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February 2005
Domestic Disquiet?
New Zealand responses to conflict in Malaya/Malaysia 1954-1966

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of BA(Hons) in History and Political Science
University of Otago
2006

Georgina Sargison
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To my family and friends,
Thank-you for your love and support
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### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ANZAM</td>
<td>Australia, New Zealand and Malaya Area Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANZUS</td>
<td>Australia, New Zealand and the United States Treaty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJHR</td>
<td>Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAR</td>
<td>External Affairs Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOL</td>
<td>Federation of Labour</td>
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<tr>
<td>NZH</td>
<td>New Zealand Herald</td>
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<td>NZMR</td>
<td>New Zealand Monthly Review</td>
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<td>NZPD</td>
<td>New Zealand Parliamentary Debates</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEATO</td>
<td>South East Asian Treaty Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>PV</td>
<td>People's Voice</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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Introduction

New Zealand's involvement in Malaya in the 1950s and early 1960s was central to the development both of New Zealand's foreign policy after World War Two, and to the structure and development of New Zealand's peacetime armed forces. Malaya was New Zealand's major defence commitment for all of the years between the Korean and Vietnam wars. New Zealanders were involved in the Malayan Emergency, an anti-communist insurgency campaign which ran from 1948-1960. They also saw action in the Indonesian Confrontation, a dispute between Indonesia and Malaysia which saw Indonesian guerrillas raiding Malaysian territory. It was this commitment, rather than the one to South Vietnam, which shaped the role, organisation and equipment of the New Zealand armed forces from 1949-1989. The Malayan commitment was also a very important part of New Zealand's post-war foreign relations strategy, a period in which New Zealand was rethinking its position in the world and moving towards a more independent foreign policy stance. Yet despite the centrality of the conflict to New Zealand's history, the commitment of New Zealand troops to Malaya has become a forgotten conflict.

The major work on New Zealand's military involvement in Malaya and Malaysia is Christopher Pugsley's From Emergency to Confrontation: The New Zealand Armed Forces in Malaya and Borneo 1949-1966, published in 2003. As he himself elucidates in the preface, New Zealand commitments in the Malayan arena have become a forgotten chapter in New Zealand military history. Although Pugsley's work was published very recently, it is focussed primarily on the military story behind the events and the effects the commitments had on military doctrine and the development of the armed forces post-World War Two. Pugsley does not examine in any detail the reactions of the New Zealand public to the country's troop commitments or the effect they had on domestic opinion. These issues are addressed in part by the only two other works of note which are available on the Malayan conflicts. Michael Green's fourth year essay entitled "New Zealand and the Malayan Emergency: A Study in Commonwealth Obligation" was written in 1969 and Raymond Caird's Masters thesis on "New Zealand's Foreign Policy

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² Pugsley, xii.
and Malaya/Malaysia" appeared in 1970. Although both look at important issues connected with the New Zealand response to the Malayan Emergency, and Caird's thesis also examines the Confrontation, they are now somewhat out of date. Green's essay does examine public reaction to the initial announcement regarding troop commitments in 1955 but does not examine the opposition to New Zealand foreign policy, either broadly or specifically in reference to Malaya. He argues that the vast majority of the public supported the commitments in 1955. Unlike Green, Caird deals with both conflicts, but again, while he analyses broader New Zealand foreign policy and the Government's position with regard to Malaya/Malaysia, he does not delve to any great degree into public reaction to the commitments. Like Green, he simply emphasises that most citizens backed Government policy.

The gaps in the historical record about New Zealand's involvement in Malaya/Malaysia are curious, given the vast amount of information published on New Zealand's reaction both at governmental and popular level to Vietnam, a conflict which overlapped with the later stages of the Malayan commitment. In his book on New Zealand and the Vietnam War, Roberto Rabel agrees with Green and Caird, asserting that "only a few groups and individuals on the margins of political life were criticising New Zealand foreign policy in the 1950s." This dissertation seeks to examine that proposition in more detail, by focussing on the New Zealand public's opinion of the troop involvement in Malaya and Malaysia. The way the commitment was justified by the Government is examined, the role of the Labour Party is assessed and the attitude of the general public towards New Zealand's involvement is described.

The Malayan involvement raises a number of questions which deserve more attention than they have received: Why was a Cold War commitment in South East Asia acceptable in the case of Malaya but not Vietnam? Why did the Malayan campaigns not raise issues of independence in foreign policy in the way Vietnam did? Were there any sectors in society which disagreed with the Government decision to send troops overseas in peace time? The issue of public reaction to the Malayan/Malaysian commitments is important not only in itself but because it may provide a greater understanding of the Vietnam protests.

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To address these questions and broader issues, this work has focussed on newspaper editorials, both in the mainstream media and in the more left-wing press, parliamentary debates, Government archives and a number of periodicals. Some use has also been made of trade union archives, because trade unions were among the most vociferous opponents of New Zealand's troop commitments in South East Asia. There is, however, further work to be done in this area. In the following chapters, I have endeavoured to place the Malayan commitments in the broader context of New Zealand foreign policy after World War Two, both generally and with specific reference to South East Asia and Malaya/Malaysia. I have then discussed in some detail the way in which proponents of the policy reacted to it, followed by the reaction of those who opposed the policy. The stance of both the National Government and the Labour Party which was in opposition at the time of both decisions is assessed. The reactions in the mainstream media and the public sphere are examined and analysed. Finally, the groups in society who opposed the commitments are identified and the reasons behind their resistance are evaluated.

It is my contention that while the vast majority of the New Zealand public either actively supported the commitment of troops or were indifferent to it, there was also an underlying current of resistance to the troops being sent offshore to Malaya/Malaysia. This element of dissent challenges to some degree the widely held belief that New Zealand society in the 1950s was highly conservative, extremely conformist and uninterested in world affairs. The opposition to the Government's policies was largely unmentioned in the mainstream press and in the parliamentary debates and has therefore been ignored in most histories of the period. But students, trade unionists and the Communist Party staunchly opposed the sending of New Zealand troops to Malaya in 1955 and their use in 1963 and 1964 against Indonesian infiltrators, and it was from this foundation of dissent that the more mainstream opposition to the Vietnam commitment sprang. Furthermore, alongside this small but vehement opposition was a more mainstream unhappiness with American attitudes and policies in Asia. This unease is evident in both the press and in parliament, and was present long New Zealand became involved in Vietnam. The seeds of doubt and resentment which blossomed in the Vietnam protests of the later 1960s were sown during the years of the Malayan Emergency and the Indonesian Confrontation, and this fact helps to explain why the Vietnam War was an anathema to many New Zealanders who earlier supported the Malaysian commitments.
I

"Search For Security":

New Zealand foreign policy after World War II

The historiography surrounding New Zealand foreign policy focuses to a large extent upon the issue of independence. Most accounts stress that New Zealand has been closely linked with greater powers for much of its history, first with the mother country, Britain, and then with the United States. Nevertheless, writers also focus on increasing independence in New Zealand policy, dating this either from World War One or World War Two. New Zealand’s supposedly independent anti-nuclear policy of the 1980s is described as a major turning point. Work on the issue of independence in foreign policy has been published from the early 1930s and the debate is still very much alive today, both in academic literature and the public sphere. Should New Zealanders follow their allies without question in order to gain benefits and a security guarantee, or should we place our trust fully in the multi-lateral security articulated by the United Nations and stand strong to our principles? These issues appear regularly in New Zealand political debates.

Most commentators agree that for the first 100 years after New Zealand became a British colony in 1840, its various governments decided “for the most part that we had no need to assert ourselves in the world at large.”¹ In this period, New Zealand had what basically amounted to no external affairs policy at all. Some authors and policymakers suggest however that, although New Zealand’s policy was to follow Britain and think largely in imperial terms, the country did demonstrate an independent streak. Thus Ian McGibbon argues that “from before World War One New Zealand consistently followed a course of action aimed at protecting national interests ... it was a distinctive policy recognised as such by successive British Governments.”² Diplomat George Laking asserts that “there has always been a sturdy streak of independence in the New Zealand attitude to the rest of the world” and that this meant that by the early 1950s “the

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development of an independent stance consistent with New Zealand’s interests was well underway."

Most commentators acknowledge the particular problem which affects New Zealand’s ability to formulate independent foreign policy: no country — especially a small one — can be entirely independent in its policy making. Co-operation with others is essential for security and so foreign policy must walk a line between the ideal and the realistic, or, to put it in simple terms, between interest and power politics. New Zealand is constitutionally independent and free to decide on a course of action but it remains dependent on others both militarily and economically, which restricts its room for manoeuvre. As Erik Olssen explained to students in Critic in 1963, “New Zealand cannot hope to have an independent foreign policy until the economic contradictions [of New Zealand’s position] are resolved.” Until at least the 1950s, New Zealand did not really have the capacity to develop and implement foreign policy with any sort of independence.

Contributors to New Directions in New Zealand Foreign Policy suggest that foreign policy innovation and moves toward independence have tended to occur under Labour Party Governments. Nevertheless, it can be argued that there were two strands of independence within New Zealand foreign policy in the period before the second world war. The Conservative party coalitions of the 1920s and early 1930s believed in independence of interest within the imperial framework, while the Labour Party, which first came to power in 1935, supported what Malcolm McKinnon terms “independence of loyal dissent.” Until the Vietnam controversy of the late 1960s, however, external relations were almost entirely bipartisan. New Zealand’s two major political parties — National and Labour — conceived of New Zealand’s foreign policy priorities in very similar ways. Both parties, for example, regarded communism as a threat to the New Zealand way of life. In the closing years of its administration in the late 1940s, Labour

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6 H. Gold (ed.) New Directions in New Zealand Foreign Policy (Auckland: Benton Ross, 1985), 142.
was virulently anti-communist but its National successor was equally so.\(^8\) As Barrington has pointed out, primacy in New Zealand's external affairs was given to the power of interest not ideology and this lay at the heart of the continuing foreign policy consensus of National and Labour.\(^9\) The New Zealand Herald asserted happily upon the arrival of a new Labour administration in office in 1958, “foreign policy in New Zealand, to our great advantage, has nearly always been bipartisan ... the sentiments expressed are largely basic tenets with which all New Zealanders agree.”\(^10\) The basic cornerstones of New Zealand’s external policy were outlined by The Press five days later: adherence to “the United Nations Charter and its [New Zealand’s] membership of the British Commonwealth.”\(^11\)

The decision to commit troops to Vietnam in 1964 triggered the first substantial debate in New Zealand on foreign policy and brought questions about external relationships into the domestic sphere. The long standing tradition of keeping a friendly great power on side was questioned for the first time. This questioning has continued to this day – a point emphasised by both Ian McGibbon and Malcolm McKinnon. McKinnon argues the Vietnam War led to the unpleasant realisation that external relations were dominated by power considerations rather than the interplay of interest and dissent which New Zealand had used previously.\(^12\) Up until the Vietnam controversy, external affairs rarely entered into the consciousness of mainstream New Zealanders and these issues were certainly not seen as ones in which they might engage or help to shape.

Rudyard Kipling described Auckland as the city which is “last, loneliest, loveliest, exquisite and apart.”\(^13\) This poetical phrase perfectly captures New Zealand’s isolation and the subsequent sense of security felt by the majority of the population, at least until 1942. People were generally happy to let Governments decide what was needed and accepted that external events often required New Zealand to assist larger powers in conflicts far away. It was a given that New Zealand’s prosperity and security depended on the prosperity of other actors, most notably the United Kingdom. In order to retain

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\(^12\) McKinnon, 12.

the "confidence and support" of her allies, New Zealand must "join with them in
defending what they regard as their vital interests as well as our own."\(^{14}\) In 1955 there
was still the preconception among New Zealanders that periodically they must go and
fight somewhere in propitiation of a distant danger.\(^ {15}\)

The scares of the second world war brought about a slow realisation among the political
elite and then among the populace that this distant danger might not in fact not be so
distant after all. New Zealanders slowly woke to the knowledge that along with
Australians they were "precariously situated outposts of the European world in an Asian
ocean."\(^ {16}\) By the late 1950s publications and politicians were constantly reminding New
Zealanders that "geographically speaking we are Asians. Our destiny is bound up with
that of the great nations of Asia."\(^ {17}\) This new realisation was complicated by the fact that
New Zealand "historically [is] almost an off-shoot of Europe" and more particularly of
Britain – 90% of New Zealanders in the 1950s were of British descent.\(^ {18}\) History,
tradition and hard economic fact located New Zealand as a member of the Atlantic
community yet geography placed her in the South Pacific. Thus New Zealand's foreign
policy in the post-war period was shaped by the need to reconcile geography and history,
economic and strategic fact. In practice this meant an attempt to maintain the many links
that bound the United Kingdom to New Zealand, while at the same time increasing New
Zealand's involvement in Pacific and Asian affairs.\(^ {19}\)

Most commentators agree that these considerations led New Zealand to operate two
distinct foreign policies in the period from 1954-1966. The first followed traditional
lines with a British focus, while the second was an attempt to reconcile strategic reality in
the Pacific by keeping the United States on side. W.K. Jackson put this point-of-view in a
paper to the New Zealand Foreign Policy School in 1969, and in the same year, Michael
Green argued that New Zealand's post-war external policy underwent realignment.\(^ {20}\)

\(^{15}\) R.J. Caird, "New Zealand's Foreign Policy and Malaya/Malaysia, 1955-1965", MA thesis, (Christchurch,
\(^{16}\) D.M. Rae, NZPD, vol. 311, June 13, 1957, 40.
\(^{17}\) We Are Asians", Critic, vol.34, no.11, September 25, 1958, 9.
\(^{18}\) Minister of External Affairs, "Statement of New Zealand Foreign Policy", EAR, vol.4, no.5, May 1954,
19.
\(^{19}\) "New Zealand Foreign Policy", EAR, vol.5, no.7, July 1955, 50.
\(^{20}\) W.K. Jackson, "New Zealand Foreign Policy 1954-1964", paper delivered at the University of Otago
Fourth Residential School on New Zealand Foreign Policy, May 1969, 1, in Elsie Locke Papers, Arch. 346,
Christchurch City Libraries, Box 4, Folder on Foreign Policy Schools 1968-1969. Also M. R. Green, "New
Zealand and the Malayan Emergency: 'A Study in Commonwealth Obligation': An examination of the
Britain remained an important ally but the realities of New Zealand's isolation in the Pacific were acknowledged by the development of regional alliances involving the United States. Thus, the years following the war were a time of transition, when loyalty to Britain remained central to New Zealand's external relations, while at the same time the United States came gradually to play a near equal role in New Zealand security. Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s then, New Zealand's world was one of dual dependency.

Although on the surface, New Zealand might have seemed somewhat torn between two divergent interests – Britain and Europe on the one hand, and the United States and Pacific on the other, the New Zealand Government considered there to be no real conflict. As the Minister of External Affairs noted in 1954, “our foreign policy ... is based fundamentally on the continuing and harmonious cooperation of the United Kingdom, United States, France and the other powers of the great democratic coalition.” In other words, the two strands of policy identified above were actually just aspects of the same policy.

Fredrick Doidge announced to the House of Representatives in 1947 that loyalty to the motherland remained “an instinct as deep as religion” in New Zealand. It took much more than the fall of Singapore to break this allegiance. The second world war might have demonstrated Britain was a declining power, but New Zealanders remained hopeful that Britain would recover her situation and everything could continue as before. Ashby and McKinnon both acknowledge that New Zealanders’ sentimental loyalty to Britain strongly affected the ways in which the institutions of the New Zealand Government

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reasons behind and the implications of New Zealand’s 1955 contribution towards the Malayan Emergency” (Wellington: Victoria University, 1969), 6, in M.A. McKinnon Papers, MS-Papers-7115-04, Alexander Turnbull Library.
21 Green, 6.
23 Phrase is commonly used by writers discussing New Zealand foreign policy, for example W.D. McIntyre, “From Dual Dependency to Nuclear Free” in G.W. Rice (ed.) Oxford History of New Zealand (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992), 529-532.
formulated their policies. This work agrees with that thesis. While British power had failed the Dominion in the war, the myriad of political, economic, cultural and personal links between New Zealand and the mother country remained intact. Britain continued to have a major political role and military presence in Asia and many in New Zealand felt that the close relationship they had with Britain gave New Zealand greater security and greater scope for an independent position than it would have standing alone. Furthermore, despite the decline of British power, the British were still able to provide New Zealand with considerable material rewards. In 1955, for example, Britain was still the market for half New Zealand's exports. New Zealand policymakers hoped that by protecting and continuing their intimate relationship with the United Kingdom, they could protect a market still so crucial for New Zealand's economic livelihood. The External Affairs Review claimed in 1960 that "the economic links with the United Kingdom, New Zealand's best customer, remain strong." The rewards which the continued association with Britain and the Commonwealth offered also included security benefits. Macky argues that New Zealand had far more standing with the United States as part of a British community which was America's closest ally than it would have done alone. The continued association was also a matter of necessity, because although the United States might have the power, it did not necessarily have that political will which New Zealand Governments sought. American attention was focussed primarily on Europe and did not seem to have as much consideration for the requirements of a small nation in the Pacific.

Nevertheless, as Alistair McIntosh pointed out in the mid-1940s, the "United States strength will be decisive in the Pacific for at least the foreseeable future." New Zealand really had no other option but to create an alliance with the Americans in order to ensure

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26 McKinnon, 10-11; M.S. Ashby, "Under Southern Skies: Sources of New Zealand Foreign Policy, 1943-1957", PhD thesis (Wellington; Victoria University, 1989), 244.
27 Barrington, 28.
28 New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, New Zealand Foreign Policy with Special Reference to South-East Asia (Wellington: the Institute, 1968), 17.
32 Macky, 143-144.
33 W.K. Jackson, 5.
the security of her peoples. The communist victory in China in 1949 emphasised the Asian threat to New Zealand and the need for cooperation with the Americans. It brought back memories of the fall of Singapore and the Japanese island-hopping which had left the New Zealand populace in shock and fear in 1942. The signing of the Australia, New Zealand and United States Pact (ANZUS) in 1954 was thus a formal recognition that Britain could no longer defend New Zealand. There was still hesitancy in New Zealand about taking such a significant step, due to the strength of New Zealand's ties to Britain.35 But as W.H. Oliver suggests, ANZUS did not necessarily mean any weakening of the British connection but rather "a cool calculation that implicitly distinguishes between loyalty and security."36 It was the "close Anglo-American alliance [which made] New Zealand's adherence to the United States camp not only possible but also acceptable to New Zealand public opinion."37 New Zealand accepted the need for American involvement in its security arrangements but strove to incorporate this new dependence into its existing dependence on Britain and the Commonwealth.

Accordingly, New Zealand foreign policy after world war two evolved into a complex web of alliances. These included not only membership of ANZUS, but also of the South East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in 1955, and of ANZAM from 1949 (Australia, New Zealand and Malaya Area). New Zealand, was of course, also a member of the United Nations (UN) and of the Commonwealth of Nations. The central theme was, therefore, effective alliance management. Policy-makers were able to cope with the dramatic changes in the international environment by focusing on one key principle – New Zealand's interests were best advanced by the closest possible relationship with stronger powers in which New Zealand had confidence.38 In 1958 the New Zealand Herald decreed that "security pacts [were] the basis of New Zealand national security" and that in current circumstances, New Zealand could not afford to give "less than whole-hearted support to accepted regional alliances".39 The External Affairs Department recognised that New Zealand security depended on others: "our present policy concerning Pacific security which rests basically on alliance with the United States, Australia and the United

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35 Macky, 14.
37 Memorandum (by Jermyn), "The Essentials of a Policy Towards Asia", quoted in Barrington, 278.
38 Barrington, 35.
Kingdom. It can be assumed that the ‘alliance’ itself is not in question. The ANZUS Treaty acknowledged two fundamental and widely accepted facts of New Zealand’s position: Australian-New Zealand interdependence and Australian-New Zealand reliance on the United States for security. SEATO was however, just as attractive to New Zealand, because it was a multilateral alliance focusing on collective security – something that was close to the hearts of most New Zealand policy makers – and, in the words of Thomas MacDonald, the External Affairs minister, it had “the great advantage that the United Kingdom is a member.” Another notable effect of the alliance-based foreign policy was the tightening of the relationship between New Zealand and Australia. By 1956 Australia was the only other country party to all three agreements – ANZUS, ANZAM and SEATO – at the heart of New Zealand defence policy.

A Dunedin student in 1958 criticised the lack of independence in New Zealand’s external affairs, claiming that “New Zealand’s Foreign Policy’s main aim is to avoid offending either Britain or the United States.” In fact, that was exactly what the policy aimed to achieve. New Zealand never wanted to alienate either of its two protectors for fear that the country would be left defenceless in the event of an Asian communist invasion. Policymakers viewed the relationship between New Zealand’s two great power allies as crucial to New Zealand security, and they invested significant energy into ensuring the relationship between Britain and America remained close. The Press summed up this attitude stating that all Commonwealth countries “firmly believe that nothing must be done which will draw Britain away from the United States.”

New Zealand administrators were fully cognisant that although their two protectors were close allies, they did have major differences of opinion. Walter Nash noted that “the difference between the known objectives of the United States and of the United Kingdom is very small, but the methods of reaching these objective are a perpetual source of tension ... the patience and tolerance and the consequential delay, of the United Kingdom are causing trouble, but I believe both will win through to their

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50 New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, New Zealand Foreign Policy with Special Reference to South-East Asia, 15.
42 Green, 6.
43 “We are Asians”, Critic, vol. 43, no. 11, September 25, 1958, 9.
44 Caird, 6.
objectives – peace, independence and cooperation.” Thomas Webb echoed this opinion when he expressed his belief that the two countries “can continue to co-operate in the full realisation that although they may play different roles at the moment they are at one with each other and with all free nations in working for peace and security.”

New Zealand policy makers were keen for Britain and America to remain close because it reduced the possibility, always in the background when pursuing a dual dependency policy, of having to choose between its two allies. This dilemma is characterised in the literature as an ‘ANZAC’ dilemma, affecting as it did both New Zealand and Australia. Problems arose when American and British policies diverged, as they did for example over recognition of Communist China. F.L.W. Wood claims “the dilemma failed to develop into a predicament” because both countries were largely willing to take a tolerant attitude towards the other’s policies. There were certainly periods of awkwardness for New Zealand when they were forced to make a choice – the Suez Crisis of 1956 was one such occasion – but these differences were short-lived, largely because the United States had little inclination to force New Zealand to relinquish ties with Britain. A pattern emerged whereby the United States would initiate any Western response to a perceived communist threat and ask for New Zealand support. They accepted, however, that New Zealand’s response would be strongly influenced by the British response to the American lead. Accordingly, the External Affairs Department claims “it is doubtful whether the alternative policies of seeking support from either the United Kingdom or the United States, so often put forward as a fundamental dilemma of New Zealand policy really exist.” For the most part the major difficulty of the dual dependency policies was pursuing them without causing offence to public opinion which was warmly loyal to the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. The two strands of policy may not have been well integrated but significant problems never developed because of the close relationship between America and Britain.

New Zealand foreign policy after World War Two certainly underwent a major realignment, with the country finally realising that it needed to deal with the outside

49 Macky, 113.
50 Macky, 41.
51 Memorandum (by Jermyn), ‘The Essentials of a Policy Towards Asia’, quoted in Barrington, 278.
52 Barrington, 279.
world directly. New Zealand policy-makers, however, were still very aware of the fact that New Zealand was a tiny country on the edge of a hostile ocean and therefore needed more powerful countries to act as protectors. The period 1954-1966 was one in which New Zealand pursued two distinct foreign policies. The first was based on the traditional links with the mother country, Britain, while the second was predicated on security imperatives and linked New Zealand with America. For most of the period, the British link remained the most powerful and influential of the two associations, but this started to alter in the 1960s. New Zealand’s traditional disengagement with Asia could no longer be maintained and New Zealand was catapulted onto the South East Asian scene.
II

"Not the Far East but the Near North":

New Zealand foreign policy in South East Asia

Because of its close links with Britain and Europe, New Zealand had shown little interest in its Asian neighbours in the years before World War Two. What engagement New Zealand had with South and South East Asia prior to 1939 was strictly qualified by the Dominion's imperial connections. The concept of the area being crucial to New Zealand security dates back to the 1920s, when the Singapore Naval Base was being constructed. It was from this base that Britain planned to defend New Zealand and Australia in case of conflict. At the Imperial Conference in 1930, the Prime Minister, G.W. Forbes, specifically and at length reiterated New Zealand's need for the Singapore base as insurance, and this insurance policy theme came to the fore in the 1950s. It was, however, the British presence in South East Asia which was seen as essential to New Zealand, not the Asian countries themselves. While New Zealand did have a number of small military commitments in the Malayan area prior to 1955, including air force units stationed there during World War Two, these received only spasmodic interest from the Government and the press, and did not represent any coherent New Zealand foreign policy with regards to the region. Even in the early 1950s, New Zealand had little interest in Asia, despite the lessons which the war had made obvious. What interest there was in New Zealand circles regarding Asia developed out of a desire to maintain post-war security alliances. The fact that New Zealand's military contact with Asia came before any diplomatic or trade contact is indicative of the high level of disinterest in the area.

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3 Caird, 26-27.
5 Pugsley, 4.
Nevertheless, during the 1950s New Zealand gradually became more and more involved in South East Asia, despite the best intentions to remain aloof from the Asian masses. Barrington asserts that loyalty to the Commonwealth, combined with a sense of national interest, involved New Zealand in the very region from which it had hoped to remain apart.  

6 The importance of New Zealand’s commitment to the Commonwealth cannot be understated. As Foss Shanahan, a senior New Zealand diplomat asserted “one of our [New Zealand’s] primary, if not the first objectives of our foreign policy is to ensure a strong and stable Commonwealth.” 7 This abiding loyalty to the Commonwealth of Nations is a thread that runs right through the period. It was recognised even in the New Zealand relationship with the United States. The ANZUS treaty had a clause within it which stated “that Australia and New Zealand as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations have military obligations outside as well as within the Pacific Area.” 8 It was initially an adjunct to the absolute loyalty to Britain but as time passed and the relationship between the mother country and its colonies needed to change to suit the altered world, New Zealand’s loyalty to Britain was re-directed towards the Commonwealth. MP Tom Skinner got the relationship exactly right when he claimed that New Zealand’s “first duty is to the Commonwealth … New Zealand is prepared to put her whole weight behind the Commonwealth at any point in time.” 9 By the late 1950s and certainly by the 1960s, it was through the Commonwealth association that New Zealand justified its military assistance to countries in South East Asia such as Malaya. The Commonwealth retained its centrality to New Zealand foreign policy even as the links to the United Kingdom receded, because the Commonwealth organisation gave a small country like New Zealand a measure of independence from the United States when the latter’s Cold War policies did not accord with New Zealand national interest. 10

New Zealand’s national interests and Commonwealth concerns are thus are the keys to understanding the growing importance of South East Asia in New Zealand’s external affairs. The Commonwealth and the British connection were central to the change in

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7 F. Shanahan, Memorandum to Minister of External Affairs, “New Zealand Policy towards South and South East Asia” August 11957, 8, EA-1-W1784-58/94/1-1, National Archives, Wellington.
10 Subritzky, 195
focus from the Middle East realm to the Asian one. From 1949 onwards, New Zealand was involved in a regional defence arrangement known as ANZAM. Initially, this was seen as a naval and air contingency planning arrangement for the protection of convoys through New Zealand, Australian and Malayan waters but inevitably it also covered security problems in the British territories of South East Asia, principally Malaya. Although New Zealand was not directly affected and remained unwilling to get involved in Asia, it became a party to military discussions regarding the situation. It was from this platform that New Zealand became directly involved in South East Asia and more specifically in Malaya in 1955. The despatch of the Special Air Service Squadron and the transfer of a bomber and transport squadron was the New Zealand response to the Communist Emergency in Malaya. It was a response that was very much in the context of a foreign policy that incorporated a sturdy maintenance of the British link matched by a reorientation in defence thinking towards faith in regional alliances. It was not a response that demonstrated any serious concern for the wellbeing of the states in South East Asia.

Over the following two decades, New Zealand was involved in a number of conflicts in South East Asia. This work will examine New Zealand’s role during the Malayan Emergency from 1955, and during the Confrontation between Malaysia and Indonesia from 1962. New Zealand politicians claimed that the Malayan Emergency “was one of the worst periods of civil strife in a Commonwealth country in post-war years.” The campaign against the communists in Malaya, however, was never a full-scale war. It can best be described as terrorist action, involving a prolonged series of coordinated murders and acts of intimidation rather than extensive military manoeuvres. The Emergency began in 1948 when the Malayan Communist Party decided on a policy of armed struggle. The Malaya Races Liberation Army (MRLA) embarked on a three stage strategy to wrest control of the Government from the British colonial authorities. On 18 June 1948, the federal Government declared a state of emergency in response a number of strikes and murders. This marked the beginning of a 12 year campaign which pitted the MRLA against the Malayan Government and its security forces, and against British,

\[11\] Pugsley, 8.
\[12\] Green, 3.
\[14\] Green, 8.
\[15\] Pugsley, 12.
Malay and Commonwealth troops. By 1951 the MRLA numbered around 8000 and was at its peak in terms of threatening the Malayan countryside.

After 1954 the Emergency ceased to be a national threat as the terrorists had lost the initiative. By 1955 when New Zealand troops were sent to Malaya, there was no question that the Commonwealth and Federation of Malaya forces were winning the war against the communist insurgency. According to Prime Minister Sidney Holland, the MRLA had been drawn back to the “deep jungle that covers a large part of Malaya and they have a vast are in which to live. To hunt for them in their jungle hiding places is like searching for a needle in a haystack.” Under the strong rule of General Sir Gerald Templar, the British High Commissioner and Director of Operations in Malaya, the Communist jungle menace was greatly reduced, though – like the Mau Mau in Kenya – it was difficult to root out altogether. As the New Zealand Herald declared, “the communist menace lurks still in the jungle ... active armed terrorists are greatly reduced in numbers and influence but await opportunities for mischief.” Accordingly, New Zealand soldiers did have some real work to do, although Malaya as a whole was no longer in danger.

Sections of New Zealand opinion recognised that the problem in Malaya was not simply a military one. F.L.W. Wood pointed out in 1954 that the ‘terrorists’ could only be eliminated by curing the political and economic tensions on which they lived. This was echoed by the Leader of the Opposition Walter Nash, who in his preparation for the debate in Parliament, noted he must affirm that the problem in Malaya was 75 percent political and 25 percent military. For the most part however, what public attention there was on the crisis focussed on the military dimension.

The Emergency ended in 1960 and the New Zealand press declared that “with wise guidance from Britain and the resolute help of Commonwealth forces in the field, the

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14 Pugsley, 13-14.
15 Royal Airforce, Malayan Emergency, 3, quoted in Pugsley, 15.
16 Green, 8.
21 “Malayan Background”, March 24, 1955, Nash Papers, 132-0154-38/14/2, National Archives, Wellington. The Press also believed the problem was mainly political: see “Malaya”, The Press, June 1, 1954, 10.
Malayan people have won a notable victory over international communism.\footnote{24} New Zealand had some justification for feeling proud, the Malayan prime-minister noting that “Commonwealth troops had saved Malaya.”\footnote{25} Although the New Zealand armed forces were small numerically, they had certainly played a part in the ending of the Emergency in their first major military deployment both in South East Asia and during peace-time.\footnote{26}

The Federation of Malaysia, comprising the states of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah (North Borneo) was declared on September 16, 1963. The Federation was opposed by both Indonesia and the Philippines and the Confrontation was an undeclared war initiated by Indonesia in an attempt to destabilise it between 1962 and 1966. From New Zealand’s point-of-view, what happened with regards to the Indonesian-Malaysian situation was what they least desired – direct opposition from Indonesia not simply to Malaysia but to a continuing British influence in the area.\footnote{27} President Sukarno feared Malaysia as a competitor in South East Asian power politics and was determined to “crush” the federation.\footnote{28} By repeated small scale raids across narrow waters, Sukarno hoped to provoke Malaysia into some act of retaliation outside its territory. In this event, Sukarno would have claimed he was the victim of imperialist aggression and would have launched a major offensive.\footnote{29} The conflict involved largely British and Malaysian forces, with contributions from Australia and New Zealand in operations on both the Malayan Peninsula and along the frontier between the North Borneo territories and Indonesian Kalimantan on the island of Borneo.\footnote{30}

The superpower attitudes and relationships with regard to the Confrontation were somewhat more problematic than they had been during the time of the Emergency. This was half a decade further into the Cold War and attitudes has hardened significantly. The Kennedy administration in America supported in principle the idea of a greater Malaysia, but regarded Indonesia as far more important in the balance of the Cold War. America feared that an outbreak of hostilities would serve only to push Indonesia into the communist camp. The United States had been attempting to bring neutralist states such as Indonesia further under the American umbrella and this situation was the litmus test

\footnote{24} “Malayan Emergency Ends”, NZH, August 1, 1960, 6.\footnote{25} P.G. Connolly, NZPD, vol. 323, August 10, 1960, 1368\footnote{26} Pugsley, 100.\footnote{27} Caird, 106.\footnote{28} L. Moggie, “Revolt in Brunei”, Critic, vol. 39, no. 2, March 27, 1963, 7.\footnote{29} “Flagrant Indonesian Aggression”, NZH, September 5, 1964, 6.\footnote{30} Pugsley, xi.
of that policy. The policy infuriated the British, creating at times considerable tension in
the Anglo-American alliance. This in turn created difficulties for New Zealand and
Australia. The British wanted ANZAC troops deployed in Borneo, both to share the
burden with British troops and as a way of involving the US in the conflict. Washington,
on the other hand, attempted to use ANZUS as a means of controlling Australasian
involvement, thereby controlling British policy in the process.31

This obviously led to problems for New Zealand and Australia. The result was that the
two countries undertook a great deal of double diplomacy over the issue, trying to keep
on-side with both America and Britain, and supporting Malaysia while remaining on
good terms with Indonesia.32 As in the previous West Guinea dispute, New Zealand
made every attempt possible to maintain cordial relations with Indonesia while clearly
disputing their aspirations.33 In carrying out policies regarding the Indonesian
confrontation, the Holyoake Government was restricted by the very different attitude in
Canberra. Both Governments agreed that a common response was essential. In reality
this meant that New Zealand waited to send troops as the Australians opposed such a
move. In January 1964, Holyoake agreed that New Zealand troops could play a greater
role on the border to allow British and Malaysian infantry units to be released for service
in Borneo.34 By mid-August the Confrontation had escalated to such a level, direct New
Zealand involvement was impossible to avoid. By September 2nd 1964, New Zealand
troops were involved in counter-infiltrations duties in Malacca, dealing with Indonesian
paratroops landings.35

Thus by 1969, the whole shape of New Zealand's foreign relations with Asia had
changed. As diplomat George Laking claimed, it had taken New Zealand a "decade and
more to come to terms with it [Asia] and to move into relations with most of the
countries of the area."36 At the beginning of the 1950s, most New Zealanders were, in
the words of Rev. Allan Brash, "deplorably ignorant about our Asian neighbours" and

31 J. Subritzsky, Confronting Sukarno: British, American, Australian and New Zealand Diplomacy in the Malaysian-
32 Caird, 111.
(Auckland, University of Auckland, 1994), 217.
34 Pugsley, 198.
35 Pugsley, 199-212.
36 Extract from speech by G.R. Laking to the Institute of International Affairs, "International Problems
furthermore did “not care about our ignorance.” The Department of External Affairs noted that New Zealanders tended to “be parochial and unused to dealing with people whose backgrounds and traditions are utterly different from ours.” The military commitment to Malaya, along with New Zealand’s involvement with the Colombo Plan aid programme in South and South East Asia, changed this insular outlook to some degree. As Pugsley asserts, these commitments introduced a microcosm of New Zealand society to the countries and cultures of Asia.

This change was driven by the realities of the Cold War and its effect on New Zealand’s strategic outlook. Although initially New Zealand’s involvement in Asia was engendered by its loyalty to Britain and the Commonwealth rather than by any concern for the welfare of her Asian neighbours, the result was the same – New Zealand’s future became intimately linked with that of South East Asia. Diplomat Foss Shanahan argued in 1957 that New Zealand was already “deeply involved, militarily, politically and economically in Asia.” While this was perhaps an exaggeration at that time, by 1966 the statement certainly held true. As Keith Holyoake told the press in 1969, New Zealand had carried out “our moral and our treaty obligations” in South East Asia. South East Asia was where all of New Zealand’s major defence commitments lay and the area which New Zealand defence policy was geared to serve. By 1969 New Zealand had had troops in Malaya and Singapore continuously for fourteen years. It had become very clear to all concerned that New Zealand Government’s considered that South East Asia was New Zealand’s front line of defence; it was stated policy that “we must be ready to meet military danger where it exists and not wait for it to creep inexorably closer to our own

37 Rev. Allan Brash, quoted in “South East Asia – 'tis folly to be wise”, Critic, vol. 33, no. 9 July 18, 1957, 7.
39 The Colombo Plan was an aid programme designed in the mould of the Marshall Plan in Europe. New Zealand was particularly involved in the technical aspect of the plan and hundreds of South East Asian students studied at New Zealand tertiary institutions from 1951 onwards. For further discussion of this see: G. Sargison, 'Sa7's in a Cold Climate: Colombo Plan Students at the University of Otago” in Culture of Change: Beginning at the University of Otago, (Dunedin, Departements of History and English, 2006), 95-117. Also, Department of External Affairs, “New Zealand and the Colombo Plan: Its Origins and Establishment” in New Zealand and the Colombo Plan: reprint of articles from EARs 1962, (Wellington: Department of External Affairs, 1962). Also Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, The Colombo Plan at 50: A New Zealand perspective, (Wellington: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2001).
40 Pugsley, xii.
41 F. Shanahan, Memo for Minister of External Affairs, “New Zealand Policy to South and South East Asia”, August 1 1957, 3, EA-1-W1784-58/94/1-1, National Archives, Wellington.
It was New Zealand’s commitment to the British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve in Singapore and Malaya from 1955 that had the defining influence on the evolution of all three services post Second World War, shaping their role, organisation and equipment. Militarily speaking, New Zealand was fully committed in South East Asia by the 1960s.

New Zealand’s commitment to South East Asia had also been demonstrated through increasing diplomatic and trade ties. In the 1950s, New Zealand had no diplomatic posts in South East Asia and was therefore reliant on the United Kingdom for intelligence about the area. The Prime Minister, Sidney Holland pointed out that New Zealand had depended on British services for years and paid nothing towards it. By 1955 he felt that “we are sufficiently grown up to undertake a little of our own diplomatic work, working alongside the United Kingdom.”

This belief that it was time for New Zealand to consider diplomatic representation grew once New Zealand troops were stationed in Malaya in 1955. As the *New Zealand Herald* pointed out, “closer contacts are all the more useful since New Zealanders are even now engaged in operations in that country [Malaya] and New Zealand is making contributions to the Colombo Plan.”

In 1955 Foss Shanahan was appointed as the New Zealand Commissioner in South East Asia, based in Singapore. On arrival in Singapore Shanahan made an announcement to the public which stated that the establishment of his post was an indication of New Zealand’s desire to keep in touch with South East Asian events, and that it was “particularly valuable that our first formal link with the countries of this area should be a Commonwealth one.” In 1956 he became the First New Zealand Ambassador to Thailand and in 1957 he was cross-accredited to the Federation of Malaya. Shanahan was succeeded in his post by New Zealand’s first Maori to be sent overseas on a diplomatic posting, Charles Bennett, who arrived in 1958.

It was from this modest beginning that an extensive network of New Zealand embassies was established across the Asia-Pacific.

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46 Pugsley, xi.
48 “Diplomat from Malaya”, *NZH*, March 17, 1958, 8.
52 Letter from A. McIntosh to F. Shanahan, September 9, 1958, found in McGibbon, *Unofficial Channels*, 255.
In 1954 South East Asia simply was not a factor in New Zealand’s economic activities. By 1966 this had changed to a degree, partly because of Britain’s announcement in 1961 of its desire to join the EEC and partly because of the effect of increased contact with the region. New Zealand policy in Asia was at least partially driven by economic considerations, in that it was in New Zealand’s interest to “see conditions of relative stability prevail so that we can live and trade with our Asian neighbours without the constant alarms of wars and upheavals.” New Zealand and Malaya offered each other useful markets and diplomats hoped to reinforce the close military relationship the two countries had by creating economic linkages. This policy came to fruition in February 1961 when the Government of New Zealand signed a trade agreement with the Government of the Federation of Malaya. This is noteworthy because it was the first of many such connections and South East Asia is now a central New Zealand trading partner. South East Asian countries are now among the top twenty destinations for New Zealand exports, Malaysia itself being ranked at sixteen.

By 1966 therefore New Zealand’s relationship with South East Asia had changed dramatically from one of distance and avoidance to one of deep entanglement. We must now look at how New Zealand politicians and public reacted to this change in New Zealand foreign policy and military commitments.

53 Laking “International Problems confronting New Zealand”.
III

"The primary purpose of our foreign policy is to preserve the peace, independence and freedom of our people":

Support for New Zealand's troop commitments in Malaya/Malaysia

The motivation to send troops to Malaya was very much a British one. Keith Holyoake announced in 1955 that the transfer of troops from the Middle East to Asia was designed to relieve the heavy defence burden borne by the United Kingdom in South East Asia, an area where New Zealand had vital interests and important obligations. The New Zealand press recognised that the area was of strategic importance to New Zealand due to “Asian events and new kinds of warfare.” Other politicians echoed the need to support Britain and the Commonwealth. P.G. Connolly spoke for many in the House of Representatives when he claimed that “we must stand shoulder to shoulder and show that we have faith in our great Commonwealth, and that if necessary we shall defend its ideals which form the basis of our great democracy.”

When justifying the change in focus from the Middle East to South East Asia, the New Zealand Government focussed on the need to relieve the defence burden borne by Britain. In the mid-1950s, it was recognised that the time had passed when countries such as New Zealand could have a free ride in matters of security. The time had come for New Zealand to assist Britain in the defence of the country. New Zealand, it was agreed, must “pull our weight in the British boat.” The sentiment of the House of Representatives was very much that New Zealand was “willing and anxious” to relieve the pressure on the United Kingdom. Even members of the Opposition recognised the need to assist the mother country in her time of need. Mr Rae claimed New Zealand “should do all that we can to meet the request of the Prime Minister of Britain ... when we realise the tremendous economic strain being placed on Britain ... we must accept we

could do a little more." This was especially pertinent given that Malaya was viewed as an area which directly affected New Zealand security. The basic motivation behind this shift in global focus was thus as simple as Mr. Holland asserted: "we have been invited to undertake ... a very special duty ... to form a cold war front in Malaya ... We are going to help Britain draw that line in a British country." Thus, in its simplest form, this supposedly major change in New Zealand's foreign policy was actually no change at all. As always, "loyalty to and cooperation with the United Kingdom has been the guiding principle in New Zealand's foreign relations," so there was really no question about it: New Zealand would go where Britain led.

By the time of the Indonesian Confrontation in 1962, this absolute reliance on British leadership had receded to some degree. Nevertheless, residual traces of the paradigm were still visible. When discussing the Indonesian threat, Holyoake mentioned both New Zealand's relationship with Malaysia, and that New Zealand should recall that "the British Government has recently deployed additional forces in the area." In other words, New Zealand needed to increase her contribution to the defence of Malaysia because the British had done so.

New Zealand's continuing loyalty to Britain, combined with its determination to support the mother country whenever it requested assistance, meant that the implications and details of the policies were not well understood either in New Zealand or Australia. ANZAM itself was essentially a British strategy which was merely transported wholesale into New Zealand terms. It therefore emerged that no one really grasped the ramifications of the commitment to either ANZUS or SEATO. This vagueness continued right through the 1950s and early 1960s, with New Zealand politicians emphasising particular aspects of the policy, depending on the conditions of the time. When asked directly about the overall situation in Malaya, they tended to fudge the answers.

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7 D.M. Rae, NZPD, vol. 309, August 9, 1956, 941.
8 This is discussed in many places, including "New Zealand Help in Malaya", The Press, March 1, 1955, 12. Also mentioned in "New Zealand force for Malaya", The Press, March 26, 1955, 6; "Into 1955", New Zealand Truth, January 5, 1955, 14.
13 Examples include: "Defence Commitment to Malaysia", The Press, September 3, 1963, 12. Caird, 50-52, discusses this lack of clarity in New Zealand Government pronouncements regarding the deployment.
Reinforcing New Zealand's desire to assist Britain in Malaya was the Commonwealth association. Michael Stenson argued in the *New Zealand Listener* in 1970 that the most significant assumption behind the commitment of troops to Malaysia after 1969 was the belief that New Zealand was morally bound to help friendly Commonwealth neighbours. The same argument can be applied to New Zealand's contributions from 1955 onwards. The Commonwealth connection was particularly pertinent during the Indonesian Confrontation when dependence upon the British lead had somewhat receded. Malaya had become a member of the Commonwealth upon gaining independence in 1957 and the new Federation of Malaysia followed suit. Thus, as far as New Zealand was concerned, Malaysia was "a stable and progressive member of the Commonwealth; as such, it deserves, and will have New Zealand's full support." In virtually every statement made by a Government minister regarding the crisis between Malaysia and Indonesia, the ties of the Commonwealth were alluded to. Defence Minister Dean Eyre made the connection clear in 1964 when he announced that "as a member of the Commonwealth we have a moral duty apart from any other duties to assist Malaysia especially in counteracting outside force." The reaction of members of the Commonwealth to the Federation on Malaysia was used as a measure by New Zealand to demonstrate that even countries very sensitive to notions of colonialism and imperialism "accepted, nay even welcomed the Prime Minister of Malaysia to the Commonwealth Association." Therefore in New Zealand eyes, Indonesia did not have a leg to stand on when accusing Malaysia of being an imperialist federation. The equation was simple: if Malaysia was threatened to the extent that they needed outside support, New Zealand "would not stand idly aside."

New Zealand's post-war foreign policy was also coloured by its attitude to communism. David McCraw argues that because of its dislike of communism, New Zealand needed little encouragement from its allies to become involved in Asia. After the war, which had seen the Pacific threatened by the military might of Japan, New Zealand continued to fear Asian aggression, and this fear was exacerbated when China became communist.

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19 D. McCraw, quoted in Macky, 62.
in 1949, New Zealand became very wary of the possibility of communist expansion. “We are faced with a grave and ever present danger”, Minister of External relations Thomas MacDonald announced in 1955, “from the expansionist ambitions of the new communist imperialism which is seeking to dominate the world.”

The fear of communism was ever present in New Zealand society at all levels throughout the 1950s and 1960s. As New Zealand Truth reported in 1955, “New Zealand can no longer hesitate to take part in active measures to discourage communist expansion southward from Asia.”

The belief that New Zealand must take an active part in containing communism was reinforced by the knowledge that if the country did not assist, it could again face being isolated and threatened in an alien and hostile region, out of the reach of its superpower protectors. Dean Eyre outlined the rationale for New Zealand involvement in Asia perfectly in 1963:

> While we in New Zealand are vitally interested in the peace and security of South East Asia, let us not delude ourselves that New Zealand is primarily there to preserve the peace in the South West Pacific; we are there to preserve the peace and security of New Zealand … the primary purpose of our foreign policy is to preserve the peace, independence and freedom of our people.

This fear of communist expansion was heightened in New Zealand due to geographic realities. The London Times pointed out that it was natural that Australia and New Zealand should envisage a greater contribution to the defence of Malaya and Singapore, as it was the next step in their own security. Commentators such as Reverend Brash warned of the potential danger if New Zealanders buried their heads “in the fertile soil of this land of milk and honey”, instead of opening their eyes to threats from the communist north.

Fresh in the minds of the New Zealand public, politicians and diplomats was the speed of the Japanese advance towards New Zealand in World War Two. It was widely thought that during the war “New Zealand was one of the prizes for the conquerors from the North.” By the 1950s, this memory, along with fear of communism, was enough to provoke policymakers into believing the formation of a security system for South East Asia was a matter of real importance to New Zealand.

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The domino theory was a paradigm which gained mainstream acceptance in the Western world during the Cold War. New Zealand policymakers had their own twist on the domino theory, commonly referred to as the “stepping stones thesis”. This thesis suggested that the “Malay Peninsula points like a finger in our direction with Indonesia and Australia as convenient stepping stones on the way ... it is only a matter of time before New Zealand ... [is] directly threatened.” The thesis flowed through to the concept that it was better to defend New Zealand from communist aggression somewhere away from the country itself. Thomas MacDonald asserted that Malaya was important to the Commonwealth and successful communist advances there would make it difficult to resist communist advances elsewhere. This argument was also known as the forward defence argument. E.H. Halsted concluded in the House that “Malaya is the cornerstone of any defence system in South East Asia; for our Commonwealth, Malaya is the front line.” While he was the only member of Parliament to dwell on the threat the Malayan Emergency posed to New Zealand security for any length of time, the majority of his colleagues agreed that by having troops in Malaya, New Zealand was aiding the struggle against communism.

This pervasive fear of Asian aggression came to the forefront during the Indonesian Confrontation. The moral duty conferred by the Commonwealth association was made much more important due to an awareness that New Zealand’s strategic self interest was at stake much more directly than it had been during the Malayan Emergency. New Zealand newspapers pointed out that no hesitation was possible: “Indonesia must be stopped.” The New Zealand Herald reasoned that President Soekarno had already swallowed West New Guinea by exactly the same processes he was using against Malaysia. Therefore any “impression that New Zealand and Australia are hedging on their obligations will serve only to convince Soekarno that they will seek further excuses as he steps up his aggression.” The public was also quick to recognise this threat. Letters to the New Zealand Herald urged New Zealanders to open their eyes to the spectacle of an imperialist dictator securing hegemony on New Zealand’s front door.

28 Caird, 59.
30 E.H. Halsted, quoted in M.R. Green, 6.
They pointed out that if New Zealand "held back now where shall we look for help if the hordes of Mao and Soekarno march south?" The country was "conscious of the vital importance of the security of Malaysia" to New Zealand. These attitudes, along with the moral obligations of the Commonwealth and the defence pacts in which New Zealand was associated, meant there was no other viable option open to New Zealand other than defending Malaysia to the best of her ability.

Government policy was therefore straightforward. New Zealand had to play a role in defending South East Asia and Malaya/Malaysia was the ideal location for this defence to take place. The policy was premised on British and Commonwealth ties and reinforced by the fear of both Asian aggression and communist expansion. What though was the reaction of the Labour Party, which was in opposition when this policy was first announced in 1955 but was itself in power from 1957 until 1960? The Australian Labour Party, also in opposition at the time of the Malayan Emergency, vehemently opposed the commitment of Australian troops to the conflict but the New Zealand Labour Party took a very different road.

The New Zealand Labour Party faced a complicated situation which made opposition to any troop commitment much more difficult. The Party had been in Government until 1949, under the leadership of Peter Fraser, and in August of that year, they had committed a flight of Dakota aircraft to Singapore to assist the Royal Air Force in transport missions between Hong Kong and Singapore. This Dakota flight remained based in Singapore and assisted with transport and supply-dropping work in Malaya. Because of this commitment, Labour was to a degree backed into a corner with regard to further assistance to Malaya. After all, it had been under its governance that New Zealand had first made a military commitment to South East Asia. It made it awkward in 1955 therefore, to argue that New Zealand should not be getting entangled in the internal disputes of other countries.

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36 Malayan Background, 24 March 1955, Nash Papers 123-0154-38/14/2, National Archives, Wellington.
New Zealand foreign policy had always been governed by a bipartisan consensus. Both parties respected this informal agreement. While external affairs were debated in the House of Representatives, it was usually only around the specifics of any given problem, rather than general policy itself which were question. As the Secretary of the Federation of Labour pointed out to a dissenting trade union movement, “on the broad principle of the defence of our national security there can be no division.”

It took the explosive issue of the New Zealand response to the Vietnam War to break this consensus. The initial Malayan commitment seemed at the time to be a relatively minor one. It really was simply a matter of moving New Zealand's already standing commitments from the Middle East to South East Asia and recruiting 200 more troops. Something as minor as this certainly did not seem to the Labour Party at the time to be an issue worth breaking the bipartisan consensus for.

Added to these two major factors was the fear of communism, which was omnipresent through all strata of New Zealand society in the 1950s and 1960s. The Labour Party, like most liberal parties in the western world, was very conscious of the perceived association between socialism and communism. Labour was therefore at pains to assert that socialism was not the same as communism and regularly emphasised that they had “no time for communism. We have never supported communism. We hate it with a bitter hatred ... We are on the side of the Western democratic powers.” Accordingly, it found it necessary to support actions which defended western allies against communist insurgencies. In the context of Cold War, left wing political parties felt in many ways they needed to be stronger on matters of national security than parties on the right, who were the traditional defenders of aggression and the armed forces. This feeling ensured that the Labour Party had another reason to support the Government decision to send troops to Malaya. It was an action which was aimed at supporting a Western ally against the threat of communism and at protecting New Zealand shores from an Asian communist menace. Any critics of the decision were told that they showed a “total disregard or lack of understanding of international political realities”, which indicates the Cold War context played a role in Labour's support of the policy.

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37 Letter from Mr. K. Baxter to Mr. L.F. Evans, 25 April 1955, 2, Nash Papers 132-0225-38/14/2, National Archives, Wellington.
38 J. Matheson, NZPD, vol. 332, October 25, 1962, 2362.
39 Letter from Mr. K. Baxter to Mr. L.F. Evans, 25 April 1955, 2, Nash Papers 132-0225-38/14/2, National Archives, Wellington.
These constraints resulted in the New Zealand Labour Party formulating a policy which endorsed the Government's actions, while still attempting to slightly differentiate its position. After the initial debate in the House of Representatives regarding the deployment of troops to Malaya, it was claimed that the absence of objection from Opposition members throughout the debate could be interpreted as approval of the Government's proposals. This was probably a fair call. In general Labour members expressed a qualified approval of the Government's intentions. The only criticisms they made were about the timing of the announcement and the way it was presented as a fait accompli to Parliament. In essence, the Labour Party under Walter Nash decided to support New Zealand's contribution to assist the United Kingdom in the suppression of terrorism in Malaya. The Party believed that by removing the terrorist menace from the area and ensuring a redistribution of Malaya’s wealth more equally among the population, New Zealand could assist in moving the area further toward self government. Labour quibbled instead over minor issues such as the way in which the force was going to be raised: Labour members opposed conscription absolutely. They also insisted that the force could not be used for dealing with internal strikes in Malaya. The latter point was of some concern to many in the Labour Party as it was feared New Zealand troops could be called in to intervene in Malayan industrial disputes. The National Government, however, was happy to agree that the New Zealand force would not at any time be available for use in connection with strikes. Thus the Labour Party had no further reasons for dissent with regard to the troop commitment.

While the National Party and most of the public welcomed Labour's decision to support the commitment of troops, the party faced some opposition from its grassroots members and also from the trade union movement. Labour was, therefore, forced to justify its position at length on numerous occasions. Walter Nash explained the major motivation behind his party’s support of the troop commitment in a letter to David Marshall, the leader of the Singapore Government. New Zealand Labour, he wrote, acquiesced in the proposed new arrangements on the “basis of assisting the United Kingdom to meet

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41 Nash Papers, 132-0169-38/14/2, National Archives, Wellington.
42 Ibid.
43 Letter from Mr. W. Nash to Mr. D. Marshall, April 4, 1955, Nash Papers, 132-0205-38/14/2, National Archives, Wellington.
44 Ibid.
commitments she has in that part of the world." The Party reacted violently to any suggestion that they were conniving with the National Government but emphasised their opposition to communism. As they wrote to trade union secretaries, "the National Executive views with grave concern any tendency upon the part of a few unions in New Zealand to act as the agents for the foreign policy of the Kremlin and Peking." Labour was at great pains to ensure it was well known that by voting to support any steps to "preserve New Zealand national security", the Labour members in question were upholding the "principles of democracy, the cause of human freedom" and "opposing and combating totalitarianism and aggression" in any form, just as the principles of the New Zealand Federation of Labour required. Nash also argued that support for the United Kingdom in eradicating terrorist activities in Malaya did not in any way "contravene Labour's principles of maximum encouragement of development and self-government among all peoples - rather I [Walter Nash] believe it is conducive to those ends."

After its own time in power at the end of the 1950s and once again in Opposition, it is possible to see changes in Labour's perception of foreign policy. The Party started to differentiate its viewpoint from that of the National Government. Like many who protested against the sending of troops to Vietnam, Labour saw the issues of Malaysia and Vietnam in different lights. To the Government both wars were extensions of the same policy but to Labour, the two were very different; one deserved support while the other was to be avoided. Labour considered Malaysia to be New Zealand's front line of defence, but this was not the case in Vietnam. The Party pointed out that, geographically speaking, Malaysia was much closer to New Zealand. That was why Labour had "agreed to support without equivocation moves to help in the defence of Malaysia." Members of the Labour Party felt that not only was the possibility of communism in Indonesia more probable than communism spreading through Laos, Thailand and Cambodia, but that the threat to New Zealand was far greater in the Malaysia-Indonesia sphere than in

45 Ibid.
46 Letter from Mr. K. Baxter to Mr. L.F. Evans, 25 April 1955, 2 in Nash Papers 132-0225-38/14/2, National Archives, Wellington.
47 Ibid.
South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{50} Arnold Nordmeyer, the Labour leader after 1960, pointed out that the United States had refused to become involved in the Malaysia-Indonesia dispute because of its commitments in South Vietnam. Nordmeyer felt, therefore, that New Zealand had grounds for refusing to assist in South Vietnam due to its already declared commitment in Malaysia.\textsuperscript{51} This view found much sympathy amongst the general population. The \textit{Critic} editor claimed "New Zealand cannot afford to spread the ludicrously small forces she has too thin. Our first obligation is in Malaya where we have given an undertaking. Let us fulfil it."\textsuperscript{52} Thus by the mid-1960s, Labour was beginning to criticise openly Government foreign policy for the first time. Prior to this they for a number of reasons had supported the Government's decisions to commit forces first to the Malayan Emergency and then to the Confrontation. It was not until Vietnam became a flashpoint in New Zealand foreign policy that Labour dissented in any significant way from the bipartisan consensus.

Christopher Pugsley writes that "there was little domestic questioning of New Zealand's forward defence posture" either in Malaya or elsewhere during the 1950s and into the 1960s.\textsuperscript{53} Other authors echo this viewpoint and promote the thesis that the vast majority of New Zealanders not only supported the conflict in Malaya and in Malaysia but were generally uninterested in how it was run.\textsuperscript{54} This prevailing wisdom regarding the period would seem by and large to be correct. The high level of national support for the policies did not change significantly over time. The commitment to the Malayan Emergency in 1955 was just as well supported as the commitment to defend Malaysian territorial integrity in the early 1960s. If anything, the change was that the public were more interested in the Indonesian Confrontation than the Emergency and consequently urged the Government to act more decisively.

Throughout the period, it is possible to see a developing consciousness of the importance and role of public opinion in fighting conflicts during peacetime. By the late 1950s, Government papers were starting to focus on analysing not only whether the New Zealand public supported a particular foreign policy but also the nature of public opinion

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} "Labour claims Malaysia, not Vietnam, first line of defense", \textit{The Press}, May 29, 1965, Elsie Locke Papers, Arch. 346, Box 1, Scrapbook 1964-5, Christchurch City Libraries.
\textsuperscript{52} "Vietnam Attitudes", \textit{Critic}, vol. 41, no. 6, June 10, 1965, 2.
\textsuperscript{53} C. Pugsley, 354.
\textsuperscript{54} NZ Institute of International Affairs. \textit{New Zealand Foreign Policy with special reference to South East Asia}, Wellington: the Institute, 1968, 12.
itself. Policymakers recognised that the “government and the department [Department of External Affairs] cannot move too far ahead of public opinion in foreign policy.” This statement implicitly recognises the crucial link between public support of a policy and the implementation of that policy. While the New Zealand public was slow to come to grips with the power it could have over external relations, the Government was much quicker to recognise the necessity of influencing that public opinion. Diplomats began to acknowledge that the press at the least had a “pervasive influence on public opinion.”

By the Vietnam War period, the Department of External Affairs was keeping a file in an attempt to track public opinion regarding the war. Through editorials, the press began to push the Government to educate and inform the public about international events. Popularist publications such as *New Zealand Truth* began urging the Government to make a “real effort” to inform public opinion, not to “merely present the public with banal generalities” regarding foreign affairs decisions. The *Wanganui Herald* pointed out that press comment could only do so much to keep the public informed; it could not “fulfil also the function of establishing the kind of popular urgency which should derive from the nation’s political leaders.” Department analysts believed that New Zealand public opinion generally only became coherent in connection to specific events and subsequently it was this “awareness and knowledge of the significance of specific events rather than the pursuit of an elusive policy toward Asia that we should seek to foster.”

Government ministries, therefore, were concerned not with how the public felt about the shape of wider New Zealand foreign policy in Asia, but with how they felt about small slivers of it such as the commitment of troops to Malaya.

It is probably fair to say the New Zealanders generally paid very little attention to either the Emergency or the Confrontation. There are two major factors behind this. The editor of *The Press* wrote in 1965 that “public opinion had not been stirred from the

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56 F. Shanahan, Memorandum for Minister of External Affairs, “New Zealand Policy towards South and South East Asia”, August 1, 1957; EA-1-W1784-58/94/1-1, 5, National Archives, Wellington.
60 “Notes on New Zealand Policy towards Asia”, April 29, 1957, EA-1-W1784-58/94/1-1, 2, National Archives, Wellington.
traditional belief that New Zealand's isolation provides security. \footnote{Our inadequate defences", \textit{The Press}, January 11, 1965 Elsie Locke Papers, Arch. 346, Box 1, Scrapbook 1964-5, Christchurch City Libraries.} Geographically New Zealand was still isolated from the world and this fed into a feeling of immunity from external threats and a belief that external relations was something that did not have the capacity to affect New Zealanders' lives directly. Even when New Zealand soldiers were stationed in Malaya, "the general attitude of the public is very near to apathy." \footnote{D. J. Eyre, NZPD, vol. 339, August 27, 1964, 1652.} At times the lack of public reaction to events is astonishing. In 1964, for example, \textit{The Press} published a report discussing the British plan to bomb Indonesian bases during the Confrontation. Within the article, the United States was quoted as being concerned that the Indonesians might retaliate by bombing New Zealand and Australia. \footnote{"Britain may bomb Indonesian bases", \textit{The Press}, September 14, 1964, 14.} It might be supposed that such a threat would worry readers but in the two weeks following the article, there were no letters to the editor about the possibility of bombings, nor were there any editorials on the issue. \footnote{\textit{The Press}, September 14, 1964--September 28, 1964} It would seem, therefore, that once New Zealanders had made up their minds to support Malaysia, nothing would deter them and they paid little further attention to the conflict.

This apathy was not engendered by a lack of interest in the world around them. Indeed, as Sir Leslie Munro asserted "I have found that the people of this country are intensely interested in the Pacific, South East Asia and Japan." \footnote{Sir L. Munro, NZPD, vol. 338, June 18, 1964, 150.} It was just that "this concern was curiously academic". During this period, the majority of New Zealanders did not seem to realise that defence and foreign policy affected not only soldiers on a battlefield but the well-being of the country as a whole. \footnote{"New Zealand's vital interests in Asia", published in an Indian newspaper, \textit{Hindu}, quoted in \textit{Airmail Bulletin}, August 13, 1959/29, 5, in EA-I-W1784-58/94/1-1, National Archives, Wellington; L. F. J. Ross, "New Zealand Foreign Policy and the drift toward war in Asia", NZMR, vol. 5, no. 45, May 1964, 9.} Gradually, this attitude did change. A commentator noted in 1965 that "the politically lethargic New Zealander has shown signs of stirring and is tentatively showing active interest in world affairs." \footnote{J. Thompson, "Vietnam", \textit{Critic}, vol. 41, no. 7, June 24, 1965, 2.} This development was stimulated both by the growing coverage and recognition of the Asian threat and by an increasing awareness that foreign affairs and trade were intimately connected. If Britain was going to join the EEC, as it announced in 1961, New Zealand had to start being much more proactive on the economic relations front.
The other element behind the apparent disinterest in South East Asian conflicts was the global situation. During the key decision-making periods regarding New Zealand’s commitment to these conflicts, there were numerous other global events which drew press and therefore public attention away from Asia. Just after New Zealand troops were sent to Malaya in 1955, for example, another world event took centre stage in the news and public consciousness: 1956 was the year of the Suez Canal Crisis, in which New Zealand had to choose whether to support the United States or the United Kingdom. During the build-up to New Zealand's involvement in the Confrontation, the Cuban Missile Crisis captivated world attention. This was an event which could have taken the world to nuclear war and naturally this seemed much more important than a localised conflict between Indonesia and Malaysia.

In terms of New Zealand's immediate backyard – which by the 1950s was seen to be South East Asia – the Malaysian situation was not the only crisis in the area. From 1954 onwards, the unfolding drama in IndoChina and the American responses to it were covered in reasonable depth by New Zealand newspapers. The Korean War had reached a stalemate by 1955 but New Zealand troops were still in the area and reports surfaced reasonably regularly regarding this situation. Finally, throughout the period of New Zealand involvement in Malaya/Malaysia, the peace movement tended to focus on the wider issue of disarmament, especially nuclear disarmament. The press, from student publications, the People’s Voice and the New Zealand Monthly Review right through to mainstream newspapers such as The Press and the New Zealand Herald, gave this issue a lot of coverage. It was something that New Zealanders as a whole were very much in favour of and it united a range of opinions in a way that the Malayan commitment did not.

The Malayan and Indonesian conflicts did, however, receive a reasonable degree of publicity in the New Zealand daily press, not only in news items and editorial comments but also in special articles by newspapermen covering the operations in the area.68 Dean Eyre noted this when he stated that “many thoughtful editorials have been written ... [and] they have served to stimulate interest and to make us aware of the dangers which threaten us in the North.”69 Editorial comments in mainstream newspapers were generally very positive about New Zealand’s commitments in Malaya and in fact often

urged the Government to do more and quickly. The New Zealand Herald believed that "responsible public opinion will uphold the Government honouring its commitments to Malaysia", and The Press announced in 1964 that "New Zealand troops are at last in action against Indonesian troops". The media tended to present the situation to the public in a very simplistic manner, one of heroes and villains, with the side New Zealand was supporting painted whiter than white. The public seem to have accepted this version uncritically and gave little thought to anything deeper than the fact New Zealand was supporting a country which was threatened by wanton aggression. Consequently, there was little discussion in the press about problems within the Malaysian Federation. When Singapore withdrew from the Federation in 1965, for example, the New Zealand public and press were shocked, as they had not seen this change coming.

In their editorials major metropolitan newspapers discuss in their editorials their perceptions of the feelings of their readers. Editorials in The Press, the New Zealand Herald and New Zealand Truth without exception present them as being fully behind defence commitments in South East Asia. New Zealand Truth stated in 1955 that it was "convinced that the people of New Zealand will not quibble about doing their part in the defence of the Commonwealth." The Press considered that "there should be no doubt about popular consent for a properly devised defence scheme under which New Zealand would take up a reasonable share of the burden of the free world" in her own backyard (South East Asia). During the Confrontation, the New Zealand Herald depicted Malaysia in the best possible light: "it looks like developing into a strong industrious and progressive nation". The newspaper claimed that "New Zealanders look realistically on the lessons learnt from past appeasement", implying that the public knew a stand had to be taken over Indonesian intimidatory tactics. Basically these newspapers believed that the New Zealand public were more than willing to support a commitment both to Malaya in 1955 and to Malaysia in 1964.

70 "Military commitment in Malaya", NZH, September 7, 1964, 6; "Malaysia appeals to the UN", The Press, September 8, 1964, 14.
71 I.W. Harris, "Confrontation", in M. Basset & R. Nola (eds), New Zealand and South-East Asia: Lectures given at "Teach-In" on South-East Asia, (Auckland: Committee on South East Asia, 1966), 25.
72 S. Leatie, New Zealand's Interests and Policies in the Far East, 23-24. EA-1-W1784-58/94/1-1, National Archives, Wellington
73 Harris, 25.
74 "Tell The Public", New Zealand Truth, January 26, 1955, 18
The accuracy of these portrayals of public reaction to Government policies regarding Malaya/Malaysia is very hard to gauge. It was not until the Vietnam War period that public opinion became central to foreign policy. During the Malayan/Malaysian conflicts, public views were not polled either by the Government or by the press. It is difficult therefore to look back and trace how the New Zealand public reacted to the deployments. Nevertheless, it is still possible to conclude that broadly the general public in New Zealand was supportive of their Government's South East Asian policy.

Michael Green reports that “outside of parliament the decision to send troops to Malaya was noted with little rejoicing.” While there certainly were not parades in the street or spontaneous celebrations, it does seem that the decision to send troops was met not only with acceptance but with some enthusiasm. The recruiting figures for the special air service squadron sent to Malaya in 1955 indicate that there was a reasonable degree of interest among the public regarding the deployments. The Press noted that in “less than three days of recruiting, nearly 300 men have volunteered for service” and that “keen interest is being shown by Territorial Force members” for service in the first battalion sent to Malaya in 1957. In 1959, the Minister of Defence was certainly very happy with the recruiting figures for the battalion. “It is very gratifying to me,” he wrote, “that the proposal to offer this opportunity for overseas operations has brought such a response.”

One member of the public, a school teacher from New Plymouth, supported involvement in South East Asia to such a degree that he felt motivated to send a book *Adventurers for God* to Keith Holyoake and Alistair McIntosh. The accompanying letter congratulated the two men for battling “for Malaysia, for our country and even for Indonesia and South East Asia.” This type of correspondence was quite different from the kinds of letters received by Government ministers during the Vietnam War controversy. They indicate a high level of public support for the Malayan commitment.

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77 Green, 3.
80 Letter from B. Barnett to K. Holyoake and A. McIntosh, received 28 April 1964, PM’s Office, EA-1-W1784-58/94/1-1, National Archives, Wellington.
There were a number of reasonably well attended public events supporting the troops, both as they left for Malaya and when they arrived back in New Zealand. There was great consternation when it was announced that the departing Special Air Service squadron would not march through Auckland prior to departing for Malaya. The *New Zealand Herald* claimed that "every man who volunteers for hard and dangerous duty in the defence of the Commonwealth had the right to receive the acclaim of his fellows". The *Herald* was very pleased when the decision was altered "in response to public reactions" so that the SAS unit could parade through Auckland: "it is right that they should have an opportunity to appear before the public so that citizens may pay tribute to their spirit."82

When the troops arrived home in 1959, the battalion paraded through central Christchurch accompanied by a band and several hundred people lined the parade route to welcome them home.83 This positive public atmosphere was certainly not experienced during the Vietnam years and demonstrates that during this earlier period the public were more supportive of the armed forces and of the Government decision to send them to South East Asia.

Letters to the editor in newspapers echo this general support for Government policy. In fact during the Confrontation, letters often criticise the Government, not for getting involved, but for not doing enough to defend Malaysia’s territorial integrity against Indonesian incursions. H.V. Chatterton asserted that “our Government is dragging its feet, the threat … is now very real and the government has done nothing to protect the people."84 Another letter congratulated the *New Zealand Herald* for its coverage of the Malaysian situation and hoped “it will be the means of stirring the appropriate action from our authorities."85 By the 1960s, it is clear that New Zealanders felt they had an obligation to defend Malaysia and that the Government should be shaping foreign policy to serve that end. Thus when it was announced in 1964 that New Zealand troops would assist their Malaysian and British counterparts, most of New Zealand populace were fully behind the decision.

This positive attitude of the public towards Government policy in Malaya/Malaysia was reinforced by a number of other factors. First, the people of Malaya/Malaysia and the

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81 "Unseen and Unsung", NZH, October 7, 1955, 10.
82 "A march of honour", NZH, October 18, 1955, 10.
84 H.V. Chatterton, "Indonesian Menace", NZH, January 14, 1964, 6.
Government were very grateful for the New Zealand assistance. Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Chief Minister of Malaya, told the Auckland Star that the New Zealand battalion would be “a real help”.

The Bishop of Wellington, Rt. Rev. H.W. Baines, visited Malaya in 1961 and reported back saying that New Zealanders were known in South East Asia for their willingness to help and their friendly approach. This sort of feedback was regularly reported by members of parliament and by the press. It was a source of satisfaction to New Zealanders to hear that their efforts were appreciated by the people they were trying to help and such sentiments encouraged New Zealanders to continue supporting the troop commitment.

The nature of the conflicts themselves also contributed to New Zealanders’ support of their country’s involvement. The conflicts were low-level insurgencies, especially the Malayan Emergency. By the time New Zealand troops arrived in 1955, the Emergency had petered out into occasional forays by small groups of communists, who were being driven further and further into the jungle. Guerrilla tactics by equally small groups of Commonwealth soldiers were used against the communists, and there was little risk of any major engagement. Only 33 members of the New Zealand armed forces lost their lives during these conflicts, and of these, only a third were killed in action. Even Britain, the country with the most troops in the area had a fairly low casualty rate, their dead during the Emergency numbering 519. The conflicts simply did not lend themselves to days of mass casualties. Nor were the Commonwealth forces ever in any danger of losing these two conflicts. They were fought without the scandals associated with the American involvement in Vietnam; there was no equivalent of the Mai Lai massacre in Malaya/Malaysia. The regime being supported by the Commonwealth forces was also much more palatable to Western ideals than the Vietnamese military dictatorships. Consequently the press coverage of the Malayan Emergency and the Indonesian Confrontation was much more positive than the coverage of Vietnam. It

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86 “Malaya is Grateful”, Auckland Star, June 20, 1957, in Nash Papers 132-0203-38/14/2, National Archives, Wellington.
focussed much more on the positive changes being wrought than on the death toll. In the days before the television era, images from the battlefields were not beamed live into people’s living rooms, which allowed them another layer of distance and disconnected them from the conflicts. It was Vietnam which was the first television war and news broadcasts from the battlefields in Vietnam dramatically altered New Zealand’s perceptions of that war.

The nature of the conflicts was well suited to New Zealanders’ strengths in warfare. On the ground, both campaigns involved weeks or months of patrolling in extremes of climate and country, which varied from fetid swamps to tortuous rainforest-clad mountains.\(^{92}\) This environment suited New Zealand soldiers very well. Reports continually came into New Zealand discussing the excellent work of New Zealand troops. The Press reported in 1959 that New Zealanders “showed themselves superior to other units by their capacity to meet difficult, unexpected or dangerous situations with normal, calm and decisive action.”\(^{93}\) This type of reporting reinforced positive feelings about the deployment. The initial commitment to Malaya in 1955 was a special air service squadron, and later deployments involved battalions. Both divisions, however, operated on the ground as commando units, with small numbers of men patrolling the jungle hunting enemy insurgents. This sort of military environment was something New Zealanders felt they were especially fitted for, as it appealed “to the adventurous spirit of many New Zealanders.”\(^{94}\) The success of the New Zealand battalion was reported to be due to the “New Zealanders ability to turn the jungle to advantage, our patrols were capable of operation in it without fear … the unit soon gained a reputation for excellence in long range penetration.”\(^{95}\)

A final factor reinforcing public support for the commitments was the New Zealand armed forces’ reactions. Most servicemen, all of whom were volunteers, were extremely enthusiastic about their deployments. John Lench, who served with the Air Force in Malaya, recalls the deployment with great affection: “a good squadron, a good aeroplane,

\(^{92}\) C. Pugsley, *From Emergency to Confrontation*, xii.

\(^{93}\) “‘Quality of Men: ‘Crack Jungle Fighters’’, The Press, December 16, 1959, 18.


good record and sky-high morale!”96 Lieutenant Colonel D.J. Aitken believed that “it was excellent peacetime experience for all elements of the unit,” while other soldiers recall the great advantages of local servants; amahs, kebuns, laundry wallahs and shoe cleaners who were available to all the troops.97 “A posting to Singapore in the 1950s gave many the opportunity to purchase a good car and take it home ... at the end of their tour” was a perk seen as a major bonus in the 1950s when it was very difficult to import new cars to New Zealand.98 Thus, in Malaya “The ingenuity and innovative character of the Kiwi soldier was never more apparent” and the New Zealand soldier “proved himself a very good ambassador for his country.”99 This fondness for the deployments meant that the public felt even more positively towards the commitments as they were clearly doing ‘our troops’ good.

The change in New Zealand defence orientation came about due to a combination of factors. The primary motivation for the involvement in South East Asia was a British and Commonwealth one. The New Zealand Government justified the Malayan/Malaysian commitment in these terms. The Labour Party opposition, unlike their Australian counterparts, supported the Government policy both in the Emergency and Confrontation.

In the public sphere there was very little questioning of the Malayan/Malaysian commitment. The major newspapers and their editors encouraged the involvement. It is difficult to ascertain how the wider populace felt about the commitment as polling was never carried out. From attendance at public events, letters to the editor and recruiting numbers, however, it would appear that the majority of the New Zealand population were warmly disposed to the commitments in South East Asia.

97 The First Battalion Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment, 70; Boys, 1-1.
98 Boys, 6-2.
IV

"American-inspired colonial butchery":
Opposition to New Zealand's troop commitments in Malaya/Malaysia

George Laking, a senior New Zealand diplomat claimed that "even in the midst of the debate on Vietnam, there seems to me to have been virtually no questioning of the basis on which New Zealand policy towards Asia has rested since the Second World War. And this I believe is because that policy truly reflects the realities of our position in the world."

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, this is largely correct. The New Zealand population for the most part accepted the wisdom of its Government's foreign policy. Nonetheless, it is not true to suggest, as some historians have, that there was no popular opposition to New Zealand foreign policy until the Vietnam years. In some quarters of society, New Zealand's involvement not only in Malaya and Borneo but also in the Cold War generally, and in SEATO, engendered considerable debate and vocal protest. The nature of these protests makes it clear that arguments which became much more widespread during the Vietnam conflict received their first airing in the decade before New Zealand committed troops to Indo-China.

Not surprisingly, it was in the left wing press that significant discussions regarding the conduct of the Cold War were published. The socialist New Zealand Monthly Review claimed that the only reason the communist-capitalist ideological conflict became a conflict of arms was because "the defenders of the capitalist system chose to play it that way." Some commentators went even further. They attacked the arrogance of the white western world for assuming it was the arbiter of what was and what was not democracy, and for involving itself in areas such as South East Asia because "we know better than the people themselves what is good for them." K. Buchanan wrote that it "was dangerous nonsense because it assumes that the nations and peoples of South East Asia are mere pawns to be used in a cold war policy of containment." Many became disillusioned with the hypocrisy which the Cold War bred. Governments repeated ad

2 W. Youren, "Foreign Policy in a changing world", NZMR, vol. 1, no. 6, October 1960, 11.
3 "External Affairs: Mr Eyre on Defence", NZMR, vol. 5, no. 45, May 1964, 8.
4 K. Buchanan, "Illusion and Reality in South East Asia", NZMR, vol. 6, no. 56, May 1956, 5.
nauseam that the West must fight to defend freedom and democracy which were in danger. Yet critics argued that “obviously freedom and democracy are not what we have been so feverishly fighting for,” pointing to numerous decidedly non-democratic regimes which were supported by the West, including the South Vietnamese Government and the Thai authorities.5

Cold War alliances such as ANZUS and SEATO also came under attack. Adherence to SEATO in particular provoked widespread outrage among certain portions of the New Zealand populace. The left wing press pointed out that the alliance concerned South East Asia but did not contain any South East Asians and that “Asians generally regard SEATO as another Western attempt to impose colonialism.”6 The SEATO pact was characterised by the *New Zealand Monthly Review* as “a mutual suicide pact.”7 The level of animosity felt by some with regards to SEATO is evident in the following description of a SEATO meeting in Bangkok, which appeared in the Communist Party’s newspaper, the *People’s Voice* in 1955: “the gathering will arrive at the best ways to bring to Asian peoples a rain of napalm death from the skies.”8

Opposition to New Zealand’s broad foreign policy strategies, however, was not just confined to left-wing organisations. Even some members of parliament believed that fighting communism on purely military terms would achieve nothing. Sir Clifton Webb, for example, was quoted as saying that ideas could not be stopped by bullets9, while the Rev. Clyde Carr asserted that the only way to kill communism was to kill the conditions in which it was bred; commandos could not destroy subversion.10 New Zealand’s alliance-based foreign strategy was also criticised more broadly by members of the public, who suggested that New Zealand was hamstrung by its adherence to alliances and that these alliances inhibited New Zealand from pursuing an independent foreign policy.11 The dual dependency which characterised New Zealand external affairs was not viewed kindly by all sectors of society.

8 “Big War Confib – with the people shut out”, *PV*, February 16, 1955, 4.
9 “At home and abroad: New Zealand and South East Asia”, *NZMR*, vol. 1, no. 10, March 1961, 3.
10 NZPD, 30 March 1955, 77.
According to the left wing press, New Zealand got involved in South East Asia because the United Kingdom and America blackmailed the country into it. The New Zealand Monthly Review declared that Churchill's so called 'appeal' for assistance in Malaya in 1955 was "in fact a demand, with all the possible blackmail of London's financial interests behind it." This perspective continued right through the period. As late as 1964, Keith Holyoake was accused of "selling New Zealand to British monopoly interests particularly those with a stake in Malaysia."

It was not, however, New Zealand's determination to follow where the British led which engendered the loudest criticism of New Zealand policy. After all, New Zealand had pursued a similar policy since its Crown Colony days. It was New Zealand's adherence to the American policy line which caused real criticism at home. The New Zealand Monthly Review announced that New Zealand should not follow a foreign policy based on a belief in "America right or wrong", because such a policy would demude the country's local defence potential in favour of fighting American wars overseas. As W. Rosenberg described it, such a policy would create a vicious circle; the more intensely New Zealand pursued the objective of fighting wars off-shore, the more dependent the country would become on America for its own defence, and the more dependent New Zealand was on America, the more wars they would be forced to fight off-shore. The People's Voice conveyed a similar sentiment much more emotively, claiming the "crusade against a mythical communist aggression is nothing but a blind to get the New Zealand people to give up the internal development of their country in aid of American-inspired colonial butchery." The editor of the New Zealand Monthly Review summed up very accurately the reasons behind the widespread anti-Americanism prevalent in parts of society, when he declared that New Zealanders had a natural distaste for Big Brother tycoon/philanthropist, his pathetic attempts to equate human justice and human freedom with what is best for big business, his ability of manipulate and vulgarise the means of communication, his alliance with petty scoundrels in various parts of the world and the muddle of racial and class relations he tolerates on his own doorstep.

13 "Where is Holyoake dragging New Zealand?", PV, July 15, 1964, 3.
Anti-Americanism found a ready audience among the wider community too, magnified by dislike of American boasting about how they had won both world wars, and reinforced by all too recent memories about the behaviour of American troops with New Zealand women during World War Two. As Nancy Taylor has written, “Many New Zealanders found it difficult to stomach the idea that America saved them from the Japanese ... New Zealand ... had been fighting [the war] for two years before America came in ... and used New Zealand as a base because this suited American strategy”.

Furthermore, well-paid and well-garbed American soldiers had invaded a man-denuded New Zealand landscape and had caused a good many broken engagements and understandings, as well as marriages which had brought heartbreak for loyal New Zealand men serving their country overseas.

There were thus significant numbers of New Zealanders who did not feel warmly towards Americans and this engendered a more mainstream unhappiness with the American attitude and policy in Asia. A letter to The Press in 1955 asked how much longer the Western world was to be dominated by big business in the form of the United States and how much longer was the Eastern world to be terrorised by it. Editors commented on the hypocritical nature of American policies, particularly during the Confrontation. The United States was so desperate to keep Indonesia and Soekarno away from Communist influence that it never openly criticised Indonesian aggression against Malaysia, even when the interference was blatant. The New Zealand Herald asserted pointedly that the “time has come when New Zealand should exert all her influence to have the Western world treat Soekarno as the United States would have us treat Castro.”

This criticism of American actions was not just limited to the media. Members of parliament were much more vocally critical of American policies than they ever were about Malaya and British conduct. From the early 1950s, there was a deep and widespread unease about the American attitude in Asia. This attitude was summed up by William Douglas, an American Supreme Court Judge, when he noted that “We [America]...
have assumed that if a nation is not for us then it must be against us.\textsuperscript{23} Such a stance did not make New Zealand comfortable, being in stark contrast to the climate of loyal dissent which had governed Commonwealth relations with the United Kingdom.\textsuperscript{24} Mr Mathison declared that he was “critical of the actions the United States has taken over Cuba ... I am not prepared to support them, as the Prime-Minister apparently does, whether they are right or wrong. If we are to insist on the rule of the law, we ought to insist that our friends observe it equally.”\textsuperscript{25} Another Member of Parliament, Tom Shand claimed that New Zealanders had been astonished and disgusted by some American policies and politics, adding that the hysteria of McCarthyism was “rather frightening to us all.”\textsuperscript{26}

Animosity towards the United States in Parliament was so strong that Government ministers at times felt they had to speak up in defence of their ally. They emphasised that the United States really were the good guys, who were extremely generous and central to New Zealand’s security. New Zealand was therefore bound to support them. Prime Minister Sidney Holland in 1955 announced he greatly regretted some of the comments made about America during the previous debate, saying that “some speeches seemed to say that the United States was the enemy of peace and the British family, whereas in fact she is our greatest friend.”\textsuperscript{27} Mr Holyoake objected similarly to the anti-American sentiment expressed by speakers during the debates on Cuba in 1962.\textsuperscript{28} This thread of anti-Americanism which ran through New Zealand society in the 1950s and 1960s helps explain why protests against the Vietnam War and its conduct attracted many New Zealanders who had supported the Malayan commitments, which were designed to aid Britain.

Sam Leathem of the Institute of International Affairs wrote in 1950 of New Zealand foreign policy that “while there is little doubt that the very great majority of citizens accept the verdict of their Government, there is sufficient evidence of a difference of

\textsuperscript{25} J. Mathison, NZPD, vol. 332, October 25, 1962, 2362.
\textsuperscript{26} T.P. Shand, NZPD, vol. 303, July 7, 1954, 266.
\textsuperscript{27} S. Holland, NZPD, vol. 305, March 31, 1955, 151.
\textsuperscript{28} K. Holyoake, NZPD, vol. 332, October 25, 1962, 2373.
viewpoint in some quarters to make an assessment desirable." It is thus time now to examine the groups in New Zealand which did oppose New Zealand's commitments in Malaya and Borneo and which were the forerunners of the far more widespread opposition to Vietnam which was to erupt in the mid-1960s.

Among the loudest and most bitter critics of the Vietnam War were students but student groups were not particularly concerned with the Malayan Emergency, at least initially. By the 1960s, they had begun to take a more positive rather than an apathetic interest in the affairs of the world, and by the time of Vietnam were actively engaged with the protest movement.39 There were, however, some early signs of opposition from the student population, when the annual student congress at Curious Cove voted in 1955 against New Zealand forces being sent overseas.30 Victoria University students seemed to engage with the issues from an early date. Their student magazine, Salient, wrote in April 1955 that the "presence of New Zealand fighters in Malaya can only have the effect of antagonising Asians towards New Zealand."32 On the other hand, the Otago University magazine, Critic, was noticeably more supportive of government policy although by the early 1960s, letters to the editor begin to question the logic of having New Zealand's defensive line in Malaysia.

It was the labour movement, represented by the trade unions who were the strongest and most vocal opponents of New Zealand's foreign policy in the 1950s and early 1960s. Predictably, the New Zealand Communist Party also opposed the commitment. While this group was very small, numbering no more than a couple of hundred members, its influence nevertheless belied those statistics.33 The General Secretary of the Party called on the labour movement to oppose the Government's decision to send troops to Malaya/Malaysia, and workers within individual trade unions by and large did just that.34 By the middle of 1955, according to the People's Voice, over 60,000 New Zealanders had voted through their unions against sending troops overseas.35 The Press put the numbers somewhere in the region of 30,000, but this newspaper published its figures prior to the

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31 "Labour urged to resist conscripts army for Malaya", PV, February 23, 1955, 1.
32 Salient article, April 6 1955, quoted in "Students clash over Malaya intervention", PV, April 27, 1955, 1.
33 Leathem, 9.
35 "No forces for Malaya says biggest trades council", PV, March 23, 1955, 1.
announcement of opposition by the Auckland Trades Council.\textsuperscript{36} \textit{People's Voice} therefore, is probably not exaggerating to any great degree. At this time, almost 20 unions had voiced their opposition to the policy, including several very large organisations such as the Auckland Trades Council, which represented more than 32,000 unionists, and the Auckland Labour Representatives Council.\textsuperscript{37} Even so, not too much should be read into these statistics. Undoubtedly, not all 60,000 trade unionists were in active opposition to the Government policy. Most almost certainly did oppose the policy in principle but the majority probably did not care too much one way or another, much like the rest of the New Zealand populace.

Nevertheless, a proportion of the labour movement was vehemently opposed to the troop commitment, and the number of unions opposing the policy grew over time. As the \textit{People's Voice} declared in 1964, the "movement for peace is growing ... whereas our union [Northern Drivers Union] was once amongst a lonely group of voices ... such is not the case now."\textsuperscript{38} Some of the more prominent unions which voiced their opposition included the New Zealand Watersiders Union which refused to load arms or troops to any war area, especially not Malaya "or any other place where human beings are slaughtered."\textsuperscript{39} The Otago Trades Council strongly protested against the Government's decision to send a New Zealand armed force to Malaya.\textsuperscript{40} The New Zealand Freezing Workers Federation requested that "New Zealand troops at present in Malaya be recalled."\textsuperscript{41} The Northern Drivers Union was one of the first unions to oppose sending troops offshore and continued its opposition right through the period. During the Confrontation the union expressed "serious disapproval of suggestions that New Zealand troops become involved in Northern Borneo, Sarawak and Brunei."\textsuperscript{42} Other unions which opposed the policy included the Women's Cooperative Guild, the Carpenters Union, the Taranaki Timber Workers, the Grey Valley Mine Workers, the Auckland Engineers, the Auckland Boilermakers, the Otahuhu Railway Tradesmen, the Ngauranga Freezing Workers, the Otago Labour Union and the Mangakino Hydro-

\textsuperscript{36} J. Burbridge, "New Zealand and Malaya", \textit{The Press}, March 17, 1955, 7.
\textsuperscript{39} Leatham, 9.
\textsuperscript{40} Letter to Mr. L.F. Evans from Mr. K. Baxter, April 25 1955, Nash Papers 0132-0225-38/14/2, National Archives, Wellington.
\textsuperscript{41} Minutes and proceedings of the 22nd annual conference of the New Zealand Federation of Labour, April-May 1959, 100.
\textsuperscript{42} Minutes and proceedings of the 27th annual conference of the New Zealand Federation of Labour, May 1964, 71.
Workers Association. It can be said with certainty that many sections of the New Zealand labour movement were dead against the New Zealand presence in Malaya/Malaysia.

Thus, there was a small but distinct segment of dissent within the New Zealand population towards New Zealand involvement in the Malayan Emergency and the Indonesian Confrontation. The focus of their protest was two major areas of concern; there were those who opposed the commitment on the basis of economics and those who cited political reasons for their opposition. Most groups articulated both economic and political motivations to varying degrees.

One of the primary reasons given for opposing the troop commitments in Malaya was that New Zealand was enriching foreign monopolies at the expense of improving her own economic situation. One Australian trade journal made it very clear what it considered British motives for supporting the Malayan Federation to be; they were there “to protect her [Britain] rich oil, tin and rubber interests in the area [Malaya].” Mr Baldwin, a trade union representative in the Federation of Labour put it bluntly when he stated that “we should not send troops to protect other countries’ investments.” The People’s Voice tended towards even more bold declarations about the reasons for the conflict. “Danger of aggression ... [comes] from those nations which want to hold and extend the profiteering spheres of their monopolies,” it proclaimed. It is evident therefore that many believed the Emergency was conducted only at the behest of foreign monopolies. This perspective also extended to the Confrontation. The Canterbury Trades Council, for example, objected to New Zealand being “dragged into years of adventurism at the behest of financial tycoons.”

The flip side to this belief that the conflicts in Malaya/Malaysia benefited only foreign monopolies was that the conflicts were detrimental to the New Zealand economy. By the early 1960s, especially after Britain declared its intention of joining the EEC, New

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43 “Union seeks united protest”, PV, March 16, 1957, 1; “Six more Unions oppose forces going overseas”, PV, March 9, 1955, 1; “Kiwi, Stay Home: Unions say no to war moves”, PV, February 16 1955, 1; “Unions attack decision to send force overseas”, PV, April 20, 1955, 2.
46 “Is Indonesia a threat to us?”, PV, May 15, 1963, 7.
Zealanders were becoming much more aware of the need to diversify their export markets. Many believed that the Government’s actions in supporting Malaysia were “not doing anything to find new markets for meat and butter among the 110 million people of this region.” \(^{48}\) A popular catchphrase epitomising this concern was that the commitments made “enemies not trade.” \(^{49}\) Many of the trade unions also pointed out that the labour situation in New Zealand was not such that the country could afford to send significant numbers of young men overseas to fight other countries’ wars. The Otago Railways Association said there were desperate staff shortages, especially in the railways and that was the reason they opposed the troop commitments. \(^{50}\) This view was echoed by a delegate to the Federation of Labour, Mr Staddon, who asserted that “our labour power should be used for producing food”, not for fighting wars. \(^{51}\)

Most opponents used their concern over living standards in New Zealand to justify their positions. “It will mean in the end a rapid fall in the country’s standard of living so that a heavy military expenditure can be met,” announced V.G. Wilcoy, a spokesman for the New Zealand Communist Party. \(^{52}\) This sentiment was echoed by the People’s Voice which announced that “with every soldier sent to rob the Malayans of freedom goes a part of workers’ living standards.” \(^{53}\) By 1959, over three million pounds a year was being spent conducting the war effort in Malaya, much to the consternation of unionists back in New Zealand. \(^{54}\) Some trade union delegates went even further. Mr Skinner asserted that a large portion of the earth’s resources and a vast store of human energy were being devoted to the prosecutions of wars. “If we could devote the same attention to world peace and raising living standards”, he suggested, “we would achieve the greatest progress ever known.” \(^{55}\)

The political reality, both in Malaya/Malaysia and globally, was the other major facet from which opposition sprung. Many people were reluctant to be seen as supporting

\(^{48}\) “No New Zealand troops for Malaysia”, \textit{PV}, March 11, 1964, 1.
\(^{50}\) Letter to all NIPs from C. Sharples, Branch Secretary Railways Tradesmen’s Association, March 9, 1955, Nash Papers, 132-0217-38/14/2, National Archives, Wellington.
\(^{52}\) “New Zealand Foreign Policy: Communists call for revision”, \textit{The Press}, March 30, 1955, 12.
\(^{53}\) “New Zealand’s Shame”, \textit{PV}, September 28, 1955, 3.
\(^{54}\) “£3million of our taxes go to keep Malayan People ill-fed and oppressed”, \textit{PV}, September 16, 1959, 7.
\(^{55}\) Skinner, T. “President’s address to the annual conference of the New Zealand Federation of Labour, 1965” (Wellington: Standard Press, 1965), 15.
colonialism or as opposing people who were rightly fighting for their independence. A letter to the *New Zealand Listener* in 1955 wondered if the fight was a genuine attempt by the Malayan people to terminate British exploitation of invaluable Malayan resources.\(^{56}\) This was a genuine concern, even within the more mainstream section of society which largely supported Government policy. A letter to *The Press* the same year asked, “could you please tell me exactly who these Malayan terrorists are and what they are really trying to attain. Are they committed nationalists?”\(^{57}\) The Government and mainstream media organisations expended a lot of energy attempting to reassure the New Zealand population that they were fighting against committed communist insurgents and not simply to oppress a people attempting the gain freedom.

Those who opposed the war were in no doubt about the issue. They continually hammered home the idea that New Zealand soldiers were being “sacrificed on the jungle altar of colonialism.”\(^{58}\) New Zealanders were fighting in a “dirty war against people fighting for their freedom.”\(^{59}\) The *People’s Voice* characterised the struggle not as a conflict between terrorists and the Commonwealth but as one in which “Malayans are defending their lives against the occupying power’s brutal efforts to crush all demands for national independence.”\(^{60}\) Opposition groups thus tried to seize the moral high ground in justifying their resistance to Government policies.

This tactic was especially evident during the Confrontation in the 1960s when Indonesia criticised Malaysia as being neo-colonialist entity. New Zealand opponents of the conflict certainly had a great deal of sympathy with this viewpoint. A booklet written by E.L. Wheelwright on the origins of Malaysia begins with the sentence, “Malaysia originated largely as a political device for dealing with Singapore’s political problems, more specifically a device for suppressing Singapore’s left wing.”\(^{61}\) The *People’s Voice* claimed that Malaysia was set up to “smash the growing independence movements of the peoples of British colonies in Borneo, Malaya and Singapore.”\(^{62}\) An Indonesian official was quoted as saying that Indonesians intended not to crush the peoples of Malaysia but

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\(^{57}\) N.M. Bell, “Malayan terrorists”, *The Press*, April 14, 1955, 9.

\(^{58}\) “Save a New Zealand soldier’s life, demand withdrawal of troops in Malaya” *PV*, February 1, 1956, 3.


\(^{60}\) “Big War Contab – with the peoples shut out”, *PV*, February 16, 1955, 4.


\(^{62}\) “Aggression Charge Phoney: Malaysia is Real Culprit”, *PV*, January 20, 1965, 3.
rather the “neo-colonialist system, the new project of the British monopolies.” If Malaysia was a colonialist entity and, according to its opponents, this was not in question, New Zealand should not be involved in defending it.

Opponents of New Zealand policies also claimed that the Malaysian population supported the ‘terrorists’. This view was strengthened by General Templar who summed up his difficulties in 1952, when he announced that “I could win this war in three months if I had two thirds of the population on my side.” This was interpreted by those who opposed the Emergency to indicate that the Malayan people supported the insurgents and simply wanted to be left alone. A New Zealand Herald reporter who visited the area in 1959 wrote that the villages were still surrounded by wire and had strict curfews in an attempt to stem their support for the insurgents. It was also pointed out in various quarters that the Malayan populace did not want outside interference and, more broadly, that New Zealand’s involvement both in the Emergency but more particularly in the Confrontation was tarnishing its reputation. David Marshall, the leader of the Singaporean Labour Party, told Water Nash in 1955 that “nobody in Malaya cares for the proposition that we should die to the last Asian baby to protect other countries from communism.” The Wellington Drivers’ Union called on the Government to recall all New Zealand troops stationed elsewhere because the policy had long-term damaging effect on New Zealand in the eyes of those people emerging from colonialism and establishing independence. A disarmament campaigner, Mary Woodward, pointed out that New Zealand’s military policy “divides New Zealand from neutral countries like Malaya, Singapore and Indonesia”, when in reality, these countries were New Zealand’s natural allies.

While union movement opposition did not lack venom, its effectiveness was blunted. In the usual course of events, individual trade unions lodged their complaints with regional trades councils, which then took the protests to the national level at meetings of the

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63 "Indonesian visitor to New Zealand answers questions about clash with ‘Malaysia’", PV, September 16, 1964, 2.
64 "Malayan Villages bombed and shelled", PV, February 23, 1955, 6.
65 “N.Z. policies in Malaya: Mr Bennett faces unpleasant task”, PV, January 28, 1959, 8.
67 Minutes and proceedings of the 26th annual conference of the New Zealand Federation of Labour, April-May, 1963, 107-8.
Federation of Labour. The Federation of Labour had significant sway with the parliamentary Labour Party, representing as it did a large percentage of Labour Party voters. In the Malaya/Malaysian crisis, however, the chain of dissent was interrupted. For a start, not all the trades councils opposed the commitments, although the largest council in Auckland did so, as did the Otago Trades Council. The Canterbury Trades Council was one of those which did not oppose troops in Malaya. More crucial was the decision of the Federation of Labour to support the Parliamentary Labour Party in its support for the Malaya/Malaysia policy. In 1949, while Labour's Peter Fraser was Prime Minister, the Federation of Labour had passed a remit which endorsed his decision to involve New Zealand in operations overseas to keep the peace, and it refused to budge from this stance. Accordingly, whenever the matter was raised at national meetings, the Federation either refused to discuss the matter at all or referred its dissenting members to its previous decision to support Labour Party foreign policy. In 1958, the Federation recorded its endorsement of Nash's statement that "New Zealand will fully honour its treaty obligations under ANZUS and SEATO and its defence commitments to Malaya." Two years later, it announced that "we should have faith in the ability of the Labour Government to arrive at a decision satisfactory to all." In short, any attempt by dissenting members to discuss and protest the New Zealand involvement in Malaya was thwarted at the Federation of Labour level. This meant that protests got much less media attention and had significantly less political importance.

The trade union movement also had problems in getting its views fairly represented in the mainstream media, which was almost unanimous in its strong opposition to unions. The President of the Federation of Labour told the annual conference in 1959 that "over the last year or so the labour movement has been the subject of vicious and unfounded attacks by a section of the capitalist press. I am aware of no period in New Zealand's history when such hatred was previously revealed against the working people." This mutual animosity between the groups helps to explain why expressions of dissent over Government policy and in particular Government foreign policy were not well covered

69 "No forces for Malaya says biggest trades council", PV, March 23 1955, 1; Baxter, 1.
70 Minutes and proceedings of the 23rd annual conference of the New Zealand Federation of Labour, April 1962, 79.
72 Minutes and proceedings of the 21st annual conference of the New Zealand Federation of Labour, April-May 1958, 90.
73 Minutes and proceedings of the 23rd annual conference of the New Zealand Federation of Labour, April-May 1960, 84.
in the mainstream press – trade union movements and those associated with them were considered nonentities.

In conclusion, although the People’s Voice report of 1955 that “the Malayan War is unpopular” was certainly overstating the case, the war was certainly unpopular among some sections of New Zealand’s population. Opposition to the dispatch of New Zealand troops to Malaya in 1955 and against Indonesia in 1964 was not widespread. Even the People’s Voice itself admitted that “only spasmodic protests have been made”, contrasting these to the vociferous opposition of the Australian labour movement. The level of discontent with New Zealand’s role in Asia grew over time and exploded during the Vietnam War.

75 “Demand Withdrawal of Malayan Troops”, PV, October 30, 1955, 8.
76 “New Zealand’s Shame”, PV, September 28, 1955, 3.
Conclusion

This work has examined the responses at domestic level to New Zealand troop involvement in Malaya/Malaysia in the 1950s and 1960s. It is a subject which has not been explored in any great depth in the literature on the period, so that the vehement and widespread Vietnam protests of the later 1960s have seemed to spring from nowhere.

New Zealand foreign policy after World War Two was characterised by dual dependency, as the country attempted to reconcile strategic realities with historical linkages. A web of alliances, including ANZUS, SEATO and ANZAM, along with membership of the UN and the Commonwealth, was constructed in an attempt to guarantee New Zealand security. This alliance-based foreign policy combined an inherent loyalty to Britain and the Commonwealth with a need for American protection.

In the 1950s, as a result of this foreign policy, New Zealand was forced to break out of its historic disengagement with its near neighbours in Asia. By the end of the period examined by this work, New Zealand's relationship with Asia had altered completely. In military terms, New Zealand was totally committed in South East Asia throughout this period, and it was these commitments which shaped the development of the armed forces. Politically, New Zealand became much more involved with her neighbours in the form of diplomatic representation. Economically, the country and its populace became more aware of the role of Asia as a market for New Zealand goods. In short, as a result of SEATO, ANZUS and ANZAM and New Zealand's commitments to the Malayan Emergency and Indonesian Confrontation, the New Zealand relationship with Asia was dramatically transformed.

The justification offered by National Party governments for sending troops to Malaya in 1955 and for allowing its troops to be used against Indonesian infiltrators in 1964 was primarily a British and British Commonwealth one. There was a perceived need to relieve Britain's heavy defence burden and assist in the Cold War more directly. There was also a very real fear of Asian communist aggression and the memory of the speedy Japanese advance towards New Zealand in World War Two was fresh in the minds of both policymakers and the public.
The Labour Party opposition stayed within the bipartisan consensus which had always governed New Zealand foreign policy and supported the Government position both in 1955 and again in 1964. This was a distinctly different response from that of the Australian Labour Party, and it was not the response which New Zealand trade unions wanted the Labour Party to take. The only difference in Labour’s policy when compared with the National Party was that Labour considered Malaya/Malaysia and Vietnam to be very separate issues. Labour advocated remaining out of Vietnam, so that the New Zealand military could focus on drawing a line in Malaysia.

The vast majority of the New Zealand public supported the decision of the government and was generally disinterested in events in Malaya and Indonesia, both because of an historic disengagement with foreign affairs and because the global arena at the time was very full of other often more interesting events which drew attention away from Malaya/Malaysia. The most interesting development in terms of public opinion during this period was the growing realisation at policymaking level that public opinion played a central role in the conduct of conflicts in peacetime. This became much more of an issue in the late 1960s as the protests regarding New Zealand involvement in Vietnam became more and more vehement. The Government began to track public opinion on the issue and to take notice of ways in which they could shape that opinion.

This work has argued that although New Zealand society in the period examined, particularly in the 1950s, is widely assumed to be highly conservative and conformist, there was an undercurrent within that society which was gaining momentum, and had distinctly non-conformist attitudes. This undercurrent is exemplified by the case of the Rev. Clyde Carr, who was the Member of Parliament for the conservative, rural Timaru electorate from 1928 until 1962. Rev. Carr held views which were almost always out of kilter with mainstream perspectives. He was frequently the only member of the House to vote against certain bills and was a consistent critic of New Zealand’s policies in Malaya, often the only speaker to protest during debates. The fact that he was able to hold onto his seat in Timaru for such a long time, despite his maverick views, suggests, according to Steve Kerr, that “New Zealand may well have contained a larger population tolerant of

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1 Mentioned in many histories of New Zealand, including T. Brooking, Milestones: Turning Points in New Zealand History (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1999), 183.
dissent than we imagine and indeed may not have been as conformist as is assumed.\textsuperscript{32} The same can be said for public opinion regarding the troop deployments to Malaya/Malaysia. The fact that the majority of the populace supported the policy has obscured the fact that there was opposition to the policy and that this opposition increased exponentially when the issue of Vietnam hit New Zealand in the mid-1960s.

It is simply not true that there was no public opposition to New Zealand foreign policy until Vietnam. As this work has demonstrated, in some quarters of New Zealand society, New Zealand’s involvement not only in Malaya and Borneo, but also more generally in the Cold War and within alliances such as SEATO, provoked considerable outrage and protest. It was from this core of trade union, Communist Party and student protesters who had criticised New Zealand foreign policy for over a decade, that the more widespread opposition to Vietnam sprang. The arguments which dominated the Vietnam protests got their first airing in the opposition movements of the earlier period. Those who opposed the Malayan/Malaysia commitment did so for both economic and political reasons; they felt the commitment was adding to the profits of foreign monopolies at the expense of the New Zealand population’s living standards, and that New Zealand soldiers were being forced into a colonial campaign of oppression against a people simply fighting for freedom and independence. These concerns were recycled and enhanced during the debate about Vietnam which was one about the need for “an ‘independent’ and more overtly nationalist foreign policy.”\textsuperscript{33}

This opposition to troop commitments should not be overstated. While it did number, at least nominally, over 60,000 individuals, it was neither as large nor as well organised as the later Vietnam protests. It is, however, important to note its existence, because it demonstrates that the roots of the Vietnam controversy were laid prior to the start of New Zealand involvement in that conflict. The differences between the Malayan Emergency, the Indonesian Confrontation and the Vietnam War are too numerous to describe here but Vietnam is important to this story in that it provides a useful point of comparison for the Malayan/Malaysian commitments. Critically, Vietnam was controlled by a different superpower and in different world conditions than those which shaped the


earlier conflicts. Perhaps most significant of all, New Zealand’s Vietnam commitments came almost a decade after the country’s first involvement in Malaya. That decade had brought great changes to New Zealand, socially, politically and economically. A new generation, less affected by world war two, more urbanised and better educated, and much more heavily exposed to media and especially television reporting of world affairs, was far less prepared to commit blindly to old loyalties and expectations. Nevertheless, the signs of dissent were there in the earlier years for those who chose to see them. The 1950s and early 1960s may indeed have been a period of general conformity but the underlying domestic disquiet of those years heralded something of the turbulence to come.
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