IN TALKING about South-East Asia, I am going to include the activities of a number of countries, which, while not geographical parts of the region, cannot realistically be disregarded. These are the United States, the Soviet Union, China and India.

We are speaking of Australia and the South-East Asia Region after the Vietnam War, that is, we are assuming that the war is virtually over. Well, so it is, in the sense that it is probably lost, but the agony and the shillyshallying may drag on for longer than many people thought when Johnson pulled out of the Presidential race, and put in his agent Humphrey.

Nevertheless, we can already discuss the lessons of the War and the philosophy underlying our presence there without waiting for the final curtain. Our presence in Vietnam is just the latest example of a long standing Australian theory, which has been summarised as 'better there than here' — i.e. better fight them there than here. This was one very important reason for our joining in the First two Great Wars: to keep the Germans from coming our way. And, of course, the Germans were established in the Pacific in 1914. This theory implies that we have always been, more or less, in danger from outside attack — German, Russian, Japanese, and now Indonesian and Chinese.

There is no doubt that China and Japan have been our favorite international homicides, and Dr. Noel McLachlan's recent lecture on the Yellow Peril points up the reason. As Alfred Deakin so charmingly put it in a letter on June 4, 1908, speaking of the visit of the American fleet (along with Jack Johnson and Tommy Burns):

The visit of the United States Fleet is universally popular here not so much because of our blood affection for the Americans though that is sincere
but because of our distrust of the Yellow race in the North Pacific and our recognition of the "entente cordiale" spreading among all white races who realize the Yellow Peril to Caucasian civilisations, creeds and politics.¹

Cook gave tongue to similar sentiments, and spoke with gloomy relish that it was "certain that we stand in the way of other nations and must some day — perhaps soon — clash."² Believing in the Yellow Peril from way back — for Australian newspapers such as the *Sydney Morning Herald* were talking of the dangers of the "Chinese invasion" in the 1880's, at a time when China was in utter disarray — believing in all this — Australians took one of two paths, or tried to combine them. (There was a third alternative which they never considered.) Australians either sought to snuggle up as close as possible to a Great White Power, or better still, a collection of them; a recurring Australian troilistic scenario, or else they cast around for ways of making Australia self-sufficient in defence. Sometimes they combined the two strategies. A third possibility, that of realising that Asians were far too busy with their own problems to worry about us, never gained acceptance. The thought that one's inferiors never think about you, let alone envy you, is really not to be borne. And as to trying to *help* these countries or be friendly to them, that would be left to missionaries, who no doubt had their own little crosses to grind.

The isolationists concentrated on things like home defence forces, and pressure for an independent Australian Navy. The others ran around, concentrating mainly on the British connection, but also dreaming of Pacific alliance systems and putting out periodic feelers to the Americans. For example, Deakin wrote to the British Colonial Secretary, Lord Crewe, on 27 September 1909 suggesting "an agreement for an extension of the Monroe Doctrine to all the countries around the Pacific Ocean supported by the guarantees of the British Empire, Holland, France, and China added to that of the United States". China was OK at that time, being patently under Western domination if not occupation, and so could join the club, just as Nazi Germany allowed the Japanese in as honorary Aryans. The proposed Deakin gang-up was aimed at Japan and Germany. But, not for the last time, the British stalled.

Even before the First War, Australian Governments were doubtful of British abilities to hold the Pacific against a Naval Power like Japan. As Britain concentrated more and more upon Europe and Germany, she steadily denuded her Pacific Fleet. The con-

¹ *Deakin-Jobb Correspondence* 4/6/08 (Australian National Library. Cook was also having similar thoughts. See Cook's *Notebook*: April 1908, 24-6.
² Cook's diary, 27/5/09. *Cook Papers.*
sequence was pressure to get British permission for an independent naval squadron and a real voice in Empire strategy. The entry of Japan on our side in 1915 removed the dangers for a time, although there had been some anxious moments with the German warships during the first convoying of the A.I.F. overseas. But after the war the Australian anxieties persisted and culminated in the fiasco of 1941, when Britain could not help us, most of Australia's forces were overseas, and the Japanese unwisely attacked Pearl Harbour.

This dialogue between those who plump for alliances, while secretly doubting their foolproof character — as Cook said when introducing the Defence Bill on 21st September 1909, "no nation depends entirely for its security upon treaties" — and those urging the building up of strong home defences and keeping out of alliances, has been going on ever since.

Thus Australian attitudes to Asia up to the Japanese War were either fear, and when there was patently nothing to fear, indifference. The Japanese War set the Labor Government thinking of Pacific Pacts (such as Lyons had proposed, unsuccessfully, in 1937). The Anzac agreement of 1944 was the first result but we had to wait until 1951 for a firm American guarantee in the form of Anzus, and till 1954 for Seato.

Australian attitudes towards post-war decolonisation were either yes or no, or yes and no (that really covers all the permutations, doesn't it). The Labor Government and most Labor people supported decolonisation, especially in the heady atmosphere of the Four Freedoms and promises of a new world, which always follow major holocausts, and which can never be taken as accomplished facts or as statements of real intention. Essentially they are sops to the survivors. Conservatives greatly disliked seeing the French, the British and the Dutch eased out of their possessions and replaced by independent, hence unstable colored governments. In the same way they now fear the moving out of Americans from Asian countries — just as they dislike the possibility of White South Africans, Rhodesians and Portuguese losing their dominions in Africa.

After the onset of the Cold War and the Korean War, Australian Governments and their supporters have taken a generally jaundiced view of Asian independence movements and Asian governments who are not on our side. Those who are on nobody's side are also viewed with a degree of jaundice and their difficulties in maintaining their non-aligned status are anticipated with some pleasure. Given these long standing strains of fear of Asia, feelings of national weakness, and an acute consciousness
of the great disparity between our chances of a decent life and the chances of those around us, the foreign policies of postwar Conservative governments are easily explained. Just to take our guilt about being so much richer than our neighbors and our determination not to help them in a really worthwhile way. Asians then take on the visage of "the mob" of 18th and 19th century England and France, the great unwashed as they used to be called. Such people are dangerous — so in Australian conservative minds the buried but still active fear of the Australian mob, potentially violent, thirsting for equality and the bosses' daughters, is matched by an even more general fear of the teeming Asian mobs bent upon similar tasks. When Mr. Askin referred to anti-Vietnam demonstrators as the unwashed, he was simply reviving a fear still slumbering fitfully in bourgeois breasts, and revealed the kind of emotions which even impeccably peaceful demonstrations can arouse. And there is nothing one mightn't do to all these various intruders into the Garden of Eden or, should I say, the Temple of Mammon — driving over them, or napalming them is OK, so long as we can preserve our Caucasian chalk circle.

To turn to relations with individual countries around us.

China

This country is now our fourth best customer, and our wheat exports are very nearly dependent upon future trade with the Mainland of China. Nevertheless, it is going to be a long time, apart from important sectional interests such as this, before China becomes a really important customer for this country — so we do not need to be nearly as circumspect with her as say, with the United States or Japan. We can certainly afford, economically speaking, to go on boycotting China in international politics. Of course, this is a policy which has patently failed. In so far as this boycott has produced results, these have been to confirm Chinese suspicions that the West is incorrigibly hostile, has never really accepted her decision to establish a Communist state, and still hankers after a restoration. If we don't, why do we continue to deny China her rightful place in the society of nations? It is indeed hard to give an answer, other than to say that our policy of non-recognition and exclusion from the United Nations, is the only, way we can express our hostility to China short of force. There are those among us who favor this outlet.

Whether our policies towards China change after the Vietnam War depends much more upon what our Government and that
of the United States decide, than upon anything which China is likely to say or do. It is becoming more and more evident that Americans are going to be confronted with another no-choice, no-contest, election in a few months — the Convention numbers being stacked by the respective Party machines long before the selection process. The great mass of American people who have opposed the Vietnam war, opposed the policy of overseas intervention, interventions on what have been essentially, grounds of Real Politik, and who view the scenario of permanent Cold War and a Warfare State stretching until 1984 with dismay — are going to be disenfranchised, as they were in 1964. If the new American government and the new Australian government based upon a likely ALP electoral debacle even greater than that of 1966 — if these decide to continue their story of the Chinese thrust south and the necessity of defending free Asian countries from Communist subversion, then Chinese Australian relations will be the same old story as now. It is no use Mr. Chipp saying that the theory of the Chinese thrust south is untenable, any more than it was for Mr. Whitlam to say so in his Roy Milne Lecture in 1963. The fact is, as both acknowledge, election after election has been won on this theory and there is little doubt that this coming one will be as well. As Mr. Whitlam said in The House, this Government has won Khaki elections in 1951, 1954, 1958, 1963 and 1964. And it won one in 1966 and will do so this year if there is an election.

The only prospect for this grotesque stalemate between China and America being broken, is in the event of an entirely new Administration attitude towards Asia—an attitude questioning the right and the need to intervene, but, more especially, the actual as against the imagined relation between China and social revolutionary change in Asia. Not that there is much likelihood of radical change in South East Asia in the next decade. I personally don't get the impression that there are many explosive revolutionary situations in our part of the world. At any rate, we can discuss this by looking at a number of our neighbours.

Malaysia and Singapore

Many of you will remember the Four Corners programme of a few months ago when Abdul Razak and Mr. Lee were interviewed about their security problems, both internal and external. The Malaysian minister did not even speak of American help, nor was there a word of the Chinese thrust south. He mentioned insurgents, but expressed confidence in his country being able to handle them on their own. He expressed an interest in our troops staying on, though of course they would not be in the numbers likely to
make any real contribution in the event of any genuine military emergency, such as an overland or oversea invasion.

Malaysia's stability and military viability depend to a major extent upon the internal policies of her Government—and this boils down to a satisfactory accommodation between Chinese and Malay. If the Government discriminates against the local Chinese—governing by a policy of Malay supremacy, then the country is in for trouble. In a situation of quasi civil war, Communism, either local or Mainland, would flourish, or could flourish, and the result could be tragedy—civil war and intervention. We certainly would have no role in such a tragedy, except perhaps that of a bemused, imported, assistant chucker out. However, such developments take time, and the future is really up to the Malaysian Government. Stationing a few battalions of Australians in Kuala Lumpur, with orders to keep out of communal strife, would be a completely irrelevant gesture for us to make, but one which, like many irrelevant gestures, could land us in trouble. Trouble with the locals, trouble with the Philippines, trouble with the Indonesians. This because of the disputed Borneo territories. So long as this dispute lasts, it seems extremely unwise to commit ourselves to military arrangements with any of these three countries.

Singapore's troubles are different. They are economic, and those are producing political strains. Probably the bulk of Singapore's Chinese population look with benevolence, if not some pride, at the achievements of Mainland China, although they must be puzzled as most of us at what has been happening there over the last few years. But this does not make them Communists, or Singapore another Cuba. But it does mean that if all substantial political opposition to the present Government continues to be crushed by repressive measures, and Singapore's economic difficulties multiply, then many citizens of Singapore may look to other creeds and other countries for support. But of course, Singapore is a city state—guerilla war is out, a strong and loyal army and police force can certainly control city disturbances as they can in most places. Furthermore, Singapore is jammed in between two Muslim countries, both experienced in crushing subversion, both anti-Chinese and anti-Communist. The situation in Singapore would need to deteriorate a great deal before that country is a security risk. What Mr. Lee wants, and will probably get, is economic aid. His attachment to Western troops and the great base is primarily economic, as Malta's is. And of course, Western backing helps him in dealing with Malaysia and to a lesser extent, for there is no great animosity yet, with Indonesia. I don't really see why we would take sides in this internal struggle for power in this corner of the peninsula. Mr. Lee has said explicitly that he
doesn’t want American troops, because he hasn’t a security problem, and doesn’t want the kinds which Americans bring. Enough said.

**Indonesia**

Our relations with Indonesia are going to depend upon the kind of regime they have. Unless our governmental attitude changes a good deal the more right-wing the regime the better we will like them, the more dominated the country is by the military, and by right-wing religious obscurantists, the better we will like them. The appalling massacres over the last few years — involving deaths of perhaps more than half a million people — the worst since the Nazis quite possibly — have gone uncriticised — and, by most of the electorate — (life members of the sleeping sickness society) unnoticed. Our Press and mass media are not interested — as you know, mass murders of left wingers is not news. Nor is there any outcry in this country about the conditions revealed by Dr. Feith in his article in the *New Republic*. If a Government of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) did this, we would have nothing to do with them. Probably, we would judge them as threats to our security. The only thing we really worry about vis a vis Indonesia is whether they might acquire a Communist government, for we equate such an event with the appearance of a threat to our security. In the days of the close links between Indonesia, Russia and China, there were many people who feared that Indonesia would become a nuclear base directed at Australia, involved, as we then were, in confrontation with Indonesia. I remember writing at the time that there was very little chance of that occurring. That Great Powers do not give allies, let alone politically unstable allies, nuclear weapons — for fear of making them independent, for fear of the ally changing sides and becoming a nuclear enemy, for fear of outside intervention which a combination of distance from the scene and, quite possibly, the basic weakness of the Great Power concerned, would render the Great Power unable to deflect. And so it happened.

A Communist Indonesia would have the same internal problems and the same geopolitical limitations as Suharto’s regime. It could threaten us in New Guinea or by nuclear attack. It would only acquire its own nuclears if we had already done so, as part of the normal cycle of proliferation. It would be no more likely to become a Chinese tool than any other Asian Communist country — if anything, it would lean more on Russia, which, once it starts operating in the Indian Ocean, will be able to give it some support. But Russia would not arm it with nuclears — being, along with the United States, the Power most interested in preventing nuclear proliferation. Whether Russia
decided to establish bases in a Communist Indonesia would depend largely on American-Russian relations and Russo-Australian and Indonesian-Australian relations.

It is manifestly in our interest to get on well with Indonesia and the External Affairs Department’s policy during confrontation still trying to keep as many links going with Indonesia as possible, was a very far sighted and fruitful affair. It only shows what we could do with China, who is much farther away, who has never been in open conflict with us except for Korea. It only shows how a realistic non-ideological foreign policy can keep temperatures down while still defending one’s vital interests.

There are only four circumstances in which we could tangle in the future with Indonesia. One is if we are lured into an alliance gang up against her; a second is if we became mixed up in possible future disputes with Indonesia on the one hand and Malaysia on the other, or even between Indonesia and the Philippines; a third would arise were we to intervene in an internal revolutionary situation such as might arise in 10 or 15 years time; a fourth could result from a dispute over New Guinea. Some of these potential conflict situations would be more likely in the event of a revival of the PKI — but others could occur without it.

In particular, involvement in the political fortunes of Malaysia and Singapore seems to be against our long term interests, because of the chance of clashing with Indonesia. (I have already spoken of the military redundancy of our forward presence there vis a vis combating China or internal subversion).

As to New Guinea, this seems to me a political and military liability to Australia. It would be very difficult to defend in the event of large-scale Indonesian infiltration tactics, if these were to combine with a disaffected native population — And the way we are governing and regarding New Guinea is likely to produce this disaffection, which could be reflected in the attitudes of a post-independence New Guinea government. Even if such a government wanted to shelter under our wing, I’m not sure that we should guarantee it against Indonesia.

The military grounds for such a guarantee are not terribly firm. It is said that we must hold East New Guinea on strategic grounds — just as it used to be said that West New Guinea was a vital interest of ours. We seem to be bearing up quite well in the face of having lost that vital interest.

East New Guinea is supposed to protect our northern sea routes from Indonesian harassment, and our Northern and
Eastern coasts from raids. But, of course, Indonesian bombers and rockets could still hit us without Eastern New Guinea, Moresby and Milne Bay are useful but that is all. If we had command of the sea and air around the islands we could protect Australia and our northern sea routes, but if we didn't have that command, we'd lose out anyway. Seeing that Eastern New Guinea is so difficult to defend by land, and seeing that it is one of the few things which we and Indonesia, Communist or otherwise might quarrel about, we should not attempt to give it a military guarantee. A joint guarantee with a number of other states would be preferable, a UNO one even better. This latter would be difficult to organise, and might not operate when the time came. From a military point of view, it would be better if we established a couple of bases on islands off New Guinea, e.g., Not that I rate the chances of an Indonesian attack very highly, but it's something one should keep in mind.

**Better There Than Here**

Which brings me to a strategic theory which has been far too important and far too unquestioned in Australian military thinking. I refer to the doctrine “better fight them there”. Thus it is supposed to be better to fight the Indonesians in New Guinea, rather than catch them as they try goosestepping down the Birdum track or while they are around the beef roads near Carpentaria. I can't see that it’s better, I really can't. It's supposed to be better to try fighting the dreaded Communists in a country where they know every inch of the country and have massive popular support. Well, I don't think the Americans think it is better, i.e. easier, any more. Of course, it is better to mess up someone else's country than your own — but the thing is to win, not lose. Is it better to fight a massive Chinese army, say, with short supply lines, and an enormous supporting hinterland, with one's own back to the sea and with long sea communications, rather than fight a much smaller version at the end of a long and valuable sea route, protected only by a fraction of the air-power which a country can mobilise near its own borders? I would have thought not. This is why, after Korea, the US Chiefs of Staff ruled that further land wars on the Asian mainland were out. President Johnson's decision to ignore this rule has only produced verification of the soundness of the Chiefs of Staffs dictum. Not that the chances of a Chinese land thrust are very high — while those of a Japanese style sea invasion is really to fight the last war. If nations want to threaten distant lands, it is going to be with missiles, not armadas of ships as yet unbuilt.

There are a number of Asian countries which produce or could produce changes in our regional environment. They in-
clude India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand, and I will discuss them in turn.

India

Our main interest in India has resided in her non-aligned foreign policy, in the enormous problems of starvation and misery which afflict her and which threaten a search for drastic political solutions, in her apparently endless dispute with Pakistan, and in her relations with China. We are also interested in India's apparent nuclear ambitions.

What are likely to be India's relations with China after the Vietnam War? Unless China's attitudes change, they will probably go on being bad. India is one of the many Asian nations who has been steadily critical of the Western role in Vietnam, but this has not changed Chinese distrust for India. Indian public opinion has been pretty much against China since 1962. Though not so strongly as it has been against Pakistan. India has never really recovered face, which she perhaps needlessly lost in 1962, nor has she forgiven the Chinese for pricking her military pretensions.

This is not to say that international affairs loom large in most Indians' calculations — they do not. Problems of how to keep alive and then if possible to live well, occupy most Indian minds. The struggle for education, for jobs, for some kind of breakthrough in agriculture and population control, is enough to keep most Indians busy. In voting at elections, a number of states are showing increasing preference for Communist candidates — Peking-oriented ones in particular. So the China problem has not entirely deflected Indians from the path of what may be political realism for them: Nor would we be distracted by the Yellow Peril if we were in half the social and economic troubles in which the Indians find themselves. Only our Government, with its neat schizophrenic split between trade and war, shows a degree of cynical realism.

The Indian-Pakistan rivalry is one of the most puzzling to outsiders, just as the original drive for partition of the sub-continent was. But both facts are rooted in deep historic antipathies which appear insoluble and which make Greeks and Turks seem like blood brothers. The Indo-Pakistani split, besides leading to two wars, so far, and a ruinous arms race, has made a joint plan for defence of the sub-continent against outsiders impossible. It has also started to let in the outsiders — all busily pushing their own barrows. China, Russia and America are in the van, and the only reason why Britain isn't cracking her whip is that she has lost the handle.
Pakistan is probably China's only friend in Asia — and one can see why. Pakistan figures that America, Britain and Russia are busily courting India, not only by sympathising with India's unjust retention of Moslem territory, but also arming India, ostensibly to combat China, but really, whether they like it or not, to fight Pakistan. Hence the close Sino-Pakistani embrace — of great military value to Pakistan. During the last war with India, Pakistan was able to concentrate all her forces in the West, leaving East Pakistan virtually undefended. She did this partly because it was practically indefensible, but also because Chinese troops poised in the North acted as a deterrent against Indian action in the East. India was also obliged to keep a powerful force immobilised watching the Chinese. Pakistan did not win, but she did not lose either. The Indian reaction to this problem of war or possible war on two fronts, is to prepare to make the Bomb. She is reasoning that in the end it will be less expensive and more of a deterrent than conventional forces. The initial outlay might be considerable, but the running costs will be moderate. Also, the peaceful uses of atomic power can revolutionise India's power and dam-building enterprises. Finally, Chinese nuclear blackmail will be checked.

Now of course these arguments are all right, so far as they go, although it is sad to see what is left of Ghandian non-violence. India is in a spot, no doubt. But how would making a Bomb help her? The first result would be a firm Sino-Pakistani alliance. The second would be a Pakistani bomb. Also as we know, nations who rest their security upon nuclears find that they cannot use them, and that they encounter other kinds of pressure, which they have to cope with by diversifying their weapons systems. This spells greater not less expenditure, and heightened rather than reduced tension. The Bomb would average out at 2.3 per cent of India's GNP — a sizable proportion of her education expenditure. India is the last country to be able to afford such nonsense.

Another sad thing about the Indian Bomb is that many Indians think that India's prestige will soar, and India's voice in world affairs will be listened to with a new respect. When one remembers with what respect, even if much of the respect was grudging, the voice of India was heard in the 1940's and 1950's, precisely because Nehru was not disposed to grind out the hateful Real Politiks which has so degraded Cold War politics, one can only marvel at India's new naivete.

What can Australia do about this situation? In the first place, she should steer clear of entanglements with either India or
Pakistan. Suggestions for a Pacific Confederation including India — a DLP proposal — could lead to quite undesirable consequences, and wouldn’t stop India’s nuclear march.

Secondly, we should have no part of the Indian lobbying against the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, and try to persuade her to sign it.

Thirdly, we should do nothing to legitimise her activities by refusing to sign the Treaty ourself, or by surreptitiously welshing on the Treaty by building nuclear power stations and accumulating plutonium.

Fourthly, we might view with some sympathy India’s (and Sweden’s for that matter) suggestion, that non nuclear countries, or some of them, who can make the Bomb, but do not at present, should be included in the Committee to supervise the Treaty. This suggestion is really an attempt to break the Great Power monopoly in the world. If the Great Powers really put world peace before trying to push their national and ideological interests, there would be some hope, for any increase in the influence of potential nuclear powers like Sweden, India, Canada and even Japan, and the decrease of Russian and American control, would be a positive gain to the international system, in my opinion. But watching America’s homicidal antics in Vietnam, and Russia’s bullying of Czechoslovakia, one can guess what their reaction would be. Still, the Indian proposal is one which we should support.

Fifthly, we should have no part of suggestions that we help the Americans out in the Indian Ocean — the object of the exercise being to contain Russia in the Western Indian Ocean and also defend India against China. (This despite Indian protests about the setting up of US polaris bases to her South). This scenario, yet another from the DLP book of military fables, could succeed in embroiling us with Russia and China, and just possibly, with Pakistan. In the light of our other commitments proposed by the interventionists, just what we could send to the Indian Ocean area is hard to say. The YCW’s perhaps. Upon reflection, that mightn’t be such a bad idea. So long as there is no settlement of the Kashmir dispute, the probability of a Sino-Pakistan Alliance, and of India being forced into the American or Russian orbit will get stronger. Meanwhile India’s grave social problems will mount, almost unnoticed. We can only keep out.

Thailand and the Philippines are also countries which we should treat carefully. They are both corrupt and unjust societies.
The Philippines is also a violent one. Insofar as we line up with their present governments, we underwrite injustice, and we might have to pay out one of these days, in defence of rotten things.

Thailand was very unwise to forsake her pre-1954 neutrality. She is now on very bad terms with Vietnam, Cambodia and China — she has an insurgency problem stemming partly from outside help — her troops are in Vietnam, her American nuclear bomber bases qualify her as a nuclear target. After the War, she would be well advised to return to neutrality and ask the Americans to leave. Whether she does will depend partly upon the magnitude of the eventual American defeat, whether America retains her taste for forward mainland presences after the War, and whether the Thais are really her agents. We could be of no help here, other than to urge the Liberalisation of the Thai Government. But our Conservative Governments have had little enthusiasm for such work.

This brings me to the theory that we ought to try and influence events in Asia by aid, by preferential trade arrangements and by developmental programs of one kind or another. We should of course be doing all of these things — but not in the hope of containing Communism and keeping the existing governments in. Now, of course, if this aid, trade and development served to alter the chronic social injustices of some of these dictatorships and plutocracies — that would be a very good thing. But the results of aid, for example, of American aid, since the War, have been to reinforce existing governments, to multiply corruption, and, in Asia and Latin America, to drive Nationalist and Left Wing Forces together. For every society which has become more progressive as a result of US aid there must be half a dozen who have become more reactionary or who are unaltered.

The effect of aid in Europe was to bolster Conservatism everywhere — and Spain, Portugal and Greece particularly come to mind. The North European bourgeois governments, having been replaced firmly in the saddle, are now trying to kick the American ladder away, on the quite reasonable grounds that the Americans have done their job. The US resistance to this idea and their attempts to invoke the Russian threat is paralleled by Russian attempts to retain full control of her satellites. (One only has to think of the grave US threat to Czechoslovakia which Pravda has recently discovered — the Russians have actually spoken of the Americans and Germans planning to attack.) We tend to admire nationalism in Asia, but not in Eastern Europe.

But the US aid strategy has failed in Asia — whereas if it has failed in Europe, it is only because America wants permanent
political control of Western Europe so that she can take over their economies and markets. Otherwise, aid as a stabiliser and as a factor working against a radical social reconstruction of West European Society, has worked only too well. But in Asia and Latin America it has not — for the government host societies are mostly too archaic, too inflexible for America to be able to legitimise. Also a number of them have attitudes towards social organisation, education and the like, which work against economic progress, even as defined by capitalism. The other day Mr. Nixon deplored the fact that America had spent over $150,000 million in aid over the last 25 years — and deplored it in the context of America still not being able to get her way. The context was Vietnam.

Now if America can’t, neither can we, with our quite puny surpluses for aid and overseas investment. An estimate of the amount of aid invested which the South-East Asian Region can economically absorb and use in a year, is $19,000 million. Our contribution to that kind of need would be a drop in the bucket. So let us not thing we can affect sizable political events in Asia by aid and investment. As for trade, like most rich countries, the bulk of our trade is with other rich countries, and South-East Asian trade is not important to us, and is only likely to become so when Indonesia manages an economic take-off.

So if we wish to affect political events in Asia by direct methods, military means have a greater prima facie plausibility. But only prima facie — This article has been written in the wake of a historic fiasco procured by its own hands by an immensely powerful International nation.

The ethics of intervention have never been properly set out by those most in favor of it. This is partly because their motives are never as pure or as unmixed as they make out; partly because intervention patterns tend to be peculiar, to say the least. The US have intervened to overthrow Left Wing regimes in Cuba and Guatemala and San Domingo, and there is plenty of evidence of massive CIA activity in British Guiana before the destruction of Chéddi Jagan’s regime. They supported Jiminez, Batista and Trujillo to the last, and now underpin dictators like Shoessner, of Paraguay with his torture chambers and secret police organised by none less than the late Anton Pavelic. What right wing regime has been overthrown by the US on moral grounds? Not Spain, not Greece, nor Portugal — nor the barbaric sheikdoms.

The same double standard is used in Asia, as we all know, and as we now witness daily in agreements justifying the Western presence in Vietnam. Sometimes we are supposed to be punishing
aggression — that is, doing UNO's job for it, without asking it and in the face of continuous criticisms from the Secretary General of the United Nations, and most of the members of the United Nations.

Sometimes we are acting to save the Vietnamese from a fate worse than death, viz. Communism, by providing them with a better alternative, which is, of course, Death. This whole decision of ours to play God to millions of people, of deciding to will the deaths and maimings of thousands and thousands of them on such flimsy, shifting grounds — has probably not been paralleled since the Spaniards sacked the empires of South America and destroyed their peoples, on grounds of giving them the Christian Way of Life.

We are humbugs, most of us, who defend intervention on these kinds of grounds, because when pressed, we fall back on Reasons of State i.e. better there than here, or the best way to keep the Americans in the area is to agree with everything they say and do, whether or not we really believe that they are right, or even acting in their own best interests. And we call this hypocrisy being a good ally, whereas, of course, it is acting the false and selfish friend. These were the grounds argued by the Holt Government in 1966. You can tell an electorate who boozes by the government it chooses.

To return to the master interventionist in S.E. Asia — America. She has been described by Professor Wolfgang Friedman of Columbia Law School as a country torn between a moralising tradition and the demands and aspirations of an imperial power. Probably. At any rate, the normal end to that kind of conflict is ideology, and rationalisation. And so has it happened in South-East Asia. One way of getting out of this whole tension between morality and Reasons of State, is to simply plump for Power Politics. There are many powerful supporters of this kind of international approach, both in the United States and in Australia, as we know.

So long as these people retain their influence, which is partly a matter of general acceptability, they will impede efforts to give up the attempt to win victory in Vietnam and accept the verdict of Asian nationalism in full cry. They will, right up to the end, argue one last major throw to win, and failing that, a falling back to an endless war of attrition a la the Thirty Years War. If for example, Mr. Nixon wins, we may expect a long last attempt by the US to save face and produce at least the appearance of a victory. If Humphrey wins in December, we might similarly expect a long period of stalling well into the New Year,
during which time thousands more, including Australians, will
die. In these circumstances, the protest movement in America,
inflamed by the knowledge of having been denied any real choice
in the election, will doubtless escalate its activities. It might
meet repression aimed at keeping the streets clear, using negro
violence as the pretext. But the political result in Vietnam is
hardly in doubt.

The only way I think a post-Vietnam America can continue
playing the kind of Imperialist role in South-East Asia and
elsewhere which it has acted out over the last 20-odd years, is
to bring to the fore a coalition of military men, scientists, technicians, politicians
and "realist" intellectuals who would combine a virulent anti-Communist ideology
with an unrestrained primacy of military and strategic needs. It would lead to
the gradual suppression of dissent and move the United States closer toward
the society of 1984. (Wolfgang Friedman)

What is more likely is a half-baked risotto of semi-withdrawal
and searches for new and more efficacious ways of continuing to
try and control the world system. Alternatively, a major spheres
of influence deal, which if it were to work would have to include
China. Otherwise East, South and South-East Asia could con­
tinue to be the scene of a three-way tug of war between the three
Great Powers.

We have no role in any of these scenarios, except tagging
along; saying "me too". We have tried that and it hasn't worked.
The alternative is to be a reliable, moral, law-abiding member
of international society, and to start spending rather more time
than we have hitherto, asking ourselves what kind of a country
we want here, and how we can synthesise our interests in Europe,
in America, in Australia, and in Asia, in ways which do not over­
emphasise any of these interests. We have neglected Asia —
we have neglected Australia — and over-emphasised the white
communities overseas. Let us, after Vietnam, try to redress the
balance.

Contribution of articles and comments from readers are
welcome, and should be sent to Australian Left Review,
Box A247, Sydney South Post Office 2000.

To meet printing schedules, articles are normally required
one month before date of issue—the first day of every second
month. Contribution for the discussion pages should not
exceed 1000 words.