89(39)7, 20 November, 1939, CAB 65/2; see also note by Ismay, no date but referring to Churchill's memorandum, CAB 21/893.

148 See above, pp. 37-38.
if we told the Australians and New Zealanders that we had every intention of sending a Fleet to Singapore if a serious attack developed, but that a slight risk of raids had to be undergone, they should not be deterred from sending their forces overseas. After all, the Japanese would hardly allow a decision to invade Australia to turn on the absence of one Division.

Both Chamberlain and Chatfield were influenced by past experiences. As First Sea Lord at the time of the imperial conference in 1937, Chatfield bore a large share of responsibility for the promise then made to place far eastern interests before those in the Mediterranean in all circumstances. He was, therefore, keen to stress that Italy's neutrality made the situation similar to that envisaged when this promise had been made. Chamberlain, on the other hand, had been obliged to repudiate this assurance in March 1939 and he did not want a similar embarrassing situation to arise in the future.

Churchill did not hesitate to remind his colleagues that some assurance to the dominions was necessary if they were to be induced to send troops overseas. Moreover, no one in Cabinet was prepared to question the assumption that in the event of an invasion of Australia, however remote such a contingency might be, there would be no other course of action open to the British government but to abandon the Mediterranean and proceed to the dominion's aid. After a heated discussion, therefore, the British War Cabinet approved Churchill's paper on the understanding that it was to be read in conjunction

149. See above, p. 36.
150. See above, p. 38.
with previous statements on the subject, notably Chamberlain's telegram of 20 March, 1939.\textsuperscript{151} There was no intention to promise the dominions that a fleet would be sent to Singapore in the event of Japan showing signs of hostility or becoming a belligerent. The key factor in the despatch of British naval forces to the Far East would be the gravity of the threat to the dominions in the southern Pacific.

This became clear when Churchill met with the representatives of Australia and New Zealand later the same day; there could, the First Lord of the Admiralty stressed, be no question of moving powerful naval forces to the Far East on the mere threat of a Japanese attack.... We would undertake to send adequate naval forces to prevent any serious catastrophe but we could not make pledges to give a hundred per cent security against dangers which would probably never eventuate.

As for the island of Singapore itself, it 'could stand a siege of some months, and during that period it would be possible to assess more accurately the degree of force required to achieve its relief'.\textsuperscript{152}

On behalf of Australia, both Bruce and Casey realised that they were being given no more than a limited undertaking. Casey explained that while he had been 'much heartened' by Churchill's original memorandum, he had been 'somewhat disturbed by his amplification of it at the present

\textsuperscript{151}War Cabinet Minute, WM89(39)7, 20 November, 1939, CAB 65/2; for the telegram in question see above, p.38.

\textsuperscript{152}8th meeting of Dominion Ministers and a Representative from India, 20 November, 1939, CAB 99/1.
meeting'. In common with Bruce he recalled that the Australian government had for many years felt quite sure in their minds that if Japan entered the war, an adequate Fleet would be sent immediately to Singapore ....they certainly had not realised that the despatch of a Fleet was contingent upon a 'serious attack'.... If Australia were to put in the full war effort of which she was capable, his government would require a most comprehensive undertaking regarding the security of Singapore.

In reply Churchill stated that if, in the event of a three-front war against Germany, Italy and Japan, it did not prove possible to knock Italy out quickly, Britain might have 'temporarily' to leave operations in the Mediterranean to the French and 'to despatch to the East a Fleet of sufficient strength to re-establish the situation at Singapore'. Hence, under Australian pressure, Churchill had added to his first principle - that the British government would intervene to prevent a serious attack on Australia or New Zealand - a second, 'that we should never allow Singapore to fall'.

As a result of the discussions in the British War Cabinet and between British and dominion ministers, a revised version of Churchill's memorandum was produced and approved. At the request of New Zealand's representative, the Deputy Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, its scope was extended to include the smaller dominion. Thus the basic assurance was altered

\[153\] Ibid.

\[154\] WP(39)135, CAB 66/3; War Cabinet Minute WM92(39)5, 23 November, 1939, CAB 65/2.

\[155\] Note of Mr. Fraser's views, 20 November, 1939, annex to Minutes of 8th meeting of Dominion Ministers and a Representative from India, 20 November, 1939, CAB 99/1.
to read: 'our duty to our kith and kin would take precedence' over British interests in the Mediterranean. But, while the promise to defend the Pacific dominions remained, a 'more elastic' sub-paragraph was inserted, at the insistence of the more cautious British ministers, to deal with a situation in which the Japanese threat was less menacing:

the Admiralty would make such preparatory dispositions as would enable them to offer timely resistance either to the serious attack upon Singapore or to the invasion of Australia and New Zealand. These dispositions would not necessarily take the form of stationing a fleet at Singapore, but would be of a character to enable the necessary concentrations to be made to the eastward in ample time to prevent a disaster. With our present limited forces we cannot afford to have any important portion of H.M. Fleet idle. All ships must play their part from day to day, and there are always the hazards of war to be faced, but the Admiralty can be trusted to make the appropriate dispositions to meet events as they emerge from imagination into reality.

Churchill had been privately irritated by the insistent Australian attempts to obtain specific assurances. He was pleased to find that New Zealand took 'a much more realistic view of the situation'. Fraser was not able to attend the meeting of ministers on 20 November but he expressed in writing his opinion that there was 'no immediate fear of serious delay or difficulty in despatching a substantial British fleet to Singapore, should hostilities develop in the Far East, nor indeed have we any immediate

156. War Cabinet Minute WM92(39)5, 23 November, 1939, CAB 65/2.
157. WP(39)135, CAB 66/3.
158. War Cabinet Minute WM92(39)5, 23 November, 1939, CAB 65/2.
fear of such hostilities ...’. New Zealand's High Commissioner in London, Sir William Jordan, added that it was impossible for the United Kingdom to give 'any more complete assurances' than were contained in Churchill's paper.

New Zealand's government had, in fact, decided to send troops to the Middle East before any of these pledges had been made. On 6 November Fraser had attended a meeting at the War Office where the Secretary of State for War pressed strongly for a commitment by New Zealand in the Middle East; not only did Egypt offer excellent training facilities but it was in a central strategic position and the early despatch of the dominion's troops would have an important 'moral effect'. Fraser reported home favourably on this recommendation and his views were decisive in Wellington. On 11 November, ten days before the meeting of dominion ministers which discussed the Singapore strategy, Savage was able to cable his deputy with news of his Cabinet's agreement that the first echelon of the expeditionary force could leave for Egypt at the end of January 1940.

In London Casey was becoming perturbed that Australia might be left behind as the other dominions

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159. Annex to minutes of 8th meeting of Dominion Ministers and a Representative from India, 20 November, 1939, CAB 99/1.
160. 8th meeting, ibid.
161. Note of a meeting held at the War Office on 6 November, 1939, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 1, Appendix 2.
162. Fraser to PMNZ, 7 November, 1939, ibid.
163. PMNZ to Fraser, 11 November, 1939, ibid.
hastened to help Great Britain. As early as 19 September Canada had announced that she would provide a division for overseas service. The South African representative at the meeting of ministers told Casey confidentially of his government's intention to send the personnel for thirty air squadrons to Europe. On 16 November the Australian minister reported to Canberra that the British assessment of the Japanese situation 'reads very satisfactorily from the point of view of our security in the Far East' and he added pointedly the information that New Zealand had decided to send troops to Egypt even before she had received this assessment. Despite his disappointment at the dilution of Churchill's memorandum on the naval position, Casey agreed that 'the general situation was much better than anything we had foreseen a year ago'. After the meeting on 20 November it required only one further session between Bruce and Casey on the one hand and Chamberlain and Eden on the other to convince the two Australian representatives that they should advise their government that 'the wise and proper course would be for them now to authorise the despatch to Europe of the Australian Expeditionary Force'.

165 Telegram from Casey, dated 16, received 17 November, 1939, CRS A816 item 52/302/135.
166 Ibid.
167 8th meeting of Dominion Ministers and a Representative from India, 20 November, 1939, CAB 99/1.
168 War Cabinet Minute WM93(39)7, 24 November, 1939, CAB 65/2. Unfortunately the details of this meeting between the Australian representatives and the British Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs appear to have gone unrecorded. See also telegram from Casey, dated 23, received 24 November, 1939, CRS A816 item 52/302/135.
The Chiefs of Staff in Australia agreed; indeed, they had already, on 13 November, recommended that the 6th Division should be sent in December or January to complete its training in Egypt or Palestine and that a second division should follow the 6th overseas as soon as possible. This new enthusiasm for an overseas commitment may have been related to recent changes in the general staff; at the end of September the Australian War Cabinet, at its first meeting, had appointed General Squires, a British army officer, to be Chief of the General Staff. Nevertheless, the War Cabinet hesitated to accept the Chiefs' recommendations. After meetings on 15 and 16 November it decided to defer the question for consideration by the full Cabinet.

The reasons for this delay became clearer on 21 November when Menzies sent an extraordinary telegram to Casey. It began by stating that the Australian government was not convinced that the presence of an Australian division in the western hemisphere was 'sufficiently urgent to justify us incurring risk with our own defensive position'. Menzies then noted that the forty vessels needed to transport the division, together with the requisite naval convoy, appeared to be available at short notice. This puzzled the Prime Minister:

169. Meeting of Defence Committee, 13 November, 1939, CRS A2671 item 34/1939.
170. Long, To Benghazi, pp. 44-45.
171. Australian War Cabinet Minute, 15 and 16 November, 1939, CRS A2671 item 34/1939.
... the Commerce Department has for weeks been endeavouring to get some sort of satisfaction in relation to shipping urgently needed to transport our export commodities and without which the wheat industry alone will need many millions of Government support. All the efforts of the Commerce Department so far have been practically unavailing, and our anxiety regarding shipping is increasing.

We cannot reconcile these two things. It would appear that, having regard to the shipping position, we must determine the relative priority of such things as wool and wheat, and the special Division.¹⁷²

The Australian government was indignant that the United Kingdom had remedied its wheat shortage at the beginning of the war by purchases in Canada.¹⁷³ But Menzies' telegram implied a good deal more than indignation; it hinted that if the British government wanted the help of Australian troops it should, in turn, help Australia to meet one of her most pressing needs by buying up her large wheat surplus.

The glut on the world's wheat market was causing the Australian government serious domestic problems.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, Menzies' administration was leading a precarious existence, entirely dependent on the support of the Country Party in the House of Representatives.¹⁷⁵ There could be no better way of ensuring the loyalty of the Prime Minister's rural allies than by inducing the British government to buy up large

¹⁷² Telegram from Menzies to Casey, 21 November, 1939, CRS A816 item 52/302/135.


¹⁷⁵ See above, p. 6.
quantities of Australia's surplus primary products.

In London Casey, following Menzies' instructions, raised the question of the new season's wheat situation in Australia and pressed for a decision on the tonnage Britain would buy in 1940. The British authorities took the hint; the relevant volume in the civil series of the United Kingdom's Official War History finds it 'a little odd', to say the least, that the British government, which had been able by December 1939 to secure shipping for only half the 300,000 tons of wheat and flour which it had purchased in Australia up to that date, went on to conclude a contract with the Australian Wheat Board for 1,500,000 tons of wheat and 150,000 tons of flour for shipment in the calendar year 1940. Thus the United Kingdom paid for enormous quantities of an Australian product which it did not need or want, could ill-afford and a large proportion of which it knew would never be received. This is not necessarily to suggest that the Australian 6th Division went abroad solely in order that Menzies could conclude an agreement which would smooth the path for continued support from the Country Party for his administration. But it does indicate that the Australian government had a clear appreciation of what it considered its own particular interests to be and was quite capable of looking after them. The suggestion that 'Europe-minded men had rushed Australian forces to the aid of beleaguered

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176. Telegrams from Casey to Menzies, dated and received 22 November, 1939, CRS A816 item 52/302/135.
Britain is, at the very least, an oversimplified judgement on the events surrounding the raising and despatch of the second Australian Imperial Force.

There were, of course, strategic reasons for the Australian decision to send troops to the Middle East, reasons which also lay behind New Zealand’s deference to British advice. As with co-operation in the naval sphere, the gesture was intended to cement the alliance with Britain; in this sense the dominions were building up a forward defence line in London to complement that at Singapore. Moreover, in stressing the 'very central position' of Egypt, the British government was playing on the traditional importance which Australia and New Zealand attached to the Suez Canal as their 'life-line' to the United Kingdom. Equally important, it was a reasonable assumption that so long as Britain and France were not 'getting the worst of it in Europe' there was little danger of Japan acting against British or French interests in the East. Conversely, as Casey explained to his government, 'the greatest menace to

178See above, p. 4.
179See above, pp. 71-72.
180Note of a meeting held at the War Office between United Kingdom and New Zealand Representatives, 6 November, 1939, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 1, Appendix 2.
182Telegram from Casey, dated 23, received 24 November, 1939, CRS A816 item 52/302/135.
A cartoon by Norman Lindsay in the *Bulletin*, 7 August, 1940, illustrates the great importance which Australia and New Zealand attached to the Suez Canal as their 'life-line' to the United Kingdom.
Australia is the possibility of Britain being beaten in Europe'.  It was, therefore, in the best interests of the Pacific dominions to give as much help as possible to the war effort in the West. When, on 29 November, Menzies was finally able to announce that troops would be sent overseas, he stressed that his first aim was always to protect Australia; to that end his policy was 'to make the best possible contribution to the victory of the Empire and allied cause, wherever and whenever that contribution is needed'.

The convoy carrying the first main body of Australian and New Zealand troops to war arrived in the Middle East in February, 1940. Both the dominions took the greatest care to ensure that their soldiers were well-protected on the journey. In the previous December the Admiralty, following up a suggestion by Fraser of New Zealand, had offered the battleship Raimilles to escort the troopships. The Australian Naval Board, worried at the presence of German raiders, considered this protection inadequate and wanted three of the Royal Australian Navy's cruisers added to the escort. Menzies insisted that these extra vessels would

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183. Ibid.
187. Memorandum by Colvin, 6 December, 1939, CRS A2671 item 42/1939.
188. Gill, Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942, p. 87.
have to be provided by the Royal Navy 'so that Australian
cruisers should not leave coastal waters'.\footnote{Memorandum by Colvin, 15 December, 1939, CRS A2671 item 42/1939.} Once the
recommended that the demand for a reinforced escort should be
dropped in view of the reduced danger of enemy action against
the convoy.\footnote{Memorandum by Colvin, 15 December, 1939, CRS A2671 item 42/1939.} But the War Cabinet would accept no reduction
in the margin of safety for its troops.\footnote{War Cabinet Minute 97, 21 December, 1939, ibid.} The Admiralty was
therefore forced to find two additional cruisers for the
escort work, one of which was made available by the French
naval authorities.\footnote{Gill, \textit{Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942}, p. 88.} Several months later New Zealand
insisted on an improvement in the protection provided for her
troop convoys and the Admiralty was again forced to give way.\footnote{Waters, \textit{The Royal New Zealand Navy}, pp. 80-81; and for Fraser's insistence, while he was in London in November, 1939, on adequate naval protection for New Zealand's troops see his \textit{Supplementary Report on Arrangements for the Escort of the First Echelon}, 5 October, 1948, \textit{N.Z. Documents}, Vol. 1.}

Once they had arrived in the Middle East, the Australian and
New Zealand troops completed their training before going into
action in the North African campaign at the beginning of 1941.

\textbf{Australia and New Zealand had committed themselves
wholeheartedly to the concept of imperial defence with their
naval and land forces. It was to be a similar story in the
air. The British government had been trying for many years to}
get the Australian air force to undertake duties at Singapore. At the beginning of the war the Australian Chiefs of Staff agreed that the R.A.A.F. should do so as soon as its aircraft had been suitably re-equipped. The main air effort of both dominions, however, was not to be devoted to their own defence, or that of the Pacific region, but to the Empire Air Training Scheme by which they trained aircrew 'as a contribution towards Imperial defence' and largely for operation with the R.A.F. in Europe. Australia's attachment to the E.A.T.S. was dramatically demonstrated in December 1939 when, at Menzies' behest, Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Burnett replaced Air Vice Marshal Goble as Chief of the Air Staff. Goble had expressed reservations about the effect of the scheme on Australia's own defence position but Burnett was an avowed imperialist and set about providing airmen for the British Bomber Command with great enthusiasm. After his appointment, the heads of all three services in Australia were British.

While the Pacific dominions devoted their military efforts to war in Europe, they maintained an active interest in developments in the Pacific area. The Australians, in

196. Observations and Recommendations of the Australian Chiefs of Staff on SSDA's telegram of 8 September, 1939, CRS A2671 item 14/1939.
198. McCarthy, 'The Defence of Australia and the Empire Air Training Scheme, 1939-1942'.
199. This arrangement continued until March 1940 when General Squires died and was replaced as Chief of the General Staff by the veteran Australian soldier, Sir Brudenell White.
particular, revealed this at the meeting of ministers in London in November 1939 when they raised questions about the Netherlands East Indies and Thailand. The Netherlands East Indies, an oil-rich archipelago pointing down from Malaya towards Australia, had an important place in the Singapore strategy; a Japanese occupation of these islands could threaten both the Singapore naval base and Australia directly. Thailand, Malaya's mainland neighbour, was also vital to the defence of the south-east Asian area. In November 1939 Casey stressed the importance which his government attached to the integrity of the Dutch Empire in the East and asked about British intentions in the event of an assault on the islands; he also enquired about the likely attitude of the Thais in the event of Japanese encroachments and recounted, cryptically, that he had recently received information which 'pointed to the fact that we might secure their goodwill at the present time, if we were prepared to take the necessary measures'.

In reply the British representatives explained that it was not within their power to prevent Japanese aggression against the Dutch territories and they were therefore opposed to entering into any obligations to the Dutch authorities in

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200. See Map 3 between pp. 94 and 95.
201. 8th meeting of Dominion Ministers and a Representative from India, 20 November, 1939, CAB 99/1.
Map 3: South-East Asia and East Indies Archipelago.
(from S.D. Waters, The Royal New Zealand Navy)
Churchill, plainly annoyed at the neutrality of the Netherlands in the European conflict, went further than his colleagues and suggested that as long as Holland remained unallied with the British Empire there could be no question of going to war with Japan for the integrity of the Netherlands East Indies. Even if the Dutch did become allies, 'it did not necessarily follow that Japanese encroachments on the Netherlands East Indies would result in our declaring war on Japan'. This, the First Lord implied, would depend on the British assessment of the threat to Singapore and Australia. Casey's references to Thailand were interpreted to mean that Britain should support the claims of the Thais in their border dispute with French Indo-China. But the British spokesmen could not contemplate any adjustments which would be unacceptable to their French ally. Casey thus failed to get the government in the United Kingdom to recognise either question as a vital British interest. But in raising the matter he had drawn attention to the need to establish a line beyond which Japanese encroachments would not be tolerated and had laid the foundations for later attempts by Australia and New Zealand to define this line.

202. This was consistent with the pre-war British attitude. At least as early as 1936 the Dutch government had attempted to interest London in the defence of its eastern Empire. The British Chiefs of Staff accepted that the integrity of the Dutch East Indies was a major concern for the British Empire but, in view of the heavy burden of existing responsibilities, they would not consider giving any firm commitments there. 280th meeting of the C.I.D., 10 July, 1936, CAB 2/6 and 307th meeting, 20 January, 1937, CAB 2/7.

203. 8th meeting of Dominion Ministers and a Representative from India, 20 November, 1939, CAB 99/1.

204. See below, Chapters 3, 4 and 5.
Upon the outbreak of the second world war the Pacific dominions, and especially Australia, were very much aware of the threat which Japan could pose to their security. At the beginning of 1939 New Zealand had expressed her interest in the defence of the south-western Pacific area; towards the end of that year Casey drew British attention to 'the reality of the Japanese menace in the minds of the Australian Government'. But, once it had been established that Japan intended to remain neutral, the conflict in the dominions between the demands of imperial defence and their own local defence was resolved decisively in favour of imperial defence. Australia and New Zealand, as integral parts of a greater Empire, saw their own survival as dependent on that of the Empire as a whole; more specifically, the reasoned, correctly, that so long as they could help the United Kingdom to hold the position in the West, Japan would not be tempted to adopt a more belligerent attitude. While relying mainly on diplomacy to contain the potential danger in the East, the dominions did not neglect defence policy. During the months to the end of the 'phony war' in Europe, however, their defence thinking continued to centre mainly around the Singapore strategy and their faith in British naval assistance. Thus the Australian government undertook the extravagant construction of a graving dock for battleships at Sydney on the grounds that the Admiralty was 'likely to be favourably influenced in disposing capital ships in Australian waters if these

205. See above, pp. 42-56.
206. 8th meeting of Dominion Ministers and a Representative from India, 20 November, 1939, CAB 99/1.
docking facilities are available. 207

The British authorities themselves were forced to reconsider the Singapore strategy when they urged Australia and New Zealand to provide troops for the western hemisphere. As at the imperial conference in 1937 208 and the Wellington conference in April 1939, 209 the British government was faced with the difficult task of steering a course between the two dangers of promising more than it might eventually be able to give and less than was required to retain the commitment of the Pacific dominions to imperial defence. Chamberlain restrained Churchill and Chatfield from making any rash assurances and the War Cabinet wisely declined to assume that Italian neutrality would continue indefinitely. Both British and dominion ministers expected Singapore to hold out against a prolonged siege. But, in the end, the only definite and unqualified assurance which Australia and New Zealand received concerning their own security was that their protection against a major attack or invasion would take precedence over British interests in the Mediterranean or Middle East.

In these early months of the war Anglo-Australasian relations remained good. But communications between London and Canberra occasionally showed signs of strain. In October 207. Covering memorandum to Remarks of Naval Board, by A.G. Cameron, Minister for the Navy, 10 April, 1940, CRS A2671 item 81/1940.

208. See above, p. 36.

209. See above, p. 50.
1939, for example, the British handling of the announcement of the Empire Air Training Scheme stole much of the thunder from the Australian government and resulted in a strong protest from Canberra. In November 1939 it was suggested at a meeting of the British War Cabinet that Australia's persistent claims for assurances concerning the despatch of a fleet to the Far East stemmed from a long campaign of propaganda waged by the general staff in Australia to divert money from naval to land forces. The Australian general staff certainly had waged such a campaign but the suggestion that this was the sole motive for Australia's anxieties revealed a lack of sympathy for her genuine fears of the potential Japanese menace in the Pacific. These strains, and the want of appreciation in the United Kingdom of Australia's concerns, portended much more serious disagreements if the allied cause should suffer serious setbacks in the Far East at some future date.

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210. Telegram to SSDA, 11 October, 1939, CRS A981 item Defence 261.

211. British War Cabinet Minute WM92(39)5, 23 November, 1939, CAB 65/2. The minutes do not record who advanced this argument.

212. See above, pp. 26-27.
CHAPTER THREE

THE FALL OF FRANCE AND THE DEFENCE OF THE PACIFIC

June 1940 - 1941

In the early hours of 10 May 1940 the German army and air force launched their lightning attack against western Europe. This *blitzkrieg* set in motion events which were to have a direct effect on the Singapore strategy. By the end of June Germany occupied a coastline extending from Norway to Spain. The British Isles were directly threatened with invasion. Meanwhile, on 10 June Mussolini, fearful of forfeiting 'his share of the spoils', had pushed Italy into the war alongside his Axis partner. The loss of the French fleet and the addition of the Italian navy to the enemy's strength created a new and unfavourable situation for the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean and eastern Atlantic. The difficulty of maintaining the allied forces in the Middle East was thereby compounded. All these factors increased the problem of despatching a fleet to Singapore.

The events in Europe of May and June 1940 also gave rise to a direct threat to the security of the Singapore naval base itself. The collapse of metropolitan France opened the way for Japanese penetration into French Indo-China and brought Japanese forces closer to the Malay peninsula. At the same time the fall of Holland rendered the Dutch East Indies highly vulnerable to the attentions of an aggressor.


2. See, for example, memorandum by Admiral Colvin, *A Review of Naval Dispositions, November, 1940*, CRS A2680 item 10/1940.
Italian Intervention and the Fall of France

As the first winter of the war began to give way to spring in the northern hemisphere the possibility of Italian intervention in the conflict was foreseen in London, Canberra and Wellington. At the end of April 1940 anxieties about the position in the Mediterranean led the Admiralty to favour the recall of the battleship Ramilles from its convoy escort duties in the South Pacific and Indian Oceans. The Australian and New Zealand governments, for their part, were influenced to consider seriously the implications of Italian hostility when their second and third troop convoys sailed for the Middle East in April and early May. Contingency plans for the diversion of the troopships to the United Kingdom via the Cape of Good Hope were produced. On the whole, however, the British Chiefs of Staff were not greatly perturbed at the possibility of Italian belligerence. Neither the Italian army nor air force, they suggested, were ready for war. Even the possibility of a direct attack by the Italian navy on allied interests in the Mediterranean and Red Sea appeared to cause the Chiefs very little concern. Their complacent attitude was adopted by the Chiefs of Staff in Australia who had no hesitation in claiming that the 'advent of Italy into the war is unlikely seriously to affect the Naval situation'.

3 SSDA to GGNZ, 29 April, 1940, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 1.
4 PMA to PMNZ, 30 April, 1940, enclosing telegram from PMA to SSDA, and GGNZ to SSDA, 30 April, 1940, ibid.
5 SSDA to GGNZ, 30 April, 1940, and GGNZ to SSDA, 2 May, 1940, ibid; Australian War Cabinet Agendum 96/1940, CRS A2671 item 96/1940; see also M.P. 1185/5, Box 7, File 1869/2/3.
6 Telegram from SSDA, dated and received 4 May, 1940, Appendix A to War Cabinet Agendum 96/1940, Supplement No. 1, CRS A2671 item 96/1940.
outside the Red Sea and Mediterranean areas. 7

The views of the Australian Chiefs of Staff appear to have derived simply from the absence of Italian naval forces in the Pacific. They took no account of the effect on the Singapore strategy of increased British naval commitments in the West. The neglect of this connection by the British Chiefs of Staff is equally surprising in view of the importance attached to Italian neutrality in earlier statements concerning the Singapore policy. 8 It may be that the British government still genuinely believed that Italy would hold aloof from the war; even at this late stage attempts to induce the Italians to maintain their neutrality were not abandoned. 9 These efforts may, indeed, have met with success if France had proved capable of withstanding the German onslaught; it was the French collapse which was the unforeseen factor in British and French strategic thinking. 10 Until this débacle the Admiralty's plans to counter any Italian naval intervention had assumed an equal division of labour with the French navy in the Mediterranean: the British being largely responsible for the eastern basin and the French for the western. 10 The disengagement of the French fleet left the Royal Navy alone to bear the triple burden of the preservation of the United Kingdom from invasion, the defence of the vital

7 'Strategical Appreciation by the Australian Chiefs of Staff, 2 May, 1940, CRS A2671 item 97/1940.
8 See above, pp. 35, 37 and 79-80.
10 Telegram from SSDA, dated and received 4 May, 1940, Appendix A to War Cabinet Agendum 96/1940, Supplement No. 1, CRS A2671 item 96/1940.
trade routes to the British Isles and the protection of the Mediterranean flank in the middle eastern theatre. As a member of the British War Cabinet's secretariat noted, whatever Britain's obligations in the eastern hemisphere, 'the cold hard fact remains that no British government in their sane senses could possibly contemplate the despatch of even an inadequate Fleet to the Far East at the present time'.¹¹ The fall of France was, then, a much more serious setback for the Singapore strategy than an Italian declaration of war by itself would ever have been.

Before these two blows fell, the Australian government had, in contrast to the British and Australian Chiefs of Staff, become deeply concerned about the Mediterranean situation. Menzies knew that attention had been given in recent years to the probable effect of Italian hostility on the Singapore strategy and complained vehemently to London that Australia had been denied the fullest information which was available on the problem.¹² Australian ministers doubted that the United Kingdom appreciated the urgency of the situation; on 7 May the War Cabinet concluded that it was necessary, in Australia's own interests, to urge on the British government 'the vital need for a positive and active diplomacy' by Great Britain and France in the neutral countries of the Balkan and Mediterranean regions.¹³

¹¹ Minute by Colonel Hollis for Ismay, 3 July, 1940, CAB 21/893.
¹² Telegram to SSDA, 8 May, 1940, CRS A2671 item 97/1940.
¹³ War Cabinet Minute 260, 7 May, 1940, ibid.
Despite this considerable insight, the French withdrawal from the war caused feelings of shock in the antipodes as great as those in London. Sir Percy Spender recalls that the news struck the Australian War Cabinet 'like a bomb' with one of his colleagues, Sir Henry Gullett, repeating over and over 'I just can't believe it. I just can't believe it'. The immediate Australian reaction was to offer more assistance to the British Empire's general war effort. Menzies set the tone by insisting that imperial and local defence continued to be 'closely interrelated'. Already on 22 May his government had agreed that the Royal Navy's cruisers Ceres and Colombo then at Singapore en route for service in Australian waters, could be released for duties on stations where they were more urgently needed. On 12 June the Chief of the Australian Naval Staff recommended that the Admiralty be given 'every possible help' in keeping the Red Sea route open so that supplies and reinforcements could continue to get through to the troops in the Middle East. Admiral Colvin suggested that, in making this effort, 'some risks must be accepted' in Australian waters. By straining her naval resources to the full Australia was able to offer the additional assistance of an armed merchant cruiser and a sloop for service in the Red Sea immediately and promised a further sloop by the end of July. At the end of May the War

15. See above, pp. 1-2.
16. War Cabinet Agenda 139/1940, CRS A2671 item 139/1940.
17. War Cabinet Minute 285, 22 May, 1940, CRS A2671 item 112/1940.
18. Report by Colvin, 12 June, 1940, CRS A2671 item 136/1940.
19. Report by the Australian Chiefs of Staff on Empire Co-operation and Local Defence, 12 June, 1940, ibid; War Cabinet Agenda 139/1940 and War Cabinet Minute 360, 25 June, 1940, CRS A2671 item 139/1940.
Cabinet had agreed to the despatch of a squadron of Hudson aircraft to Singapore; in mid-June it followed the advice of the Chief of the Air Staff and approved the transfer of a further squadron of Hudsons and one of Wirraways to the island. At the same time ministers agreed to the establishment of another division for overseas service.

While Australia was eager to give increased military, naval and air support, an attitude of 'business as usual' persisted in other areas. In October 1940, for example, the War Cabinet gave a most unsympathetic reception to a proposal, originating from India, for a joint war supply policy for the whole of the eastern Empire. The Australian government was unwilling to become dependent on India for any of its war needs. The reasons for this reluctance were not only strategic and political; Australia was also determined not to be put in the position of importing goods which she could already produce and had no intention of allowing wartime expediency to cramp the development and expansion of her secondary industries. Once again the Australian government showed its determination, despite the demands of a wartime

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20. Telegram from Menzies to Bruce, 28 May, 1940, CRS A1606 item D17/2/1.

21. Report by the Australian Chiefs of Staff on Empire Co-operation and Local Defence, 12 June, 1940, CRS A2671 item 136/1940; War Cabinet Agendum 139/1940 and War Cabinet Minute 360, 25 June, 1940, CRS A2671 item 139/1940.

22. Menzies had actually used the phrase 'business as usual' in a speech at the beginning of the war; it was apparently intended to show the need to build up Australia's strength at home in order to be able to fight the war abroad. The Sydney Morning Herald, 6 September, 1939, Hasluck, The Government and the People, Vol. 1, pp. 198-99.

23. Notes on discussion between Menzies and certain officials, 12 October, 1940 in War Cabinet Agendum 217/1940, CRS A2671 item 217/1940; see also War Cabinet Minutes 5/5, 20 October 1940 and 565, 17 October, 1940 and Menzies to SSDA, 14 October, 1940, ibid.
situation, to protect what it perceived to be the particular interests of the country.  

The 'business as usual' attitude in certain spheres of the national life did not carry over to Australia's neighbour in the south Pacific. New Zealand's government reacted to the events of May 1940 in Europe by taking 'virtually unlimited' powers to dispose of men and resources in the national interest, with compulsion, including conscription, freely envisaged. In terms of quantity, of course, New Zealand had far fewer resources and men to offer than Australia but she did place the decision on the disposition of the third echelon of the expeditionary force in the hands of the British authorities, indicating that she was even prepared to accept the brigading of her troops with Australian or British soldiers to form a composite division if the situation so required.

In their initial enthusiasm to match the British 'spirit of Dunkirk' by rallying ever more loyally to the imperial cause, Australia and New Zealand appear to have overlooked the full impact of the fall of France on the Singapore strategy. This had to be spelt out to them from London. As early as 13 June the dominions were warned that naval reinforcements were unlikely to be sent eastward in the event...

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24. See also above, pp. 87-90.
of a Japanese declaration of war. Following the formal surrender of France the Dominions Office forwarded a fuller and brutally frank appraisal. The French defeat, it explained, 'radically altered' the circumstances of previous assurances concerning the basing of an adequate fleet on Singapore. The loss of the French fleet had affected the whole balance of naval strength in home waters:

Formerly we were prepared to abandon the Eastern Mediterranean and despatch a Fleet to the Far East, relying on the French Fleet in the Western Mediterranean to contain the Italian Fleet. Now if we move the Mediterranean Fleet to the Far East there is nothing to contain the Italian Fleet which will be free to operate in the Atlantic or reinforce the German Fleet in home waters, using bases in north-west France. We must therefore retain in European waters sufficient forces to watch both German and Italian Fleets and we cannot do this and send a Fleet to the Far East.  

The reactions in Wellington and Canberra suggest that neither of the Pacific dominions had been prepared for such a disclosure. In New Zealand Prime Minister Fraser treated the news as an unanticipated blow. He complained to Churchill, who had succeeded Chamberlain as British Prime Minister on 10 May, in strong and bitter terms about the

28. Telegram from SSDA, dated 28 June, 1940, CRS A2671 item 156/1940.
29. A more cynical interpretation would be that it was the candour of the British authorities on this occasion in admitting their inability to send a fleet, rather than the substance of their message, which was unexpected. Whatever truth there may be in this proposition, it certainly does appear that Australia and New Zealand, in their initial reactions to the fall of France and the direct threat of an invasion of the British Isles, had genuinely lost sight of the deeper implications for their own security.
repudiation of 'repeated and most explicit assurances'. In Australia the effect was to cause the Chiefs of Staff to reassess the importance of the defence of south-east Asia. And in London High Commissioner Bruce immediately flew 'off the handle' when presented with the text of the Dominions Office's telegram.

This was not the first occasion on which Bruce's sensitivity on the subject had been made apparent to the British government. General Ismay, the Military Secretary to the British War Cabinet, hastened to reassure the High Commissioner; since Japan had made no immediate move to capitalize on the European situation it was not necessary to make any choice between British imperial interests in the eastern and western hemispheres. Moreover, the General insisted, the Singapore strategy was still intact in so far as Japan would never attempt a 'serious invasion' of Australia while the British fleet, wherever located, was still in being and Singapore remained secure. Nothing in recent events had altered the basic promise that, in the last resort, 'the security of the Empire in the Far East' would be placed before

30 Wood, The New Zealand People at War, p. 194; see also Gordon New Zealand Becomes a Pacific Power, pp. 119-20.
31 See below, pp. 134-35.
32 Minute by Hollis for Ismay, 3 July, 1940, CAB 21/893.
33 See above, pp. 82-83. And as early as June 1939 Bruce had taken a most indignant attitude to what he regarded as a repudiation of previous British promises to send a fleet to Singapore. See record of meeting in Prime Minister's room at House of Commons, 28 June, 1939 and record of meeting at Dominions Office, 11 July, 1939, both dealing with the situation in the Far East and both attended by Bruce; annexed to minutes of 362nd meeting of the C.I.D., 26 June, 1939, CAB 2/9.
that of the Middle East. Churchill's assurances of November 1939,\textsuperscript{34} Ismay claimed, remained valid.\textsuperscript{35}

This was, to say the least, an optimistic interpretation of the situation. Ismay neglected to observe that since November 1939 the relative importance of the Middle East had been increased by those very developments which made it impossible to send a fleet to the Far East. The disasters in western Europe made the retention of the Middle East theatre of the 'utmost importance' to the successful prosecution of the war, particularly in view of the vital Anglo-Iranian oilfields and the need to maintain the economic blockade of Europe.\textsuperscript{36} The Dominions Office did, indeed, inform Australia and New Zealand in this sense at the very same time as the War Cabinet's Military Secretary was providing Bruce with his 'reassurance'. It was the British government's clear intention, the Dominions Office explained, to retain the fleet in the eastern Mediterranean 'as long as possible'. Moreover, the supply of equipment to the middle eastern theatre ranked second in importance only to the defence of the United Kingdom itself against invasion.\textsuperscript{37}

Ismay's dealings with the Australian High Commissioner were influenced by fears that Australia and New Zealand would refuse to provide further troops if the far eastern situation

\textsuperscript{34}See above, pp. 78-84.
\textsuperscript{35}Ismay to Bruce, 3rd/4th July, 1940, CAB 21/893.
\textsuperscript{36}Telegram from SSDA, dated 3, received 4 July, 1940, CRS A2671 item 136/1940 Supplement No. 1.
\textsuperscript{37}Ibid.
was presented in its darkest colours. As the Battle of Britain reached its height, similar sentiments troubled others in Whitehall. By August 1940 London was presenting the picture in a more cheering light. The British Chiefs of Staff endorsed Ismay's long-term faith in the Singapore strategy so long as Singapore itself was available as a base and a fleet remained in being. The maximum scale of attack to which Australia and New Zealand were likely to be subjected continued, therefore, to be limited to 'cruiser raids and light seaborne attacks against ports'. On 11 August Churchill sent a personal message to both Menzies and Fraser in which the British Prime Minister declared his belief that Japan was unlikely to go to war, at least until she had been able to judge whether Germany could make a successful invasion of the British Isles. Even if Singapore were attacked it 'ought to stand a long siege'. Finally, Churchill gave a most definite undertaking:

If ... contrary to prudence and self-interest, Japan set about invading Australia or New Zealand on a large scale, I have the explicit authority of Cabinet to assure you that we should then cut our losses in the Mediterranean and proceed to your aid, sacrificing every interest except only the defence of the safety of this Island on which all depends.

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38. See, for example, covering note by Sir Edward Bridges, Secretary of the British War Cabinet, to Appreciation of the Situation in the Far East by the Chiefs of Staff, WP (40)302, CAB 66/10.

39. Appreciation of the Situation in the Far East, 31 July, 1940, COS(40)592, enclosed in WP(40)302, Ibid.

40. SSDA to High Commissioner for the United Kingdom (Wellington), 11 August, 1940, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3. In Churchill's own account the message has a slightly different wording and continues 'and would proceed in good time to your aid with a fleet able to give battle to any Japanese force which could be placed in Australian waters, and able to parry any invading force, or certainly cut its communications with Japan'. Churchill, The Second World War, Vol. 2, p. 386.
Thus Churchill did not follow Ismay to the extent of putting 'the security of the Empire in the Far East' before that of the Middle East. Instead the Prime Minister stuck closely to his position of November 1939 by referring only to a large-scale invasion of Australia and New Zealand. Nevertheless, the cutting of British losses in the Mediterranean implied the abandonment of the whole of the Middle East by the Allies. The consequent loss of vital oil supplies would have seriously jeopardized the Allies' ability to continue the conduct of the war. It is a matter for speculation whether, in the event, Churchill would really have been prepared to abandon the oil of the Middle East, even to defend Australia and New Zealand from invasion. It seems improbable. It is less unlikely, however, that the British war leader had complete confidence that Japan would never attempt a large-scale invasion of the Pacific dominions and that he therefore had no fear of ever actually being called upon to make good his pledge. 41

The new optimism which, from August 1940, characterized London's reports to the dominions owed much to the anticipation of an improvement in the naval situation within a matter of months. In the meantime the most which Churchill could promise Australia and New Zealand in the first stage of a war with Japan was the stationing of a battlecruiser and aircraft carrier in the Indian Ocean. 42 By the end of the

41. In his memoirs Churchill certainly maintained that he never believed Japan would attempt to invade Australia; see The Second World War, Vol. 3, The Grand Alliance, pp. 523 and 592.
42. SSDA to High Commissioner for the United Kingdom (Wellington), 11 August, 1940, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.
summer no reduction in the Royal Navy's commitments had occurred and it was becoming apparent that the time scale for the recovery of naval supremacy in the Mediterranean and eastern Atlantic would have to be revised. In November 1940 the Fleet Air Arm did secure a notable victory in disabling half of the Italian fleet at Taranto. This success led to hopes in Australia that some naval units might be freed from the Mediterranean for service in the Far East, a suggestion which was also taken up strongly in London by R.A. Butler, Chairman of the War Cabinet's Far Eastern Committee. The Admiralty, however, was concerned that the Italian warships had been damaged rather than destroyed. It insisted that the maximum possible force had to be retained in the Mediterranean on the grounds, as the new First Lord, A.V. Alexander, vividly put it, that 'we must still sock the wop' when his battleships had been repaired. Moreover, 'we must put first things first, and ... concentrate our forces on beating Italy and Germany'. If it did prove possible to withdraw any ships from the Mediterranean, Alexander believed that the vital Atlantic convoys had the most deserving claim on their services.

Churchill agreed with his First Lord; indeed, he suggested that the victory over the Italians carried

43. Telegram to Bruce, 3 December, 1940, CRS A2680 item 10/1940.
44. Memorandum by Butler, 23 November, 1940, F5359/193/1, F.O. 371/24711. See also 10th meeting of the Far Eastern Committee, 28 November, 1940, CAB 96/1. See also below, p.203.
45. Minute by Alexander, 27 November, 1940, ADM 1/10365.
46. Alexander to Halifax, 29 November, 1940, ibid.
The Italian naval defeats in the Mediterranean towards the end of 1940 were followed by Italian military failures in North Africa at the beginning of 1941. Norman Lindsay in the Bulletin, 12 February, 1941, comments on increased German pressure on Japan to join the conflict. Stalin's Russia is seen as another potential enemy.
implications rather the reverse of freeing forces to proceed to the Far East. The Japanese would realize that 'the paper strength of the Italian fleet was not to be reckoned upon ...'. The British fleet in the Mediterranean would, then, in accordance with the principle of the 'fleet in being', continue to exercise a deterrent effect on Japan. This was the gist of the reply offered by the Prime Minister at the end of 1940 when the Australian government inquired about the possibility of sending three or four capital ships to Singapore. In place of warships Churchill could offer only patronizing advice: 'We must try to bear our Eastern anxieties patiently and doggedly' until Italy had been completely knocked out of the war, 'it always being understood that if Australia is seriously threatened by invasion we should not hesitate to compromise or sacrifice the Mediterranean position for the sake of our kith and kin'.

The Admiralty's views were also shared by the Australian Naval Board. By November 1940, the Royal Australian Navy's six cruisers and two armed merchant cruisers were divided equally between the Australian Station and more distant waters. The Sydney, together with five Australian destroyers, was serving in the Mediterranean; Hobart, with two Australian sloops, in the Red Sea; Australia with the Home Fleet and Westralia was on escort duty in the Indian Ocean.

47 British War Cabinet Minute WM288(40)2, 13 November, 1940, CAB 65/9.
48 Telegram from Churchill, quoted in Advisory War Council Minute 80, 8 January, 1941, CRS A2680 item 10/1940.
49 Review of Naval Dispositions, November, 1940, by Colvin, ibid.
These disposition were questioned by opposition members of the Advisory War Council who indicated that the R.A.N. might have been better employed in providing direct protection for Australian ports and sea-borne trade in Australian waters. Their anxieties coincided with greatly increased activity by German raiders in the seas adjacent to Australia at the end of 1940. Nevertheless, Admiral Colvin immediately countered their suggestion with a resolute exposition of the case for imperial defence. The problem of the Australian Station could, the Chief of the Naval Staff insisted, be viewed only in the light of 'the Empire's worldwide naval responsibilities'. The location of the bulk of British naval forces in the North Sea and Mediterranean was actually a safeguard for Australian trade and sea communications because it contained the enemy's main naval forces in those waters. Colvin went on to maintain that naval dispositions had always to be based on 'the overriding assumption that supplies and food to and from the United Kingdom are the most essential requirements for the waging of the war'. The defence of the Atlantic trade routes was therefore first in importance among the tasks of those naval forces not required to contain the enemy's warships. In second place came routes from the United Kingdom, India and Australia to the Middle East and only then the routes in the southern Indian and Pacific Oceans. Finally, the Admiral

50. After the general election of September 1940 and Menzies' failure to obtain a national coalition government, an Advisory War Council of four government and four opposition members was set up to advise the War Cabinet on matters concerning the defence of Australia and the conduct of the war.  
51. Advisory War Council Minute 34, 25 November, 1940, CRS A2680 item 10/1940.
The Advisory War Council in session at Canberra yesterday. From left: Messrs. J. Beasley, N. J. O. Makin, F. M. Forde, J. Curtin (Leader of the Opposition); the Prime Minister, Mr. Menzies; Mr. W. M. Hughes (Attorney-General and Minister for the Navy); Mr. P. Spender (Minister for the Army), Mr. A. Fadden (Treasurer), and Mr. H. Holt (Minister for Labour).
endorsed the argument that the containment of German and Italian attacks and the ability to destroy their naval forces 'must be a vital factor in the possibility of Japan joining issue in the Far East'. 52

Colvin's disquisition did not prevent the Australian government from bowing to Labour Party pressure for an approach to the United Kingdom on the early despatch of capital ships to Singapore. 53 But the irresolution of Menzies' overture 54 and his acquiescent acceptance of the British refusal 55 suggest that his sympathies lay with the Chief of the Naval Staff. The fall of France and the subsequent British confession of inability to send a fleet to Singapore had not, therefore, led Australia to abandon her commitment to the principles of imperial defence. The same was true for New Zealand. In January 1941 Wellington did request the return of the cruiser Leander to help meet the German raider menace but was easily persuaded by the Admiralty that, from the larger imperial point of view, it was more desirable to allow the vessel to continue to carry out her duties

52. Review of Naval Dispositions, November, 1940, by Colvin, ibid.
53. Advisory War Council Minute 48, 2 December, 1940, ibid.
54. Telegram to Bruce, 3 December, 1940, ibid. Menzies first asked Bruce to ascertain from Churchill or the First Sea Lord whether it would be advisable to make such representations.
55. The Australian approaches did succeed in achieving a small modification of the naval dispositions when, on 8 December 1940, a German raider attacked ships in Nauru Harbour in the Gilbert Islands and the Admiralty subsequently agreed to the return of the Sydney and Westralia to help deal with the raider problem. Advisory War Council Minute 70, CRS A2680 item 10/1940; British War Cabinet Minute WM303(40)1, 10 December, 1940, CAB 65/9; Gill, Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942, pp. 283-84.
While Churchill could offer Menzies no help in satisfying the Australian Labour opposition, the British Prime Minister steadfastly refused to abandon the Singapore strategy as the long-term basis of the security of the British Empire in the Far East. In October 1940 the First Lord of the Admiralty brought before the War Cabinet proposals for a new naval building programme which entailed the construction of six new capital ships. Churchill lent the programme his full support and secured its acceptance in the face of strong opposition. The critics were led by Lord Beaverbrook, the Minister for Aircraft Production, and other ministers concerned with supply who feared that the naval building would devour a large share of already scarce resources. The programme was wasteful, they argued, because none of the capital ships could be completed until 1943 or 1944 at the earliest. It was a reasonable assumption that the United States, with her decisive naval strength, would be involved in any war with Japan by that date. But Churchill was adamant that if Britain was to retain her place in the Far East she could in no circumstances afford to fall behind the Japanese in capital ship construction.

57 WP(40)349, CAB 66/11. The capital ship proposals actually entailed the resumption of work which had been suspended after the outbreak of war. The Admiralty now suggested that work on the *Howe* and *Vanguard* should go forward as rapidly as possible, that on *Lion* and *Temeraire* should proceed as men and material became available and *Conqueror* and *Thunderer* ought to be started as soon as practicable.
58 British War Cabinet Minute WM277(40)3, 25 October, 1940, CAB 65/9.
In taking this stand the British Prime Minister clearly had in mind exigencies beyond those of the immediate wartime situation. He was determined that Great Britain should be capable of demonstrating her presence in the eastern hemisphere after the end of hostilities not only for the benefit of defeated enemies but for that of subject peoples and also in order to counter the influence of victorious allies which might threaten to become too strong. Since Churchill was emphatic that he had not come to power in order to preside over the disintegration of the British Empire, the Singapore strategy, though temporarily in abeyance after the fall of France, remained a fundamental factor in British imperial thinking.

The Greater Threat of Japan

During the second half of 1940 Australia and New Zealand continued to share British hopes that an improvement in the European situation would quickly restore the Singapore strategy to the realms of practical possibility. At the same time both dominions began to examine more urgently the possibilities of complementary and alternative security arrangements. Australia adhered to a policy of containing the Japanese threat to the northward by diplomatic measures. New Zealand, by contrast, strongly resisted the granting of any concessions to Japan.

It was Australia's views which accorded more nearly with those of the United Kingdom. In the wake of the French collapse the British Chiefs of Staff urged that, from a
military point of view, 'a wide settlement in the Far East - including economic concessions to Japan - should be concluded as early as possible'. The British Ambassador in Tokyo, Sir Robert Craigie, offered advice in a similar vein.

Winston Churchill, for his part, appreciated that British weakness necessarily dictated the nature of British diplomacy in the Far East. But he also knew that Japan was unlikely to be satisfied with any arrangement which did not effectively exclude British interests altogether. He preferred, therefore, to 'play for time' rather than attempt a general settlement. As the Prime Minister told the dominions on 11 August:

We are trying our best to avoid war with Japan, both by conceding on points where the Japanese military clique can perhaps force a rupture and by standing up where the ground is less dangerous.... I do not think myself that Japan will declare war unless Germany can make a successful invasion of Britain. Once Japan sees that Germany has either failed or dare not try, I look for easier times in the Pacific. In adopting against the grain a yielding policy towards Japanese threats, we have always in mind your interests and safety.

Australia fully endorsed the idea of playing for time. The dominion's government was concerned that tough bargaining for a wide-ranging settlement might only serve to accentuate British weakness. On the other hand, it considered

61. SSDA to High Commissioner for the United Kingdom (Wellington), 11 August, 1940, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.
that time was running in the Empire's favour. Above all, it was in Australia's interests that the Sino-Japanese war should not be brought to a successful negotiated conclusion because this would 'simply leave Japan free to take full advantage of new opportunities occasioned by any set-back in the European war'. Thus, Menzies insisted, any discussions should be drawn out in order to keep Japan involved in China and to provide 'that necessary three months to demonstrate we are able to withstand the attack of Germany'.

Each specific problem ought to be dealt with as it arose in such a way as to avoid hostilities and 'where the ultimate issue is a war in which we cannot afford to become involved tactics of bluff should not be used'.

New Zealand's views diverged completely from those of her Pacific neighbour. Wellington naturally remained eager to avoid hostilities with Japan but Fraser was quick to rebuke Menzies and suggest that continued concession at the expense of our friends, our rights and our principles is not the best way of achieving this object, which is more likely to be attained by a reasonable and discreet display of confidence and determination.

New Zealand thus returned to her belief that conciliation

62. Extract from telegram from Menzies to Bruce, 25 July, 1940, Annex E to External Affairs Department Memorandum on British Policy in the Pacific, 2 January, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 14A.

63. Extract from secret telegram to Bruce, 8 August, 1940, Annex G, ibid.

64. Extract from telegram from Menzies to Bruce, 6 August, 1940, Annex F, ibid.

65. GGNZ to SSDA, 7 August, 1940, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3
would merely encourage the aggressor. Her government readily appreciated the dangers which were involved in a strong stand backed only by weak forces but it also held that the British Commonwealth should do nothing to risk 'misunderstanding and resentment in the United States of America'. Unlike Australia, New Zealand did not have her own diplomatic representation in Washington and was not, therefore, so aware of the great difficulties involved in achieving any concerted policy with the Americans.

A major test of British and Australasian policy in the Far East followed immediately after the French surrender. Japan demanded the closure of the 'Burma Road', along which supplies were transported to Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Nationalist forces. The quantity of material sent by this route was not great but the issue was complicated as the majority of the equipment was of American origin. Moreover, the question of aid to the Chinese resisters of Japanese aggression was a sensitive one for public opinion and the matter soon assumed a moral as well as material aspect. As the Dominions Office summed up the situation for the benefit of the Australian and New Zealand governments: 'Put bluntly, our problem is whether we are to incur both United States and Chinese odium by stopping traffic or face the consequences of

66 See above, pp. 42-43 and 64.
67 GGNZ to SSDA, 30 July, 1940, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3
68 See below, pp. 191-92.
69 Telegrams from SSDA to GGNZ, 26 June, 1940, N.Z. Documents Vol. 3. See Map 3 between pp. 94 and 95.
refusal without United States support'.

The solution proffered by Australia was entirely a product of British impotence in the Far East. The War Cabinet might maintain boldly, and for the record, that the British Empire 'should not become committed to a policy of appeasement towards Japan'. But all the advice tendered from Canberra encouraged such 'appeasement'. The Japanese demand, it was suggested, did not affect the 'future or present security of [the] Empire'. If the United States was not prepared to give 'the most complete support' there was, Menzies advised, little alternative to acceptance; refusal was likely to lead to 'a grave risk of war ... which cannot be contemplated in our present position'.

British inquiries in Washington revealed that something considerably less than complete support could be expected on this issue; the American advice was that Britain should agree to the Japanese demands. Nevertheless, in London the War Cabinet was at first inclined to take a strong stand and informed the dominions accordingly. In the meantime the Australian government received a report from its Trade Commissioner in Tokyo intimating that any failure to

71. Telegram from SSDA to GGNZ, 26 June, 1940, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.
72. War Cabinet Minute 449, 2 August, 1940, CRS A2671 item 162/1940.
73. Telegram to SSDA, 27 June, 1940, CRS A981 item Far East 20A, part 2.
74. War Cabinet Agendum 162/1940, CRS A2671 item 162/1940.
75. Extract from telegram from SSDA, 1 July, 1940, Annex C to External Affairs Department Memorandum on British Policy in the Pacific, 2 January, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 14A.
accede to the Japanese claims would be met with open aggression. The Trade Commissioner urged that Australia's influence on the home government should be used to secure conciliation. In the light of this information, Whitehall's proposed reply to Japan threw the Australian Minister for External Affairs, John McEwen, into a state little short of panic. The minister feared that Australia might be to blame for not urging the policy of appeasement on London with sufficient force. He insisted that a further communication should be sent stressing much more emphatically Canberra's desire that 'these concessions should be made rather than incur any real risk whatever of becoming engaged in hostilities with Japan'. It was clear that McEwen's views stemmed firstly from the absence of British capital ships in the Far East and secondly from the indications that the United States would not come to the Empire's aid in the event of hostilities over the Burma Road affair.

These Australian representations reinforced the views of the British Chiefs of Staff and Sir Robert Craigie. The British military position, they argued, left no room for the refusal of the Japanese demands since such a rejection would almost certainly mean war. On 10 July, therefore, the British War Cabinet revised its attitude and agreed to 'suspend the transit of war material through Burma for a

76. Telegram from Trade Commissioner, Tokyo, 5 July, 1940, in War Cabinet Agendum 162/1940, CRS A2671 item 162/1940.
77. War Cabinet Agendum 162/1940, ibid.
period of three months, on the understanding that during
this period special efforts will be made to bring a just and
equitable peace in the Far East’. 79

In recommending to the United Kingdom authorities a
policy of conciliation, the Australian government was urging
them in a direction in which they were already disposed to go.
New Zealand, on the other hand, adopted a stance reminiscent
of her loyalty to the idea of collective security in the four
years preceding the outbreak of the second world war. 80 A
highly moral tone entered into the expression of New Zealand's
views. When it appeared that the British government would
take a strong line on the Burma Road, Wellington voiced
approval, asserting that it was not convinced 'that a simple
acceptance of the present Japanese demands would be morally
right or even politically expedient'. It would, moreover,
smack of a readiness 'to sacrifice ... the principle of
resisting aggression for the purpose of endeavouring to
protect our own interests'. 81 When the United Kingdom did
decide to close the Burma Road Fraser, who had become Prime
Minister of New Zealand following Savage's death in March
1940, complained bitterly that this had been done without
consultation. As for the substance of the decision, 'we
neither understand nor sympathise with the policy that has
been adopted vis à vis Japan ...'. In Fraser's opinion,

79. Telegram from SSDA to GGNZ, 11 July, 1940, N.Z. Documents,
Vol. 3.
80. See above, pp. 42-43 and 64.
81. GGNZ to SSDA, 3 July, 1940, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.
The policy of 'appeasement' is in our view no more likely to be successful in the Far East than it was in Europe ... and we would be most reluctant to associate ourselves with any further attempts of this nature which would we feel be wrong in principle, and in practice more likely to precipitate aggression.... 82

The day before the formal conclusion of the Burma Road agreement a change of government in Japan brought the more pro-Axis administration of Prince Konoye to power. The New Zealand government could not refrain from chiding London that its policy had failed even before it had begun.83 There was certainly no sign of any Japanese willingness to arrive at 'a just and equitable peace in the Far East'. But in terms of the British and Australian strategy of 'playing for time' the arrangement was not entirely unsuccessful. The failure of the German Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain, a failure which led to the abandonment of Nazi plans for the invasion of the British Isles, occurred within the three months' duration of the agreement. There is evidence to suggest that these events caused the Japanese to adopt a less intransigent attitude in at least some of their dealings in the Far East. 84.

By the end of September 1940, however, it was apparent that three months would not be sufficient for the

82. GGNZ to SSDA, 30 July, 1940, ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. The Dutch authorities, for example, were able to report that the Japanese attitude to the Netherlands East Indies had become much less stiff after the defeat of the German air force in August and September, 1940. British War Cabinet Minute WM265(40)6, 3 October, 1940, CAB 65/9. Hitler finally cancelled Operation 'Sea Lion', his plan for the invasion of the British Isles, on 12 October, 1940.
clarification of the European situation. The Australian government indicated that it would favour the temporary extension of the Burma Road agreement. This would complement the 'temporizing negotiations' with Japan which Menzies advocated in the belief that 'the outcome of events in the near future promises to strengthen our position'. New Zealand stood by her previous decision and wholeheartedly supported the re-opening of the Road.

Towards the end of September two events occurred which indicated that New Zealand's attitude was fully justified. On 23rd of that month, after issuing an ultimatum to the Vichy authorities, Japanese troops moved into the northern provinces of Indo-China. In the estimation of the British Chiefs of Staff Japan had thereby gained a vantage point from which she could seriously threaten Singapore.

85. Extract from most secret telegram from Menzies to SSDA, 17 September, 1940, Annex H to External Affairs Department Memorandum on British Policy in the Pacific, 2 January, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 14A. See also draft telegram to SSDA, Annex A to War Cabinet Agenda 203/1940, CRS A2671 item 203/1940. These views of the Australian Prime Minister accorded well with those of Churchill who considered that the Empire would be in little better shape to fight Japan in October than it had been in July but who held out hopes for an improvement within the next three months, especially with two Royal Sovereign battleships due to come into commission. External Affairs Department Memorandum on Policy in the Far East (no date), CRS A981 item Far East 20A, part 3.

86. GGNZ to SSDA, 25 September, 1940, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.

87. WP(40)364, CAB 66/11. The Japanese moves were not, however, part of a deliberate plan for a future attack on British territory. The new government headed by Konoye had resolved to expedite a successful conclusion to the war in China but at the same time wanted 'to solve the problem of the south within such scope as would not lead to war with other powers'. H. Feis, The Road to Pearl Harbour. The Coming of the War Between the United States and Japan (Princeton, 1950), p. 85, citing a contemporary Japanese document entitled 'Gist of the Main Points in Regard to Dealing with the Situation to Meet the Change in World Conditions' (Feis' emphasis).
Four days later a ten-year pact between Germany, Italy and Japan was signed; in return for recognition of the 'new order' in Europe, Japan secured Axis endorsement of her leadership of a 'Greater East Asia'. This agreement was generally considered as being aimed at the United States and therefore appeared to strengthen the possibility of a hardening of American opinion against Japan, perhaps leading eventually to United States participation in any far eastern war. Early evidence of this was suggested when the British Ambassador in Washington reported Secretary of State Cordell Hull as saying that he "greatly hoped that we would re-open the Burma Road". In the new circumstances Craigie also favoured the end of the agreement. The British War Cabinet therefore resolved that the altered situation required a new policy, a judgement for which it secured the agreement of the Australian government. On 8 October Craigie told the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs that His Majesty's Government did not intend to renew the Burma Road agreement and the Ambassador's interview passed off peacefully.

The endorsement of the re-opening of the Burma

88. British War Cabinet Minute WM260(40)5, 27 September, 1940, CAB 65/9. Telegram from Casey (Washington), dated 27, received 30 September, 1940 and External Affairs Department Memorandum on Australian Policy in the Far East since the Outbreak of War, 30 September, 1940, CRS A981 item Far East 14A.
89. British War Cabinet Minute WM265(40)5, 3 October, 1940, CAB 65/9.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
93. British War Cabinet Minute WM268(40)6, 9 October, 1940, CAB 65/9.
Road by the Australian government marked a highly significant change of policy. Canberra began to move away from the idea of relying primarily on diplomacy to contain the Japanese threat. The change, however, was slow and never complete and often the old and new courses were pursued concurrently. In December 1940, for example, the British government, emboldened by the more co-operative attitude of the United States, stepped up its aid to China in the form of an extension of £10 million credit. As expected, New Zealand welcomed this move enthusiastically. Menzies, on behalf of Australia, also expressed his approval, thereby giving voice to the dominion's new line of action. In the same vein the Australian government accepted proposals put forward by the United Kingdom from October onwards for economic action to prevent Japan accumulating stocks of strategic raw materials and to make her 'feel the effect of ranging herself against the democracies ...'.

On the other hand, the Australian government entertained nagging doubts about the new course. These led Sir Frederick Stewart, McEwen's successor in the External

94. See below, p. 234, for the eleventh hour attempts by Australia to salvage the American-Japanese talks at the end of November, 1941.

95. External Affairs Department Memorandum on British Policy in the Pacific, 2 January, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 14A.


97. Extract from telegram from Menzies to Bruce, 26 November, 1940, Annex I to External Affairs Department Memorandum on British Policy in the Pacific, 2 January, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 14A.

98. External Affairs Department Memorandum, 2 January, 1941, ibid.
Affairs portfolio, to wonder 'whether the present policy being pursued towards Japan is not calculated to lead to awkward consequences for Australia, without being a substantial deterrent to Japan'. By the end of 1940 the Australian government had placed a total prohibition on the export of scrap iron, steel and tin to Japan, restricted the export of other metals to a pre-war average and confined wheat sales to a cash basis. These represented interim measures organised by the United Kingdom until such time as the United States would co-operate in more elaborate restrictions. But Canberra had considerable qualms about taking unilateral action without any prior understanding with the United States. The full extent of this nervousness was not revealed to London but on 9 December Stewart cabled the Australian Minister in Washington complaining that 'the present time is not one for a policy of pin pricks' and regretting that 'the application of piecemeal measures against Japan ... appears to have had the effect of driving Japan more deeply into a policy of southward expansion'.

It is not surprising, therefore, that some aspects of the old appeasement policy lingered on in Australia. In October 1940 the Advisory War Council seriously entertained a proposal by Sir John Latham, the Minister-designate to Tokyo, that Australia should order aircraft from the Japanese.

99. Telegram from Stewart to Casey, 9 December, 1940, Annex J, ibid.
100. External Affairs Department Memorandum, 2 January, 1941, ibid.
101. Telegram from Stewart to Casey, 9 December, 1940, Annex J, ibid.
102. Extract from Advisory War Council Minute 19, 19 October, 1940, CRS A2684 item 50.
a suggestion intended to put the interests of Japan in opposition to those of Germany. No less an authority than the Japanese Consul-General in Sydney was convinced that the Australian government was entirely serious in this endeavour.\footnote{103} The Air Department had, indeed, been giving consideration to a similar idea for several months and the Aircraft Production Commission had entered into discussions with Mitsubishi Shoji Koisha Ltd. for the supply of training aircraft.\footnote{104} In December 1940 the Advisory War Council recommended that the possibility of obtaining the immediate delivery of fighters should also be investigated\footnote{105} and the importance of the continuance of the negotiations was emphasised.\footnote{105} The idea was only abandoned when Burnett, the Chief of the Australian Air Staff, complained that the cunning Japanese might install secret delayed-action explosive devices in the planes which could be activated in the event of any attempt to use them against Japanese forces.\footnote{106}

The decision to send Sir John Latham to Tokyo in December 1940 was another example of the persistence of the older strand of policy. The appointment of a Minister to Japan had been decided in June by a War Cabinet anxious to carry out the exchange of representatives before the

\footnote{103} Telegram from External Affairs Officer in London (Mr. Stirling), dated 28, received 29 September, 1940, CRS A981 item Defence 59, part 4.  
\footnote{104} J. McEwen, Minister for Air, to Menzies, 14 November, 1940, CRS A2684 item 50.  
\footnote{105} Advisory War Council Minute 50, 2 December, 1940, \textit{ibid.}.  
\footnote{106} Chief of the Air Staff's views as recorded in McEwen to Menzies, 11 December, 1940, \textit{ibid.}.}
international situation deteriorated still further. Some delay in announcing the appointment resulted from Latham's reluctance to leave the office of Chief Justice of the High Court in order to undertake the task. When McEwen was finally able to make the nomination public in August, he echoed Menzies' statement of April 1939:

> it is natural and indeed right that in considering Australia's own international life we should think first of our position in the Pacific. It is upon this stage that our destiny is set. Here, Australia and with us New Zealand have a direct and primary responsibility.

McEwen was also at pains to stress that the appointment in no way weakened 'our utterly indissoluble bond with Britain ...'. But, as Craigie anxiously pointed out, the nomination came at a time when 'torrents of abuse' were being directed daily at the United Kingdom in the Japanese press. From the British point of view the moment was hardly propitious for an announcement which 'might be generally acclaimed in Japan as evidence that Australia is indifferent to Japan's inexusable behaviour towards the United Kingdom ...'.

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108 The *Melbourne Argus*, 25 June, 1940. Latham consulted Casey, by then Australian Minister in Washington (see below, p.189), before finally deciding to accept the job. Casey, along with the British Ambassador in Washington, consider the proposal 'admirable'. Latham to Menzies, 27 June, 1940; Latham to Menzies, 3 July, 1940; telegram from Casey, dated 3, received 4 July, 1940, Series 65, Folder 1, Latham Papers, Accession 1009, National Library of Australia.

109 See above, p. 58.

110 Contained in telegram to Bruce, 28 August, 1940, CRS A981 item Far East 14A.

111 Ibid.

112 Telegram from SSDA, dated and received 20 August, 1940, ibid.
when the British government asked Australia to emphasise that Empire solidarity on far eastern policy remained unbroken, the response was no more than coolly sympathetic.\(^{113}\)

In Australia itself the appointment was greeted with great enthusiasm and relief; Latham's private papers contain no less than seven thick files of letters and telegrams of congratulation and good wishes in his new endeavour.\(^{114}\)

Latham arrived in Tokyo on 20 December and presented his credentials four days later. Australia's Official War Historian records that the appointment 'was the action of a government that still fervently hoped for peace with Japan and believed in the possibility'.\(^{115}\)

The Australian government certainly did still hope that Japan would refrain from war. But by the end of 1940 belief in this possibility was not preventing Australia from examining in earnest military measures which she could take to provide for the defence of the south-east Asian and Pacific areas.

The Defence of South-East Asia and the Pacific

The collapse of France not only removed the possibility of a British fleet sailing to the East but brought the Japanese threat closer to the Singapore naval base itself.

\(^{113}\)Ibid and telegram to Bruce, 28 August, 1940, ibid.

\(^{114}\)Series 65, Folders 2-8, Latham Papers. Unfortunately this collection contains no material relevant to Latham's work in Tokyo. The circumstances surrounding the Minister's departure from Japan suggest that his private papers were probably left behind. (See below p.258, footnote 71.) For other examples of the welcome accorded to Latham's appointment see The Melbourne Argus, 19 August, 1940; The Bulletin, 21 August, 1940.

French Indo-China, with its potential advanced bases for an attack on Malaya, became a tempting bait for Japanese encroachments. At the same time the German occupation of Holland left the future of the Netherlands East Indies clouded in uncertainty. A Japanese seizure of this archipelago, besides yielding a rich harvest of natural resources, would menace Singapore from the south. It would, moreover, sever communications between the base and Australia and New Zealand, bringing danger much nearer to those two dominions themselves.

Even before the outbreak of the second world war Japanese advances into China had weakened the strategic position of Singapore. At the end of June 1940 London warned the dominions that any further Japanese infiltrations into French Indo-China, the Dutch East Indies or Thailand could only exacerbate the situation. Moreover,

Owing to the increased range of aircraft and the development of aerodromes, particularly in Thailand, we can no longer concentrate on the defence of Singapore Island entirely but must consider the defence of Malaya as a whole, particularly the security of up country landing grounds. For this reason and because we cannot spare a fleet for the Far East at present it is all the more important that we should do what we can to improve our land and air defence in Malaya.

Thus it was only in mid-1940 that the security of Singapore in relation to the defence of the Malayan peninsula as a whole began to receive serious consideration at the highest level of British military planning. In their

117 Telegram from SSDA, dated 28, received 29 June, 1940, CRS A2671 item 156/1940.
far eastern appreciation, forwarded to the Pacific dominions on 12 August 1940, the United Kingdom's Chiefs of Staff stated,

Our policy in the Far East until the Fleet again becomes available is to rely primarily on air power in conjunction with such military forces as can be made available. Land forces are also essential for the close defence of naval and air bases, for internal security, and for dealing with such enemy land forces as might succeed in gaining a footing in Malaya and Dutch Borneo despite our air action.\textsuperscript{118}

The Chiefs now admitted that even the stationing of a fleet at Singapore would 'only partially guard' the naval base against the overland threat presented by Japanese infiltration.

The protection of Malaya clearly required greater forces than the protection of Singapore island alone but those available in the existing situation, especially in the air, were totally inadequate. In March 1940, in deference to the view of the British Chiefs of Staff that the threat from Japan had receded while that from Russia had increased, the two squadrons which had been despatched to Singapore from India during the previous northern hemisphere summer were returned.\textsuperscript{119} At the end of July 1940 there were only eighty-eight first-line aircraft in the Malay peninsula. The Chiefs of Staff recommended this number be increased to three hundred and thirty-six by the end of 1941. They also recommended that

\textsuperscript{118} WP(40) 302, CAB 66/10 and N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3, Appendix 4.

\textsuperscript{119} See above, p.68. WP(40) 102, CAB 66/7; British War Cabinet Minute WM73(40)9, 20 March, 1940, CAB 65/6. At Eden's insistence the governments of Australia and New Zealand were consulted before this transfer was made but they raised no objections.
six brigades of troops constituted the minimum acceptable garrison. Even this figure, more than twice the existing number actually stationed in the peninsula, was based on the assumption that the recommended level of air strength would be attained; otherwise the equivalent of three divisions and attached troops was necessary. There was, however, not a single British division available in any theatre to go to Malaya. The only suitable troops, London considered, were in Australia. On 28 June, therefore, the United Kingdom sought Australian help in the form of the despatch of a division of the A.I.F. to Malaya. The use of Australian troops to plug this gap would, London asserted, be 'in the best interests of the Empire' as a whole.

The Australian Chiefs of Staff rejected this proposal outright. They were not prepared to disrupt the 7th Division's pre-arranged training programme. More importantly, the Chiefs insisted that the country's first obligation was to her men who had already been sent to the Middle East. Diversion of reinforcements, or resources of any kind, away from that area was not an acceptable policy. The Australian War Cabinet fully concurred in these objections and on 3 July London was informed accordingly.

121 Telegram from SSDA, dated 28, received 29 June, 1940, CRS A2671 item 156/1940.
122 Australian Chiefs of Staff recommendations, 2 July, 1940, ibid.
123 War Cabinet Minute 394, 3 July, 1940, ibid.
124 Telegram to SSDA, 3 July, 1940, ibid.
The United Kingdom authorities, for their part, were resolved not to submit lightly to this refusal. The British Chiefs of Staff successfully urged their government to continue to press the matter. The appreciation of the far eastern situation, forwarded to Australia in mid-August, was accompanied by an animated request to reconsider the early despatch of troops to Singapore 'in view of the urgency of the problem'.

The British military appreciation did, indeed, have a profound effect on the Australian Chiefs of Staff. For the first time the full extent of the British Empire's weakness in the Far East was spelt out to them from London. As a result the Australian Chiefs were no longer disposed to accept Whitehall's assessment of the scale of attack to which Australia was likely to be subjected. With the Japanese 'well aware of the containment of our fleet' in European waters' the prospect of Japan sending naval forces including battleships and aircraft carriers into the seas adjacent to Australia had to be seriously considered. A medium scale attack or even an invasion could not, therefore, be ruled out.

125 WP(40)302, CAB 66/10. The Chiefs of Staff were successful despite the attitude of Churchill who was personally far from enthusiastic about the prospect of the 7th Australian division remaining in the Far East rather than proceeding to the Middle East. See Butler, Grand Strategy, Vol. 2, p.337.

126 Extract from telegram from SSDA to British High Commissioner (Canberra) 11 August, 1940, in Annex B to War Cabinet Agendum 186/1940, Supplement No. 1, CRS A2671 item 186/1940 Supplements 1 and 2.

127 My emphasis. The term 'our fleet' clearly refers to the Royal Navy as well as the Royal Australian Navy, an interesting example of the way in which imperial concepts permeated the thinking of the Australian Chiefs of Staff (two of whom were, at this stage, British; see above, p. 93)
This in turn led to a fundamental revision by the Chiefs of Staff of their previous attitudes towards the Far East in general and Malaya in particular: 'we should strain all our efforts and resources to co-operate in the actual defence of the area as, strategically, it now becomes, as far as Australia is concerned, of greater ultimate importance than the Middle East'. The despatch of the 7th Division to Malaya would, the Chiefs now suggested, 'provide the most effective contribution towards the ultimate defence of Australia'. They were even prepared to go to the extent of supplying the division with equipment allocated for the defence of the Australian mainland itself and which could not be replaced before March 1941.

The Australian War Cabinet did not share in this dramatic conversion of its professional military advisers. Ministers would go no further than to inform the British government at the end of August of their desire to see the 7th Division employed in 'the theatre in which it can render the most effective support'. Summoning up a complete lack of enthusiasm, they indicated that if the United Kingdom still insisted that the relevant theatre was Malaya then Australia would not press her objections. Even this was a most reluctant concession; Menzies made it quite clear that if the 7th was to be retained in the East at all he much preferred India to Malaya as the location, not only in view of the better

128 Report by the Australian Chiefs of Staff on the United Kingdom Appreciation, 23 August, 1940, CRS A2671 item 186/1940.
129 Ibid.
training conditions offered but because 'greater occupation of interest, difference of climate, and a less circumscribed role than that of garrison duties at Singapore would be more compatible with the psychology of the Australian soldier'.

By the time the British government could reply to this most grudging of offers its attention was focussed firmly on the Battle of Britain and the danger of an invasion of the British Isles. Meanwhile the Australian Prime Minister sent another telegram to London stressing the importance which he attached to the security of the Middle East and Mediterranean in relation to the 'whole Empire position ...'. He therefore urged that 'a maximum effort should be made there compatible with the safety of the United Kingdom'.

On 13 September the Italian army invaded Egypt. The British authorities now agreed that the major threat to the Empire, outside the United Kingdom, was to be found in the Middle East. They therefore concluded that on balance it would be better for the 7th Division to join the 6th in that theatre.

The reluctance of the Australian authorities to provide troops for the defence of clearly definable Australian interests in Singapore and Malaya requires explanation. Any charge of subservience to instructions emanating from a Whitehall preoccupied with the immediate

130. Telegram to SSDA, 29 August, 1940, ibid.
132. Telegram from SSDA, dated 18, received 19 September, 1940, Annex A, ibid.
threat to the heart of Empire can be dismissed; indeed, if British advice had been followed the A.I.F.'s 7th Division would have been stationed in Malaya by the latter months of 1940. Australia's attitude was, rather, the result of a deliberate decision by her government that there were definable interests of greater importance outside south-east Asia and the Pacific areas; the Middle East was the key to the strategic situation and it was there that the dominion's efforts should be concentrated in order that Australia might exercise the maximum influence on the conduct of the war as a whole.133

Some of the reasons for this decision are to be found in the motives which inspired Australia to send forces to the Middle East in the first months of the war; the traditional importance attached to securing the Suez Canal route to the United Kingdom and the reasonable assumption that Japan would not actively threaten British eastern interests unless the Allies were seen to suffer severe setbacks in the West.134 The defeats in western Europe made it all the more important to hold North Africa and the Mediterranean. This explains Menzies action in September 1940 in urging on the British government his views about the importance of the Middle East to the security of the whole Empire. The Australian Prime Minister feared that the loss

133. The extent to which the battles subsequently fought in the Middle East really were the decisive ones of the second world war and the question of whether the Australian and New Zealand governments therefore made the 'right' decision in accepting a middle eastern commitment cannot be pursued further here but the problem might provide a fascinating topic for another study.

134. See above, pp.90-91.
of Egypt and Palestine and the withdrawal of the fleet from the eastern Mediterranean, involving as they would the loss of British prestige and bargaining power and the collapse of the economic blockade of Europe, would have the effect of stimulating 'the activities of the anti-British parties in Japan and encourage them in any fresh adventure'. Moreover, a further principle of Australian policy had been established by the Australian Chiefs of Staff in the first months of the war; if Australian troops were to go abroad they should take a full part in the fighting and not be 'relegated' to any inactive theatre. It was, no doubt, this kind of thinking which led Menzies to imply that garrison duty in Singapore was somehow beneath the dignity of the Australian soldier.

There were other considerations in the Australian emphasis on the Middle East. These stemmed from the fact that once the original decision had been made to commit troops to that area the arguments for concentrating all Australian troops there gained a momentum of their own. General Blamey, the Australian commander in the Middle East, had a vested interest in commanding as large a force as possible. There was also a widespread belief that the Australian Imperial Force had to be maintained together as one large unit if the dominion was to exert the maximum possible influence in London. Australia was suspicious that the United Kingdom authorities

135 Telegram to SSDA, 7 September, 1940, Annex C, War Cabinet Agendum 186/1940, Supplement No. 1, CRS A2671 item 186/1940, Supplements No. 1 and 2.
136 See above, p. 76.
137 See above, pp. 135—36.
138 See, for example, Blamey to Spender, Minister for the Army, 27 June, 1941, CRS A2671 item 197/1941.
aimed to split the Australian forces into units of a size which would have to be integrated with British forces and come under direct British command. This suspicion, which had a long tradition, was strongly entertained, for example, at the beginning of May 1940 when it was suggested from London that in the event of an Italian declaration of war the convoy transporting part of the 6th Division should be diverted away from the Red Sea via the Cape to the British Isles. The reaction of Menzies' government suggests that it saw nothing less than the sinister machinations of Whitehall behind this proposal. Canberra went so far as to intimate that it would prefer its forces to be diverted to north-west India or South Africa rather than the United Kingdom. In the following year Blamey wrote to the Minister for the Army: 'Once any Australian unit gets into the command of a U.K. formation it is like prising open the jaws of an alligator to get them back again'. Even when the Australian Chiefs of Staff underwent their dramatic change of mind and recommended the despatch of the 7th Division to Malaya they stressed that it was intended to be no more than a temporary arrangement. The Australian division was to be relieved by British troops as soon as this proved possible so that the Australian Imperial Force might be concentrated as a full Army Corps in the Middle East.

139. Telegram to SSDA, 1 May, 1940, Appendix B, War Cabinet Agendum 96/1940, CRS A2671 item 96/1940; see above, p. 100.

140. PMA to PMNZ, 17 May, 1940, enclosing telegram to SSDA, and SSDA to PMNZ, 17 May, 1940, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 1

141. Quoted in Spender, Politics and a Man, pp. 141-42.

142. Report by Australian Chiefs of Staff on an appreciation by the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff, 23 August, 1940, CRS A2671 item 186/1940.
The strength of this Australian commitment to the Middle East received renewed testimony with the conclusion of the German-Italian-Japanese pact. The Australian War Cabinet considered the news of the treaty in relation to its previous decisions on the theatre of employment of the 7th Division and judged that the effect on the far eastern situation and the local defence of Australia would not be sufficient to justify withholding the formation from the Middle East.

The Australian reluctance to send troops to Singapore did not apply equally to air forces. In fact, the Australian offers of two squadrons of Hudsons and one of Wirraways preceded British requests for such assistance. On the other hand the War Cabinet offered no challenge to the Chief of the Air Staff's insistence that Australia's main effort should continue to be exerted through the Empire Air Training Scheme. Indeed, Air Chief Marshal Burnett's suggestion that the Hudsons and Wirraways be sent to Singapore appears to have been at least partly the result of technical factors which made it impossible for them to be stationed further afield. The former were not fully armed while the latter, being peculiar to Australia, had to be supplied with spares from R.A.A.F. sources. It was therefore necessary to locate both types of aircraft as close to

143. See above, p.125.
144. War Cabinet Minute 543, 1 October, 1940, CRS A2671 item 186/1940, Supplements No. 1 and 2.
145. See above, pp.103-104.
146. War Cabinet Agendum 139/1940, CRS A2671 item 139/1940.
147. Report by Burnett, 12 June, 1940, CRS A2671 item 136/1940.
Australia as possible. The British government's request to Australia for direct help in defending Malaya and Singapore was not matched by any similar suggestion to New Zealand. The smaller Pacific dominion could not, of course, raise forces on the same scale as her neighbour. The United Kingdom acknowledged New Zealand's desire to concentrate its troops in one division and in mid-July suggested that the third echelon of the expeditionary force should proceed to the Middle East as previously arranged. The New Zealand government was, however, also anxious to act on the recommendation of the Pacific defence conference to despatch a brigade group to Fiji in the event of an emergency. At the end of July the New Zealand Chiefs of Staff visited the colony and, following their report, Wellington decided to 'retain from the reinforcements that would otherwise be despatched with the Third Echelon the necessary force (3050 all told) for despatch to Fiji ...'. When New Zealand's troops arrived there in November 1940 it was the first occasion on which forces from a self-governing dominion had been used to garrison a Crown Colony. Early in 1941 New Zealand also

148. Ibid.
149. SSDA to High Commissioner for the United Kingdom (Wellington), 13 July, 1940, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 1.
150. See above, p. 54.
152. GGNZ to SSDA, 3 August, 1940, ibid, Vol. 1.
acted to augment the garrisons of Tonga and Fanning Island. 

By the end of 1940 Australia was coming to share New Zealand's concern for the immediate defence of neighbouring areas. This change of attitude in Canberra was the natural result of the gradual abandonment of diplomacy as a means of deflecting Japanese ambitions. But it was also given impetus by the findings of a conference of British far eastern commanders who, together with representatives from Australia and New Zealand, met at Singapore in October 1940. During the course of these meetings the British delegation was at pains to stress that Singapore remained the key to the whole far eastern position. Indeed, the governments of Australia and New Zealand had made attempts to get the conference held in Melbourne but the British authorities, fearing that this might imply a shift in the focus of their far eastern defence policies from Singapore to Australia itself, had been emphatic in rejecting the proposal. 

The report produced by the conference at Singapore in October could only present the situation in grim terms. The naval forces available in the Far East were 'totally

154. PMNZ to SSDA, 7 February, 1941, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.  
155. PMNZ to SSDA, 19 February, 1941, ibid.  
156. See above, pp. 125-126.  
157. War Cabinet Agendum 211/1940, 20 September, 1940 and War Cabinet Minute 527, 24 September, 1940 and telegram from PMNZ, dated and received 1 October, 1940, CRS A2671 item 211/1940.  
158. War Cabinet Minute 567, 17 October, 1940, CRS A2676 item 567.
inadequate to meet a major attack by Japan'; the inevitable recommendation was, therefore, that the deficiencies in air force and army strength in Malaya 'must obviously be remedied immediately ...'. The aircraft requirement for Burma and Malaya was put at 582 machines, considerably higher than the figure of 336 arrived at by the British Chiefs of Staff. 159 As only forty-eight out of the eighty-eight aircraft currently in Malaya were 'modern' the conference estimated the existing deficiency at no less than five hundred and thirty-four. However, as the deficiencies in both the Pacific dominions were also substantial 160 it was inadvisable to transfer any further aircraft from this source, except in the case of an 'extreme emergency'. When it turned to consider land forces, the conference was reduced to putting its faith in the diversion eastward of four Indian divisions, currently earmarked for the Middle East, by the end of 1941. In the meantime the report stressed that the interests of Australia and New Zealand would best be served by 'an adequate concentration of forces in Malaya' and the Australian government was again urged to provide a strong brigade group for service in the peninsula. 161

The conference's emphasis on Malayan defence

159. See above, p. 132.

160. A total of three hundred and twelve aircraft were recommended for Australia and sixty for New Zealand. This compared with existing strengths of eighty-two, only forty-two of which were classified as 'modern', in Australia and twenty-four, all of which were obsolete, in New Zealand.

accorded with the conclusions drawn by the Australian Chiefs of Staff themselves two months earlier. The 7th Division was now committed beyond question to the Middle East but the 8th was under training in Australia and the Chiefs recommended that a brigade of these troops be despatched to Singapore even at the cost of breaking up a well-organised divisional formation. They took comfort in the reflection that the arrangement was no more than a temporary expedient to last only until the Australians could be relieved by Indian troops.

On this occasion the advice of the Chiefs of Staff received a more sympathetic hearing. Menzies appears to have been genuinely shocked by the 'alarming position' revealed in the report of the Singapore conference. The War Cabinet as a whole was still not enthusiastic about meeting the British request but if 'Imperial strategic considerations' called for urgent measures, and they clearly did, then ministers were prepared to send Australian troops to Malaya. In informing London of this decision the Australian Prime Minister indicated, for the first time, that his views were not uninfluenced by the anxieties of Australian opinion about the Pacific situation, anxieties which he feared could interfere with Australian efforts elsewhere. As he pointed out to the British government, 'the extent of

162 See above, pp. 134–35.
163 Report by Australian Chiefs of Staff, 18 November, 1940, Annex 1, War Cabinet Agenda 254/1940, CRS A2671 item 254/1940.
164 Advisory War Council Minute 39, 25 November, 1940, CRS A2684 item 135.
165 War Cabinet Minute 632, 26 November, 1940, CRS A2671 item 254/1940.
Australian co-operation in overseas theatres is dependent on the Australian public's impression of the degree of local security that exists'. In a sense, then, even the despatch of a brigade to Malaya may be seen as an attempt to confirm the Australian commitment in the Middle East.

The British government viewed matters in a similar light; in gratefully accepting the Australian offer it renewed the promise that the troops would be relieved from India by May 1941. The Australian 22nd Brigade disembarked at Singapore in mid-February 1941, Whitehall ensuring that the maximum propaganda value was extracted from this reinforcement of British strength in the Malay peninsula.

A week or so before the 22nd Brigade reached Singapore the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, made the journey in the opposite direction in order to consult with the Australian government. Before the Commander-in-Chief reached his destination, London had already informed Canberra that it regarded the report of the Singapore conference as 'unduly pessimistic' and insisted, particularly, that the figure of three hundred and

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166. Telegram to SSDA, 1 December, 1940, ibid.
167. Telegram from SSDA, dated 23, received 24 December, 1940, ibid.
168. Telegram to SSDA, 1 February, 1941 and from SSDA, dated 11, received 12 February, 1941, CRS A816 item 56/301/66.
169. Brooke-Popham's post was newly created as a result of the Singapore conference. It was intended to secure greater co-operation between the different British commands in the Far East. See CRS A2671 item 243/1940.
thirty-six aircraft 'should give a fair degree of security!'. Brooke-Popham adopted the same vaguely optimistic attitude in his meetings with the Australian War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council. Singapore, the Air Chief Marshal assured his hearers, would hold out for at least six and probably nine months, this prediction notwithstanding his admission that no fixed defences had yet been established on the north side of the island. Brooke-Popham also made much of the sixty-seven Buffalo fighters which were en route to Singapore from the United States. These machines were, he maintained, superior to anything Japan had to offer, a view based on a gross overestimation of the capabilities of the Buffalo and complete ignorance of the Japanese Zero fighter.

But lack of information alone did not account for

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170. Telegram from SSDA dated 28, received 29 January, 1941, CRS A2684 item 135. This view was obviously influenced by Churchill's attitude. On 13 January the Prime Minister sent his Chiefs of Staff a minute on the report of the Singapore conference which stated 'the political situation in the Far East does not seem to require, and the strength of our Air Force by no means warrants, the maintenance of such large forces in the Far East at this time'. Quoted in Wigmore, The Japanese Thrust, p. 51. Churchill, in fact, did not favour the idea of defending the Malay peninsula as a whole. He continued to insist that the 'prime defence' of Singapore was the fleet which would have a 'protective effect' whether it was on the spot or not: 'The defence of Singapore must therefore be based upon a strong local garrison and the general potentialities of sea-power'. Minute from Churchill to Ismay, 10 September 1940, Churchill, The Second World War, Vol. 2, pp. 591-92. Emphasis in original.

171. War Cabinet Minute 802, 14 February, 1941, CRS A2671 item 64/1941; Advisory War Council Minute 149A, 14 February, 1941, CRS A2680 item 35/1941.

Brooke-Popham's optimism. The Commander-in-Chief privately entertained great anxieties about the position at Singapore; in a letter written to Ismay shortly after his arrival in the Far East he complained bitterly about 'the lack of touch and indeed the latent hostility between the Central Government, the Services and the Civilian Community' in the colony. The Air Chief Marshal had also discovered 'that the word "impenetrable" as applied to jungle has many interpretations and that it is dangerous to rest one's flank on it thinking that nothing will get through'. It is clear that Brooke-Popham was giving the Australian government a less than comprehensive survey of his view of the situation.

Percy Spender, the Minister for the Army, was, nevertheless, the only member of the Commander-in-Chief's audience to express serious scepticism. Spender had the advantage of having inspected Singapore at the end of 1940 on his way to visit Australian troops in the Middle East. He was not happy with the state of preparedness he found on the island. The minister suggested that the Chiefs of Staff in the United Kingdom might not hold the view that Singapore was vital to the Empire. To this Brooke-Popham could only reply that before he had left England Churchill had instructed him to hold the island until capital ships could be sent and given an assurance that 'We will not let

173. Brooke-Popham to Ismay, 5 December, 1940, CAB 21/1044.  
174. See CRS A981 item Defence 155.  
175. Advisory War Council Minute 126, 5 February, 1941, CRS A2682, Vol. 1; Spender, Politics and a Man, pp. 81-82.
Brooke-Popham's visit to Australia in February came at a time of great anxiety in the dominion about Japanese intentions. After the Advisory War Council had discussed the far eastern situation, the acting Prime Minister, A.W. Fadden, and the opposition leader, John Curtin, took the unusual step of issuing public statements which stressed the gravity of the position. Their action may not have been entirely due to official anticipation of imminent hostilities. In fact, it seems to have been more in the nature of an attempt to rouse the nation to a greater war effort. Nevertheless, the Council's conclusions that 'at the present time when the United Kingdom was fighting with her back to the wall and using the whole of her available resources, she could have very little reserves available to support us' serves to show the manner in which Australian interest was coming to focus more firmly on the immediate defence of the country.

The arrival of Australian troops in Malaya provides

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176 War Cabinet Minute 802, 14 February, 1941, CRS A2671 item 64/1941.

177 Menzies was on his way to the United Kingdom. See below, pp. 165-179.

178 Statement by Fadden, 5 February, 1941, CRS A981 item Defence 59, part 4; see also Advisory War Council Minute 145, 13 February, 1941, CRS A2682, Vol. 1.

179 Hasluck, The Government and the People, Vol.1, p. 322. There was much concern at the time about the effect of industrial troubles on the war effort. See, for example, Advisory War Council Minute 149A, 14 February, 1941, CRS A2680 item 35/1941.

180 Advisory War Council Minute 135, 5 February, 1941, CRS A2684 item 135.
the most obvious example of Australia's interest in the
defence of the eastern Pacific region but her attention was
also directed to other areas. After the collapse of France,
for example, Canberra became deeply worried by the situation
in the French colony of New Caledonia. It appeared that the
local administration might declare for Vichy. Moreover, the
colony's supplies of nickel and chromium and its strategic
value to any potential enemy of Australia made it a tempting
object for Japanese occupation. The possibility that
Australian troops might forestall a Japanese takeover was
entertained by the Australian government but on balance the
scheme was rejected, one reason being the fear of setting a
precedent for Japanese action elsewhere. In September,
however, a bloodless coup on the island brought a Free French
Governor into power. These events were largely the result
of internal and local activities and the Australian government
was very cautious about any direct involvement. The Royal
Australian Navy cruiser Adelaide did, nevertheless, play a
part in escorting the new Free French Governor from the New
Hebrides to New Caledonia and subsequently remained in the
area for almost a month after the coup. In the aftermath of
these events the Australian government felt obliged to give
the colony financial assistance to provide for its defence
and to maintain a certain stability, without which Japan might
have been able to create a pretext for intervention.

181 Telegram to SSDA, 18 June, 1940, CRS A2671 item 147/1940.
182 Memorandum by the Department of External Affairs on
Franco-British Relations Since the Outbreak of War, 13
January, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 14A; Hasluck,
Although this incident occurred at a time when Australia's efforts were directed primarily at a policy of 'appeasement' in the Far East and was of relatively minor importance it did point the way to far-reaching changes in Australian policy which were to take shape from the beginning of 1941.

In February of that year the Australian Chiefs of Staff produced an appreciation which went much further than the usual acknowledgement of the importance of Singapore in the protection of Australia and New Zealand. The defence of the Netherlands East Indies was, they suggested, a major Empire interest. The security of the Dutch territories not only vitally affected that of Singapore; their capture could drive a wedge between Australia and Malaya. The Chiefs also suggested that any Japanese movement in strength into southern Thailand should, because of that country's importance in relation to Singapore, be regarded as a casus belli.

The question of the stage at which Japanese aggression should be judged to have a critical effect on British interests had been under consideration in Whitehall since the fall of France. In August 1940 the British Chiefs of Staff had been forced by the obvious British weakness in the Far East to take a very circumscribed view. The British garrisons in China and Hong Kong, for example, were not considered vital. Moreover, 'under present conditions' any Japanese penetration of Thailand or Indo-China did not

183. See above, pp. 116-125.
184. Appreciation dated 13 February, 1941, CRS A2671 item 64/1941.
justify a declaration of war. Both areas, of course, provided ideal bases for an attack on Malaya but given the wherewithal available to British policy-makers in the Far East, the Chiefs of Staff's views reflected the realities of the situation accurately.

A Japanese attack on the Dutch East Indies was, however, viewed differently:

if Japan established herself in the Netherlands East Indies, our whole defence system would be most gravely compromised, our vital sea communications and base at Singapore would be endangered, and the air route to Singapore and the Commonwealth of Australia would be threatened. The security of the Netherlands East Indies is therefore an essential British interest, second only to the integrity of Australia, New Zealand and Singapore, and their defence is an important part of our Far Eastern defence plans.

Therefore, 'under normal conditions' steps which did not stop short of war would be justified to prevent the Japanese establishing a foothold in the islands. But, at the same time, the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff had to admit that Britain was in no position to prevent a Japanese occupation of Dutch territory by force. The action to be taken in the event was, therefore, a matter for political decision by the British government in the circumstances of the time. The problem resolved itself basically into the question of whether the limited British resources in the Far East, together with the Dutch resources, would be sufficient to justify actions which could precipitate war with Japan.

185 WP(40)302, CAB 66/10 and N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3, Appendix 4, Emphasis in original. 186 Ibid.
The Australian Chiefs of Staff agreed with their British colleagues on the importance of preventing Japan acquiring Dutch territory and Menzies was sure that in the event of a Japanese attempt 'almost inevitably ... we would find ourselves at war with Japan'. On the other hand the Australian Prime Minister agreed that, in view of the military situation in the United Kingdom and the Middle East, it was not advisable to enter into 'a binding unilateral obligation' to aid the Dutch. Thus in declining to enter into any binding commitments, even when the Netherlands government in exile gave assurances that the Netherlands East Indies would resist any Japanese attack and would also become involved in the event of an attack on Singapore, the United Kingdom was pursuing a line which met with full Australian agreement. The British government even considered it inappropriate to initiate staff conversations as these would imply the extension to the Dutch of some form of military assistance which, in the existing circumstances, could not be made effective.

Nevertheless, the considerable modifications in British and Australian far eastern policy which followed the conclusion of the German-Italian-Japanese pact and the

187 Report by Australian Chiefs of Staff on Appreciation by United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff, CRS A2671 item 186/1940.  
188 Telegram to SSDA, 29 August, 1940, ibid.  
189 Note for the Minister on Netherlands East Indies-Inquiry by Consul-General (no date but about August, 1940), CRS A981 item Far East 16B.  
190 SSDA to High Commissioner for the United Kingdom (Wellington), 12 August, 1940, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.
Japanese advance into Indo-China in September 1940 had significant implications for attitudes towards the Netherlands East Indies. So far-reaching was the change that at the end of November staff conversations did take place at Singapore between British and Dutch officers. The discussions centred around the defence of Malaya, Borneo and the Netherlands East Indies and plans were drawn up to meet a Japanese attack. A scheme for practical co-operation by means of a re-distribution of air forces in the event of an emergency was worked out, although it was clearly understood on both sides that the making of plans involved no political commitment. The nature of Japanese actions which might constitute a _casus belli_ came under discussion but, as Australia and New Zealand were subsequently informed, the British government was not prepared to tie its hands in advance on this matter:

> It is felt that action by Japan which would constitute an act of war could only be decided by H.M. Governments in the light of circumstances at the time and that planning should be conducted on the assumption that war might break out as a result of some hostile act by Japan, the precise form of which cannot at present be foreseen.

Australian representatives did not attend these conversations, an omission which greatly annoyed the members of the Australian Chiefs of Staff’s Joint Planning Committee who felt that their dominion’s interests had been neglected. They were particularly upset that the demolition of oilfields

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191 See above, pp.124-126.
192 Telegram from SSDA, dated 3, received 5 January, 1940, CRS A816 item 58/301/79.
193 Telegram from SSDA, 3 January 1941, quoted in Annex A to War Cabinet Agendum 109/1941, CRS A2671 item 109/1941.
in the Netherlands East Indies, whence Australia received her entire petrol supply, appeared to have been given priority over their effective defence. The Committee considered that not only did this situation require review but that attempts should at least be made to secure a political decision from all governments concerned that Japanese incursions beyond a certain defined area would automatically bring a state of war into being. In pursuance of these aims it was recommended that Australia should hold her own military talks with the authorities in the Netherlands East Indies as soon as possible. The Joint Planning Committee also advocated the appointment of a liaison officer for the Australian armed services on the staff of the Australian Trade Commissioner in Batavia.

While the Australian government and Chiefs of Staff were giving sympathetic consideration to these recommendations, the Governor-General of the Netherlands East Indies himself took over the initiative by suggesting in mid-January 1941 that Australia send a military mission to Batavia for secret staff conversations. On the advice of the Defence Committee the Australian government accepted this invitation. The arrangements were made largely through the

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194. Secretary, Department of Supply and Development, to Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 11 December, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 18B.


196. War Cabinet Agendum 49/1941, 3 February, 1941, CRS A2671 item 49/1941.

197. Defence Committee Minute 6/1941, 21 January, 1941, CRS A816 item 58/301/79; War Cabinet Minute 745, 4 February, 1941, G6 A2671 item 49/1941. See also F.G. Shedden, Secretary of Department of Defence Co-ordination, to Secretary, Department of Army, 23 January, 1941, M.P. 729/6, Box 12, File 12/402/17.
Dutch Consul-General in Sydney. The Australian government thus aided Dutch consular officials to perform functions which were distinctly diplomatic rather than consular. All this took place despite objections from the Dutch government in exile in London that the Netherlands East Indies had no separate legal existence and also despite the sensitivity of the British government itself on such issues. Indeed, at the end of January the United Kingdom informed Canberra that it had arranged for staff talks involving British, Australian, New Zealand and Dutch representatives to be held at Singapore on 22 February and plainly hoped to head off independent Australian initiatives in this way. But the Australian government insisted that nothing should be allowed to interfere with the bilateral discussions in Batavia. These took place immediately before the Singapore meeting, the Australian delegation having the same composition at both sets of talks.

Before the delegation left Australia the Chiefs of Staff made some far-reaching recommendations affecting its discussions. The original idea of appointing a liaison officer was expanded into a suggestion that each service should maintain its own representative in the Dutch colony. More significantly the Chiefs of Staff recommended that the

198 See, for example, War Cabinet Agendum 335/1941 and telegram from Bruce, dated 5, received 6 November, 1941, CRS A2671 item 335/1941 and Advisory War Council Minute 470, 14 August, 1941, CRS A2682 Vol. 3.

199 Defence Committee Minute (Agendum 8/1941), 31 January, 1941, Annex A to War Cabinet Agendum 49/1941, CRS A2671 item 49/1941.

200 Ibid, and War Cabinet Minute 745, 4 February, 1941, Ibid.
Dutch authorities should be asked to agree to the stationing of Australian troops on their territory, particularly in Timor, only 300 miles from the Australian mainland. This was part of a wider proposal that the northern limits of the Australian-New Zealand area of responsibility should be a line inclusive of Timor, New Guinea and Nauru. The Chiefs of Staff advocated that the country would have to take on additional responsibilities not previously contemplated in providing garrisons within the Australian area. To meet these commitments the 8th Division would have to be kept in the Far East and all notions of its eventual despatch to the Middle East abandoned. The War Cabinet accepted the broad outlines of the Chiefs of Staff's scheme, together with the need to retain the 8th Division, on 14 February.

This decision is a landmark of the greatest significance in the development of a distinctively Australian defence policy. In view of the powerful reasons previously advanced for sending the 7th Division to the Middle East it cannot have been taken lightly and was indicative of the extent to which Australia's awareness of her position in the Pacific had matured. Of particular importance was the conscious decision to act outside the imperial orbit to the extent of conducting bilateral military conversations in the Dutch East Indies and committing troops and resources to areas.

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201 See Map 3, between pp. 94 and 95.
202 Chiefs of Staff Appreciation, 13 February, 1941, CRS A2671 item 64/1941.
203 War Cabinet Minute 802, 14 February, 1941, ibid.
204 See above, pp. 137-39.
which were not within the British Empire but were of strategic significance for Australian security.

At the same time as Australia decided to commit forces for the defence of Dutch territory she also insisted, together with New Zealand, that greater attention should be paid to her local naval defence. Already at the Singapore conference of October 1940 the Australian and New Zealand delegations had successfully insisted on widening the terms of reference from a narrow consideration of the defence of Malaya and Singapore to a wider treatment of problems more directly affecting the two dominions. The conference had confirmed that in a Japanese war there was no danger of an attack on Australia or New Zealand initially, that the main defence in the Far East was the security of Singapore and that the Indian Ocean route was vital to the supply and maintenance of troops in the Middle East. The British government therefore suggested at the end of January 1941 that, in the light of these findings, Australia and New Zealand might not wish to insist on the previously agreed arrangement for the return of all their naval forces on the outbreak of a war with Japan. Australia rejected this proposal outright. It was quite conceivable, she argued, for Japan to aim at placing a cruiser force, possibly backed by heavy units or an aircraft carrier, in the Tasman Sea at the same time as she launched an attack on the Netherlands East.

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Indies or Malaya. In these circumstances all the Australian and New Zealand warships currently serving overseas would be required in their home waters. New Zealand took a similar line.

It was, then, in the context of this greatly heightened Australian concern for the security of the western Pacific area that the bilateral talks between the Australians and Dutch at Batavia and the Anglo-Dutch-Australian talks at Singapore took place in February, 1941. In Batavia it was tentatively agreed that, in the event of war with Japan, Australia should provide a garrison for Timor. The Dutch were also anxious for the Australians to operate air forces from Ambon, another island in the chain linking Java and New Guinea.

At the Singapore conference attempts by British and Australian delegations to arrange an agreed case for presentation to the Dutch resulted in a certain amount of friction. There can be no doubt that the British representatives

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208 'Recommended reply by Chiefs of Staff, Annex C, War Cabinet Agendum 61/1941 and War Cabinet Minute 790, 12 February, 1941, ibid; telegram to SSDA, 12 February, 1941, CRS A2671 item 64/1941.

209 'War Cabinet Agendum 61/1941, Supplement No. 1, CRS A2671 item 61/1941.


211 Ibid, Part 2, Preliminary Conference of Commanders-in-Chief, Far East and China, and the Australian Delegation, 22 February, 1941. New Zealand was not directly represented at the conference. Her Chiefs of Staff had previously discussed matters with the Australian Chiefs of Staff and approved of their views. Report by Australian Chiefs of Staff, 13 March, 1941, Annex A, ibid.
were disconcerted at the degree of independent enterprise now being demonstrated by Australia. The conflict which had occurred at the conference in October 1940\textsuperscript{212} was also renewed and again the Australians successfully secured the widening of deliberations to deal more generally with the far eastern area and their own particular concerns.\textsuperscript{213}

A major topic considered by the conference at Singapore was the point at which it would become imperative to meet the expansionist designs of Japan with force. Thailand, Malaya’s northern neighbour, now assumed a particular importance in this respect. As early as July 1940 the British authorities had suspected that if Japan moved into Thailand in strength she was unlikely to meet any serious resistance.\textsuperscript{214} In January 1941 the situation took a turn for the worse when the Thai government, taking advantage of the fall of France, asked Japan to mediate in its border dispute with Indo-China.\textsuperscript{215} From Tokyo Latham urged that Thailand was the place ‘where we must draw our line’ against Japanese aggression\textsuperscript{216} and Menzies, on his way to the United Kingdom, cabled from Cairo his opinion that ‘if Japan were told exactly where the chalk line was’ the

\textsuperscript{212}See above, p. 157.
\textsuperscript{214}Crosby (British Minister in Bangkok) to Babington (Air-Officer-Commanding, Far East), 15 July, 1940, CRS A981 item Far East 16B.
\textsuperscript{216}Telegram from Latham, dated 4, received 5 February, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 14A.
effect would be to restrain her advances. The Australian Chiefs of Staff, for their part, favoured the treatment of a Japanese movement in strength into southern Thailand as a casus belli, a view endorsed by Air Chief Marshal Brooke-Popham on his visit to Australia in February 1941. On this occasion the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, also indicated that he was considerably hampered in providing for the defence of Singapore by the lack of any definition of Japanese actions which would be regarded as giving rise to a state of hostilities.

The general tenor of these views prevailed at the Anglo-Dutch-Australian conference at Singapore and the report produced was in the unusual form of an agreement between the parties to co-operate in the event of one of the governments being forced to take military action to counter Japanese aggression. As the report declared:

failure to act together in the face of a Japanese move which threatened one of us would weaken the military situation of all. Our collective military strength can only be developed fully if our Governments agree to act together should any one of them judge that the Japanese have taken action which necessitated active military counter action.

Recommendations were made for joint action in six sets of

217. Telegram from Menzies, 14 February, 1941, quoted in War Cabinet Agendum 77/1941, CRS A2671 item 71/1941.
218. Chiefs of Staff Appreciation, 13 February, 1941, CRS A2671 item 64/1941.
219. War Cabinet Minute 802, 14 February, 1941, ibid.
220. Ibid.
circumstances involving aggressive moves by Japan. In the case of one of these, a Japanese advance towards Malaya, the conference suggested that counter-measures would have to be immediate, reference to London being impracticable in view of the time factor.

These proposals did not accord well with the British reluctance to undertake any binding commitments in the Far East. It was not surprising, therefore, that London rejected the recommendations on the grounds that an act of war could only be decided by His Majesty's Governments concerned on the basis of the conditions prevailing at the time.

The Australian authorities, despite their desire to 'draw the line' for Japan, shared the British wish not to lose control of events through an automatic commitment to engage in hostilities in certain previously defined situations. Indeed, Stewart, as Minister for External Affairs, had always

**222** These were: (a) a 'direct act of war' against the territory of one of the parties; (b) a movement of Japanese forces into any part of Thailand west of 100 East or south of 10 North; (c) the movement of a large number of Japanese warships (or warships accompanying a convoy) towards the east coast of Malaya or across the parallel 6 North between Malaya and the Philippines; (d) the movement of Japanese forces into Portuguese Timor; (e) the movement of Japanese forces into New Caledonia or the Loyalty Islands and (f) a Japanese attack on the Philippines. The report was highly over-optimistic in assuming that Japan would only be able to undertake one major expedition at a time and would therefore have to choose between Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies.

**223** This reluctance stemmed from Churchill's determination not to get involved in war with Japan unless he was assured of American support. See below, pp.178-79 and Chapter 4.

**224** Telegram from SSDA, dated 15, received 16 April, 1941, Annex C, War Cabinet Agendum 135/1941, CRS A2671 item 135/1941.
been opposed to any guarantee to Thailand for this reason and, additionally, because he feared such a guarantee might actually act as a provocation to Japan. Any decision to 'draw the line', the minister insisted, had to depend on the strategic situation in the whole south-west Pacific area at the moment in question. In March the Australian War Cabinet went a long way to meet Stewart's case when it insisted that 'a decision to take counter measures against Japan should only be made by all the Governments concerned in the light of the circumstances at the time'.

The New Zealand government adopted a similar attitude; in March 1941 it informed the British Government that

> While they would accept a decision to declare war on Japan made by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, they are not prepared to agree to local authorities initiating measures which might lead to war without previous reference to London.

The tone of this message was somewhat at variance with the bold line the dominion had taken in the latter months of the previous year. After the fall of France, Wellington had matched its stand on the Burma Road with a tough policy for meeting any possible Japanese attack on the Dutch East Indies. The New Zealand authorities considered that the British Commonwealth was bound 'both by honour and interest' not only to resist the assault as vigorously as possible but also make it known beforehand to Japan that such behaviour would be regarded as a hostile act. This was a much

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225 War Cabinet Agendum 71/1941, CRS A2671 item 71/1941.
226 War Cabinet Minute 909, 22 March, 1941, CRS A2671 item 109/1941.
228 'GGNZ to SSDA, 7 September, 1940, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.'
stronger line than that adopted by Australia. But the reluctance of the political authorities in New Zealand, along with those in the United Kingdom and Australia, to sacrifice their freedom of decision concerning a casus belli provides an indication of a more cautious approach which the smaller Pacific dominion was coming to adopt.

Australia's cautionary second thoughts concerning the exact circumstances in which war should be joined with Japan were not allowed to interfere with her preparations for that event. In March 1941 the War Cabinet authorised the concentration in Darwin of three bomber squadrons and a brigade group, with an additional battalion, drawn from the 8th Division. These forces were to be held in readiness for the reinforcement of the Dutch territories. In the same month approval was given for the exchange of liaison officers with Batavia and the individual services carried this decision into effect in the course of the subsequent two months. In April the Chief of the Australian Air Staff paid a visit to the Netherlands East Indies. The importance now attached by the Australian government to co-operation with the Dutch authorities may be gauged from a message sent to Spender by Fadden on 26 March, 1941:

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229. See above, p. 152.
230. See below, pp. 224-225 and 229.
231. War Cabinet Minute 909, 22 March, 1941, CRS A2671 item 109/1941; see also report by Australian Chiefs of Staff, 13 March, 1941, Annex A to War Cabinet Agendum 109/1941, ibid.
232. Telegram to British Consul-General, Batavia, 11 March, 1941 and 1 May, 1941 and to Australian Legation, Washington, 4 April, 1941, CRS A816 item 58/301/79.
233. CRS A2676 item 960, especially War Cabinet Minute 960, 17 April, 1941; see also CRS A981 item Defence 158.
It is essential that we should retain the support of the Netherlands East Indies, and any reluctance on our part to make common cause on the principles outlined by the Conference [at Singapore in February] in this connection may result in a reconsideration of her attitude, to our disadvantage.  

Meanwhile, Australia's forward defence line was extended eastwards; a battalion of the A.I.F. arrived in Rabaul, capital of New Guinea, in March and April while smaller units were sent to protect airfields in New Ireland, Bougainville, Guadalcanal and the New Hebrides.  

The recommendations of the Anglo-Dutch-Australian conference were never to receive formal ratification. Nevertheless, the overwhelming evidence that Japan intended to take advantage of every opportunity to advance her power and interests in the Far East had forced Britain and Australia to adopt more resolute policies. The British authorities were clearly perturbed at the independent initiatives taken by Australia. In other ways Anglo-Australian relations suffered from certain tensions. When, for example, the three Australian squadrons arrived in Singapore at the end of September 1940 Menzies had occasion to complain bitterly that a premature British radio announcement of the event had seriously embarrassed his government. The Prime Minister was particularly annoyed because Australia had been considering ways in which the information might be released without offending Japanese

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234. Fadden to Spender, 26 March, 1941, CRS A2671 item 109/1941.  
susceptibilities. This represented no less than the eighth complaint which he had felt compelled to make about the unsatisfactory actions of the British Broadcasting Corporation to date.\textsuperscript{236} Again, the Australian government considered that it was not provided with sufficient information about various aspects of the conduct of the war, and particularly about British attitudes towards Japanese policy.\textsuperscript{237} When these grievances were supplemented by the report of the Singapore conference in October 1940 which awakened Menzies to the 'alarming position' in the Far East, the Australian Prime Minister decided that it had become necessary for him to hold personal discussions with the British leaders.\textsuperscript{238} After securing the consent of the Advisory War Council for his mission, Menzies left Sydney by air for London on 21 January, 1941, passing through the Netherlands East Indies, Malaya, India, Palestine, Egypt and Libya \textit{en route}.\textsuperscript{239}

\textbf{Mr. Menzies in London}

The Australian Prime Minister shared his dissatisfaction at the British government's conduct of affairs with his War Cabinet as a whole. While Menzies was on his way to the United Kingdom he received a cable from the acting Prime Minister in which Fadden laid stress on 'the concern of the

\textsuperscript{236}Telegram to Bruce, 1 October, 1940, CRS A1606 item D 17/2/1.

\textsuperscript{237}Telegram from Fadden to Menzies, 12 February, 1941, CRS A2671 item 64/1941.

\textsuperscript{238}Advisory War Council Minute 39, 25 November, 1940, CRS A2684 item 135.

\textsuperscript{239}Hasluck, \textit{The Government and the People}, Vol. 1, pp. 313-14.
Government in regard to the present Japanese position and the lack of information in our possession as to the intentions of the United Kingdom Government to counter any move she may make. As a partner in Empire affairs with one brigade already in Malaya, Australia had, Fadden suggested, a right to know in advance 'what hostile actions on the part of Japan are likely to be regarded by the United Kingdom authorities as a casus belli'.\(^{240}\) The War Cabinet was, moreover, deeply perturbed at the failure of the Anglo-Dutch-Australian conference at Singapore in February 1941 to formulate a co-ordinated naval war plan for the Far East.\(^{241}\) A further cable was therefore despatched urging Menzies to approach the Admiralty with a view to remedying this omission.\(^{242}\)

The attitude of the Australian Labour Party also called for the Prime Minister to air his discontent. Curtin made frequent use of the Advisory War Council to complain about the British neglect of the far eastern theatre. In addition to questioning the distribution of Australian naval forces on an Empire-wide basis and urging attempts to secure the despatch of capital ships to the Far East,\(^{243}\) the Labour leader on occasions expressed doubts about the extent of Australia's commitment in the Middle East. Towards the end of March 1941 he went so far as to suggest that it might be necessary to withdraw forces from the Middle East in order to

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\(^{240}\) Telegram from Fadden to Menzies, 12 February, 1941, CRS A2671 item 64/1941.

\(^{241}\) War Cabinet Minute 909, 22 March, 1941, CRS A2671 item 109/1941.

\(^{242}\) Telegram from Fadden to Menzies, 27 March, 1941, ibid.

\(^{243}\) See above, pp.113-14.
meet the new commitments which the country had decided to undertake in the Far East. But it would be wrong to infer that the opposition members of the Advisory War Council were very far in advance of the government in their views on the importance to be attached to the Far East. The War Cabinet had recently sanctioned the retention of the 8th Division east of Suez and no minister would have disagreed with Curtin's insistence that the defence of Australia and New Zealand was 'of paramount importance'.

Menzies demonstrated his own concern about the far eastern position when, during a press conference in Egypt where he had broken his journey, the Australian Prime Minister reminded the British that 'although you speak of the Far East, to us it is the very near north'. The first important meeting which Menzies attended after his arrival in the United Kingdom was at the Foreign Office where the discussion centred around Japanese activities in south-east Asia.

The Australian Prime Minister's views clearly indicated that

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244. Advisory War Council Minute 236, 25 March, 1941, CRS 2680 item 35/1940 and see below, pp. 242-43.

245. See above, p. 156.

246. Advisory War Council Minute 236, 25 March, 1941, CRS 2680 item 35/1940. Evidence of the Australian War Cabinet's views is provided in a telegram despatched to Menzies on 23 April 1941: 'We appreciate that the United Kingdom has a very formidable problem to face in defence of its own shores and we also realise that the preservation of the integrity of Great Britain is vital to our defence and security. Our great concern must, however, centre around the defence of Australia ...'. CRS A981 item Defence 59, part 4.

247. Copy of telegram from Lampson, British Ambassador in Cairo, to Eden, 18 February, 1941, CRS A981 item Defence 156; see above, p. 58.

248. Record of a meeting in Mr. Butler's room at the Foreign Office, 26 February, 1941, F1422/17/23, F.O. 371/27888.
his thinking still suffered from a dichotomy between the old line of Australian policy involving the appeasement of Japan and the new line of taking a strong stand. His journey through the Netherlands East Indies had made him fully aware of Japanese efforts at penetration throughout the region. Menzies therefore took up the theme which was simultaneously coming to prominence in Australia. He put it to the meeting that there had to be an expeditious decision on 'where the line was to be drawn which we could not allow the Japanese to cross and which we should let them know that we would not allow them to cross'. The Netherlands East Indies were one area where he insisted this line should be drawn: 'The taking of the Netherlands East Indies by the Japanese would be so vital to Australia that he thought it ought to be made clear to the Japanese that it would mean war with us'. There was also good reason for including Indo-China and Thailand. Northern Indo-China had, however, already been lost. Menzies therefore implied that it would be worth attempting to strengthen the resolve of the Thais to resist Japanese infiltration by favouring their territorial demands on Indo-China, even at the expense of offending General de Gaulle.

On the other hand, the older line of policy showed through when Menzies, supported by High Commissioner Bruce, wondered 'whether there was any positive policy which we could adopt to win the Japanese from the Axis'. As the

249 See above, pp. 159-60.
250 See above, p. 124.
Australian Prime Minister put it, he was 'anxious that we should not settle into the mental condition of thinking that all was lost and making up our minds that there must be war'.

The Australian suggestion of 'drawing a line' did not take a firm guarantee of United States support as an essential pre-condition. The United Kingdom's representatives, however, took their cue from Churchill and indicated that the British government was not prepared to take the risks involved in unilateral resistance. But, ironically, the United Kingdom's patient attempts to gain a close co-ordination of policy with the Americans also militated against an enthusiastic adoption of a policy of appeasement. Any concessions offered to Japan at the expense of China were certain to have a bad effect on opinion in the United States. Nevertheless, the British refusal to give any assurances of resistance to Japanese aggression inclined Menzies to continue to put forward the need for diplomacy and the case against regarding war with Japan as inevitable. This he did particularly forcefully in a public speech on 3 March. His words caused consternation at the Foreign Office where it was feared they created the impression of a divergence between British and Australian policy. The reaction in Australia was equally unfavourable. The Australian Prime Minister appeared to be repudiating the decision for a strong line

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251. See below, pp. 178-79 and Chapter 4.
252. Record of a meeting in Mr. Butler's Room at the Foreign Office, 26 February, 1941, F1422/17/23, F.O. 371/27888.
253. The Times, 4 March, 1941.
taken by the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council the previous month.\textsuperscript{255} That differing Australian policies appeared to be proclaimed from opposite ends of the earth was largely the result of Menzies' greater awareness of the extent of British objections to taking any strong stand without prior American support.

The Australian Prime Minister encountered an equal reluctance on the part of the United Kingdom authorities to give any commitments regarding their naval plans in the event of war with Japan. Menzies aimed not only to remedy the failure of the Anglo-Dutch-Australian conference to produce a far eastern naval war plan,\textsuperscript{256} he also declared that Australia could no longer be satisfied with the vague statement that the Mediterranean would be abandoned in favour of the Pacific dominions if they were threatened with a Japanese onslaught.\textsuperscript{257} Instead, the Prime Minister wanted 'a plan of the specific measures that really would be possible in the event of such a contingency arising.'\textsuperscript{258}

At a meeting at the Admiralty on 8 March Menzies put forward strong demands that a definite scheme for the naval reinforcement of the Far East should be drawn

\textsuperscript{255}The Sydney Morning Herald, 5 March, 1941; The Times, 6 March, 1941; See also Hasluck, The Government and the People, Vol. 1, pp. 321 and 331.

\textsuperscript{256}See above, p. 166.

\textsuperscript{257}Record of Conversation of Menzies, Bruce, Shedden, Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty, and Phillips, the Vice Chief of the Naval Staff, 8 March, 1941, ADM 1/11062.

\textsuperscript{258}VAP(41)22, Memorandum by Menzies, 29 March, 1941, CAB 99/4. See also extract from telegram from Menzies, 12 March, 1941, in War Cabinet Minute 909, 22 March, 1941, CRS A2671 item 109/1941.
up. But his efforts met with little favourable response. The naval staff prepared a memorandum which did not treat the possible abandonment of the Mediterranean at all. It could therefore make little advance on the promise to station a battle-cruiser and aircraft carrier in the Indian Ocean in the event of a war with Japan in which the United States remained neutral. Even if America entered the conflict and relieved certain British naval forces from duty in the western hemisphere it was likely to be 'a matter of months rather than weeks' before a fleet arrived in the Far East. And that fleet itself was unlikely to consist of more than five capital ships, of which three were of the old and obsolete 'R' class. At a subsequent meeting the First Sea Lord, Sir Dudley Pound, pointed out that it had always been assumed that if the British fleet was to fight its way into Singapore it would have to include nine capital ships, one less than the complete force Japan might be able to send against it. Pound clearly had doubts about sending a fleet at all if it was not powerful enough to face the Japanese navy with a good prospect of success.

Menzies was not prepared to accept this dismissal of his request lightly. He pressed the matter sufficiently

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259. Record of Conversation of Menzies, Bruce, Shedden, Alexander and Phillips, 8 March, 1941, ADM 1/11062.

260. VAP(41)1, CAB 99/4.

261. This is itself a classic example of the Royal Navy's superior attitude, an attitude which led to a serious underestimation of Japanese capabilities.

262. 6th meeting of the visit of the Australian Prime Minister, 28 March, 1941, CAB 99/4.
for the War Cabinet's Defence Committee to consider it, though only in the Australian Prime Minister's absence. The Committee as a whole had little sympathy for Menzies' position. Churchill declared that he would not 'give up our great interests in the Middle East on account of a few raids by Japanese cruisers'. This ignored the fact that Menzies clearly had a much more serious attack in mind. Alexander suggested that the Australian Prime Minister was trying to use the British government in an attempt to quieten the anxieties of Australian public opinion and Lord Cranborne, the Dominions Secretary, said that Menzies' attitude arose solely from a political situation where he had a majority of one and where

the Opposition was composed of men who were entirely isolationist in their view and thought of nothing but the protection of Australia. Mr. Menzies wished to go home with some specific assurance which he could pass on to the Opposition.

To this explanation Attlee could only reply that 'it would be wrong to give Mr. Menzies a worthless promise which would delude his people. It should be the task of Mr. Menzies to educate them'. Churchill agreed, adding that 'it would be wrong to give up sound strategical ideas to satisfy the ignorance of the Australian Opposition.'

The British ministers may not have been mistaken in viewing Menzies as a politician to his fingertips but they were guilty of a gross underestimation in suggesting that his attitude was in no way influenced by a serious and genuine

263. 12th meeting, 9 April, 1941, CAB 69/2
concern for the security of Australia. In the same way they greatly overestimated the isolationist tendencies of the Australian Labour Party. 264

At the same time the British authorities themselves were truly faced with a difficult problem in drawing up a definite scheme to honour the promise to protect their 'kith and kin'. Pound was not necessarily being inconsistent in claiming that the basic assurance to Australia and New Zealand remained good whilst insisting that

it would be wrong to abandon the whole of our interests in the Middle East until it became absolutely necessary to do so; and it was quite impossible to draw up any kind of timed programme for a move of definite ships. 265

If a decision to withdraw the fleet from the eastern Mediterranean was ever taken, the allied armies in the surrounding lands, including large numbers of Australian and New Zealand troops, would have to be evacuated before the naval movement could take place. 266 Indeed, Menzies himself recognised this when, in his discussions at the Admiralty, he stressed the extent of the commitment by Australia and New Zealand in the Middle East and concluded that 'public opinion would not stand for those forces being left improperly protected by a complete withdrawal of Naval Forces from the

264 See particularly below, Chapter 5. The A.L.P. had also, for example, supported the Empire Air Training Scheme; see C.P.D., Vol. 162, 29 November, 1939, pp. 1701-02 and Vol. 163, 28 May 1940, p. 1364.

265 12th meeting of the Defence Committee (Operations), 9 April, 1941, CABS 69/2.

266 VAP(41)25, Annex 4, CABS 99/4.
Mediterranean'. The presence of their troops in the Middle East created a serious problem of divided loyalties for all Australian policy-makers. In these circumstances it is not surprising that in the end Menzies had to accept that it was impossible for the British government to give him a written statement of its intentions in the event of certain purely hypothetical situations.

The Australian Prime Minister had little more success in his attempts to secure reinforcements for Singapore. He was particularly concerned at the lack of any fighter aircraft on the island. But Churchill maintained his previously expressed reluctance to commit forces 'to lie about idle' in Malaya whilst they were desperately needed in actual theatres of war. For the same reason Menzies did not get very far in pressing his complaints about the rate of supply of aircraft to Australia herself. The most he could achieve was a 'categorical assurance' that if war occurred in the Far East 'there will be an immediate review of air resources with a view to their re-disposition to meet

267 Conversation of Menzies, Bruce, Shedden, Alexander and Phillips, 8 March, 1941, ADM 1/11062.
268 20th meeting of the Defence Committee (Operations), 29 April, 1941, CAB 69/2.
269 'Record of Conversation in Mr. Butler's Room at the Foreign Office, 26 February, 1941, F1422/17/23, F.O. 371/27888. See also Conversation of Menzies, Bruce, Shedden, Alexander and Phillips at Admiralty, 8 March, 1941, ADM 1/11062.
270 'Telegram from Churchill quoted in Advisory War Council Minute 80, 8 January, 1941, CRS A2680 item 10/1940.
271 12th meeting of Defence Committee (Operations), 9 April, 1941, CAB 69/2.
272 Ibid.
the dangers on all fronts'. As for land reinforcement at Singapore, the War Office estimate given to Menzies put the existing deficiencies at two infantry brigades and one tank brigade. Australia was asked to remedy the former, a request partially met in June 1941 when the Australian War Cabinet agreed to send one additional infantry brigade to Malaya. Its refusal to send a second was based on a reluctance to interfere with the accepted commitments in Timor and Ambon.

Upon Menzies' departure from the United Kingdom Bruce cabled Mrs. Menzies to inform her of the Prime Minister's 'amazing personal triumph'. The Australian had certainly created a favourable public impression; the External Affairs Officer in London was able to report such descriptions as 'one of the outstanding expositors of ideas for which the Empire is fighting'. Menzies' speeches were 'simple, vigorous and lucid but full of the spirit of the fighting Australian race'. In terms of strengthening Australia's defence position in the Far East, however, the visit must be judged considerably less than an outstanding success.

273. War Cabinet Agendum 198/1941, 7 June, 1941, by Menzies, CRS A2671 item 198/1941.
274. War Cabinet Agendum 197/1941, 7 June, 1941, by Menzies, CRS A2671 item 197/1941.
275. War Cabinet Minute 1145, ibid.
276. War Cabinet Minute 1138, 10 June, 1941, ibid.
277. Cable from Bruce for Mrs. Menzies, dated 3, received 4 May, 1941, CRS A981 item Defence 156.
278. Cable from Mr. Stirling, External Affairs Officer, London, quoting reviews of Menzies' speeches in The Times and Times Literary Supplement, dated 26, received 27 July, 1941, ibid.
The impression that Menzies wanted a timetable for the transfer of a British fleet to the Far East primarily for the purpose of bolstering his political position at home did not encourage the British government to overcome the great difficulties involved in formulating a definite scheme. The Australian Prime Minister was himself much to blame for this impression gaining currency because of the great interest he displayed in politiking in general while in London. As he travelled to the United Kingdom he had matters wider than the far eastern situation in mind. He undoubtedly wanted to play a large role in the central conduct of the war. To this end he favoured the formation of some kind of imperial cabinet akin to that which had operated during the first world war; so keen was Menzies on this idea that the Canadian Prime Minister, W.L. Mackenzie King, formed the distinct impression that 'he [Menzies] would rather be in the War Cabinet in London than Prime Minister of Australia'.

As a first step in the realization of his aim Menzies had attempted to initiate a meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers but his colleagues in the other dominions had proved decidedly reluctant to leave their home fronts. Nor did Menzies' own ministers or the Labour opposition care much for the idea of their Prime Minister spending a great deal of his time abroad.

Nevertheless, Menzies still had hopes of altering

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280. WP(G)(40)277, CAB 67/8 and British War Cabinet Minute WM 282(40)6, 4 November, 1940, CAB 65/9.
281. Advisory War Council Minute 467, 14 August, 1941, CRS 2682, Vol. 3.
and influencing the conduct of affairs in London. But in spite of the many similarities between the two men, or perhaps because of them, there appears to have been a good deal of friction between Churchill and Menzies. Churchill believed, as he confided to the Canadian Prime Minister in 1944, that the Australian had 'wanted to put me out; he wanted to have the war run by himself and others'.

Certainly, when he returned to Australia, Menzies was not loath to criticize, in private, Churchill's conduct of the war in highly scathing terms. He regretted that no one in the United Kingdom, including the Chiefs of Staff, would stand up to their Prime Minister. No doubt these regrets stemmed partly from the fact that the Chiefs of Staff gave the Far East a higher priority than Churchill was ever prepared to concede. Menzies also had every right to object to Whitehall's high-handed methods in committing Australian troops to Greece even at a time when he himself was in London.

But much of Menzies' resentment can be ascribed to no other motive than personal pique that he had not been able to secure for himself a greater influence on the conduct of imperial affairs.

285. Hasluck, The Government and the People, Vol. 1, pp. 143-41; see also below, pp. 27-18 for another instance of Menzies' discontent when the British government failed to consult him on an American proposal to transfer part of the United States Navy from the Pacific to the Atlantic.
Menzies returned to Australia at the end of May 1941, almost a year after the fall of France. The state of the Singapore strategy at the end of this twelve month period was little different from that which prevailed at the beginning. The only new elements in the situation were the positive initiatives being taken by Australia and New Zealand to provide for their own defence. While the United Kingdom was pledged, in the last resort, to defend the Pacific dominions from invasion by the Japanese, there existed no practical scheme for the fulfilment of this understanding. The absence of any significant improvement in the naval situation meant that only token naval forces could be sent east of Suez in the first stage of a war with Japan. In these circumstances the Singapore strategy depended to a great extent on the role which the United States would undertake. Moreover, the American attitude would, except in the case of a direct attack on British territory, be a decisive factor in any British decision to resist Japanese aggression. Winston Churchill maintained a personal and complete refusal to do anything which entailed the risk of involving the British Empire in war with Japan without American support. His fear of this disastrous situation led the British Prime Minister on one occasion to declare to his War Cabinet that 'We ought to regard the United States as having taken charge in the Far East'; it was to be left entirely up to the Americans to take the lead in this area and the British
government would follow. It is therefore necessary to turn to a consideration of the part played by the United States in the Singapore strategy.

286. British War Cabinet Minute WM103(41)5, 16 October, 1941, CAB 65/23. It is interesting to speculate on the situation which would have developed if Japan had attacked the Netherlands East Indies and the United States had refused to intervene. Churchill's attitude implied a similar refusal by Great Britain. But Canberra's undertakings to the Dutch authorities might well have involved Australia automatically in the hostilities. Thus those long, complicated and boring arguments about the possibilities of a dominion remaining neutral while the United Kingdom was at war might have been reversed.
Great Britain had not been slow to recognise the importance which the United States could exercise in the defence of the Pacific. As early as 1914 Winston Churchill, in his capacity as First Lord of the Admiralty, admitted that if the British fleet were to be prevented from protecting Australia and New Zealand 'the only course of the five millions of white men in the Pacific would be to seek the protection of the United States'. ¹ At the imperial conference of 1923 General Smuts criticised the Singapore strategy on the grounds that any trouble in the Far East was likely to coincide with difficulties in Europe and these would inhibit the despatch of the Royal Navy to the other side of the world. ² In reply the Admiralty had asserted that Britain would also have allies and the ability of Singapore to hold out for a good many weeks or even months would be a strong inducement to the United States to lend help quickly before the situation in the Far East was entirely and irretrievably lost. ³

Australian statesmen have been criticised for failing to appreciate the implications of this remark. ⁴ But in fact Australian governments came to a realisation of the important role America could play in her defence at least as early as the authorities in the United Kingdom. In 1909

² 8th meeting, 15 October, 1923, CAB 32/9.
³ 9th meeting, 17 October 1923, ibid.
⁴ See, for example, McCarthy, 'Singapore and Australian Defence, 1921-1942', pp. 175-76.
Alfred Deakin, sensing British weakness and the need for United States support, had taken the initiative in proposing an arrangement between the Pacific powers on the lines of the American Monroe Doctrine. There is adequate evidence to suggest that Deakin's basic idea was still alive in official Australian circles in the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties. In 1923, for example, Bruce implied, at the imperial conference, that the British government should attempt to arrange for 'joint action' with the United States for the defence of Singapore. Again in 1935 Joseph Lyons' government devoted considerable efforts to the attempt to secure a pact between the Pacific powers by which the United States would have assumed some responsibility for maintaining stability in the region; these efforts were only abandoned with the renewed Japanese assault on China in late 1937.

New Zealand was less forward in her attitude to the United States and, from the mid-nineteen-thirties, relations between the two countries were bedevilled by the complex dispute over the ownership of certain Pacific

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6. 8th meeting, 15 October 1923, CAB 32/9.

islands. Nevertheless, the common interests of the United States and the Pacific dominions in relation to Japanese designs were not completely overlooked. In 1936 the Dominion newspaper, noting that New Zealand should not rely completely on 'a hope of British naval supremacy in all places and at all times', advanced the idea of American assistance as one alternative. In the following year the Christchurch Press proclaimed:

To the Pacific Dominions it has always seemed that Imperial policy in the Pacific should be based on the cardinal need for free co-operation with the United States .... To put the matter plainly, the attitude of the British Empire should not be such as to discourage the United States from assuming wider responsibilities in the Pacific.

It was not, however, the British Empire which was responsible for any American lack of interest in the Pacific area. While it may be true that America has always been less isolationist in the Far East than in Europe, the strength of 'isolationism' in the United States during the 1930s was such that it would have been very unwise to base any policy on the assumption of her intervention. At the very time that Lyons was floating his idea of a Pacific Pact, the

8. See above, pp. 43-44.
American Congress was formulating its Neutrality Acts. Moreover, in strategic terms the restrictions placed by the Washington naval treaty of 1922 on naval bases and fortifications in the western Pacific had rendered it impossible for the United States Navy, relying on its own facilities, to exercise any influence in the western Pacific even if the political will to do so existed. It is from this negative starting-point that the role of the United States in relation to the Singapore strategy must be examined.

The United States and the Singapore Strategy

During the nineteen-thirties co-ordination between the far eastern policies of the United States and Great Britain was practically non-existent. The mutual recriminations which stemmed from the celebrated Simon-Stimson incident in 1932 cast a long shadow. For most of this period, then,

13. The American reaction to Lyons' proposal was one of suspicion that Australia was trying to entangle the United States with Japan; see R.W. Bingham, American Ambassador to the United Kingdom, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, 4 June 1937, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States (Washington, in progress from 1861) Hereafter F.R.U.S., 1937, Vol. 2.


15. These recriminations arose when H.L. Stimson, the United States Secretary of State, indicated that American proposals for a joint approach to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria had been rejected by the British Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon. It subsequently emerged that Stimson was, to say the least, somewhat disingenuous in his implication that his suggestion had amounted to anything more than moral disapproval of Japan and that it was the reluctant British attitude which had prevented the United States from adopting a stronger line. For Stimson's account of these events see his The Far Eastern Crisis. Recollections and Observations (New York, 1936), especially, pp. 162-64 and also H.L. Stimson & M. Bundy, On Active Service in Peace and War (London, 1949), pp. 81-82 & 89-90. For an effective refutation of the American's claims by a former member of the British Foreign Office, see J.T. Pratt, War and Politics in China (London, 1943), pp. 226-28 and Appendix.
it was simply impracticable to attempt to interest the United States government in the Singapore naval base and its associated strategy. Indeed, to urge a particular course upon the Americans in the inter-war years often seemed a sure method of deciding them against it.

By December 1937, however, when Japanese aircraft sank the American gunboat Panay near Nanking, Washington was beginning to show some interest in co-operation with the Royal Navy. Captain Ingersoll, Chief of the United States Navy's Plans Division, was accordingly despatched to London for conversations with the Admiralty. Upon his arrival in the United Kingdom Ingersoll informed the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, of the American administration's view that the time had come for the two nations to exchange information and co-ordinate war plans. But Roosevelt had already indicated that he had no intention of going so far as to base warships on Singapore. Ingersoll's talks with the British naval staff therefore centred around the proposed American strategy of a naval blockade of the Japanese mainland. The American fleet, based on Hawaii, was to maintain this blockade in the eastern Pacific while a British fleet based on Singapore would be responsible for the western side of the Ocean.

16. Ingersoll's memorandum on his discussions (no date), ADM 1/9822.
These conversations in London were followed by signs of increasing co-operation between the two naval services. The attendance of three American cruisers at the formal opening of the graving dock at Singapore in February 1938 was considered by the British authorities to be a notable achievement. In May of the same year the Admiralty waived its long-standing reluctance to agree to the exchange of technical information with the United States Navy. And in April 1939, after the Japanese had annexed certain islands in the South China Sea, the American government agreed to a request from Britain and France for an immediate transfer of the United States fleet from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Captain Ingersoll's visit was returned in June 1939 when Commander Hampton, R.N., undertook a highly secret mission to Washington. Admiral Leahy, the American Chief of Naval Operations, informed Hampton of his belief that in the event of war in Europe Roosevelt would order the American fleet to Hawaii to act as a deterrent to Japan. This would, the Admiral suggested, ensure that Australia and New Zealand would not be in any danger from Japanese operations. But both the Chief of Naval Operations and his Director of Plans were reluctant to talk about definite intentions in the event

of American involvement in hostilities. When pressed by Hampton, Leahy revealed that he was personally in favour of basing the United States fleet on Singapore but this could not be considered as part of an actual war plan. Admirals Leahy and Ghormley were inhibited from talking freely by fears about the political repercussions if news of the talks leaked out to the isolationist Congress. So great was their concern that even the American Director of Naval Intelligence was not made aware of Hampton's visit.

The strong isolationist pressures in the United States were by no means dispelled by the outbreak of war in Europe. The course of American far eastern policy over the next twenty-seven months has been thoroughly recorded elsewhere. Here it is intended to deal only with attempts by Australia, and to a certain extent New Zealand, to influence the United States to take an interest in their security. The Pacific dominions frequently tackled this task in conjunction with the United Kingdom and it will therefore be necessary to give some consideration to British policy.

When the dominion ministers met in London in

24. Conclusion to Hampton's report, ibid.
November 1939 very little consideration was given to the role of the United States in the far eastern situation. Churchill concluded his paper on Australasian naval defence with the observation that there was nothing to prevent the despatch of troops from Australia and New Zealand to the Middle East, 'always assuming that the United States is our friend ...'. And when Casey raised the delicate question of British intentions in the event of Japanese aggression against the Netherlands East Indies, the First Lord indicated that he expected Japan to be deterred from any such act by the probability that the Americans would take 'a very stiff line'. But there was no general discussion of the American position. This omission does not, however, indicate any lack of appreciation on the part of the dominions of the importance of an American presence in the Far East. It was quite apparent that Britain's overriding concern was to secure United States help for the waging of war in Europe and that Australia and New Zealand would therefore have to act very much on their own initiative in regard to their 'primary responsibilities and primary risks' in the Pacific.

Shortly before the dominion ministers assembled in London, the British Ambassador in Washington, Lord Lothian, forwarded to the Foreign Office his appreciation of

26. See above, pp.77-85 and 93-95.
27. WP(39)135, CAB 66/3.
28. 8th meeting of Dominion Ministers and a Representative from India, 20 November, 1939, CAB 99/1.
29. These were the words used by Menzies in April, 1939; see above, p.58.
At the beginning of the second world war the Bulletin takes a dim view of the American attitude towards the war in the West. (Cartoon by Norman Lindsay, 20 September, 1939).
probable American action in the event of Japanese aggression. The Ambassador had little doubt that a challenge to the Philippines would be met with force. But if Japan concentrated on British possessions, 'other than Australia and New Zealand', or the Dutch territories, the reaction of American public opinion would be 'far slower'. Clearly, American help to defend Singapore and Malaya could not be anticipated. Although Australia and New Zealand might be popular as 'young democracies', Lothian could detect no 'particularly strong feeling' for them. His prediction that America would be at war long before Japanese action threatened either of the Pacific dominions was, rather, based on the realistic assessment that Washington would always act first and foremost in her own interests. Increasingly, Americans were coming to realise that their security was,

in the long run, just as dependent upon the British as on the American Navy. If the United States is to rely upon Great Britain to prevent totalitarian Europe from entering the Atlantic through the Straits of Gibraltar and the exits from the North Sea, the United States must themselves underwrite the security of the British Empire in the Pacific because they cannot afford the weakening of Great Britain itself which would follow the collapse of her dominions in the Pacific. 30

The British government circulated the text of this message to the dominion representatives. It was clear that if Americans policies were to be determined on the basis of self-interest, the task of the Pacific dominions was to represent their own interests as being also those of the United

30. Lothian to Halifax, 10 November, 1939, Annex to DMV(39)2, CAB 99/1; see also British War Cabinet Minute WM81(39)9, 13 November, 1939, CAB 65/2.
States. The arrival of Casey as the first Australian Minister at Washington in March 1940, in fulfilment of Menzies' announcement in April 1939, marked the beginning of a campaign by the Australian government to execute this task. The importance attached to the position of Minister in Washington is indicated by Menzies' claim that at one stage he had seriously considered resigning as Prime Minister in order to undertake the mission himself.

Casey's activities in the United States provide one of the primary examples of a distinctive Australian policy. Much of his work centred around publicising his little-known country for the benefit of Americans. This the Minister did most effectively after his first few months in the post had enabled him to gauge how best to deal with the American political scene. In order to help with the

31. See above, p.58.
32. C. Edwards, Bruce of Melbourne. Man of Two Worlds (London, 1965), p. 275. It seems unlikely that Menzies would actually have given up the Prime Ministership in order to go to the United States. It is more probable that if he had lost his precarious grip on the Australian political scene so soon after forming a government he might have found the Washington Legation a suitable retreat. D. Whittington in The House Will Divide. A Review of Australian Federal Politics (revised edition, Melbourne, 1969), p. 68, puts forward the much more doubtful contention that Lyons had been thinking of the post for himself before his sudden death in April, 1939.

The possibility that Menzies might go to Washington was raised again by Churchill in 1942 but the suggestion was not well-received by the Australian Labour government. See R.G. Menzies, Afternoon Light. Some Memories of Men and Events (Melbourne, 1967), pp. 60-61; A.A. Calwell, Be Just and Fear Not (Melbourne, 1972), pp. 73-74; K. Tennant, Evatt. Politics and Justice (Sydney, 1970), p. 146.

33. Casey's wife records that 'Australia was very little known. Even assistants in Washington stores were bemused by the word and constantly jotted it down as Austria'. M. Casey, Tides and Eddies (London, 1966), p. 70.
The Bulletin comments on Casey's appointment as the first Australian Minister to the United States. (Cartoon by Norman Lindsay, 17 January, 1930).
publicity work Casey went so far as to engage the services of a New York public relations firm. Many of the recommendations made in its long report, for example the establishment of a Press and Information Bureau in New York, were adopted. The Australian government, however, wisely eschewed the suggestion that it should launch a full-scale advertising campaign across the States. The American administration was notoriously sensitive to anything which smacked of an appeal over its head to the people.

Casey also established a wide range of contacts and these influential Americans clearly had confidence in the Australian Minister. On several occasions he was entrusted to convey delicate messages which the American administration wished to have filter through to London. For example, Casey played a key role in making known the American dismay at the rumour that Lloyd George was to be appointed to the Washington embassy, left vacant by the sudden death of Lord Lothian. He was also responsible for breaking the ice between Lothian's actual successor, the former British Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, and the American Secretary of State, Cordell Hull. Those members of the Washington administration who were most advanced in their advocacy of support for the Allies found it quite possible to speak

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34. CRS A2680 item 3/1940.
37. Casey, Personal Experience, pp. 63-64; telegram from Casey dated 15, received 16 February, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 1611.
freely with the Australian Minister. His conversations, particularly with Hull, certainly accomplished one of their objectives in keeping the Japanese guessing about the state of Australian-American co-operation.

The Australian example in appointing a Minister to Washington was not followed by New Zealand until November 1941 and Walter Nash did not take up the post until March 1942. The New Zealand government did give serious consideration to the establishment of a legation in the American capital at least from the time of Casey's arrival there and became particularly keen on some form of representation once the fall of France presaged a grim strategic situation in the Far East. But London advised against an immediate appointment. Whitehall expressed concern lest it should appear that the move was an attempt by Britain to apply pressure on the Americans during the build-up to the November presidential elections. It may be that the British government was attempting to preserve what remained of the 'diplomatic unity of the Empire'. If so, the attempt was rather belated; by this stage New Zealand was the only dominion without representation in Washington. The British government was, moreover, fully alive to the enormous sensitivity of United States governments and public opinion to anything which appeared as a bid to exercise outside pressure. The reasons

38. See, for example, telegrams from Casey, dated 9, received 10 October, 1940; dated 17, received 19 October, 1940; dated 4, received 6 November, 1940, CRS A981 item Pacific 8.

39. Telegram from Colonel W.R. Hodgson, Secretary of the External Affairs Department, to Casey, 26 September, 1940, ibid.
given for its opposition may, therefore, have been entirely genuine. The delay in making an appointment once the American elections had taken place seems to have resulted mainly from the difficulty of sparing anyone of sufficient calibre from the New Zealand scene itself until the situation absolutely demanded that the sacrifice be made.  

The absence of representation in Washington did not prevent the New Zealand authorities from taking a keen interest in the American role in the Pacific. They consistently urged the British government to give the United States every encouragement to take a strong line with the Japanese. In February 1940, for example, the United Kingdom gave a cool response to an American suggestion for a progressive embargo on war supplies for Japan. Wellington complained that this reaction might cause 'resentment and misunderstanding' in the United States. New Zealand's government attached 'the greatest possible weight to good relations with the United States and to the encouragement in every possible way of every American tendency towards resisting or restraining aggression'.  

Similarly, Wellington's insistence that the British Empire should resist a Japanese attack on the Netherlands East Indies was based on the fear that 

42. See above, pp. 162-63.
the United States of America, would be gravely disturbed by what they would regard as another instance in which we have considered ourselves unable to assist our friends against piecemeal attack and destruction. This would, they feel, be highly disadvantageous to us, especially if it militated, as it well might, against the possibility of our receiving assistance from the United States.  

Australia, still heavily committed to the idea of containing the Japanese threat in the Pacific by diplomatic means, was more cautious. She was less concerned that an apparently weak British policy would deter American support than that a strong British stand would bring about war between Japan and the Empire with the United States holding aloof. The large uncertainties which surrounded the likely attitude of the United States in the event of the outbreak of war in the Far East provided one of the main reasons for Australia's persistent adherence to a policy involving the appeasement of Japan. When Japan made her Burma Road demands, for example, Menzies insisted that without a guarantee from the United States of 'the most complete support' there was no alternative but to accede to Japanese wishes. The Department of External Affairs went so far as to prepare a submission which suggested that there was every indication that the Americans would not consider a Japanese attack on British interests as sufficient reason to go to war. In the same way Australia was far from

43. GGNZ to SSDA, 7 September, 1940, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.
44. See above, p. 119.
45. Telegram from Menzies to SSDA, 27 June, 1940, quoted in War Cabinet Agendum 162/1940, CRS A2671 item 162/1940.
46. War Cabinet Agendum 162/1940, ibid.
happy about the initial introduction of sanctions against Japan without a firm American commitment to assistance in the event of hostilities. 47

In view of the inconsistencies in American policy at this time the Australian attitude was not an unwise one. It appeared that every three steps forward taken by Washington had automatically to be accompanied by two backwards. In April 1940 Cordell Hull issued a stern warning that the status quo in the Netherlands East Indies was to be respected whatever happened to Holland. 48 Two months later, following the fall of France, the British and Australian authorities attempted to secure a further American declaration that no alteration in the status quo of French far eastern possessions would be tolerated. But on this occasion the Americans, anticipating that the Japanese would not be readily deterred from moving into northern Indo-China, refused to undertake a commitment which might have required fulfilment in the very near future. 49

The differences between Australian and New Zealand policies towards the United States at this time should not be seen solely in terms of the different degree of risk each dominion was prepared to undertake. As in the case of the

47. See above, pp. 126-27.
48. Telegram from SSDA, dated and received 19 April, 1940, CRS A981 item Japan 158, part 4.
49. Telegram from Menzies to SSDA, 18 June, 1940; telegram from SSDA to British High Commissioner in Australia, dated 21, received 22 June, 1940 and Supplement No. 1 to Agendum 147/1940, CRS A2671 item 147/1940.
Burma Road affair, New Zealand's government, with no representation of its own in Washington, did not share Canberra's acute appreciation of the real problems involved in placing any reliance on future American actions.

Casey's job was not, of course, limited to gathering information and seeking publicity for Australia. His long-term aim was to convince the American administration that it would at some point have to take a stand against Japanese aggression. In the meantime he had to endeavour to increase progressively United States involvement in the area, always remembering that any appearance of an attempt to manipulate American policy-makers was likely to have adverse repercussions. Sometimes the Australian Minister undertook these efforts in combination with the British Ambassador and sometimes independently. At the end of June 1940 Lothian and Casey together attempted to extract from Hull a definition of American policy in terms either of taking a very strong line with Japan, involving a full embargo on exports or the sending of United States warships to Singapore, or else negotiating a complete settlement with Tokyo. But the American government firmly resisted this ploy to make it take up a clearly determined position. Instead, the Secretary of State adopted a pose which indicated that American policy would continue to drift along an ill-defined course between the two extremes outlined.

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50. See above, pp. 119-25.
An example of a more independent initiative by Casey occurred several months later when, in September 1940, he requested the Australian Defence Committee to draw up a list of the 'most telling arguments' respecting the value to the United States of non-American bases in the south-west Pacific area. The Australian Minister had in mind the possible joint use of existing bases as well as the possibility of lease arrangements and even the construction of new bases by the American authorities. The arguments which the Defence Committee produced all stressed the extent to which it would be in the United States' interest to control sea communications in the south-west Pacific. Casey kept these propositions 'up his sleeve' for use on appropriate occasions. Since the United States Navy had no base westward of Hawaii the Minister's information must have been of considerable interest to the more forward-minded in Washington.

One particular base in which both the British and Pacific dominion governments were concerned to arouse American interest was, of course, Singapore itself. In his first message to President Roosevelt after assuming the office of Prime Minister, Churchill indicated that he was 'looking to you to keep the Japanese quiet in the Pacific, using Singapore in any way convenient'. On various occasions, for example in April and again in October 1940, the

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52 CRS A2671 item 210/1940.
53 See above, p. 183.
55 Note of Conversation between Deputy Chief of Naval Staff and United States Naval Attaché on 16 April, 1940, F2885/2739/61, F.O. 371/24716; extract from Casey's Diary for 23 April, 1940, Personal Experience, p. 31.
56 War Cabinet Minute WM267(40)2, 7 October, 1940, CAB 65/9.
United States naval authorities enquired whether facilities at the base would be available to them in the event of serious trouble in the Far East. The British government naturally welcomed these approaches but nothing significant developed from them. The last three months of 1940 saw some particularly intensive activity to persuade the United States to send a naval force to Singapore. R.A. Butler, in America during October and November, had numerous conversations on the subject with various members of the American administration. His efforts were fully supported by Casey. But these yielded no positive result and both Butler and the Australian Minister discovered that the American government spoke with more than one voice in this matter. The most the American navy would send to Singapore proved to be a naval officer who arrived unobtrusively on the island at the end of October in order to take part in an exchange of military information.

The importance which the Pacific dominions attached to the American part in far eastern events was inevitably increased by the fall of France, and the consequent admission of British inability to send a fleet to Singapore. Though the dominions scarcely needed encouragement from London, Churchill's message of 13 June certainly provided it.

57 See various telegrams between Butler and Lothian and the Foreign Office, F.O. 371/24710.
58 Telegram from Casey, dated 17, received 19 October, 1940, CRS A981 item Pacific 8; Casey, Personal Experience, p. 50.
59 Telegram from Casey, dated 4, received 6 November, 1940, CRS A981 item Pacific 8.
60 6th meeting of the British War Cabinet's Far Eastern Committee, 31 October, 1940, CAB 96/1.
61 See above, pp. 105-06.
Having confessed that, while facing the combined Italian and German navies in European waters, he could not send adequate reinforcements to the East, the British Prime Minister added: 'We should therefore have to rely on the United States of America to safeguard our interests there'.

Menzies had not waited for this cue; at the end of May, and following a suggestion from Bruce, he took the initiative in appealing to President Roosevelt to step up his aid to the British Commonwealth. On 14 June the Australian Prime Minister sent another request for the United States to 'make available to the Allies the whole of her financial and material resources ...'. A further appeal, this time inspired by Casey, followed at the end of June. These three messages were of the greatest importance in the development of Australian policy; they showed 'the growing realisation in Australia that the strategic facts of life were pointing towards an increasing reliance on the United States for Australian security and, at least relatively, a decreasing dependence on Britain'. The incident also provides more evidence of the significance of Casey's appointment to the United States; Churchill was far from

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63 Bruce to Menzies, 22 May, 1940 and Menzies to Casey, 26 May, 1940, CP 290/6, bundle 4, item 64. The events in this paragraph are dealt with more fully in P.G. Edwards' important and excellent article 'R.G. Menzies's Appeals to the United States, May - June, 1940', Australian Outlook, Vol. 28 (1974) pp. 64-70.
64 Quoted in Edwards 'R.G. Menzies's Appeals to the United States', p. 67; CP 290/6, bundle 3, item 60.
66 Ibid, p. 69. The appeals have also, therefore, an important bearing on the interpretation which should be placed on Curtin's famous invocation of American aid on 27 December, 1941; see below, pp. 311-312.
enthusiastic about Menzies' appeal but the presence of an Australian Minister in Washington enabled the Australian Prime Minister to communicate directly with the American President.\textsuperscript{67}

New Zealand's disadvantage was also revealed; when Fraser decided to launch a similar appeal to Roosevelt he was forced to seek Menzies' permission for Casey to deliver it on New Zealand's behalf.\textsuperscript{68}

Meanwhile, in some British circles the collapse of France had given rise to a line of thought concerning the role of the United States in the far eastern theatre which conflicted with the prominence now given to that role by the Pacific dominions. Craigie, in Tokyo, was one of the first to give expression to this view when he wrote:

\begin{quote}
our object should on no account be to involve the United States in the war in the Far East on our behalf. Such involvement would be disastrous to our most vital interests since it would divert United States attention from Europe and seriously diminish the extent of United States material assistance at a crucial point.\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

The Ambassador's views were shared by Eden and, it seems, in the Foreign Office generally.\textsuperscript{70} Hence in the months after the fall of France the Office was not inclined to take a particularly strong stand against Japan.

New Zealand, as was to be expected from her previous attitude, was unable to approve of any policy which deterred

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Craigie's views as quoted in SSDA to GGNZ, 26 June, 1940, \textit{N.Z. Documents}, Vol. 3.
\textsuperscript{70} British War Cabinet Minute WM264(40)5, 2 October, 1940, CAB 65/9.
the United States from taking as firm a line as possible with the Japanese. But Wellington did indicate an understanding of the reasons for British reluctance to see America become actively involved in hostilities at this time. The Australian Minister of External Affairs, J. McEwen, also agreed that 'it would be contrary to [the] successful prosecution of [the] war for the U.S.A. to become involved in war in the Pacific ...'. It was, to say the least, ironic that, on the one hand, the Pacific dominions should be told that in the last resort they had to rely on the United States for protection and, on the other, that American participation in the war was undesirable because it might detract from the war effort in the western hemisphere. But this anomalous situation was the inevitable result of the fact that a state of hostilities existed in Europe but not in the Far East. Given these circumstances, the line taken by Australia, involving as it did concessions to Japan in such matters as the Burma Road demands, was more applicable to the realities, if not the moralities, of the position than New Zealand's attitude.

The British concern that American entry into the war might impair the fighting ability of the Allies in the West did not outlive the year 1940. At the beginning of 1941 high level staff talks took place between United Kingdom and American staff officers in Washington. These left no room for doubt that the United States viewed the elimination of the

71. GGNZ to SSDA, 3 July, 1940, (2 telegrams), N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.
72. War Cabinet Agendum 162/1940, CRS A2671 item 162/1940.
German menace as the first priority; indeed, so emphatic were the Americans on this point that the British government became perturbed at the very limited extent to which Washington was prepared to underwrite the British Empire in the East.

The Washington Staff Conversations

The staff talks in Washington took place from January to March, 1941. Even before these discussions the British government had received indications that the efforts of the United States would, in the event of her entry into the war, be concentrated primarily on Europe. On 6 November, 1940, the War Cabinet was told that the British Assistant Naval Attaché had been shown, in the strictest confidence, certain American naval plans. These confirmed the worst fears of the British authorities about the effect which an offensive American strategy in the Pacific would have on the war in the West:

the conduct of a fully offensive war by the United States against Japan would involve the whole of American Naval and industrial resources, and ... with the adoption of such a forward plan, the United States Navy will be unable to provide the minimum assistance in the Atlantic and Europe necessary to prevent a British defeat. Consequently any idea of conducting simultaneously an offensive war against Japan and satisfactory assistance in Europe must be abandoned.

The conclusions drawn from this appreciation by the Americans

73. British War Cabinet Minute WM283(40)3, 6 November, 1940, CAB 65/9.

74. Telegram from R.A. Butler (in Washington), 1 November, 1940, attached to ibid.
were, however, highly comforting for the British government. First, 'every political expediency' had to be adopted to avoid war with Japan until victory was secure in the West. But, in the event of the Japanese forcing hostilities, 'America should conduct a strictly defensive war against Japan.... In general a war in the Far East should be relegated to second place and [the] ultimate eviction of Japan deferred until a satisfactory conclusion to [the] European war was certain'. Similar advice was offered by General Raymond E. Lee, the American Military Attache in London, although he put it in more graphic form:

the U.S., in my opinion, ought to keep its eye right on the ball, which is Germany. If the Germans are knocked out so will be the two second-rate nations who are hanging on to Germany like tarts to a gunman.76

While this American willingness to concentrate on the western hemisphere was welcome to the British Cabinet, the corollary, as viewed by the United States Navy, was highly unpalatable. The Assistant Naval Attaché reported that the planners in Washington were prepared to accept the temporary loss not only of the Philippines and Borneo but also of the Netherlands East Indies and Singapore.77 It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the British and Australian attempts in the last months of 1940 to persuade the Americans

75. Ibid.
77. Telegram from R.A. Butler (in Washington), 1 November, 1940, attached to War Cabinet Minute WM283(40)1, 6 November, 1940, CAB 65/9.
to transfer naval forces to the Singapore naval base had failed.  

There were some members of the United States administration, most notably Stanley Hornbeck of the State Department's Far Eastern Division, who attached an importance to Singapore second only to that of the British Isles themselves.  

It was almost certainly Hornbeck who prompted Butler, upon returning to London, to make his vain plea for increased British naval strength in the Far East.  

Hornbeck argued that the degree of help which the United States would be willing to give at Singapore depended on her assessment of the real importance attached to the base by the British government, as evidenced by its own attempts to strengthen the island.  

But it seems that more highly placed members of the United States government had already decided the order of American priorities regardless of British views or actions. President Roosevelt's directive to the American delegation at the Washington staff conversations emphasised that in any war the United States would do no more than 'stand on the defensive in the Pacific'.

As soon as the staff talks got under way in

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78. See above, pp. 196-97.
79. Telegram from Butler, dated and received 14 November, 1940, F5134/193/61, F.O. 371/24710. It seems that Joseph Grew, the American Ambassador in Japan, was also of this opinion. Telegram from A. Watt, Australian Legation, Washington, for Hodgson, Secretary, Department of External Affairs, dated 13, received 14 February, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 26A.
80. See above, p. 111.
81. Telegram from Butler, dated 22, received 23 November, 1940, F5134/193/61, F.O. 371/24710.
Washington the United Kingdom launched a renewed attempt to secure an American commitment at Singapore. No pains were spared in stressing the importance of the base. Singapore was presented as essential to the continued cohesion of the British Commonwealth. Thus, the place of the island naval base in British strategy stood

not only upon purely strategic foundations, but on political, economic and sentimental considerations which, even if not literally vital on a strictly academic view, are of such fundamental importance to the British Commonwealth that they must always be taken into serious account. Just as United States strategy has to take account of the political factor and the element of public opinion in relation to the integrity of their Western seaboard, so British strategy must always be influenced by similar factors in the Dominions of Australia and New Zealand, to whom we are bound, not only by the bond of kinship and a common citizenship, but by specific undertakings to defend them.\(^\text{83}\)

Moreover, the various parts of the British Commonwealth were dependent on sea communications and trade routes. The United Kingdom itself relied for its very existence on imported food and raw materials, much of which came from the East. The implication was that the whole of the British Empire's war effort depended on the preservation of the Singapore strategy against Japanese aggression.

The representatives of the American armed services remained unmoved by these arguments. First, they warned that there could be no guarantee that a Japanese move against Malaya, Borneo or the Netherlands East Indies would

\(^83\) BUS(J)(41)13, The Far East, Appreciation by the United Kingdom Delegation, 11 February, 1941, CAB 99/5; see also BUS(J)(41)2, Statement by the United Kingdom Delegation, 29 January, 1941, ibid.
automatically or immediately lead to a United States declaration of war. Second, the Americans expressed considerably anxiety about the ability of Singapore to withstand a determined attack. The defences in Malaya were described as 'weak' while Rear-Admiral Turner of the United States Navy, had doubts whether Singapore 'could be made sufficiently secure as a base for the operation of a fleet which included capital ships'. Finally, the United States

84 'BUS(J)(41)16, Statement by the United States Staff Committee, 19 February, 1941, ibid.
85 Minutes of the second meeting, 31 January, 1941, ibid.
86 Minutes of the eleventh meeting, 26 February, 1941, ibid. There is no evidence that it was ever formally suggested that the United States should help with the direct defence of Singapore. General Lee does, however, appear to have had some highly unofficial discussions on this matter in London in November, 1940. He made it clear that the use of American troops for this purpose would present great difficulties. Washington certainly did not want any 'native trouble' on its hands. There was also the problem of command: '... there is no question but that they [the British] would want to direct the whole affair and we would find ourselves sending armed forces out to Singapore to be drawn into action at the discretion of a British GHQ. There is no question but they would send someone high enough to outrank anyone we could produce since they have field marshals and we do not. Or they could send only one of their many full generals because we have none of those except the single officer who happens to be the Chief of Staff.' Moreover, at this stage the United States had resolved that the Philippines could not be saved if attacked in force by the Japanese and would have to be allowed to fall. Lee 'did not think the American public would welcome the idea of sending American troops to hold Singapore, while allowing the Philippine Islands to be gobbled up. Whatever the purely military arguments might be, it would look silly for us to be fighting to keep the Union Jack afloat in one part of the Far East and doing nothing to keep the Stars and Stripes afloat in another.' Leutze, The London Observer, pp. 143-44, diary entry for 26 November 1940. American doubts about the value of the naval repair facilities at Singapore were heightened when, after German air action had seriously damaged HMSs Barham, Warspite and Illustrious in the Mediterranean early in 1941, the British government asked for these vessels to be repaired in American dockyards rather than at Singapore. The First Sea Lord later explained to Sir Earl Page that this had been done in order to effect the repairs more quickly. Morison, History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vol. 3, p. 50, footnote 3; British War Cabinet Minute WMI09(41)2, 5 November, 1941, CAB 65/24.
Staff Committee, putting American interests first and foremost, saw the western hemisphere as its main area of concern: 'the United States is far more interested in North and South American territories bordering in [sic] the Atlantic than in territories in the Far East'. Therefore, should 'Japan enter the war, United States operations in the mid-Pacific and Far East would be conducted in such a manner as to facilitate the exertion of its principal military effort in the Atlantic or navally in the Mediterranean'.

The Americans were also much less pessimistic about the consequences which would stem from the loss of Singapore. Contrary to the claims of the United Kingdom's delegation, they doubted whether the Japanese would go on to penetrate the Indian Ocean and threaten sea communications between Australasia and the Middle East. Such bold moves would not accord with 'the traditional Japanese policy of caution'. The danger of an immediate invasion of either Australia or India was similarly discounted; such operations were 'beyond Japan's present power ...'. It was admitted that one inevitable consequence of the fall of Singapore would be a concentration by the dominions and India on their own defence rather than the provision of support for the Empire in the Middle East and elsewhere. But this down-grading of imperial defence caused the American administration little

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87 'BUSH(J)(41)16, CAB 99/5.
88 'BUSH(J)(41)3, Statement by the Chief of Naval Operations and Chief of Staff, ibid.
89 'Minutes of second meeting, 31 January, 1941, ibid.'
of the anxiety which it aroused in the British authorities. It may, in fact, be doubted whether it was wise for the British delegation to place so much emphasis on the security of Singapore as a vital element in the cohesion of the British Empire and Commonwealth. This contention may have served only to strengthen the resolve of the Americans to eschew all interest in the naval base.

As the talks progressed the British delegation attempted to supplement its imperial and strategic arguments by an appeal to America's own interests in relation to the natural resources of the Malayan peninsula, and also of the Netherlands East Indies. The loss of these areas would deny to the United States, as well as the British Empire, the immensely important resources in food and vital raw materials, such as rubber, tin and oil which at present play such an important part in our war effort, and which could not be replaced at least within a reasonable time.

It was estimated that the United Kingdom obtained 84% of her rubber supplies and 56% of her tin from Malaya and the United States about 80% and 70% respectively. But the Americans, optimistically insisting that alternative sources could be found if the need arose, refused to acknowledge that there was any more substance in this contention than in the rest of the British case.

90. BUS(J)(41)16, ibid.
91. BUS(J)(41)13, ibid.
92. BUS(41)16, Aide-memoire by British delegation, 25 February, 1941, Annex, ibid.
93. BUS(J)(41)16, ibid.
The kernal of the disagreement between the British and American delegations was best summed up in the minutes of their sixth meeting on 10 February, 1941:

It was generally agreed that Great Britain and the United States each had a fundamental policy with reference to the Far East. For Great Britain it was fundamental that Singapore be held. For the United States it was fundamental that the Pacific Fleet be held intact and not become firmly committed to the Far East, although detachments might be sent to the Atlantic.\(^4\)

Within these two fundamental positions, the minutes continued, it was the aim of both sides to formulate a basic agreed strategy for the Far East. But given the widely divergent nature of the two fundamentals this task was clearly impossible. In the end the United Kingdom delegation insisted that the differences over far eastern policy were of such importance that they should be brought out in the final report of the conversations\(^5\) and this was done.\(^6\)

\(^{94}\) 6th meeting, 10 February, 1941, ibid.

\(^{95}\) 11th meeting, 26 February, 1941, ibid.

\(^{96}\) BUS(J)(41)30, (also numbered ABC 1), Report on United States-British Staff Conversations. Held at Washington, 29 January-27 March, 1941, ibid.

The differences were stated, under the heading of Strategic Defense Policies', as follows:

'The principle of United States and British national strategic defense policies of which the Military forces of the Associated Powers must take account are:

(a) United States

The paramount territorial interests of the United States are in the Western Hemisphere. The United States must, in all eventualities, maintain such dispositions as will prevent the extension in the Western Hemisphere of European or Asiatic political or Military power.

(b) The British Commonwealth

The security of the United Kingdom must be maintained in all circumstances. Similarly, the United Kingdom, the Dominions and India must maintain dispositions which, in all eventualities, will provide for the ultimate security of the British Commonwealth of Nations. A cardinal feature of British strategic policy is the retention of a position in the Far East such as will ensure the cohesion and security of the British Commonwealth and the maintenance of its war effort.'
The report of the Washington talks was never formally accepted by either the British or United States governments. But all subsequent planning was based on the general formulae which were evolved during the discussions. The British authorities had no alternative but to accept the low priority which was given to the Far East by the United States. If a fleet was to go to Singapore it would clearly have to be provided by the Royal Navy. The Americans indicated that they were prepared to help only in so far as an increase in their forces in the Atlantic and Mediterranean would relieve British war ships for service in the Far East. 97 Even then it was not possible for the United States to give any details of the number of ships which would be provided or the timing of their transfer. 98 Nevertheless, the British delegation held firmly to its announced intention to reinforce Singapore, indicating that if need be the Mediterranean would have to be sacrificed for the benefit of the Far East. 99 A fleet of at least six capital ships would be sent to act on the defensive and this minimum would have to be increased to nine if the American Pacific Fleet was not stationed at Hawaii. 100

The very strong British insistence at Washington on the importance of the Far East does not accord well with

97 BUS(41)33, Report by the United Kingdom delegation, ibid.
98 Minutes of 11th meeting, 26 February, 1941, ibid.
99 BUS(J)(41)13, ibid.
100 BUS(41)16 and BUS(J)(41)33, Reply to Note by Navy Section of the United States Staff Committee, 15 March, 1941, ibid.
the case presented by the British government a few months later when the Australian Prime Minister was in London. Then the greatest emphasis was placed on the enormous difficulties involved in any rapid abandonment of the Mediterranean and Middle East in favour of the Far East. In fact, the United Kingdom delegation was equally aware of these difficulties at the time of the Washington talks. When asked by the Americans to assign a relative importance to the two theatres, the British concluded their appreciation with the assessment that, while they could not afford to abandon either: 'On a long-term view the Far East is to the British Commonwealth of greater importance than the Middle East'. A similar memorandum circulated to the United Kingdom delegation, and not seen by the Americans, contained the same sentence but then continued: 'On the other hand, on the short term view, it is vital that we should retain the Middle East in order to defeat Germany and Italy'. Wartime situations frequently demand that long-term interests be sacrificed for the sake of short-term expedients. It appears, therefore, that in their efforts to obtain an American commitment at Singapore, the British authorities consciously professed to give the Far East a degree of importance which did not correspond with their own private thoughts on the matter.

In attempting to influence the United States to

101. See above, pp. 165-77.
102. BUS(J)(41)6, Note by United Kingdom Delegation, CAB 99/5.
103. BUS(41)2, ibid.
take up additional responsibilities in the Far East the British government was acting entirely in line with the wishes of the Pacific dominion, if not always in full consultation with them. In Washington, Casey had kept abreast of the developments leading up to the staff conversations and tried to ensure that Australia would be either directly represented at the talks or else afforded the opportunity of separate unilateral discussions with the American authorities. His efforts met with no success. But while no representatives of the dominions were present at the joint meetings between the United Kingdom and American delegations, Australia and New Zealand, as well as Canada, were represented at the meetings of the British delegates themselves. The Australian government also promptly forwarded to the British delegation a copy of the appreciation which the Australian Chiefs of Staff produced in mid-February. The United Kingdom representatives were therefore fully aware of the nature of the Australian anxieties which were leading the dominion to an increasing emphasis on the defence needs of her more immediate geographical area. Meanwhile, outside the scope of the staff talks, Casey continued his exertions to keep the importance of Singapore before various key figures in the American administration.

104. Telegram from Casey, dated 9, received 10 October, 1940, CRS A981 item Pacific 8.
105. BUS(41)33, CAB 99/5.
106. BUS(41)17, ibid. See above, p. 150.
107. Telegram from Casey, dated 15, received 16 February, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 168; also F1042/17/23, F.O. 371/27887; telegram from Halifax dated and received 16 February, 1941, F1001/17/23, F.O. 371/27887; Casey, Personal Experience, pp. 50 and 61.
The Australian government was kept well-informed of the progress of the talks in Washington not only through its Minister in the American capital but also through its newly appointed Naval Attaché. At the beginning of 1941 Commander Burrell, R.A.N., took up his post in the United States and, at the same time, an American Attaché, Commander Causey, U.S.N., arrived in Canberra.  

Burrell made his reports to the Chief of the Australian Naval Staff but the Department of External Affairs also received a wide cross-section, if not a complete set, of his communications and these gave a detailed and accurate reflection of the proceedings in Washington. Thus, while Australia may not have been directly consulted on the 'Beat Hitler First' strategy, Dr. Evatt's later claims that he was not made aware of this decision until May 1942 are difficult to understand. The British government may have been remiss in not elucidating the policy fully for Canberra's benefit. But Australia did now have her own effective sources of information in the American capital. Strangely enough, Evatt's implication that his dominion had been left in ignorance because London denied it the facts suggests that he failed to appreciate the significance of Menzies' establishment of separate diplomatic representation. Moreover, the Australian Chiefs of Staff

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108. Telegram to PMNZ, 1 November, 1940, CRS A2676 item 566; telegram from Casey, dated 4, received 6 November, 1940, CRS A981 item Pacific 8; Gill, Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942, pp. 431-32. Commander Collins, of the United States Navy, was simultaneously appointed as an observer at Darwin.

109. CRS A981 item Far East 25B; see also MP 1185/5, Box 7, File 1877/10/29.

110. See, for example, Tennant, Evatt, p. 363.
were certainly aware from an early date that the Atlantic and Europe were to be 'the decisive theatre of war' as were the ministers in Menzies' government. For example, in a telegram despatched to Menzies while he was in the United Kingdom in April 1941 they clearly stated their understanding that 'the fundamental principle of the United States policy is that the Western Hemisphere is the primary and overriding consideration'. Since this message was sent only after a 'full discussion' in the Advisory War Council it is difficult to believe that at least some Labour leaders did not share this understanding.

After the Washington staff conversations the Pacific dominions had no greater assurance of American support than beforehand. Indeed, the United States Staff Committee had insisted on treating the Pacific and Far East as separate areas. This distinction was made in order 'to avoid any possible commitments in the Far East area' and thereby 'to avoid any commitment to defend Australia or New Zealand'. On the other hand, the American interest in the far eastern area was undoubtedly increasing. At the end of March 1941, for example, four United States Navy cruisers and a destroyer squadron paid visits to Australian and New Zealand ports, visits which were greatly welcomed in both dominions.

III. Report by the Australian Chiefs of Staff on the American-British-Dutch Conversations and the British-Dutch Conversations, April 1941, 14 May, 1941, CRS A816 item 37/301/88.

112 Telegram to Menzies, 23 April, 1941, CRS A981 item Defence 59, part 4.

113 BUS(41)33, CAB 99/5.

Washington also appreciated the need for joint naval planning in a region where American, British and Dutch vessels would be operating. Despite the priority given to the western theatre and the refusal to reinforce the small Asiatic Fleet based on Manila, the United States Navy did not intend to conduct a purely holding operation in the Pacific. The naval authorities aimed to carry out a series of tactical offensives to harry Japan and help with the defence of the 'Malay Barrier',\(^{115}\) an arc of islands extending from Malaya down to Timor\(^{116}\) and whose retention was considered essential if Singapore was to be held as 'a card of re-entry for the main fleet into the Far East ...'.\(^{117}\)

In order to participate in joint planning the Americans sent representatives to a defence conference held at Singapore at the end of April. This was the first occasion on which the United States had enjoyed anything more than observer status at the Singapore conferences. The April discussions were almost entirely naval in character and followed on naturally from the Washington conversations. But the conference was also complementary to the Anglo-Dutch-Australian gathering at Singapore two months beforehand.\(^{118}\)

The Australians, particularly, were discontented with the results of their earlier meeting; the Chiefs of Staff regretted that it had not produced a co-ordinated war plan.

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\(^{115}\) BUS(J)(41)16, CAB 99/5.

\(^{116}\) See Map 3 between pp. 94 and 95.

\(^{117}\) BUS(J)(41)13, CAB 99/5.

\(^{118}\) See above, pp. 158-61.
for the Far East and the War Cabinet agreed, expressing 'great concern' at this failure. The Australian delegation to the April conference was therefore deliberately composed mainly of naval officers and was headed by Admiral Colvin himself.

When the proceedings opened the delegates had little difficulty in agreeing once more that there was no danger of an invasion of either Australia or New Zealand so long as Singapore held firm and the Japanese were kept out of the Netherlands East Indies. Brooke-Popham maintained his sanguine views on the defence of Malaya. The land and air reinforcements provided since the previous October had, he explained, 'materially strengthened' the position and 'he was most optimistic as to the ability of Singapore to hold out, and to continue to operate as a Fleet Base'. Brooke-Popham failed, however, to impress the American representatives. As soon as it came to drawing up a war plan for the far eastern area the differences between British and American ideas quickly re-emerged. While the British may have

120. War Cabinet Minute 909, 22 March, 1941, ibid; also telegram from Fadden to Menzies, 27 March, 1941, ibid.
121. Report by the Australian Chiefs of Staff, 10 April, 1941, CRS A816 item 37/301/88. Colvin had been unable to attend the February conference for reasons of health and in April had to travel to Singapore by ship rather than aeroplane because of his high blood pressure. See Colvin to Minister for Navy, 10 April, 1941, ibid.
122. Report by the Australian Chiefs of Staff on the American-British-Dutch Conversations and the British-Dutch Conversations, 14 May, 1941, CRS A2671 item 135/1941.
123. Colvin to Fadden, 11 May, 1941, enclosing report on Singapore conference, CRS A816 item 37/301/88.
abandoned hope of persuading the United States to send part of its Pacific Fleet to Singapore they still regarded the base as the key factor in the strategy which was to be pursued by the British, Australian, New Zealand, Dutch and American naval forces. But the Americans objected that the plans which the United Kingdom delegation put forward on this basis were too defensive and entailed too much emphasis on local defence. Nevertheless, the conference did produce some element of agreement on local defence operations in the event of a war with Japan. The Australian and New Zealand governments subsequently gave their approval to this scheme but, because of the central role allotted to Singapore, the American authorities rejected it completely in July 1941. They also revoked the arrangements which had been made for the United States Asiatic Fleet to operate under the strategic command of the British Commander-in-Chief, China, in wartime.

Despite this failure to evolve a joint strategy, the United States government proceeded to implement other

126. War Cabinet Minute 1073, 15 May, 1941, ibid and telegram from Acting PMNZ, dated and received 21 May, 1941, CRS A816 item 37/301/88.
aspects of the Washington staff conversations earlier than had been anticipated. At the end of April the Secretary for the Navy, Frank Knox, asked Admiral Danckwerts, a member of the British delegation at the Washington staff talks, for his reaction to the proposition to transfer 'almost the whole' of the Pacific Fleet to the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{128} This was a considerably larger movement than had been envisaged at the Washington talks, a sign that the United States Navy was encountering difficulties in meeting its increasing commitments in the Atlantic. From a naval point of view, Danckwerts indicated that it would be unwise to leave only a small force in the Pacific because Japan would almost certainly seize the opportunity thereby offered for a southward advance. But when Churchill heard of this response he was horrified. With his thoughts concentrated almost entirely on the war actually in progress, the British Prime Minister attached the greatest importance to the psychological effect on the war as a whole of a move as dramatic as that mooted in Washington.\textsuperscript{129} The British embassy in the American capital was therefore instructed to counteract Danckwert's initial reaction and 'strongly encourage' the United States in its proposal.\textsuperscript{130} Although Menzies was in London at this time he was not consulted before these instructions were despatched. The following day he met with the War Cabinet's Defence Committee and complained bitterly that as Australian and New Zealand delegations had not been consulted.

\textsuperscript{128} 21st meeting of Defence Committee (Operations), 30 April, 1941, CAB 69/2; British War Cabinet Minute WM48(41)6, 8 May, 1941, CAB 65/22.

\textsuperscript{129} 21st meeting of Defence Committee (Operations), 30 April, 1941, CAB 69/2.

\textsuperscript{130} Telegram from Foreign Office to Washington embassy, 1 May, 1941 Annex 2 to ibid.
Zealand interests were so vitally affected their views should have been sought. The Australian Prime Minister was inclined to agree with the line taken by the British government; it was the manner of the treatment of the dominions which troubled him. The protest was sufficiently strong for the Defence Committee to instruct Halifax to hold up any action on the matter pending the sounding of Australian and New Zealand opinion.

The Australian authorities in Canberra received their own news of the proposed American naval movements from their Attaché in Washington. Burrell was inclined to favour the transfer on the grounds that it would 'have the effect of increasing considerably the chances of some incident which might easily hasten the entry of [the] United States into the war'. But the other Australian ministers proved to be more cautious than Menzies, or, indeed, Burrell. They opposed any reduction in the strength of the United States Pacific Fleet below six capital ships and considered the retention of the aircraft carriers in the Pacific as 'indispensable'. The New Zealand government also displayed great anxiety, believing that Japan would be more willing to risk war if the bulk of the American fleet was situated in the Atlantic.

131. 22nd meeting, 1 May, 1941, ibid.
132. Annex 1, ibid.
133. See, for example, telegrams dated 1, received 2 May, 1941, dated 8, received 9 May, 1941 and dated 7, received 8 June, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 25B.
134. Telegram dated 1, received 2 May, 1941, ibid.
135. Fadden to SSDA, Casey and PMNZ, 4 May, 1941, CRS A816 item 37/301/88.
136. Telegram from Acting PMNZ, dated and received 6 May, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 26A.
On 8 May, therefore, London told Washington that while it agreed to the transfer in principle it was advisable to retain at least six battleships and two aircraft carriers in the Pacific. In the event the Americans decided to send only three battleships and one aircraft carrier to the Atlantic, leaving nine battleships and three carriers in the Pacific Ocean.

The United States naval movements appear to have been decided on the basis of America's particular interests in the Atlantic. It seems unlikely that the views of the United Kingdom or the Pacific dominions would have been allowed to influence a decision on the matter to any significant extent. The same may be said of American policy generally. The administration intended to move at its own speed and according to its own strategy. If the United Kingdom was unable to exert any great influence in Washington then it was unrealistic to expect that Australia and New Zealand would be able to do so. Australia did benefit from the presence of a competent representative in the American capital who was able to keep Australian anxieties before the administration. But the impossibility of securing any positive commitment from the United States government emphasised the dangers of basing any policy on a firm assumption of American assistance. In these circumstances it is

137. Telegram from Foreign Office to Washington embassy, 8 May, 1941, annexed to British War Cabinet Minute WM48(41)6, 8 May, 1941, CAB 65/22.
139. Ibid, p. 57.
difficult to fault the Australian government's guarded attitude towards the American role in the Far East.

'Tightening the screw' against Japan

The sanctions which the United States, the British Commonwealth and the Dutch government imposed on Japan from the latter half of 1940 were limited in their scope. They were intended to restrict exports to Japan in order to prevent the Japanese from aiding their Axis partners and from building up their own stocks. No attempt had been made to strike at Japan's most vulnerable point by cutting off her oil supplies. The policy was, rather, 'one of gradually tightening the screw, always with a keen eye on the necessity of not going so far as to provoke an explosion'. This caution accorded well with Menzies' contention that war with Japan should not be regarded as inevitable, a contention which it was possible for him to maintain at least until the end of July, 1941.

Australia's reluctance to provoke Japan was again made apparent when the British War Cabinet considered an approach to Washington for a declaration by the United States, Dutch and British governments to the effect that continued southward aggression by Japan would not be tolerated. Menzies, who was still in London when the question was discussed

140 Memorandum by J.M. Troutbeck of the Ministry of Economic Warfare, 28 October, 1941, enclosed in Eden to Craigie, 27 November, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 19.

141 See above, pp. 168-70.

142 See below, pp. 232-33.
towards the end of April 1941, at first expressed some enthusiasm for the idea. But a month later, after returning to Australia, he began to show great concern at the rancour such a move might arouse in Tokyo. Accordingly, he revised his view and advised against any public declaration. The reasons for this change of front are not far to seek. The Australian Prime Minister was well aware, from information received from Casey, that the United States was unlikely to be prepared to participate in any public statement. From Tokyo Latham also urged that the 'extremist elements' in Japan should be given 'no excuse for picking a quarrel' on the basis of allegations of encirclement.

In the meantime the British government had sounded Australian opinion on the implementation of additional sanctions in the event of further Japanese moves to the south. Stewart, as Minister for External Affairs, suggested that more drastic counter-measures, for which United States co-operation was an essential precondition, would be required in the case of a blatant act of aggression. In any other circumstances, he had grave doubts about the extension of sanctions as proposed by the United Kingdom; it would involve a 'policy of irritants and pin pricks to which the Commonwealth Government has always been opposed in dealing with Japan', and which was 'of doubtful efficacy as a deterrent'.

143 British War Cabinet Minute WM42(41)3, 21 April, 1941, CAB 65/18.
144 Telegram to SSDA, 30 May, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 26A.
145 Telegram from Menzies to Bruce, 7 June, 1941, ibid.
146 Telegram from Latham, dated and received 12 June, 1941, ibid.
in so far as it would constitute unilateral action without American co-operation, the measure would be 'a retrograde step ...'.

This guarded attitude was not allowed to inhibit Australian preparations to resist a possible assault in the event of her hopes for continued peace in the Pacific proving vain. In May, for example, visits by Netherlands East Indies Air Force units to Darwin were reciprocated by the R.A.A.F. at Koepang and Ambon. Menzies also favoured a 'private assurance' to the Dutch government concerning the integrity of its East Indian Empire. With Australia's immediate defence policies so closely tied to the security of the Dutch Islands, he was worried lest a reticent attitude on the part of the British government cause the Dutch authorities to reconsider their resolve to fight if attacked. Australia regarded the matter as of such importance that she advocated this 'private assurance' even if the United States declined to undertake a similar obligation. The Australian Prime Minister also suggested that the work of the various Singapore staff conferences had reached a stage where plans could in future be drawn up on the basis of a 'clear political understanding' such as that he advocated with the Dutch.

Australia had good reason to be particularly

149. Telegram to SSDA, 30 May, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 26A.
150. Ibid.
concerned about the Netherlands East Indies at this time. The economic negotiations between the Japanese and Dutch which had been proceeding since September 1940 had reached a state of deadlock. Japan had hoped to bring the Dutch territories within her 'co-prosperity sphere' by economic means but these attempts had been tenaciously resisted and the negotiations came to an inconclusive end in June 1941. That Australia was kept fully informed of the proceedings in Batavia is another sign of the close degree of co-operation which existed between Canberra and the Netherlands East Indies.  

The end of the Japanese-Dutch negotiations coincided with the opening of the German campaign against the Soviet Union. This development opened up new opportunities for Japan. She could turn her attention northwards and attack an already beleaguered Russia. On the other hand, with the security of the Manchurian border ensured by the German action, she could concentrate her efforts to the south and merely await a Russian collapse in Europe before consolidating her northern aims. In anticipation of a Japanese move against southern Indo-China the British government, early in July, asked all the dominions for their views on the proposed termination of the Anglo-Japanese Commercial Treaty of 1911, the India-Japan Commercial Convention of 1934 and the Burma-Japan Commercial Convention of 1937.  

151 Dutch Consul-General in Australia to Hodgson, 11 February 1941, CRS A981 Japan 158, part 5; telegram from SSDA, dated 21, received 22 July, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 19.  
152 British War Cabinet Minute WM72(41)9, 21 July, 1941, CAB 65/19; see also SSDA to Acting PMNZ, 12 July, 1941, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.
The Canadians and South Africans agreed to the proposal. Menzies, however, followed Stewart's arguments of two months earlier. If there were to be any reprisals at all, he suggested, they ought to involve severe restrictions on Japanese imports and this could only be done if the United States was prepared to act concurrently with the British Empire. Denunciation of the commercial agreements would, the Australian Prime Minister argued, amount to no more than one of those 'pin pricks' to which Australia had always been opposed.

The attitude of New Zealand to the question of sanctions against Japan had undergone some interesting modifications. As the British, Australian and American governments adopted an increasingly strong line towards Japanese aggression, the smallest dominion no longer carried the banner of 'anti-appeasement' alone. At the same time her enthusiasm for coercion was tempered by the prospect that it would lead to armed conflict in the Pacific. Thus, in reply to the British government's soundings on the extension of sanctions in late April, Wellington had harped on the 'exceedingly delicate' nature of the existing circumstances and considered that 'any unnecessary irritation

153. Telegram to SSDA, dated 15, received 16 July, 1941, annexed to British War Cabinet Minute WM72(41)9, 21 July, 1941, CAB 65/19.
154. Telegram to SSDA, dated and received 15 July, 1941, ibid.
155. See above, pp. 221-22.
156. Telegram from Menzies to Bruce, received 16 July, 1941, annexed to British War Cabinet Minute WM72(41)9, 21 July, 1941, CAB 65/19.
157. See above, pp. 221-22.
at the present juncture would be unwise'. Like Australia, New Zealand also insisted on the need for co-operation with the United States. By July she had reverted to some extent to her former line and was certainly more sympathetic than her Pacific neighbour to the proposal to denounce the Anglo-Japanese Commercial Treaty. Wellington also made a strong plea for a public declaration proclaiming to Japan the line beyond which she would not be able to proceed without incurring armed resistance:

the most effective step at this stage would be a joint declaration by the United Kingdom, Australian, New Zealand, Netherlands East Indies and United States Governments emphasising that any move likely to prejudice the security line which runs from Malaya to New Zealand through the Netherlands East Indies equally concerns all the affected parties and must be regarded as an attack on all. Even if the United States find themselves unable to join publically in the proposed declaration His Majesty's Government in New Zealand are of the opinion that the British Governments concerned together with the Government of the Netherlands East Indies should, without delay, make known their identity of views and interests on this matter.

The importance of the termination of the Anglo-Japanese commercial agreements was rather overtaken in the course of the next few days by the Japanese military

158. PMNZ to SSDA, 26 April, 1941, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.
159. Acting PMNZ to SSDA, 16 July, 1941, annexed to British War Cabinet Minute WM72(41)9, 21 July, 1941, CAB 65/19 and also in N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3; see also Acting PMNZ to Fraser (in London), 16 July, 1941, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.
160. Acting PMNZ to SSDA, 16 July, 1941, attached to British War Cabinet Minute WM72(41)8, 21 July, 1941, CAB 65/19, see also N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3. Emphasis in British War Cabinet Minute.
occupation of southern Indo-China. This brought forth a most dramatic and far-reaching response from the United States in the form of a freezing order applied to all Japanese assets from 26 July. The British and Dutch governments immediately announced that they would take similar action. The most important effect was that Japan, deprived of her foreign exchange, was no longer in a position to buy her vital oil supplies from the Netherlands East Indies.

The immediate British decision to freeze Japanese assets was made in order to show solidarity with America's action. It was not dependent on any United States guarantee of military support. Although Menzies indicated that he understood the reasons which had led the United Kingdom to act in this way, he was also apprehensive that Japanese retaliation against British interests might not bring about automatic American involvement. Besides making use of Casey to press the United States government on this point, Australia urged the British government to continue to work for a firm American assurance. If this were made public, Menzies implied, it would have the salutary effect of

161 Memorandum by J.M. Troutbeck of the Ministry of Economic Warfare, 28 October, 1941, enclosed in Eden to Craigie, 27 November, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 19. See also British War Cabinet Minute WM73(41)4, 24 July, 1941, CAB 65/19.

162 Telegram from SSDA, dated 26, received 27 July, 1941, CRS A981 item Pacific 8; telegram from SSDA, dated 2, received 3 August, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 20A, part 2; see also Advisory War Council Minute 431, 29 July, 1941 and Agendum 102/1941, CRS A2680 item 102/1941.

163 Telegram from Casey, dated and received 7 August, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 20A, part 2.
preventing Japan from engaging in policies 'from which at a later stage she cannot withdraw without a serious loss of face'. In the same message Menzies revealed a certain exasperation with the taciturn policies of Washington and London towards a direct confrontation with Japan. In neither capital, he suggested was there a full appreciation of the real situation in the Pacific: 'There is an apprehension in our minds and in the minds of leading members of the Opposition that the dangers in the Pacific are more dimly perceived elsewhere than by ourselves'.

Whatever its exact perception of the Pacific situation, the American government was certainly not prepared to give a comprehensive undertaking of the type Menzies envisaged. Nor was Churchill prepared to jeopardise his relations with Roosevelt by pressing the American President too hard or too fast. When the two leaders met at sea off the coast of Newfoundland for the Riviera conference in mid-August it became apparent that the United States was still concentrating her thinking on the western hemisphere and her military planners put the importance of the Middle East above that of Singapore. After the meeting Roosevelt did issue a warning to Japan in the following terms:

164 Telegram to SSDA, 30 July, 1941, CRS A981 item Pacific 8.
165 COS(41)504, CAB 99/18 and telegram from SSDA, dated and received 1 September, 1941, CRS A981 item United States 206. This conference did clear up certain disagreements relating to the report of the Anglo-American-Dutch conference at Singapore in April 1941 (see above, p.214-16) and an agreed basis for the detailed planning of operations in the Far East was finally established.
if the Japanese Government takes any further steps in pursuance of a policy or program of military domination by force or threat of force of neighbouring countries, the Government of the United States will be compelled to take immediately any and all steps which it may deem necessary toward safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of the United States and American nationals and toward insuring the safety and security of the United States.166

But the tone of this admonishment fell below Australian expectations.167 And, as the minutes of the Advisory War Council subsequently recorded: 'The results of the discussions between Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt have now established the U.S.A. as the spearhead of the opposition to Japan, with United Kingdom support'.168 The British Prime Minister was as firmly committed as ever to taking no initiative in the Far East without prior American approval and co-operation.

Nevertheless Australia and New Zealand continued to advocate a more adventurous course. Both Wellington and Canberra maintained the view that a definite guarantee should be extended to the Netherlands East Indies.169 In the latter months of 1941, however, attention began to focus more on the

168. Advisory War Council Minute 475, 2 September, 1941, CRS A2680 item 114/1941.
169. Telegram to SSDA (also to Prime Ministers of Canada, South Africa and New Zealand and to Casey), 11 August, 1941, CRS A981 item Pacific 8; also in N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3; Wood, The New Zealand People at War, p. 201.
security of Thailand. Japan's occupation of southern Indo-China confronted the Thais with Japanese forces along the entire length of their eastern flank and made them the most likely next victim in Japan's 'one by one' advance. The integrity of Thailand was even more vital than that of the Dutch East Indies to the security of Singapore for the narrow neck of land which made up the southern half of the country led on directly to Malaya and the weakly defended 'back door' to the naval base. But in this case New Zealand's more cautious attitude, based on a realistic appreciation of the help which it was possible to render, was uppermost. The dominion's government doubted whether it would be wise for 'the British countries alone' to proclaim that a Japanese attack on Thailand would constitute a casus belli, unless and until there is available a force sufficiently strong to ensure successful resistance to Japan in the area threatened. The result of any hasty or ill-conceived guarantee might well be a repetition of the circumstances surrounding the British guarantee to Poland in 1939.

New Zealand's view was obviously affected by the recent disasters suffered by her troops in Greece and Crete:

the result of a defeat in this region Thailand such as we experienced in Norway, in Belgium, in Greece and in Crete, arising from any premature or ill-conceived attempt to assist the Thais, could not fail to have the most disastrous results, particularly in the United States.

170. See Map 3 between pp. 94 and 95.
171. Ibid, and Map 4 between pp. 235 and 236.
172. The United Kingdom went to war in September 1939 to honour this guarantee but was totally incapable of defending Polish territory against German invasion.
173. Acting PMNZ to PMA, repeated to SSDA and Prime Ministers of Canada and South Africa, 14 August, 1941, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.
Australia, on the other hand, was emphatic that Thailand's significance to the defence of Singapore made it essential that an attack upon her territorial integrity should be regarded as a casus belli; 'if Thailand is abandoned ...', Menzies cabled to London, 'we will be one country nearer to war ... and in particular in the defence of Singapore, Japan will be relatively stronger and we relatively weaker than at present'. Moreover, 'while every pressure should be maintained upon the United States, it would be an error to condition our action upon American action, though actual objection by the United States of America would of course be fatal'. Menzies was concerned that British inability and American unwillingness to give the Thais material help would only serve to throw them into the arms of the Japanese.

In mid-August, when it was believed that extensive Japanese demands on Thailand were imminent, the Prime Minister abandoned a tour of Australian state capitals in order to deal with the crisis. At a meeting of the Advisory War Council Dr. Evatt asked Menzies whether Australia would go to war in the event of a Japanese attack on Thailand. Menzies replied that she would and, in answer to a further question, stated that the British Empire would if necessary go to war without similar American action, providing that the United States did not

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174 Telegram to SSDA, repeated to Prime Ministers of Canada, South Africa and New Zealand and Casey, 11 August, 1941, CRS A981 item Pacific 8.

175 Advisory War Council Minute 451, 6 August, 1941, CRS A2680 item 103/1940.

176 Dr. H.V. Evatt resigned as a Judge of the High Court of Australia in 1940 to enter federal politics as a Labour member of the House of Representatives. He was one of the opposition members on the Advisory War Council and became Minister for External Affairs when Curtin's government came to power in October, 1941.
definitely object.¹⁷⁷

The Australian Prime Minister was hardly entitled to speak for the whole Empire. In London, opinions were becoming increasingly divided with Eden heading those who favoured a stronger line against Japan.¹⁷⁸ But it was Churchill who was the final arbiter of policy and he 'deprecated giving an automatic undertaking to the Netherlands Government that we would go to war with Japan in certain circumstances, irrespective of the attitude of the United States'.¹⁷⁹ He also opposed any ratification of the recommendations of the staff conversations held at Singapore in February and April 1941, a move for which the Dutch were pressing and of which Australia and New Zealand approved. Churchill told his War Cabinet that even if the Japanese encroached on the Netherlands East Indies it might not be right to make an immediate declaration of war.¹⁸⁰

These views greatly perturbed Fraser, the New Zealand Prime Minister who was visiting London at this time and who attended the Cabinet meeting in question. But Churchill refused to be moved by any entreaties. As late as 3 November Eden was complaining that it was becoming

¹⁷⁷ Advisory War Council Minute 466, 14 August, 1941, CRS A2680 item 110/1941.
¹⁷⁸ See, for example, British War Cabinet Minutes WM75(41)8, 28 July, 1941 and WM83(41)4, 18 August, 1941, CAB 65/23; also WP(41)168, CAB 66/17.
¹⁷⁹ British War Cabinet Minute WM75(41)8, 28 July, 1941, CAB 65/23.
¹⁸⁰ British War Cabinet Minute WM72(41)10, 21 July, 1941, ibid; see also telegram from SSDA, dated 6, received 7 September, 1941, CRS A981 item Far East 26A.
increasingly difficult to explain to the Dutch the reasons for the British government's refusal to conclude a formal defensive agreement with them. The Foreign Secretary backed his case with the argument that the Australian government '
were anxious to send Australian troops to certain places in the Netherlands East Indies'. Eden received support from Leo Amery, the Secretary of State for India, who argued that the Dutch islands were 'one of the outposts of India's defence'. The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, Viscount Cranborne, stressed that

there would be a painful impression in Australia and New Zealand if we did not intervene in the event of the Netherlands East Indies being attacked. He thought that this opinion was so strong as almost to force us to declare war.

But Churchill remained adamant: 'Our policy in the Far East should be to persuade the United States to cover our weak position in that area. We should not run the risk of finding ourselves at war with Japan without American support.'

Attempts to avoid war with Japan now took a definite second place with the British Prime Minister to the securing of American involvement. This conflicted with Menzies' earlier insistence that war with Japan must not be regarded as inevitable. But Menzies himself seems to have been moving away from this position in the last few months of his own wartime government. On 6 August 1941 he informed

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181. British War Cabinet Minute WM108(41)5, 3 November, 1941, CAB 65/24; see also WM111(41)3, 11 November, 1941, ibid.

182. See above, pp. 168-70.
the Advisory War Council that the Japanese Minister in Australia had suggested Menzies himself go to Tokyo 'in an endeavour to check the drift of the situation'. But the Australian Prime Minister rejected the idea, recalling, as he did so, 'Mr. Chamberlain's visit to Munich and the consequent criticism that he ultimately incurred for appeasement'. On the other hand, John Curtin, who came to power at the head of a Labour administration on 3 October, appeared in the latter months of 1941 to become increasingly keen to negotiate with Japan.

In a very real sense, however, it had become inevitable from the end of July 1941 that Japan would go to war. By their occupation of southern Indo-China the Japanese had brought about the freezing of their assets by the American, British and Dutch governments. Without foreign exchange, Tokyo could not afford to continue to buy oil from the Netherlands East Indies; without oil the whole Japanese state would be brought to its knees. Japan had thereby presented herself with a fundamental dilemma: she had either to withdraw from China and East Asia generally in order to induce the United States to relax the freezing order or else embark on a daring policy of widespread conquest to capture the sources of oil supply themselves. In so far as the former course was unthinkable for the military establishment, Japan's basic decision for war had been made by the middle of 1941.

183. Advisory War Council Minute 451, 6 August, 1941, CRS A2680 item 103/1940.
184. See below, pp. 255-57.
Whether the United States would also enter this war was another matter. The uncertainty which persisted almost to the last minute led to an eleventh hour attempt by Casey to salvage the American-Japanese discussions in Washington, an attempt which represented 'a purely Australian initiative'.\textsuperscript{185} The talks appeared to have broken down at the end of November. After seeing Cordell Hull and consulting Evatt by telephone on 29th the Australian Minister approached the Japanese negotiators with the suggestion that he might act as an intermediary if they had any further proposals to make which might allow the resumption of discussion. But Ambassador Nomura and special emissary Kurusu had to explain that they had no authority to take any new initiative and Casey was forced to abandon his efforts.\textsuperscript{186}

A firm American commitment to fight alongside Britain was not forthcoming until 1 December 1941. On that day, Halifax reported, Roosevelt stated that 'in the event of an attack on ourselves [i.e. British territory] or the Dutch, we should obviously all be in it together'. As soon as he heard this Churchill agreed that 'we could now say to the Dutch that if any attack was made on them by Japan, we should at once come to their aid ...'.\textsuperscript{187} The American

\textsuperscript{185} Watt, Australian Diplomat, p. 37.


\textsuperscript{187} British War Cabinet Minute WM124(41)4, 4 December, 1941, CAB 65/24.
President also assured the British Ambassador that the United States would support any British action aimed at dealing with a Japanese attack on Thailand. The British had, in fact, evolved a plan to forestall an assault on Malaya through Thailand. Known by the code name Matador, it involved the occupation of part of the narrow Isthmus of Kra which linked southern Thailand with northern Malaya. The object was to deny to the enemy the use of the port of Singora, the adjacent airfields and the railway and road which led to the Malayan frontier. But London was naturally hesitant to sanction any action which would lead to armed Japanese retaliation. Only on 4 December, once Roosevelt indicated that he definitely supported the operation, did Churchill concede that the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, should be given instructions which would enable him to put Matador into effect in the appropriate circumstances.

Thus, the assurance of American support in a far eastern war for which the British, Australian and New Zealand governments had been working for two years was secured only a matter of days before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941. The nature of this attack ensured that President Roosevelt encountered no domestic opposition in honouring his commitment.

189 See Map 4 between pp. 235 and 236.
191 British War Cabinet Minute WM124(41)4, 4 December, 1941, CAB 65/24.
Map 4: The Malay Peninsula.
(from B. Collier, The War in the Far East, 1941-1945)
It is evident that the two Pacific dominions fully appreciated the importance for their own protection of the potential United States role in the Pacific. The policies which they adopted as a result often differed widely and each government's own policies and attitudes were far from consistent throughout the two year period in question. Many of these inconsistencies stemmed from the difficulties and frustrations experienced in trying to influence the United States in any way at all. But it cannot be denied that Australia and New Zealand actively attempted the task.

The British refusal to run the risk of involvement in a far eastern conflict from which the United States held aloof does not indicate an indifference towards the safety of Australia and New Zealand. On the contrary, it was evidence of London's concern that the two dominions should not be put in the dreadful position of having to face a Japanese onslaught alone.

By the time Japan unleashed her attack, a Labour government had been in power in Australia for two months. Apart from occasional pressure from the dominions, the Singapore strategy had remained largely dormant since the fall of France. John Curtin, the new Australian Prime Minister, now pressed hard for the despatch of capital ships to the Far East. But his action merely continued an initiative which had already been taken up by Menzies.

192. See, for example, above, pp. 113-14.
193. See below, pp. 239 and 270.
194. See below, p. 272.
Indeed, every aspect of the new administration's initial policy was to belie the British government's fears that the Labour leaders were 'entirely isolationist in their view and thought of nothing but the protection of Australia'.

195 See above, p. 172.
CHAPTER FIVE

LABOUR IN POWER IN AUSTRALIA
October - 8 December, 1941

By August 1941 the personal animosity towards Prime Minister Menzies from within the coalition government's own ranks was threatening to make good government in Australia impossible. Menzies resigned from office on 29 August and A.W. Fadden, the affable leader of the Country Party who had acted as Prime Minister in Menzies' absence abroad earlier in the year was commissioned by the Governor-General to form a new administration. This he did without effecting any further ministerial changes; Menzies retained the War Cabinet portfolio of Defence Co-ordination. But only forty days later Fadden himself suffered defeat in the House of Representatives on the issue of the budget when two independent members transferred their support to the Labour Party. The vote reflected a growing disillusion throughout Australia with the conduct of the war effort. On 3 October John Curtin received the Governor-General's commission to form a new government. This was a well-deserved reward for his patient efforts, since assuming the leadership in 1935, to unite and build up his party. It was also a tribute to Curtin's attitude to the wartime situation which Fadden

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1 See above, pp. 165-77.

2 For the budget debate preceding the fall of the government see C.P.D., Vol. 168, 2 and 3 October, 1941, pp. 625-79 and pp. 681-720.

3 See, for example, 'Australia', Round Table, Vol. XXXI (December, 1940 - September, 1941), pp. 796-808 and 'Australia. Political Hostilities', ibid, Vol. XXXII (December, 1941 - September, 1942), pp. 166-70.
Shortly before his forced resignation as Prime Minister of Australia, Menzies had wanted to pay another visit to London. A Norman Lindsay cartoon in the Bulletin takes note of Menzies' precarious grip on office. (20 August, 1941).
subsequently described as one of 'consistent and unabated ... responsibility to the nation, regardless of party implications'.

In his first weeks of power Curtin forwarded two major requests to the United Kingdom. The Australian Prime Minister insisted that the relief of the Australian troops at Tobruk should continue; he also pressed urgently for the despatch of a first-class battleship to the Pacific. At first sight it might appear that the new administration intended a drastic revision of policy which would place Australia's purely local interests first and foremost while calling upon the British government to begin to put the Singapore strategy into effect. But in fact Curtin was doing little more than following up the actions of his predecessors.

The Prime Minister's first demand continued an acrimonious dispute which had arisen between London and Canberra some months previously. General Blamey, the Australian commander in the Middle East, was naturally eager to effect the concentration of the three Australian divisions there into a single Army Corps at the earliest possible date. The 6th and 7th Divisions were already together in Syria but the 9th was closely besieged at Tobruk. From mid-1941 Blamey

5. British War Cabinet Minute WM106(41)2, 27 October, 1941, CAB 65/23.
6. For an excellent account of the capture, siege and relief of Tobruk see C. Wilmot, Tobruk, 1941. (Sydney, 1944).
had been sending back complaints to Australia concerning the serious decline in the 9th's fighting value as a result of its continuous front line service. He urged Menzies to press strongly for its relief and the reconstitution of the A.I.F. as a single force.\(^7\) Menzies immediately took up these points with London\(^8\) but received no early reply.\(^9\) The delay annoyed the Australian government; even more displeasing was Blamey's discovery that Churchill had informed General Auchinleck, the Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East, that he would make it right with the Australian Government if Auchinleck 'did not see fit to relieve the 9th Australian Division'.\(^10\)

There were genuine technical difficulties involved in the evacuation of a whole division of troops from a city under close siege. But the British authorities were also undoubtedly anxious to forestall the formation of a full Australian Army Corps for this would limit their freedom of decision on the tactical deployment of the Corps' component units.\(^11\) Menzies, however, bluntly refused to allow Churchill to 'make it right' with him and by the end of August the first of the 9th's four brigades had been successfully withdrawn.\(^12\) Churchill then attempted to prevail upon

\(^7\) Telegram from Blamey to Menzies, dated 18, received 19 July, 1941, CRS A2684 item 556.

\(^8\) Telegram from Menzies to SSDA, 20 July, 1941, ibid.

\(^9\) Telegram from Menzies to SSDA, 7 August, 1941, ibid.

\(^10\) Telegram from Blamey to Menzies, dated 4, received 5 September 1941, ibid.


Fadden's administration to suspend the operation but his efforts met with no greater success. The British Prime Minister was left to bemoan to his own War Cabinet that Australia was persisting with her 'lamentable' decision. Finally, in October, Churchill appealed to the new Labour government to reconsider the question, only to meet with a further rebuff.

Thus, in one of its first major decisions, Curtin's government insisted that Australian interests be put before those of the Empire as a whole; but this was no more than the continuation of a policy originally adopted by a United Australia Party Prime Minister and sustained by a Country Party one. The insistence on the withdrawal of Australian forces from Tobruk did not stem from fears about the vulnerability of Australia itself in the Pacific. In his first two months of office Curtin was as firmly committed as his predecessors to the concentration of the A.I.F. as a single Corps in the Middle East. No moves were made to recall any forces to the far eastern theatre.

13. SSDA to Fadden, dated 11, received 12 September, 1941; Churchill to Fadden, 30 September, 1941; Fadden to Churchill, 4 October, 1941, CRS A2680 item 556; War Cabinet Minute 1360, 16 September, 1941, CRS A2671 item 326/1941.

14. British War Cabinet Minute WM93(41)3, 16 September, 1941, CAB 65/23. This may also have been the occasion on which Churchill passed across the table of the War Cabinet room a scribbled note which read 'Australia is the greatest obstacle in the way of our winning the war'. See the Melbourne Age, 6 November, 1973.

15. SSDA to Curtin, dated 13, received 14 October, 1941, CRS A2671 item 326/1941; Advisory War Council Minute 534, 16 October, 1941, CRS A2680 item 132/1941. It is notable that Churchill's subsequent indignant account of these events quotes only from the text of his telegrams to the Australian government and not from their reasoned, though increasingly exasperated, replies. Churchill, The Second World War, Vol. 3, pp. 367-73.
It is certainly difficult to reconcile Curtin's attitude with some of the stated views of the Labour leadership while in opposition. When, for example, Menzies had announced in November 1939 that Australian troops would be sent overseas, Curtin had suggested that it might be wiser to await 'some clearer exposition of what is to be the ultimate alignment of nations in this struggle ...'. He wanted no reduction in Australia's manpower resources while Japan continued to present a potential threat. On 18 March 1941 Curtin told the Advisory War Council that if Labour's policy had been followed 'Australians would not have been serving in the Middle East'. One week later, and shortly after the Australian government accepted the commitment to garrison territories within its newly defined area of responsibility in the Pacific, the non-government members of the Council recommended that no new obligations should be undertaken in the Middle East and that serious consideration should be given to 'the return of some, if not all, of our troops' from that region. In May, Dr. Evatt, explaining that 'every trained and equipped man in Australia was an additional protection against Japanese intervention', stated that 'no further A.I.F. troops should be sent abroad ...'. The government in the United Kingdom was, as Mr. Beasley indignantly

18. See above, p. 156.
20. Advisory War Council Minute 313, 8 May, 1941, ibid.
pointed out, 'sitting tight' on a large number of troops even though the danger of an invasion of the British Isles had receded and 'a stalemate position' had arisen in the Middle East. Australia, Beasley suggested, should look after her own interests in a similar fashion: 'In the disposition of Australian troops Australia should be considered first. Such a policy would involve the replacement of Australians in the Middle East ...'.

When Curtin became Prime Minister he paid little heed to these earlier doubts about the middle eastern commitment. On 5 November he assured the House of Representatives that his government had 'no intention of recalling the Australian Imperial Force', a decision which was confirmed by the War Cabinet on 26 November. Labour ministers might not be prepared to go as far as Blamey, who continued to press for the transfer of the 8th Division from Malaya to his own command, but they did resolve to maintain the supply of reinforcements for the Middle East and even to despatch a complete armoured division there as soon as it became available.

It must be conceded that it was not at all easy for

22. Advisory War Council Minute 431, 29 July, 1941, CRS A2680 item 102/1941.
24. War Cabinet Minute 1520, 26 November, 1941, CRS A2671 item 197/1941.
the new government to effect major alterations in existing strategic and logistic arrangements. The withdrawal of the A.I.F. from the Middle East would have been an enormous undertaking, giving rise to severe dislocation of the whole war effort. This was especially true after the launching of the critical Crusader campaign in the western desert on 18 November.\(^{27}\) If the troops were to remain in the Middle East they clearly had to be adequately reinforced and supplied.

But Curtin's attitude was not simply an example of the familiar process by which policies become tempered by the responsibilities of office. The new Prime Minister had begun to show a subtle appreciation of the inter-relationship between the situations in the Middle East and in the Far East some time before he came to power. This had been well portrayed in a speech delivered in the House in June, 1941. Curtin had then said that

> if a crucial battle is to be fought in the Middle East, Australia cannot afford that battle to go against it in circumstances that precluded the subsequent movement of the British Fleet into the Indian Ocean or the Atlantic Ocean; for if it were a 'last ditch' battle, in which Alexandria was destroyed and the fleet in the Middle East was, in substance, put out of action, such a state of affairs would involve almost immediately the uselessness of Singapore as a bastion for the defence of Australia; instead of being a bastion for Australia, it would become merely a service station for the enemy.

In this sense the avoidance of defeat in the Middle East was as important to Australia as it was to Great Britain. On

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the other hand, Curtin said, 'no nation completely denudes its last line of defence, which is its own territory, in order to resist the enemy at an outpost'. This maxim had implications for Singapore as well as for the Middle East; thus, while Curtin agreed that 'this country should make provision to ensure that all the places round about us are garrisoned and equipped', he also insisted that 'there must be some understanding of what represents the balance as between what we can do in those theatres and what we are called upon to do in Australia'.

Curtin was certainly more willing than Menzies to proclaim openly that the extent of Australia's overseas commitment had to be judged against her more immediate security. But in October and November 1941, after weighing this balance carefully, he came to the conclusion that Australia could still contribute most usefully to her own defence by assisting the Allies to avoid 'overwhelming defeat' in the Middle East. Such defeat 'would involve synchronously the loss of Singapore and inability to salvage the Mediterranean Fleet into the Indian Ocean or the Atlantic Ocean'. These disasters would, in turn, present Australia's enemies in the eastern hemisphere with opportunities of which they would take full advantage. The only way to prevent a

28. C.P.D., Vol. 167, 18 June, 1941, p. 109. Later in the speech Curtin reiterated this point: 'There must be some assessment of the balance between the manhood required for production in Australia, and for defence within Australia, and the number of men we can use for service overseas.' Ibid, p. 110. For the influence on Curtin's views of the German attack on the Soviet Union, see below, pp.262-63.

chain reaction was to secure the first link. Until Japan actually launched her attack, Curtin held views on the relationship between the middle eastern and far eastern theatres which were basically the same as those of Menzies.

This similarity became apparent when Brooke-Popham paid another visit to Australia in mid-October. Brooke-Popham again radiated considerable optimism. Malaya was 'growing from strength to strength'. Japan had diverted her attention northwards in the hope of taking advantage of the German attack on Russia 'and for the next three months she would not be able to undertake a large-scale attack in the south'. During that period the existing Allied air strength could cope with any aircraft the Japanese would be able to base on their existing airfields; Japan might have superiority in numbers but not in quality. 30 Finally, the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, comforted his audience concerning the complete absence of tanks in Malaya by explaining that the peninsula 'is not tank country'. 31

In reply Curtin showed some concern that only just over half of the 336 aircraft recommended by the British Chiefs of Staff for Burma, Malaya and Borneo 32 had been provided. The Prime Minister also suggested that 'the urgent needs of the Far East' might not be receiving sufficient priority in

30. Once again, Brooke-Popham maintained that the Buffalo fighter was 'superior to the Japanese and well suited for work in Malaya', an estimate which was to prove entirely false. See also above, p. 146.

31. Advisory War Council Minute 533, 16 October, 1941, CRS A2684 item 552.

32. See above, p. 132.
the United Kingdom. Brooke-Popham responded with the justification that 'he had made all representations short of resigning' and that, in any case, the British government was making a fair allocation of resources between its various commitments. Curtin pressed the matter no further; neither did any other Labour ministers. In fact, the Commander-in-Chief was subjected to even less critical questioning than in the previous February and no one echoed Spender's scepticism on that occasion about the extent to which the United Kingdom would be prepared to go in order to hold Singapore.

In the following month, November 1941, Australia received a visit from Mr. Duff Cooper. This British Cabinet minister had been sent out to the Far East with the task of improving co-ordination between the various British agencies operating in the region. His visit came none too soon. No less than eight government departments had representatives in the Far East, each communicating separately with London. As Duff Cooper reported home at the end of October, 'the affairs of the British Empire in the Pacific were being conducted at the outbreak of war by machinery which had undergone no important change since the days of Queen Victoria'. And the

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33. Advisory War Council Minute 533, 16 October, 1941, CRS A2684 item 552.

34. See above, p. 147. When, in November, 1941, the Australian War Cabinet heard that Brooke-Popham was to be replaced, it expressed what appears to have been a deep and genuine regret. War Cabinet Minute 1500, 17 November, 1941, CRS A2676 item 1500.
situation had deteriorated still further since 1939.  

While in Canberra Duff Cooper met with the Advisory War Council and, although not primarily concerned with the military side of the far eastern situation, gave what was perhaps one of the frankest assessments which the Australians had received. The British minister made no attempt to conceal the existing state of confusion in the Far East. He informed the Council of his proposal to improve matters by the appointment of a Commissioner-General for the region. This figure would not be an originator of policy but rather the prime source of the information and advice on which a general Far Eastern policy could be formed by the British Cabinet. He would also serve as an executive agent, whether of the Cabinet as a whole or of individual Ministers, in all matters in which it was desirable that several departments should act together.

In his memoirs Cooper maintains that he favoured Menzies for

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35 Gwyer, Grand Strategy, Vol. 3, part 1, pp. 285-86. See also Advisory War Council Minute 560, 7 November, 1941, CRS A2680 item 134/1941; D. Cooper, Old Men Forget (London, 1954), pp. 297-98. The eight government departments involved were the Foreign Office, with Ambassadors in China and Japan, a Minister in Thailand and Consuls-General in Saigon, Manila and Batavia; the Colonial Office to which the Governors of the Straits Settlements and Hong Kong reported; the India Office, to which the Governor of Burma was responsible; the Dominions Office with High Commissioners in Australia and New Zealand; the Ministry of Information which had a bureau in the Far East, at Singapore; the Ministry of Economic Warfare with representatives at Singapore; the Ministry of War Transport with a representative at Hong Kong and the Treasury which had appointed a Financial Commissioner to the Far East who was located at Shanghai.

36 Advisory War Council Minute 560, 7 November, 1941, CRS A2680 item 134/1941.

37 Gwyer, Grand Strategy, Vol. 3, part 1, p. 288; see also Advisory War Council Minute 560, 7 November, 1941, CRS A2680 item 134/1941 and Cooper, Old Men Forget, p. 298.
this post. When in Australia, however, the British minister told the Advisory War Council that the job should go to a United Kingdom representative 'in view of his relations with the United Kingdom Government and as it was necessary that he should know the mind of the British War Cabinet'. The Commissioner-General's principal assistant, however, should be an Australian.

Curtin, perhaps worried that Australia's views would count for little under this arrangement, did not welcome the proposal. He preferred that Duff Cooper himself should remain as a Resident Minister of the British War Cabinet in the Far East and have 'sole authority' while being responsible to the dominion governments as well as to London, a proposition which would never have been acceptable to Churchill.

On the wider aspects of British far eastern policy, Curtin did not have much to say. It was left to Menzies to open this discussion with the observation that 'the general attitude of the Foreign Office to the Far East was intensely wooden ...'. Duff Cooper indicated that he was personally inclined to favour a defiant attitude towards Japan; 'if we had to draw a line then it would have to be the present one, since if we drew a line beyond the present one the Japanese are certain to move within those limits'. The British minister

38. Cooper, Old Men Forget, p. 298 (which just goes to show that his memoirs were not inaptly titled).
39. Advisory War Council Minute 560, 7 November, 1941, CRS A2680 item 134/1941.
doubted that public feeling would allow the British government to stand aside if the Netherlands East Indies were actually attacked. This being so, several of the non-government members of the Advisory War Council found it difficult to understand what objection there could be to a formal guarantee to the Dutch territories. Spender considered an attack on the Dutch islands should definitely constitute a *casus belli* while McEwen was 'profoundly shocked' by Churchill's view that it might be necessary to delay operations for the defence of the Netherlands East Indies: their position in relation to Australia was 'similar to the Channel Ports in relation to England' and he asked that the Commonwealth government should make 'a vigorous protest' against Churchill's attitude. Menzies was somewhat less outspoken but did suggest that, because of 'the force of an irresistible public opinion', any idea of not responding immediately could exist only in 'an unreal world'. Having been relieved of responsibility for the consequences, Menzies, and particularly certain of his colleagues, were now advocating a stronger line towards Japan than they had ever been prepared to contemplate when in office.

Curtin, on the other hand, was highly cautious. He did believe that it was inevitable that the Empire would go to war if Japan invaded the Dutch islands but he thought that a binding guarantee should be given only on two

40. See above, p. 231.

41. There was certainly a strong feeling in much of the Australian press for close co-operation with the Netherlands East Indies. See, for example, the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 7 October, 1941, and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 October, 1941.
conditions: that there were sufficient forces available to back it up and that the co-operation of the United States was assured. The position of Australia's Labour Prime Minister on this matter was, then, not very far removed from that of Churchill.

When Dr. Evatt asked about the 'real plans' of the United Kingdom for the defence of the Pacific, Duff Cooper stated that the British were prepared to abandon the Mediterranean to save Singapore. This promise went considerably further than Churchill's undertaking to evacuate the Mediterranean in order to save Australia and New Zealand from invasion and there is no evidence that Cooper had authority from the British Cabinet for his statement. It was another non-government member of the Advisory War Council, W.M. Hughes, who interjected to say, in effect, that he did not believe Cooper:

the abandonment of the Mediterranean was a very remote possibility. He doubted if public opinion in the United Kingdom would ever support this. His view was that such a policy did not have a firm basis and ignored the foundations of the Imperial structure which had roots in the Mediterranean as well as in the Far East.

McEwen also felt that the evacuation of the Mediterranean 'had little relation to the realities of the situation'. Menzies added that 'Mr. Churchill had always told him of the importance which he attached to the defence of Singapore but Mr. Menzies doubted if Mr. Churchill was, in fact, fully seized with its vital significance'. Government members may well have shared

42 See above, pp. 84 and 109.
similar sentiments but the minutes of the meeting do not record that they expressed them.

Menzies and his opposition colleagues, freed from their fraternal obligations as one of His Majesty's Governments, were now much more willing to voice their doubts about the Singapore strategy. Something of a reverse process had taken place in the case of the Labour Party. This is not to suggest that when the Australian government and opposition parties changed places at the beginning of October 1941, they also exchanged entire policies. What is clear is that no Australian government, whatever its doubts about the scheme, was prepared to abandon the Singapore strategy as the long-term basis of its security. This is not very surprising; while powerful objections to the policy could be raised, none of the critics had succeeded in producing a feasible alternative, particularly in view of the refusal of the United States to show its hand.

It was, as Menzies had already demonstrated, possible to take some measures for Australia's immediate local defence. These precautions could not make the dominion totally self-reliant in the event of a large-scale attack by Japan. On the other hand, the activities within the Australian area of responsibility were a positive contribution to Australian security and Curtin maintained and extended the previous governments' initiatives in this direction.

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43 See above, Chapter 3.
44 See above, p. 156.
On 15 October, for example, the War Cabinet agreed that Australia's military arrangements with the Netherlands East Indies should be extended to the Portuguese section of Timor. It was feared that the occupation by Japan of any part of the island, only 300 miles from the Australian mainland, would 'seriously prejudice' the defence of Darwin and the Netherlands East Indies. From the beginning of 1941 an officer of the Department of Civil Aviation had been sending back reports on Japanese activities in the colony. In August Canberra had approached Whitehall with a view to drawing up a scheme for the occupation of Portuguese Timor, a scheme to be carried out in any one of three eventualities: a German occupation of Portugal, a Japanese landing in Timor or an outbreak of hostilities with Japan. The War Cabinet meeting of 15 October decided that 'Australia should be prepared to co-operate to the fullest practicable extent' in the defence of the colony because of 'the threat to Australia' which would arise from its occupation by Japan. The air forces allocated for the defence of Ambon and Koepang were to be made available for operations over Portuguese territory as well while an extra battalion would be found for service there if the Portuguese agreed.

Meanwhile the Department of Civil Aviation's official at Dili

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45. War Cabinet Minute 1401, 15 October, 1941, CRS A2671 item 270/1941.
46. Telegram from Evatt to Bruce, 6 January, 1942, ibid; see Map 3 between pp. 94 and 95.
48. War Cabinet Minute 1313, 13 August, 1941 and telegram to SSDA, 8 August, 1941, CRS A2671 item 270/1941.
49. War Cabinet Minute 1401, 15 October, 1941, ibid.
was given the rank of Australian consul in order to help with his intelligence work. In November the Dominions Office reported that preliminary soundings showed the Portuguese government would welcome the projected assistance. But the negotiations had not been completed by the time war came to the Far East and this particular operation was to be hampered by serious complications.

The Labour government also continued to take every opportunity which arose to draw American influence into the Australian area. Until mid-1941 the United States had considered the loss of the Philippines inevitable in a war with Japan but from July new plans were being drawn up for a determined defence of the islands. As a result, the United States approached the British government with proposals for the construction of a chain of air bases across the Pacific linking Hawaii with the Philippines. In addition to Singapore, the Americans had in mind airfields at Rabaul, Port Moresby, Darwin and Rockhampton. That this approach was made first to the United Kingdom indicates the extent to which the United States still entertained ideas of Australia's subordinate status. Nevertheless, Curtin's administration welcomed

51. Indeed, they would expect it 'as a consequence of the ancient alliance'. Telegram from SSDA, dated 18, received 19 November 1941, CRS A2671 item 270/1941.
52. See below, pp. 287-88.
54. War Cabinet Agendum 334/1941, CRS A2671 item 334/1941.
the news that the Americans were showing an interest in Australian facilities and was eager to make these available. In mid-October the United States made direct proposals to Australia, entailing extensions to the runways or new construction at Darwin, Port Moresby, Townsville and on New Caledonia, the cost of which was to be borne by Washington. Further plans were laid for the use of airfields in northern Australia for United States training and tactical purposes. In addition to these air measures the Americans also offered to help make Rabaul a well-defended anchorage with a view to its possible use as a base for United States naval operations against the Caroline Islands and Japanese lines of communications passing to the east of the Philippines. Curtin welcomed all these moves as instances of 'increasing United States participation in the defence of the Pacific ...'.

It was not only in defence policy that Curtin's administration displayed a remarkable degree of continuity with its predecessors; Australia's foreign policy was, on

55. Telegram to SSDA, 11 October, 1941, ibid.
56. Supplements No. 2 and 4 to War Cabinet Agendum 334/1941 and War Cabinet Minutes 1489, 12 November, 1941, and 1532, 4 December, 1941, ibid; file 2345, diary entry for 20 October, 1941, Page Papers, Accession 1633, National Library of Australia. Although the plans had been prepared, work had not actually begun before the outbreak of war with Japan. R.A. Esthus, From Enmity to Alliance. U.S.-Australian Relations, 1931-1941 (Seattle, 1964), p. 121. This question may also be followed in F.R.U.S., 1941, Vol. 1, pp. 573-84.
57. Supplement No. 3 to War Cabinet Agendum 334/1941, CRS A2671 item 334/1941.
58. War Cabinet Agendum 334/1941, ibid.
59. Ibid.
the whole, similarly unaffected by the change in government. The policies of Curtin and Menzies had, in fact, been converging during the latter's last months in office. Curtin's earlier criticisms of Australian defence policy and his demands for the recall of her dispersed land and naval forces had been based on the assumption that war with Japan was, if not inevitable, at least a very strong possibility. But by 6 August he was telling the Advisory War Council that he
did not necessarily consider that Japan was involved with the Axis to the extent that might appear to be so. Japan was still susceptible to a face-saving arrangement, and Government should talk to Government in a frank manner to ascertain if a solution was possible.

When the Attorney-General, W.M. Hughes, said he doubted whether the Japanese would honour any arrangement made, Curtin disagreed and cited the Anglo-Japanese alliance and the Axis pact as evidence of 'the trustworthiness of the Japanese word'.

Curtin went on to explain the reasons which made an agreement with Japan desirable:

Hitler was aiming at involving Japan, the British Empire and the United States in a naval war in the Pacific, and if this happened he would turn south, towards Suez. The effect of such a war on the battle of the Atlantic was not hard to see.

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60. See above, p. 113 and below, pp. 270-73.
61. Advisory War Council Minute 451, 6 August, 1941, CRS A2680 item 103/1941.
62. Ibid. Curtin also said: 'It was alleged against us that we went into Syria, yet we would not allow another Power to combine with Japan for the defence of Indo-China.' Moreover, 'The Japanese believed that their action in Indo-China was legitimate, because it was carried out by agreement with the Vichy Government.'
63. Advisory War Council Minute 451, 6 August, 1941, CRS A2680 item 103/1941.
Curtin had, it seems, come round to accepting Menzies' two-year old argument that it was necessary to appease Japan in the East in order to win the war in the West. The traditional importance of the Suez Canal as Australia's life-line had finally permeated his thinking. Although still Leader of the Opposition at this time, Curtin had, since June 1941, been sufficiently impressed by the necessities of the situation to arrange private meetings between himself and the Japanese Minister to Australia in an attempt to improve relations. He believed there was a body of 'well-disposed opinion' in Japan which ought to be encouraged. By a strange irony it was in these months that Menzies was inclining to the view that appeasement was unlikely to have any beneficial effect on the far eastern situation.

The Labour government's reluctance to launch Australia on a new diplomatic course is seen in its reaction to proposals by Casey and Latham that they should return home in order to bring themselves up to date with official thinking. Casey in particular had been lobbying for several months to be allowed to visit Australia in order to catch up on the latest developments. Neither Menzies nor Fadden had wished to give the appearance of having recalled their Ministers from

64. See above, Chapters 2 and 3.
67. See above, pp. 232-33.
68. Telegram from Casey, dated 28, received 29 June, 1941, CRS A981 item Australia 225.
Washington and Tokyo, an action which could be interpreted as presaging some dramatic change of policy. This interpretation was even more likely following a change of government and Curtin and Evatt were certainly afraid that a 'misleading impression' might be created. Therefore, despite the very strong representations made by both diplomats, they were firmly instructed to remain at their posts.

It is a further irony of the situation that Curtin's optimistic outlook on the Far East reflected British views during the months of September and October, 1941. Churchill later wrote: 'I confess that in my mind the whole Japanese menace lay in a sinister twilight, compared with our other needs.' The British Prime Minister's attitude was not untypical as Sir Earle Page, the Australian Minister of Commerce who had been despatched to London in September 'to discuss with the United Kingdom Government  

69. Draft reply to Casey, 1 July, 1941, ibid, and Stewart to Bowden, Australian Government Representative in Singapore (for Latham), 4 October, 1941, CRS A981 item Australia 193.

70. Evatt to Casey, 11 October, 1941, CRS A981 item Australia 225 and Evatt to Bowden, 13 October, 1941, CRS A981 item Australia 193.

71. Ibid, and Evatt to Casey, 15 October, 1941 and Evatt to Bowden (for Latham), 15 October, 1941, CRS A981 item Australia 193. Latham did, however, leave Japan at the end of September for consultations with Duff Cooper at Singapore and clearly hoped to go on from there to Australia. It certainly appears that the Minister's action had not been approved by the Department of External Affairs. (Telegram to Lady Latham, 29 September, 1941, CRS A981 item Australia 193). Before his arrival at Singapore, Latham became seriously ill and had to proceed to Australia for an operation. He was still in the country when Japan entered the war. Telegrams from Bowden, dated 15, received 16 and dated 18, received 19 October, 1941, CRS A981 item Australia 193. See also Latham Papers, Series 65, Folder 9.

vital war matters of common interest', 73 discovered when he broke his journey at Singapore. The British authorities on the island gave the Australian a hopeful appreciation of the far eastern situation on the lines of the survey Brooke-Popham was to provide for the Advisory War Council several weeks later. 74 Not only was Japan reported to be concentrating her forces against Russia, and therefore to be unprepared for a strike southwards, but the unfavourable weather which beset the South China Sea from November to February made it 'highly improbable' that Japan would attempt an attack during this period. 75 Similar optimism was expressed by the United States officials Page met at Manila.

73. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 168, 17 September, 1941, p. 293. Page was selected for this task by Fadden and some suggested that this was a deliberate move by the government 'to get rid of the "sharp shooter" in its midst', ibid, p. 294. When the Labour Party took over office during the course of Page's journey to London, Curtin agreed that the former Country Party leader should continue with his mission. File 2345, diary entry for 4 October, 1941 and file 2659, statement at Singapore, 6 October, 1941 and statement on arrival at San Francisco, 15 October, 1941, Page Papers; E. Page, *Truant Surgeon. The Inside Story of Forty Years of Australian Political Life* (Sydney, 1963), pp. 298 and 302-03. See also Australian Cabinet meeting of 7 October, 1941, CRS A2700, Vol. 1A, No. 2. In announcing the appointment in the House of Representatives, Fadden made it clear that 'Sir Earle Page is not going to London to become a member of the Imperial War Cabinet. He is going in pursuance of a decision of this House that a Minister should be sent to London to inquire into many vital matters which closely affect the welfare of this country.' *C.P.D.*, Vol. 168, p. 294. Of course, no Imperial War Cabinet, as distinct from the British War Cabinet, existed.

74. See above, pp. 246-47.

75. *Review of the Situation in the Far East, 29 September, 1941, attachement (a) to Supplement No. 1 to War Cabinet Agendum 324/1941, CRS A2671 item 324/1941.*
and Washington, their attitude reflecting the revision of American plans for the defence of the Philippines. Towards the end of October Churchill made his own contribution towards this feeling of well-being when he assured Curtin that Japan would not commit herself to war unless or until the Soviet Union was decisively defeated. Even then she would probably wait to see whether the promised German invasion of the British Isles in the following (northern) spring developed.

Against this background of optimism, however, and despite his caution concerning a guarantee to the Netherlands East Indies, Curtin wanted to maintain the stronger line towards any further Japanese encroachments which Menzies had adopted at the end of his Prime Ministership. The policy was one of conciliation towards Japan if she would refrain from further aggression; resistance if she would not. While hoping for the best Curtin wished to prepare for the worst. Thus, when Page met the British War Cabinet in London

76 File 2345, diary entries for 7, 18, 19 and 20 October, Page Papers. General MacArthur, in the Philippines, was, however, highly critical of the 'dilatory' British attitude in the Pacific and Indian Oceans; (diary entry for 7 October). Page did not meet President Roosevelt on his way through the United States. The Australian minister also seems to have had his troubles with the American press. His diary of the journey records that at San Francisco his interviewers were 'extraordinarily rude - they pointed out that I was ruddy faced and did not look like a British Knight' while shortly before leaving New York he held a 'symposium with press, gave them £4 worth of drinks and a lot of excellent dope, and the next morning not an item appeared anywhere so far as I could find out'. (Diary entries for 15 and 24 October).

77 See above, p. 254.

78 Telegram to Curtin, annexed to British War Cabinet Minute WM106(41)2, 27 October, 1941, CAB 65/23.

79 See above, pp. 232-33.
on 12 November he stressed that it was his country's object to keep Japan out of the war. But at the same time Australia entertained 'doubts about the United Kingdom Government's attitude of insisting that the United States should take the lead' in every aspect of far eastern policy. As for Japanese designs on the Netherlands East Indies, Page felt an obligation 'to let the War Cabinet know that the reaction in Australia and New Zealand would be tense if Britain allowed the Dutch East Indies to be attacked without taking any action.' Furthermore, in the case of a Japanese invasion of Thailand, 'Australia thought that military necessity plus political considerations would force us into war with Japan. He himself had little doubt that we should have to take action'.

Again, in the last days before the outbreak of war in the Far East, the British government contacted the dominions about reports that Japanese forces were moving south, possibly with the object of attacking Thailand and seizing the Kra Isthmus. Australia's reply stated that, if confirmed, these reports provided sufficient justifica...
for the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, to move his troops into the Kra region. Attempts should be made to gain the prior consent of the Thais but if these failed the defence of Malaya was of such importance that the operation should still go ahead. It was also necessary to inform the United States of British intentions but, Curtin implied, Matador should not be made conditional on her promise of support, a view which Churchill could not accept. On the other hand, in case the reports proved to be incorrect, the Australian Prime Minister reiterated that 'even at this late stage a further endeavour should be made to encourage the United States to establish a modus vivendi with Japan which can be made satisfactory to China as well as to the other powers concerned'.

So far it has been argued that the foreign and defence policies of the new Australian Labour government did not differ significantly from those of its predecessors. There remained, however, one area of policy where it might be claimed that the new administration did introduce innovations. This concerned the Soviet Union, a country in which the Labour Party, for obvious ideological reasons, had more faith than the United Australia Party. Indeed, it is significant that it was particularly after the German invasion of Russia that Curtin showed increasing sympathy for the Australian

83 See, for example, above, pp. 178-79, 228 and 232.
84 Curtin to SSDA, dated and received 1 December, 1941, annexed to British War Cabinet Minute WM122(41)3, 1 December, 1941, CAB 65/24; see above, p. 234.
commitment in the Middle East. By engaging Germany and Italy in this region, Australia was helping to take some of the pressure off the Soviet Union. Curtin went so far as to tell the Advisory War Council on 6 August that it was necessary to avoid hostilities with Japan 'in order to concentrate our massed strength against Germany, particularly now that Russia had entered the war'. He was sure that 'the Japanese blow would fall on Siberia' and Japan's threats to the south were merely 'an attempt to immobilise Australia's co-operation with the other parts of the British Empire in the war against Germany and Italy'. Seven weeks later Evatt is to be found bemoaning what he considered to be the indifference of a section of 'English public opinion' to the outcome of the Russo-German war and the possibility of a Russian collapse. Conversely, the expectation that Soviet help would be available against Japan contributed to Labour's hopeful picture of the far eastern situation.

The Labour administration was anxious that the British Empire and the Soviet Union should reach an

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85. This was clearly a point of major importance in Curtin's thinking but it should also be borne in mind that his speech in the House of Representatives on 18 June 1941 (see above pp. 244-245) was made four days before the German invasion of Russia began. This event cannot, therefore, have been the sole influence on the Labour leader's change in attitude. For other influences, see above, pp. 244-245.

86. Advisory War Cabinet Minute 451, 6 August, 1941, CRS A2680 item 103/1941.

87. Advisory War Council Minute 524, 23 September, 1941, CRS A2680 item 121/1941. The war was, indeed, going very badly for Russia at this stage. It seems that only a few weeks earlier Churchill had been seriously worried that Stalin might attempt to gain a separate peace with the Germans. Churchill, The Second World War, Vol. 3, pp. 406-07 and 409.
understanding on the Far East. During his visit to Australia in mid-October Brooke-Popham was presented with the proposal that the British Empire should go to Russia's aid in the event of a Japanese attack. His reply was very wary. Nevertheless, the view of the Advisory War Council at a subsequent meeting was that Britain could hardly remain aloof if a Japanese assault on the Russians did take place, if only because of the fear of a separate Russo-German peace agreement. A week later the War Cabinet resolved that Japan ought to be told that any aggression against the Soviet Union would be resisted by the Empire, irrespective of the attitude of the United States. A reciprocal guarantee should be sought from the Soviets but the former declaration was not to be dependent on this. These views were sent to London on 4 November and three days later Duff Cooper expressed his agreement with them to the Advisory War Council. Churchill, however, was of a different frame of mind. The British Prime Minister's attitude to a guarantee of Russia was determined by the same considerations affecting a guarantee to the Netherlands East Indies; he found the Australian suggestion 'somewhat alarming, for the one situation he was anxious to avoid was that we should be at

88. Advisory War Council Minute 533, 16 October, 1941, CRS A2684 item 552; also CRS A2680 item 131/1941.
89. Draft Advisory War Council Minute 552, 23 October, 1941, CRS A2684 item 552.
90. War Cabinet Minute 1464, 30 October, 1941, CRS A2671 item 363/1941; see also CRS A2680 item 131/1941.
91. Telegram to SSDA, 4 November, 1941, CRS A2671 item 363/1941.
92. Advisory War Council Minute 560, 7 November, 1941, CRS A2680 item 134/1941; also CRS A2680 item 131/1941.
93. See above, p. 231.
war with Japan without the assistance of the United States'.

Evatt, meanwhile, persisted with arrangements for an Australian delegation to visit Russia 'for the promotion of understanding between the two countries, encouragement of the Russian morale and as an earnest of our desire to co-operate and assist in the common cause'. Australian intentions, however, were overtaken by events. Japan's decision was to strike south and, although the Japanese had to hold a large number of troops ready in case of Russian attack, the Soviet Union did not find it politically expedient to make war on Japan until shortly before her final defeat in 1945.

Even in this field of Russo-Australian relations the Labour government's efforts were not those of a first pioneer. Wartime situations give short shrift to ideological considerations. It was Menzies' government which, shortly after the Germans invaded Russia, had taken the first soundings in London on the likely Soviet attitude towards the suggestion that formal relations be established between the two countries. No less a scourge of the Communist menace than the Sydney Morning Herald could state, on 13 October,

94. British War Cabinet Minute WM109(41)2, 5 November, 1941, CAB 65/24; see also British War Cabinet Minute WM122(41)3, 1 December, 1941, ibid.
95. War Cabinet Agendum 367/1941, CRS A2671 item 367/1941.
96. See below, p. 283.
97. War Cabinet Agendum 335/1941, CRS A2671 item 335/1941. Menzies actually had in mind the establishment of consular relations. When Bruce replied that the Russians would probably press for the exchange of Ministers, the government decided to hold the matter in abeyance.
STEALING THEIR THUNDER.

"Labor politicians, army leaders, and friends of the Soviet must not be allowed to go aboard the U.S.S.R. ships in Sydney Harbor. Sir Thomas Gordon gave the Soviet Mission a party in the Cold Room of the Wentworth Hotel. The Lord Mayor, Sir Victor Wilson, managers of several shipping companies, the secretary of the U.A.P. and the secretary of the Young Men's Hebrew Association were among those present."

A cartoon in the Bulletin ridicules the Australian establishment's change in attitude towards the Soviet Union after the German attack on Russia in June, 1941. (Norman Lindsay, 13 August, 1941).
1941, that 'the consequences of a Russian collapse would be so serious for the plans and hopes of the Allies for the next year that in any counteraction now, designed to relieve pressure on the Soviet army, the risks involved might well be justified'.

The impact of Labour on Australian foreign and defence policies in the two months from October 1941 to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour amounted at most to some minor changes of emphasis. New Zealand, of course, was governed by a Labour Party throughout the war but the accession to power of Labour in Australia does not appear to have improved co-operation between the two Pacific dominions; indeed, the state of such co-operation was little better than in 1939. Cabinet ministers of the two dominions did occasionally meet but not on any regular basis. In February 1941 the New Zealand government suggested the creation of a joint Council of Ministers. This was rejected by the Australian War Cabinet on the grounds of the 'heavy demands' which were already made on its members. No exchange of High Commissioners had taken place; nor even of liaison officers between the respective Departments of External Affairs.

With no change of government in New Zealand there

100. See above, pp. 44-45.
101. Telegram from Australian Trade Commissioner, Wellington, dated 26, received 25 February, 1941; War Cabinet Minute 852, 27 February, 1941; telegram to Trade Commissioner, Wellington, 4 March, 1941, CRS A2676 item 852.
102. War Cabinet Agendum 335/1941, CRS A2671 item 335/1941.
is no specific reason to look for any change in the dominion's policy in the last months before the Japanese attack. Having, by mid-1941, modified her former boldness vis à vis Japan, Wellington held to this attitude. She naturally joined Australia in welcoming the American interest in bases in the south-west Pacific area; indeed, the approach came shortly after a speech by Fraser in Washington which had stressed that New Zealand bases were available for American use. In mid-November the United States government officially proposed the construction of three airfields in Fiji. New Zealand was as eager as Australia to avoid war in the Pacific if possible, but also agreed that the United Kingdom would be justified in taking precipitate action to secure the Kra Isthmus if it was directly threatened by Japan. Attempts should be made, it suggested, to secure the agreement of the Thais and the assistance of the Americans but, even if these failed, the importance of Kra to the defence of Malaya and Singapore made it essential that the operation should go ahead. In the matter of a guarantee to Russia a major point of difference did develop between New Zealand and Australia. New Zealand Labour was much more restrained; since such a declaration could not be backed by effective action in the near future, it would fail

103 See above, pp. 162-63 and 224-25.
104 F.R.U.S., 1941, Vol. 1, United States Minister in Australia (Johnson) to Secretary of State, 30 October, 1941.
105 The Times, 27 August, 1941.
107 PMNZ to SSDA, 24 November, 1941, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.
108 PMNZ to SSDA, dated 1 December, received 30 November, 1941 annexed to British War Cabinet Minute WM122(41)3, 1 December, 1941, 6AB 65/24; also N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.
as a deterrent and might be seen by Japan as 'a challenge to immediate action' while the United States could see it as 'premature and too precipitate ...'.

On the whole, however, Australian and New Zealand views were by now in harmony. Their main aims had been, firstly, to see that the American-Japanese talks extended for as long as possible in the hope that they would succeed but, if they did not, at least in order to gain time, and secondly, to establish with the British and American authorities exactly what action would be taken in the event of the breakdown of negotiations. The dominions' efforts in the latter respect foundered on the refusal of the Americans, and therefore also of the British, to enter absolute commitments until the last minute. But that those efforts were made is to the credit of the Australian and New Zealand governments.

The advent of the Labour party to power in October 1941 did not lead to any major alterations in the conduct of Australia's war effort. The reaction of the new government to a situation in which the British Empire was at war in the western hemisphere was basically the same as that of its two wartime predecessors. Two months later, however, Japan altered the position completely by attacking in the East, an

109. PMNZ to PMA, dated and received 31 October, 1941, Annex B to Supplement No. 1 to War Cabinet Agenda 363/1941, CRS A2671 item 363/1941; also N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.

110. See above, p. 234 and PMNZ to SSDA, 24 November, 1941, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.
event which was to bring about the almost immediate collapse of the Singapore strategy and a rapid decline in Anglo-Australian relations.
CHAPTER SIX

THE COLLAPSE OF THE SINGAPORE STRATEGY
December 1941 - February 1942

The Singapore strategy was based on the twin pillars of a well-equipped and secure naval base at Singapore island and the existence of a fleet to operate from the base. Before the Japanese attack, the leaders of the Australian Labour Party had voiced considerable anxieties not only about the strength of British land and air defences in the Far East but also about the level of British naval power in the region. It was, for example, pressure from opposition members of the Advisory War Council which had led Menzies, towards the end of 1940, to approach the British government on the possible despatch of capital ships to the Pacific.  

The Australian Prime Minister also had Labour's views in mind when, in London early in 1941, he attempted to get the British authorities to draw up a definite timetable for the movement of a fleet eastwards.  

The second of the two major demands which Curtin made on the British government upon coming into office was for the despatch of a first-class battleship to the Pacific. In this request, as, ultimately, in the demand for the withdrawal of Australian troops from Tobruk, Curtin met with success.

The Despatch of the 'Prince of Wales' and 'Repulse'

By the early months of 1941 the A.L.P.'s fears for

1. See above, pp. 113-14.
2. See above, pp. 170-72.
3. See above, p. 239.
the security of the Far East were giving rise to objections to the extent of the British naval commitment in the Mediterranean. In May Curtin suggested to the Advisory War Council that it might be wiser to evacuate the Mediterranean 'before the British fleet was hemmed in there'. From the point of view of the defence of Australia, India was of greater importance than Egypt and 'we should give consideration to the effect that the transfer of our troops to India would have on our defence problem'. Moreover,

the evacuation of the Mediterranean by transfer of the Mediterranean Fleet to the Atlantic would bottle up the enemy fleet in the Mediterranean and we should then have better prospects of a British Fleet based on Singapore, immediately relieving Australia and the Empire of any danger of Japanese entry into the war.  

A month later Curtin was even more forthright, asking whether 'it might not be better to scrap the African Empire, close the Suez Canal and endeavour to hold Palestine. The effect of Air power on Naval power had greatly modified the effectiveness of our Fleet in the Mediterranean.'

In July, Mr. Forde pointed out that with the fleet detained elsewhere, 'Singapore was like an empty garage ...'. After the German

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4'Advisory War Council Minute 313, 8 May, 1941, CRS A2682 item Vol. 2.
5'Advisory War Council Minute 353, 5 June, 1941, ibid. See also Minute 373, 12 June, 1941, ibid, where Curtin said he 'could not regard as otherwise than unsound a strategy which looked on the Mediterranean as a pivotal point of the Empire'. Again, he questioned 'whether it would not be better if we got out before a severe defeat was inflicted on us'.
6'Opposition member of the Advisory War Council and subsequently (1941-45) Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Army and briefly Prime Minister in July 1945 following the death of Curtin.
7'Advisory War Council Minute 431, 29 July, 1941, CRS A2680 item 102/1941.
attack on Russia, Labour objections to the Middle East campaign as such lessened but Curtin persisted in urging on Menzies 'the importance of locating a capital ship fleet at Singapore ...'.

In arguing so forcefully for the despatch of a battle fleet to the Pacific, Curtin revealed that he was fundamentally as committed as the United Australia-Country Party government to the doctrines of sea power in general, and the Singapore strategy in particular. Indeed, on 12 September 1941, Curtin explained to the Advisory War Council his view that 'the presence of capital ships at Singapore' should be the determining factor in the whole shape and direction of Australia's defence policy.

By this time Menzies himself had come to the conclusion that the far eastern situation did require an urgent redistribution of naval forces. On 11 August, three weeks before he fell from power, the Prime Minister reminded London in forceful terms that Australia had always assumed that in the event of war with Japan naval reinforcements would be sent to the Far East: 'We now say and emphasise that an early despatch of capital ships east of Suez would itself be the most powerful deterrent ...'.

8. See above, pp. 244 and 262-63.
9. Advisory War Council Minute 466, 14 August, 1941, CRS A2680 item 110/1941.
10. Advisory War Council Minute, 512, 12 September, 1941, CRS A2684 item 489.
11. 'Menzies' anxieties must have been heightened by the scare in early August that Japan was about to invade Thailand. See above, p. 230.
12. Menzies to SSDA, 11 August, 1941, CRS A981 item Pacific 8; also N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.
into office, therefore, Curtin was able to do no more than reinforce representations which had already been made by Menzies.

In New Zealand the situation was viewed less urgently. While the government held to the assumption that British capital ships would be transferred to the Pacific on the outbreak of war it hesitated to anticipate the event. When Menzies informed Wellington of his views, the acting Prime Minister replied that while the New Zealand government fully agree that the presence now of British capital ships in Singapore would act as a powerful deterrent upon the Japanese, they are not without doubts as to the wisdom of denuding the British fleets in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean to the extent proposed, at a time when a number of capital ships are under repair and so long as there remain in existence heavy units of the German and Italian navies. Until the United States have agreed to take over a more active role in the Atlantic and have transferred sufficient capital ships to balance the withdrawal of British naval units, it would in their [i.e. the New Zealand government's] opinion be dangerous to remove five capital ships from the actual theatres of war.13

Nevertheless, a fortnight after Menzies' views had been received in London, Churchill penned a minute to the Admiralty on the matter; the British Prime Minister was eager to place a 'deterrent squadron' which would consist of 'the smallest number of the best ships' in the Indian Ocean in the near future. This force would, he predicted, cause the Japanese navy as many preoccupations as were

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13. The acting PMNZ to PMA, repeated to SSDA and Prime Ministers of Canada and South Africa, 14 August, 1941, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3. Menzies had actually made no mention of a specific number of ships in his message to Churchill.
provided for the Admiralty in home waters by a small number of German capital ships; Churchill, indeed, expected it to exercise 'a paralysing effect upon Japanese naval action'. The vessels he wanted to send were a battleship of the new King George V class, a battlecruiser and a fast aircraft carrier. Churchill was keen to tell both the Americans and Australians of this arrangement as soon as possible. He was clearly concerned to meet Australian anxieties as well as to do something to demonstrate to the United States that the Singapore strategy remained a credible proposition.

The First Sea Lord, Sir Dudley Pound, was also interested in meeting 'the wishes of Australia and New Zealand for the Far East to be reinforced'. But he wanted to go about the task in a different way. Pound was reluctant to release any modern warships from home waters for fear of the consequences if one of the German battlecruisers broke out into the Atlantic. Instead, he favoured a gradual build-up of potentially greater strength in the Indian Ocean. The older battleships Nelson and Rodney, together with the battlecruiser Renown, would be based on Trincomalee, in Ceylon, as the first step in the establishment of an Eastern Fleet. The four very old 'R' class battleships, the Revenge, Royal Sovereign, Ramilles and Resolution, all of first world war vintage, would also be transferred gradually to the Indian Ocean for convoy escort duties.

15. First Sea Lord to Prime Minister, 28 August, 1941, ibid., pp. 769-73.
This proposal did not appeal to the British Prime Minister at all. He considered it would be a faulty disposition to create in the Indian Ocean a fleet considerable in numbers, costly in maintenance and man-power, but consisting entirely of slow, obsolescent, or unmodernised ships which can neither fight a fleet action with the main Japanese force nor act as a deterrent upon his modern fast, heavy ships, if used singly or in pairs as raiders.

The 'R' battleships were described as nothing less than 'floating coffins'. Again, Churchill returned to a comparison with the naval situation around the British Isles:

The potency of the dispositions I ventured to suggest in my minute is illustrated by the Admiralty's own extraordinary concern about the Tirpitz. Tirpitz is doing exactly what a K.G.V. in the Indian Ocean would do to the Japanese Navy. It exercises a vague general fear and menaces all points at once. It appears, and disappears, causing immediate reactions and perturbations on the other side.

Japan, Churchill noted, was hesitating before making any further aggressive moves now that the United States, the Soviet Union and Great Britain were taking an increasingly strong line: 'Nothing would increase her hesitation more than the appearance of the force I mentioned, and above all a K.G.V. This might indeed be a decisive deterrent.'

On 1 September, before the composition of the British force had been finally determined in Whitehall, Churchill informed Fadden of the intention to place a force of capital ships, as they became available, in the triangular

16. Prime Minister to First Sea Lord, 29 August, 1941, ibid, pp. 773-74.
area of ocean between Aden, Singapore and Simonstown by the end of 1941. It seemed in Australia that the first step had been taken towards the fulfilment of the Singapore strategy. The news was very well-received by both the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council, especially as Churchill had added the promise that 'you may be sure that we shall never let you down if real danger comes'. Once he had assumed office, Curtin endorsed his predecessor's views and urged strongly that the redistribution should be effected as soon as possible. He was thoroughly convinced by Churchill's 'deterrent' argument and made a special point of stressing his hope that a modern capital ship would be included in the force despatched. Curtin also instructed Bruce to use his influence to the full to back up this plea. Meanwhile, following the meeting between Page and the defence authorities at Singapore, a telegram was despatched to London from the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, stressing 'the propaganda value of even one or two battleships at Singapore'.

Thus, when Churchill met with his Cabinet's Defence Committee on 17 October he knew his views on the type of force which should be sent to the Far East were supported by Australia. He proposed that the recently commissioned battleship

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17. Telegram from SSDA, dated 31 August, received 1 September, 1941, CRS A2676 item 1382.
18. War Cabinet Minute 1382, 26 September, 1941, ibid; telegram to SSDA, 4 September, 1941, and Advisory War Council Minute 514, 19 September, 1941, CRS A2684 item 516.
19. Telegram to SSDA, 16 October, 1941, CRS A2684 item 516.
20. Telegram from Curtin to Bruce, 16 October, 1941, ibid; Advisory War Council Minute 535, 16 October, 1941, CRS A2684 item 535.
22. Telegram from Page, dated 1 October, 1941, relating telegram sent to the United Kingdom by the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, on 29 September, 1941, War Cabinet Agendum 324/1941, CRS A2671 item 139/1941, file 2749, Diary entry for 29 September, 1941, Page Papers.
ship *Prince of Wales* should be sent out to Singapore to join the battlecruiser *Repulse* which was then in the Indian Ocean. The Prime Minister received strong support from Attlee, who referred to the attitude of the dominion governments, and from Eden who made no attempt to hide the fact that the arrangement was entirely a political move:

from the point of view of deterring Japan from entering the war, the despatch of one modern capital ship, such as the *PRINCE OF WALES*, to the Far East would have a far greater effect politically than the presence in those waters of a number of last war's battleships. If the *PRINCE OF WALES* were to call at Cape Town on her way to the Far East news of her movements would quickly reach Japan and the deterrent effect would begin from that date.23

So, despite strong opposition from the Admiralty on this occasion and at a further meeting of the Defence Committee three days later,24 the fateful decision was taken to send the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* to Singapore.25

The analogy which had been drawn by the British war leader between the naval situations *vis à vis* Germany and Japan was hardly valid. As the First Lord of the Admiralty pointed out, the *Tirpitz* presented such a great threat because of its potential to menace the Atlantic trade routes.

23. 65th meeting of the Defence Committee (Operations), 17 October, 1941, CAB 69/2.
25. The decision actually taken by the Defence Committee on 20 October was that the *Prince of Wales* should go to Cape Town, 'a decision as to her onward journey being taken in the light of the situation when she arrived ...'. But the Committee did not consider the matter again and it seems that Churchill must have prevailed upon Pound privately to accept his scheme.
Similar action against Japanese shipping would not be the aim of British strategy in the first phase of a far eastern war; on the contrary, the chief concern would be the protection of British trade and territory against raids by the Japanese navy. Moreover, the enormous distances involved in operations in the Indian and Pacific Oceans bore no relation to the problem in British home waters; a small British force based on Ceylon or even Singapore could not hope to exercise any 'vague general fear' on Japan. It would be no threat to her main islands or her most vital sea routes. Nor did Churchill appear to appreciate the important role of aircraft carriers where such vast expanses of ocean were concerned.

This is not to suggest that the Admiralty's own scheme was sound. As with Churchill's, it neglected the role of air power, particularly the vulnerability of warships to land-based aircraft when operating near enemy-held territory. As for the purely naval aspects of the problem, the Vice Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Phillips, pointed out that there was no comparison between the German fleet, small but very modern, and the British and Japanese fleets which were much larger but contained a mixture of old and modern vessels. But the Admiral apparently failed to draw the conclusion that, even if sea power were measured in terms of capital ships alone, Japan would be able to match any battle fleet which the Royal Navy could send against it.

26. 65th meeting of the Defence Committee (Operations), 17 October, 1941, CAB 69/2.
27. Ibid.
The fact of the matter was that Churchill did not consider the strategical and tactical questions. He was interested only in a political gesture which would deter Japan from war; if it was successful the force sent would be in no danger because it would not have to fight. Australia was willing to accept that it was a political gesture which was required. Not only did Curtin press for a 'first-class battleship'; Page, in London, was obviously impressed when the decision to send the Prince of Wales was announced and his efforts to gain reinforcements for the Far East were therefore concentrated on air forces rather than additional warships. 28

The Prince of Wales and Repulse arrived at Singapore on 2 December. The Australian government's delight was given tangible expression with its approval that four of the R.A.N.'s destroyers should help provide an anti-submarine screen for the two capital ships. 29 The force was also to have been accompanied by an aircraft carrier, Indomitable, but this vessel belied her name by running aground in the West Indies and no replacement could be found. The Prince of Wales and Repulse were thus deprived of all sea-borne air cover. Once Japan launched her attack, the soundest strategy would have been for the two huge vessels to retreat into the Indian Ocean, or at least attempt to lose themselves in the vast wastes of the Pacific where they might hope to escape detection and destruction. But because their

28 See below, p. 290.
29 War Cabinet Agendum 390/1941, CRS A2671 item 390/1941; Gill, Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942, p. 460. Only one of the four, Vampire, was ready for service, however. Stuart, Voyager and Vendetta were undergoing refits.
original despatch had been a political gesture such a course was impossible. Following on the boost to morale given by the warships' arrival, the sight of the Royal Navy running away would have struck a shattering blow. Admiral Phillips, who had been appointed to command the far eastern fleet, therefore took his unbalanced and motley force up the east coast of Malaya in the hope of intercepting enemy landings and on 10 December it provided a sitting target for Japanese torpedo bombers.

In despatching the Prince of Wales and Repulse the British government was doing all it could, short of abandoning the Middle East, to fulfil the promises made to Australia and New Zealand over the past twenty years. Churchill's gamble on the deterrent effect of the two vessels was the price he was prepared to pay to honour British obligations to the Pacific dominions. In his account of the subsequent melancholy events given to the House of Commons, the First Lord of the Admiralty explained that the anxieties of 'our Dominions in the Southern Seas' had been a primary consideration in the decision to allow the Prince of Wales and Repulse to proceed ahead of the larger force which it had been hoped would eventually be sent eastwards.

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30 Of course, the loss of the two vessels was also a shattering blow but few were willing to believe it could happen until it did.


32 Notes for a speech at a secret session of the House of Commons, 19 December, 1941, ADM 1/11043.
It is the sinking of the two ships, rather than the fall of Singapore itself two months later, which in a very real sense marks the effective end of the Singapore strategy. The concept of sea power around which the whole policy revolved was demonstrated to be obsolete. Naval engagements were no longer a simple matter of two battle fleets blasting away at each other.

The subsequent Malayan campaign was, from the allied point of view, plagued with misfortune from the very beginning. The decision to put Matador into effect was left until it was too late; thereafter the story is one of continual retreat down the Malay peninsula with General Percival, the British commander, surrendering Singapore to the Japanese on 15 February, 1942. These traumatic events have received an extensive coverage elsewhere but their effect on relations between the United Kingdom and the Pacific dominions will now be briefly considered.

33 See above, p. 235.
The Impact of the Japanese Victories

The first Japanese landings in Malaya preceded the attack on Pearl Harbour by more than one hour. Curtin described the Japanese onslaught as the 'gravest hour of our history'. On 11 December the Australian Chiefs of Staff warned:

The defeat of the Allied Naval forces or the capture of Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies leading to the occupation of bases to the North East of Australia would enable the Japanese to invade Australia. These happenings are possible...

As disaster followed upon disaster in the next few months it did appear that for the first time in their history the two Pacific dominions might be subject to the danger of an Asiatic invasion.

We now know that the Japanese did not intend to invade Australia, still less New Zealand. Such an undertaking would have presented enormous strategic and logistical problems; the Japanese army estimated that it would require no less than twelve divisions and one and a half million tons of shipping and naval support for an operation against

35 Local time differences tend to obscure this order of events. Measured by local times, the first Japanese landings in Malaya took place just after 1.00 a.m. on 8 December and the attack on Pearl Harbour just before 8.00 a.m. on 7 December.

36 The Sydney Morning Herald, 9 December, 1941.

37 Appreciation by the Australian Chiefs of Staff, 11 December 1941, War Cabinet Agendum 418/1941, CRS A2671 item 418/1941.
Meeting of Curtin and Fraser at Parliament House, Canberra, immediately after the declaration of war against Japan. Left to right at the head of the table: Fraser, Curtin, Dr. Evatt. Other members of the Australian War Cabinet are at the table.
Australia alone. By early 1942 Japanese land forces were already heavily over-committed. Throughout the war Japan was obliged to maintain more troops in mainland China than she could make available for the entire Pacific area. In September 1941 there had been twenty-eight Japanese divisions in China, thirteen in Manchukuo and ten in Japan itself. For the conquest of south-east Asia she had been able to release only eleven - five from China and six from home - a total still one division short of the estimated force needed to invade Australia. Moreover, only 700 of her 1,500 first-line aircraft, augmented by about 480 land-based naval aircraft, could be spared for the southern thrust. Japan also faced a serious shortage of sea transports.

Nor was Australia, unlike Malaya or the Netherlands East Indies, producing raw materials which were essential to the conduct of the Japanese war effort.

It is true that in September 1940 Japanese leaders determined that, in co-operating with Germany and Italy in the creation of a 'new order' in Europe and Asia, they should include Australia and New Zealand in Japan's 'Sphere of


Living'. But this programme marked 'the furthest range to which Japanese dreams of empire reached' and 'represented the edge of ambition rather than the reality of a military plan'. No serious detailed consideration had been given to the question of an invasion of Australia or New Zealand by the military planners in Tokyo before the outbreak of the war in the Pacific. After the initial spectacular victories, a rift developed between the army and naval staffs over future policy. The heavily-burdened army wanted to concentrate on consolidating the gains already made. A faction within the navy favoured further and immediate strikes against the Allies before they had a chance to reorganise and retaliate; their case included the need for an invasion of Australia on the grounds that it was 'the most vital base the Americans could use for a counteroffensive against Japan'. The dispute was only resolved by recourse to the policy conferences of 1941 which determined Japanese policy, Australia and New Zealand received only a very few brief mentions. See N. Ike (editor), Japan's Decision for War, The Records of the 1941 Policy Conferences (Stanford, California, 1967).

This divergence is dealt with in two excellent articles, one by Professor Turner in R.M.C. Historical Journal, Vol.1 (1972), pp. 3-14 cited above p.283 footnote 40, and the other by Mr. Gary Brown, a defence specialist on the research staff of the Parliamentary Library, Canberra. The latter article is entitled 'Attitudes to an Invasion of Australia, 1942' and is due to appear in the Royal United Services Institute Journal early in 1975. I am deeply indebted to Mr. Brown for showing me a copy of his article and for valuable discussions on the topic. Much of this section on Japanese policy relies on information he provided, about both the subject itself and useful sources.

to the highest level in Tokyo and the navy's arguments for an invasion of Australia were then rejected: 47

The General Staff had no well-considered contingency plans for such an operation. In the Australian barrens, a Japanese force would have to depend entirely on supplies from the rear. The Japanese merchant fleet was already taxed to the utmost without taking on new assignments. Also, if the United States became alarmed and poured Flying Fortresses into Sydney, it would be difficult to maintain air superiority. On the Australian badlands Japanese columns would be fearfully vulnerable to long-range, high-level air attack. 48

The Japanese navy did win part of its case when the army reluctantly agreed to operations to take Rabaul and Port Moresby. 49 The aim, after seizing Papua and New Guinea, was to extend eastwards to the Solomons, Fiji, Samoa and New Caledonia in order to sever United States communications with Australia and thereby prevent the Americans from using the dominion as a base from which to attack the newly-acquired Japanese Empire. The attempt to take Port Moresby failed with the Allied victory in the Battle of the Coral Sea and from the moment of their defeat at the Battle of Midway

47 Ibid., Vol. 2, part 3, p. 118; Morton, Strategy and Command: The First Two Years, Appendix B.

48 D. Bergamini, Japan's Imperial Conspiracy (London, 1971), p. 899. Unfortunately this massive study is not highly regarded by most specialists in the field. See, for example, a review of the book by D.C.S. Sissons in the Sydney Morning Herald, 9 October, 1971. On the place of Australia in Japanese planning, however, Bergamini does not differ significantly from the major authorities. See, for example, in addition to the works already cited, the evidence given by Sissons to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence entitled 'Australian Fears of Japan as a Defence Threat, 1895-1971' in Official Hansard Report of the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (Reference: Japan), 1971-72 (Canberra, 1973), pp. 450-51.

49 Turner, 'The Crisis of Japanese Strategy'; Brown, 'Attitudes to an Invasion of Australia, 1942'.
in June 1942 the Japanese went over to the defensive. Their activities in New Guinea had never been intended as a prelude to the invasion of Australia. If Japan had succeeded in maintaining her early gains there may have been a serious long-term threat to the Pacific dominions. In January 1942 the semi-official Japanese Total War Research Institute predicted that at least twenty years were required for the consolidation of the Smaller Co-Prosperity Sphere which took in China, Indo-China, the Philippines, Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies. Only then could attention be turned to the Greater Sphere which was to include Australia, New Zealand and India. For the immediate future the Pacific dominions had little to fear. At his war crimes trial in 1948 General Tojo, Japan's wartime Prime Minister, was asked if an invasion of Australia or New Zealand was ever contemplated; he replied:

We never had enough troops to do so. We had already far out-stretched our lines of communication. We did not have the armed strength or the supply facilities to mount such a terrific extension of our already over-stretched and too thinly spread forces. We expected to occupy all New Guinea, to maintain Rabaul as a holding base, and to raid northern Australia by air. But actual physical invasion - no, at no time.

In the circumstances of early 1942 it was, however, only reasonable for the Pacific dominions to be obsessed with their own immediate security. After Japan's first blow the Australian naval forces serving overseas were returned to

51. Quoted in Gillespie, The Pacific, p. 211.
their home station. Moreover, Australia and New Zealand quickly put into effect the measures which they had been planning for their local geographical areas. Australia, in fulfilment of the arrangements made with the authorities in the Netherlands East Indies, despatched a battalion and two flights of Hudson bombers to Ambon and a battalion and one flight of Hudsons to the Dutch sector of Timor. The latter battalion was accompanied by an independent company for deployment in Portuguese Timor. The Australian authorities were under the impression that a plan for their troops to be stationed there had been agreed between the British and Portuguese governments. But complications arose when the Portuguese Governor, with the backing of Lisbon, refused to grant permission for any Australian, or Dutch, troops to enter the colony until a Japanese attack had actually taken place. The would-be garrison did, nevertheless, disembark on to Portuguese territory. Arrangements were subsequently made for it to be relieved when a force of eight hundred Portuguese soldiers arrived, although the Australian government

52. War Cabinet Minute 1563, 11 December, 1941, CRS A2680 item 586; Gill, Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942, pp. 407 and 488.
53. See above, Chapters 3 and 4; also MP 729/6, Box 27, File 12/402/25.
54. War Cabinet Minutes 1557, 8 December, 1941 and 1558, 9 December, 1941, CRS A2680 item 586; telegram to Bruce, 5 December, 1941, CRS A1606 item D17/2/1; telegram to SSDA, 12 December, 1941, CRS A2671 item 270/1941; Wigmore, The Japanese Thrust, pp. 418-19; Hasluck, The Government and the People, Vol. 2, p. 14.
55. See above, pp. 253-54 and telegram from SSDA, dated 13 December, 1941, CRS A2671 item 270/1941.
56. Advisory War Council Minute 586, 9 December, 1941, CRS A2680 item 586; telegram from SSDA, dated 27 December, 1941, CRS A2671 item 270/1941.
57. Telegram from SSDA, dated 14, received 15 January, 1942, CRS A2671 item 270/1941.
continued to doubt that these could defend the colony effectively. The relief had not taken place by 20 February, 1942, when the Japanese launched their attack on Timor. Meanwhile, an independent Australian company was despatched to New Caledonia. And in the territories of New Guinea and Papua, a squadron of Wirraways was sent to Rabaul while, on 18 December, the War Cabinet decided to raise the strength of the garrison at Port Moresby to a brigade group.

The New Zealand government, for its part, was busy with preparations to expand its forces in Fiji to two brigades and to strengthen the artillery in the colony, aims which were largely achieved by the end of January, 1942. The emergency finally brought about some effective co-operation between Wellington and Canberra; the Australian Chiefs of Staff advised that because of the vital importance of the retention of the Suva fleet base, Australia should assist New Zealand with its defence. At the end of December, therefore, the Australian War Cabinet agreed to a request from Wellington for the supply of equipment to Fiji, although it also specified that no items urgently required by the forces

58. Telegram from Evatt to Bruce, 6 January, 1942; telegram to SSDA, 6 January, 1942; War Cabinet Minute 1792, 29 January 1942, ibid.
62. Supplement No. 1 to War Cabinet Agendum 418/1941, Advisory War Council Minute 599, 18 December, 1941 and War Cabinet Minute 1585, 18 December, 1941, CRS A2671 item 418/1941.
64. Supplement No. 1 to War Cabinet Agendum 418/1941, CRS A2671 item 418/1941.
These measures taken by the two Pacific dominions had never been intended to provide a comprehensive defence. At the most they were expected to ward off the Japanese threat in the period while the United Kingdom reorganised her naval forces in order to send a fleet to Singapore. The despatch of Australian and New Zealand forces to outlying base areas was an important undertaking but the attention of both dominions was even more firmly directed to the struggle which was under way in Malaya to save the Singapore naval base. The Australian government's intense anxiety about the security of Australia itself was the driving force behind its increasingly frantic attempts, between December 1941 and February 1942, to influence the United Kingdom to take effective measures for the defence of Singapore.

Australia's apprehensions were increased by a feeling that the government in London simply did not appreciate the true gravity of the situation in the Far East. Whitehall's actions often served to confirm this impression. On 12 December, for example, Curtin received a reply to his urgent request for a British appreciation of the new situation. The Dominions Office contented itself with quotations from the review drawn up by the Chiefs of Staff in August 1940 which estimated the possibility of raids by cruisers as the highest scale of attack which Australia and New Zealand were

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65. War Cabinet Minute 1657, 31 December, 1941, CRS A2671 item 450/1941.
likely to incur. 67

The air force deficiencies in Malaya were a particular case where the Australian government made great efforts to influence British policy. Before Japan struck, Page, in London, indicated that his demand for naval reinforcement had been at least partly met by the despatch of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* and concentrated his efforts on the need for air reinforcements. On 5 November he had told the British War Cabinet that 'the position which gave rise to most anxiety was the air', 68 and a week later he hinted that if Singapore could be made secure then it would be possible for many more Australian troops to be sent for service overseas. 69 Page's audience was always willing to extend sympathy but never anything more tangible. Churchill frequently repeated the assurance that if Australia's own security was threatened 'we should be prepared to abandon our position in the Middle East in order to go to her assistance'. 70 But, together with representatives of the Air Ministry, he also produced the familiar argument that it would be 'a

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67. War Cabinet Agendum 143/1941, CRS A2680 item 143/1941; also War Cabinet Agendum 145/1941, CRS A2680 item 145/1941.
68. War Cabinet Minute WM109(41)2, 5 November, 1941, CAB 65/24; File 2345, diary entry for 5 November, 1941, Page Papers.
69. British War Cabinet Minute WM112(41)1, 12 November, 1941, CAB 65/24. Page certainly did argue forcefully and persistently in London for the reinforcement of the Far East. But one entry in his diary suggests that the Australian minister's fears were not only for Australia's safety but also for his own political reputation. On 4 November Page recorded that he 'Got letter ready for Churchill putting myself on safe side if any trouble ultimately and we were not defended'! File 2345, Page Papers.
70. War Cabinet Minute WM109(41)2, CAB 65/24; see also WM112 (41)1, ibid.
waste of effort' to send aircraft to Singapore when there was no war there and they could be actively employed against Germany and in the Middle East.\(^71\) The Secretary of State for Air even implied that Page was exaggerating the deficiencies since the arrival of the Prince of Wales and Repulse would, for reasons he did not explain, lessen the requirement for air forces in the region.\(^72\)

Once war had broken out in the Far East Page, together with Bruce, redoubled Australia's urgent representations to the British War Cabinet and its Defence Committee.\(^73\) Some additional aircraft were found for Malaya; on 13 January, for example, 51 Hurricanes arrived.\(^74\) But the numbers involved were completely inadequate for any serious attempt to hold the position. Churchill refused to believe in any real threat to Australia\(^75\) and the plain fact was that in the British order of priorities Singapore now came a poor fourth, after the defence of the British Isles, the gaining and maintenance of air superiority in the Middle East and the importance of supporting Russia with supplies. Thus Page could record in his diary that Sir Charles Portal, the Chief of the Air Staff, 'staggered me by indicating that

\(^71\) Ibid. Also telegram from Page, dated 14, received 15 November, 1941, CRS A2671 item 384/1941.
\(^72\) War Cabinet Minute WM109(41)2, 5 November, 1941, CAB 65/24.
\(^73\) War Cabinet Minute WM126(41)2, 10 December, 1941, ibid; 73rd and 75th meetings of the Defence Committee (Operations), 19 and 27 December, 1941, CAB 69/2; File 2345, diary entry for 15 December, 1941, Page Papers.
\(^74\) Gillison, Royal Australian Air Force, 1939-1942, p. 331.
\(^75\) See above, p.110.
if Singapore were lost we could pick it up again' later. 76

In Washington Casey noted in his diary on 4 January, 1942:

I have the figures of aircraft, tanks, etc., sent from U.K. and U.S. to Russia in the last two months - a good many hundred aircraft and tanks and a vast assortment of other weapons, ammunition and vehicles. What a difference these things would have made in the Middle East and in Singapore! I expect we had to send them to Russia, but they might have saved the Far East situation if we had had them there. 77

Two days later he added: 'The amount of air strength necessary to secure Singapore and Malay was a fleabite compared with the combined U.K.-U.S. aircraft production'. 78

Meanwhile Canberra was becoming increasingly alarmed at the conduct of the campaign in Malaya. In September Mr. V.G. Bowden, formerly the Australian Trade Commissioner in China, had been transferred to Singapore. This move was intended to improve Australia's supply of information about the local situation and give the Australian

76 File 2345, diary entry for 15 December, 1941, Page Papers; see also Page, Truant Surgeon, pp. 315-16.

77 Casey, Personal Experience, p. 83, emphasis in original. At the Moscow conference in September 1941 it had been agreed that the United Kingdom should supply the Soviet Union with 200 fighters a month. The United States was to provide 100 fighters and 100 light bombers a month and the Americans and British between them undertook to send 500 tanks and 250 Bren-gun carriers a month as well as a great deal of other military equipment and an extensive list of raw materials. See Gwyer, Grand Strategy, Vol. 3, part 1, pp. 158-59. It would not be difficult to argue that if a proportion of these supplies, particularly British Hurricane fighters, had been directed to Malaya they might have made a significant difference to the outcome there. Nevertheless, the thought that equipment which might have saved Malaya was instead sent to Russia in no way embittered the Australian government towards the Soviet Union. See Hasluck, The Government and the People, Vol. 2, pp. 41-44.

78 Casey, Personal Experience, pp. 83-84.
government a larger voice there. 79 On Christmas Day a report arrived in Canberra from Bowden which stated that the deterioration in the situation was 'assuming landslide proportions ...'. The existing measures for reinforcement were 'little more than gestures'; the only hope lay in the sending of troops 'not in brigades but in divisions' and, most importantly, the arrival of large numbers of the latest fighter aircraft. Bowden stated that the 'plain fact is that without immediate air reinforcements Singapore must fall. Need for decision and action is a matter of hours not days.' 80

Curtin and Evatt took Bowden at his word. Churchill was at this time in Washington for the Arcadia conference and Bowden's report was immediately forwarded to him there. 81 The Australian Prime Minister also sent an urgent telegram of his own appealing to the American President for help. The reinforcements earmarked for Malaya were described as 'utterly inadequate, especially in relation to aircraft ...'. Curtin stressed the important role of Australia as a base for future American operations in the Pacific and added that 'in order that it shall remain a base, Singapore must be reinforced'. As a further inducement to Roosevelt the

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79 'Telegram to Page from Murphy, Department of Commerce, 29 September, 1941, File 770, Page Papers.
80 'Quoted in Wigmore, The Japanese Thrust, p. 182.
81 Churchill, The Second World War, Vol. 4, The Hinge of Fate, pp. 6-7. The text of the report as given here is worded somewhat differently to that quoted by Wigmore. Such discrepancies occur frequently when the form of a message before its despatch is compared with the version actually received. The explanation is that those responsible for de-coding communications generally paraphrased them in order to hamper code-breaking.
Australian Prime Minister stated that he was quite willing to accept an American commander in the Pacific area. At the same time Curtin informed Casey that 'the stage of gentle suggestion has now passed.... This is the gravest type of emergency and everything will depend upon a Churchill-Roosevelt decision to meet it in the broadest way'.

The final report of the Arcadia conference, however, served only to confirm that the far eastern theatre was to remain subordinate to the European; Germany was still 'the prime enemy and her defeat is the key to victory. Once Germany is defeated, the collapse of Italy and the defeat of Japan must follow.' Churchill did inform Curtin that the leading brigade of the 18th British Division, which had been on its way to the Middle East via the Cape, had been diverted to Singapore. But this hardly met the Australian claim for massive reinforcement, especially in the air.

Nor was the Australian government satisfied with an appreciation by the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff which was forwarded from London on 23 December. This set out the British intention to build up a fleet in the Indian Ocean.

82. Telegram from Curtin to Roosevelt, 26 December, 1941, quoted in ibid, pp. 5-6.
83. Telegram to Casey, 26 December, 1941, quoted in Hasluck, The Government and the People, Vol. 2, p. 27.
84. WW1, Memorandum by British and United States Chiefs of Staff on American-British Strategy, CAB 99/17.
86. Telegram from SSDA, dated and received 23 December, 1941, CRS A2671 item 445/1941; telegrams from Page (2 telegrams) dated 20, received 21 December, 1941, CRS A2680 item 143/1941.
The Americans would concentrate separately on restoring their own naval strength in the Pacific. There was, the appreciation explained, no question of combining the two fleets into a force equal, or superior, to the Japanese because the two navies found it impossible to agree on a base acceptable to both. But Australia was situated between these two widely separated fleets and the Australians feared that the British and American plans might leave a gap in which they would be highly vulnerable to Japanese advances. The Australian Chiefs of Staff found the whole situation most 'unsound' and the Advisory War Council fully agreed. These views were forwarded to Churchill in Washington and Page took up the matter in London. The Australian case was supported by Admiral Pound who, before the beginning of the Arcadia conference, emphasised that the British aim 'should be to operate a combined United States-British fleet from Singapore'. But the Americans would not be moved from the position they had adopted at the staff talks twelve months previously; they were very reluctant to be seen to defend British imperial interests and there was never any question in their minds of basing an American fleet on Singapore.

87. Report by Australian Chiefs of Staff, 29 December, 1941, CRS A2671 item 445/1941.
88. Advisory War Council Minute 633, 31 December, 1941, CRS A2680 item 143/1941.
89. Telegram from Prime Minister of Australia, 29 December, 1941, enclosure 1 to CR40, CAB 99/17.
90. 76th meeting of the Defence Committee (Operations), 31 December, 1941, CAB 69/2.
91. CR10, CAB 99/17.
92. See above, pp. 201-09.
By the beginning of 1942 it seemed unlikely that the Allies would, in any event, have the use of Singapore for very much longer. On 2 January the *Sydney Morning Herald* suggested that matters were going so badly that it was "not too soon for the Australian Government to plan and prepare this people for a "scorched earth" policy, guerilla fighting, and all else that "total war" entails"; and the government was, in fact, making such preparations. Curtin nevertheless continued his efforts to prevent the loss of Singapore and kept up a barrage of pleas to Churchill for the reinforcement of Malaya. The British Prime Minister, for his part, found it increasingly difficult to suppress his irritation at this Australian persistence. On 3 January he cabled patronisingly from Washington: 'Night and day I am labouring here to make the best arrangements possible in your interests and for your safety, having regard to the other theatres and the other dangers which have to be met from our limited resources'. Churchill could not resist pointing out that it was 'only a little while ago that you were most strongly urging the highest state of equipment for the Australian Army in the Middle East'. On 14 January, in reply to another telegram from Curtin, the British Prime Minister implied that, since Australia had not followed the British example by sinking all party differences and introducing universal compulsory service, she had no moral right to question whether

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94 See, for example, CRS A816 item 14/303/81.
96 Curtin to Churchill, 11 January, 1942, quoted in ibid, pp. 9-10.
the United Kingdom could not make greater war efforts.\footnote{Churchill to Curtin, 14 January, 1942, quoted in ibid, pp. 10-11.}

On 18 January Curtin brought up the pre-war 'assurances' which Australia had received concerning the Singapore strategy.\footnote{Curtin to Churchill, 18 January, 1942, quoted in ibid, pp. 12-13.}

This, in turn, gave Churchill the opportunity to point out that he was in no way responsible for 'the neglect of our defences and [the] policy of appeasement which preceded the outbreak of the war',\footnote{Churchill to Curtin, 19 January, 1942, quoted in ibid, pp. 13-15.} the clear implication being that this was more than could be said for the Australian Labour Party.

Despite the worsening situation in Malaya, the Australian government was noticeably hesitant to commit any substantial reinforcements from its own forces to the area. As early as 16 December General H. Gordon Bennett, the Australian commander in the peninsula, had urged consideration of the transfer of at least one Australian division from the Middle East.\footnote{Bennett to Army Headquarters, Melbourne, 16 December, 1941, quoted in Wigmore, The Japanese Thrust, p. 154.} Two days later he estimated that such a move, by the fastest possible means, was essential to save the situation.\footnote{Telegram from Bennett to General Sturdee, Chief of the Australian General Staff, 18 December, 1941, quoted in ibid, p. 164.}

But on 19 December Bowden addressed a telegram to the Department of External Affairs which cast serious doubt on the wisdom of Bennett's advice and, indeed, anticipated the loss of the 8th Division. 'I feel strongly,'
the Australian representative at Singapore said, 'that before further Australian troops are committed every possible guarantee should be taken that they will not be abandoned with those already here.' 102

This appears to have been the first recorded reference to the possible abandonment of Singapore. The question was soon to lead to a further decline in relations between Churchill and Curtin. As the Malayan campaign rapidly turned into a rout the British war leader's thoughts inclined towards cutting the losses at Singapore and making a concerted stand in Burma. On 20 January he wrote an unambiguous minute for the Chiefs of Staff: 'As a strategic object, I regard keeping the Burma Road open as more important than the retention of Singapore'. 103 On the following day he expressed the view that if Singapore was likely to hold out for only a few more weeks the question arises whether we should not at once blow the docks and batteries and workshops to pieces and concentrate everything on the defence of Burma and keeping open the Burma Road .... We may, by muddling things and hesitating to take an ugly decision, lose both Singapore and the Burma Road. Obviously the decision depends upon how long the defence of Singapore Island can be maintained. If it is only for a few weeks, it is certainly not worth losing all our reinforcements and aircraft. 104

102. Telegram from Bowden to Department of External Affairs, 19 December, 1941, quoted in ibid.
104. Prime Minister to General Ismay, for C.O.S. Committee, 21 January, 1942, quoted in ibid, pp. 49-50; emphasis in original. See also 4th meeting of the Defence Committee, (Operations), 21 January, 1942, CAB 69/4.
As Churchill later recalled, Earle Page, by 'some means or other', learned of the direction in which the British Prime Minister's mind was working and reported his information directly to Australia. Curtin responded on 23 January with a telegram which, in Churchill's own words, contained 'a severe reproach': 'After all the assurances we have been given the evacuation of Singapore would be regarded here and elsewhere as an inexcusable betrayal'. Churchill later denied that this message 'decided the issue' but after its receipt all ideas of abandoning Singapore were given up and the greater part of the 18th Division, which had not yet arrived, proceeded on its way to the island.

The phrase 'inexcusable betrayal' greatly rankled Churchill and he could not easily forget it. The minutes of the British War Cabinet meeting which reviewed events the day after General Percival's surrender recorded that 'it now seemed a pity that we had sent the 18th Division to Singapore'. It had, in fact, arrived in time to do little more than surrender. In this context the minutes also recalled 'that the Australian Prime Minister had represented that failure to attempt to defend Singapore to the utmost would be an inexcusable betrayal', a reference

105. Churchill, The Second World War, Vol. 4, p. 50; see also British War Cabinet Minute WM11(42)3, 26 January, 1942, CAB 65/29. Cecil Edwards maintains that the "some means or other" was almost certainly Bruce but he does not explain how Bruce himself gained this knowledge. Bruce of Melbourne, p. 330.


110. War Cabinet Minute WM21(42)2, 16 February, 1942, CAB 65/25.
which had clearly been included in a mood of bitter recrimination.111

When Japan's southward advance was not halted at Singapore, the Australian fear of invasion became acute. The Sydney Morning Herald predicted that Japan 'may descend upon Australia in force. The occupation of Singapore ... must expose us to this peril as we have never been exposed before.'112 There were only 7,000 regular soldiers, less than half the number which had just surrendered to the Japanese, in the dominion.113 The government, not unnaturally, remained unconvinced by British assurances that a full-scale attack was unlikely. In a broadcast to the nation on 16 February Curtin described the fall of Singapore as 'Australia's Dunkirk', opening the way for 'the battle for Australia'.114 The Prime Minister stated that the 'protection of this country is no longer that of a contribution to a world at war but the resistance to an enemy threatening to invade our own shore'.115

Only three days later Darwin was subjected to heavy bombing,

111. This Anglo-Australian antagonism was not limited to private exchanges between the two Prime Ministers. See, for example, statement by J.A. Beasley, the Minister for Supply and Development, 24 January, 1942, CRS A981 item Far East 16B.
112. The Sydney Morning Herald, 13 February, 1942.
113. Of the 130,000 men who became prisoners of war at Singapore, 17,000 were Australian. The 7,000 regular soldiers in Australia were, of course, supplemented by the Australian Military Forces - the militia - which, by May, 1942, numbered 265,000. See Wigmore, The Japanese Thrust, p. 382 and D. McCarthy, South-West Pacific Area - First Year. Kokoda to Wau (Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series 1, Army, Vol. 5, Canberra, 1959), p. 31.
114. The Melbourne Age, 17 February, 1942.
This cartoon by Norman Lindsay in the Bulletin - 4 February, 1942 - illustrates the decline in Anglo-Australian relations (or, more specifically, the personal relations between Churchill and Curtin) which accompanied the collapse of the Singapore strategy.
the first serious external attack on Australia in her history.\textsuperscript{116} It was these anxieties which brought relations between the governments of the United Kingdom and Australia to a new nadir in the week or so after the fall of Singapore.

Up to the end of December, 1941, the Australian authorities made no move to recall any of their troops from the Middle East. On 24\textsuperscript{th} of that month an appreciation by the Minister for the Army spoke in terms of maintaining the existing A.I.F. forces in that theatre and even of reinforcing them.\textsuperscript{117} The initiative for the recall of Australian troops to the Far East actually came from the British Prime Minister before he left the United Kingdom to attend the Arcadia conference.\textsuperscript{118} Thereafter arrangements were made for the embarkation of the 6\textsuperscript{th} and 7\textsuperscript{th} Divisions which began to leave the Middle East in a succession of convoys from the end of January.\textsuperscript{119} Originally both divisions had been assigned to the Netherlands East Indies\textsuperscript{120} but as the rapid Japanese advances continued the Australian government decided that they should return directly to Australia and that the 9\textsuperscript{th} Division should also be recalled.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{116}Ibid, pp. 140-44 and D. Lockwood, Australia's Pearl Harbour, Darwin, 1942 (Melbourne, 1966).

\textsuperscript{117}Supplement 5, War Cabinet Agendum 197/1941, CRS A2671 item 197/1941.


\textsuperscript{119}Maughan, Tobruk and El Alamein, p. 527.


\textsuperscript{121}Ibid, pp. 75-76, citing War Cabinet Minute 1896, 18 February, 1942 and War Cabinet Agendum 106/1942.
Churchill, however, had other ideas about the destination of the A.I.F. The situation in Burma had reached a critical stage. On 20 February the British Prime Minister cabled Curtin requesting that the leading Australian division, which was near Ceylon in the Indian Ocean, be diverted to Rangoon. Then, without waiting for a reply, Churchill ordered the convoy to change course. In Australia, Curtin was agonised by the decision he had to make on the British request but he eventually insisted that the A.I.F. should return home. The British Prime Minister then had to confess that he had already diverted the convoy.

Curtin's response was spirited but more restrained than Churchill, who had been personally responsible for this flagrant interference with Australia's right to control her own forces, had any right to expect. Australia's approval, Curtin complained, had been treated 'as merely a matter of form'. Churchill was held answerable for a situation which had added to 'the dangers of the convoy ...'. Finally, Curtin reiterated that the Australian troops were to return home immediately because his government felt 'a primary obligation to save Australia not only for itself, but to

123. Ibid, p. 133.
124. This was confirmed in a letter of 10 July, 1974, to the author from Dr. John W. Burton, an official in the Australian Department of External Affairs at the time of this incident and subsequently, from 1947 to 1950, the Department's Secretary. The Australian Cabinet apparently left the decision entirely to Curtin, Dr. Evatt remaining at home 'with a cold'. The whole question was, perhaps, even more important politically than it was strategically.
126. Churchill to Curtin, 22 February, 1942, quoted in ibid, p. 143.
preserve it as a base for the development of the war against Japan'. The convoy was diverted again to Colombo to refuel and from there it proceeded to Australia, arriving in Adelaide on 23 and 24 March. The bulk of the 6th and 7th Divisions had returned home by the end of that month; the 9th arrived back in Australia in February 1943.

The acidity which marked the exchanges between Churchill and Curtin never entered into the messages which passed between London and Wellington. The reason for this is not that Fraser was any less determined to do all that he could to protect his own country. Rather, the New Zealand Prime Minister adopted a different approach; instead of trying to influence, or even dictate, major strategic decisions he concentrated on requests for direct material assistance.

Upon the outbreak of war in the Far East, New Zealand's Chiefs of Staff advised that the dominion was in no immediate danger. On 8 December, recommending that reinforcements for the Middle East should not be held back, the Chiefs suggested that the invasion of New Zealand was 'most improbable' unless Singapore fell and the United States

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127 Curtin to Churchill, ibid, p. 144.
129 Ibid. The 16th and 17th Brigades of the 6th Division remained in Ceylon from March until July, 1942, arriving back in Australia in early August.
130 For an account of this incident by a member of Curtin's Cabinet, see J.J. Dedman, 'The Return of the A.I.F. from the Middle East', Australian Outlook, Vol. 21 (1967) pp. 157-63.
suffered a major naval defeat in the Pacific. At least six months would have to elapse before a direct attack could take place.\textsuperscript{131} By 30 December the rapid deterioration in the situation resulted in a revised estimate of three months.\textsuperscript{132} But the New Zealand Chiefs of Staff maintained a remarkably balanced and accurate view of Japan's real intentions. In an appreciation dated 10 January 1942 they stated that the main preoccupation of the Japanese remained the struggle in China. Japan's southward advance was intended to obtain resources to continue the China war and New Zealand could provide none of Japan's main needs. The only foreseeable danger stemmed from the Japanese necessity to prevent Allied reinforcements and supplies interfering with their programme. New Zealand could become vulnerable if the enemy seized islands 'in the general latitude of Fiji' in order to cut the American lines of communication: 'For this reason, New Zealand must be deeply committed to the defence of Fiji as part of her contribution to the Allied security and to the security of Australia and New Zealand in particular'.\textsuperscript{133} Nevertheless, the Chiefs' conclusions retained an optimistic note: 'Japan has little object or incentive to stage raiding operations employing land forces until she has consolidated her position in territories surrounding the China Seas and also eliminated Allied Naval power in the Pacific'.\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{131} Wood, The New Zealand People at War, p. 214.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{133} Quoted in Gordon, New Zealand Becomes a Pacific Power, p. 150.
\textsuperscript{134} Quoted in ibid, p. 151.
The New Zealand government, as it viewed the apparently irresistible advance of Japan, found it difficult to share fully in this confidence of its professional military advisers. But in this situation Fraser did not follow Curtin in making frantic demands for the rapid reinforcement of Malaya and Singapore. Instead he concentrated on efforts to make good the deficiencies in equipment for the defence of New Zealand and those islands most vital to her security. Fiji was considered so important that the outbreak of war with Japan had resulted in the despatch not only of a second New Zealand brigade to the island but also, as Fraser told Churchill on 24 December, 'the only (four) heavy AA guns and the only (four) Bofors guns which we possess ...'. The Prime Minister of New Zealand expressed a certain hesitation 'to trouble you in the midst of your many preoccupations' but asked Churchill to press Roosevelt to make good a long list of equipment deficiencies in both Fiji and New Zealand itself.

Fraser was by no means incapable of making forceful representations when he considered they were merited. On

135. Ibid, p. 152 and p. 154. On 12 January Fraser stated in a cable to Churchill that 'in New Zealand itself we have been told by the highest military authority only a few months ago that New Zealand and Fiji were in no danger of serious attack unless in the "unthinkable" contingency of the British and American Fleet being driven from the Pacific and Singapore having fallen, and that this could not happen under six months. Our reflection on this is that the unthinkable is now in everybody's minds.' PMNZ to SSDA, 12 January, 1942, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.

136. See above, p. 288.


138. Ibid.
12 January, for example, he told Churchill that
to be completely frank, we have not always
felt that the potential problems of the Pacific have had the importance attached
to them in London which we, more intimately concerned therewith, have considered that they have perhaps deserved ....the position in the Pacific should be treated now as one of at least equal importance to that in Europe and in the Middle East.

Moreover,

We have noted also the opinion constantly expressed in the past by the Chiefs of Staff, both in the United Kingdom and in New Zealand, that there is no 'immediate large-scale threat to the territory of Australia and much less of New Zealand!' ....Frankly we do not accept this, and, even if we did accept it, prudence and the demands of our own people would oblige us to prepare against the worst.139

But in going on to make a further request for 'the provision of implements of war', the New Zealand leader adopted a most courteous tone, concluding with an apology 'for adding this additional burden to your shoulders'.140 Churchill clearly appreciated this repeated recognition that he was concerned with the problems of war on a world-wide scale and his replies provide a marked contrast with those to Canberra. On 17 January he thanked Fraser for the 'frank expression' of New Zealand's views which had been presented with 'well-balanced reasoning' and added: 'The Government and people of New Zealand have always adopted a helpful and realist attitude to this war ...'.141

139. PMNZ to SSDA, 12 January, 1942, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.
140. Ibid.
Churchill received renewed evidence of this attitude when the government in Wellington failed to make any demand for the recall of its expeditionary force from the Middle East. There was considerable pressure in New Zealand for the return of the force, much of it connected with the criticism that large numbers of men were being held in the United Kingdom while dominion troops were ruthlessly used in the North African desert. The return of two Australian divisions naturally increased the New Zealand government's difficulties and it seems that Curtin was actively urging Fraser to recall his troops. Even when Churchill arranged for an American division to be sent to New Zealand in lieu of the men in the Middle East many found this arrangement difficult to reconcile with New Zealand's primary responsibility for her own defence. But Fraser refused to give way to this pressure. On 10 March Churchill told him of his admiration for 'the constancy of spirit and devotion to the cause which has animated your government and people' in the decision to maintain the New Zealand division in North Africa. Sir Harry Batterbee, the British High Commissioner in Wellington throughout the war years, is convinced that the balance in favour of leaving

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142. See, for example, PMNZ to Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, 7 February, 1942, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 2.
145. See, for example, PMNZ to SSDA, 15 March, 1942, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3; Wood, The New Zealand People at War, pp. 223-27.
146. SSDA to PMNZ, 10 March, 1942, N.Z. Documents, Vol. 3.
the New Zealand force in the Middle East was tipped when he reported to Churchill on the dominion government's anxiety that Wellington should be provided with an anti-aircraft battery and the British Prime Minister responded by providing the equipment immediately, much to the annoyance of the War Office which wished to retain the battery for home defence.  

The differing reactions of Australia and New Zealand to the collapse of the Singapore strategy no doubt stemmed in part from the more immediate danger which the Japanese line of advance appeared to present to Australia. But there was also a major clash of personalities involved. The Labour government in New Zealand had had two years of war in which to prove its loyalty to the British Empire before Japan entered the hostilities. Churchill appears to have always been on the most cordial of terms with Fraser. But the Labour Party in Australia was largely an unknown quantity in London; before it came to power, Churchill and other imperially-minded British ministers had been deeply suspicious about Australian Labour's constancy. The two months from October 1941 in which Curtin had followed policies largely indistinguishable from those of Menzies had not been sufficient to remove these British suspicions; indeed, the events surrounding the withdrawal of the Australians from

\[147\] Interview with Sir Harry Batterbee, 24 January, 1973. Sir Harry went on to say that he considered the decision to retain the New Zealand division, which was a very large one, in the Middle East had a decisive effect on the outcome there. Earl Alexander of Tunis, who was Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East from 1942 to 1943, later spoke to Batterbee in the most glowing terms about the value of New Zealand's troops.


\[149\] See above, p. 172.
Tobruk had had quite the opposite effect. On the Australian side Curtin allowed Dr. Evatt a very free hand in drafting the cables to London, a practice which certainly did not reduce the abrasive nature of Anglo-Australian relations. But in the same way that the outbreak of war with Japan and the direct threat to Australia led to a revision of the Labour government's attitude, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Menzies, although his manner would probably have caused less friction with Churchill, would not have acted in substance very differently from Curtin when faced with a Japanese onslaught. The fundamental factor determining Australian policy from 8 December 1941, and more particularly from the end of that month when it was becoming apparent that Singapore would be lost, was not political ideology but the transformation of the second world war from a conflict in distant deserts of the western hemisphere to a world-wide struggle in which the Pacific was, for the first time, directly involved as a major theatre.

The Singapore strategy collapsed because it was based on a strategic illusion: 'the illusion that a Two-Hemisphere Empire can be defended by a One-Hemisphere Navy ...'.¹ The illusion was created at the end of the first world war in order to hide Britain's inability to defend her world-wide possessions and interests. Australia and New Zealand based their defence upon this illusory policy but Singapore meant even more than this to the two dominions: it was a symbol of the continuing value, for defence, of the imperial connection.² As the Melbourne Age stated two days after the fall of the 'fortress': 'We had come to think of Singapore as an outer rampart of our security, a symbol of watchful might that would guard our northern reaches and the approach to oceans that wash Australia's shores east and west'.³

The destruction of this symbol inevitably had an important effect on the two dominions. When Britain could not send forces to protect Australia and New Zealand, the United States filled the gap. The previously expressed American intention to give the European theatre priority was not allowed to interfere with the establishment of powerful American bases in the southern Pacific. With the Americans

²See, for example, the editorial in the Sydney Morning Herald, 14 February, 1938, on the occasion of the opening of the graving dock at Singapore.
³The Melbourne Age, 17 February, 1942.
replacing the British as their major ally the intense loyalty which the Pacific dominions had shown for the imperial system was transferred to the American, as the attitudes of Australia and New Zealand towards such issues as the Korean war, the containment of China and the Vietnamese war amply demonstrate. But the speed and enthusiasm of this transfer must not be exaggerated and it certainly did not follow immediately on the collapse of the Singapore strategy.

One of the most famous statements in the evolution of Australian foreign policy is Curtin's article in the Melbourne Herald on 27 December, 1941, which contained the following avowal: 'Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom'. This appeal is often seen as marking the point at which Australia ceased to look primarily to the United Kingdom and turned instead to the United States; indeed, we are told that, in the dark days of December 1941, 'Australia's agonized cry for American help' echoed across 'the turbulent waters of the Pacific .... It was not in vain .... Australians and Americans met the common Pacific foe shoulder to shoulder and forged the first links in the unequal

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5 The Melbourne Herald, 27 December, 1941.
More recent evidence, however, leads to less dramatic conclusions. It appears that Curtin never intended great significance to attach to his words; they were originally written for a platitude-laden New Year message. It may even be that the article was composed by one of the Prime Minister's aids and was never seen by Curtin himself. The statement only acquired its importance when the Herald's editorial staff picked out the words quoted and used them as front-page news. The Sydney Sunday Telegraph then seized upon the article and presented it as a major declaration of the government's policy.

There was, in fact, no radical revolution in the policies of Australia and New Zealand. Instead a series of gradual developments, whose origins can be traced back well before the outbreak of the second world war, took place as the dominions came to a growing realisation of the significance of their geographical position. The setbacks suffered by the allied cause during the war certainly provided a stimulus for new initiatives but the early Japanese victories were by no means all-important in this respect; Menzies' appeals to the United States after the collapse of France - an incident until very recently almost totally ignored or unknown - were most significant precursors to Curtin's more publically expressed anxieties. New Zealand, too, had joined in these approaches in mid-1940.


Just as the formation of Australian and New Zealand defence and foreign policies before December 1941 was an evolutionary process, so the replacing of the 'traditional links' with the United Kingdom by new ties with the United States was to be an involved and complicated story. The Pacific dominions soon found that their problems in influencing British policy had not stemmed specifically from their role as junior partners in the British Empire; such frustrations are the lot of all smaller allies as Australia and New Zealand discovered when their attempts to exert influence in Washington met with no more success than their previous efforts in London. But, whereas each dominion had tended to see imperial relations in terms of its own particular dealings with the United Kingdom, their new relationship with the United States did help Australia and New Zealand to see their common regional interests more clearly. The dissatisfaction which arose from their inability to influence American conduct of the war in the Pacific finally led to the first major step in co-operation between the two southern dominions in the form of the Australian-New Zealand agreement of January 1944 which was, 'in effect, a formal declaration that the views of the two countries on international affairs had much in common and that their influence in Allied and world councils would be greater if they acted together'.

There was to be a lapse of ten years between the fall of Singapore and the conclusion of the ANZUS treaty.

8. Reese, Australia, New Zealand and the United States, p. 32.
From 1943 Australia and New Zealand did not look to the United States 'without any inhibitions of any kind' as they may have done briefly while the Japanese were still advancing. Serious differences developed over the conduct of allied offensives, the form of the peace settlement and future security arrangements in the Pacific; the dispute over Manus Island is only the most well-known example of antagonism between the United States and Australia in the period immediately after the war. One Australian scholar has recently asserted that:

Increased Dominion diplomatic and military independence, combined with active support for a reassertion of British power and influence in the Far East under Australian leadership, not co-operation with the United States, was the principal feature of Australian policy during 1944-1946.

Indeed, Anglo-Australian relations made a quick recovery from the bitterness of the exchanges between Curtin and Churchill in the early months of 1942. In March 1945 Curtin himself informed the House of Representatives that it is necessary, in order to combat a potential enemy such as Japan, to have a base in a suitable strategical position, and a fleet which can ensure command of the sea in the South-West Pacific Area, apart from the maintenance of overseas communications to this area. Australia and New Zealand cannot provide a fleet and equip a base on the parallel of what was contemplated in regard to Singapore as the bastion of the defence of British interests in the Pacific. Co-operation with Britain is therefore essential.

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Two years later J.J. Dedman, the Labour Minister for Defence, delivered a statement of policy which emphasised that, while Australia awaited the establishment of an effective system of collective security under the United Nations, 'reliance must primarily be placed on co-operation in Empire defence ...'. Moreover, the minister insisted that 'the British Commonwealth still remains a maritime Empire, dependent on sea power for its existence' and the government's new defence programme gave precedence to the navy; Australia, Dedman boasted proudly, was making a greater peace-time contribution to 'British Commonwealth defence' than at any time in her history. More than five years had passed since the fall of Singapore. The substance of the imperial connection had, it seems, outlived the symbol.

15. Ibid, p. 3344.
APPENDIX

Naval Strengths of the Major Powers, 1939.

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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30*</td>
<td>150*</td>
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*Approximate estimate.

Source: Jane's Fighting Ships, 1939 (London, 1939)
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PRIMARY SOURCES.


The major primary sources upon which this thesis is based are the government archives in the Public Record Office, London, and the Commonwealth Archives Offices, Canberra and Melbourne. The work is basically a study of official policy and I have always found it easiest to begin my research at the apex of the policy-making apparatus - that is, at the level of Cabinet or War Cabinet - and work downwards from there. The alternative of tracing a policy or idea from its origin within a particular department is very laborious and time-consuming, frequently leads to a dead end and, especially in the case of the Australian departmental records which are not organised to make research an easy task, may be completely impossible. In the brief survey which follows I refer only to those classes of documents which I found most useful for this particular study.

For the inter-war period the minutes of the British Cabinet are to be found in the Public Record Office's series CAB 23. The minutes usually provide a fairly full record of the discussions which took place and the decisions reached but they are even more useful when used in conjunction with the Cabinet memoranda in CAB 24. The minutes of the Committee of Imperial Defence, the Cabinet's main advisory body on all questions of defence policy, are an invaluable collection and are contained in the series CAB 2; the Committee's memoranda dealing with Australia and New Zealand are in CAB 5. The Chiefs of Staff Committee, formed in 1923, also has comprehensive minutes and these, together with the Chiefs of Staff's memoranda, form the series CAB 53. The registered files of the Cabinet secretariat comprise series CAB 21; these deal with problems covering the whole range of governmental activity and include a lot of material on defence issues. The papers of Sir Maurice Hankey, the powerful and influential Secretary of the British Cabinet and C.I.D., are contained in CAB 63. Two other Cabinet series which have also been cited in this thesis are CAB 27 and CAB 16, the former consisting of proceedings, memoranda and reports of ad hoc sub-committees of the Cabinet and the latter fulfilling the same function for the Committee of Imperial Defence. CAB 29 deals with various international conferences, including the inter-war naval conferences (except the Washington conference of 1921-22 which has its own series: CAB 30). A very important source for the study of inter-imperial relations is CAB 32 which contains the records of the imperial conferences. PREM 1 takes in correspondence and other material relating to the activities of the Prime Minister himself rather than the Cabinet as a whole.
The British departmental papers referred to in the text are those of the Admiralty (the relevant series being ADM 1 and ADM 116), the Foreign Office (F.O. 371 covers all political correspondence) and the Dominions Office (D.O. 35 and 114). It was not until 1925 that the Dominions Office was established as a separate government department; until that time correspondence with the dominions comes under various Colonial Office series, the only one of which I have cited is C.O. 532.

Upon the outbreak of the second world war the CAB 23 Cabinet minutes were replaced by the minutes of the War Cabinet in CAB 65; the War Cabinet memoranda are to be found mainly in CAB 66 with some also in CAB 67. After Churchill became Prime Minister many of the major British strategic decisions were debated in the War Cabinet's Defence Committee (Operations) rather than the War Cabinet itself; this Committee's very important records are in CAB 69. CAB 99 comprises various war-time conferences and has been a very useful source for this thesis; CAB 99/1 deals with the meeting of Dominion Ministers and a Representative from India in London in November 1939, CAB 99/4 with Menzies' visit to London early in 1941, CAB 99/5 with the staff talks in Washington of January to March 1941, CAB 99/17 with the Arcadia conference between Churchill and Roosevelt of December 1941 and January 1942 and CAB 99/18 with the Riviera conference between the British and American leaders in August 1941. CAB 96 contains the records of the War Cabinet's Far Eastern Committee. The CAB 21 series continued into the war years as did the series of departmental records mentioned above. There are excellent finding aids for all the material located in the Public Record Office.

The Australian records for the inter-war years are, unfortunately, in a much less satisfactory state for research than the British. The standard of record-keeping, even at the highest levels, seems to have been at best indifferent and such Cabinet records as were maintained are, in any case, inaccessible to bona fide researchers at the time of writing. The minutes of the Council of Defence have recently become available but the Council was not an effective body in policy-formation until the late nineteen-thirties. I have found the most useful source for both the foreign and defence policies of Australia in the years between the two world wars to be Commonwealth Record Series A981, the records of the Department of External Affairs. Although the functions of this department came under the Prime Minister's Department until 1935, its records have been maintained as a separate entity for the entire period.

The situation for war-time records is, happily, much better. When I completed my research the most important war-time material - the minutes and agenda of the War Cabinet and Advisory War Council - was available only to the end of 1941 but as the thesis concludes with the fall of Singapore in February 1942 this was not a serious handicap. I found
the most useful series of documents upon which to begin work were the War Cabinet agenda files, CRS A2671. Each file deals with a particular topic and centres around an agenda on that subject prepared for consideration by the War Cabinet. The agenda usually sets out the question in detail and the file also contains a copy of the relevant War Cabinet minute and sometimes other material relating to the problem. Series CRS A2680 follows the same pattern for the Advisory War Council from the date of its establishment in October 1940. This approach by subject may also be followed in CRS A2676 which consists of particular War Cabinet minutes without agenda and in CRS A2684 which provides a similar format for the Advisory War Council. Each of these four series is served by a comprehensive finding aid. If a strictly chronological procedure is preferred, a complete set of War Cabinet minutes are to be found in CRS A2673 and of Advisory War Council minutes in CRS A2682. Unfortunately the Australian War Cabinet minutes do not generally provide a detailed account of discussion and any disagreements which took place; often they do little more than record a decision. The minutes of the Advisory War Council are much fuller and highly informative. Complete sets of War Cabinet agenda are located in series CRS A2670 and of Advisory War Council agenda in CRS A2679. In Australia the full Cabinet continued to meet throughout the war in addition to the War Cabinet and an incomplete set of minutes and submissions for the Menzies and Fadden ministries may be found in CRS A2697. Cabinet agenda, together with some minutes, for the full Cabinet of Curtin's ministry are contained in CRS A2700.

The records of the Department of External Affairs - CRS A981 - again proved very useful for the war years, as did the records of the Department of Defence in CRS A816. In addition, some of the files of the Prime Minister's Department in series CP 290, CRS A1606 and CRS A1608 were consulted. All these departmental collections are very large; they do have finding aids but the quality of these guides is highly variable. A most disappointing feature of the Australian records, by comparison with the British, is that they consist almost entirely of memoranda, letters, telegrams etc. and contain very few minutes by the officials who were working on the file in question. In the British documents such minutes frequently provide an invaluable guide to the way in which policy was formed and the detailed reasons for the adoption of a particular course of action.

The records of the Department of the Navy, as well as some additional material relating to the Department of Defence, are located in the Victorian Branch of the Commonwealth Archives in Melbourne; all items deposited there have the prefix 'MP'. This material was consulted after I had completed my survey of the Cabinet papers in Canberra and did not add a great deal to the story of official policy at the highest level. The most useful of the Department of the Navy's series was MP 1185/5 entitled
'Classified Correspondence', 1923-1950; this collection has been released only very recently. Also of some help were MP 729/6, Department of Defence/Army, 'Classified General Correspondence files', 1937-45; MP 1049/5 and MP 1049/9, both entitled Department of the Navy, 'Classified General Correspondence files', 1923-50. Less useful, but nevertheless containing some material relevant to the topic, were MP 150/1, Department of the Navy, Navy Office, 'Navy Series', 1939-50; MP 151/1, Department of the Navy, Navy Office, 'General Correspondence files', 1923-50; MP 692/1, Department of the Navy, Navy Office, 'General Correspondence', 1923-50 and MP 981/1, Department of the Navy, 'General Correspondence', 1923-50. Once again, the indexes and finding aids for these documents are of variable quality.


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