
"Trust between nuclear armed states is impossible."

Servility to, and dependence upon, large imperialist powers combined with arrogance towards Australia's Asian neighbors, naivety, ignorance, prejudice and, at times, downright cowardice (e.g. in East Timor - W.G.) have been the distinguishing features of Australian foreign policy.

These have been more pronounced in governments of the right but were present also with Labor governments.

In the few decades in which Australian foreign policy has been articulated, it has been bi-partisan in essentials, subordinating Australia's policies to those of "great and powerful friends" who, in practice, followed their own national interests, often to the detriment of Australia.

Past policy involved this country in military intervention in Malaya, in two aggressive wars - in Korea and Indo-China - which gave it, in Asia, the status of junior partner to an imperialist aggressor and was damaging to Australian interests in the Asian Pacific area.

The long delay under US tutelage in the recognition of the People's Republic of China harmed Australia's position.

Finally, Britain's withdrawal from Asia, and the change in US policy following its debacle in Vietnam, has left Australia in complete isolation, indefensible and subject to nuclear blackmail or devastation in a war among the great powers, a position it has brought on itself by acting as host to US nuclear facilities over which it has no control.

These ideas are not new or surprising. What does occasion some surprise is that they are publicly expressed by a senior serving officer in the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Surprising because they reject, in large part, the fundamentals on which Australian foreign policy has rested for decades, and because they expose and reject assumptions and attitudes that have existed even longer.

Foreign policy for Booker is concerned with promoting national interests and, above all, with ensuring national survival. He would agree with Palmerston's dictum that a nation has no permanent friends or permanent enemies but only permanent interests.

He evaluates the policies of all nations, capitalist and socialist alike, as being determined by their perceived political and economic needs: not by ideology, loyalty, morality or sense of mission.

In other words, he assesses the world from the viewpoint of realpolitik. Geo-political factors, he believes, are decisive in determining a nation's relations with neighbors, and a nation will continue to exist only if it evolves a foreign policy based on a realistic analysis of the facts. In this respect Australia is extremely lucky to have survived to this point without having been subjected to foreign conquest for it has signally failed to develop a policy appropriate to its place in the world and its obvious needs.

By its own efforts alone, Australia, a continent with the population of a small European country, is militarily indefensible. It has alienated its neighbors by an arrogant and contemptuous racism towards Asia, and genocide against its own Aboriginal people.

These facts are widely known in the developed and developing countries of Asia, as also is its role as an aggressive satellite of British and American imperialism.

After elaborating this general thesis, Booker turns to a survey of the environment in which Australian foreign policy has to operate. His central argument is that the "great and powerful friends" in whose protection Australian governments relied in the past do not exist because, in today's world, no nation has a national defence strategy which includes the defence of Australia against attack.

"It is a harsh but true statement", he declares, "that allies should be no more trusted than enemies. In the Second World War, Churchill was prepared to contemplate the loss of Australia to the
Japanese rather than reduce the British effort in the Mediterranean, and Roosevelt concurred. In order to ensure that we caused no trouble, vital information was withheld from us by both the British and the Americans (similarly in Korea and Vietnam) ... The lesson to be learnt is that the value of an ally is only as great as its need for our support .... There can be no question but that nowadays the American government Congress, and defence authorities, no longer regard Australia as necessary to the security of the United States. No moral blame can be attributed to them for this. They have simply adjusted themselves to the strategic realities of the modern world. We should do likewise.” (p.232)

Booker analyses in some detail the role of the main Asian-Pacific powers - Japan, China, USA and USSR - and Australia's policies in relation to them. He demonstrates how Australia's dependence on US "information", and its gullible acceptance of the myth of aggressive world communism threatening Australia, deprived Australian governments of any freedom of diplomatic action.

By deliberately rejecting the realities of what was happening in China, Australia became part of the diplomatic farce of recognising Taiwan and refusing recognition to the People's Republic until forced by events to reverse its policy.

On the subject of China, he takes the view of the professional diplomat that the USA, like Australia, refused to recognise the obvious conflict between Stalin and Mao Tse-tung, and the possibilities this offered the USA and its allies to intensify the division to their own advantage.

The consequence, he believes, was to force China under Mao's leadership into an unwilling partnership with the USSR which, of course, was later disrupted by the Sino-Soviet split.

The deep roots of the Sino-Soviet division are traversed in some detail - Stalin's misleading advice, his preference for Chiang Kai Shek, his support of Wang Ming, Mao's predecessor as Party secretary and his bitter opponent, who continued his polemic against Mao from his refuge in Moscow with the approval of the CPSU.

In addition, he underlines the geo-political factors and the one-sided resumption by the USSR of Czarist privileges in Manchuria after the defeat of Japan in 1945, an action intensely resented by the Chinese Communist Party, and only reversed under strong Chinese pressure.

Moreover, he believes the border question goes much more deeply than is sometimes thought as the Chinese still demand that the USSR should publicly testify that the maritime provinces including Vladivostock are historically Chinese territory, wrongfully seized by Czarist Russia, held under unequal treaties, and retained by the USSR.

Given these geo-political factors, Booker sees little likelihood of an amicable relationship, and perhaps not even a detente, between China and the USSR.

He is aware of the great significance especially to the 'Third World' of the Chinese revolution. "In China the great achievement of the new regime has been that it has been able to restore the dignity of the common man.” (p.89)

He also believes that the future of China is now clearly defined and that within decades China will become one of the world's leading economies with corresponding military power "especially in the nuclear field”.

This, together with his belief that Japan, by the end of the century, may well be one of the two richest countries in the world and that it already has the capability to develop nuclear armaments, is the starting point for his views on Asian-Pacific strategy.

"Japan has become and seems certain for many years to remain Australia's most important trading partner. Her economic influence in Asia and the Pacific will progressively overshadow that of the United States and the individual affluence of the Japanese will not only exceed that of her mainland neighbors but most western countries including Australia.”

It might be observed in passing that, according to Mr. R.J. Hawke, the latter has already been achieved, at least as far as Australia is concerned.

It is also important to observe, as Booker remarks, that the Japanese parliament in 1975 refused to ratify the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Clearly, with its growing reliance on nuclear power stations, the day cannot be far distant when Japan "goes nuclear” in armaments as well.

The remaining element in the Asian-Pacific area is the role of the developing nations - the Indo-Chinese countries, the ASEAN block, especially Indonesia, and the nations of the Indian sub-continent.

The collapse of the Manila pact (SEATO) following the US defeat in Vietnam and the obvious irrelevance of the ANZUS Pact to Australia's security have created a situation which requires new policies. Even the parties of the right are beginning to acknowledge this.

The need was already apparent even in 1969 when the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Freeth, attempted to shift away from the doctrine of the "communist conspiracy", supposedly aiming at world domination and "sought to encourage a realistic attitude to the Soviet Union and the role it might play in the area.” (p.199)

In the event, the chickens of the long period of anti-Soviet hysteria came home to roost. The DLP led the fanatical reaction. Freeth lost his seat and ultimately the most extreme exponents of the
“communist conspiracy” myth led by Malcolm Fraser, came to power. This put an end, temporarily at least, to any realistic assessment of Australia’s real role in the region, rendered still more difficult by Fraser’s provocative intervention in the Sino-Soviet dispute and his anti-Soviet promotion of a major US presence in the Indian Ocean.

Meanwhile, it has become clearer that the “American alliance” which had remained the core of foreign policy of both Liberal and Labor governments no longer had any credibility.

“Bases in unstable regions of the world are hostages to fortune which could inhibit the United States’ own freedom of action. It has never been plausible that the Americans would defend the territory of another country at the risk of nuclear attack on their own cities. It is unthinkable that they would allow themselves to be precipitated into a nuclear war for any other reason than to defend their home territory. After Vietnam it seems certain that they would not again fight a conventional war on behalf of any other country, certainly not outside Europe.” (pp.215-216)

Meanwhile, in Asia, the realities are that each government while seeking economic and technical aid from the developed countries is pulled in three directions: by the United States and other developed capitalist countries such as Australia which seek to maintain existing regimes by a rather parsimonious aid policy, by the Soviet Union, seeking in part to strengthen its position vis-à-vis China, and by China itself with the powerful attraction of the “Asian” type of socialist revolution.

This, of course, produces some odd contradictions at times, such as the recognition by the Soviet Union of the reactionary regime of Lon Nol in Cambodia, presumably because it appeared as an alternative to a government that would expand Chinese influence. In this instance, the direction of Soviet policy coincided with that of the US and Australia against China.

In Booker’s view, the continuance of the Sino-Soviet conflict is likely to lead to a repetition of such events in other countries, making at least theoretically possible a joint policy by Australia and the Soviet Union to maintain “stability” in the area, i.e. to maintain existing regimes in power.

However, to come to the heart of the matter, Booker does not believe that Australia should exchange its dependence on the US for entry into any other bloc. Rather, it should free itself from all blocs, follow a policy of non-alignment, recognise that there are four major powers involved in the Asian-Pacific area - the USA, Japan, China and the USSR - and keep its hands free in relations with each of them in pursuance of its own national interest.

This has a special significance in relation to the ASEAN nations and above all, to Indonesia which, in Booker’s view, whatever happens in its internal politics, will be immeasurably stronger by the end of the century or even before than, than it is today.

Policy, he believes, should be determined by realpolitik which some would dub opportunism. Because there is no real alternative, Australia’s primary aim should be to maintain workable relations with all of its South-east Asian neighbors irrespective of their political systems.

In economic terms, this would involve a major expansion of economic and technical aid and a fiscal policy designed to assist them in finding markets in Australia as well as providing markets for Australia in their expanding economies.

This is the only way, he believes, for Australia to maintain its independence and assist the smaller powers of South-east Asia to avoid being absorbed into, or dominated by, one or other of the four great powers. It can do this only by a conscious and deliberate policy of non-alignment. “It should continue to be our objective to encourage the establishment of an effective regional organisation which would also concern itself with both economic and security matters; and if this were established it would be sensible for us to supply aid at the request of, and in co-operation with, whatever collective machinery were established .... our policy to all forms of aid should be vigorously impartial whether the recipient be communist, Buddhist, Moslem or mixtures of all three.” (pp.227-228)

He comments further that such an approach would require a complete abandonment of past immigration policies and the acceptance of one free from any trace of racial discrimination.

Booker sees a diminishing role for the USA in the economies of South-east Asia and a growth in the political and economic influence of China and Japan in particular. In this situation - “In order to preserve our own political and economic freedom, we will need the greatest possible flexibility and skill. We should therefore move towards the fullest possible disengagement from our present strategic ties and towards a position of neutrality in relation to the competition between the great powers.”

How is this to be achieved with our negligible military potential in a nuclear age? To “go nuclear” in a major way is beyond our resources and would provide no security in a conflict among the great powers.

“If a nuclear war were to break out the only course for Australia would be to try to stay out of it.” (p.230). But he argues that while there are United States communication facilities in Australia this would be impossible.
"The solution, however, is not to dismantle these facilities; they should be internationalised and made available to all countries without discrimination." (p. 231)

Such facilities, according to Booker, are necessary for communication, navigation, etc. in the contemporary world, and their internationalisation would give Australia "at least the beginnings of an international status of neutrality. .... Any nuclear fuel enrichment facilities ultimately built in Australia should also be placed under international supervision and its product made available without discrimination."

Australia should not be deterred from reaching such a position by any arguments about the moral commitment to existing treaties. Both Whitlam and Fraser have affirmed their allegiance to the "American Alliance". But, in reality, the alliance as a form of safeguarding Australia's security is a dead letter.

What is far more important is that Australia in its own interest needs to free itself from one international instrument in particular - the agreement on the North West Cape Naval station entered upon by the Menzies government with "exceptional folly" in 1963. "As the agreement now stands Australia could be a hostage in a nuclear war until 1988." (p.233)

To free Australia, Booker suggests a number of possible courses but preferably a major renegotiation to abolish the clause providing for a fixed term, and replacing it with a provision for either party to terminate the treaty as in the case of ANZUS, at one year's notice. "If this were part of a move towards the general internationalisation of communication facilities in Australia it would strengthen our role as a key element in the creation of a zone of peace and neutrality (pp.233-234)

Booker also comments on the maintenance of a small sophisticated force for local defence in such matters, for instance, as an attack on New Guinea, but this is peripheral to his main argument which is a call for an entirely new approach to Australian foreign policy based on non-alignment and neutrality.

How relevant are the substance and conclusions of Malcolm Booker to the left and the anti-war movement?

It is, of course, true that any foreign policy expresses the interests of the dominant classes. This does not mean, however, that conflicting views among the ruling classes should not be taken into account. Foreign policy reflects domestic policy but both are subject to the influences of the mass movement. It was the mass movement of the Moratorium which changed Labor Party policy on Viet Nam, and ultimately brought it to power. The fact that Booker openly attacks so many of the sacred cows of foreign policy makes it evident that, under pressure of changing circumstances, including tactical changes by the USA, a body of opinion is emerging in the Department of Foreign Affairs which conflicts with government policy and goes beyond anything the Labor Party has so far advanced as a realistic response to the new situation.

In different circumstances from Australia, Switzerland and Sweden have shown that a policy of genuine neutrality is practicable. The non-aligned movement which includes states with very different social systems may provide a setting in which Australia also could become neutral and/or non-aligned.

It would not be easy because it involves radical changes in public thinking on a whole range of issues, and a reversal of policies which have been part of the conventional Australian outlook for generations.

As a stepping stone to liberation from the demands of bloc strategy and as at least a partial alternative to domination by the multinationals, Booker's thesis merits serious consideration.

- W.E. GOLLAN.

For anyone interested in the brand-name differentiation game as carried on among the various ideology merchants, Network will be your cup of myth. This film about the underside of the television industry not only permits that quintessential cultural whore, Hollywood, to come on all holier-than-thou about the evils of the 21-inch screen, but enables the press lords to get in a kick or two as well - witness The Australian's serialisation of Paddy Chayevsky's screenplay in February.

You may think that devoting large chunks of "your nation's newspaper" to the furthermoreance of film culture is merely another example of the self-sacrificing service we have come to expect and love in Uncle Rupert, but those with keener noses will smell a rat once they've got past the cheese.

Press interests, like those of film are fighting a dark and dirty game for media dominance - and the more mud they can sling at the small screen, the better. Some of it may stick, with the enhanced possibility that the populace can be pried, square-eyed, from the box and gently cantilevered back into dream palaces like Hoyt's new grounded 747 in George Street, or into their new easy chairs for a