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**TIES WITHOUT STRINGS? THE COLOMBO PLAN AND THE
GEOPOLITICS OF INTERNATIONAL AID, 1950-1980**

by

Ademola Adeleke

**A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of History
University of Toronto**

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

TIES WITHOUT STRINGS? THE COLOMBO PLAN AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF INTERNATIONAL AID, 1950-1980

Ph.D. 1996

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The dissertation is a study in the politics of aid. It explores the connections between British, Commonwealth, and American aid policy— and how this affected western approaches to the Asia/Pacific region (and the third world in general) at a crucial point in the Cold War.

Its frame of reference is "The Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia"— the first multi-national aid program which linked the West with the non-communist countries of Asia. The Plan was initiated in 1950 by the Commonwealth. By 1973 it had twenty-six members, five western and twenty-one Asia/Pacific states

The thesis argues that the Plan was motivated by Cold War geopolitics; that this was why it was targeted only at countries within the strategic and security orbit of the Soviet Union and China; and that it was the Commonwealth's contribution to western efforts to contain communism in South and Southeast Asia;

The establishment of the program was based on the logic that poverty and underdevelopment, and a huge population, made the non-communist states in the region vulnerable to communist subversion. Economic development, the

program's Commonwealth sponsors argued, was the most effective measure against the communist threat. The Colombo Plan was the medium through which western aid - capital and technical assistance - was to be made available for this purpose.

The dissertation analyzes the politics and diplomacy of expansion of the program's membership; the strategic, security and economic motivations of the participating countries, both in their capacity as individual actors, and as members of a collective concerned with problems of the Cold War. It also analyzes the structure and functions of Colombo Plan institutions, as well as the program's peculiar architecture— a multi-national institution operating on the basis of the bilateral principle.

The dissertation is a work of synthesis drawing together the national and parochial perspectives of participating countries. The approach is holistic and global. The methodology is comparative and interactive. The context is Cold War geopolitics.

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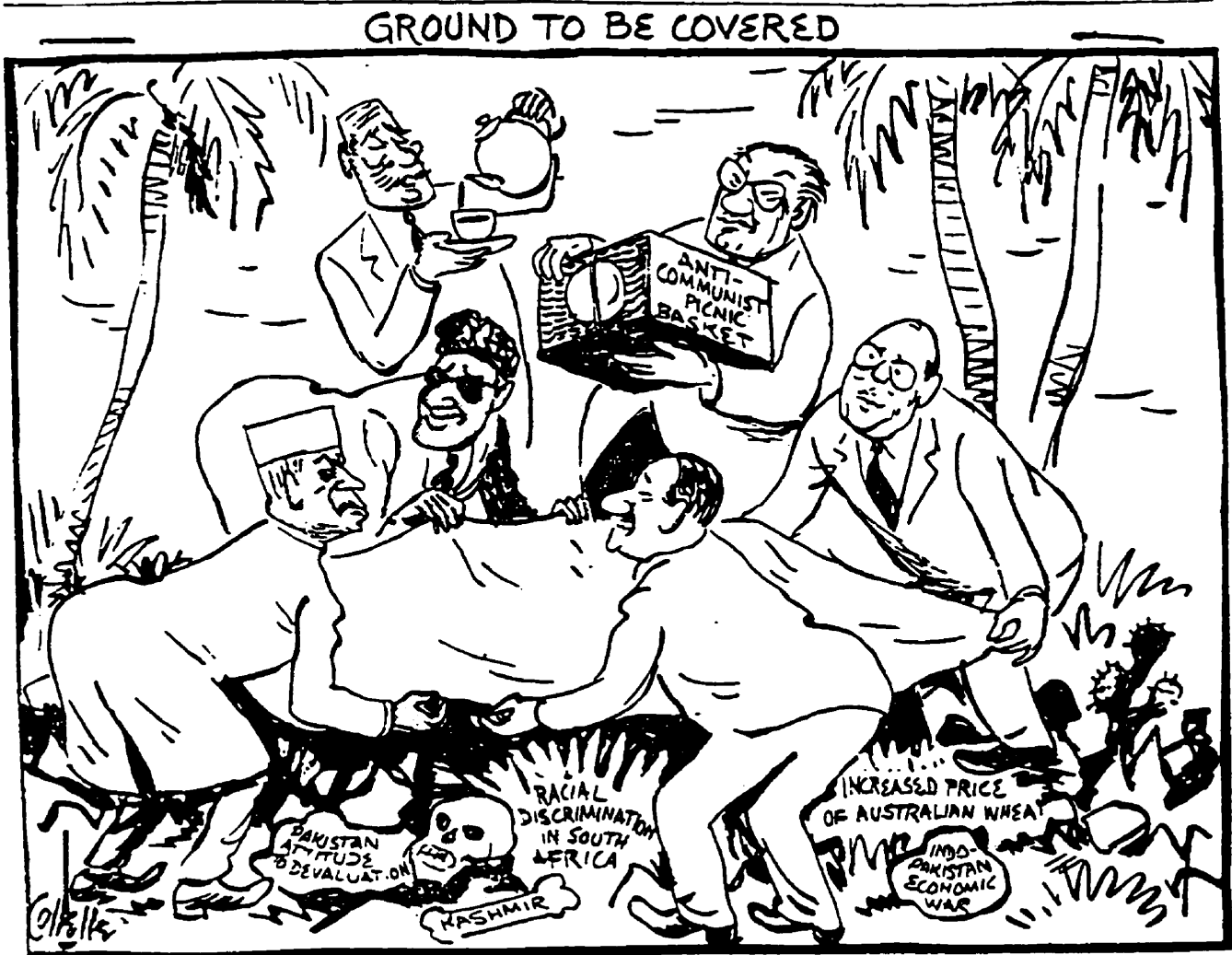
ABBREVIATIONS

AFPFL	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (Burma)
ANZUS	Australia, New Zealand and the United States (tripartite security treaty)
BCA	Bank of Canada Archives
CAB	Cabinet Papers
CEEC	Committee for European Economic Cooperation
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CRO	Commonwealth Relations Office
CDWA	Colonial Development and Welfare Act
CFEP	Council on Foreign Economic Policy
CO	Colonial Office
DDEL	Dwight D. Eisenhower Library
ECA	Economic Cooperation Administration
ECAFE	Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
EPTA	Expanded Program of Technical Assistance
ERP	European Recovery Program
ESCAP	Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific
FO	Foreign Office
FOA	Foreign Operations Administration
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
HSTL	Harry S. Truman Library
HSTP	Harry S. Truman Papers
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ICA	International Cooperation Administration
NA	National Archives of the United States
NSC	National Security Council
OEEC	Organization for European Economic Cooperation
PAC	Public Archives of Canada
P. L. 480	Public Law 480
PPS	Policy Planning Staff (State Department)
PRO	Public Record Office
TCA	Technical Cooperation Administration
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNP	United National Party (Ceylon)

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Subject Commonwealth Conference

Monday,
Date January 16, 1950..... Publication The Times of Ceylon.....



DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Subject..... Commonwealth Conference.....

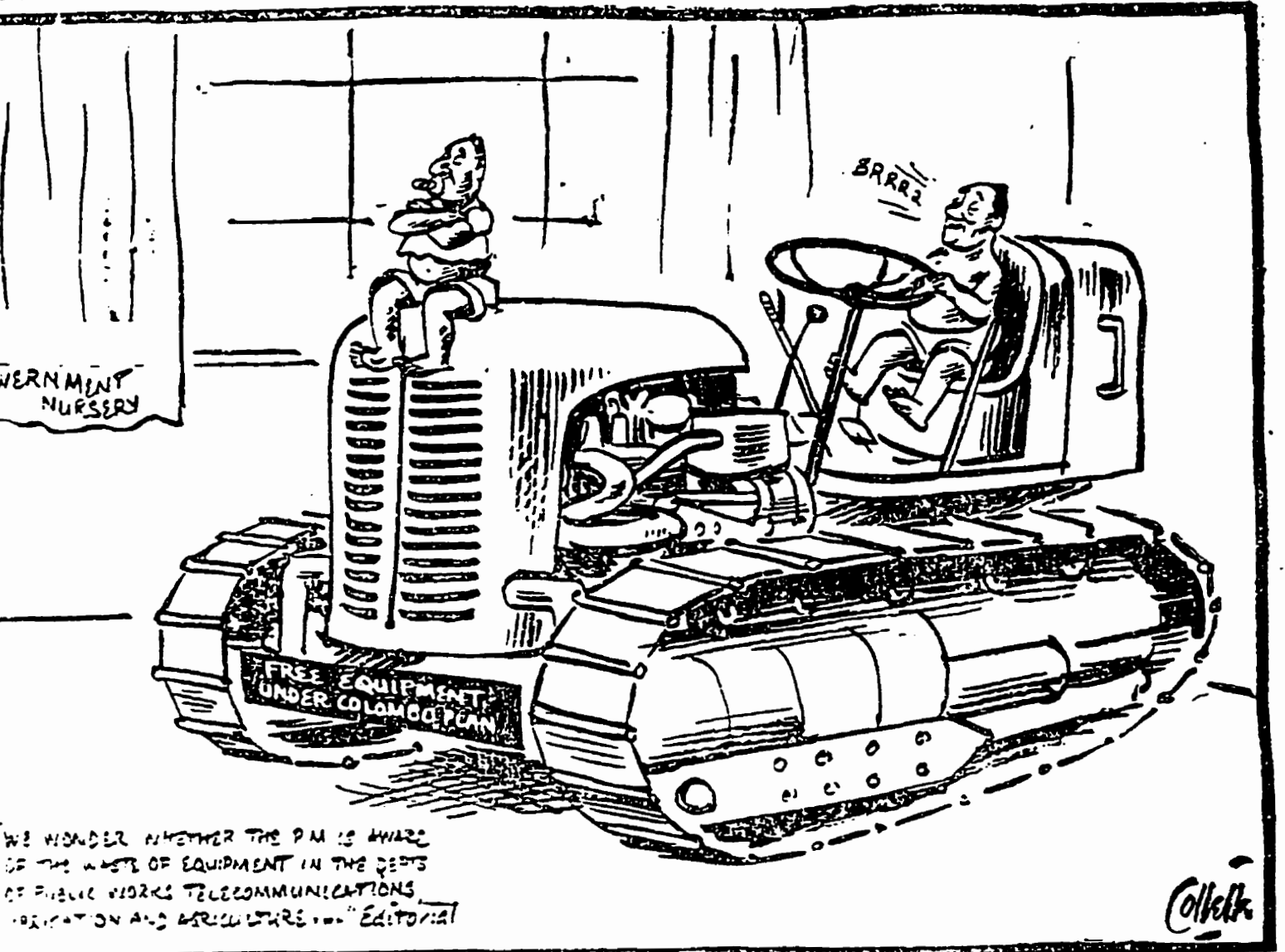
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LOTS OF CLEARING UP AFTER A SUCCESSFUL PARTY



Source: Lester B. Pearson Papers MG 26 N1, Vol. 22, File: Colombo Plan 1951 pt. 4
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BADES IN TOYLAND

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INTRODUCTION

This is a study in the politics of aid, an exploration of the connections between British, Commonwealth, and American aid policy— and how they affected western approaches to the Asia/Pacific region (and the third world in general) at a crucial point in the Cold War.

The frame of reference is "The Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia"— the first multi-national aid programme that linked the West with the non-communist countries of Asia. The Plan was initiated by the Commonwealth in 1950 following the adoption of proposals which Australia's minister for external affairs, Percy Spender, presented to the meeting of Commonwealth foreign ministers in Colombo (Sri Lanka) in January 1950. By 1973 twenty-six countries had agreed to participate in the programme, five from the West and twenty-one from the Asia/Pacific region: Afghanistan; Australia; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Cambodia; Canada; Fiji; India; Indonesia; Iran; Japan; Korea, Republic of; Laos; Malaysia; Maldives; Myanmar (Burma); Nepal; New Zealand; Pakistan; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Singapore; Sri Lanka; Thailand; the United Kingdom and the United States.

The central argument of the thesis is that the Colombo Plan was motivated by Cold War geopolitics; that it was the Commonwealth's contribution to western efforts to contain communism in South and Southeast Asia. The

Commonwealth took the initiative at a time (before the outbreak of the Korean war) when the United States was not fully engaged in the region, and was inclined to view South Asia as the strategic responsibility of the United Kingdom.

Britain did have vital economic and strategic interests in the region, as did Australia, and it was this coincidence of interests and objectives that made the Commonwealth the most logical forum to launch what was essentially an instrument of Australian foreign policy— Spender's proposal to promote economic development in South and Southeast Asia. Like Britain and other countries with interests in the region, Australia was concerned about the threat which communism posed to regional stability, and to the security of its non-communist neighbours. More importantly, Australia is itself a Pacific state sharing the same geopolitical space - Southeast Asia - with China. South Asia marks the outer ring, and Southeast Asia the inner ring, of its defence perimeter; hence any instability in the region could have a direct impact on its security. No government in Canberra could simply ignore this, certainly not after the experiences and anxieties of the second world war. Such was the situation that confronted the government of Robert Menzies when it took power in December 1949, two months after the communist victory in China. For the non-communist governments in the region Mao's victory was a potent symbol of the resurgence of communism, and of the threat it posed to their security. The Menzies government responded to this renewed danger with two mutually interactive proposals— a Pacific pact to strengthen Australia's defence, and a scheme to

promote economic development to counteract the threat to regional stability. The first led to the creation of ANZUS in 1951, the second to the Colombo Plan, the subject of this study.

The Plan, as designed by the Commonwealth, was aimed at resolving the dialectic between poverty and communism. It was based on the logic that poverty and underdevelopment, and a huge population, made the non-communist states in the Asia/Pacific region vulnerable to communist subversion; that economic development was the most effective weapon against this menace; and that a significant improvement in living standards in the region would render communism less attractive to the people. It would strengthen the non-communist governments and enhance their capacity to resist the communist threat. It would improve regional stability, foster trade and industry, and promote harmonious relations between Asia and the West. That to achieve these goals it was necessary for the West to aid the non-communist countries in the region - Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth - in their development efforts. The Colombo Plan was promoted as the medium through which western aid - capital and technical assistance - would be made available for the purpose. The Plan was thus an instrument of containment, which explains why it was targeted only at countries within the strategic and security orbit of the Soviet Union and China. It was, to paraphrase the title of Nik Cavell's (Canada's Colombo Plan administrator) article in the *Financial Post* of November 10, 1951, a weapon against reds.

The dissertation analyzes the politics and diplomacy of expansion of the programme's membership; the strategic, security and economic motivations of the participating countries, both in their capacity as individual actors, and as members of a collective concerned with problems of the Cold War. It also analyzes the structure and functions of Colombo Plan institutions, as well as the programme's peculiar architecture-- the application of the principle of bilateralism in a multi-national environment.

Chapter one explores the origins of the Colombo Plan against the background of Cold War geopolitics. It analyzes the position of South and Southeast Asia in the postwar international system and demonstrates that in the early Cold War a strategic vacuum did exist in the region. Communism thrived in this vacuum. By aligning itself with poverty, nationalism, and anti-colonial sentiment it created a dynamic whose destabilizing potential could not be ignored by states with vital interests in the region. The chapter analyzes the strategic and economic motives that underpinned Australia's proposal, and made the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth countries receptive to it. It also explores the extent to which the postwar transformation of the character and composition of the Commonwealth made the organization the most appropriate medium for the implementation of the proposal.

Chapter two is an exploration into Commonwealth conference diplomacy. It traces the evolution of the proposal following its adoption at the Colombo conference of Commonwealth foreign ministers through the Sydney conference

to the London conference where it eventually took concrete form as "The Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia". Chapters three and four analyze the politics and diplomacy of expansion of the Plan's membership. Chapter three concentrates on the United States. It situates the attempt to secure the support of the United States for the Plan within the context of Anglo-American relations. It analyzes the strategic issues (arising from the outbreak of the Korean War) that transformed the Truman administration's lukewarm attitude to full support and membership in the programme's implementation machinery, the Consultative Committee.

Chapter four focusses on the effort to extend the Plan to the non-Commonwealth, non-communist states in the Asia/Pacific region. Chapter five analyzes the architecture of the Colombo Plan, its operating procedures, the structure and functions of its institutions, and their evolution over the time frame of this thesis, 1950-1980. The concluding chapter offers an assessment of the Colombo Plan. The study traces the Plan's geopolitical origins and demonstrates that it was another one of the instruments employed by the West to contain communism in Asia.

The Plan's peculiar architecture - the application of bilateralism in a multi-national environment - is one of its distinguishing features. This, and the fact that it has endured for more than four decades while other instruments of containment in the region, such as SEATO, have disintegrated make the Colombo Plan an interesting subject of study. The dissertation reveals that the

Plan's contribution to the economic development of non-communist Asia is rather insignificant; that it was no more than a showpiece of Commonwealth and western propaganda induced by the Cold War.

Chapter 1.

ORIGINS

The aim of the United Kingdom should be to build up some form of regional association in South-East Asia in partnership with like-minded Governments, including the United States of America. The immediate aim of a wider association of the West, including the Pacific members of the Commonwealth with the South-East Asia countries, would be to prevent the spread of Communism and to resist Russian expansion; its long-term object would be to improve economic and social conditions in South-East Asia and the Far East...Since it is clear that the situation in South-East Asia will not allow of any attempt being made in the immediate future to bring about a greater degree of political co-operation...the economic approach, rather than the political, offers a better chance of achieving our aim in the area.¹

Postwar Transformation of the Commonwealth

In January 1950, Commonwealth foreign ministers convened in Colombo, Ceylon* to discuss some of the pressing international problems of the postwar world. The postwar international system, in which the Commonwealth states now operated, was polarized into two camps — the "free world" and the communist bloc — dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union. Its chief characteristic was the Cold War in which the two superpowers engaged in mutually antagonistic competition for allies, ideological ascendancy and global influence. In this bipolar configuration, Commonwealth states, as democracies, were "natural" members of the "free world" and would be expected, understandably, to be concerned with the problem of communist imperialism.²

*Ceylon was officially renamed Sri Lanka in 1972 when the country became a republic. To maintain the context and time frame of this thesis the old name is used throughout.

The Commonwealth itself could not escape the centrifugal forces unleashed by the war. It had to undergo associative and institutional transformation to reflect the new realities of the postwar world.³ First, the institutions of the old British Commonwealth - the Committee of Imperial Defence and the Imperial Conferences* - which permitted the mother country, Britain, and the self-governing Dominions (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa) to coordinate their foreign, defence and economic policies, were swept away as relics of Britain's imperial past by the Second World War. The new Commonwealth which emerged from the war was an informal and loose association of sovereign states, united by a common tradition and a common allegiance to the Crown, with each member pursuing an independent foreign, defence and economic policy.

By granting independence to some of its Asian colonies in the late forties Britain contributed to the transformation of the character and composition of the Commonwealth. India and Pakistan joined the organization as independent nations in 1947. Ceylon followed suit in February 1948. Only Burma, granted independence in January 1948, decided to dissociate itself from the Commonwealth. The expansion of the Commonwealth raised a fundamental question: what would be the nature and form of the association of the Asian states with the organization? Although India, for economic, political and strategic

*The Colonial Governments of India (from 1917), Southern Rhodesia (from 1926) and Burma (from 1937) attended the Imperial Conferences.

reasons⁴ was anxious to retain its links with the Commonwealth, it had made known its intention to become a republic. But could a republic still hold allegiance to the Crown? For the Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, the Crown was the very antithesis of India's independence and a symbol of her colonial past. In a nation-wide broadcast on May 10, 1949, he declared: "as far as the Constitution of India is concerned the King has no place and we shall hold no allegiance to him."⁵ Sovereign India could not hold allegiance to the Crown.

The dilemma which this posed to the United Kingdom and the "white" Dominions was how to reconcile their common allegiance to the Crown,⁶ the last imperial bond of the Commonwealth, with the desire of the Asian states, especially India, to assert their full sovereignty and eliminate all the symbolic vestiges of their colonial past. "India ought not to function with any Commonwealth bloc at international conferences", Prime Minister Nehru is reported to have said in 1948, "as a kind of camp follower of the British."⁷

The forum for the resolution of these problems was the Commonwealth prime ministers' meetings, first held in London in the fall of 1948. The British prime minister, Clement Attlee, discussed this problem privately with his counterparts from Australia, Canada and New Zealand, before and during the meeting, the first, incidentally, to be attended by the prime ministers of India, Pakistan and Ceylon.⁸ It was not until the 1949 meeting, also held in London, that a formula was found to reconcile India's republican status with the notion of

common allegiance to the Crown.⁹ The resolution of this problem inaugurated what McIntyre calls “the Eurasian phase of Commonwealth consultation.”⁹¹⁰ It also established the framework for a multiracial Commonwealth which would embrace other British colonies in Asia and Africa when they attained independence in the 1960s.

The association of the newly independent Asian states with the Commonwealth not only transformed the organization; it altered fundamentally its character and *raison d'être*. To remain relevant the Commonwealth would henceforth have to concern itself with the peculiar problems of the Asian members— problems of poverty and underdevelopment. It would have to reconcile the world views of its western (developed) and Asian (underdeveloped) members and respond to the support, or at least sympathy, which the Asian members were certain to give to nationalism and decolonization in the Third World.¹¹ At the geopolitical level the West would be interested in securing the support of the Asian Commonwealth states in the free world's struggle to contain communism. And, as a corollary to this, it would greatly prefer that their governments did not fall prey to Sino-Soviet inspired communist takeovers. The Cold War, and the bipolar configuration which engendered it, would ensure that none of these issues could be treated in an insular fashion as purely Commonwealth matters. The organization would have to operate within the ambit, or at least with the support (perhaps under the protection), of American power and global hegemony.

To improve the discussion of the manifold economic and foreign policy problems of the member states, the prime ministers agreed in London in 1948 that other meetings of the organization should be held at the ministerial level. A meeting of finance ministers was consequently held in London in 1949. The first¹² meeting of foreign ministers, devoted to a discussion of international affairs, was the meeting which opened in Colombo on January 9, 1950, the first ever to be held in the non-European world. The choice of the conference venue underlined the extent to which the association of the Asian states had transformed the Commonwealth.

The Geopolitical Background to the Colombo Conference, 1947-1949

The Australian Minister of External Affairs, P.C. Spender, who led his country's delegation to the Colombo conference, saw the choice of Ceylon as host to the conference as indicating a shift of the centre of gravity of international matters towards the Middle East and Asia.⁹¹³ Although Spender's statement on the shift in the locus of international conflict may be overstated, it does indicate the destabilizing potential to the postwar international system of the emergence of a new dynamic in South and Southeast Asia: the alignment between poverty, nationalism and communism.

The epicentre of the early Cold War was Europe. But this theatre had been stabilized to a greater extent by the division into spheres of influence symbolized by the iron curtain, by the formation of NATO, and by the Czech putsch of 1948. The Berlin Airlift had also demonstrated the determination of the United States and its allies to contain Soviet imperialism in Europe. Containment had, to paraphrase Professor John Gaddis, restored a balance of power in Europe by 1949.¹⁴

No such power balance, nor mutually acceptable spheres of influence, existed in Asia on the eve of the Commonwealth foreign ministers' conference in Colombo.¹⁵ Britain did of course retain residual influence in the region, its colonial empire being only partially decolonized. The Attlee government's foreign policy, in the late forties, was aimed in part at maintaining the country's remaining imperial interest and influence, and on the broader scale, at preserving the U.K.'s position as a world power. The United States recognized this and, some will argue, was at least hopeful that British influence could promote, if not secure, western Cold War interests in Asia, particularly, in South Asia.

But as we shall see in subsequent sections, Britain was no longer a world power, certainly not in the league of the United States and the Soviet Union, although it would take some time before Whitehall admitted this.¹⁶ In short, the United Kingdom was not in a position to hold South and Southeast Asia against a sustained communist onslaught. Its forces, supported by Australian and New

Zealand contingents, were already engaged with communist insurgents in Malaya, the French had their hands full in Indochina, while the Dutch, to the dismay of their western allies, were engaging Indonesian nationalists in a conflict which could only advance the cause of local and international communism. The strategic situation in Asia was therefore highly fluid. Unlike Europe, the region was yet to be carved out into recognizable and mutually acceptable (to the superpowers) spheres of influence.

There was, as yet, no Asian "iron curtain" nor any regional or international arrangement — economic, defense or political — which brought the states in the region together for a common cause. Neither NATO nor the Marshall Plan was replicated in Asia. With the exception of the activities of United Nations agencies like ECAFE, UNESCO, UNICEF and WHO, and the IBRD, there was no institutional, multilateral arrangement to promote economic development in South and Southeast Asia. And yet this was one region where the decolonization of the European empires had created a power vacuum in which poverty interacted with an exponential increase in population: a classic recipe for political instability! From the perspective of the West these were the very 'conditions likely to accelerate the spread of communist influence.'¹⁷ The only organization linking the underdeveloped Asian region with the developed West was the Commonwealth. But the fact that the Commonwealth lacked any formal institutional structures, its members meeting annually for the primary purpose of consultation, made it the least likely organization to promote economic

development in South and Southeast Asia. It certainly could not provide for the defence and security of the states in the region.

Viewed from a global, geopolitical perspective, American containment doctrine at the end of the forties did not regard South and Southeast Asia as *vital*⁶ to the security of the United States. In defining the purpose and strategy of containment, George Kennan had proposed that Soviet expansion should be confronted in the European-Mediterranean area, and in Japan in Northeast Asia. Kennan's geopolitical analysis was based on calculations of power. In addition to the Soviet Union, these were the only regions which possessed sufficient industrial and military capacity to threaten the security of the United States. Since only the Soviet Union, among the industrial-military power complex regions, was under communism, the purpose of containment was to prevent the European-Mediterranean region, plus Japan, from falling under communist control and thereby becoming a threat to the security of the United States.¹⁸

The power equation among the regions of primary strategic significance was not in perfect symmetry however. The United States and the Soviet Union were the main actors, each manoeuvring to assert its influence over the other primary centres, and in other areas of secondary or marginal strategic importance. The other primary centres, i.e., the European-Mediterranean region

⁶The CIA defined "vital" as "essential to the continued existence of the US as a nation, i.e., something for which the US must fight." See CIA, *Relative US Security Interest in the European-Mediterranean Area and the Far East*, September 12, 1949, HSTP, PSF, Intelligence File, Box 257, HSTL.

and Japan, were similarly not of equal strategic importance in the Cold War. 'A definite realignment of the Western Europe-Mediterranean area', the CIA warned, 'would have a more immediate and decided effect on the global balance of power than would that of the Far East.'¹⁹ Japan remained of *vital* importance (in the longer term) to the United States nevertheless. No other region in Asia, certainly none in South and Southeast Asia, met Kennan's industrial-military power complex criteria to make it a direct object of containment. (A postwar version of Halford Mackinder, one might say). Yet the region remained *important* in American strategic thinking. The key to South and Southeast Asia's importance in American geopolitical calculations lay in the region's strategic, historical and economic links with two of the primary centres in Kennan's analysis, Europe and Japan.

The long-range security objective of the United States in the Far East, according to the CIA, was to prevent the development of an industrial-military power complex controlled by the Soviet Union. Although it was improbable, the agency admitted, that this could occur in the next ten years, it was bound to happen sooner than later; when it did, Japan would be the pivot. Retaining Japan in the American orbit was therefore fundamental to resolving the security dilemma in the Far East.²⁰ Such strategic calculations initiated the so-called reverse course in American policy toward occupied Japan.²¹ One of the elements of the reverse-course policy was the need to rehabilitate the Japanese economy. But this could be done successfully only if markets and raw material

sources could be secured for the Japanese economy. History and geography dictated that these sources should be in Southeast Asia.²²

The region's importance also lay in its perceived economic value to America's allies in Europe. It could serve as an important source of raw materials, and of investment income to Western Europe. The Indian subcontinent could be useful for such strategic materials as cotton, mica, manganese monazite (a source of thorium) and beryl. It also had some locational advantages. It lay astride the major sea lanes between Europe and the Far East, and was geographically proximate to the oil fields of the Middle East.²³ The sterling bloc, and the balances, also tied most of the countries in the region to the British economy. (France and the Netherlands also had economic and historical links with Asia although both were busy dissipating whatever influence they had with their "imperialist" actions in the region.) Since the Western European-Mediterranean area, in Kennan's power analysis, was of *vital* strategic importance to the United States, Washington could not ignore South and Southeast Asia, a region whose economy was organically linked to that of its European and Japanese allies and, more importantly, to that of the United Kingdom, its closest ally in the Cold War.

According to NSC 20/4 the objective of American policy was "to reduce the power and influence of the USSR to limits which no longer constitute a threat to the peace, national independence and stability of the world family of nations."²⁴ Approved in 1948, the document gave form and context to the

Truman administration's conception of the Cold War as a global phenomenon. The policy was formulated at a time when there was a lot of confusion in Washington on the desirability or otherwise of globalizing containment; on whether a distinction should be made between Soviet expansionism and international communism.²⁵ The success of communism in China complicated the confusion by casting doubt on the prevailing view of the Cold War as a bi-dimensional confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Was China a puppet and/or a siamese twin of the Soviet Union, or was it a third force?

Secretary of State George Marshall believed that China could not pose any strategic threat to the United States because it was impoverished and technologically backward. Kennan's view was that the communists 'could not make a dangerous military power out of China.'²⁶ Although a communist victory in China was 'regrettable' it was unlikely to be 'catastrophic to United States interests.'⁹ It was probable, Kennan suggested, that such a victory would promote 'powerful "Tito"* tendencies within the Communist movement.'⁹²⁷ Commercial access to China was similarly not 'essential' to the American economy. It would however be advantageous to the United States, the CIA suggested, to 'draw China away from vassalage to the USSR into a *modus*

*Kennan was referring here to the breach in the communist bloc in 1948 when the Soviet Union denounced its friendship treaty with Yugoslavia in response to Marshal Tito's ideological deviation. Yugoslavia subsequently signed a series of economic agreements with the United States.

vivendi (italics in original) with the West.⁹²⁸

Like China, and indeed most of Asia, Korea was, in Kennan's view, "not of decisive strategic importance" to American security. The United States, he recommended, should extricate itself from the peninsula "without too great a loss of prestige."⁹ Moreover, neither a communist victory in China nor American withdrawal from Korea was likely to have any impact on Soviet-American confrontation in Asia since, Kennan reasoned, there were "definite limitations on both the military and economic capabilities of the Russians in that area."⁹²⁹

This was also the view of General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers in Japan: the Soviet Union, he told Kennan on March 1, 1948, "could not exercise great influence in the Far East."⁹³⁰ If the Soviet Union did not have the capability to exercise great influence in the Far East, the United States did not think the region sufficiently vital to her security to warrant a deployment of Washington's full capabilities. Hence, as the 1940's came to a close a power vacuum remained in the region. With the exception perhaps of the Philippines, South and Southeast Asia remained *important* but not *vital* to the security of the United States and was therefore ancillary to the geopolitical calculations of containment.³¹ All this would of course change by the middle of 1950 when the Korean War brought the full capabilities of the United States to the Far East and turned the region into a vital theatre of the Cold War. But this was still in the future. Until the outbreak of the Korean War South and

Southeast Asia would remain outside the *vital* centres of American Cold War operations.

But for the Commonwealth foreign ministers assembled in Colombo, especially those from the Asia/Pacific region, South and Southeast Asia was *vital* to the security of their states even if, individually or as a Commonwealth collective, they had little capacity to assert the primacy of their interests in the region, as one would expect of say the superpowers. Moreover, unlike the United States, Asia-Pacific Commonwealth States regarded communism, rather than Soviet imperialism, as the major threat to their stability, and to the stability of the region in general. There was a clear distinction, as far as Commonwealth ministers were concerned, between Soviet imperialism and communism. None of them disagreed with Lester B. Pearson, Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs, when he made this distinction at the Colombo conference. Indeed there was a consensus, among the assembled ministers, that Soviet imperialism and communism required different responses: whereas the former could be checked by a countervailing force, such as NATO, the only effective remedy to the communist threat was economic development.³² The Commonwealth ministers' concern about communism is quite understandable. The governments of Australia, Ceylon, India, New Zealand and Pakistan not only had to respond to communist subversion, especially the Chinese variety. They also had to contend with the activities of local communists in their countries. The case of Australia and Ceylon are illustrative.³³

In Australia, the Liberal-Country Party Coalition led by Prime Minister Robert Gordon Menzies was swept to power in the federal elections of December 1949 on a platform promising, *inter alia*, "to outlaw the Communist Party."³⁴ The Australian communists had demonstrated their power in July and August 1949 when they inspired a coal strike which literally paralysed all industrial activity. The strike put 600,000 workers out of work forcing the Labor government to use troops to operate the mines. Australian communists were, according to the CIA, also supporting communists in Indonesia, Malaya and India.³⁵

The communist movement was even more popular and more influential in Ceylon³⁶ although it was fractured into three mutually antagonistic parties: the Lanka Sama Samaya Party, LSSP, (Trotskyist), the Bolshevik-Leninist Party, BLP (Leninist), and the Ceylon Communist Party, (Stalinist). In spite of their ideological differences, all three parties espoused revolutionary internationalism. Like their counterparts elsewhere, communists in Ceylon gained popularity by championing the cause of workers and controlling the labour movement. However, whereas in Australia, to pick an obvious example, the communists sought to influence government policy by controlling organized labour from which the Labor Party drew its strength, the Marxist parties in Ceylon were legitimate political organizations and were therefore legally permitted to contest elections. The fact that the communists could form the government of an independent Ceylon spurred non-communist elements in the elite to overcome

their fragmentation and form a grand party, the United National Party, UNP, in 1946. One chronicler of Ceylonese politics put it more succinctly:

the most compelling factor dictating the formation of a comprehensive organization [UNP] was the power and threat of the Marxist Left... the Marxist parties appeared to be a formidable political force with a solid base of popular support... [and] possessed leaders of wide popular appeal who were capable of evoking a nationalist response almost as strong as that aroused by any party in Ceylon.³⁷

The colonial administration in Colombo was equally aware of the power of the Marxist parties. To secure independent Ceylon against any future Communist-inspired uprising, the State Council[☞] enacted a public security ordinance that empowered the Governor-General to proclaim a state of emergency, to impose censorship and martial law and to proscribe organizations.³⁸

Elections for a government to lead Ceylon into independence were held in August and September 1947. The Marxist parties, unable to overcome their ideological differences and fissiparous tendencies, contested on different platforms and together won 20.5 per cent of the popular vote and 18 of the 95 elective seats in the House of Representatives.³⁹ The UNP formed the government under the prime ministership of D.S. Senanayake. And it was the UNP, the anti-communist coalition of conservatives and pro-western elements of the Ceylonese elite, which, in November 1947, signed a defence agreement with the U.K. The agreement secured for the government a pledge of military assistance for internal security and for defense against external aggression.⁴⁰ In

[☞]The State Council was the legislative arm of the colonial government. Its Ceylonese members later formed the nucleus of the UNP.

plain language this meant that British troops in bases⁴¹ in Ceylon could be used to quell internal disturbances. Since such disturbances were likely to be orchestrated by the Marxist parties the defence agreement was in part an additional (to the public security ordinance) weapon the government could use against them.⁴²

Whereas the Menzies government pressed for legislation to dissolve the Australian Communist Party (the Act was overturned by the high court) the government of Senanayake preferred to destroy the basis of the Marxist parties' influence: their control over labour. It enacted a series of legislation detaching parties from unions, restricting strikes and prohibiting union contributions to political parties⁴³ thereby effectively undercutting the financial and organizational base of communism in Ceylon. If the government had succeeded, for the moment at least, in dealing with the threat posed by local communists, what could it do about the threat posed by international communism to regional stability? The government's card, like that of Australia, would be revealed at the Colombo conference.

The Colombo Conference

The dialectic between the communist threat, economic development and political stability in South and Southeast Asia shaped the agenda for the Colombo conference. Two sets of meetings were to be held simultaneously, one by senior officials concerned with economic matters 'to take stock of the general balance of payments position of the sterling area as a whole.'⁴⁴ The major conference was that of the Commonwealth foreign ministers. The agenda proposed for this conference covered four principal topics (1) the general international situation; (2) the situation in China; (3) the Japanese Peace Treaty; and (4) the special problems of South-East Asia.⁴⁵ When the conference opened in Colombo the foreign ministers adjusted the agenda to read as follows: (1) the general international situation (including the current economic situation); (2) China; (3) Japanese Peace Treaty; (4) Southeast Asia (including particularly (i) Indochina, (ii) Burma); (5) Europe.⁴⁶

During one of the informal pre-conference consultations between British and Canadian officials, M.E. Dening, Assistant Under Secretary of State in the Foreign Office, informed the Canadian High Commissioner in London, L.D. Wilgress, that the British government was concerned about Nehru's 'considerable distrust of United States imperialism and [his] consequent tendency to play down necessity for defensive measures against possible Soviet aggression.'⁹ The government therefore 'hoped that at Colombo something could

be done to educate him [Nehru] in the economic facts of life, and to encourage India to play a greater part in general economic and security measures calculated to resist communist expansion in the Far East and in Southeast Asia.⁹ Canada could play a useful role in the discussion at Colombo, Dening suggested, “particularly in calming Indian fears as to the intentions of the United States.”⁴⁷

To what extent the British would succeed in educating the Indian prime minister remained to be seen. That the United Kingdom was determined to influence⁴⁸ the discussions in Colombo was evident in the large and powerful delegation it sent to the conference. Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin (who was reportedly sick in Colombo and had to be carried in a palanquin up the stairs to the conference room every morning⁴⁹) led the British delegation consisting of P.J. Noel-Baker, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations; Malcolm MacDonald, Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia; Walter Hankinson, High Commissioner in Ceylon; Percivale Liesching, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations; M. E. Dening, Assistant Under-Secretary of State in the Foreign Office; and J.J.S. Garner, Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations. Sir Henry Wilson Smith, Second Secretary in the Treasury, chaired the meeting of economic officials.

Australia was represented by its new Minister for External Affairs, Mr. Percy C. Spender, and three High Commissioners—H.R. Gollan (India), J.E. Oldham (Pakistan), and C.W. Frost (Ceylon). Canada was represented by Lester

Pearson (R.W. Mayhew, Canada's Minister of Fisheries, later joined Pearson at the Colombo conference); India by Prime Minister and Minister of External Affairs Jawaharlal Nehru and two High Commissioners— V.K. Krishna Menon (United Kingdom), and V.V. Giri (Ceylon). F.W. Doidge, Minister of External Affairs, represented New Zealand. Ghulam Mohammed, Minister of Finance, Habib Ibrahim, High Commissioner in the United Kingdom, and M. Ikramullah, Secretary for Foreign Affairs, represented Pakistan. South Africa was represented by its Minister for Transport, Paul Sauer, and D.D. Forsyth, Secretary for External Affairs. The host country, Ceylon, was represented by its prime minister, D.S. Senanayake, who chaired the conference, and by Senator L.A. Rajapakse, Minister of Justice, Junius R. Jayewardene, Minister of Finance, and R.G. Senanayake, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Defence and External Affairs.

When the conference opened on the morning of January 9 in the Senate Building, the ministers, to the consternation of the world press assembled in Colombo, went immediately into secret session; opening statements which at such international conferences are open to the public were made in secret. The discussions which followed, the Canadian External Affairs Minister later reported, were 'uneven' because the agenda was vague and because Senanayake 'was inexperienced and not very effective in guiding discussion.' The Ceylonese prime minister 'seemed somewhat over-awed by both Mr. Nehru and Mr. Bevin.'⁵⁰

Be that as it may, it soon became apparent that no agreement could be reached, beyond the exchange of views, on the various items on the agenda. Nehru was strongly opposed to the British proposal for the recognition of the Bao Dai regime in Indochina (Vietnam) as were the other Asian delegations. French imperialism, he argued, was the major problem in Indochina; the Bao Dai regime was no more than an instrument of French colonialism, with little influence in the country. To the disappointment of the United Kingdom which had promised France a *de facto* recognition to the Bao Dai regime, no acceptable formula could be devised, even for use in the daily press communique, to craft a message welcoming the progress of the nationalist regime in Vietnam towards independence. The only agreement, for the record, which was found acceptable was a suggestion by Senanayake that the delegations should report to their governments the exchange of views on the subject, and the need for further consultation.⁵¹

The United Kingdom, India, Pakistan and Ceylon had pre-empted any possibility of a united Commonwealth policy toward China by recognizing the communist regime before the Colombo conference. (The United Kingdom recognized China on January 6, three days before the Colombo conference.) Nevertheless, Doidge and Spender wondered why recognition could not be deferred until the question had been discussed at the conference. The complaint and its implied notion that consultation should result in a concerted Commonwealth policy elicited a firm repudiation from the Canadian, South

African and United Kingdom delegations.

Apparently, the Australian and New Zealand foreign ministers, whose parties had just come to power in their respective countries (both in 1949), still held an outdated view of the Commonwealth and were little aware of the fundamental transformation which had taken place in the nature and character of the organization. At least this was the impression Lester Pearson got from the discussion. In his opening speech Doidge had described his country as ‘a daughter in her mother’s house but mistress of her own.’⁹ But had filial relations not been abandoned in the postwar Commonwealth? The discussion on the recognition of China dispelled Doidge’s anachronistic pretensions. It provided the Australian and New Zealand foreign ministers with ‘an intensive course in the realities of present Commonwealth relations’, Pearson reported in a telegram to Ottawa.⁵²

There was nevertheless an irony in the assertion of sovereign interest on the China issue. By taking such a patently independent action in recognizing China on the eve of the conference, the United Kingdom undermined its own effort and desire to promote closer Commonwealth coordination and cooperation in foreign affairs. However, this was not as important, it eventually turned out, as ensuring that the actions of the British government, and those of the Commonwealth for that matter, were in accord with the expectation of the United States. Noel-Baker informed the delegates that US Secretary of State Dean Acheson ‘had expressed the hope that Commonwealth governments would not

recognize the new government simultaneously, lest this should suggest a split between the United States and the Commonwealth.⁹⁵³ That effectively ended the discussion on the recognition of China.

No agreement could be reached on the Japanese Peace Treaty. Instead, the conference accepted Bevin's proposal that a Commonwealth working party, directed by High Commissioners, should meet in London to coordinate the views of member states.⁵⁴ At the top secret Anglo-American talks held in London in May 1950, Bevin complained to Dean Acheson that his ignorance of the American position on the Japanese Peace Treaty had hampered his attempt to persuade other Commonwealth ministers to accept his proposals on the subject. It was 'to tide over this situation'⁹ that he had proposed the establishment of the Commonwealth working party.⁵⁵ The United Kingdom's pet project, to educate Nehru in the realities of international affairs, bore little fruit. Nehru, it turned out, was an unwilling pupil, 'a master of the diplomatic language of understatement'⁹ (as Pearson described him), fully capable of advocating and defending his position in international affairs, especially as they affected Asia. Mr. Bevin, Pearson observed, did not make 'any noteworthy progress.'⁹⁵⁶

One theme which occurred frequently in these discussions was the extent to which communism fed on, and intensified South and Southeast Asia's social, economic and political problems. It featured prominently in the discussion on the general international situation, on Indochina, on the Japanese Peace Treaty, on Burma, and of course on the recognition of China. Resolving the region's

problems, various speakers suggested, required taking action either in the economic field, or in the political and strategic arena. One such strategic option, promoted by Australia, was a Pacific or South and Southeast Asia defence pact which would be patterned on NATO and which would include the United States. New Zealand would support a Pacific Pact but only if it included the United States. Bevin thought such a pact was unworkable because of the different situations in Europe and Asia. A better option, he suggested, was to promote economic development in the region with the financial assistance of the West.

Nehru thought a Pacific Pact would merely promote closer Sino-Soviet military cooperation and would hardly enhance the security of the non-communist Pacific states. Since the problem in Asia was essentially economic, the right solution, Nehru asserted, was to accelerate the pace of economic development in the region. For Lester Pearson a Pacific Pact, like NATO, was the appropriate response to Soviet imperialism. The threat to South and Southeast Asia was communism rather than Soviet imperialism; the best defence against this was economic development.⁵⁷ By the end of the first day of the conference it had become quite evident that a political and strategic response to the problem in South and Southeast Asia, especially one involving the establishment of a Pacific Pact, ‘was either premature or out of the question.’⁹ The emerging consensus was that the range of action lay in the economic rather than in the political or strategic field.⁵⁸

Prime Minister Senanayake set the stage for the discussion of Asia's economic problems on the opening day of the conference. In his keynote address he argued that the fundamental problem in Asia was not political but economic. What Asia needed was capital equipment and technical assistance to lift the region from the morass of poverty and underdevelopment. Nehru echoed the same theme. Spender stressed the region's 'pressing and imperative need for economic assistance.'⁵⁹ Ghulam Mohammed stressed the need to replace 'talk' and 'sentiment' with economic 'action' if the West was serious in its desire to end the appeal of 'non-democratic ideas' (a euphemism for communism) in Asia.⁵⁹

Yet throughout the first three sessions of the conference, the discussions on Asia's economic development remained largely perfunctory; delegates spoke in abstract generalizations.⁶⁰ What in fact did the ministers mean by economic development? No one explained. If economic development was indeed the answer to the communist threat, as they all seemed to believe, how was it to be promoted? How could it be actualized? Who would foot the bill? That no one answered these questions in the early sessions of the conference was not unusual. Commonwealth conferences were, after all, not meant for policy formulation. It suited everyone's sovereign interest to keep discussions at the level of generalizations. No observer of the Colombo conference would have been surprised if the discussions on Asia's economic development had ended on the same note as on the other items on the agenda— long on speeches and

short on action. In fact the discussions on Asia's economic development might well have ended as perfunctorily as they had begun but for the sudden and active intervention of the Finance Minister of Ceylon, Jayewardene, and the Australian External Affairs Minister, Spender.

The Spender Plan

In the fourth plenary session, on the second afternoon of the conference, Jayewardene presented some concrete proposals for the economic development of South and Southeast Asia. Economic development, he asserted in the formal draft resolution elaborating his oral presentation, was 'the only sure guarantees (sic) for the preservation and the strengthening of the democratic way of life...and genuine independence.'⁹ To meet this goal he called for the appointment of a committee of officials to prepare a 10-year Commonwealth Economic Plan for the development of the agricultural and industrial economies of the Asian Commonwealth states and other non-Commonwealth states which might indicate interest in the programme. The plan was to be operated through an organization similar to the Economic Co-operation Administration; participating countries were to adopt legislation based upon the United States Economic Co-operation Act of 1948. Commonwealth states were to assist in the implementation of the plan 'with money, guaranteed prices, technical skill and machinery.'⁶¹ What Jayewardene had in mind was a programme structurally similar to the Marshall Plan.

The following day Spender presented an Australian memorandum proposing a plan for the economic development of South and Southeast Asia which would require a different structural and implementation mechanism for the attainment of essentially the same objectives anticipated in the Ceylon resolution. The states in the region, the memorandum asserted, required finance, capital equipment, technical assistance and consumption goods to reverse the deterioration in their political and economic situation, raise consumption standards and boost agricultural and industrial production. Considering the magnitude of the aid which would be required and the obvious limitations on the capacity of Commonwealth states to meet them, it would be necessary, the memorandum noted, to seek the support of the United States. The memorandum then called for the establishment of a consultative committee to coordinate the aid plan. If member governments found the proposals acceptable, the memorandum concluded, Australia was willing to convene the first meeting of the consultative committee.⁶²

The conference now had before it, at the sixth plenary session, two documents, the Australian memorandum and the Ceylonese resolution, both with concrete proposals for the economic development of South and Southeast Asia. To give ministers sufficient time to consider the proposals the chairman suggested that only the political aspects of the situation in Southeast Asia should be discussed at the sixth meeting; the economic aspect should be taken up at the eighth meeting. This suggestion was accepted, although not before

Nehru had emphasized the interconnectedness between the political and economic aspects.⁶³ That evening, as Spender himself recounts, he succeeded in convincing the Ceylon delegation to support a joint resolution, distilled largely from the Australian memorandum, which would stand a better chance of acceptance by all the ministers.⁶⁴

When the subject next came up for discussion at the eighth meeting the ministers now had before them a draft resolution sponsored by Australia, Ceylon and New Zealand. (The joint draft resolution is presented in full in Appendix 1 and will not be summarised in detail here.) The resolution embodied the "Spender Plan" which called for the establishment of a Consultative Committee for South and Southeast Asia as the implementation mechanism for the aid programme.

In presenting the resolution on behalf of the sponsoring countries Spender emphasized, over and over, the importance of seeking American participation in the Plan. "Indeed, not much could be accomplished", he stressed, "without considerable assistance from the United States." He also emphasized the need to link the Consultative Committee with other international organizations promoting development in the region, and the need to include non-Commonwealth states in the region in the Committee's activities.⁶⁵

Nehru welcomed the proposals but stressed the necessity for each country "to draw up a detailed plan of its own needs" before the proposed Consultative Committee could make any progress. Doidge supported the Plan

but noted that it was only in the field of technical assistance that New Zealand could make a contribution. On the recommendation that Commonwealth states should ensure that requests from Southeast Asia received a high priority in the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development he explained that there was little New Zealand could do since it was not a member of the Bank. The success of any economic development programme for South and South-East Asia, Ghulam Mohammed of Pakistan stressed in his response to Spender's presentation, 'would ultimately depend on assistance from the United States.'⁹ This could delay the implementation of the Plan. To avoid such delays it was necessary, he advised, to hold a meeting at an early date to draw up an implementation programme.

Jayewardene hoped that since Australia had already indicated its desire to convene the first meeting of the Consultative Committee it should be possible to hold the meeting in 'eight weeks' time.'⁹ Bevin agreed in principle with the recommendations embodied in the Spender Plan 'but he wished to be realistic'⁹ and would like the conference to remember that the United Kingdom had already provided £750 million to the region. Other regions, especially the Middle East and Africa, had claims on the United Kingdom's limited resources.⁶⁶ If Bevin's illness in Colombo had any significance, perhaps it was as a metaphor for Britain's financial weakness. Britain had provided aid to the region in the past, and now Britain was financially exhausted, reduced to secondary status in the global power equation. The United Kingdom, Bevin was telling the other

Commonwealth ministers, would not be able to make any significant contribution to the implementation of the Spender Plan.

Pearson underlined the importance of the recommendations without committing his government. Instead he suggested that the recommendations should be scrutinized by the economic advisers attached to delegations in order to eliminate ‘ambiguities of phrasing...[and] to avoid any possibility of misunderstanding, particularly of the part to be played by the United States.’⁹ The conference accepted Pearson’s suggestion and also agreed in principle to make recommendations to governments on the basis of the Spender Plan.⁶⁷

That evening economic advisers examined the draft recommendations and made some changes to reflect the suggestion made by Pearson on the need to avoid ambiguity. Most of the changes were in phraseology; the substance and intent of the recommendations were left intact. Douglas LePan, the economic adviser to the Canadian delegation, who participated in the revision of the draft recommendations, claims that the changes were guided by three objectives: (1) to give governments more latitude to respond to the recommendations as they thought fit; (2) to avoid the impression of attempting to pressure the United States; and (3) to protect the susceptibility of international organizations.⁶⁸

The report (see Appendix II) of the economic advisers containing the revised draft of the recommendations to governments was considered by the conference at the tenth meeting on January 13. On Pearson’s suggestion the conference agreed to omit the words "in this area" in paragraph A (1). This was

to enable governments take into account all their existing commitments both within and outside the region in considering whether to provide financial assistance to South and Southeast Asia. Thereafter the conference approved the recommendations to governments embodying the Spender Plan. It also agreed that Australia should ask governments after a suitable interval whether they accepted the recommendations and, if so, when they would be ready to send representatives to the meeting of the Consultative Committee.⁶⁹

Thus was planted the seed which would flower, later in the year, into the Colombo Plan. How many governments would accept the recommendations and membership in the Consultative Committee? This was a question for the future. When the conference formally ended on Saturday, January 14, 1950, ministers undertook an extended tour of the island, satisfied that they had established the framework for a programme which would promote economic development in the region and, through that, create politically stable states able to withstand, and repel, communist subversion. The plan would also strengthen the bonds of the Commonwealth and contribute to easing the burden of the sterling balances.

The conference had demonstrated, the final communique proclaimed, the continuity and substantial community of outlook within the Commonwealth. That all the eight Commonwealth ministers could agree to propose to their governments the acceptance of the 'progressive policies' (to use the language of the final communique) embodied in the Spender Plan was a highly significant (perhaps unprecedented) event in the postwar history of the Commonwealth.

One author has described it as ‘the first creative achievement of the postwar Commonwealth.’⁹⁷⁰ What concatenation of fortuitous circumstances made this possible? Why did Australia propose the Plan and why did the other states find it in their interest to accept? What were the geopolitical and strategic considerations underpinning the Australian proposals? Was the Spender Plan a completely novel idea or did it have antecedents within the Commonwealth? Was the need to promote economic development in South and Southeast Asia discussed at earlier Commonwealth meetings or was it at the Colombo conference that it was first recognised and accepted? These questions would be addressed in the following sections.

Antecedents to the Spender Plan

The theme of Asia’s economic development began to appear in the discussions at Commonwealth prime ministers’ meetings and at the meetings of Commonwealth officials when the Asia countries accepted membership in the organization in 1948. This was inevitable. The asymmetrical levels of development between the Asian and non-Asian members of the Commonwealth, the necessity to demonstrate that the organization was responsive to the problems of its Asian members, the economic, strategic and geopolitical interests of the United Kingdom and some of the old Dominions in the region, and the fact that both the old and new members of the Commonwealth had a common interest in the sterling balances are some of the factors which gave

prominence to the theme of Asia's economic development at Commonwealth conferences from 1948.

Even at these earlier meetings, the discussions on Asia's economic development could not be insulated from what the members regarded as the region's vulnerability to communist inspired take-overs. Such discussions invariably centred on the problems of regional instability, already manifest in the multiple civil war in Burma, and in the insurgencies in Malaya, Indonesia and Indochina. It was one of the major themes in Bevin's review of British policy toward Asia at the 1948 meeting.⁷¹

In response to Bevin's statement on communism and instability in Asia, Nehru gave an interesting and lucid exposition on the links between communism and nationalism in Asia and how the two concepts found symmetry in contradistinction to imperialism. Nehru's view was that communism would continue to enjoy the sympathy of Asian nationalists as long as imperialism, especially Dutch action in Indonesia, and French activities in Indochina, persisted. Once imperialism disappeared, Nehru argued, conflict would develop between communism and nationalism, as had happened in India where the Communist Party, even though it was well organised, had become isolated 'because it ha[d] gone against nationalist feeling.'⁷² His solution to the problem, as he told his colleagues in London in 1948, was that once decolonization had brought an end to imperialism, industrialization would discourage "upsets" or Communistic developments in Asia.⁷³ Nehru's suggestion was in fact the

solution which enjoyed the greatest support within the Commonwealth. 'Several of the representatives spoke', the Canadian High Commissioner in London reported in a telegram to Ottawa, 'of the need to strengthen economic co-operation in the interest of avoiding conditions in their countries and abroad which might encourage. . .the spread of Communism.'⁷⁴ Economic development was, therefore, for the Commonwealth, the panacea for eradicating the communist threat to the states in South and Southeast Asia. It was, of course, convenient to Nehru and other Asian leaders since it would in any case have been a pillar of good policy - communism or no. Only South Africa, understandably, expressed little interest in Asian problems, preferring to concentrate on African issues.

It was at the 1948 meeting that Bevin made his vague proposal for some organ of Commonwealth consultation on Asiatic problems.⁷⁵ It was at the same meeting that Dr. H.V. Evatt, the then Australian Minister for External Affairs, noted that promoting economic development in Asia would have the added advantage of 'assisting in the financing of the Western European deficit.'⁷⁶ However, it was the Pakistani Prime Minister, Liaqat Ali Khan, who suggested a more concrete plan for Asian economic development. Ali Khan called for the establishment of a committee which would promote industrial and agricultural development, and mutual trade within the Commonwealth. The committee would match capital requirements in one part of the Commonwealth with capital supplies in another.⁷⁷ But this was still 1948, and the situation in Southeast Asia

was not sufficiently critical to impinge on the economic, strategic and geopolitical interests of other Commonwealth states. The Pakistani proposal was not adopted. Instead, the conference merely affirmed the desirability of further consultation within the Commonwealth.⁷⁸ The next meeting of Commonwealth prime ministers, held in London in April 1949, was devoted to resolving the constitutional questions arising from India's republican status.

Three months later Commonwealth finance ministers met in London to discuss the Sterling bloc's dollar problems. Once again, Pakistan, this time through its Finance Minister, Ghulam Mohammed, submitted proposals for the preparation of plans to promote economic development and increase levels of production within the sterling area.⁷⁹ Both Treasury and Foreign Office officials later noted the similarity between this proposal and the one embodied in the Spender Plan.⁸⁰ But as the Canadian report of the finance ministers conference makes clear, support for the Pakistani proposal came mainly from other Asian delegates.⁸¹ The proposal did not commend itself to the others. In the end they merely agreed to Pakistan's more *realistic* suggestion that 'the question of the development of backward areas⁹ should be included on the agenda for the forthcoming tripartite talks in Washington in September.⁸² (The talks were held periodically by the Americans, the British, and the Canadians to discuss sterling/dollar problems and related issues.)

The preceding examples have been provided to demonstrate that the need to promote economic development in South and Southeast Asia did not

emerge suddenly in Colombo. This raises the question, inevitably, as to why it was given such primacy at the Colombo conference. One possible clue to this sudden change in the attitude of the Commonwealth to the need to accelerate economic development in South and Southeast Asia is a statement on the origin of the Spender Plan made by K.M. Panikkar, the Indian Ambassador to China (1948-1952) in his memoirs, In Two Chinas: Memoirs of a Diplomat. He claims that

The problem of communist expansion...began to interest me considerably. I thought the time had come to formulate a policy which would strengthen the economic, social, and political structure of the area [Southeast Asia]. With this objective in view I wrote a memorandum the main argument of which was that without immediate and adequate help in the economic field, the political structure of South-East Asia would provide no more than a frail barrier to the expansion of communism. I knew that my Government could not move in this matter effectively; so I decided to enlist the co-operation of the British and Australian Ambassadors and put forward the note to the Commonwealth Governments as a joint proposal. Keith Officer, the Australian Ambassador,... fell in with this idea, as did Sir Ralph Stevenson [the British Ambassador]. Stevenson also showed my paper to Leighton Stuart [the American Ambassador], who...agreed to recommend it independently to his Government. At the next Commonwealth Ambassadors' meeting the memorandum was approved with minor modifications and it was then forwarded to our Governments as a joint proposal...I was told later by Keith Officer that the proposals in that memorandum formed the basis of the discussions which led to the Colombo Plan.⁸³

Panikkar's claim, which he attributes to Keith Officer, that his memorandum formed the basis for the Spender proposals, has been independently confirmed by Lalita Prasad Singh. Michael Haas also makes reference to it without attribution.⁸⁴ Spender himself makes no reference to the Panikkar memorandum in his retrospective account of the birth of the Colombo Plan; neither does he acknowledge the contribution of the previous Labor government to the articulation of the proposals which he presented at the Colombo conference. We shall return to this shortly. Our primary concern, for

the moment, is not whether the Panikkar memorandum influenced the specificity of the Spender Plan. The significance of the memorandum lies in its geographical point of origin— China. The fact that it was the Commonwealth ambassadors in China, at the dying days of the Nationalist regime, who discussed and subsequently presented the Panikkar memorandum to their home governments provides ample justification for our thesis on the dialectic between the communist threat and the proposals for economic development in South and Southeast Asia which evolved into the Colombo Plan.

We have already seen the extent to which the discussions on Asia's economic development at Commonwealth meetings since 1948 were linked to what members perceived as the communist threat to political stability in the region. The communist victory in China in 1949 increased exponentially the possibility of communist subversion of the states in the region. Poverty and underdevelopment, nationalism, anti-colonial and anti-western sentiment made the region that much more fertile for communism. Communism now had the potential to launch a two-pronged attack on the fragile political stability in the region; the long Cold War hand of the Kremlin was strengthened by the local, more proximate threat from Beijing. Nothing demonstrated the emergence of a Moscow-Beijing axis better than the official visit of Mao to Moscow which, coincidentally, took place at the same time the Commonwealth foreign ministers were meeting in Colombo.

It was this dynamic which provided the impetus for the dramatic attention which Commonwealth ministers gave to Asia's economic development at the Colombo conference. Promoting economic development in the region was the Commonwealth's response to the implications for regional stability of the victory of communism in China. This was what inspired the acceptance of the Australian proposals at Colombo. Did it also inspire Australia to formulate and present the proposals embodied in the Spender Plan? To answer this question it is necessary to explore in greater detail the geostrategic and geopolitical underpinnings of the Spender Plan; to examine the foreign policy goals which inspired Percy Spender's proposals at Colombo.

Economics of Containment: The Spender Plan as a Prophylactic against Communism

The consolidation of Communism in China and the evident threat of its emergence as a growing force throughout South-East Asia, underline the urgency of international efforts to stabilize governments and to create conditions of economic life and living standards under which the ideological attractions which Communism exerts will lose their force. (P.C. Spender)⁶⁵

Two months after the proclamation of the Communist People's Republic of China (October 1, 1949), the Liberal-Country Party Coalition took over power in Australia. What possible connection could these two apparently disparate events have, apart from their proximity in time? One obvious answer is that both countries share a common geopolitical space: either Australia or China would describe the intervening territory – Southeast Asia – as falling within its strategic

orbit (See Map 1). In the bipolar reality of the postwar world, it was this simple fact of geography, in the face of the vast ideological gulf separating the two countries, which made the consolidation of communism in China such a significant factor in the articulation of the Liberal-Country Party Coalition government's foreign policy.

The Liberal Party, the dominant member of the coalition government, had been in the opposition since 1941. Its chief rival, the Labor Party, controlled the government from 1941-1949. Australia's foreign policy, under Labor, was shaped by the following principles: (1) support for the United Nations; (2) strengthening relations with the United States; (3) strengthening ties with Britain and the Commonwealth; (4) acceptance of a greater degree of responsibility for Australian and regional security; (5) adoption of a policy of Asian accord and good-neighbourliness towards Asian countries; and (6) support for democratic principles.⁸⁶

Three forces shaped these principles. One was the historical and cultural links with Britain. The second was the decline of Britain, and the recognition that Australia's security depended on American power. The Second World War and, in particular, Japanese militarism, had revealed the hollowness of the traditional foundations (reliance on Britain) upon which the nation's security was based. This had a decisive impact on Australia's foreign policy which no party could ignore, whether it was in power or in the opposition. And none could ignore the

MAP 1



Australia and China's Geopolitical Space

Adapted from Gordon Greenwood, *Approaches to Asia: Australian Postwar Policies and Attitudes* (Sydney: McGraw-Hill, 1974), p. 3.

role the United States had played, and would continue to play, in guaranteeing the nation's defence and security. The third, arising from a growing sense of nationhood, was an appreciation of the logic of geography: that, as an Asia/Pacific state, Australia would have to promote harmonious relations with its immediate neighbours to the north through a policy of cooperative regionalism. How far do the principles articulated by the new Liberal-Country Party Coalition government's foreign minister, Spender, diverge from the Evatt principles outlined above? Did the two parties have a common vision of Australia's place and role in international affairs? To a certain extent, there was some continuity in the foreign policies of the Labor and the Liberal-Country Party Coalition governments. But there were fundamental differences as well, especially in means, and in geopolitical focus.

Labor's fairly long tenure in office, during which Dr. Evatt stamped his personality on Australia's World War II and postwar international posture had denied the opposition any meaningful influence in the articulation of the country's foreign policy.⁸⁷ And the international system had changed since the Liberals were last in government. Hence, upon assuming power in December 1949, the Liberal-Country Party Coalition was confronted with a dynamically different international system requiring a fundamental reassessment of the basic principles of Australia's foreign and defence policy. It was the government's reevaluation of the new challenges to the country's security, especially from the Asia-Pacific region, and its development of new policy instruments to protect and

project Australia's interests and ideals, which set the stage for the articulation of the proposals Spender presented at Colombo.

Spender was the principal architect of the new government's foreign policy, at least in the first seventeen months, during which, he acknowledges, Prime Minister Menzies gave him wide authority.⁸⁸ Throughout this period his fundamental concern was Australia's security; the Colombo Plan was, David Lowe asserts, "very much a vehicle for his pursuit of sweeping measures, including an American alliance, which would provide for the future security of Australia."⁸⁹ If David Lowe's categorical assertion of Spender's objective is indeed correct (and this writer believes that it is) then we can turn to Spender himself for corroborative evidence.

In a statement to parliament on March 9, 1950, Spender outlined the principles and objectives of the new government's foreign policy.⁹⁰ Like Labor the Liberal-Country Party Coalition believed in regionalism; like Labor it was determined to maintain close relations with Britain, with the Commonwealth, and with the United States. It was also willing to support the United Nations although it did not attach as much priority to the organization as the Labor government. There the similarities ended. The new government approached foreign policy from a more stringent ideological perspective. It was bitterly antagonistic towards communism and had contested the December elections promising to outlaw the Communist Party of Australia, and to introduce compulsory military training.⁹¹ In place of Evatt's moralistic internationalism Spender brought to Australia's foreign

policy a hard-headed realism suffused with ideological fervour. He shifted the focus of policy from the United Nations and Europe to the Asia-Pacific region. Maintaining regional peace and stability now took precedence over the UN's global peace agenda.

The first objective of Australia's foreign policy, Spender told parliament, was to maintain peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. Australia's security had become an immediate and urgent issue because international events since the war had shifted the centre of potential aggression from Europe to Asia. The success of western democracies in resisting communism in Europe was 'partly responsible for the increased interest shown by the Soviet Union in fostering the spread of Communism in Asia.'⁹ It was therefore necessary, he warned, to redirect Australia's policy towards ensuring that the 'new [Asian] States co-operate with each other and with us in meeting positively and actively the new problems created in this area by the emergence of a communist China, and by the ever-increasing thrust of communism.'⁹

In his analysis of the communist threat Spender situated it within the global Cold War struggle between 'the Western democracies'⁹ and the Soviet Union and its satellites. The struggle, which he blamed squarely on the Soviet Union, had divided Asia to such an extent as to make the achievement of peace and stability impossible. The Soviet Union and China were determined to exploit poverty and nationalist sentiment in the region to expand the frontiers of communism. In other words, the chief threat to regional stability was

communism, directed from Moscow, now evidently successful in China, and potentially capable, by allying itself ‘with the national aspirations of the millions of people of South-East Asia’, of destabilizing Australia’s geopolitical space.

The success of communism in China had exacerbated the situation. Communist China was determined to ‘stir up unrest and rebellion in Asia’ and could do this with little effort by exploiting her influence among the Chinese communities in the region and by subjecting them to ‘irredentist pressures.’⁹² Moreover, local communists throughout Southeast Asia could draw inspiration from their comrades in China. The success of communism in China had therefore ‘increased immeasurably’ the task of restoring regional economic and political stability, the prerequisite for Australia’s security. Since appeasing communism was, in his opinion, ‘completely ineffective and even dangerous’, the urgent task of Australia’s foreign policy was to devise measures to combat it, and maintain stability in the region. This became the underlying determinant of the Liberal-Country Party Coalition government’s foreign policy.

The main instruments which Spender employed in pursuit of his anti-communist foreign policy agenda were economic and military. In practical terms, these would take the form of a Pacific defence pact, and economic and technical aid programmes. These instruments were mutually interactive; Pacific security, economic and technical aid, were to Spender, ‘rather like two sides of one coin’; it was only by a ‘conjunction of economic and military measures’ that political stability could be secured in the region.⁹³ Implementing the economic

programme would require providing economic and technical aid to the non-communist states in the region. The fact that communist China was itself poor and underdeveloped, and was not in a position, in the near future, 'to make any tangible contribution' to eliminating poverty in the region, provided a window of opportunity which Australia could exploit to her advantage. Australia was willing, Spender asserted, to cooperate with other countries 'to draw the teeth of Communist imperialism by carefully applied measures of economic assistance.' Australia could not of course shoulder the financial burden of the economic and technical aid programme alone. She would have to cooperate with other countries. But such cooperation could not take place in a vacuum. It needed an international medium. That medium was, for the Menzies government, the Commonwealth.

We should recall at this juncture that one of the principles of the Labor government's foreign policy was strengthening Commonwealth ties. The principle became for the new government the medium through which the economic aspect of its foreign policy programme could be actualized. But Spender was realistic enough to recognize that even the Commonwealth, or rather, its members, had serious financial limitations. 'It is evident', he told parliament, that 'the economic progress of South and Southeast Asia depends very much on the extent of the participation of the United States of America.' The United States, although not a Commonwealth state, would have to be

encouraged to participate in an Australia-inspired Commonwealth aid programme.

In his statement to parliament Spender identified one other limitation in the economic aid aspect of the new government's foreign policy. This was its long gestation period. It was possible, he said, 'that events in Asia could move too quickly to allow time for economic and political measures alone to take effect.'⁹ It was therefore essential to take measures to guarantee the nation's security in the short term. That required implementing the reverse side of his coin, i.e., the military instrument. Spender did this by advancing the concept of a Pacific Pact which he envisioned as a defensive military arrangement involving states with 'a vital interest in the stability of Asia and the Pacific'⁹, and with the capability to undertake military commitments. Once again, the Commonwealth and the United States featured prominently in his military calculations. Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States and other Commonwealth states would form the nucleus of a Pacific Pact. It is evident why maintaining 'the closest and best possible relations'⁹ with the United States, as Spender described it, was such an essential aspect of the Liberal-Country Party Coalition government's foreign policy. It is also evident why he abandoned Evatt's tendency to use the United Nations as the primary medium for the pursuit of Australia's foreign policy goals.

For Spender, any delay in implementing the economic programme could lead to a failure in attaining its political objective, i.e., regional stability. There

was a need for immediate and urgent action to meet what was essentially an ‘emergency’ situation. That the Colombo conference of Commonwealth foreign ministers was to be held two weeks after the Liberal-Country Party Coalition came to power was a timely coincidence which could be exploited by Spender to push his economic and military agenda. Spender, naturally, availed himself of the opportunity.

Yet we cannot but note that Spender barely had two weeks to prepare for the Colombo conference. He claims in his memoirs that it was on the long flight to Colombo that he and his departmental officials prepared the first draft of the proposals embodying the economic aid programme, i.e., the Spender Plan.⁹⁴ His statement to parliament, which we have used extensively in this section, was made almost two months after the Colombo conference. By then he had had sufficient time to flesh out his ideas. And no one can deny that the policy objectives and implementation mechanisms outlined in the statement are those of the new government, even if there are parallels, as naturally there should be, with the previous government’s policies. However, given the fact that Spender became Minister for External Affairs on December 19, following the electoral victory of the Liberal-Country Party Coalition, and two weeks later he was on his way to Colombo, is it not likely that he would have had to rely on briefs prepared under the Labor government?

It was the Labor government which accepted the invitation to attend the conference. Evatt had in fact ‘jumped the gun’ by making what the

Commonwealth Relations Office in London considered to be a premature announcement of the conference, and was already conveying the public impression that Australia was anxious to assume leadership for Commonwealth cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.⁹⁵ In view of this, it is inconceivable that officials at the Department of External Affairs in Canberra would not have initiated the preparation of briefs for the delegation attending the conference. In fact they did.⁹⁶ Yet Spender does not acknowledge in his memoirs the fact that the proposals he presented in Colombo were influenced, in part at least, by briefs prepared under Evatt. This point has been demonstrated convincingly by David Lowe and does not require further elaboration here.⁹⁷ It is nevertheless necessary to draw attention to it, without underestimating Spender's contribution to the formulation of the proposals he presented at Colombo, if only to demonstrate some of the continuities in the country's foreign policy.

Be that as it may, it is clear that Spender pushed hard for the acceptance of his economic aid programme at Colombo and did not hesitate to reveal the geostrategic calculations underpinning the proposals. One observer of the proceedings reports that Spender 'referred so often to Australia's security that it seems permissible to assume that his thinking was largely swayed by strategic considerations.'⁹⁸ Spender was successful in securing acceptance of his economic aid proposals, his attempt to sell the idea for a Pacific Pact proved to be premature. It failed at Colombo. But he could leave the conference confident that one of the two foreign policy instruments which would ensure the security of

his country had now been set in motion. The Plan was attractive because it offered other advantages, the principal one being that it provided a solution to some of the intractable problems of the sterling balances.

Economics of Relief: The United Kingdom, the Sterling balances and the Spender Plan

The British had come to Colombo anxious to resolve the sterling balances problem, especially those relating to the Indian balances. This was, in fact, the main item on the agenda at the meeting of senior economic officials.⁹⁹ The Indian balances, held in London, had increased dramatically during the War, when the United Kingdom made huge purchases in India of goods and services for its military operations in the Middle East and the Far East. Four years after the war the Indian balances still amounted to £603 million.¹⁰⁰ Releases to India from these balances accounted for at least one third of the total net drain on the United Kingdom's gold and dollar reserves⁹ and constituted the single most significant factor in Britain's financial difficulties.¹⁰¹

Viewed from a purely balance of payments perspective, the logical approach to resolving the difficulties of the sterling balances was for the United Kingdom to impose a limit on releases to India and to other sterling balances holders. What made such a fiscal remedy counterproductive were the geopolitical and strategic dimensions of the sterling balances. The caveat was the growing threat of communism in South and Southeast Asia.¹⁰² His Majesty's

government's response to this strategic danger was to promote economic development in the region. But India and other sterling bloc states in the region depended on their sterling balances to implement their economic development programmes. Hence, if their drawings were reduced to levels which the United Kingdom could afford, the states 'will be unable to maintain, far less increase, their present rate of development.'¹⁰³ The consequence of this would be to derail Britain's strategic objective of preventing the states from 'falling into the Communist camp'⁹ and building them up as 'centres of anti-Communist influence.'¹⁰⁴

Marshall Plan aid had helped the United Kingdom maintain the current (1949) levels of drawings on the sterling balances, and to absorb the shocks to her economy. But ECA aid was scheduled to end in 1952. Strategic imperatives dictated maintaining the current drawing levels on the sterling balances even after 1952; economic reality dictated otherwise. How could this dilemma be resolved? Considering the economic and geostrategic dynamics of the postwar world the solution which the British government proposed was predictable:

there is, therefore, no prospect of a satisfactory settlement of the sterling balance problem consistent with a continuous economic development in South and South East Asia unless new money can be found for development (or for settlement of the sterling balances) from the United States.¹⁰⁵

The Spender Plan provided the medium through which this solution could be actualized. We should recall that the most fundamental prerequisite for the attainment of the objectives of the Spender Plan was American participation.

Even though the conference records are rather vague on this, the British delegation made it quite clear at Colombo their eagerness to find some other source of financial assistance for the principal holders of the sterling balances.¹⁰⁶ Bevin hoped that the conference would initiate action “which would make it easier for the United States later to participate in some kind of economic assistance plan for Asia.”⁹ Such a plan would not only strengthen the economies of the recipient states and therefore help them to combat the spread of communism, it would also supply “the sterling area as a whole with a flow of dollars which might be expected to continue after the end of the European Recovery Programme.”⁹¹⁰⁷ Most of the elements envisaged by the British were present in the Spender Plan. It was only natural that the Plan would receive the blessings of His Majesty’s government.¹⁰⁸ But would other Commonwealth governments approve the Spender Plan? This would become clear in due course when Commonwealth foreign ministers met at their next conference in Sydney, Australia.

APPENDIX 1

SECRET

F.M.M. (50) 6
12th January, 1950

COMMONWEALTH MEETING ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

ECONOMIC POLICY IN SOUTH AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA

JOINT MEMORANDUM BY THE AUSTRALIAN, NEW ZEALAND AND CEYLON DELEGATIONS

The Australian, New Zealand and Ceylon Delegations jointly recommend to the Conference the following draft resolution:-

"The Conference of Foreign Ministers recommend to their Governments-

- A.—(i) to examine the possibility of making credit available for essential productive purposes in South and Southeast Asia and to agree to consult with each other on the subject;
- (ii) to take appropriate action in the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development to give a high priority to any requests from Southeast Asia that are in accordance with the Bank's purposes;
- (iii) to encourage Governments outside the Commonwealth which have an interest in the welfare of the region to adopt similar policies;
- (iv) to make a contribution to the Technical Assistance Programme of the United Nations;
- (v) to adopt a policy, within the various international organisations administering this programme, of giving a high priority to the claims of South and South-East Asia;
- (vi) to make supplementary bilateral arrangements in appropriate cases for the provision of direct aid of this kind;

- (vii) to have consultation among Commonwealth Governments on the implementation of these arrangements.
- B.- There should be established a Consultative Committee for South and South-East Asia with terms of reference along the following lines—
- (1) to receive from Governments an indication of action which they consider it feasible to take in response to the recommendations of this meeting;
 - (2) to examine the methods of co-ordinating development activities in South and South-East Asia, in association with other interested countries and with regional and international organisations concerned with the object of raising the level of production and the standard of living in these areas;
 - (3) to examine the question of measures to be taken if possible for the stabilisation of the price levels of basic products over long periods;
 - (4) to consider a plan for the economic development of the underdeveloped countries of this area and an organisation for the implementation of this plan within a specific and foreseeable period of time;
 - (5) to make recommendations to Governments on these subjects.
- C.- Participation in the Committee would be open to all Commonwealth countries which felt they had a direct interest in the area.
- D.- If the proposal were acceptable to the Meeting of Foreign Ministers, the Australian Government would be pleased to accept the responsibility of convening the first meeting in Australia."

*Colombo,
12 January, 1950*

Source: RG 25, Vol. 2285, Folder S-30-1, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa.

APPENDIX 2

SECRET

F.M.M. (50) 8

13th January, 1950

COMMONWEALTH MEETING ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

ECONOMIC POLICY IN SOUTH AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA

REPORT BY DRAFTING COMMITTEE OF OFFICIALS

As instructed by Ministers at their meeting on 12th January (F.M.M. (50) 8th Meeting, Minute 3), economic advisers attached to Delegations have considered the phrasing of the draft recommendations to Governments contained in F.M.M. (50) 6, and recommend that they should be revised to read as follows:-

A.— The Conference of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers recommends that the participating Governments should-

- (i) examine the possibility of making financial assistance available for essential productive purposes in South and South-East Asia, taking into account their existing commitments in this area;
- (ii) support as high a priority as possible for projects presented to the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development which would contribute to the economic well-being of the area and would be in accordance with the Bank's objectives;
- (iii) contribute to the technical assistance work of the United Nations and its Specialised Agencies, and to support in these organisations as high a priority as possible for the needs of South and South-East Asia;
- (iv) examine the possibility of making supplementary bilateral arrangements in appropriate cases for the provision of direct technical and other assistance;
- (v) generally, consider proposals for the economic development of the area, keeping in view the possibilities of mutual assistance.

B.— With a view to the implementation of these recommendations the Conference further recommends the establishment of a Consultative Committee, membership of which will be open to all Commonwealth Governments which wish to participate, with the following terms of reference—

- (i) to receive from Governments an indication of the action which they consider it feasible to take in response to the recommendations in Section A;
- (ii) to approach the Governments of countries outside the Commonwealth interested in the area with a view to enlisting their collaboration;
- (iii) to examine the methods of co-ordinating development activities in South and South-East Asia, in association with international and regional organisations concerned with the object of raising the level of production and the standard of living in the area;
- (iv) to examine the desirability of promoting international commodity agreements for basic products, which would benefit the area and could be recommended for consideration under the Havana Charter;
- (v) to consider whether the economic development of under-developed countries of the area would be assisted by the drawing up of a co-ordinated plan of development and by the establishment of special machinery;
- (vi) to make recommendations to Governments.

C.— If these recommendations are accepted the Australian Government would be pleased to accept the responsibility of convening the first meeting of the Consultative Committee in Australia.

*Office of the Secretariat,
Senate Building
Colombo
13th January, 1950.*

Source: RG 25, Vol. 2285, Folder S-30-1, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa.

ENDNOTES

1. ***Economic and Social Development in South and Southeast Asia and the Far East - Report by the Far East (Official) Committee***, January 6, 1950, CAB 134/194, E.D.(O.S.)(49)26, Public Record Office, London (henceforth PRO).
2. The categorization of the non-western members of the Commonwealth (India, Pakistan and Ceylon) in the western bloc was apparent rather than real. As the CIA noted in 1948 these former colonies were 'all intensely nationalistic' and, as such, tended 'to unite in opposition to the Western European powers on the colonial issues and to US economic dominance'. The gravest danger to the US, the report continued, was 'that friction engendered by these issues may drive the so-called colonial bloc into alignment with the USSR.' See CIA, ***The Break-up of the Colonial Empires and its Implications for US Security***, September 3, 1948, HSTP, PSF, Intelligence File, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri (henceforth HSTL).
3. For a detailed treatment of the transformation of the Commonwealth see W.D. McIntyre, ***The Commonwealth of Nations: Origins and Impact, 1869-1971*** (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); See also British Information Service, ***Consultation and Co-operation in the Commonwealth***, Rev. ed., (London: 1963), pp. 7-13.
4. See ***N.A. Robertson to Mike Pearson***, May 8, 1948, RG 25 A-12, Vol. 2118, Folder AR 430/21, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa (henceforth PAC). The economic reason would be explored in greater detail in Chapter 2.
5. Jawarhalal Nehru, ***India's Foreign Policy: Selected Speeches, September 1946 - April 1961*** (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1971), p. 133.
6. The legal basis of this bond can be traced to the Balfour Declaration of 1926 and the preamble of the Statute of Westminster of 1931.
7. ***Memorandum from Escott Reid to Mr. Leger: Mr. Nehru's Visit***, October 21, 1949. RG 25, Vol. 3849, Folder 9126-40 pt.1, PAC.
8. The problem was, understandably, not discussed in full conference. See ***N.A. Robertson to Mike Pearson***, May 8, 1948. RG 25 A-12, Vol. 2118, Folder AR 430/21, PAC.
9. The "white" Dominions, plus Pakistan and Ceylon, retained their common allegiance to the Crown but recognized India's 'acceptance of the King as the symbol of the free association of its [Commonwealth] independent member nations and as such Head of the Commonwealth'. See ***The High***

- Commissioner for Canada, London, to the Department of External Affairs, Ottawa: Commonwealth Conference— Text of Press Communique**, April 27, 1949. RG 25 A-12, Vol. 2118, Folder AR 430/23, PAC. Nehru believed that the problem could not have been solved if it had been left to lawyers. See J. Nehru, **India's Foreign Policy**, p. 143.
10. McIntyre, **The Commonwealth of Nations**, p. 356.
 11. The Asian Commonwealth states' support for nationalism and decolonization is discussed by Nicholas Mansergh. See N. Mansergh, "The Commonwealth in Asia", **Pacific Affairs**, Vol. XXIII, No. 1 (March 1950): 3-20.
 12. A special meeting of foreign ministers had in fact been held in Canberra, Australia, in 1947, to discuss the Japanese Peace Treaty before the Prime Ministers took their decision in 1948. If the Canberra meeting is regarded as the first Commonwealth ministerial meeting then the Finance Ministers' Meeting in London in 1949 would be the second, and the Colombo Meeting the third.
 13. P.C. Spender, **Exercises in Diplomacy, The ANZUS Treaty and the Colombo Plan** (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1969), p.193. Lester Pearson, the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, believes that the choice of Ceylon was influenced by the desire of Commonwealth states to promote international recognition for Ceylon's independent status and to assuage the country's feelings following the Soviet veto of her application to join the UN, ostensibly because of her Commonwealth membership. See **Secretary of State to the Heads of Canadian Missions Abroad**, Circular Document No. A. 13, April 8, 1950. MG 31 E6, D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
 14. John Lewis Gaddis, **Russia, The Soviet Union and the United States: An Interpretive History** (New York: John Wiley, 1978), p. 193.
 15. See A. Iriye, **The Cold War in Asia: A Historical Introduction** (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 127.
 16. On Britain's residual world power status and its influence on policy see John Kent, **British Imperial Strategy and the Origins of the Cold War 1944-49** (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993); David Reynolds, (ed.) **The Origins of the Cold War in Europe: International Perspectives** (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), especially chapter 3; David Reynolds, **Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century** (London & New York: Longman, 1991).
 17. **Economic and Social Development in South and Southeast Asia and the Far East - Report by the Far East (Official) Committee**, January 6, 1950, CAB 134/194, PRO.

18. J.L. Gaddis, "The Strategy of Containment", in T.H. Etzold and J.L. Gaddis, (eds.) ***Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945-1950*** (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 35; G.F. Kennan, ***Memoirs, 1925-1950*** (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1967), p. 359.
19. CIA, ***Relative US Security Interest in the European-Mediterranean Area and the Far East***, September 12, 1949, HSTP, PSF, Intelligence File, Box 257, HSTL.
20. CIA, ***Relative US Security Interest in the European-Mediterranean Area and the Far East***.
21. See J.W. Dower, "Occupied Japan and the Cold War in Asia", in M.J. Lacey (ed.), ***The Truman Presidency***, (New York: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 368.
22. See M.P. Leffler, ***A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War*** (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 253-58, 298-303.
23. R.J. McMahon, ***The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan*** (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 13-15; CIA, ***The Strategic Importance of the Far East to the US and the USSR***, May 4, 1949, HSTP, PSF, Intelligence File, Box 256, HSTL.
24. NSC 20/4, "US Objectives with Respect to the USSR to Counter Soviet Threats to US Security", ***FRUS*** 1948, Vol. 1, p. 667.
25. See, for instance, J.L. Gaddis, ***Russia, The Soviet Union and the United States***, p. 195; J.L. Gaddis, "The Strategy of Containment", in Etzold and Gaddis (eds.), ***Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945-1950***, p. 35.
26. See Leffler, ***A Preponderance of Power***, p. 248.
27. PPS/39/1, ***United States Policy Toward China***, November 24, 1948, RG 59 Lot 64 D 563, National Archives, Washington (henceforth NA). See also CIA, ***Relative US Security Interest in the European-Mediterranean Area and the Far East***.
28. CIA, ***Relative US Security Interest in the European-Mediterranean Area and the Far East***.
29. PPS 13, "Resume of the World Situation", in Etzold and Gaddis, (eds.), ***Containment***, pp. 95-96.

30. See Section 2, "Memorandum of Conversation with General of the Army Douglas MacArthur", in PPS/28/2, **Recommendations with Respect to U.S. Policy toward Japan**, May 26, 1948, RG 59 Lot 64 D 563, NA.
31. G.F. Kennan, **Memoirs, 1925-1950**, p. 359; Gaddis, "The Strategy of Containment", in Etzold and Gaddis, **Containment**, p. 27; J.L. Gaddis, **Russia, The Soviet Union and the United States**, p. 30; For the strategic importance of Japan to the United States see CIA, **Strategic Importance of Japan**, May 24, 1948, HSTP, PSF, Intelligence File, Box 255, HSTL.
32. Spender, **Exercises in Diplomacy**, p. 14.
33. The choice of Australia and Ceylon is deliberate. As we shall see in a subsequent section these are the two states that made concrete proposals for economic development in South and Southeast Asia at the Colombo Conference.
34. A. Watt, **The Evolution of Australian Foreign Policy 1938 - 1965** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 106.
35. CIA, **Communist Influence in Australia**, April 11, 1949, HSTP, PSF, Intelligence File, Box 256, HSTL.
36. For a discussion of the strategic significance to the Commonwealth of the Communist problem in Ceylon see N. Mansergh, "The Commonwealth in Asia", **Pacific Affairs**, Vol. XXIII, No. 1 (March 1950), pp. 15-16.
37. C.A. Woodward, **The Growth of a Party System in Ceylon** (Providence: Brown University Press, 1969), pp. 53 -54.
38. Woodward, **The Growth of a Party System in Ceylon**, p. 84.
39. Woodward, **The Growth of a Party System in Ceylon**, pp. 70 -71, 244, table 6.
40. The Agreement is printed in **United Nations Treaty Series**, Vol. 86, pp. 25-29; cf., Department of State, **Policy Statement: Ceylon**, February 13, 1951, RG 59, 611.46E/2-1351, NA.
41. In 1955 the government of Solomon W.R.D. Bandaranaike cancelled the bases agreement to reinforce its policy of neutrality.
42. ¶Insofar as the Ceylonese ruling elite had any stake - beside a financial one - in the British military bases... it was that they provided insurance against possible internal troubles.¶ G. Myrdal, **Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of**

- Nations*, Vol. 1. (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1968), p. 343 n.1.
43. Woodward, *The Growth of a Party System in Ceylon*, p. 85.
 44. **Commonwealth Liaison Committee, Note by the Joint Secretaries: Commonwealth Economic Discussions in Colombo January 1950**, December 12, 1949, RG 25 A-12, Vol. 2118, AR 430/27, PAC.
 45. **The High Commissioner for Canada, London to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa**. December 2, 1949, RG 25 A-12, Vol. 2118, AR 430/27, PAC.
 46. See **Circular Document No. A. 13, Secretary of State to the Heads of Canadian Missions Abroad**, April 8, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
 47. **The High Commissioner for Canada, London to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa**, December 22, 1949, RG 25 A-12, Vol. 2118, AR 430/27, PAC.
 48. On one item at least, i.e., the de facto recognition of Vietnam as an associated state in the French Union, the British Government was determined "to influence other Commonwealth nations to take similar action." See "The Secretary of State to the Embassy in the Philippines", *FRUS* 1950, Vol. VI, pp. 691-92.
 49. Spender, *Exercises in Diplomacy*, p. 202, cf., **Circular Document No. A. 13, Secretary of State to the Heads of Canadian Missions Abroad**, April 8, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
 50. **L.B. Pearson to A.D.P. Heeney**, January 17, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 6, Folder 70, PAC; **Circular Document No. A. 13, Secretary of State to the Heads of Canadian Missions Abroad**.
 51. **Commonwealth Meeting on Foreign Affairs, Colombo: Minutes of the Sixth Meeting**, 2.30 p.m., January 11, 1950; **Minutes of the Seventh Meeting** 10 a.m., January 12, 1950; **Minutes of the Eighth Meeting**, 2.30 p.m., January 12, 1950, RG 25, Vol. 2285, S-30-1, PAC; **L.B. Pearson to A.D.P. Heeney**, January 17, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 6, Folder 70, PAC.
 52. **L.B. Pearson to A.D.P. Heeney**, January 17, 1950; **Circular Document No. A. 13, Secretary of State to the Heads of Canadian Missions Abroad**.
 53. **Circular Document No. A. 13, Secretary of State to the Heads of Canadian Missions Abroad**.

54. **Commonwealth Meeting on Foreign Affairs: Minutes of the Tenth Meeting**, 2.30 p.m., January 13, 1950, RG 25, Vol. 2285, S-30-1, PAC.
55. See Document 85, "Record of an Anglo-American Meeting in the Foreign Office on 10 May 1950" in R. Bullen, (ed.), **The London Conferences: Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Strategy, January-June 1950**. Vol. II. (London: HMSO, 1987). For the American record of the same meeting see **FRUS** 1950, Vol. VI, pp. 1198-1200; cf. **FRUS**, 1950, Vol. VI, pp. 46-51.
56. **Circular Document No. A. 13, Secretary of State to the Heads of Canadian Missions Abroad.**
57. Spender, **Exercises in Diplomacy**, pp. 13-14; **Commonwealth Meeting on Foreign Affairs, Minutes of the Sixth Meeting, Circular Document No. A. 13, Secretary of State to the Heads of Canadian Missions Abroad.**
58. **United Kingdom Delegation, Colombo to the Foreign Office**, January 10, 1950, FO 371/82935, UEE 45/1, PRO.
59. Spender, **Exercises in Diplomacy**, pp.208-209; D. LePan, **Bright Glass of Memory** (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1979), p. 173.
60. See LePan, **Bright Glass of Memory**, p. 173.
61. **Commonwealth Meeting on Foreign Affairs, (Economic Policy in South and South-East Asia): Draft Resolution submitted by the Minister of Finance, Ceylon**, January 11, 1950, RG 25, Vol. 2285, S-30-1, PAC.
62. **Commonwealth Meeting on Foreign Affairs, (Economic Policy in South and South-East Asia): Memorandum by the Australian Delegation**, January 11, 1950, RG 25, Vol. 2285, S-30-1, PAC.
63. **Commonwealth Meeting on Foreign Affairs: Minutes of the Sixth Meeting.**
64. Spender, **Exercises in Diplomacy**, p. 223.
65. **Commonwealth Meeting on Foreign Affairs: Minutes of the Eighth Meeting.**
66. **Commonwealth Meeting on Foreign Affairs: Minutes of the Eighth Meeting.**
67. **Commonwealth Meeting on Foreign Affairs: Minutes of the Eighth Meeting.**
68. LePan, **Bright Glass of Memory**, p. 178.

69. ***Commonwealth Meeting on Foreign Affairs, Minutes of the Tenth Meeting.***
70. J.R.E. Carr-Gregg, "The Colombo Plan: A Commonwealth Programme for Southeast Asia", ***International Conciliation***, No. 467 (January 1951): p. 20; "Final Communique, Meeting of British Commonwealth Foreign Ministers, 1950", in M. Haas, (ed.) ***Basic Documents of Asian Regional Organizations***, Vol. 1 (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Oceana Publications, 1974), p. 35.
71. See ***The High Commissioner for Canada, London to the Department of External Affairs, Ottawa.*** October 12, 1948, RG 25 A-12, Vol. 2118, AR 430-21, PAC.
72. Cited in ***The High Commissioner for Canada, London to the Department of External Affairs, Ottawa.*** October 12, 1948.
73. ***The High Commissioner for Canada, London to the Department of External Affairs, Ottawa.*** October 13, 1948, RG 25 A-12, Vol. 2118, AR 430/21, PAC.
74. ***The High Commissioner for Canada, London to the Department of External Affairs, Ottawa.*** October 12, 1948.
75. See ***The High Commissioner for Canada, London to the Department of External Affairs, Ottawa.*** October 12, 1948.
76. See ***The High Commissioner for Canada, London to the Department of External Affairs, Ottawa.*** October 13, 1948.
77. ***The High Commissioner for Canada, London to the Department of External Affairs, Ottawa.*** October 13, 1948.
78. See "Text of the Final Communique of Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting", ***The High Commissioner for Canada, London to the Department of External Affairs, Ottawa.*** October 23, 1948, RG 25 A-12, Vol. 2118, AR 430/21, PAC.
79. See ***The High Commissioner for Canada, London to the Department of External Affairs, Ottawa: Commonwealth Finance and Economic Talks.*** July 16, 1949, RG 25 A-12, Vol. 2085, AR 16/31 pt.1, PAC.
80. See ***R. W. Jackling, Minutes: Colombo Conference - Economic and Social Development in South and South-East Asia and the Far East***, January 11, 1950, FO 371/82935, UEE 45/1, PRO.
81. See ***The High Commissioner for Canada, London to the Department of External Affairs, Ottawa: Commonwealth Finance and Economic Talks,***

July 16, 1949.

82. **A.F.W. Plumptre to Mr. Ritchie [plus Attachments]**, December 14, 1949, RG 25 A-12, Vol. 2118, AR 430/27, PAC.
83. K.M. Panikkar, ***In Two Chinas: Memoirs of a Diplomat*** (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955), pp. 55-56.
84. L.P. Singh, ***The Politics of Economic Cooperation in Asia: A Study of Asian International Organizations*** (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1966), p. 177; M. Haas, (ed.) ***Basic Documents of Asian Regional Organizations***. Vol. 1. (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Oceana Publications 1974), p. 1. It is probable that Professor Haas' source is Lalita Singh. See M. Haas, "Asian Intergovernmental Organizations and the United Nations", in B. Andemichael, (ed.) ***Regionalism and the United Nations*** (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Oceana Publications for the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, UNITAR, 1979), p. 407 n.13 where he cites Lalita P. Singh's book as the definitive work on the Colombo Plan.
85. ***Commonwealth Meeting on Foreign Affairs: Memorandum by the Australian Delegation***, January 11, 1950.
86. A. Renouf, ***Let Justice Be Done: The Foreign Policy of Dr H.V. Evatt*** (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983), pp. 95-125; G. Greenwood, ***Approaches to Asia: Australian Postwar Policies and Attitudes*** (Sydney: McGraw-Hill, 1974), p. 6; G. Greenwood, "Australian Attitudes towards Pacific Problems", ***Pacific Affairs*** Vol. XXIII, No. 2 (June 1950): 156.
87. See G. Greenwood, "Australian Attitudes towards Pacific Problems", p. 153.
88. Spender resigned in April 1951 and was subsequently appointed ambassador to the United States. On his wide authority see Spender, ***Exercises in Diplomacy***, p. 214; Greenwood, "Australian Attitudes towards Pacific Problems", p. 155.
89. D. Lowe, "Percy Spender and the Colombo Plan 1950", ***Australian Journal of Politics & History***, Vol. 40, No. 2 (1994): 162.
90. Appendix: "Statement on Foreign Policy by the Minister for External Affairs, The Hon. P.C. Spender in the House of Representatives, 9th March, 1950", in P.C. Spender, ***Politics and a Man***, (Sydney and London: William Collins, 1972), p. 307-329. References to the government's foreign policy would be to this statement except otherwise indicated.
91. A. Watt, ***The Evolution of Australian Foreign Policy 1938 - 1965*** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 106; Greenwood, "Australian Attitudes

- towards Pacific Problems", p. 158.
92. For a more detailed treatment of the irredental links between the Mao regime and the Chinese population in Southeast Asia see M. Sacks, "The Strategy of Communism in Southeast Asia", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. XXIII, No. 3 (September 1950): 227 - 247; M. Beloff, "Soviet Policy in China", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. XXIII, No. 2 (June 1950): 128 - 138.
 93. Spender, *Exercises in Diplomacy*, pp. 13, 196.
 94. Spender, *Exercises in Diplomacy*, p. 194.
 95. See *The High Commissioner for Canada, London to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa*, November 14, 1949, RG 25 A-12, Vol. 2118, AR 430/27, PAC.
 96. See D. Lowe, "Percy Spender and the Colombo Plan 1950", pp. 162 - 164.
 97. Lowe, "Percy Spender and the Colombo Plan 1950", pp. 160-176.
 98. LePan, *Bright Glass of Memory*, p. 174.
 99. **Report on the Official Discussions on Economic Affairs held during the Commonwealth Meeting on Foreign Affairs in Colombo, Ceylon, January 1950**, February 24, 1950, MG 31 E6, Vol. 6, Folder 70, PAC.
 100. Document 95: "[Sterling balances]: Cabinet Economic Policy Committee: Report of the Working Party on Sterling Balances. Appendix III: Notes on the treatment of the balances since the war and possible future prospects". CAB 134/223, EPC(49)137, November 14, 1949 in R. Hyam, (ed.) **British Documents on the End of Empire, Vol. 2. The Labour Government and the End of Empire 1945-1951, Part II: Economics and International Relations**. (London: HMSO for the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in the University of London, 1992), p. 117.
 101. **Memorandum for the Prime Minister: The Indian Sterling Balances**, October 22, 1949, Lou Rasminsky Papers, LR 76-418-1-1, Bank of Canada Archives, Ottawa (henceforth BCA).
 102. Document 97: "Sterling Balances and Southeast Asia: Joint memorandum for Cabinet Economic Policy Committee by the Working Parties on the Sterling Area and on Development in South and Southeast Asia (March 18, 1950)". CAB 134/225, EPC(50)40, March 22, 1950 in R. Hyam, (ed.) **British Documents on the End of Empire Vol. 2. The Labour Government and the End of Empire 1945-1951, Part II: Economics and International Relations** (London: HMSO

- for the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in the University of London, 1992), p. 142.
103. Document 97: "Sterling Balances and Southeast Asia".
 104. Document 95: "[Sterling balances]: Cabinet Economic Policy Committee paper: Report of the Working Party on Sterling Balances", *op. cit.*, p. 124.
 105. Document 97: "Sterling Balances and Southeast Asia", *op. cit.*, p. 143.
 106. LePan, *Bright Glass of Memory*, p. 171.
 107. **Canadian Delegation, Colombo to the Department of External Affairs, Ottawa**, January 17, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 6, Folder 70, PAC.
 108. **United Kingdom Delegation, Colombo to the Foreign Office**, January 10, 1950, FO 371/82935, UEE 45/1, PRO.

CHAPTER 2

Establishing the Colombo Plan

We are proceeding on a course of action which is unprecedented in the history of the world. Not only is our purpose that of raising the living standards of the largest mass of people ever attempted in man's long history, but the task is also to be organised not by one State alone, but by the co-operative endeavour of a large number of independent States with problems of their own. (Junius Jayewardene, Ceylon's Finance Minister)¹

Between Colombo and Sydney (Prelude to the Sydney Conference)

The adoption of the resolution embodying the Spender Plan by Commonwealth ministers in Colombo marked the beginning of a process which would lead to the establishment of a programme to promote economic development in South and Southeast Asia. The resolution had mandated the Australian government to ask other Commonwealth governments, after an appropriate interval, whether they accepted the recommendations outlined in the Plan and, if so, when they would be willing to send representatives to Sydney for the first meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Committee. Canberra, as designated host, approved the Colombo resolutions almost immediately. The programme was, after all, the brain-child of its minister for external affairs, Percy Spender. The proposed conference offered another opportunity for Spender to advance the prospects of his other foreign policy programme, the Pacific Pact, which had been rejected at Colombo. It was an opportunity he was determined to exploit fully.² In February 1950, he proposed May 15 - 19 for the conference and,

thereafter, set about trying to convince all Commonwealth governments to attend.³

The two states whose participation in the Consultative Committee remained in doubt, at the end of the Colombo conference, were South Africa and Canada. The Pretoria government, as its representative had made quite clear in Colombo, would prefer to concentrate on problems in its locality. In March, it addressed a telegram to all Commonwealth governments declining membership in the Committee.⁴

The Canadian External Affairs Secretary, Lester Pearson, had been noncommittal at Colombo and had, instead, emphasized his country's extensive new commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty.⁵ Yet one can sense from the tone of his reports on the conference that he was sympathetic and receptive to the proposals for an economic assistance plan for South and Southeast Asia. He wrote in one such report: "[if] the establishment of the proposed consultative committee is...followed by other necessary steps in the right direction, a great deal may be done not only to solve the problem of the sterling balances but also to shore up our defences in this area against the tide of Soviet expansionism."⁶ By the time he left Colombo his "provisional view" was that Canada should be represented at the proposed meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Committee by an observer.⁷

Having developed such opinions even before he left Colombo, it is hardly surprising that Pearson jumped the gun, "prematurely and incautiously" (as

LePan described it⁸), by announcing Canadian participation in the proposed Sydney conference while making his report on the Colombo meeting to the House of Commons.⁹ This was on February 22, a week after the Cabinet had referred the Colombo recommendations to the Interdepartmental Committee on External Trade Policy,¹⁰ and four days after Pearson received a personal message from Spender in which he (Spender) pressed for Canadian participation. Spender stressed his awareness of the magnitude of Canada's commitments in other areas and how this might influence its decision. Nevertheless, he urged, "the question of contribution"⁹ could be separated from "the question of participation."⁹ Canada could participate in the committee discussions without committing itself financially. If, after a review of its commitments elsewhere, it was "able to make some contribution, however limited, so much the better."⁹ Canadian participation was important because the advice which it could give "in the selection of the important objectives of policy in the area and in deciding the best way of building an association between the Commonwealth and the United States in this project"⁹ would be beneficial to the rest of the Commonwealth.¹¹

To what extent Spender's message and strategy influenced Pearson's announcement in parliament is impossible to determine. The records are, understandably, silent on this as are Pearson's own two-volume memoirs, although LePan does admit in his own reflections that Canadian officials relied considerably on Spender's message in the process of preparing for the Sydney

conference.¹² In any case, Pearson's premature announcement of Canadian participation did not go down well with some of the members of the Interdepartmental Committee when it met on March 8 to consider the Colombo recommendations. Clifford Clark, the Deputy Minister of Finance, and Graham F. Towers, the Governor of the Bank of Canada, were of the view that Canada should be represented at Sydney by an observer. In the end, however, the Committee followed Pearson's lead and recommended Cabinet approval of the Colombo recommendations and full membership in the Commonwealth Consultative Committee. The Cabinet accepted the Committee's recommendations on March 10. On March 15 it informed the Australian government¹³ and, two days later (March 17), the Canadian ambassador in Washington, Hume H. Wrong, informed the State Department of his government's decision to accept membership in the Consultative Committee.¹⁴

The Canadian government was, to be sure, concerned about the problem of communist expansion, the threat which this posed to the stability of the states in the Asia/Pacific region, and to the security of the free world. Its decision to attend the Sydney conference appeared, however, to have been influenced as much by economic arguments as by strategic considerations. Eventual American participation, or rather, the economic fallout of American participation, as the following quotation from a Department of External Affairs memorandum recommending Cabinet approval of the Colombo recommendations reveals, also

played a critical role in Canada's decision to accept membership in the Consultative Committee:

In view of the possibility that the establishment of a Consultative Committee for South and South-East Asia might eventually lead to steps which would relieve the world-wide shortage of United States dollars, and so improve Canada's trade prospects, it is recommended that the recommendations of the Conference of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers on this subject should be approved by the Canadian Government.¹⁵

Once the decision had been made Cabinet appointed the seventy year old Robert Mayhew, Minister of Fisheries (a junior cabinet post), with 'practically no experience in international negotiations'¹⁶ to represent Canada. The appointment raises some interesting questions, not the least of which is the fact that it may shed some light on the degree of importance which the Canadian government attached to the whole programme. Pearson had, quite appropriately, represented his country at the Colombo conference. This, and the fact that the meeting fell within the functional jurisdiction of the Department of External Affairs were sufficient reasons for him, or at least a senior official from the Department, (both Escott Reid, the Deputy Under-Secretary for External Affairs, and Arthur Menzies, Head of the Far Eastern Division of External Affairs, attended the Colombo conference) to have led the Canadian delegation. Instead Pearson chose to attend a meeting of the North Atlantic Council in London, leaving the Sydney conference to the fisheries minister.

Mayhew himself was present at the Colombo conference although this was by happenstance rather than design. He had been attending a meeting of the International Labour Organization in India and was invited by Pearson to join

the delegation and fly home with it. At Colombo he had, according to LePan, ‘nothing to say. . .and was virtually a supernumerary.’⁹ If his presence in Colombo was the reason he was asked to go to Sydney it was a very poor choice for, at the conference, he found himself, to quote LePan again, ‘hopelessly out of his depth.’¹⁷ The only plausible explanation, in the circumstances, is that the whole scheme was only of marginal importance to Canada. LePan’s (Mayhew’s principal adviser at the Sydney conference) opening statement to the meeting of officials: ‘our [meaning Canadian] participation in the meeting of this Consultative Committee represents a considerable stretching of our habitual interests and concerns’ supports this conclusion.¹⁸

To return to our discussion, Spender’s advocacy was not necessary to convince New Zealand to attend the Sydney conference. The New Zealand Minister for External Affairs, Frederick Doidge, identified his country, for obvious reasons, with the strategic arguments Spender advanced at Colombo. In a radio address he made after his return from Colombo, he stressed the same arguments — the shift of the centre of gravity in international affairs to Asia, the threat to regional stability from China, the need for a Pacific Pact, and the need to promote economic development in the region— as justification for his country’s support for the Spender Plan.¹⁹ Like Australia, New Zealand would take advantage of the Sydney conference to press on other delegations the need for a Pacific Pact.²⁰

The Asian Commonwealth states were the potential beneficiaries of the Spender Plan and were, to that extent, receptive to it. Ceylon had co-sponsored the Colombo resolution, and both India and Pakistan already supported it. India, as we noted in the previous chapter, joined the Commonwealth in part for economic reasons— its desire ‘to convert its sterling balances in London into capital goods for Indian development.’⁹ These balances, as one Canadian official described them, ‘were mere marks in ledgers in a distant capital. If they were to be realised in the form of goods, friendly relations would have to be maintained with the ledger keeper.’⁹²¹ By supporting the Spender Plan India, Pakistan, and Ceylon would be securing a life-line to the ledgers since the British had made it known that their contribution to the Plan would be through releases of the sterling balances.

In the strategic sphere the Asian Commonwealth states shared the concern of the West about the communist threat and, even if their reaction to communist China differed substantially from that of Australia, it was at least closer to that of the United Kingdom. Like the British government the three Asian Commonwealth states had all recognised the regime in Beijing.

Nevertheless, India, Pakistan, and Ceylon remained sensitive to any aid programme with ‘strings’. India, in particular, was determined to remain outside the orbit of any power bloc and was therefore opposed to any geopolitical or regional organization like the Pacific Pact promoted by Australia. In Whitehall, it was already an axiom that ‘any approach to South East Asian regional problems

other than an economic one encounters Indian hostility.⁹²² The Asian states could put their fears aside and embrace the Plan because Spender had chosen the economic rather than the political route. He had also presented his proposals in form of "self-help" and "mutual aid", while de-emphasizing the division of the potential participants into "donor" and "recipient" states. This had the advantage of respecting, symbolically at least, the integrity of the Asian states and preserving their sense of sovereignty. By describing the Asian states as potential donors the Plan did in fact help bolster their "image" in the international community.

Moreover, the Commonwealth, because of its structure and tradition, could allay the fears and suspicion of its Asian members about the geopolitical and strategic objectives underpinning the Plan. The key was the Commonwealth's procedure of consultation. "If we were careful", Bevin advised the French foreign minister, Robert Schuman, in a parallel context in March 1950, "that we as European Powers did not appear to be disposing of Asian problems without consultation, we might bring the Asian Powers along with us."⁹²³ The Colombo conference had ensured that this would be so. The Asian states had participated in shaping the proposals, to the mutual satisfaction of all Commonwealth members. There was no reason why they should reject membership in the Plan's implementation machinery, the Commonwealth Consultative Committee. India, Pakistan and Ceylon would be at Sydney. Even

then, to have succeeded in securing India's participation was regarded in the British Foreign Office a singular achievement.²⁴

In the case of the United Kingdom, it was inconceivable that it would not be represented at Sydney. Britain's traditional position as leader of the Commonwealth, its economic and strategic goals in the Asia-Pacific region; the fact that, as the only western power with significant influence in the region, it had to remain engaged to advance the free world's anti-communist programme; such factors made British participation in the Consultative Committee inevitable.²⁵ In any case, the Attlee government had already decided, before the Colombo meeting, to promote a regional economic association in Asia to prevent the spread of communism— a scheme which was now attaining concrete form in the Spender Plan.²⁶

What Whitehall did, after the Colombo conference, was to establish a special Interdepartmental Working Party to examine the Colombo recommendations in its economic and political aspects.²⁷ The Working Party's conclusion, which R. H. Scott, Head of the Southeast Asia Department in the Foreign Office, revealed to the Canadian High Commissioner, was that "United Kingdom authorities would like "Spender Plan" to be regarded internationally as based on the merits of conditions in South-East Asia rather than as part of an anti-Communist strategy— that the idea would have been conceived even if there were no cold war."²⁸ (But there was!)

Having decided to play down the strategic and geopolitical aspects of the Plan, at least in public, and to keep discussions at the forthcoming Sydney conference within the economic and social sphere, the British government despatched a memorandum to other Commonwealth capitals outlining its proposals on how the economic development programme to be fashioned out of the Plan should be structured. The memorandum emphasized long-term development and cautioned against raising expectations for immediate results. It was unwise, it warned, to concentrate all the discussions on short-term programmes of assistance. ‘The right way to tackle the problem’, the memorandum asserted, was ‘for each of the underdeveloped countries to draw up a long-term development programme expressing a feasible and realistic rate of development over a period of years.’ It was only when such plans had been drawn up, it concluded, that the Consultative Committee would be able to consider how much the Commonwealth could contribute and how much external finance, from non-Commonwealth sources, would be desirable.²⁹

The memorandum of instructions for the Canadian delegation followed the same line of argument adduced in the British memorandum. The delegation was to discuss *only* economic development at the Sydney conference and was ‘neither competent nor authorized to discuss security arrangements in the Pacific.’ The Canadian government could not even consider the question of financial assistance until the Committee had done a careful assessment of the problem. The delegation was therefore to ‘studiously avoid...committing the

Canadian Government in any way, either directly or by inference, to extending financial assistance to the countries of South and South-East Asia.⁹ The only concession was in the field of technical assistance: the government was prepared to cooperate with well conceived plans for providing technical assistance in the area.³⁰

There were, of course, significant differences between the British and Canadian positions on the one hand, and what Spender expected from the Sydney conference. In a memorandum which caused a diplomatic storm in Ottawa and indeed in other Commonwealth capitals, Spender revealed an apparent disregard for Commonwealth traditions in the articulation of his agenda for the Sydney conference. He wanted the conference to reach "agreement" on certain specific items— (1) establishment of a Commonwealth Fund to provide technical assistance, medical supplies and food, and credit to the states in South and Southeast Asia, and (2) the creation of a Commonwealth Council and a Commonwealth Secretariat to administer the Fund.³¹ By seeking a definite "agreement" on his proposals Spender was ignoring the traditional procedure which required that Commonwealth conferences merely *make recommendations* to governments for approval, or rejection. His proposals for short-term aid also ran contrary to the long-term economic assistance programme envisaged by other Commonwealth governments. Canada's reaction to the Spender telegram, which was as stern as diplomatic niceties would permit, was typical of the mood in other Commonwealth capitals:

While the Canadian Government agrees on desirability of Commonwealth initiative we would not repeat not agree at any rate at this stage that this implies desirability of a special Commonwealth fund or of special Commonwealth machinery...At several points the text of your telegram seems to suggest that meetings in Sydney will reach "agreements". According to our understanding this is a "consultative" committee and only type of agreements that members of committee could reach would be agreements to refer certain recommendations back to their governments for approval.³²

Spender remained unmoved. He wrote two additional notes, both dated May 10, one to Pearson and the other to Ernest Bevin. In a rather conciliatory tone he explained to Pearson why it was necessary to reach "agreements" at Sydney and why it was imperative that these be based on the Australian proposal for short-term programmes.³³ In the note to Bevin Spender was more direct and forthcoming, and was not particularly constrained by the language of diplomacy: "It is very important that your delegation to the Sydney Conference should tackle its work, not in any narrow economic context, but having in mind the global, political and strategic situation and the urgent need for action."⁹ One could almost say that Spender was repudiating the British government's public portrayal of the Spender Plan, i.e., that it was an economic project desirable for its own sake, with no strategic purpose to it. But his main objective was to respond to Whitehall's claim for long-term aid. He warned

It is not sufficient to agree to long-term proposals and by phraseology dress these up to imply the success of the Conference in terms of the immediate situation we face. Quite frankly, if that were the outcome of the Conference, it seems to me that we would be compelled to acknowledge publicly that the Conference had failed and the Australian Government, for its part, be obliged to indicate that it would now seek to implement a programme of its own in conjunction with whatever other Governments might wish to assist.³⁴

Clearly, Spender was determined to have his way and could not be swayed by the objections from other Commonwealth capitals. Since Doidge had also made it plain, on the eve of his departure for Sydney, that New Zealand could not support the Australian position³⁵ the stage was set, it appeared, for a confrontation of ideas, if not of personalities, at the forthcoming conference.

The Sydney Conference

The Sydney Conference has many enormous difficulties in front of it, but on its results may depend whether the western countries as a whole are to have a coherent and constructive policy towards an area of vital concern to them all.
The Times (London), May 13, 1950.

The differences in the positions of the western members of the Commonwealth on the form and content of the aid programme which should be fashioned out of the Spender Plan cast an ominous shadow on the Sydney conference when it opened on the morning of May 15. The delegates— Lord Macdonald of Gwaenysgor (the Paymaster General) and Malcolm MacDonald for the United Kingdom and her territories in Malaya and British Borneo, Robert Mayhew of Canada, Frederick Doidge of New Zealand, A. Ramaswami Mudaliar of India, Chaudhary Nazir Ahmed Khan of Pakistan, J.R. Jayewardene of Ceylon and the host, Percy Spender, were to consider three working papers which officials had prepared at a preliminary meeting held between the 11th and the 14th of May.

The meeting of officials had been used by both Australia and Britain to promote their very dissimilar approaches to Asian economic development and to canvass for support from other Commonwealth states, especially the Asian states. India, Pakistan, and Ceylon initially found the Australian proposals for a Commonwealth Fund and a Commonwealth Council to administer it quite attractive. But the British mounted a vigorous and effective counter-campaign to draw the Asian states away from the Australian bandwagon. Both India and Ceylon were impressed by the British argument that 'a plan for economic development drawn up on a sound basis as the urgency of the situation and the shortness of time available will permit will be more likely to enlist United States assistance than any other action which the Sydney Conference could take.'³⁶ What appeared to have swayed both India and Ceylon was the prospect and attraction of a bigger American aid budget. Australia's programme of immediate assistance would be minuscule compared to what they could receive from the United States if only they would exercise more patience and follow the British lead. This was, moreover, in conformity with the official instructions given to the Indian delegation which were to stress the necessity of United States assistance 'provided no strings are attached.'³⁷ By the end of the meeting of officials only Pakistan remained committed to the Australian proposals primarily because it needed immediate assistance to resettle eight million refugees from India.³⁸ Other Commonwealth states leaned towards the British position.³⁹

The preliminary meeting of officials could not, understandably, resolve the differences between the Australian and British proposals. It did, however, succeed in reaching agreement on the three working papers prepared for the consideration of ministers. The papers were prepared by three working parties chaired respectively by the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia. The first contained recommendations based on the British proposal for long-term economic development; the second examined technical assistance; the third, naturally enough, considered the Australian proposals for emergency relief and credit arrangements.⁴⁰ The working papers were passed to the ministers and, along with them, the cloud of suspicion and disharmony generated by the debate over competing proposals. When the Australians suggested that the plenary session be open to the public and the press, other delegates agreed on the condition that Spender's draft speech be circulated in advance.⁴¹ The suspicion that he could do something unconventional was too great among delegates. And they were *not* to be disappointed!

The Australian foreign minister had apparently decided to play to the gallery by revealing all the details of his proposals in his opening speech, and through the force of public opinion, force the hand of the conference. Understandably, other delegates saw this as a breach of the undertaking which he had personally given to them that his speech would be non-controversial. The United Kingdom, Canadian, Indian, Ceylon, and New Zealand delegations protested and demanded for extensive amendments to the speech. The

Canadian delegate, for instance, wrote a letter to Spender threatening to make public his country's very different views if he (Spender) did not amend his speech.⁴²

Spender did delete the offending passages but the ill-will which his actions and tactics had generated were such as to place the whole conference in jeopardy. The reports of delegates to their home governments are replete with such phrases as ill-will, tense atmosphere, considerable irritation between delegates, protested vigorously, whipped into a crescendo, Spender's rodomontade. "Something very close to a crisis in Commonwealth relations within the conference", the Canadian delegation cabled its home government, "has been precipitated by the tactics which Spender has been pursuing."⁴³

Remarkably, Spender intensified the crisis the moment the conference went into its first secret session by making what the Canadians considered to be "very intemperate series of remarks".⁴⁴ A British telegram describes what happened:

Spender began by repudiating the informal discussions between officials which had resulted in agreement on three papers to be submitted to the Conference. He was determined to brook no interference from officials whose duty it was to concentrate upon the policies determined by the Government and not make obstacles. (sic) He then made a slashing attack on the United Kingdom attitude which he suggested had no regard to the Colombo resolution...Finally he warned the Conference that if the Australian resolution was not adopted he would have to report the full facts to his Parliament.

He was prepared, the British telegram concluded, to accuse other Commonwealth countries, especially the United Kingdom, of failing to recognize

the urgency of the problem and of obstructing effective action to implement the Colombo resolution.⁴⁵

The atmosphere in the conference room must have been electric. But Spender's tirade was not reciprocated by other delegates. Jayewardene, who spoke next, delivered a 'lucid and even-tempered exposition' of the problems of his country without referring, even in passing, to Spender's tirade. This had a tranquilizing effect and it helped reduce the tension in the room. The British and Canadian delegates followed the example of Ceylon. 'Finally Mudaliar of India virtually gave the *coup de grace* to the Australian proposals by insisting that plans for economic development must be soundly based and must proceed step by step.'⁴⁶ But Spender proved to be a determined and persistent advocate for his proposals. The plenary session on Tuesday, May 16, was dominated by discussions of these proposals. Faced with stiff opposition from most delegates he insisted that they communicate with their governments irrespective of whatever instructions they had been given. He then, as he himself describes it, 'rather abruptly adjourned further discussions and the meeting broke up.'⁴⁷ Most delegates did communicate with their governments, although the Canadians, whose communications system was too 'slow and cumbersome' to meet the urgency of the situation, had to make use of British facilities to reach Ottawa.⁴⁸

At the next session of the conference, on May 17, the Australians introduced a new proposal which was more in line with the views of other delegates. The provisions for emergency relief and credit were dropped, as was

the idea for a Commonwealth Fund. Now the Australians were pushing a scheme to finance technical assistance in South and Southeast Asia and the establishment of a coordinating bureau in Colombo. The scheme would begin immediately and run for three years at a cost of £8,000,000 sterling. Australia would contribute 35 per cent and the United Kingdom, Spender suggested, should assume an equal responsibility. India then introduced an amendment, which was accepted, that contributions be expressed in amounts rather than in percentages, and that technical assistance arrangements under the scheme be made on a bilateral basis. The new proposal was a welcome relief from the suffocating atmosphere which had pervaded the conference thus far. It helped break ‘the abscess of ill feeling’ (sic), the Canadian delegation reported.⁴⁹

But the relief proved to be premature. That very evening, Spender resurrected his proposal for emergency credit. ‘No Commonwealth Fund would be created’, his new memorandum asserted, ‘but countries which can find the resources would undertake to provide finance over a twelve monthly period (sic) up to a maximum of say £15 million sterling.’⁹ Australia was prepared to assume responsibility for up to £7 million sterling.⁵⁰ The reaction was, once again, confusion and indignation. Delegates could not but wonder how much Spender’s pledges were worth. Had he not made it quite explicit, that very morning, that he was abandoning the proposal? Why then this volte face?⁵¹

Time made it easier for the delegates to *deal* with the latest Australian proposal. The Committee was scheduled to complete its deliberation on Friday,

May 19th. Spender distributed his memorandum late in the evening on Wednesday. On Thursday the sessions were wrapped up early to enable officials prepare the draft report and the communique, even though no one knew, as yet, what the outcome of the conference would be.⁵² There was also the fact that both the Canadian and United Kingdom delegations were still waiting for instructions from their home governments on whether or not they would participate in the technical assistance scheme. Hence, even if the two delegations were to be favourably disposed (which they were not) towards the new proposal and were willing to discuss it, they would still have to send for and receive instructions from their governments on how to respond. Time made this impossible. Since, there were no sessions on Thursday the proposal could not even be discussed formally. Privately, though, Lord Macdonald made clear to Spender his government's objections to the new proposal.

When the sessions resumed on Friday, Spender presented a modified proposal on the same issue in a last and desperate attempt to get it adopted. It was the Canadian delegate, Robert Mayhew, who put an end to this charade by making it clear that it was impossible to consider the proposal at this eleventh hour. The proper course, he suggested, was to defer consideration until the next meeting of the Committee in September. His last-ditch attempt having failed, Spender had no option but to withdraw his proposal.⁵³

The Canadian delegation received its new instruction on Friday morning and it was to the effect that it should follow the lead of the British. If they decided

to contribute, Mayhew was to say that he would recommend that Canada should contribute without mentioning any sum or percentage. If they declined participation he was to decline as well.⁵⁴ It was almost midnight on Friday, after the adoption of the final report, when Lord Macdonald made it known that he had received authorization to announce that the United Kingdom would assume 35 per cent of the total cost of the technical assistance programme. This gave the cue for Mayhew to make the appropriate announcement as per his instructions before the conference adjourned for the last time at ten minutes past midnight.⁵⁵

Considering the tension and ill-feeling which permeated the deliberations it is not surprising that delegates left Sydney with strong impressions of Spender's "exercises in diplomacy" (the title of his memoirs on the Colombo Plan and ANZUS); of the unorthodox method and tactics which he employed to push for the adoption of his proposals for short-term assistance. Spender himself acknowledges that he "was not the easiest nor perhaps the most urbane of chairmen."⁹ He admits also that he was sometimes "difficult and unrelenting" and that this met with the disapproval of delegates. But he is neither remorseful nor apologetic about it. Machiavellian in style and attitude, he was determined to get his proposals adopted at the conference and was willing to employ *all* necessary means, including leaks to the media,⁵⁶ to reach his goal. Hear him:

Sometimes, however, the soft language of diplomacy is just not enough...I am satisfied however that had it not been for the pressure which every member of our delegation applied, and the publicity which the newspapers gave to the differences which existed between the Australian and United Kingdom delegations, the Sydney Conference would not have produced the results it did.⁵⁷

But did it? Of all the proposals the Australian delegation put forward, only the technical assistance scheme, which both Canada and New Zealand favoured,⁵⁸ was adopted by the Consultative Committee. Other recommendations were based on British proposals. The simple fact is that the *means* employed by Spender to reach his *ends* did not fit the *medium*. If there was one institutional forum where the "soft language" and nuances of diplomacy could not be ignored it was the Commonwealth. *Means*, not *ends*, are the stuff of Commonwealth conferences. The *ends* are the prerogative of Commonwealth governments. By ignoring this cardinal principle of intra-Commonwealth relations Spender placed in jeopardy the very programme he had struggled so hard to establish. The fact that he had secured approval to spend A£13 million on projects under the Plan and was therefore under pressure to justify the expenditure; the fact that he had raised the expectation of the Australian public that the conference would yield immediate results; the fact that his plans had been "drawn up as a palliative to Australian opinion";⁵⁹ these have been used by some commentators to explain Spender's behaviour at the conference.⁶⁰ His proposal for short-term aid was motivated in part by an urgent foreign policy problem— to give a loan to Australia's neighbour to the north, Indonesia. Spender believed that if this was done collectively by the Commonwealth it would be easier to obtain public support for it in Australia.⁶¹ Still his handling of the Sydney conference lacked tact and diplomatic savoir faire. E.J. Williams, the United Kingdom High Commissioner to Australia, said it best:

The most disappointing Delegation was the Australian. It was their misfortune, as representing the host Government, to feel compelled to take the initiative to a degree for which they were inadequately equipped, and it was still more unfortunate that the proposals which they advanced so vigorously...should be revealed on examination as shallow and lacking in substance. Worst of all, these proposals seemed to be regarded by the Australian Delegation themselves as closely linked with Mr. Spender's personal prestige...Less happily it must be added that Mr. Spender's hopes that his reputation as an international statesman would be firmly established by the Sydney meeting have been completely disappointed. It is to be expected that other Delegations will in reporting to their Governments not fail to comment not only on his arrogant and wilful conduct and undignified withdrawals, but also on his patent failure in the ordinary duties of a chairman.⁶²

In the final analysis Spender's "exercises" did not affect in any dramatic fashion the outcome of the Sydney conference or of the aid programme. The conference produced two main sets of recommendations to governments. The first, based on the long-term programme of economic development favoured by the United Kingdom, was for each Asian Commonwealth state to produce a realistic and comprehensive six-year plan of economic development taking into account its needs and resources. These plans were to be ready by September 1 for consideration at the next meeting of the Consultative Committee in London later that month.

The other set of recommendations dealt with the technical assistance programme proposed by Australia. It called for the establishment of a three-year Commonwealth Technical Assistance Scheme, for the aggregate sum of £8 million sterling, and a coordinating bureau in Colombo. The third recommendation dealt with the non-Commonwealth states in South and Southeast Asia. The Australian government was directed to brief them about the Committee's deliberations and to invite them to participate in the proposed aid programme.⁶³ Like their Commonwealth counterparts the non-Commonwealth

states were also expected to prepare development plans if they agreed to participate. These plans would be collated into a comprehensive report at the Committee's second meeting in London.

The London Conference

The seed which was sown at Colombo and transplanted in Sydney has blossomed in London and bears promise of fruit — a truly remarkable instance of ecological tolerance. (Chintaman Deshmukh, India's Finance Minister)⁶⁴

On June 25, 1950, communist North Korean forces crossed the thirty-eighth parallel into South Korea, changing dramatically the dynamics of Cold War geopolitics.⁶⁵ In rallying its allies to support its diplomatic and military response to the crisis, the United States argued that the North's action was ample proof that 'centrally directed Communist Imperialism ha[d] passed beyond subversion in seeking [to] conquer independent nations and [was] now resorting to armed aggression and war.'⁶⁶ In India, Loy W. Henderson, the American ambassador, painted a frightful picture of the danger to Asian governments. The attack, he told Nehru, 'raised possibility Communist throughout all Asia might be preparing commit series of aggressive acts.'⁶⁷ No one knew where they would strike next.⁶⁷ The invasion was a 'breach in the outer defences of the free world', declared Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent of Canada.⁶⁸ 'If we let Korea down', President Truman is reported to have warned, 'the Soviet (sic) will keep on going and swallow up one piece of Asia after another. . . If we were to let Asia go, the Near East would collapse and no telling what would happen in Europe.'⁶⁹

The invasion of South Korea was a test case, and repelling it was 'vital as a symbol of the strength and determination of the West.'⁷⁰ In other words international communism, and Soviet expansionism, had to be contained on the Korean peninsula. Such were the responses of western leaders to the communist invasion of South Korea. The war cast a long and ominous shadow over international politics.

The London conference of the Consultative Committee was held in this tense and strategically sensitive international environment. The Korean dynamic, if we may characterize it as such, gave the Spender Plan a new urgency, which was reflected in the attitude of the western Commonwealth states.⁷¹ The change in Canada's attitude is quite typical. Apart from South Africa, Canada showed the least enthusiasm in the aid programme. In Colombo its attitude was at best noncommittal. In Sydney the Canadian government remained hesitant and sceptical. The global security and geopolitical implications of the Korean conflict changed the country's attitude to the scheme, and this was reflected in the memorandum of instructions to its delegation to the London conference. It stated that

The Delegation should indicate that the Canadian Government is keenly aware the world situation is very different today from what it was last May....The military action against aggression in Korea has... accentuated the need for improved economic, political and social conditions in Asia. In the view of the Canadian Government, therefore, the turn of events has made the work of the Commonwealth Consultative Committee more important than ever....The Canadian Government fully recognizes the urgent need for economic development in Asia and the essential part of external financial assistance in meeting that need.⁷²

All the Asian Commonwealth states, as directed at Sydney, submitted their six-year development programmes by September 1, using a questionnaire adapted from the one prepared for the Marshall Plan by the Organization for European Economic Cooperation, OEEC. The main task of the London meeting was to collate these into a comprehensive report using a synopsis prepared by officials of the British Treasury.

Most of the ministers who featured prominently in the Colombo and Sydney conferences were also present in London. Percy Spender of Australia, Robert Mayhew of Canada, J.R. Jayewardene of Ceylon, Frederick Doidge of New Zealand, Ghulam Mohammed of Pakistan, and Lord Macdonald and Malcolm MacDonald of the United Kingdom. Hugh Gaitskell, the Minister of State for Economic Affairs in the British Treasury (later Chancellor of the Exchequer) presided. For the first time, the indigenous representatives of the Federation of Malaya, and Singapore, Date Onn bin Jaafar and H.C.C. Tan, were included in the British delegation. India had a new representative, Chintaman Deshmukh, the Minister of Finance. The Americans appointed a liaison officer, Ben Moore of the London embassy, although he did not participate directly in the Committee's deliberations. Moore's appointment and the influence which the United States exerted on the London conference belong properly to the politics of expansion and would be discussed in the next chapter.

The Committee's meeting was preceded, as in Sydney, by a meeting of officials. In fact, two such meetings were held, between September 6 and 23. At

the first meeting, officials scrutinized the six-year plans submitted by the seven Asian Commonwealth states and territories using the Treasury's draft synopsis. Issues which could not be reconciled at the first meeting were taken up by more senior officials at a second meeting held between the 19th and 23rd. The Committee itself met from September 25 to October 5 to consider the draft report.⁷³ Its first working session was devoted to a report on technical assistance presented by Jayewardene.

The Sydney conference, we should recall, had recommended the establishment of a technical assistance scheme and a coordinating bureau in Colombo. To ensure that the scheme began on schedule (July 1, 1950) the Consultative Committee had appointed a standing committee to exercise the (as yet unspecified) functions of the bureau, fashion a constitution for it, and recommend additional administrative arrangements for the scheme's operation. The committee had been directed to meet in Colombo not later than July 15 although, following a request from Pakistan, it met between July 25 and August 4.⁷⁴ The report presented by Jayewardene contained the standing committee's recommendations— the establishment of a Council for Technical Cooperation to supervise the activities of the bureau, and a draft constitution for the Council and the bureau. These were adopted with little debate.

On the second day of the conference, ministers took up the draft report distilled from the development plans of the Asian Commonwealth states and territories. Since it had already been agreed at Sydney that country programmes

should not be subject to screening⁷⁵ the Committee concentrated on the more important issue of capital and manpower. Its guiding principle was realism: the plans had to be viable; countries could not commit themselves beyond their capacities. The report had to indicate clearly how much of the development programmes could be financed from domestic sources (including drawings from sterling balances), and the extent and nature of external assistance which would be required from Commonwealth (i.e., the western members) and non-Commonwealth (i.e., the United States) sources.

The issue of capital received the greatest attention, understandably so. This was, after all, where the western Commonwealth states had to show their willingness to make financial contributions to the programmes and, through that, demonstrate the sincerity of their commitment to promoting the welfare of the states and people of South and Southeast Asia. On the other hand, western ministers had to ensure that whatever financial commitments they made were "reasonable" and would not constitute a burden on their own economies. They had to balance their commitment to Asian economic development with their commitments elsewhere, and with their means.

In the end the Committee approved development programmes whose combined total, over a six-year period, was estimated at £1,868 million sterling (about US\$5.2 billion). It was estimated that 45 per cent of the capital requirements would come from external sources, 13 per cent from drawings on the sterling balances, and 42 per cent from domestic sources (see Table 1). A

hefty 74 per cent (about £1,379 million sterling) of the total estimates were for programmes in India, no doubt a reflection of the country's size and population. Pakistan's estimates came to a modest £280 million, Ceylon £102 million, while the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, Borneo and Sarawak had a combined total of £107 million sterling (See Table 2). 72 per cent of the total expenditure was earmarked for programmes — agriculture, transport and communications, and hydro-electric power — deemed as essential by all member governments to meeting the overriding need of Asia: accelerating the production of food and raw materials (See Table 3).

The other pertinent issue was the serious shortage of trained manpower which the Asian states needed to implement their development plans. The Committee's endorsement of the recommendations of its standing committee on technical assistance provided a means, it was asserted, to relieve the problem. Under the scheme, donor countries would provide assistance for the expansion of local training facilities — technical schools, research laboratories, field stations, experimental farms, and other agencies for the dissemination of knowledge; they would also provide training opportunities for Asian students in their educational institutions and industry.⁷⁶ Since this complemented the economic development programmes the Committee decided to incorporate the constitution of the Council into the report.

The Committee was also concerned about the reception the report was likely to receive in the international arena. While it was by no means certain that

the United States and the non-Commonwealth countries in South and Southeast Asia would endorse the programme, no effort was spared in ensuring that the report did not contain passages which could jeopardize the prospects of their membership or support. This objective influenced the Committee's decision to delete "Commonwealth" from the title of the Council for Technical Cooperation.

In fact the word had generated intense debate earlier in July when the standing committee was drafting the Council's constitution. Australia had insisted then that the word be dropped from the title because states like Indonesia, Burma and Thailand, which might be willing to take part in a technical assistance scheme for South and Southeast Asia, were unlikely to participate in one with a Commonwealth designation. The committee decided to put "Commonwealth" in brackets in the draft constitution, thereby transferring the resolution of the problem to the Consultative Committee which, as we noted above, decided to drop the name.⁷⁷

From Colombo through Sydney the economic assistance programme had been called the Spender Plan, after the Australian external affairs minister who proposed it. The Committee decided to give the honour to the city where the seed was first sown, rather than to the proponent. The report was therefore given the title "The Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia". It was to run for six years, effective July 1, 1951. On September 29, the Committee gave it a formal approval, commending it to Commonwealth governments for acceptance and implementation. And thus was

born the Colombo Plan. From conception to its actualization, Australia (and the West's) instrument to contain communism in South and Southeast Asia had taken approximately nine months.

Now it was necessary to sell the Plan to the international community, especially the United States and the non-Commonwealth states in Southeast Asia. Between October 2 and 5, Commonwealth ministers met with the representatives of non-Commonwealth countries who had agreed to come to London. Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia sent full delegations while Burma, Indonesia and Thailand sent observers. In three sessions the ministers and the representatives discussed the Plan. An official statement issued at the end of the meeting (no formal communique was issued) merely noted that "there was a full and frank exchange of views, and the representatives undertook to submit, for the urgent consideration of their Governments, a full report of the proceedings."⁷⁸ Would the non-Commonwealth countries in Southeast Asia seek membership in the Consultative Committee and in the Council for Technical Cooperation? Would the United States which was expected to provide the bulk of the external capital live up to that expectation? Would France and the Netherlands, both of which had extensive interests in Southeast Asia, and had been mentioned as potential donors⁷⁹ associate with the programme? How would the politics and diplomacy of membership be played? This is the subject of the next chapter.

TABLE 1

**ESTIMATES OF DOMESTIC AND EXTERNAL FINANCE FOR THE SIX-YEAR DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMMES OF THE ASIAN COMMONWEALTH STATES AND TERRITORIES
(THE COLOMBO PLAN 1951- 57)**

	India	Pakistan	Ceylon	Malaya & Borneo	Total	Percentage
	£ million	£ million	£ million	£ million	£ million	
Domestic Sources	561	135	42	46	784	42
Drawings on Sterling Balances [†]	211	16	19	----	246	13
External Sources	<u>607</u>	<u>129</u>	<u>41</u>	<u>61</u>	<u>838</u>	<u>45</u>
Total	1,379	280	102	107	1,868	100

[†]The drawings from the sterling balances were classified under External Finance in the Report, in part because the United Kingdom regarded the releases as her main contribution to the Colombo Plan. In fact, these balances are debts owed to the balance holders. It is therefore disingenuous to describe them as external finance. They have been placed in a separate category in this table.

Computed from figures in *The Colombo Plan for Co-operative Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia*, Report by the Commonwealth Consultative Committee, London: September-October, 1950. Cmd. 8080, HMSO, p. 58, Table 27.

TABLE 2
COUNTRY ESTIMATES, 1951 - 1957

	Country Total	Percentage
	£ million	
India	1,379	74
Pakistan	280	15
Ceylon	102	5
Malaya and Borneo	<u>107</u>	<u>6</u>
Total	1,868	100

Computed from figures in *The Colombo Plan for Co-operative Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia*, Report by the Commonwealth Consultative Committee, London: September-October, 1950. Cmd. 8080, HMSO, pp. 40 - 44.

TABLE 3**BREAK-DOWN OF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES**

	India	Pakistan	Ceylon	Malaya and British Borneo	Total	
	£ million	£ million	£ million	£ million	£ million	Percentage
Agriculture (a)	456	88	38	13	595	32
Transport & Communications	527	57	22	21	627	34
Fuel & Power	43	51	8	20	122	6
Industry & mining (b)	135	53	6	----	194	10
Social Capital (c)	<u>218</u>	<u>31</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>53</u>	<u>330</u>	<u>18</u>
Total	1,379	280	102	107	1,868	100

(a) Including multipurpose projects

(b) Excluding coal

(c) Housing, health and education projects

Adapted from *The Colombo Plan for Co-operative Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia*, Report by the Commonwealth Consultative Committee, London: September-October, 1950. Cmd. 8080, HMSO, p. 42, Table 19.

ENDNOTES

1. Opening statement by the Ceylon delegate, Jayewardene, at the second meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Committee in London, September 25, 1950. Quoted in P.C. Spender, *Exercises in Diplomacy: The ANZUS Treaty and the Colombo Plan* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1969), p. 267.
2. See *The High Commissioner for Canada, Canberra to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa*. April 27, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
3. See *P.C. Spender to L.B. Pearson*. February 18, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
4. *South African Government to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations*, March 1, 1950, FO 371/84552, FZ1106/4, PRO.
5. See *Circular Document No. A. 13, Secretary of State to the Heads of Canadian Missions Abroad*. April 8, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC. See also D. LePan, *Bright Glass of Memory* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd, 1979) pp.176-77.
6. *L.B. Pearson to A.D.P. Heeney*. January 17, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 6, Folder 70, PAC.
7. See *Canadian Delegation, Colombo to the Department of External Affairs, Ottawa*. January 17, 1950, MG31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 6, Folder 70, PAC.
8. LePan, *Bright Glass of Memory*, p. 190.
9. Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 1950, Vol. 1, p. 132.
10. The Cabinet decision was on February 14, 1950. See LePan, *Bright Glass of Memory*, p. 190.
11. *P.C. Spender to L.B. Pearson*. February 18, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
12. LePan, *Bright Glass of Memory*, p. 192. For Pearson's memoirs see J.A. Munro and A.I. Inglis, (eds.) *Mike: The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson, Vol. II, 1948-1957*. (Scarborough: The New American Library of Canada, 1975), pp. 107-33.

13. LePan, *Bright Glass of Memory*, p. 190.
14. *H.H. Wrong to Dean Rusk*. March 17, 1950, RG 25 B-3, Vol. 2132, Folder: 1950— South East Asia, Economic Assistance pt.1, PAC.
15. *Department of External Affairs Memorandum: Consultative Committee for South and South-East Asia*, March 1, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 6, Folder 70, PAC.
16. See LePan, *Bright Glass of Memory*, p. 188.
17. LePan, *Bright Glass of Memory*, p. 187. See also *The Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa to the High Commissioner for Canada, London*, December 8, 1949, RG 25 A-12, Vol. 2118, AR 430/27, PAC.
18. *Canadian Delegation to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa*, May 20, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol.9, Folder 101, PAC.
19. *American Embassy, Wellington to the Department of State: Bi-Weekly Summary, January 31-February 12, 1950*. February 14, 1950, RG 59, 744.00/2-1450, NA.
20. See *The High Commissioner for Canada, Wellington to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa*. April 27, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
21. *Department of External Affairs: Memorandum on Economic Cooperation in the North Atlantic Community*, December 5, 1949, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol.2, Folder 11, PAC.
22. See *Patrick Reilly to Air Chief Marshal Sir John C. Slessor*. April 24, 1950, FO 371/83012, F1021/1G, PRO.
23. *Record of Conversation between Mr. Bevin and M. Schuman during the State Visit of the French President to London*. March 7, 1950, FO 371/84552, FZ1106/6A, PRO.
24. See *Patrick Reilly to Air Chief Marshal Sir John C. Slessor*, April 24, 1950, FO 371/83012, F1021/1G, PRO.
25. ‘The United Kingdom’, the British Cabinet asserted in 1950, ‘has a particular position in Asia which is not enjoyed by other Western Powers, and that unless this position of advantage is used to bring about closer collaboration between East and West, there is a very real danger that the whole of Asia will become the servant of the Kremlin.’ See *Note by the Chairman of the Official Committee*

- on Economic Development (Overseas): Economic and Social Development in South and Southeast Asia and the Far East - Report by the Far East (Official) Committee [plus Annex]***, January 6, 1950, CAB 134/194, E.D.(O.S.)(49)26, PRO. See also Document No. 43. "Foreign Office Memorandum for the Permanent Under- Secretary's Committee: British Overseas Obligations", P.U.S.C. (50) 79 Final 2nd Revise [ZP 3/5] April 27, 1950 in R. Bullen, (ed.) *The London Conferences. Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Strategy, January-June 1950. Documents on British Policy Overseas, Vol. II* (London: HMSO, 1987), pp. 157-172.
26. See ***Note by the Chairman of the Official Committee on Economic Development (Overseas): Economic and Social Development in South and Southeast Asia and the Far East - Report by the Far East (Official) Committee [plus Annex]***, January 6, 1950, CAB 134/194, E.D.(O.S.)(49)26, PRO.
27. See ***Foreign Office to Commissioner General for United Kingdom in Southeast Asia, Singapore***. March 10, 1950, FO 371/84553, FZ1107/3, PRO.
28. See ***The High Commissioner for Canada in the United Kingdom to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada***, April 29, 1950. MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
29. ***Memorandum by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom: Economic Development in South and South East Asia***, April 28, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
30. ***Memorandum of Instructions for the Canadian Delegation to the Meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Committee on South and Southeast Asia to be held at Sydney, Australia, the 15th of May, 1950***. n/d, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC; ***The Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada to the High Commissioner for Canada, Wellington, New Zealand***, April 29, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
31. ***Proposal of Australian Government for Establishment of Commonwealth Fund***, May 3, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 102, PAC; ***The Minister of External Affairs, Canberra, to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa***, May 3, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
32. ***Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa to the High Commissioner for Canada, Canberra***, May 8, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.

33. ***Australian Minister of External Affairs, Canberra to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa***, May 10, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
34. ***Personal Message to Mr. Bevin from Mr. Spender***, May 10, 1950, FO 371/84546, FZ1102/122, PRO.
35. ***United Kingdom High Commissioner in New Zealand to Commonwealth Relations Office***, May 11, 1950, FO 371/84546, FZ1102/127, PRO.
36. See ***High Commissioner for Canada, Canberra to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa***, May 14, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
37. ***United Kingdom High Commissioner in India to Commonwealth Relations Office***, May 15, 1950, FO 371/84546, FZ1102/128, PRO.
38. See ***U.K. Delegation to Canberra Consultative Committee, Sydney to the Commonwealth Relations Office***, May 16, 1950, FO 371/84546, FZ1102/126A, PRO.
39. See ***U.K. Delegation to Canberra Consultative Committee, Sydney to Commonwealth Relations Office***, May 15, 1950, FO 371/84546, FZ1102/131, PRO; ***Canadian Delegation to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa***, May 11, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC; ***High Commissioner for Canada, Canberra to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa***, May 14, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
40. ***British Commonwealth Consultative Committee, Report to Committee by the Preliminary Meeting of Officials: Plan of Development for South and South-East Asia***, n/d, (May 1950?) MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC; ***British Commonwealth Consultative Committee, Report to Committee by the Preliminary Meeting of Officials on Technical Assistance***, n/d, (May 1950?) MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 102, PAC; See also ***United Kingdom Delegation to Canberra Consultative Committee, Sydney to Commonwealth Relations Office***, May 12, 1950, FO 371/84545, FZ1102/120, PRO ; ***The High Commissioner for Canada, Canberra to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa***, May 14, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
41. ***The High Commissioner for Canada, Canberra to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa***, May 16, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.

42. See ***U.K. Delegation to Canberra Consultative Committee, Sydney to Commonwealth Relations Office, London***, May 16, 1950, FO 371/84546, FZ1102/126, PRO. For the Canadian delegate's letter to Spender see ***R.W. Mayhew to P.C. Spender***, May 14, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
43. ***The High Commissioner for Canada, Canberra to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa***, May 16, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
44. See ***The High Commissioner for Canada, Canberra to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa***, May 16, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
45. ***U.K. Delegation to Canberra Consultative Committee, Sydney to the Commonwealth Relations Office***, May 16, 1950, FO 371/84546, FZ1102/126A, PRO; cf. ***High Commissioner for Canada, Canberra to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa***, May 16, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
46. ***The High Commissioner for Canada, Canberra to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa***, May 16, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC; cf. ***U.K. Delegation to Canberra Consultative Committee, Sydney to the Commonwealth Relations Office***, May 16, 1950, FO 371/84546, FZ1102/126A, PRO.
47. P.C. Spender, ***Exercises in Diplomacy***, pp. 255 - 257.
48. LePan, ***Bright Glass of Memory***, p. 199.
49. ***Canadian Delegation to the Secretary of State for External Affairs***, May 17, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
50. ***British Commonwealth Consultative Committee, Memorandum by the Australian Delegation: Priority Economic Requirements of Countries in the Area***, n/d, (May 1950?) MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 102, PAC.
51. See ***Canadian Delegation to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa***, May 20, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
52. See LePan, ***Bright Glass of Memory***, pp. 200-1.
53. ***Canadian Delegation to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa***, May 20, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC; LePan, ***Bright Glass of Memory***, p. 201.

54. **United Kingdom Representative, Ottawa to United Kingdom High Commissioner, Canberra for immediate communication to Canadian Delegation, Sydney**, n/d (May 1950?), MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
55. **British Commonwealth Consultative Committee Eighth (Final) Plenary Session, 10 p.m., Friday 19th May 1950, Summary Record**, May 19, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
56. See **United Kingdom High Commissioner in Australia to Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations**, June 29, 1950, (C.R.O. Ref.: E (B) 8850/50/23), FO 371/84548, FZ1102/192, PRO.
57. Spender, **Exercises in Diplomacy**, p. 262.
58. See **Memorandum of Instructions for the Canadian Delegation to the Meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Committee on South and Southeast Asia to be held at Sydney, Australia, the 15th of May, 1950**. n/d, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC; **American Embassy Wellington to the Department of State: Bi-Weekly Summary, May 9-22, 1950**, May 22, 1950, RG 59 744.00/5-2250, NA.
59. **United Kingdom Delegation to Canberra Consultative Committee, Sydney to Commonwealth Relations Office, [Sydney Conference]**, May 16, 1950, FO 371/84546, FZ1102/133, PRO.
60. See LePan, **Bright Glass of Memory**, pp. 198-99; David Lowe, "Percy Spender and the Colombo Plan 1950", **Australian Journal of Politics & History**, Vol. 40, No. 2 (1994):162 - 176.
61. See **High Commissioner for Canada, Canberra to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa**, May 14, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
62. **United Kingdom High Commissioner in Australia to Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations**, June 29, 1950, (C.R.O. Ref.: E (B) 8850/50/23), FO 371/84548, FZ1102/192, PRO.
63. See **Final Communique for British Commonwealth Consultative Committee**, May 19, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC. The communique is also printed in M. Haas, (ed.) **Basic Documents of Asian Regional Organizations. Vol. 1** (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1974), pp. 38-40. See also **U.K. Delegation to Canberra Consultative Committee, Sydney to Commonwealth Relations Office**, May 21, 1950, FO 371/84547, Folder FZ1102/156, PRO.

64. Closing Speech by Chintaman Deshmukh, Minister of Finance and Indian delegate at the London Conference, September 1950. Cited in LePan, *Bright Glass of Memory*, p. 217.
65. The literature on the Korean War is vast. The following are a representative sample. B. Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War Vol. I: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes 1945-1947, Vol. II, The Roaring of the Cataract 1947-1950* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981, 1990); J. Grey, *The Commonwealth Armies and the Korean War: An Alliance Study* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1988); A. Farrah-Hockley, *The British Part in the Korean War Vol. I: A Distant Obligation* (London: HMSO, 1990); D. Stairs, *The Diplomacy of Constraint: Canada, the Korean War, and the United States* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974); Ian McGibbon, *New Zealand and the Korean War Vol. 1: Politics and Diplomacy* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992); R. O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950-53 Vol. I: Strategy and Diplomacy* (Canberra: 1981). See also *United Nations Security Council Resolution of 27th June, 1950 at the 474th Meeting*, UN Doc. S/1511 and 1509.
66. *FRUS*, 1950, Vol. VII, pp. 186-7.
67. *FRUS*, 1950, Vol. VII, p. 236; See also *Loy W. Henderson: Oral History*, January 1976, p. 184, HSTL; H.W. Brands, *Inside the Cold War: Loy Henderson and the Rise of the American Empire 1918-1961* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 212-215; Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs Vol. 2: Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), Chapter 22.
68. Department of External Affairs, *Statements and Speeches*, No. 50/28.
69. Cited in M.P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 366.
70. Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, p. 339.
71. Douglas LePan, who was on the Canadian delegation to Colombo, Sydney, and London, acknowledges that the Korean War made western countries more forthcoming towards the Spender Plan. See LePan, *Bright Glass of Memory*, pp. 207-8.
72. *Draft Instructions to the Canadian Delegation to the Second Meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Committee for South and South East Asia, London, September 25 - October 5*, September 1, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 106, PAC.

73. The actual meeting of the Consultative Committee ended on September 30. Between October 2 and 5 Commonwealth ministers met with representatives of non-commonwealth states.
74. See ***Report of the Standing Committee of the British Commonwealth Consultative Committee***, July 1950, RG 25 Acc 86-87/160, Box 140, 11038-A-40 pt.1, PAC.
75. See ***Foreign Office to United Kingdom Ambassador in Washington***, November 13, 1950, FO 371/84587, FZ11013/142, PRO.
76. ***The Colombo Plan for Co-operative Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia***, Report by the Commonwealth Consultative Committee, London: September-October, 1950. Cmd. 8080, (London: HMSO, 1950). See, in particular, Chapter 9 "The Need for Trained Men", pp. 46-54.
77. ***The High Commissioner for Canada, Karachi [Pakistan] to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa***, August 11, 1950, RG 25 Acc 86-87/160, Box 140, 11038-A-40 pt.1, PAC.
78. Quoted in ***The Times*** (London), October 6, 1950, p. 5.
79. See ***The Times*** (London), October 6, 1950, p. 7.

The Colombo Plan was designed from the outset to secure the eventual participation of the United States and other non-Commonwealth states in the economic reinforcement of non-communist South and Southeast Asia. The interplay of economic power (or lack of it) and Cold War geopolitics made this necessary. Since the programme's goals reflected American and the free world's concern about the communist threat, its Commonwealth sponsors hoped that the United States would support it.¹

The non-Commonwealth states, lacking economic power, were potential recipients of Colombo Plan aid. Their importance lay in the fact that they provided additional channels for the attainment of the Plan's geopolitical objectives. The West desired closer ties with Asia, especially with the non-communist states on the periphery of the Soviet Union and China. The Plan was the first, and to that date, the only scheme which brought the "free" countries of Asia and the West together in one political and economic forum.² Restricting its membership to the three Asian Commonwealth states (plus the British territories in the region) was clearly inadequate. It was logical, and more cost effective, to extend the scheme to all the non-communist states in the strategic reach of the communist world.

But there were differences of emphasis, even among the Plan's sponsors. Australia, which proposed the programme, was far more concerned with the

threat to Indonesia, Malaya, and other non-communist states in Southeast Asia than to the relatively more distant Commonwealth states in South Asia.

Communist resurgence in this theatre posed the gravest danger to the country's security; maintaining stability there was therefore the main motive behind the Menzies government's interest in the Colombo Plan.³ New Zealand shared Australia's concern. In contrast Britain had strategic and economic interests in both South and Southeast Asia. Although Canada had no direct interest in the region it shared the free world's general concern about the communist threat. The decision to extend the Plan to the non-communist states took care of each sponsoring country's particularist interests in South or Southeast Asia, just as the need for American participation promoted their collective interest.

Nevertheless, securing the cooperation of the United States and of the non-Commonwealth states proved to be a difficult task. That the United States shared the western Commonwealth states' geopolitical objectives while the non-Commonwealth countries were poor and therefore in dire need of economic assistance did not mean, *ipso facto*, that they would jump on the Commonwealth bandwagon. The organization had to exert a lot of effort to induce the United States and the non-Commonwealth states to support the Plan. Over the course of the politics of expansion the geographical definition and territorial space of South and Southeast Asia was extended, figuratively, to accommodate Afghanistan, Japan and South Korea. The expansion of the membership of the Colombo Plan proved to be a complex and intriguing political and diplomatic

game. This chapter will concentrate on one aspect of this game— the effort to secure American participation. The extension of the programme in the Asia/Pacific region will be examined in the next chapter.

Wooing the Fairy Godfather

...The Americans.. are chary however of identifying themselves too closely with a Commonwealth scheme, partly because they are afraid of being accused that they are letting outsiders decide how United States money will be spent, and partly because they like to play Fairy Godfather directly and not through any Commonwealth machinery.⁴

Australia and the United Kingdom led the effort to persuade officials of the Truman administration to support the Colombo Plan. This was neither by design nor happenstance; it was a logical outcome of their foreign policies. One of the fundamental principles of the Menzies government's foreign policy (discussed in Chapter 1.6) was to strengthen relations with the United States as a means to guaranteeing Australia's defence and security. Its strategy to contain what it perceived as the destabilizing potential to regional stability of the communist victory in China had two mutually interactive components— the creation of a Pacific defence pact and the provision of economic assistance to the non-communist states in the region. Neither of these could be actualized without the active support of the United States. Australia's defence depended on it and Percy Spender, the external affairs' minister, was determined to secure it.

The United Kingdom had both strategic and economic reasons for promoting American participation in the Plan. Its foreign policy, even in 1950,

was aimed at maintaining “the United Kingdom’s position as a world power.”⁵

For a country dependent on Marshall Plan aid to meet the dollar gap in its balance of payments, pursuing such a grand objective proved to be a costly venture. It carried with it certain military and economic obligations among which, in the case of South Asia, were the sterling balances.⁶

ERP aid helped the British government to maintain the postwar levels of sterling balances releases to India, Pakistan, and Ceylon (See Chapter 1.7). But it was scheduled to terminate on July 1, 1952, after which it would be difficult to maintain the current drawing levels. Reducing or postponing the sterling balances releases was not feasible because it conflicted sharply with the strategic objective of containing communism in South Asia and maintaining the country’s influence and status as a world power. Such a policy, the Foreign Office warned, could have disastrous consequences for Britain’s interests. India and/or Pakistan could withdraw from the Commonwealth and from the sterling bloc and seek stronger ties with the Soviet Union. It could shake the stability of both states and leave them open to communist subversion; no one could tell what effect (domino?) this could have on the whole of Asia.⁷

The Attlee government knew that the British economy could not sustain the country’s status and obligations as a world power. Yet it could not accept proposals such as reducing the defence budget or withdrawing from as many overseas obligations as possible. Political prestige and influence, it argued, were as important as commercial transactions in supporting the country’s status

and balance of payments. Abandoning Britain's position and role as a world power could lead, for instance, to the dissolution of the sterling bloc. It could create a vacuum in such areas as South and Southeast Asia which the Soviet Union would be only too glad to fill. It could also

greatly reduce the support which the United Kingdom received from its membership of the Commonwealth, from its special relations with the United States and from its Western European and other alliances, all of which form essential parts of its present world position. It would certainly lead to a radical change of the whole Commonwealth relationship... The grim reality would be a progressive descent into weakness and a severe fall in the standard of living which would be impossible to arrest even by the most ingenious economic expedients.

The government chose to resolve the contradiction between Britain's world power status and its weak economic base by transferring some obligations to its allies, especially the United States. In the specific case of South Asia it meant securing American dollars for India, Pakistan and Ceylon to replace or complement a reduced level of drawings on the sterling balances.⁸

Talks on this and related issues were held through bilateral channels and in the tripartite forum between Britain, American and Canadian officials in late 1949 and early 1950.⁹ The Commonwealth's decision to establish an aid programme for South and Southeast Asia offered Britain the opportunity to secure some relief from the burden of the Asian balances, if the United States agreed to support the scheme. The Attlee government was determined to see that it did.

Canada and New Zealand did not play any significant role in the diplomatic game to secure American support for the programme. Both countries shared the West's geopolitical goals and the belief that the success of the

Colombo Plan depended on the participation of the United States. However, with only minimal economic and security interest in the region, Ottawa did not consider itself a key player in the Commonwealth aid programme. Wellington, while sharing Canberra's security concerns, did not have the resources nor the diplomatic clout to influence the outcome of the game one way or the other. It stayed in the background, conceding to its bigger neighbour the initiative to devise measures to contain the threat to regional security.

The Asian Commonwealth states, as potential recipients, were passive observers of the diplomatic game. They were not expected to, and did not play any role in persuading the United States. They would play a more active role in subsequent phases of the politics of expansion when the Colombo Plan was extended to the non-Commonwealth states in the region.

The first step in the "American phase" of the politics of expansion was taken by the Australian and British delegations to the Colombo conference. Even before delegates could discuss the Australian memorandum Spender revealed the details to the American ambassador, Livingston L. Satterthwaite. The British chose to impress on him Commonwealth governments' expectation that the United States and the IBRD would be the main source of external finance for the programme. The ambassador responded by acknowledging the fact that structuring the programme on the basis of "self-help" and "mutual aid" could make it attractive to the United States.¹⁰ Subsequent attempts by London and

Canberra to woo Washington proceeded on separate but parallel channels, with little or no coordination in strategy.

In the weeks following the conference the issue of when a formal approach could be made to the Americans dominated discussions in British diplomatic circles. The embassy in Washington favoured taking immediate action because of the communist insurgency in Burma, Indochina, Malaya and Thailand.¹¹ Malcolm MacDonald, the Commissioner General for the United Kingdom in Southeast Asia, argued along similar lines. In mid February the Truman administration had dispatched an economic survey mission to Southeast Asia (the so-called Griffin Mission) to assess the economic needs of the non-communist states in the subregion.¹² In the same month United States Chiefs of Mission in the Far East held a conference in Bangkok on the problems of the states in the region.¹³ These events, MacDonald argued, demonstrated the administration's interest in Southeast Asia. It was therefore essential for the British government to formulate its proposals before the Griffin Mission completed its tour so that it (the Mission) could 'be used as the link to connect the United States with the Colombo framework. Unless we work quickly', he urged, 'we may miss this particular boat and may find that there is not much American aid left for South East Asia, other than Indo-China and possibly Siam [Thailand].'¹⁴

In British strategic and economic calculations South Asia, rather than Southeast Asia, was the greater asset. The Attlee government's support for the

Colombo Plan, and its desire to secure American support for it was motivated largely by the country's interests in the Indian subcontinent. By focussing on Southeast Asia MacDonald and the Washington embassy ignored this central purpose in British strategy. Not surprisingly the Foreign Office rejected what it considered to be a narrow and ill-considered argument. In separate telegrams to Washington and Singapore it cautioned against launching any precipitate action based on 'insufficient brief'; of not jeopardizing the approach to Washington with 'premature and hastily considered proposals.'⁹ The telegram to Singapore went further in elaborating the need for caution and tact in British strategy. 'You would realize', MacDonald was advised, 'that it is most important not to frighten the United States Administration away from cooperation by loose talk of American aid in staggering amounts.' It was therefore necessary 'to avoid exchanging ideas with the Australian, United States or other representatives in Singapore' until the [Interdepartmental] Working Party completed its review.¹⁵ (The Working Party, as we noted in Chapter 2, had been instituted to examine the Colombo recommendations in the light of British policy.)

In the interim British officials maintained informal contacts with their American counterparts. At a meeting in the Foreign Office on March 8, Bevin briefed W. Averell Harriman (the ECA's special representative in Europe) on the Colombo resolution and on the expectations of the British government.¹⁶ The State Department's record of this meeting makes no reference whatsoever to the Commonwealth aid programme.¹⁷ Is this perhaps an indication of the relative

importance of the project in the British and American scheme of priorities? While the aid programme and the economic and strategic objectives behind it were of fundamental importance to the British, American officials were describing the Colombo conference, cynically, as ‘the dying glow of a setting sun.’¹⁸ The remark was undoubtedly a reflection of the State Department’s growing impatience with Britain’s determination to cling to the afterglow of its imperial past.

This, together with the related problem of the sterling balances, was one of the major issues of controversy in Anglo-American relations, and the subject of several meetings in the State Department. At one such meeting, convened by Dean Acheson to consider various measures to improve relations with the United Kingdom, Henry A. Byroade, the Director of the Bureau of German Affairs, suggested that it was important ‘to get the British to recognize that they had lost their old position of power and would have to face-up to a changed status in the world.’¹⁹ Whitehall was, however, *not* blind to this reality. The British were well aware of the change in the global configuration of power but were calculating that they could maintain at least the influence associated with their old status if *only* the United States would carry some of His Majesty’s obligations, especially those relating to the sterling balances of the states in South Asia. The advantage to the United States, as the British saw it, was keeping the United Kingdom in the game at a time when Washington was not ready, and possibly, not able wholly to replace them. It was therefore necessary,

from Whitehall's point of view, to persist in the effort to convince Washington to support the Colombo Plan.

And so did Australia. On March 9, Spender delivered his foreign policy statement to the House of Representatives calling, among other things, for the participation of the United States in the Colombo Plan. The following week (March 13) J.W. Burton, the Head of the Department of External Affairs in Canberra, called at the American Embassy with a request for the United States to send an observer to the forthcoming Sydney conference of the Commonwealth Consultative Committee. The Australian government, he stressed, was determined to keep Washington "closely informed" of the Committee's work but could not extend a formal invitation because the non-Commonwealth states could not be allowed to participate in the meeting.²⁰

Clearly, Canberra's expectation was premature, if not unrealistic. The British, with more experience in dealing with Washington, had decided that it was prudent to proceed with caution. Not so the Australians. Having jettisoned the British security umbrella at the end of World War II they were confident that they could play a leadership role in the political economy of the Asia/Pacific region; that they could negotiate the Washington diplomatic maze independent of the British. Spender and his officials chose to deal directly with Washington rather than avail themselves of British influence and expertise. With State Department officials describing the Colombo conference as the dying glow of a setting sun; with no coordination between the British and Australian efforts,

Canberra's precipitate invitation, extended without preliminary consultation, was bound to fail. The State Department rejected the invitation. To soothe Canberra's feelings the Americans made it known that the rejection did not mean that they were not sympathetic to the purposes of the programme.²¹

In mid April the British government approved the recommendations of its Interdepartmental Working Party on the Colombo resolution. The new policy was articulated in two memoranda. One, proposing the structure for the aid programme, was dispatched to Commonwealth capitals in preparation for the Sydney conference²² (See Chapter 2.1). The other, on the sterling balances and the development of South and Southeast Asia, went to the State Department.

The memorandum (or Note as it was called) to the State Department started with the same basic (prosaic?) arguments— the burden of the sterling balances on the British economy, the growing threat of communism in South and Southeast Asia, the interconnectedness between the two, the need to counter the threat with a constructive policy of economic assistance, the United Kingdom's inability to contribute meaningfully to such a programme, the importance of the region as a source of strategic materials, and its contribution to improving Western Europe's balance of payments. The elaboration of these points set the stage for the main purpose of the note: the request that the United States assume a greater part of the financial cost of the aid programme to South and Southeast Asia.

Formal talks with the United States, the note asserted, would be initiated once the Consultative Committee, at its forthcoming meetings, agreed on the structure of the aid programme. It was necessary, meanwhile, to start exploratory discussions with American and Canadian officials through the tripartite forum. 'If discussions with Commonwealth nations are to be based on certain assumptions as to the acceptability of a given course of action to the United States (and Canada), we must know whether that course of action will in fact meet with the approval of the United States and Canada and have some idea of what sort of action they themselves would contemplate.'²³

On May 5 Secretary of State Dean Acheson discussed American reaction ('first thoughts' was the way Acheson described it) to the British note with the economic minister in the British embassy in Washington, Leslie Rowan. The United States, Acheson said, agreed that South and Southeast Asia had great strategic value. It was in recognition of this that some economic and military aid had already been given to the area. Nevertheless, it was impractical to expect that whatever action the administration took could be considered as relating to the sterling balances. This was a different and separate issue from the development needs of the states in the region. The United States would approach the problem solely from *the needs of the area* (my italics) and would wish that the British presented the American attitude in this light. In essence, the United States was de-linking the sterling balances from the aid programme for South and Southeast Asia. When Rowan inquired when further talks could be

held on the proposals in the British memorandum Acheson's response was not very encouraging: no further discussions were contemplated. What started as Acheson's 'first thoughts' turned out to be the core of the administration's policy.²⁴

Acheson's response was a setback to British strategy which linked aid to the region directly with the problem of the sterling balances. In view of the prevailing opinion in the State Department that the United Kingdom would do well to abandon the illusion and accoutrements of world power, one cannot but wonder how much influence this had on the decoupling of the sterling balances from development aid for South and Southeast Asia. Thus far, the British effort to commit the United States to the Commonwealth aid programme had failed miserably.

When the Consultative Committee convened in Sydney for its first meeting, little or no progress had been made either by Australia or the United Kingdom in their uncoordinated efforts to attract the support of the United States. 'Uncle Sam, unwilling yet to play Fairy Godfather, made it clear, 'informally but quite unmistakably', to the British that the Sydney conference 'should not make premature assumption about subsequent United States association and point publicly and inescapably at Washington in its conclusions.'²⁵ Still the Commonwealth states proceeded on the assumption that the programme would eventually attract international support.

The preparations for the London conference gave some momentum to the effort to interest the United States in the Colombo Plan. Was it appropriate to invite Washington to send an observer? How would the State Department react to such a request? These were questions officials in the Foreign Office had to ponder. Australia had been rebuffed when it asked for an observer for the Sydney conference. Other Commonwealth governments were standing behind the so-called "family affair principle" that it was "not appropriate to invite a United States observer to any purely Commonwealth meeting."⁹ If the "principle" was breached would the benefits of having an American observer at the London conference outweigh its disadvantages? Would the observer make a useful contribution? Was he likely to influence the proceedings in an "undesirable way"?²⁶

In the final analysis, *only* one option was possible. Since Britain's motive for seeking American support for the Plan was, to repeat, to resolve the contradiction between the nation's economic weakness and its strategic and geopolitical goals (South and Southeast Asia's stability and development was merely an outcome of this), the Foreign Office decided in favour of inviting an observer to the conference. The arguments it advanced to justify this decision reflected that broad objective: it was essential that the report to be produced by the Committee be in a form acceptable to the United States. Having an observer would make things easier for the delegation which would go to Washington to discuss the report with the administration. American support, when it was

eventually offered, would be useful if other Commonwealth states proposed an elaborate bureaucratic machinery for the Plan. Once again the need for caution was paramount. Oliver Franks (the British ambassador in Washington) warned that 'in inviting the United States to attend it might be wise to try to avoid any semblance of wishing thereby to involve the United States in further responsibilities.' Instead, the invitation should be justified by 'the need to co-ordinate our mutual efforts in the area.'²⁷

And it worked. Unlike Australia, the British succeeded in convincing the United States to send an official to the conference. The State Department appointed Ben Moore of the London embassy as *liaison officer* rather than as an *observer*. This semantic change in the designation of the official was of great import, symbolically, to the United States. It was to show that even if the administration was sympathetic to the objectives of the Commonwealth programme it was not in any way committed to it. For the British, it was quite irrelevant. The immediate goal was to get an American official, whatever his title, at the London conference. And that had been achieved. Was this success a testament to the effectiveness of British diplomacy, or was it in fact a reflection of a change in American attitude occasioned not by British effort but by the new dynamic in the geopolitical and strategic firmament?

Security and the Practice of American Foreign Aid

Economic diplomacy became a major instrument of American foreign and security policy at the end of World War II.²⁸ For most of the early postwar years, foreign aid, reflecting Washington's strategic priorities, was channelled to Western Europe through the Marshall Plan and to Japan following the adoption of the "reverse course" policy in 1948. Throughout this period, and subsequently, the United States maintained a direct correlation between the strategic significance of a particular region or country and the amount and type of aid it offered. Of the net foreign aid bill of \$15.7 billion in fiscal years 1948 to 1950, \$12.6 billion went to Europe while \$2.5 billion was spent in Asia and the Pacific, mostly Japan.²⁹ The Point IV programme (Act for International Development, 1951) which President Truman proposed in his inaugural address in 1949 had a lot of propaganda value but provided only limited technical assistance to underdeveloped countries through bilateral channels and through the United Nations.

As long as South and Southeast Asia remained peripheral in United States strategic and geopolitical calculations there was little interest in Washington to articulate and implement any significant aid programme for the region. The exception was China. The United States had provided substantial aid to the Nationalist regime of Chiang Kai-shek since the end of the War, with apparently little to show for it. The China Aid Act of 1948 which authorized the

President to spend \$463 million³⁰ on economic and military aid was based on General Marshall's recommendation, following his return from China, that the United States adopt "a policy of limited aid and watchful waiting."³¹

The implementation of the China aid programme had hardly begun when most of the appropriation was transferred to Formosa in November 1949 by authority of the China Area Act. The reason was the expulsion of the Nationalist regime from China. The victory of communist forces in China raised the profile of Southeast Asia on the list of American strategic priorities. States in the subregion could now receive American economic and military aid under a provision in the China Area Act which made unobligated funds in the China programme available for disbursement in the "general area of China".

In the cacophony of Republican charges that the Truman administration had "lost" China, Acheson addressed the National Press Club (on January 12, 1950) on the subject "Crisis in China— An Examination of United States Policy". The administration, Acheson announced, was willing to provide the "missing component" in the development efforts of the states in the region.³²

In the next few months a plethora of study groups and missions were appointed to examine American policy and programmes in Southeast Asia. Between December 15, 1949 and March 15, 1950, ambassador-at-large Philip C. Jessup undertook a 14-nation fact-finding mission to the Far East to express the United States' support for the Asian governments and explain the rationale and intentions of the Point IV programme.³³ The Jessup Mission was still in the

field when R. Allen Griffin led the United States Economic Survey Mission to Southeast Asia.³⁴ In Washington the special assistant to the President, Gordon Gray, led a committee to review the administration's foreign economic policies and programmes.³⁵ In July an Economic Survey Mission led by Daniel W. Bell was dispatched to the Philippines.³⁶ A military aid mission, the Joint State-Defense Mutual Defense Assistance Program Survey Mission, under John Melby, went to Southeast Asia.³⁷ In April the President approved NSC 64 which stressed the need to take all practicable measures to prevent further communist expansion in Southeast Asia.³⁸ It was clear that the administration was taking the situation in Southeast Asia seriously.

Britain and other sponsors of the Colombo Plan must have wondered: what of South Asia? The administration had evinced little or no interest in the subcontinent. The great elasticity in the definition of the "general area of China" did not extend to South Asia.³⁹ The prevailing view in Washington was that India and Pakistan were 'comparatively remote and sheltered from the Communists' direct line of attack.⁴⁰ They were also the primary responsibility of the United Kingdom.⁴¹ As long as the United States was unwilling to give substantial aid to the South Asian states there was little hope that it would agree to participate in the Colombo Plan.

On the eve of the Korean War, American aid available to the Indian subcontinent amounted to \$24 million, mainly for technical assistance under the Point IV programme.⁴² In addition to the strategic factors discussed above the

chill in Indo-American relations contributed to Washington's reluctance to provide aid to India. Prime Minister Nehru's visit to Washington (October 11 - 13, 1949) had not endeared him to American officials, nor, as George McGhee, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs claims, to the American people.⁴³ India's neutralist policy, its actions at the United Nations which appeared to the Americans to be in opposition to United States foreign policy objectives, Nehru's disposition toward communist China, the Kashmir problem, all these made it difficult to generate support within the administration for an aid programme for South Asia.

Nevertheless, the subcontinent did have a voice in the State Department. In a June 7 memorandum addressed to Acheson, McGhee advocated the development of 'a more positive policy of economic development assistance to the countries in South Asia and the Near East.'⁹ Experience had demonstrated, he claimed, that non-communist states in the strategic orbit of the Soviet Union required 'the stiffening and confidence provided by the United States economic assistance.'⁹ India, Pakistan and Afghanistan remained the only states, within this perimeter, for which there was no programme of American aid. The memorandum recommended an annual grant-in-aid of \$200 million, as a supplement to the Commonwealth aid programme, to strengthen the political stability and the western orientation of India, Pakistan, Ceylon, and Afghanistan.⁴⁴ The Policy Planning Staff supported the McGhee memorandum but added that since the problems in the Near East, South Asia and Southeast

Asia were similar, an aid programme should be developed for the three areas as a whole.⁴⁵

The McGhee memorandum could not be translated into policy as long as the strategic equation remained unchanged. Then came the Korean War and, with it, the blurring of the distinction between areas of vital and of peripheral significance. The war changed the strategic and geopolitical landscape in the Asia/Pacific region. It gave a new urgency, and a broader focus, to American aid policy. It was this new dynamic which ultimately impelled the United States to respond favourably to the overtures from the Commonwealth. But then, we anticipate.

The Truman administration responded to the war in part by launching a large scale rearmament of the free world. This required huge quantities of such strategic materials as mica, kyanite, talc, and manganese, which could be sourced from India.⁴⁶ In these circumstances South Asia could no longer be ignored. The change in strategic priorities raised the profile of the subcontinent and this was duly reflected in a reinvigorated American policy. ‘The United States objective in respect of South Asia’, NSC 98/1 stated with candour, ‘is to improve the security of the United States.’⁴⁷ The states in the subregion became, almost by accident, of strategic importance to the security of the United States and, therefore, potential candidates for American aid. The war made the administration receptive to the proposals in the McGhee memorandum. Even the

President was beginning to think of "some kind of Marshall Plan for Southeast Asia."⁹⁴⁸

Pakistan's attitude towards the United States also contributed to Washington's decision to give assistance to South Asia. In marked contrast to the "chill" in Indo-American relations, Pakistan was willing to support American Cold War objectives. Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan demonstrated this in May 1950 when he agreed to cancel his scheduled trip to Moscow and go to Washington instead. There, he announced that his country was determined "to throw all her weight to help the maintenance of stability in Asia."⁹⁴⁹ It was in the administration's interest to encourage Pakistan to follow this policy. The irony in the situation was that the same encouragement would have to be given to India in spite of its neutralist policy. The geopolitics of the subcontinent was such that aid could not be granted to Pakistan without a corresponding measure extended to India, and vice versa. Ignoring India, or favouring Pakistan at the expense of India could push the latter into the "other camp". Such a scenario would be prejudicial to the interests of the United States and inconceivable to the United Kingdom.

What India and Pakistan needed was development assistance which could hardly be accommodated in the current American aid profile, with its focus on military aid. Apart from the Point IV programme, all American grant aid operations, reflecting the post-Korean security imperative, were to be transferred to the Mutual Security Agency once Congress passed the Mutual Security Act,

which it did in 1951. Even the vocabulary of aid changed. All assistance in support of the economies of states taking part in the free world's rearmament programme was now called "defense support".⁵⁰

Once the decision to give aid to India and Pakistan had become accepted policy a way had to be found to accommodate their needs.⁵¹ The report to be issued at the end of the London conference of the Commonwealth Consultative Committee would spell out in detail the "missing component" (to use Acheson's expression) in the development programmes of the South Asian states. This offered an avenue through which the United States could channel "economic aid" rather than "defense support" to the states in the subregion. "The Americans have told us", the Foreign Office recorded, "that their chief interest in the Commonwealth plan lies in the prospect of being handed ready-made the framework of a comprehensive plan on which to base a programme of aid to the Indian subcontinent and Ceylon."⁵² Accordingly, the State Department responded cautiously but positively to the overtures from the United Kingdom. It agreed to appoint a liaison officer for the London conference.

Uncle Sam Plays Fairy Godfather

To the officials of the Foreign Office, the appointment of the liaison officer brought the United Kingdom closer to realizing an important foreign policy objective: United States support for the Colombo Plan. It was therefore imperative that the report to be issued by the Consultative Committee be in

accord with American policies and procedures. Towards this end, the Washington embassy was instructed to discuss a synopsis of the report prepared by the Treasury with officials in the State Department.⁵³

Meanwhile, Spender, unaware of the action initiated by the British government, but fearful of the reaction the report was likely to receive in the United States, suggested to Bevin that they jointly discuss the issue with Acheson when they met in New York in September for the opening of the United Nations General Assembly. Acheson should be informed, 'quite frankly', that the attainment of the political and economic objectives of the programme depended largely on substantial financial contribution from the United States. It was necessary to know exactly what the reaction of the United States would be before the London conference.

It is my opinion that if we fail to have such a discussion with the Americans before the meeting... takes place, we may issue a report and a programme of aid which fail to win the interest of the United States administration (sic) and the Commonwealth will be embarrassed by its inability to carry the project alone. If we were to receive a discouraging report from the Americans before the London meeting there would be the opportunity at that meeting to confine ourselves strictly to what the Commonwealth could do alone. Secondly, we may risk a reaction on the part of the United States Administration against what they might consider an attempt by the British Commonwealth to impose a commitment upon the United States in the form of a report already prepared for publication.⁵⁴

These were fears which were shared equally by British and Canadian officials. However, while Spender was still uncertain about American position, Whitehall was now quite confident that the United States government would eventually provide some financial assistance to the Commonwealth programme. A joint approach to Acheson, as Spender had proposed, was therefore

unnecessary.⁵⁵ What was essential was to ensure that the Fairy Godfather's views were not taken for granted in the preparation of the report.

As the Foreign Office had anticipated, the State Department had objections to some sections of the report, or rather, the synopsis. The report should not point to the United States as the source of the "missing component", nor should it incorporate a formal request for assistance from the United States, the State Department advised. It should stress what Commonwealth countries could do individually and collectively to develop the region. It should not claim that aid would be "untied": the State Department would prefer that this was "stated less directly and not seemingly directed at United States aid or policies." (Even Washington, like Whitehall, found it expedient to camouflage the strings attached to Colombo Plan aid.) The report should stress the needs of the area rather than its contribution to the world.⁵⁶ All of these "suggestions" were incorporated in the report.⁵⁷

Up to this point, the Canadians had not made any attempt to convince the United States to support the programme although, like others, they believed that American participation was paramount. In preparing their delegation for the London conference they decided to approach the Americans to find out what their reaction would be if the report was structured to reflect the concerns of the United States. The State Department merely responded that it welcomed the Commonwealth initiative and that it would be necessary, in the future, to coordinate American and Commonwealth programmes to avoid duplication.

Far more revealing (a fact which is not recorded in the American version of the memorandum of conversation) is the fact that the Americans wanted Canadian advice on how best to channel their aid to South Asia. The administration, the Canadians were informed, viewed any suggestion from the United Kingdom and other sterling bloc countries as suspect because of "their direct self interest in the sterling balance problem."⁵⁸ We should recall that in May Acheson had told Leslie Rowan that the United States was not prepared to link its aid programme to the region with the British sterling balances. Since he did not provide any explanation, we had wondered then whether this was a result of the State Department's impatience with British pretensions at playing the world power game. The Department's suspicion, revealed now to the Canadians, appears to justify this conclusion.

Be that as it may, the Canadians made it clear that they were not prepared to shoulder the responsibility for transmitting American views to the Consultative Committee. They did not consider themselves prime movers in the Commonwealth programme. The Americans should therefore transmit whatever information they had through the United Kingdom or Australia.⁵⁹

By the end of the London conference, the United States, without being a member of the Consultative Committee, had had a significant input in the form and tone of the report. Even the title reflected American concerns. The State Department made it known that it wanted the title "worded so as not to identify report directly with the Commonwealth."⁹ It did not. The Consultative Committee

titled the report "The Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia".⁶⁰ That the Colombo Plan now reflected the views of the United States administration did not ease the anxiety of officials in Whitehall about the reception it would receive from Washington officialdom. The Plan had been given wide publicity in the Washington media. A pamphlet, "The Colombo Plan: A Commonwealth Programme for Southeast Asia", prepared by John R.E. Carr-Gregg of the British embassy, was to be published by the Carnegie Foundation as part of the effort to promote the Plan.⁶¹ Every care had also been taken to ensure that the report did not appear as a bid for American assistance or an appeal to Congress.⁶² But was that sufficient guarantee that the United States would cover the "missing component"? A week after presiding at the London conference, Hugh Gaitskell (Minister of State for Economic Affairs in the Treasury) went to Washington ostensibly to exchange ideas with important administration officials. His actual purpose was to find out whether the United States would join the Consultative Committee.

The State Department's briefing memorandum for Under Secretary of State James E. Webb, who was to meet Gaitskell, ostensibly spelt out the current American thinking on the Colombo Plan report. The Department had resisted all attempts to get it involved in the work of the Committee, it stated. Its liaison officer had been instructed not to attend any of the sessions of the London conference. Nevertheless, the United States remained sympathetic to the Plan and was willing to coordinate its own programmes with that of the

Commonwealth on a country basis. But it was impossible for the United States to channel its aid through the Commonwealth organization. If therefore Gaitskell raised the issue of a formal visit to Washington by experts from the Committee Webb was to tell him that the State Department would be 'pleased to talk with anyone who happens to be in Washington but that a delegation would not be desirable'.⁶³ The United States would also not welcome a formal presentation of the report and did not have any opinion on when it should be published.⁶³

Contrary to the impression created in the memorandum, the meeting between Webb and Gaitskell revealed that the State Department did have an opinion, a very strong one, on the publication of the report. For budgetary reasons it wanted the publication deferred until after November 7, but not beyond the 10th.⁶⁴ Whitehall agreed, and made plans to present the report to the House of Commons on the 13th, since the 10th was a Friday. Then Australia derailed the publication schedule by requesting that it be delayed until the 21st to enable Spender introduce the report in the House of Representatives in Canberra. The anxiety which this created in the Foreign Office is aptly conveyed in its telegram to the embassy in Washington: 'we feel strongly that the decisive factor in the choice of date for the authoritative report must be the convenience of the United States Administration. Can you let us know urgently whether a postponement to 21st November... would inconvenience the Americans in any way.'⁶⁵ In the end the report was published on November 28, 1950, the very

day, coincidentally (and symbolically), communist Chinese forces opened their offensive in Korea.

On the more important question which had taken Gaitskell to Washington, Webb could not provide an immediate answer nor relieve the anxiety of the British government. When the answer was eventually transmitted to Whitehall in an aide memoire signed personally by Acheson, officials at the Foreign Office were elated. At long last the United States was committing itself to the Colombo Plan:

The United States Government is fully aware of the aspirations of the countries of South and South East Asia in the field of economic development. It understands the need for such development and has independently given much study to the nature of the problem, its necessary dimensions, and the role which the United States might play in contributing to its solution. Participation of the United States Government in arrangements for continuing consultation... would be a natural consequence of United States interest and work in this area... the United States is willing, with the agreement of all member countries, to participate... in future meetings of the Consultative Committee.⁶⁶

The main conditions the United States set for its participation — recognition that this did not imply endorsement of or commitment to fund particular development projects, the need to extend the Plan to non-Commonwealth states in the region in order to avoid creating an exclusive Commonwealth-United States club — had already been anticipated and dealt with by the Consultative Committee. The United Kingdom, and indeed the Commonwealth organization, could congratulate itself that it had succeeded in securing American support for the Colombo Plan. This could guarantee the programme's success and was, for both London and Canberra, an important foreign policy achievement.

But was this a Commonwealth "achievement"? Was it an outcome of British (and Australian) diplomacy? To be sure, both countries exerted a lot of effort and diplomatic capital in the attempt to convince the United States to support the Plan. The Australians were hampered by a lack of experience and sophistication, while the British attempt to link aid to Asia with their sterling balances problems was rebuffed by the State Department. The argument in this chapter leads only to one conclusion: that it was the change in the strategic situation in Asia created by the Korean War which finally induced Washington to support the Colombo Plan. Like Australia and the United Kingdom, the United States acted first and foremost in its own national interest, according to its own scheme of priorities. Its decision was not aimed at promoting the interests of Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Commonwealth. That it did was merely a by-product of Washington's global reach.

For Britain and the Commonwealth, what was important was that Uncle Sam had finally agreed to play Fairy Godfather. They could now concentrate on the second phase of the politics of expansion, that of extending the Plan to the non-Commonwealth, non-communist states in South and Southeast Asia.

ENDNOTES

1. This expectation conformed with the instrumentalities of American foreign policy. Until the Korean War economic diplomacy, including foreign aid, was the most important component of the policy of containment. See R.A. Pollard, ***Economic Security and the Origins of the Cold War, 1945-1950*** (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); J.L. Gaddis, ***Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy*** (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp.33-38; Commission on Foreign Economic Policy, ***Staff Papers*** (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1954).
2. Other United Nations institutions like ECAFE involved the Soviet Union and other Communist States and were therefore inappropriate for the attainment of the goals set for the Colombo Plan.
3. See P.C. Spender, ***Exercises in Diplomacy, the ANZUS Treaty and the Colombo Plan*** (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1969), p. 54.
4. ***F.R. MacGinnis to R.W.D. Fowler***, December 5, 1951, FO 371/93067, FZ1102/969, PRO.
5. Document No. 43: "Foreign Office Memorandum for the Permanent Under-Secretary's Committee: British Overseas Obligations". P.U.S.C. (50) 79 Final 2nd Revise [ZP 3/5] April 27, 1950 in R. Bullen, (ed.) ***The London Conferences. Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Strategy, January-June 1950. Documents on British Policy Overseas, Vol. II.*** (London: HMSO, 1987), pp. 157-172, p.158.
6. See Document No. 43 in Bullen, ***The London Conferences***, pp. 165-6.
7. Document No. 43 in Bullen, ***The London Conferences***, p. 166.
8. Document No. 43 in Bullen, ***The London Conferences***, pp. 161-2.
9. See R.W. Jackling, ***Colombo Conference— Economic and Social Development in South and South-East Asia and the Far East***, January 11, 1950, FO 371/82935, UEE 45/1, PRO; Document No. 2. "Letter from Sir L. Rowan (Washington) to Mr. Hitchman (Treasury)", [AU 1156/3]. February 14, 1950 in Bullen, (ed.) ***The London Conferences. Vol. II***, pp. 3-7; ***FRUS***, 1950, Vol. III, pp. 618-9.
10. ***United Kingdom Delegation, Colombo to the Foreign Office: Colombo Conference***, January 10, 1950, FO 371/82935, UEE 45/1, PRO; ***United Kingdom Delegation, Colombo to Foreign Office: Colombo Conference***,

January 11, 1950, FO 371/82935, UEE 45/2, PRO.

11. **United Kingdom Embassy in Washington to Foreign Office**, February 15, 1950, FO 371/84553, FZ1107/1, PRO.
12. United States Economic Survey Mission to Southeast Asia led by R. Allen Griffin, a California publisher and in 1948-49 deputy chief of the China Mission of the ECA. The Mission's tour was from February 27 to the end of April. See S.P. Hayes, (ed.) **The Beginning of American Aid to Southeast Asia: The Griffin Mission of 1950** (Lexington, Mass and Toronto: D.C. Heath, 1971).
13. The conference, chaired by Ambassador-at-Large Philip C. Jessup, was held between February 13 and 15, 1950. See **FRUS**, 1950 Vol. VI, pp.18-22. MacDonald received an oral account of the conclusions of the conference from William R. Langdon, the American Consul General in Singapore.
14. **Singapore to Foreign Office**, February 28, 1950, FO 371/84553, FZ1107/3, PRO.
15. **Foreign Office to Commissioner General for United Kingdom in Southeast Asia, Singapore**, March 10, 1950, FO 371/84553, FZ1107/3, PRO; **Foreign Office to United Kingdom Embassy in Washington**, March 8, 1950, FO 371/84553, FZ1107/1, PRO.
16. See Document No. 4: "Record of Conversation between Mr. Bevin and Mr. Harriman at the Foreign Office on March 8, 1950 at 5.30 p.m." [FO 800/517] (Secret) in Bullen, (ed.) **The London Conferences, Vol. II**, pp. 9-12.
17. See **FRUS** 1950, Vol. III, pp. 643-4.
18. The remark was made by Charles E. Bohlen, Minister, American Embassy in Paris at the Seventh Meeting of the Policy Planning Staff in the State Department on January 24, 1950. See **FRUS** 1950, Vol. III, pp. 620-1.
19. **FRUS** 1950, Vol. III, p. 641.
20. **FRUS** 1950, Vol. VI, p. 54.
21. **FRUS** 1950, Vol. VI, p. 63.
22. See **Memorandum by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom: Economic Development in South and South East Asia**, April 28, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.

23. See "Sterling Balances and South East Asia: Note by the United Kingdom", **FRUS** 1950, Vol. III, pp. 1632-39.
24. "Memorandum of Conversation by the Secretary of State", May 5, 1950, **FRUS** 1950, Vol. III, pp. 1639-41.
25. ***The High Commissioner for Canada in the United Kingdom to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa***, April 29, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 101, PAC.
26. ***Foreign Office to Washington***, August 10, 1950, FO 371/84582, FZ11013, PRO.
27. ***U.K. Embassy in Washington to the Foreign Office***, August 15, 1950, FO 371/84582, FZ11013/7, PRO; ***Foreign Office to Washington***, August 10, 1950, FO 371/84582, FZ11013, PRO.
28. The best monograph on the subject appears to be R.A. Pollard, ***Economic Security and the Origins of the Cold War, 1945-1950*** (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
29. Commission on Foreign Economic Policy, ***Staff Papers***, p. 30. Other aid figures used in this section will be from this reference except otherwise indicated.
30. \$338 million of this amount was for economic aid and this was further reduced to \$275 million in the Appropriation Act. \$125 million went to military aid.
31. Commission on Foreign Economic Policy, ***Staff Papers***, p. 26.
32. Dean Acheson, ***Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department*** (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), pp. 354-8. See also Hayes, ***The Beginning of American Aid to Southeast Asia***, pp. 4-5.
33. See **FRUS** 1950 Vol. VI, pp. 68-76; See also Hayes, ***The Beginning of American Aid to Southeast Asia***, p. 5.
34. See Hayes, ***The Beginning of American Aid to Southeast Asia***.
35. See G. Gray, ***Report to the President on Foreign Economic Policies*** (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950). The Committee was appointed on March 31. It submitted its report on November 10, 1950.
36. See **FRUS** 1950, Vol. VI, pp. 1467-83.
37. See **FRUS** 1950, Vol. VI, pp. 164-73.

38. "The Position of the United States with Respect to Indochina". The document is printed in **FRUS** 1950, Vol. VI, pp. 744-7.
39. See **Memorandum of Conversation between Canadian and American (ECA) Officials: Aid to Southeast Asia**, April 28, 1950, RG 25 B-3, Vol. 2132, Folder: 1950 South East Asia, Econ Asst, pt.1, PAC.
40. See **United Kingdom Embassy in Washington to Foreign Office**, February 15, 1950, FO 371/84553, FZ1107/1, PRO.
41. Document No. 73: "Joint Anglo-United States Record of Heads of Agreement reached at Bipartite Meeting on May 4, 1950: Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent and Burma", MIN/UKUS/P/11 [FL 10118/106] May 8, 1950 in Bullen, (ed.) **The London Conferences, Vol. II**, pp. 255-7.
42. See George McGhee, **Envoy to the Middle World: Adventures in Diplomacy** (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), p. 213.
43. McGhee, **Envoy to the Middle World**, p. 47; See also Acheson, **Present at the Creation**, pp. 334-6. For the documents on Nehru's visit see **FRUS** 1949, Vol. VI, pp. 1750-52. For the Indian perspective see V.L. Pandit, **The Scope of Happiness: A Personal Memoir** (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1979), pp. 251-54. Madam Pandit was the Indian Ambassador in Washington at the time of Nehru's visit.
44. **FRUS** 1950, Vol. V, pp. 169-73.
45. See "Memorandum by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Paul Nitze) to the Secretary of State", June 13, 1950 in **FRUS** 1950, Vol. V, pp. 172-3.
46. **State Department Memorandum: Background Information on Grant Aid**, February 2, 1951, RG 59 Lot 54 D 341, Box 14, Folder 5: Economic Assistance— India, NA.
47. NSC 98/1, **The Position of the United States with Respect to South Asia**, January 22, 1951, RG 273 NSC Papers, NA.
48. See Harry S. Truman, **Memoirs Vol. 2: Years of Trial and Hope** (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), p. 401.
49. Quoted in R.J. McMahon, "Toward a post-colonial order: Truman Administration policies toward South and Southeast Asia", in M.J. Lacey (ed.) **The Truman Presidency** (New York: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 339-365, p. 358.

50. See Commission on Foreign Economic Policy, *Staff Papers*, p. 35.
51. See *Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation: Commonwealth Consultative Committee on Aid to South and Southeast Asia*, September 7, 1950, RG 59, Lot 54D 224, Box 1, Folder: Commonwealth Aid Program, 1950, NA.
52. *R.H. Scott to F.S. Gibbs*, September 26, 1950, FO 371/84585, FZ11013/101b, PRO.
53. *R.H. Scott to M.E. Dening: Southeast Asia Economic Development*, September 8, 1950, FO 371/84584, FZ11013/56, PRO.
54. *P.C. Spender to Ernest Bevin*, September 5, 1950, FO 371/84584, FZ11013/56, PRO.
55. *R.H. Scott to M.E. Dening*, September 8, 1950, FO 371/84584, FZ11013/56, PRO.
56. *Memorandum of Conversation: Discussion with British Representatives of Synopsis of South and Southeast Asia Development Report*, September 19, 1950, RG 59, Microfilm C0046, Reel 14, 890.00/9-1950, NA.
57. See *American Embassy, London to the Secretary of State*, September 21, 1950, RG 59, Microfilm C0046, Reel 14, 890.00/9-2150, NA.
58. *The Canadian Ambassador to the United States to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada*, September 8, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 106, PAC; *Memorandum of Conversation: U.S. attitude towards Commonwealth Consultative Committee*, September 8, 1950, RG 25 B-3, Vol. 2132, Folder: 1950 South East Asia Economic Assistance pt.2, PAC; *Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation: Commonwealth Consultative Committee on Aid to South and Southeast Asia*, September 7, 1950, RG 59, Lot 54D 224, Box 1, Folder: Commonwealth Aid Program, 1950, NA.
59. *Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation: Commonwealth Consultative Committee on Aid to South and Southeast Asia*, September 7, 1950, RG 59, Lot 54D 224, Box 1, Folder: Commonwealth Aid Program, 1950, NA.
60. See *American Embassy, London to the Secretary of State*, September 29, 1950, RG 59, Microfilm C0046, Reel 19, 890.00TA/9-2950, NA.

61. See J.R.E. Carr-Gregg, "The Colombo Plan: A Commonwealth Programme for Southeast Asia", *International Conciliation*, No. 467 (January 1951): 1-54. For information on Colombo Plan publicity in the United States see *P.H. Gore-Booth to S.C. Leslie*, April 9, 1951, FO 371/93045, FZ 1102/344, PRO.
62. See Document No. 101 "'Economic development in South and Southeast Asia: report on the meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Committee': memorandum for Cabinet Economic Policy Committee by Mr Gaitskell (Exchequer). Annex: description of the proceedings of the conference." CAB 134/227, EPC(50)111, October 27, 1950 in R. Hyam, (ed.) *The Labour Government and the End of Empire 1945-1951, Part II: Economics and International Relations. British Documents on the End of Empire Vol. 2.* (London: HMSO for the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in the University of London, 1992), p. 164.
63. *Henry R. Labouisse, Jr. to Mr. Webb: Briefing memoranda for your meeting with Mr. Gaitskell* (plus attachment), October 10, 1950, RG 59 Lot 54D 224, Box 1, Folder: Commonwealth Aid Program, 1950, NA.
64. *United Kingdom Ambassador in Washington to Foreign Office: South and Southeast Asia Development*, October 13, 1950, FO 371/84587, FZ11013/142 PRO.
65. *Foreign Office to United Kingdom Ambassador in Washington: Publication of Colombo Report*, November 2, 1950, FO 371/84587, FZ11013/142, PRO.
66. *Dean Acheson to American Embassy, London*, November 22, 1950, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 14, 890.00/11-2250, NA. See also *Foreign Office to United Kingdom Embassy in Washington: United States Aide Memoire*, November 28, 1950, FO 371/84594, FZ11013/273, PRO.

CHAPTER 4

THE POLITICS OF EXPANSION II

[The] British . . . would like to have participation of non-Commonwealth countries primarily because of political advantages to be gained by improving conditions in entire area.¹

There are cogent political reasons for trying to induce them [non-Commonwealth countries] to co-operate with us in the economic field, since we have always hoped that by doing so, we may be able to lead them towards political co-operation. (J. D. Murray, Foreign Office)²

In the preceding chapter we examined the "American phase" of the politics of expansion. This chapter develops the theme further; it explores the subsequent phases of expansion when the Colombo Plan was extended to the non-Commonwealth states in South and Southeast Asia, and beyond. If the cooperation of the United States could potentially increase the capital available for the Plan and was to that extent important to its success, the participation of the non-Commonwealth states was perhaps even of greater importance to the attainment of its goals.

Since these goals were geopolitical and strategic (the central argument of this thesis) their realization depended on getting most of the non-communist states in the region to participate in the aid programme. ⁶The United Kingdom, the old Commonwealth countries and the United States⁹, a British Foreign Office memorandum to Cabinet asserted, ⁶ regard the area [South and Southeast Asia] as a strategic whole.⁹

The common policy (the memorandum explained) is to prevent the spread of communism in the area. By checking the increase of poverty and social insecurity, by promoting stability and by encouraging a feeling of unity and solidarity among the countries of the Colombo region, the Colombo Plan is an important weapon against

communism. These are not principles which can be applied to the Commonwealth countries and neglected in the others. Any attempt to do so would cast doubt on the good faith of the West. . . [and] the Plan will [sic] have failed in one of its primary objects.³

The procedure employed in getting the non-Commonwealth states to participate in the programme can be contrasted with that used in the American phase of the politics of expansion. As a major donor the United States had, understandably, to be wooed into the Consultative Committee. The reverse ought, logically, to apply to the non-Commonwealth countries. These were underdeveloped states in dire need of development assistance. Economic imperatives would dictate that the initiative for participation in the Colombo Plan would flow along obvious channels, i.e., that the non-Commonwealth countries would demonstrate eagerness and a willingness to take part in a project which was being promoted as a cooperative effort, without political strings, to lift them out of the morass of poverty and underdevelopment. The non-Commonwealth states ought to have exerted some effort to secure membership in the Consultative Committee, and through that, gain access to western development assistance.

Of course the Colombo Plan had little to do with economic logic, even if its geopolitical undercurrents were masked in economic garb. Not surprisingly, the non-Commonwealth countries showed little enthusiasm for it. As it had done in the American phase, the United Kingdom had to initiate and persist in the effort to induce them to participate in the programme. In doing so it had to

display some sensitivity to the target countries' sense of national pride and independence, and to the neutralist tendencies prevalent in the region. The politics of expansion of the Colombo Plan to the non-Commonwealth states was therefore more subtle (compared to the American phase) and rather intricate.

To give this process context and perspective it is necessary to return to the period between the Sydney and the London conferences. It will be recalled that at the end of the Sydney conference the Asian Commonwealth states were asked to prepare six-year development programmes which would then be collated into a report at the London conference. The same decision applied to the non-Commonwealth states. Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia (linked together at the time as the Associated States of Indochina in the French Union), and Burma, Thailand and Indonesia were also to be invited to prepare development programmes for inclusion in the report. But this was not without some difficulty. None of the Asian Commonwealth states had recognized the governments of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. India continued to insist, as its prime minister (Nehru) had done at the Colombo conference of Commonwealth foreign ministers (January 1950) when he rejected Bevin's plea for *de facto* recognition of the Bao Dai regime in Vietnam, that the governments of the Associated States were puppets of France.⁴ For this it objected strongly to their participation in the meetings of the Consultative Committee, and neither Pakistan nor Ceylon was particularly enthusiastic about it.

But as is usual in such situations, a compromise was eventually worked out when the British warned that they would seriously consider withdrawing the invitation to *all* the non-Commonwealth states if the Associated States were excluded.⁵ Australia, it was decided, would issue the invitation on behalf of the western Commonwealth members; India, Pakistan and Ceylon would dissociate themselves from the invitation itself but would not oppose the participation of the Associated States in the London conference if they agreed to attend.⁶

Ironically, France also objected to the invitation to the Associated States. Upon being informed of the action taking by the Consultative Committee, the Quai d'Orsay protested that the proper course was to deliver the invitation to the French Union, and not to the governments of the Associated States. (If any evidence was needed to corroborate the position adopted by the Indians clearly this was it!) The Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) which dealt with the complaint warned the Quai d'Orsay that adopting the French procedure would 'have reinforced India and other countries in their belief that independence of Associate States (sic) was only nominal.'⁹ Instead of raising objections, the French government, the CRO complained, should 'welcome this opportunity for Associate States to feature on international stage.'⁹⁷

The procedural objection was in reality a continuation of the French campaign for membership in the Colombo Plan Consultative Committee. France and the Netherlands had expressed interest in the programme from the outset but had been frustrated by India and other Asian members who objected to what

they perceived as French and Dutch postwar imperialist adventures in Southeast Asia. The Associated States were caught in the middle of this ideological dispute. While India opposed the invitation to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia because of their supposedly dependent relationship with France, the latter sought to ride the invitation into the London conference and, ultimately, participation in the Colombo Plan.

In an adroit diplomatic move officials in the CRO exploited French desire for membership to secure the withdrawal of the objection. They advised the Quai d'Orsay that the independent representation of the Associated States could eventually persuade India and other states to accept French participation at a later stage.⁸ This appeared to have worked.⁹ Still the French attempted to circumvent their exclusion from the London conference by requesting that the British allow an official of the French Embassy in London to join the Vietnamese delegation. The request was clearly disingenuous. As British officials pointed out in rejecting it, the proper course was to persuade the Indochinese governments to include French officials in their delegations. Apparently, even the Associated States were not prepared to accommodate France on this issue. The invitation to participate in the Colombo Plan offered their governments the opportunity to begin to assert themselves in the field of foreign policy. They therefore chose to circumvent Paris and to deal directly with the members of the Consultative Committee, especially the United Kingdom.

In the months following the Sydney conference, British Treasury officials travelled to all the non-Commonwealth countries to explain the mechanism of the programme and to assist local officials in preparing and coordinating their six-year plans. In spite of this none of them prepared any plans and none was showing sufficient enthusiasm in the programme. The officials reported that the countries were hesitant because of their 'administrative disorganization and inexperience.'⁹ Some, like Thailand, preferred to deal directly with the United States and were suspicious that associating with what was then regarded as a Commonwealth programme could obstruct their claims on American aid.

These were clearly important observations. Nevertheless, a more pertinent reason for the non-Commonwealth countries' reluctance, one which conformed to the nationalist and neutralist sentiments prevalent in the region, was put forward by the Foreign Office. This was that the heavy military reverses which the United Nations forces initially suffered in Korea made the countries 'even less willing than they were before to take any steps which might commit them more firmly to one side or another in the struggle between the Soviet and non-Soviet worlds.'¹⁰ Hence, by the time the preliminary meeting of officials to the London conference got under way in September one fact was certain, and that was that the report which was to be issued would not contain separate chapters on the development programmes of the non-Commonwealth countries. What was not yet clear was whether the meeting between Commonwealth

ministers and the representatives of the non-Commonwealth governments would even take place.

The only positive response had come from the Associated States. They had 'responded to pressure', the British Consul-General in Saigon, Frank S. Gibbs, reported, and were willing to send their representatives to London. There was little comfort in this however. The feeling in the Foreign Office was that it was 'most undesirable for the Associated States alone of the non-Commonwealth countries to participate.'⁹ Perhaps it would be better, some argued, to cancel the meeting altogether if it became clear that Indonesia, Burma and Thailand would not attend.

On the other hand, this could displease the Associated States who were likely to regard a cancellation at best as indicative of His Majesty's government's vacillation and, more probably, as resulting from French machinations. Such negative impressions, it was agreed, were not conducive to promoting the Colombo Plan in the region, and should therefore be avoided. Far better to intensify the effort to get all the non-communist countries to cooperate.¹¹ Since Treasury officials had, as noted previously, indicated that the fear of losing American aid could be one of the reasons the non-Commonwealth countries were not showing sufficient interest in the programme, Malcolm MacDonald (Commissioner-General for the United Kingdom in Southeast Asia) suggested that the Americans should be asked to instruct their ambassadors to Burma,

Indonesia and Thailand to indicate that the United States supported the Commonwealth initiative.¹²

To what extent American intervention effected a change in the attitude of the three countries is impossible to assess. Thailand did agree eventually to send a delegation to London. Burma offered an observer, as did Indonesia. This was a great relief to the Foreign Office for as R. H. Scott noted in his letter to Gibbs ‘had Siam [Thailand] not in the end decided to send a delegation we should almost certainly have been forced to seek Commonwealth agreement to dropping the idea of a meeting with non-Commonwealth countries of the area, during the present conference at least.’¹³ Such a course of action, one may reasonably conjecture, could have imperiled the extension of the Colombo Plan to the non-Commonwealth countries.

At the end of the London meeting it was by no means certain that any or all of the non-Commonwealth countries would join the Consultative Committee. However, by the time the Committee convened again in Colombo in February 1951 British diplomatic efforts had yielded some positive results. The Associated States, as usual, were the first non-Commonwealth countries to become members of the Consultative Committee, in 1951. Thailand initially decided against participation, ‘not because of ill-will’, but because of its other commitments. Under British pressure (‘representations’ the Foreign Office called it) it agreed to attend subsequent meetings as an observer, becoming a full member of the Committee in 1954.¹⁴

Burma, Indonesia, Nepal, and the Philippines attended the 1951 meeting as observers. Burma and Nepal became members of the Committee in 1952. Indonesia joined in 1953, the Philippines, along with Thailand and Japan, the following year. Afghanistan attended the 1960 meeting as an observer and joined the Committee, together with the Maldives, in 1963. South Korea participated in 1961 as an observer, and became a full member, along with Bhutan, in 1962. Malaya and Singapore had participated in the Colombo Plan from the beginning through their association with the United Kingdom. When the Federation of Malaya gained its independence in August 1957, its membership in the Committee was regularized, in October, to reflect this. The same procedure was followed in the case of Singapore. It became a self-governing state in June 1959, and was admitted into the Committee in November. When it became an independent republic in 1965, it was readmitted into the Committee based on its new status in 1966. Iran also joined that year. Fiji and Bangladesh attended the New Delhi meeting in 1972 as observers (along with the Federal Republic of Germany) and were granted immediate membership. Papua New Guinea, the last country to join the Colombo Plan, did so in 1973.

Among the non-Commonwealth states Burma and Indonesia appear to have been the most reluctant to join the Consultative Committee. These were the two countries in Southeast Asia that openly proclaimed and pursued a policy of neutralism and nonalignment. They were determined to ensure that foreign aid did not compromise their foreign policy principles. They therefore offered the

greatest challenge to the effort to extend the Colombo Plan to Southeast Asia. The intense diplomacy which was mounted by the United Kingdom to induce the two countries, particularly Burma, to join the Consultative Committee was typical of the general effort to extend the programme to the non-Commonwealth states. Since it is clearly impractical to treat each country separately, the case of Burma examined in detail below provides a mirror into the second phase of the politics of expansion into Southeast Asia. The choice of Burma for a more detailed study is appropriate not only because it was the most difficult to persuade but also because as a former British colony which repudiated its Commonwealth links at independence, it presents some interesting contrasts to the Asian Commonwealth countries in its attitude to foreign aid.

The extension of the Plan to the Philippines, Japan, Afghanistan and South Korea also deserves separate treatment. None of these countries was on the original list of potential participants. The Philippines was admitted because of its association with the United States. It would be interesting to see why this was deemed to be necessary. The other countries are all outside the territorial boundaries of South and Southeast Asia. Yet they were allowed or invited to participate in the Colombo Plan. The final section examines why and how this happened.

TABLE 4**THE POLITICS OF EXPANSION**

Consultative Committee Meeting	Date	Observers at Consultative Committee Meetings	Joined Consultative Committee	Joined Council for Technical Cooperation
Sydney	May 1950		Australia, Canada, Ceylon, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, United Kingdom (and Malaya, North Borneo, Sarawak, Singapore)	Australia, Canada, Ceylon, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, United Kingdom
London	Sept 1950	United States (Liaison Officer), Burma, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam		
Colombo	Feb 1951	Burma, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines	Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, United States	Cambodia, Vietnam
Karachi	March 1952	Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand	Burma, Nepal	Burma, Nepal
New Delhi	Oct 1953	Philippines, Thailand	Indonesia	Indonesia
Ottawa	Oct 1954		Japan, Thailand, Philippines	Japan, Philippines, Thailand
Singapore	Oct 1955			Laos
Wellington	Dec 1956			
Saigon	Oct 1957		Federation of Malaya	
Seattle	Nov 1958			Federation of Malaya
Togjakarta	Nov 1959		Singapore	United States
Tokyo	Nov 1960	Afghanistan		

Kuala Lumpur	Nov 1961	South Korea		
Melbourne	Nov 1962	Bhutan, South Korea	Bhutan, South Korea	
Bangkok	Nov 1963		Afghanistan, Maldives	Bhutan, South Korea
London	Nov 1964			Afghanistan, Maldives
Karachi	Nov 1966	Iran, Singapore (Republic of)	Iran, Singapore (Republic of)	
Rangoon	Nov 1967			Iran, Singapore (Republic of)
New Delhi	Nov 1972	Federal Republic of Germany, Fiji, Bangladesh	Fiji, Bangladesh	
Wellington	Dec 1973	Federal Republic of Germany	Papua New Guines	Bangladesh, Fiji
Singapore	Dec 1974	Federal Republic of Germany		Papua New Guinea
Colombo	Dec 1975	Federal Republic of Germany EEC, Iraq		

The Strings of Neutralism

In Indonesia and Burma, [there] was suspicion that the Colombo plan [sic] was a deep-laid plot on the economic plane to force the countries in the area to show where they stood politically. They were concerned that participation in the Colombo Plan would prejudice their neutrality. To some extent, of course, this was true. (R.H. Scott, Assistance Under-Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, Foreign Office)¹⁵

For the governments of Burma and Indonesia the Colombo Plan offered both economic possibilities and political pitfalls. How much aid were they likely to receive through the programme? Could such aid be offered without strings? Would accepting membership in the Consultative Committee not impinge on their policy of neutrality and nonalignment? How would they balance their need for development assistance with their desire to maintain their cherished principles? Would the political price outweigh the economic benefits? The task of the western nations, especially the United Kingdom, was to convince the Burmese and the Indonesians that the Plan was not "political" in orientation or purpose and was designed primarily to promote their stability and economic development.

This proved to be relatively easy in the case of Indonesia. The best approach to securing Indonesian participation, the British ambassador, D. W. Kermode, advised, was "not to hustle them into a decision but to let them drift into it step by step until they find themselves to all intents and purposes there."¹⁶ This was in fact the policy that was adopted. And it paid off. By the end of the

1951 meeting of the Consultative Committee (in Colombo) the Indonesian government had given a clear indication that it was interested in the programme. It only wanted to be given more time to prepare its development programme before joining the Committee.¹⁷ With just enough pressure from Britain, Indonesia attended the 1952 meeting as an observer, and joined the Consultative Committee, as noted previously, in 1953. Burma was the tough nut, cracking it would task British diplomacy. Let us then turn to Burma.

Burma

Upon attaining independence in January 1948, Burma, alone among the British Asian colonies and territories, withdrew from the Commonwealth. It remained politically unstable however, and was soon engulfed in a multiple civil war in which communist insurgents tried to topple the government while ethnic minorities fought for greater autonomy.

Amidst this confusion Prime Minister U Nu unveiled, in May 1948, the so-called "Leftist Unity Program", which laid out the fifteen principles that would guide his government's socialist development programme. Three of these, proclaimed as the cornerstone of the country's foreign policy, involved (1) maintaining friendly relations with all countries, (2) avoiding alignments with the power blocs, and (3) rejecting any foreign aid which would be detrimental to the political, economic and strategic freedom of Burma. ⁶When foreign aid is offered

to us⁹, the Unity Program declared, "we must consider very carefully whether it is in the nature of a charitable gift like a contribution to the Red Cross, or whether it is just an extension of friendly mutual aid between two countries, or whether it is aid of the kind through which we shall be enslaved."¹⁸

These principles and the associated criteria for receiving aid are important in understanding Burma's attitude to the Colombo Plan. They were informed by the realities of the country's politics and reflected the precarious position in which the ruling party, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (the AFPFL coalition), and in particular, the dominant bloc within it, U Nu and his socialist associates, found themselves. Communist elements had served as the vanguard and the mobilizing agency of the popular uprising against Japanese occupation during the War and were still active and influential in post-independence Burma. The two communist parties, the Burma Communist Party (BCP) and the Communist Party (Burma) (CPB), both of which were manoeuvred out of the AFPFL by non-communist elements, were the main insurgent organizations attempting to overthrow the government. In addition to the widespread appeal of Marxism in Burmese politics, antipathy towards the West and criticism of "Anglo-American imperialism" appeared to be more pervasive in Burma than, say, in other neighbouring countries.

The government's policy of neutralism and nonalignment, which it modelled on that of Nehru's India¹⁹ was designed to ensure its survival. It took

account of its own weakness as much as that of the country itself, and provided a means to outflank the communist elements within and outside the ruling coalition who wanted to set Burma firmly in the Soviet camp. Its foreign aid principle, for instance, was based on the recognition that western assistance could serve as an effective propaganda tool for the communists who could use it to undermine its credibility. As the CIA observed in one of its reports

“acceptance and use of such assistance would present the government with the complex and delicate problem of convincingly refuting charges of subservience to foreign interests.”⁹²⁰ In short neutralism was for the government a matter of strategic exigency.

Geopolitically, Burma’s instability placed it in a fluid position within the Cold War configuration of power: it could either fall to communist subversion engineered from within or it could follow the democratically-based, socialist development path, with its associated foreign policy of neutralism, outlined by Prime Minister U Nu. The goal of the West was to ensure that, at the very minimum, the latter option prevailed. There was therefore, to a certain extent, some congruence between the objectives of the West and the needs of the U Nu government. Its political vulnerability, and its desperate need for foreign aid offered a window of opportunity which could be exploited to the benefit of the West. Foreign aid could be used as the instrument for promoting western objectives in the country and in Southeast Asia generally. “If future stability and

prosperity in Burma⁹, the CIA noted, "could be partly attributed to Western assistance, it might incline other nations in Southeast Asia to identify their interests with the Western Democracies."²¹

In spite of its socialist agenda the country remained economically orientated and militarily dependent on the United Kingdom. Much of its rice exports, its main source of foreign exchange, was contracted through Britain to India, Malaya and Ceylon. In spite of its repudiation of its Commonwealth links it remained a member of the sterling bloc. The U Nu government signed (and continued to defend against communist criticism) the Anglo-Burmese Treaty, under which Burma pledged to pay compensation for nationalized British assets, pay the country's sterling debts, and accept a British Military Mission. When it ran into serious balance of payment difficulties in 1949 it was to Britain and the Commonwealth it turned for a loan. (The loan was discussed at the Commonwealth foreign ministers conference in Colombo in January 1950). Since the Colombo Plan's mutual aid concept fit almost perfectly the second of the three criteria the U Nu government had outlined as the basis for deciding whether to accept any aid offers, it was likely to respond to the programme, especially if British diplomacy respected and reflected Burmese sensibilities.

Yet three months after the London conference there was no evidence that British diplomacy had had any impact, however marginal, on Burmese attitude to the Colombo Plan. This was the import of a letter, dated January 4 1951, which

J. D. Murray of the Foreign Office wrote to R. Speaight, the British ambassador in Rangoon. 'We have not had a single word out of them', Murray lamented, 'favourable or unfavourable since the October meeting.' Speaight was to make inquiries about 'the present Burmese attitude towards participation.'²²

Discussions did take place thereafter between Malcolm MacDonald (who was on a visit to Rangoon) and Speaight on the one hand, and U Nu and his officials on the other. It transpired that the Burmese had serious misgivings about the Colombo Plan. Some of these were banal, and dealt with the practical difficulties of preparing a development programme. The real obstacle was psychological and it went to the heart of the problem: 'the deep-rooted suspicion that there are strings attached and that the Commonwealth would only grant aid in return for some limitation on its use which would be incompatible with Burma's independent status.'⁹ The suspicion, MacDonald and Speaight were informed, was based on the government's experience with a previous Commonwealth loan.²³

What was in the nature of this experience which left such an indelible impression on the collective psyche of the AFPFL leadership? In June 1949, negotiations for a Commonwealth loan stalled when Burma rejected a proposal for the establishment of a "committee" of Commonwealth representatives in Rangoon to coordinate economic assistance and oversee the government's anti-insurgency campaign.²⁴ Subsequently, a loan of £6 million (contributed by

Britain, Australia, Ceylon, India and Pakistan) was eventually granted as a "Ways and Means" facility to provide backing for the Burmese currency. In plain language this meant that it would be in the form of blocked sterling to be held in London and would therefore not be available to the Burmese government to use for purchases overseas. These restrictions were imposed, Bevin revealed when the subject came up for discussion at the Colombo conference of Commonwealth foreign ministers in January 1950, in order to reduce the risk that the loan would not be repaid.²⁵

No doubt, by imposing such limitations on the loan the British did succeed in hedging their investment. For the Burmese however the experience was 'unpalatable'. The conditions were 'humiliating and showed lack of confidence in Burma.' It was inconceivable, they wondered, that the United Kingdom, 'with all her resources, was not able to produce £6 million on her own account without feeling it.' U Nu had wanted to reject it, he informed MacDonald, but had been prevailed upon to accept because the country needed it. In the end he accepted it but resolved not to use it. The whole Commonwealth loan episode had been for him a lesson in the politics of foreign aid. Now the same Commonwealth was asking his government to participate in another aid programme.²⁶

The best way to overcome the suspicion, and ensure their participation in the Colombo Plan, the Burmese proposed, would be through an 'imaginative gesture' such as 'offer[ing] Burma straight away a named sum to finance the

development projects without the prerequisite of a programme, but on condition that details should be worked out later in agreement between Burma and the Commonwealth experts.²⁷ In a note which the Burmese government later presented formally to the British embassy the proposal was made one of the conditions which had to be met if Burma was to join the Consultative Committee.²⁸ In setting the conditions the AFPFL leadership was in essence calling the bluff of Britain and the Commonwealth: if indeed there were no strings attached to Colombo Plan aid; if the Commonwealth was motivated solely by a desire to assist Burma, such assistance, in specific figures, could be offered in advance while the details were worked out later. The ball was now back in His Majesty's government's court.

Would Britain, and indeed the Commonwealth, put altruism and generosity before responsibility and accountability? Apparently not. As Murray noted in conversation with Donald D. Kennedy of the State Department, the Burmese condition 'cut across the whole Colombo concept' which required participating countries to demonstrate their development initiatives and prove the need for supplementary external finance.²⁹ Whitehall's response dealt mainly with the problem associated with the preparation of the development programmes. Speaight was to inform the Burmese that the British government had already recognized that non-Commonwealth countries might be unable to prepare detailed six-year development programmes. It therefore intended to

propose at the next meeting of the Consultative Committee (Colombo, February 1951) that they should be allowed to submit "country chapters" detailing their annual programmes for inclusion in the report.

On the more crucial question of "strings" it is interesting to note that the Foreign Office neither refuted nor admitted the Burmese claims that Colombo Plan aid was tied. Its response was at best an exercise in diplomatic obfuscation. 'As regards the "strings" attached to the provision of aid', Speaight was instructed, 'you should limit yourself to saying that the other Asian participant countries have not considered that joining the Plan restricts their freedom of action.'⁹ This was however hardly sufficient to calm Burmese suspicions. And the Foreign Office knew it. Clearly there was a need for more proactive diplomacy. This took the form of a request to the Asian Commonwealth governments to attempt to persuade Burma that 'participation in the Plan would not have any political implications or infringe upon their sovereignty.'⁹ A similar request was made of the United States.³⁰

In the event the Burmese government did agree to send an observer to the Colombo conference to plead its case for advance allocation of aid in specific figures. There it asked to be treated as an exceptional case because it had suffered devastation and dislocation from insurrection. This elicited the usual diplomatic platitudes from the Committee members, and nothing else besides. Burma would not receive any advance pledges of aid. At the end of the

conference the British delegation recommended that no further attempts should be made to persuade Burma to abandon its preconditions for joining the Consultative Committee. Instead it should be allowed to make the next move.³¹

Rangoon made its next move not in London but in Washington. In April 1951 James Barrington, its ambassador to the United States, met with State Department officials to inquire what the American response would be if Burma decided not to participate in the Colombo Plan. His government wanted to avoid close association with the Commonwealth, the ambassador explained, and would prefer to reduce its connection with the sterling bloc. Would Burma continue to receive dollar aid if it ignored sterling aid? If it refrained from participating in the Commonwealth programme would this invalidate its case for American aid?

Perhaps; perhaps not. This was the essence of the State Department's response. The United States, the ambassador was informed, 'encourages the countries of Southeast Asia to participate in the Colombo Plan'; in appropriating funds for American aid Congress 'might take into account failure to take advantage of other available sources of aid'; if Congress were to impose conditions which Burma would find unsatisfactory sterling aid might become valuable; 'unless Burma were the only country in Southeast Asia not to participate in the Colombo Plan, its failure to join would probably not be given great weight in considering future American aid.'³²

In initiating this dialogue with the State Department, the Burmese may have assumed that future American aid would follow the pattern set in September 1950 when they received an outright grant of \$8,010,000 through the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA).³³ By contrasting this with the Commonwealth loan the AFPFL leadership must have concluded that American aid had no strings attached to it and was therefore in conformity with their cherished foreign policy principles. If they could secure assurances of future American aid they could ignore the Commonwealth whose assistance, if past experience were any judge, would impinge on their policy of neutrality and nonalignment.

The State Department's response, innocuous as it was, contained a subtle but significant message: ties without strings was a contradiction in terms. (The Mutual Security Act which would tie American aid to strategic imperatives was already in Congress and would be enacted in October.) Foreign aid, American or Commonwealth, would not be dispensed, to use U Nu's phrase, as if it was a charitable donation to the Red Cross. Did the Burmese get the message?

Apparently not immediately. The AFPFL leadership continued to ignore overtures from Britain, concentrating instead on securing additional assistance from Washington. The bubble burst in January 1952 when the Americans requested an exchange of notes to meet the requirements of the Mutual Security

Act. Section 511(B) required all recipients of American aid "to take such action as may be mutually agreed upon to eliminate causes of international tension."⁹ The U Nu government saw this as a direct infringement of its policy of neutrality and therefore unacceptable.³⁴ In the end it did agree to sign the notes first because the State Department decided to remove the offending clause "as may be mutually agreed upon"⁹ from the phraseology,³⁵ and secondly because Burma had already benefitted from the Technical Cooperation Administration (TCA) programme for which the notes were required. Having already received part of the aid the government had to meet its contractual obligations.

Yet again U Nu and his associates had received a lesson in the politics of foreign aid. And once again they retreated, this time away from the United States and towards the Commonwealth. Now it dawned on them that Colombo Plan aid which was being promoted as a mutual assistance and cooperative effort might in the end be preferable to "mutual security" aid. On January 9 (a day after the US-Burma dialogue on the exchange of notes) the Burmese government formally notified the British government that it had decided after careful consideration to participate in the Colombo Plan.³⁶ The decision took everyone, not least the British, by surprise but the reason was quite evident: "the Burmese decision was unexpected"⁹, the British ambassador in Rangoon wrote, "the decisive factor may well have been Government's reluctance to comply with undertakings prescribed by American Mutual Security Act and fear that American Aid will in consequence

be curtailed.³⁷ The AFPFL leadership's conclusion that American aid under the mutual security regime came close to its third criteria for assessing foreign aid (one which would lead to enslavement) on the one hand, and its need for external assistance, finally pushed Burma into the Colombo Plan.

Having assured itself that it could receive some Colombo Plan aid the Burmese government informed the United States that it intended to reject further American assistance when the current ECA aid expired in June.³⁸ On March 17, 1953, it asked the TCA to terminate its programme in Burma after June 30, 1953, ostensibly because the United States was unwilling to exert pressure on the Kuomintang (Nationalist Chinese) troops to withdraw from the northeastern corner of the country where they had taken refuge.³⁹

In making these decisions the AFPFL leadership may have been ignorant of the congruence between the goals of American aid and the objectives for which the Colombo Plan was established. The United States was after all a member of the Plan's Consultative Committee. What was important to the West was that Burma had agreed finally to participate in a programme designed to promote western goals. In doing so it had opened another window for the exercise of American and western influence in Southeast Asia. The "rejection" of American aid may have reinforced Rangoon's sense of independence and a belief in the efficacy of its policy of neutrality. For the West it was at best merely of symbolic value. It did not merit, and did not elicit, a corresponding reaction

from Washington.⁴⁰ The United States did not expect to exercise anything more than “the least amount of control in Burma and Indonesia”, and that could be done through the Colombo Plan. Burma’s action merely gave credence to the State Department’s postulate, formulated in 1951, that “Burma and Indonesia will be giving lip service to the concept of neutralism and indicating in many ways their increased friendship toward the United States.”⁴¹

Uncle Sam’s Protégé

Although the Philippines is geographically a Southeast Asian country it was considered to lie outside the area covered by the Colombo Plan and was not invited to participate.⁴² Commonwealth ministers were of course aware of the country’s location; their explanation could not therefore have been based on geography. Instead it was informed by their perception of its links with the United States. They believed that the Philippines was already obtaining “all the financial assistance it was in [a] position to absorb” from the United States; that it “was outside [the] sterling area”, and that it “could offer little of constructive nature.”⁴³ What “constructive” offers the Philippines was expected to make can only be the subject of conjecture. It may however not have been unconnected with the belief that the Philippines was already in the western camp because of its association with the United States and that, unlike the other Southeast Asian countries, it did not have to be induced by offer of Colombo Plan aid.

In any case by the time the London conference convened the attitude of the Commonwealth states towards Philippine participation had undergone a revision. The new thinking was that the United States, 'on whose sympathetic interest in SEA [Southeast Asia] aid program so much depends, might prefer inclusion of Philippines.⁹ The Philippines would be allowed to join the Consultative Committee if the United States so desired.⁴⁴ The American connection, or rather, the need to secure Washington's contribution to the programme gave significance to the participation of the Philippines.

It was therefore natural that the Commonwealth states would seek clearance from Washington rather than from the Philippine government in Manila. Commonwealth ministers were 'extremely anxious to obtain US views⁹ on the desirability of Philippine participation in the Colombo Plan, the Foreign Office informed the State Department. Would the United States government object if the Philippines was invited to join the Consultative Committee?⁴⁵ Since the United States was a member of the Committee it was natural for it to support Philippine membership. What is of greater significance is its reason for doing so.

Thinking of Embassy [US Embassy Manila] re desirability British inviting Philippines participate in discussion Commonwealth aid program in general accord with views expressed by Department. Philippine dependence on US is an unhealthy phenomenon and lends credence Communist propaganda that government is US puppet. Accordingly we should welcome development which might make it clear Philippine government is free move outside strictly US orbit and which might bring in advisers who are non-American yet friendly to US.⁴⁶

The Philippines did attend the 1951 and 1952 meetings of the Consultative Committee (in Colombo and Karachi) as an observer. It did not

send any observer to the 1953 meeting in New Delhi, not because it had lost interest in the programme, but for lack of appropriate manpower.⁴⁷ Further representations from the United States persuaded the Philippines to attend the Ottawa meeting in 1954 where it accepted membership in the Consultative Committee.

The Politics of Geopolitical Space

The problem with this phase of expansion was that of geography, or rather of geopolitical space. At its inception the Colombo Plan had been restricted to South and Southeast Asia. Neither Japan, Afghanistan, nor South Korea is a South or Southeast Asian country. Land-locked Afghanistan is a central Asian country, in spite of the references in some Colombo Plan documents to a South Asian location.⁴⁸ Japan and South Korea are in Northeast Asia.

To overcome the problem of geopolitical space Japan, like the western members, joined the Consultative Committee as a donor. Afghanistan passed as a South Asian country. South Korea did not fit either model. No one believed or accepted its claim that like Japan it could participate in the programme as a donor. Although its membership was desirable to the West, there was in fact no basis on which this could be justified. In the end South Korea literally thrust itself into the Consultative Committee. In doing so it opened the way for other

countries outside the region to participate in the Plan. The strategic and geopolitical factors - the importance of the Asian-Pacific region to western security, the importance of keeping the governments in the region stable and friendly, the need to contain communism - advanced in earlier chapters explain why these states were invited or allowed to participate in the Colombo Plan.

Japan: the Donor from the East

The success of the Truman administration's reverse course policy (discussed in Chapter 1.2) depended in part on securing raw materials and markets for Japan in South and Southeast Asia. A rehabilitated and prosperous Japan could, moreover, play a major role in the economies of the states in the region, principally as an exporter of technical expertise, industrial and consumer goods. Such a symbiotic arrangement could promote development and stability in the whole of non-communist Far East and contribute to the attainment of American and western strategic goals in the region.⁴⁹ Towards this end the United States dispatched a mission headed by Robert W. West, Deputy to the Under Secretary of the Army, and Stanley Andrews, Director of the Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations, Department of Agriculture, to the Far East in February 1950 to investigate the possibility of Japanese participation in the development of Southeast Asia.⁵⁰

One major obstacle to the implementation of the American policy was the attitude of the Asian states to Japan. The Japanese had occupied most of Southeast Asia during World War II and had exploited the region to promote their so-called Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere programme. Memories of Japanese atrocities and apprehensions about the Co-Prosperity Sphere theme remained very strong in the region. Like Australia and New Zealand, the countries of Southeast Asia, fearing the revival of latent Japanese militarism, were not enthusiastic about the reconstruction of the country's industrial base. They were also determined to secure reparations from Japan and succeeded in getting Article 14 which required Japan to pay reparations to the Allied Powers inserted in the Japanese Peace Treaty signed in San Francisco on September 8, 1951.

But then, here was the Colombo Plan which was bringing most of the non-communist countries in South and Southeast Asia together under the aegis of the western powers. If Japan could secure membership in the Consultative Committee this could offer a perfect opportunity to rehabilitate the country's image in and commercial links with Asia. And so, once the United States had itself accepted membership in the Committee it began to promote Japanese participation. There was no immediate prospect for this however in view of the lingering memories of the War, the depth of anti-Japanese feeling in Asia, and the yet to be resolved question of reparations. As long as countries like India

remained technically at war with Japan it would be practically impossible to convince them to accept Japanese participation in the Plan.⁵¹

Although the United Kingdom was not in principle opposed to Japanese participation it did have some concerns as well. First Japan was not in a position to make any financial contribution and could in fact become a competitor for the limited financial assistance which the programme would provide for the Asian states. Secondly Japan was a potential competitor in the lucrative commerce with South and Southeast Asia. If it were allowed to join the Consultative Committee this would boost its exports to the region at the expense of British manufacturers. It was therefore essential to defer Japanese participation until (1) the formal termination of the state of war between Japan and *all* the countries in the area and (2) the pattern of Japan's economic relations with the area became more apparent. This was the position which the United Kingdom planned to adopt whenever the question of Japanese participation came up for discussion. The last condition was of course confidential and could not be revealed to Colombo Plan members.⁵²

Japan's participation in the Colombo Plan became a Consultative Committee issue at the Karachi meeting in March 1952. The initiative for this came from American officials in the SCAP (supreme commander for the allied powers) headquarters in Tokyo rather than from the official American delegation. SCAP informed the British government that it wanted Japan to be invited to the

meeting as an observer.⁵³ On instructions from the CRO the British delegation took unofficial soundings only to come to the conclusion that the request was not feasible. Australia was 'implacably opposed'⁹ as was New Zealand and most of the Asian members.⁵⁴ The British reported this to Tokyo and to the American delegation.⁵⁵

Apparently the American delegation had no prior knowledge of the request from Tokyo. It had no instructions to raise the issue of Japanese participation at the Karachi meeting. According to Wilfred Malenbaum, head of the delegation, the United States government had already concluded that any effort in that direction would be premature and that it was better to wait for a more auspicious time.⁵⁶ The SCAP initiative conflicted sharply with this, revealing the confusion in American policy. The State Department later informed officials in Tokyo that the administration did not favour sending a Japanese observer to Karachi.⁵⁷

Over the course of the following months the political and economic rehabilitation of Japan and its integration into the community of "free" nations proceeded on a more rapid pace. In June 1952 it was admitted into the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE). There was some progress in reparations negotiations as well, especially with Indonesia, the Philippines and Burma. By the end of 1952 opposition against Japan's membership in the Colombo Plan was not as intense as it was in previous years.

It was still there, however, and the United States decided, wisely, to proceed cautiously and to “avoid the appearance of aggressive sponsorship”.⁵⁸

Impressions, after all, die hard and collective memories even harder.

Australia and New Zealand were the two remaining states still unwilling to reconcile themselves to Japanese participation. The creation of the ANZUS alliance in 1951 provided them with American defense and security guarantees, just as the United States Mutual Security Pact with Japan (September 1951) put paid to any potential Japanese aggression in the foreseeable future. Japan therefore posed no military threat to the South Pacific. Was their opposition therefore a hold-over from the memories of World War II or were there additional forces at work?

Shortly before the New Delhi meeting of the Consultative Committee in October 1953, Australia informed the Japanese government that it would not support its bid for membership until Japan had “recognized [the] validity of Australian action on [the] Continental Shelf”. Irritated, the United States wondered why Australia “would interject apparently extraneous issue into what US considers a desirable objective - namely Japanese participation Colombo Plan.”⁵⁹

This was however merely a secondary issue. Canberra’s real concern was economic. Like the United Kingdom Australia feared that cheap Japanese exports to Southeast Asia would displace its own commerce.⁶⁰ And until a means

could be found around this problem it would not support efforts to establish a rapprochement between Japan and Southeast Asia. To no one's surprise Australia pre-empted the discussion of Japanese membership at the New Delhi meeting. The Japanese application had to be withdrawn to 'avoid head-on rejection', the American ambassador commented.⁶¹

The next meeting of the Consultative Committee, to be held in Ottawa in October 1954, offered Japan, and its chief sponsor, the United States, another opportunity. This time the United States was willing to exert pressure to get Japan admitted into the programme. It began with a series of strategy meetings with the western members of the Committee. In July Canadian officials were invited to the State Department to discuss measures to get Japan admitted at the Ottawa conference. One possibility outlined by the Americans was to get a third country, preferably Asian, to sponsor Japan. The Canadians proposed what they considered to be the most effective way to achieve this objective. Japan could promote itself, they suggested, as a potential donor in the field of technical assistance and request to be admitted into the Council for Technical Cooperation. If this was successful it was likely to pave the way for immediate observer status in the Consultative Committee. It was essential, they advised, to deal with Australia and New Zealand in advance of the conference since they could pre-empt the Committee from even discussing the issue.⁶²

As might be expected Australia and New Zealand, along with Canada and the United Kingdom, were invited to the next meeting in the State Department. To the apparent surprise of the British and Canadian representatives the Australians announced their willingness not only to support Japan but, lo and behold, to sponsor its application! Their *only* condition was that Japan apply as a donor.⁶³ Did Australia succumb to American pressure or was there a quid pro quo?

Both questions can be answered in the affirmative. The United States did put pressure on Australia to reconsider its position. It succeeded because it offered Australia a means to cover any future losses it might incur should its exports to Southeast Asia be displaced by cheap Japanese goods. Washington promised to re-negotiate certain tariff concessions of interest to Canberra.⁶⁴ Emboldened by the American pledge Australia launched a diplomatic blitzkrieg in the capitals of the Asian members of the Colombo Plan. As its representative at another strategy meeting in Washington phrased it, Australia was “anxious to derive “full credit”⁹ for its new attitude and would therefore make the running for Japan.⁶⁵ When the Japanese embassy in Canberra inquired from the Australian government whether it was acting at the behest of Washington its response was that “the initiative was entirely our own and taken in the interest of Japanese relations with Australia and with Colombo Plan countries.”⁶⁶ Evidently the agreement with the United States was not to be revealed to the Japanese.

New Zealand, the only other state opposed to Japanese participation, felt betrayed by its bigger neighbour's romance with Japan. The tone and content of a telegram from Wellington to the ambassador in Washington made this quite evident: "the Australians, who originally opposed Japanese admission more strongly than we did, have now turned about-face and want to make a "dramatic gesture" by sponsoring Japan themselves (in the hope that this will secure some goodwill). Is this not "rather woolly".⁹⁶⁷ Wellington's irritation arose from the fact that it was now isolated. What possible excuse could it give for opposing Japan if Australia was sponsoring that country? Even if it wanted to continue opposing Japan's admission, New Zealand lacked the economic and diplomatic clout to pull it off. The only viable option was to follow the pack and support Japanese membership. The Foreign Minister admitted as much in the telegram quoted above. "Taking into account the development in the views of other donor members of the Plan...we are prepared - for the sake of unanimity and not because we are convinced that the move is wise or even well-considered - to acquiesce in full membership of Japan in the Plan."⁹ So much for the power (or lack of it) of small states!

Once all opposition had been eliminated the State Department, acting on a proposal advanced by the Canadians, advised the Japanese to indicate in their opening statement in Ottawa that (1) they did not expect to receive Colombo Plan assistance; (2) they were prepared to extend some technical

assistance forthwith to countries in South and Southeast Asia; and (3) they hoped eventually to be able to assist with technical projects as well.⁶⁸ And so, on October 5, 1954, Japan was admitted to full membership in the Colombo Plan Consultative Committee.⁶⁹ The following day a jubilant Japan declared its achievement ‘a means of furthering more smoothly and effectively its economic cooperation with other nations of Southeast Asia.’⁹ The Colombo Plan, the Japanese press release proclaimed, would serve ‘the cause of prosperity and stability in Asia.’⁹⁷⁰ One observer’s comment that the triumph at Ottawa marked Japan’s official return to Asia, aptly captures its significance. The Colombo Plan opened the door into Asia which had been shut by World War II. The admission into the Consultative Committee was, without doubt, an important step towards furthering Japanese economic and western geopolitical objectives in the Far East.

Afghanistan: The Politics of Locational Advantage

Afghanistan did not demonstrate the same zeal as Japan toward the Colombo Plan. Its attitude was at best nonchalant. The prospect of its participation was first raised by J. D. Murray of the Far Eastern Department in the Foreign Office. It was shelved when the Board of Trade, in a country survey, concluded that Afghanistan was too backward and too deficient in trained technical personnel to give effect to any plans, and was therefore unlikely to be

of any use to the programme.⁷¹ Such economic conclusions were however irrelevant to Afghanistan's main attraction to the West- its strategic location between the Soviet Union and South Asia. This made it a suitable and desirable candidate for the Colombo Plan, in spite of the Board of Trade's report.

In 1954, at the height of the campaign to secure Japan a seat in the Consultative Committee, the State Department raised the issue of Afghan participation, informing its allies of its desire to see the country admitted as a recipient member. This was necessary, American officials explained, 'to increase the degree of Afghanistan's Western orientation.'⁹ Unlike the Board of Trade the State Department had little regard for Afghanistan's economic circumstance. Its primary concern was strategic and geopolitical. As the Canadian report of the discussion emphasized, the American proposal was 'based mainly on political grounds. The State Department is aware that the Soviet Union has been offering both technical and military assistance to Northern Afghanistan...The United States is naturally interested for political reasons in counteracting the pull to the north by every means possible.'⁹⁷²

The Colombo Plan offered one such possibility. The problem was that the government in Kabul had not shown any interest in the programme. Moreover, Pakistan, which the United States hoped would sponsor Afghanistan's membership, was vehemently opposed to the idea. Relations between the two neighbours had been strained since the 1949-50 "Pushtunistan" border dispute

when Afghanistan demanded autonomy for the Pathan tribes on the Pakistan side of the Durand line. (This was a reference to the Durand agreement of November 1893 which demarcated the frontier between British India and Afghanistan). With Afghanistan insisting on the resolution to the "Pushtunistan" question as a prerequisite for a rapprochement, Pakistan feared that Colombo Plan aid could provide the Kabul regime with additional resources to provoke a new border crisis. The Pakistanis warned the Canadians (who raised the issue as host to the 1954 conference) that they "would regard any attempt on the part of Canada to bring Afghanistan into the Colombo Plan as an act of assistance to the enemies of Pakistan."⁹⁷³

That, understandably, put a temporary halt to the drive, but not to western anxiety over Soviet influence in Afghanistan. A British aide-memoire addressed to the State Department expressed "concern at the scale on which Afghanistan is accepting Soviet economic assistance."⁹ It was important to warn the Afghans that they could "not count on the Western powers to rescue them at the last moment from the consequences of their ill-advised policies."⁹ Australia similarly raised concerns about reports it had received on "the imminence of a Communist take-over in Afghanistan."⁹ Although the State Department shared these concerns it did not support the application of coercive diplomacy (the threat of suspending aid), as the British had suggested, to wean Afghanistan away from the Soviet Union. A better approach was to improve Afghanistan's

communication lines through Pakistan. This would re-orient its trade away from the east and draw it closer to the West.⁷⁴ The problem was finding a way to resolve the border conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan for, until this was done, the West would be hamstrung in its effort to lure Afghanistan away from the Soviet Union.

Over the course of the next two years the Afghan question featured in discussions within Whitehall and between American and British officials.⁷⁵ Then in 1959 Kabul began to signal a desire for improved relations with the West. The American ambassador, A. L. Byroade, barely thirty days in his new post, reported to Washington what he thought was the growing apprehension in official circles over the country's increasing economic and military dependence on the Soviet Union. The government wanted to redress the imbalance in its relations with the two power blocs as a means to maintaining a coherent and effective neutralist foreign policy. This was a favourable opportunity, the ambassador reported, for the West to seek to extend its influence in Afghanistan.⁷⁶ Since the Colombo Plan, the Foreign Office noted, was 'the only means at present in sight of getting Afghanistan into a free world organisation which could help to divert her from excessive dependence on Russia⁹, efforts were intensified, both in London and Washington, to induce Kabul to join the Consultative Committee. The fact that the Afghan government was also now showing some interest in the programme gave some momentum to the effort.⁷⁷

In 1960 Kabul indicated its willingness to send observers to that year's Consultative Committee conference in Tokyo.⁷⁸ Accordingly two Afghan observers appeared in Tokyo in November and were impressed sufficiently to recommend to their government to apply for full membership immediately.⁷⁹ Still opposition from Pakistan kept Afghanistan out of the Colombo Plan for the next two years. By 1963 relations between the two countries had improved sufficiently to enable Pakistan to withdraw its objection. At the November meeting in Bangkok the West finally got what it wanted, full membership for Afghanistan in the Colombo Plan and, through that, another knot in the containment of communism.⁸⁰

South Korea: the Diplomacy of Persistence

Whereas Afghanistan was contiguous to South Asia and could be admitted on that basis, South Korea could not; it was too far removed from the Colombo Plan area and was not regarded as a potential participant. South Korea itself (rather than the West) initiated the process of securing membership in the Consultative Committee. This was in August 1957 when its foreign minister suddenly raised the issue ('broached the subject without warning') at a meeting with the British ambassador to Korea, H. J. Evans. The minister was well informed about the programme and had anticipated that the major impediment which his country was likely to face was that of geopolitical space. When the

ambassador raised this he had a ready answer. '[since] Canada and Pakistan were original members he supposed that the "region" was never among the criteria of membership even from the start.' What he wanted, the minister claimed, was advice on the appropriate 'channel of approach.'⁸¹

In Washington the Korean ambassador was also making contact with his British counterpart. In the course of a discussion he revealed what he claimed were reports from Korean posts in Asia indicating that the Asian members of the Plan were urging South Korea to participate in the programme. Even Ceylon had offered to sponsor his country's application. The State Department had also promised support. His government, the ambassador explained, 'was not so much interested in the material benefits of membership as in the goodwill which her presence would engender.' It was prepared to participate as a donor; if Japan could contribute so could Korea. In view of the excellent relations between Korea and the United Kingdom would Her Majesty's government, as 'the founder of the Colombo Plan', agree to sponsor Korea's application? As is usual in such situations the ambassador merely promised to refer the issue to the Foreign Office.⁸²

The United States did indeed favour South Korean participation. According to the State Department the Koreans 'tended to suffer somewhat from a sense of isolation.' It was therefore necessary to associate them more closely with other friendly countries, especially Asian. Participation in the Colombo Plan

would 'make the Koreans feel that they were members of the free world club.'⁹⁸³ The problem was, quite evidently, that of geopolitical space. South Korea's membership was not feasible within the current framework of the Plan. In the first instance South Korea could not pose as a donor. Such a move, as the British and the Americans characterised it, was 'unrealistic' and, in fact, 'ridiculous'. Its admission would therefore require a re-definition of the Colombo Plan area although this could 'raise problem of China and would make it difficult to resist applications from other countries in Middle East and Africa and perhaps even in Latin America.'⁹⁸⁴

The Korean application presented Britain and other western members of the Committee with the diplomatic equivalent of a Catch-22 situation. It was desirable in principle but its possible consequences made everyone uncomfortable. If South Korea were admitted how would the members deal with potentially more embarrassing applications from communist and other countries? The State Department tried to wriggle out of the dilemma with a proposal to transfer the responsibility for deciding Korea's membership to the Asian countries. Whitehall found it more desirable 'to take active steps to counter the candidature of South Korea.'⁹ This was however a decision which, from his vantage point in Washington, Her Majesty's ambassador believed would place all the blame for the failure of Korea's application on the United Kingdom while the Americans, who shared British concerns, would come out unscathed by

maintaining the line that it was the *other* countries that blocked it.⁸⁵ There was little enthusiasm for South Korean membership among the Asian members either. India opposed it on the same principle of geopolitical space, as did Ceylon. The latter felt that it could open the way for Formosa (Taiwan) and North Vietnam.⁸⁶ For Ceylon, moreover, it was essential, for political reasons, to avoid offending the communist bloc by appearing to take sides in the struggle between North and South Korea. Supporting the latter's application could lend itself to such interpretation and therefore had to be averted.⁸⁷

In the prevailing circumstances a retreat was in everyone's best interest. But the South Korean government did not see it that way. It resuscitated its application in 1961, in time for the Consultative Committee meeting in Kuala Lumpur in October. This time it was more determined than ever before to attend the meeting and could not be dissuaded by what had by now become known as the "unanimity convention", i.e., that each application should have the support of *all* the members.

Malaya, which was hosting the conference, accepted South Korea's application without first ensuring that no member government was opposed to it. Since it had the responsibility to prepare the draft agenda the Malayan government could choose to list the Korean application thereby forcing a discussion in Committee. If this were to happen it was possible, to quote the CRO's frantic telegram to the British delegation, that the "application might be

opposed by Indonesia and defended by Thailand and the Philippines on strictly ideological grounds.⁹ This could generate ‘a cold war debate in the hitherto harmonious forum of the Colombo Plan’, and therefore had to be avoided at all cost. If no other solution could be found the delegation, ‘in the last resort’, should propose that the discussion should be left in abeyance until agreement could be reached through normal diplomatic channels.⁸⁸

Why, we may ask, was London so determined to avoid debate on Seoul’s application in Kuala Lumpur? The answer can be discerned from the New Zealand Department of External Affairs’ reaction to a British note on the subject.

The question of South Korean candidature should probably be considered in relation to the implication of extending the existing Colombo Plan area. This Department is inclined to doubt the wisdom of raising so broad a subject in the Consultative Committee...A formal discussion of such a subject would raise many awkward problems— for example, political problems involving the possible membership of Taiwan and the...discussion would tend to bring out the essentially anti-Communist aspect of the Colombo Plan which it has so far been possible to keep so far submerged from view that the Colombo Plan is regarded as an outstanding example of non-political activity in the aid field.⁸⁹ (my emphasis).

With little regard for the concerns of the western members of the Colombo Plan the Korea ambassador to Thailand appeared in Kuala Lumpur ‘uninvited’ with instructions to wait there ‘unofficially’ for a decision on his country’s application. When he was informed of the unanimity convention he decided to wait nevertheless for the arrival of ministers in order to lobby them for support. With one local newspaper already reporting that the Koreans were ‘trying to gatecrash the meeting’, the situation had become, without doubt, a diplomatic

embarrassment— a situation from which the ambassador found it difficult to extricate himself with dignity.⁹⁰

On the second day of the meeting of officials (November 1) the Malayan representative announced that the South Korean government had clarified its position. It wanted to participate in the meeting as an observer and did not expect this to ‘constitute a step in the procedure towards full membership.’⁹ The Indonesian representative then read a prepared statement in which he poured undiplomatic invectives on South Korea for its deplorable behaviour and for causing embarrassment to the host government. But then he added what must, in the circumstances, have sounded like music in the ears of the Korean ambassador had he been present at the meeting: the government of Malaya, as host, should use its discretion to decide whether South Korea should attend the meeting, as long as it was clearly understood that this was no precedent for future participation in the Consultative Committee.⁹¹

In the absence of further opposition South Korea took its seat at the 13th meeting of the Colombo Plan Consultative Committee. Prudence and tact are said to hold the key to success in the diplomatic game, persistence often attracting resistance and condemnation. Yet the latter does work sometimes, at least it did for South Korea, and it helped to resolve a potentially embarrassing diplomatic situation. Hence, even though the Foreign Office took umbrage at the Indonesian delegate’s ‘needlessly offensive statement’, there was relief in

Whitehall that Her Majesty's government had been spared the unpleasant task of taking action which was liable to offend South Korea.⁹²

In April 1962, South Korea again applied to attend that year's Melbourne meeting of the Consultative Committee as an observer. In line with the unanimity convention, the Australian government, as host, circulated the Korean application around Colombo Plan capitals. Since Indonesia and Ceylon were the two countries still opposing the application Australia decided to approach their governments to persuade them to abstain. The Canadian High Commissioner and the American ambassador in Ceylon were similarly instructed by their governments to intercede in behalf of Seoul. The South Korean government also decided to play a more proactive diplomatic game. It dispatched its ambassador to Thailand on a goodwill and cultural mission to Asian capitals to canvass support for its application.⁹³

These multiple pressures eventually wore down the resolve of the Ceylonese authorities. The South Korean mission in particular appeared to have played a key role in effecting a change in the attitude of Ceylon. As it happened a North Korean delegation had come to Colombo to establish a trade office shortly before the arrival of the goodwill mission. The North Koreans had behaved in 'an inflexible, hard and uncouth manner'; their host, naturally, expected a similar attitude from the South Koreans. To their surprise the latter demonstrated 'urbanity and reasonableness'. In the event the Ceylonese were

impressed sufficiently to soften their attitude towards South Korea. The result was that Ceylon pledged not to block the Korean application if there was no opposition from any other country.⁹⁴ Since there were already indications that Indonesia might also respond favourably this appeared to have removed the last obstacle to the Korean application. South Korea went to Melbourne as an observer and was granted full membership. Tenacity, in the face of overwhelming odds, has its rewards.

By getting itself admitted South Korea breached the Colombo Plan's geopolitical space. This paved the way for countries like Bhutan in Central Asia, Iran in Southwest Asia, and Fiji in the Southwest Pacific. Most countries were now potential candidates for membership. The Federal Republic of Germany sent observers to the New Delhi (1972), Wellington (1973), Singapore (1974) and Colombo (1975) meetings but in the end decided against membership. At the Singapore meeting the government of Ceylon (Sri Lanka since 1972) which was to host the 1975 meeting was mandated to invite the European Economic Community (EEC), Denmark, Iraq, Kuwait, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, and the United Arab Emirates to attend as observers. Only the EEC and Iraq accepted the invitation although neither subsequently sought membership in the Consultative Committee.

France and the Netherlands, two countries which had sought membership in the Consultative Committee as a means to furthering their control over and

influence in Indochina and Indonesia respectively, were rebuffed. The Asian countries, incensed by what they considered to be France's and the Netherlands' attempt to re-impose colonial rule in the region, blocked the application. By the time South Korea opened the door for all other countries the political interests which France and the Netherlands sought to protect through the Colombo Plan had evaporated and, along with it, their interest in the programme.

The admission of Papua New Guinea in 1973 brought the membership in the Colombo Plan to 27. In 1977 the programme's title was changed to "The Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific" to reflect the outcome of the politics of geopolitical space. In 1978 the Hanoi regime controlling a unified Vietnam (the Socialist Republic of Vietnam) announced that it did not regard itself a member of the Consultative Committee. This reduced the number of participants in the programme to 26. The withdrawal of Vietnam not only underlined the Plan's western orientation, it put an end to the anxiety generated by South Korea's breach of the programme's geopolitical space. No communist country made any serious attempt to gain admission, and none was encouraged to try.

Conclusion

The politics of expansion proved to be an intricate and intriguing diplomatic game. Its sponsors had to contend with the nationalist and neutralist impulses prevalent in the region. They also had to respond to the rivalries and ideological disparities between and among the governments in the region. In the end none of these obstacles proved insurmountable. British diplomats and others who participated in the process demonstrated sufficient tact and sensitivity, and it paid off.

Nevertheless, the key to the success of the politics of expansion may well lie in its exploitation of the dialectic between poverty and communism. Asian governments, even those like Burma which were highly suspicious of western aid, could not ignore the yearning of their people for liberation from the clutches of poverty and underdevelopment. Cold War geopolitics made these countries and their governments potential targets of communist subversion. Poverty gave potency to the threat: it made communism attractive to some of their citizens, it weakened their internal cohesion, and denied them the means - social, economic, and political - to respond to the threat. The fact that the Plan offered the Asian governments a means to resolving this dialectic; the fact that it was framed as a cooperative economic programme operating on the principles of self-help and mutual assistance; these were the factors which aided the politics of expansion. The extension of the Plan to South and Southeast Asia and

beyond, eventually incorporating most of the non-communist states in the Asia/Pacific region, demonstrated the efficacy of foreign aid as a tool for the attainment of western geopolitical goals.

ENDNOTES

1. ***American Embassy, London to the Secretary of State***, October 10, 1950, RG 59, Microfilm C0046, Reel 19, 890.00TA/10-1050, NA.
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3. ***Memorandum by the Foreign Office [to the] Cabinet Working Party on Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia: Provision of Financial Assistance by the United Kingdom to Non-Commonwealth Members of the Colombo Plan***, July 21, 1953, CAB 134/867, E.D.(S.A.)(53)10, PRO.
4. ***U.K. Delegation to Canberra Consultative Committee, Sydney to Commonwealth Relations Office***, May 19, 1950, FO 371/84547, FZ1102/147, PRO; See also ***Commonwealth Meeting on Foreign Affairs, Minutes of the Seventh Meeting Colombo***, January 12, 1950, RG 25, Vol. 2285, S-30-1, PAC.
5. ***U.K. Delegation to Canberra Consultative Committee, Sydney to Commonwealth Relations Office***, May 21, 1950, FO 371/84547, FZ1102/156, PRO.
6. See ***Commonwealth Relations Office to the Australian Government, [and other Commonwealth Governments]*** August 14, 1950, FO 371/84582, FZ11013/5, PRO.
7. ***Commonwealth Relations Office to United Kingdom High Commissioner in India***, August 21, 1950, FO 371/84582, FZ11013/21, PRO.
8. ***Commonwealth Relations Office to United Kingdom High Commissioner in India***, August 21, 1950, FO 371/84582, FZ11013/21, PRO.
9. ***F.G.K. Gallagher (British Embassy, Paris) to D.N. Royce (Southeast Asia Department, Foreign Office)*** August 30, 1950, FO 371/84583, FZ11013/31, PRO.
10. See ***The High Commissioner for Canada, London to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa***, September 21, 1950, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 9, Folder 106, PAC; See also D. LePan, ***Bright Glass of Memory*** (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd, 1979), p. 211.

11. See **Frank S. Gibbs (British Consul-General, Saigon) to R.H. Scott (Foreign Office)** September 12, 1950, FO 371/84585, FZ11013/101, PRO; **R. H. Scott to F. S. Gibbs**, September 26, 1950, FO 371/84585, FZ11013/101b, PRO.
12. **Commissioner General for the United Kingdom in Southeast Asia to Foreign Office: Follow-up of Sydney Conference**, August 23, 1950, FO 371/84582, FZ11013/19, PRO.
13. **R. H. Scott to F. S. Gibbs**, September 26, 1950, FO 371/84585, FZ11013/101b, PRO.
14. **Foreign Office Memorandum, Colombo Plan: Non-Commonwealth Governments in Southeast Asia**, January 6, 1951, FO 371/93035, FZ1102/4, PRO; **Foreign Office to British Embassy, Rangoon**, January 4, 1951, FO 371/93035, FZ1102/22, PRO.
15. **American Embassy, London to the Department of State: Minutes on US-UK Talks on South Asia**, February 15, 1951, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 14, 890.00/2-1551, NA.
16. **D. W. Kermode to J. D. Murray**, March 17, 1951, FO 371/93044, FZ1102/315, PRO.
17. See **J.D. Murray to D.W. Kermode (British Embassy, Djakarta)**, February 26, 1951, FO 371/93042, FZ1102/250, PRO.
18. Quoted in W.C. Johnstone, **Burma's Foreign Policy: A Study in Neutralism** (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 45-47; See also CIA, **Current Situation in Burma**, March 17, 1949, HSTP, PSF, Box 255, Intelligence File, O.R.E. 1948, HSTL.
19. See Johnstone, **Burma's Foreign Policy**, p. 53.
20. CIA, **Communist Influence in Burma**, January 11, 1950, HSTP, PSF, Box 257, Intelligence File, O.R.E. 1949, HSTL.
21. CIA, **Current Situation in Burma**, March 17, 1949, HSTP, PSF, Box 255 Intelligence File, O.R.E. 1948, HSTL.
22. **Foreign Office to British Embassy, Rangoon**, January 4, 1951, FO 371/93035, FZ1102/22, PRO.

23. **British Embassy, Rangoon to the Foreign Office**, January 23, 1951, FO 371/93038, FZ1102/114, PRO. See also **Commonwealth Relations Office to U.K. High Commissioner in Canada: Burmese Participation in Colombo Plan**, January 31, 1951, FO 371/93038, FZ1102/114B, PRO.
24. See **Richard Speaight to Ernest Bevin: Burma and the Colombo Plan**, February 7, 1951, FO 371/93040, FZ1102/178, PRO. See also Johnstone, **Burma's Foreign Policy**, p. 60.
25. **Commonwealth Meeting on Foreign Affairs: Minutes of the Seventh Meeting**, January 12, 1950, RG 25, Vol. 2285, S-30-1, PAC.
26. See **Richard Speaight to Ernest Bevin: Burma and the Colombo Plan**, February 7, 1951, FO 371/93040, FZ1102/178, PRO.
27. **British Embassy, Rangoon to Foreign Office**, January 23, 1951, FO 371/93038, FZ1102/114, PRO.
28. See **British Embassy, Rangoon to Foreign Office: Colombo Plan**, February 2, 1951, FO 371/93039, FZ1102/154, PRO. Item 3 on the Burmese note read "In order that the aid under the Colombo award would receive the wholehearted backing of the people of Burma the Colombo Plan countries should announce that on Burma deciding to join the Colombo Plan a total sum of £XX,000,000 would be available for the evolution and execution of her plans of development over the six year period...The Burmese Government would of course be prepared to assist the Colombo Plan countries in the determination of a reasonable figure."⁹
29. See **American Embassy, London to the Department of State: Minutes on US-UK Talks on South Asia**, February 15, 1951, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 14, 890.00/2-1551, NA; See also **British Embassy, Rangoon to Foreign Office: Colombo Plan**, February 2, 1951, FO 371/93039, FZ1102/153, PRO.
30. **Foreign Office to U.K. Embassy in Rangoon: Burmese Participation in the Colombo Plan**, January 29, 1951, FO 371/93038, FZ1102/114, PRO.
31. See **U.K. High Commissioner in Ceylon to Commonwealth Relations Office, Colombo Plan**, February 22, 1951, FO 371/93042, FZ1102/247, PRO; See also **G.R. Bell (Treasury) to J.D. Murray (Foreign Office)**, April 3, 1951, FO 371/93044, FZ1102/328, PRO.
32. **Memorandum of Conversation: Burma and the Colombo Plan**, April 5, 1951, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 14, 890.00/4-551, NA.

33. The US-Burma Agreement signed in Rangoon in September 1950 provided for a grant aid of US\$8-10 million.
34. See ***American Embassy, Rangoon to the Department of State: Exchange of Notes required under Section 511(B), Mutual Security Act [plus Enclosures]***, January 11, 1952, RG 59, 790B.5MSP/1-1152, NA.
35. See ***American Embassy, Rangoon to the Department of State: Exchange of Notes to meet requirements of Section 511(b), Mutual Security Act***, February 11, 1952, RG 59, 790B.5MSP/2-1152, NA.
36. See ***Burmese Foreign Minister to United Kingdom Ambassador to Burma***, January 9, 1952, FO 371/101244, FZ1105/3, PRO.
37. ***British Embassy, Rangoon to Foreign Office***, January 21, 1952, FO 371/101244, FZ1105/6, PRO.
38. See ***E.B. Boothby (British Embassy, Rangoon) to J.D. Murray (Foreign Office)***, January 23, 1952, FO 371/10244, FZ1105/7, PRO.
39. ***State Department, Classified Supplement to Statement on Termination of Aid to Burma***, April 30, 1953, RG 59 Lot 58 D 258, Folder: Analysis of Military and Economic Aid Programs FY 1951-55 (1), NA.
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41. See ***State Department, Policy Guidance Mutual Security Program for Fiscal Year 1953: Regional Paper - the Far East***, August 24, 1951, RG 59, Microfilm C0046, Reel 13, 790.5MSP/8-2451, NA.
42. See ***Foreign Office to United Kingdom Embassy in Washington: Southeast Asian Economic Development***, September 25, 1950, FO 371/84585, FZ11013/99, PRO.
43. See ***American Embassy, London to the Secretary of State***, September 27, 1950, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 14, 890.00/9-2750, NA.
44. ***American Embassy, London to the Secretary of State***, September 27, 1950, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 14, 890.00/9-2750, NA.
45. See ***American Embassy, London to the Secretary of State***, September 29, 1950, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 19, 890.00TA/9-2950, NA; See also ***American Embassy, London to the Secretary of State***, September 25, 1950,

RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 19, 890.00TA/9-2550, NA.

46. **American Embassy, Manila to the Secretary of State**, October 1, 1950, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 19, 890.00TA/10-150, NA; See also **Department of State to American Embassy, Manila**, September 29, 1950, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 19, 890.00TA/9-2950, NA.
47. See **American Embassy New Delhi to the Secretary of State**, October 19, 1953, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 16, 890.00/10-1953, NA.
48. See for instance **United Kingdom Embassy, Wellington, New Zealand to Commonwealth Relations Office [Attachment: Text of Letter from the Department of External Affairs, New Zealand]**, November 20, 1961, FO 371/160019, DK14/54A, PRO.
49. See **State Department, Policy Guidance Mutual Security Program for Fiscal Year 1953: Regional Paper - the Far East**, August 24, 1951, RG 59, Microfilm C0046, Reel 13, 790.5MSP/8-2451, NA.
50. See **FRUS**, 1950, Vol. VII, p. 14.
51. See **J.D. Murray to M.T. Flett**, November 30, 1951, FO 371/93067, FZ1102/971, PRO; **G. Bowen to J.D. Murray**, December 1, 1951, FO 371/93067, FZ1102/971A, PRO; See also **American Embassy, London to the Department of State: Minutes on US-UK Talks on South Asia**, February 15, 1951, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 14, 890.00/2-1551, NA.
52. **J.D. Murray to G. Bowen: Japan and the Colombo Plan [plus Enclosures]**, January 19, 1952, FO 371/101248, FZ11011/5, PRO.
53. See **Commonwealth Relations Office to United Kingdom High Commissioner in Pakistan: Colombo Plan and Japan**, March 15, 1952, FO 371/101248, FZ11011/22, PRO.
54. **U.K. High Commissioner in Pakistan to Commonwealth Relations Office: Japan and Colombo Plan**, March 17, 1952, FO 371/101248, FZ11011/22, PRO.
55. **Foreign Office to British Embassy, Tokyo: Japan and the Colombo Plan**, March 18, 1952, FO 371/101248, FZ11011/22, PRO; **Commonwealth Relations Office to United Kingdom High Commissioner in Pakistan: Japan and the Colombo Plan**, March 18, 1952, FO 371/101248, FZ11011/22B, PRO.

56. **American Embassy Karachi to the Department of State: Report on Fourth Session of the Consultative Committee Meetings held in Karachi in March 1952**, March 31, 1952, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 15, 890.00/3-3152, NA. See also **U.K. High Commissioner in Pakistan to Foreign Office: Japan and the Colombo Plan**, March 24, 1952, FO 371/101248, FZ11011/29, PRO.
57. See **United Kingdom Embassy, Tokyo to Foreign Office: Japan and the Colombo Plan**, March 25, 1952, FO 371/101248, FZ11011/30, PRO.
58. **Memorandum, Mr. Gay to Mr. Allison: U.S. Attitude toward the Colombo Plan and the Desirability of Japanese Participation**, December 3, 1952, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 16, 890.00/12-352, NA.
59. See **Department of State to American Embassy, Canberra**, October 13, 1953, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 16, 890.00/10-1353, NA.
60. See **Canadian Embassy, Washington to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada: Colombo Plan - Japanese and Afghanistan Participation**, August 24, 1954, RG 25, Vol. 192, 11038-40 pt.16, PAC; **High Commissioner for Canada, New Delhi to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada: Japanese Membership in Colombo Plan**, September 1, 1954, RG 25, Vol. 192, 11038-40 pt.16, PAC.
61. See **American Embassy, New Delhi to the Secretary of State**, October 19, 1953, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 16, 890.00/10-1953, NA.
62. See **Memorandum of Conversation: Colombo Plan Problems**, July 20, 1954, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 17, 890.00/7-2054, NA; **The Canadian Ambassador to the United States to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada: Colombo Plan – Japanese Membership**, July 21, 1954, RG 25 INT 107, Vol. 192, 11038-40 pt.16, PAC; **Department of External Affairs, Canada, Draft Despatch to Washington: Colombo Plan - Japanese Participation**, July 22, 1954, RG 25 INT 107, Vol. 192, 11038-40 pt.16, PAC.
63. See **Canadian Embassy, Washington to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada: Colombo Plan - Japanese and Afghanistan Participation**, August 24, 1954, 25, Vol. 192, 11038-40 pt.16, PAC; **Canadian Embassy, Washington to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada: Colombo Plan - Japanese Participation**, August 24, 1954, RG 25, Vol. 192, 11038-40 pt.16, PAC; **John Foster Dulles to American Embassy, Tokyo**, August 30, 1954, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 17, 890.00/8-3054, NA; **Memorandum of Conversation between State Department and Japanese Embassy Officials: Japanese Membership in the Colombo Plan and other**

- matters*, August 30, 1954, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 17, 890.00/8-3054, NA.
64. See ***High Commissioner for Canada, New Delhi to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa: Japanese Membership in Colombo Plan***, September 1, 1954, RG 25, Vol. 192, 11038-40 pt.16, PAC.
 65. See ***Canadian Embassy, Washington to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada: Colombo Plan - Japanese and Afghanistan Participation***, September 3, 1954, RG 25, Vol. 192, 11038-40 pt.16, PAC. See also ***Department of State to American Embassy, Manila***, September 7, 1954, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 17, 890.00/9-754, NA.
 66. See ***Department of State, Japanese Association with the Colombo Plan***, September 2, 1954, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 17, 890.00/9-254, NA.
 67. ***Minister of External Affairs, Wellington to New Zealand Ambassador, Washington: Japan and Colombo Plan***, September 8, 1954, RG 25, Vol. 192, 11038-40 pt.16, PAC.
 68. See ***Canadian Ambassador, Washington to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada: Japan and the Colombo Plan***, September 17, 1954, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 5, Folder 48, PAC. See also ***Canadian Ambassador, Washington to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada: Japan and the Colombo Plan***, September 27, 1954, MG 31 E6 D.V. LePan Papers, Vol. 5, Folder 48, PAC.
 69. See ***American Embassy, Ottawa to Secretary of State***, October 5, 1954, RG 59, Microfilm C0046 Reel 18, 890.00/10-554, NA.
 70. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press Release, October 6, 1954. Cited in A. Rix, "Japan's Foreign Aid Policy: A Capacity for Leadership?", ***Pacific Affairs***, Vol. 62, No. 4 (Winter 1989-90): 461-475, p. 466. For a conceptual analysis of Japan's doctrine of economic cooperation see J.A. Caldwell, "The Evolution of Japanese Economic Cooperation, 1950-1970", in H.B. Malmgren (ed.), ***Pacific Basin Development: The American Interests***, (Lexington, Mass: D. C. Heath, 1972), p. 23-60.
 71. See ***G. Bowen (Board of Trade) to J. D. Murray (Foreign Office): Afghanistan and the Colombo Plan***, January 24, 1951, FO 371/93038, FZ1102/107, PRO.

72. ***The Canadian Ambassador to the United States to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada: Colombo Plan – Afghanistan Membership***, July 21, 1954, RG 25, Vol. 192, 11038-40 pt.16, PAC.
73. ***Acting High Commissioner for Canada in Pakistan, Karachi to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada: Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan***, August 18, 1954, RG 25, Vol. 192, 11038-40 pt.16, PAC.
74. ***Memorandum of Conversation: U.S. and UK Views on Policy Towards Afghanistan***, February 1, 1955, RG 59, 689.90D/2-155, NA.
75. See for instance ***Foreign Office Brief for Washington Talks: United Kingdom/United States Interests and Objectives in South and Southeast Asia in the Light of New Soviet Activity***, January 1956, FO 371/123246, D1073/1, PRO; ***Foreign Office Memorandum by F. S. Tomlinson: Afghanistan and Colombo Plan***, July 24, 1957, FO 371/129554, DK14/10B, PRO.
76. ***American Embassy, Kabul to the Secretary of State***, April 14, 1959, RG 59, 689.00/4-1459, NA. See also ***American Embassy, Kabul to the Secretary of State***, June 16, 1959, RG 59, 689.00/6-1659, NA.
77. See ***F.A. Warner (Foreign Office) to G.E. Millard (British Embassy, Teheran)***, August 4, 1960, FO 371/152536, DK14/18, PRO.
78. See ***Foreign Office Minutes: Afghanistan and the Colombo Plan***, October 27, 1960, FO 371/152537, DK14/35, PRO.
79. See ***UK Delegation, Colombo Plan Consultative Committee, Tokyo to Foreign Office***, November 11, 1960, FO 371/152537, DK14/42, PRO; ***British Embassy, Washington to Foreign Office***, December 5, 1960, FO 371/152537, DK14/44, PRO.
80. See ***J. M. Heath (British Embassy, Kabul) to G. F. Hiller (Eastern Department, Foreign Office)***, June 13, 1963, FO 371/169961, DK14/16, PRO.
81. ***H. J. Evans to P. G. F. Dalton (Far Eastern Department, Foreign Office)***, August 10, 1957, FO 371/129554, DK14/14, PRO.
82. ***I. P. Garran (British Embassy, Washington) to O. C. Morland (Foreign Office)***, August 22, 1957, FO 371/129554, DK14/18, PRO.

83. **British Embassy, Washington to Foreign Office**, August 26, 1957, FO 371/129554, DK14/20, PRO.
84. **A.J. de la Mare (British Embassy, Washington) to P.G.F. Dalton (Foreign Office)**, September 17, 1957, FO 371/129554, DK14/23, PRO; **B.R. Curson to H.A.N. Brown**, September 20, 1957, FO 371/129554, DK14/23A, PRO.
85. **A.J. de la Mare (British Embassy, Washington) to P.G.F. Dalton (Foreign Office)**, September 17, 1957, FO 371/129554, DK14/23, PRO.
86. **United Kingdom Delegation to Colombo Plan Meeting in Saigon to Foreign Office**, October 22, 1957, FO 371/129554, DK14/25E, PRO.
87. See **G. D. Anderson (British Embassy, Colombo) to T. L. Crosthwait (Commonwealth Relations Office): South Korea and the Colombo Plan**, September 21, 1962, FO 371/166566, DK14/23, PRO.
88. See **Lord Lansdowne (Commonwealth Relations Office) to British Delegation to Colombo Plan Meeting, Kuala Lumpur: Korean Membership of Colombo Plan**, October 26, 1961, FO 371/160019, DK14/56, PRO.
89. **United Kingdom Embassy, Wellington, New Zealand to Commonwealth Relations Office: Korea and Colombo Plan. [Attachment: Text of Letter from the Department of External Affairs, New Zealand]**, November 20, 1961, FO 371/160019, DK14/54A, PRO.
90. **United Kingdom Delegation to Colombo Plan Meeting, Kuala Lumpur to Commonwealth Relations Office, Colombo Plan: Admission of South Korea and Afghanistan**, October 30, 1961, FO 371/160019, DK14/55, PRO.
91. See **United Kingdom Delegation to Colombo Plan Meeting, Kuala Lumpur to Commonwealth Relations Office: Admission of South Korea to Colombo Plan**, November 1, 1961, FO 371/160019, DK14/55, PRO.
92. **Foreign Office Memorandum: Korea and the Colombo Plan**, November 3, 1961, FO 371/160019, DK14/57, PRO.
93. **Australian High Commission, London to Foreign Office**, August 15, 1962, FO 371/166566, DK14/22, PRO; **G. D. Anderson (British High Commission, Colombo) to T. L. Crosthwait (Commonwealth Relations Office): South Korea and the Colombo Plan**, September 21, 1962, FO 371/166566, DK14/23, PRO.

94. ***G. D. Anderson to T. L. Crosthwait***, September 29, 1962, FO 371/166566, DK14/23B, PRO. See also ***United Kingdom High Commission, Canberra to Commonwealth Relations Office: Colombo Plan***, October 10, 1962, FO 371/166566, DK14/25A, PRO.

The Colombo Plan. . . resembles a building which, though constructed in defiance of the rules of architecture, gives admirable service only as long as no one attempts major changes liable to overload the structure and bring about its collapse.¹

The word "Plan" is really an inaccurate definition of the Colombo Venture, for it is not so much a co-ordinated Plan to be operated through a central agency, as a collection of development programmes drawn up by free and sovereign Governments. . . and which have, for presentational and other purposes, been labelled the Colombo Plan.²

There is a peculiar paradox in Colombo Plan scholarship, one exemplified in the British cabinet document quoted above. It notes that the programme's name is a misconception, that the title does not reflect its structure or organization. The Colombo Plan, it asserts, is not a "plan" in the ordinary and derived meaning of the word.³ It has no centralized institutions. The modalities for allocating aid are neither centralized nor multilateral. It is not a blueprint worked out in advance to promote an integrated economic development programme for South and Southeast Asia. It is not a plan for regional development; neither is it a central organization for the administration of western aid to the region.

This paradox was built into the Plan from the outset. For instance, when the Consultative Committee examined the country programmes at its second meeting in London in the fall of 1950 it did not synthesize them, beyond calculating their total cost in order to determine the missing component which would have to be financed from external sources. Each of the Asian countries

set its own goals, prepared its own programmes, and had sole responsibility for its implementation. Most of the non-Commonwealth countries did not even have development programmes when they joined the Colombo Plan. ‘The description of the whole enterprise as the Colombo Plan’, writes one critic, ‘was something of a misnomer.’⁹ It was at best ‘a co-operative and co-ordinated study of a number of economic situations, too varying as to stages and patterns of growth, and too immense in the aggregate to be considered amenable to any centrally planned and directed scheme of development.’⁹⁴

Faced with this conceptual paradox some commentators have resorted to vague and often conflicting paradigms to describe the programme's structure and organization. Creighton L. Burns, for instance, described it as a "system" while Her Majesty's delegation to the United Nations preferred to draw attention to the Plan's "centrifugal nature".⁵ These labels deepen the paradox, yet contribute nothing to answering the question why the programme came to be so ‘singularly misnamed’.⁶ Certainly its architects could not have been unaware of its intent and structure, nor of the misleading title they had given to it. Was this then an arbitrary choice with no purpose to it? Was it merely for "presentational" purposes as the British Cabinet claimed in the second epigraph? Were there some underlying assumptions which not only influenced the choice of title but provided the model and the referent for the organization of the programme? If the Colombo Plan was not a plan, what was it, and how did it work? What

organisational principles shaped its structure? How did its institutions operate, and to what end? What was the architecture of the Colombo Plan?

A MARSHALL PLAN FOR ASIA?

The Colombo Plan and other similar plans for South and South-East Asia were based on the same philosophy as the Marshall Plan for Europe: in order to strengthen weak national societies against the virus of communism it was necessary to strengthen their economies.⁷

Was the Colombo Plan Asia's Marshall Plan? As the first multilateral programme of foreign aid in the postwar era the Marshall Plan provided a standard and a framework for subsequent aid ventures, especially those, like the Colombo Plan, involving multiple state actors. But the similarities between the two programmes go beyond the incidence of the word "plan" although this, in itself, provides a pointer to the influence which the former may have had on the latter. There are many parallels, and points of conjuncture between them. The ideological and strategic foundations of the Colombo Plan, the assumptions and intentions of its architects, issues examined at length in earlier chapters, echo those which inspired the Marshall Plan.

Both programmes were conceived within the context of the Cold War and both were aimed, ultimately, at containing communism. One was directed at Western Europe, the core of the "free world" and hence the most vital arena of the Cold War; the other at South and Southeast Asia, at the non-communist states on the eastern periphery of the "free world", a region of great strategic

and economic importance to some of the states involved in the Marshall Plan. The fear that Western Europe could come under Soviet control if the indigenous communist parties (seen as puppets of the Kremlin) succeeded in riding the wave of postwar political and economic turmoil to power exerted a strong influence on the Truman administration's decision to establish the Marshall Plan. The Plan was, to quote Professor Hogan, "a vehicle for stabilizing Western Europe against Communist subversion and Soviet expansion."⁸ The fear that the newly independent, underdeveloped, "free" countries of South and Southeast Asia, with limited resources to satisfy the rising expectations of their citizens, could be subverted by communism, engineered from within or sponsored from without, was the motive force for the establishment of the Colombo Plan. The resurgence of communism in China, as we noted in chapter 1, made the threat even more insidious not only for the Asian countries but also for Australia, the United Kingdom and other western nations with economic and strategic interests in the region.

The strategic goals of both plans were to be attained through economic means, specifically through the instrumentality of foreign aid (capital and technical assistance) based on a philosophy of self-help and mutual assistance.⁹ And it was on this economic platform that the Colombo Plan diverged from the Marshall Plan. Although the recipient countries in both instances were expected to prepare plans, in Europe these were aimed at recovery and rehabilitation, in Asia at economic development. Western European states, already developed

before the war, prepared plans for recovery aimed at re-establishing a standard of living approximating at least the pre-war level. This objective determined the amount of dollars they were to receive through the Marshall Plan. The Asian states were literally beginning from scratch to create the structures and framework for economic development. They had no precedent or national standards with which to measure the projections in their development programmes. Their plans had to be tailored to fit whatever aid was made available by the western donors— the very reverse of the situation in Europe. In other words, while the goal of recovery determined the amount of Marshall Plan dollars injected into Europe, the attainment of the objectives of the Asian development programmes was delimited by the amount of capital they could generate. ‘[The Asian] plans for economic development’, the Canadian government instructed its delegation to the second meeting of the Consultative Committee, ‘[should] be cut to fit the amount of outside assistance available.’⁹¹⁰

There was, nevertheless, a direct connection between the British (and European) economy and those of the Asian countries. Most of Asia's trade was with Europe. This, and the sterling balances, linked the U.K.'s balance of payments difficulties with the economic problems of Asia. Britain was able to absorb the debilitating effect on its economy of the drawing down of the Indian and other sterling balances because of the cushion provided by the Marshall Plan. As E. A. Berthoud of the Foreign Office noted, ‘the health of South East Asia [was] a vital element in European recovery.’⁹¹¹ If the Asian countries earned

dollars through increased production for export (as a result of Colombo Plan aid) much of this was likely to end up in London either as payment for goods and services, or as convertible reserves. The Foreign Office's rather awkward statement, 'the U.K.'s solution to the U.K. dollar problem is for South-East Asia to earn dollars some of which return to the U.K.',⁹ expressed the connection between the European and Asian economies.¹²

Still, the existence of such trade links did not mean, *ipso facto*, that the economies of Europe and Asia suffered from the same or even similar problems and would therefore respond to the same solutions. Apparently, some British Treasury officials responsible for creating the framework for the Colombo Plan did not initially appreciate, or failed to acknowledge, this distinction. They viewed Asia's economic problems, like those in Europe, as one of a balance of payments. Hence, just as the Marshall Plan was helping the European states to meet the dollar deficit in their balance of payments so Colombo Plan aid (much of it expected from the United States) would fill the missing component in the Asian countries' development budgets. Even if one acknowledges that the shortage of dollars in the postwar global economy affected Europe as much as Asia, Treasury's balance of payments analysis was overly simplistic, if not flawed. The economic problems of the Asian countries were far more complex than that of a balance of payments deficit. True, whatever external assistance they received could be described as fulfilling a balance of payments requirement, or more appropriately, filling a missing component in their

development budgets. Their problem was however not just a shortage of dollars, as in Europe, but a lack of capital in general - both internal and external - and symptomatic of their poverty and underdevelopment. Their productivity and national income levels were very low. They were therefore unable to generate or increase domestic savings to provide a spur for development. A balance of payments approach ignored that part of the problem - economic, social, political and technical - which was *not* the missing component.

Treasury's perspective was influenced by Britain's involvement in the Marshall Plan. The "Marshall Plan approach" - a balance of payments measure - shaped their attitude to, and perspective on, the structure and organization of the Colombo Plan. This was what linked the Colombo Plan directly to the Marshall Plan. In other words, it was through Britain that the Marshall Plan concept intruded into the Commonwealth aid programme. Treasury officials used the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), the Marshall Plan's administrative and distributive agency, as the referent for modelling the structures and organization of the Colombo Plan. Before exploring this in greater detail it is necessary, perhaps, to make a few remarks on Britain's attitude to the OEEC.

In response to Secretary Marshall's speech at Harvard in the summer of 1947 Bevin and his French counterpart, Georges Bidault, convened the sixteen-member Committee for European Economic Cooperation (CEEC) in Paris. The CEEC's report, issued in September, proposed a continuing organization to

administer the European Recovery Program (ERP) and to prepare periodic progress reports showing the extent to which the programme's objective had been realised.¹³ The structure and powers of the continuing organization, the OEEC, was shaped by the tensions and differences in British and American attitudes towards European integration.

The Americans wanted an organization with transnational authority to promote European integration. But in 1948 the Labour government was still clinging to the illusion of Britain's status as a world power. The country's economic well-being, its strategic reach, its position in the postwar international configuration of power depended on maintaining the integrity of the Commonwealth and the sterling area's multilateral trading system. The American proposal for Anglo-Western European union (Michael Hogan's phrase), if implemented, would sever Britain's links with the Commonwealth and the sterling area—the very backbone of its imperial authority. It would 'spell the end of the United Kingdom as a World Power.'¹⁴ The Attlee government could therefore not accept an OEEC with supranational authority, one whose powers transcended that of sovereign governments. It could not promote European integration at the cost of its Commonwealth connection. The OEEC had to be restricted to purely administrative functions, with a decentralized structure in which ultimate power would reside with national delegations. The organization would promote intergovernmental cooperation, not economic and political integration.

By and large these ideas prevailed. The OEEC's authority was concentrated in committees constituted by national delegations. Its secretariat was deliberately designed to be weak, its Secretary-General denied the authority to take any major policy initiatives. When the organization was brought into being in the spring of 1948, its major function was to distribute the American pie based on the deficit in each country's balance of payments, and then issue periodic progress reports.¹⁵ This was the experience and attitude which Treasury officials applied to the structure and organization of the aid programme for South and Southeast Asia. Although they were aware of the differences in circumstances, they sometimes failed to maintain a balance of perspective between the OEEC and the Colombo Plan.

Several elements of the OEEC were introduced into the Colombo Plan from the very beginning. The questionnaire which was to assist the Asian countries in preparing a realistic programme of economic development was based on one prepared earlier by the OEEC. It was introduced and adapted by Sir Richard Clarke, the Treasury official who chaired the working party of officials charged with drafting the working paper on economic development at the Sydney conference where the Plan first took concrete form.¹⁶ In fact the whole procedure proposed by the working party, from drawing up plans to their collation into a comprehensive report, was a mirror image of methods employed by the OEEC. Clarke's role in this is significant. He went to Sydney as the principal economic adviser to the British delegation. He played a similar role in

Paris in 1947 as a member of the British delegation to the CEEC, contributing substantially to the drafting of the report that gave birth to the OEEC. The extent to which his involvement in the Marshall Plan influenced his approach to the organization of the Commonwealth aid project attracted a comment from Douglas LePan, his counterpart in the Canadian delegation to the Sydney conference.

If his contribution to drawing up the Colombo Plan is to be faulted at any point, it would perhaps be here [Clarke's involvement in the Marshall Plan]. Almost unconsciously he sometimes fell into the trap of seeing the problems involved in terms of the problems involved in drawing up the Marshall Plan. Intellectually he knew the differences very well. But his mind had so taken the dye of that earlier and intensely arduous experience that it sometimes coloured his approach to an enterprise that was only superficially similar.¹⁷

The British were not alone in seeing the aid programme for Asia through Marshall Plan filters. At the 1950 conference of Commonwealth foreign ministers in Colombo, Junius Jayewardene, the finance minister of Ceylon, had proposed a Commonwealth Economic Plan modelled on the Marshall Plan (see Chapter 1.3). The proposal received a lukewarm response not because of the reference to the Marshall Plan *per se*, but because of the belief that the Commonwealth did not have the resources to duplicate the American programme.¹⁸ Still, it was the British who were in a position to exert the greatest influence on the organization of the Colombo Plan, and it was through them that the two programmes found their conjuncture.

In the months leading to the second meeting of the Consultative Committee (the London conference), such issues as the extent to which the

organization of the Asian aid project could be modelled on the OEEC, the nature and extent of the connection between the two programmes, and whether such a connection could be proclaimed openly, were taken up by the Working Party on Economic Development of South Asia (E.D.(S.A) in Whitehall. As it happened the United Kingdom's annual submission for the OEEC's Third Report was in preparation at this time. A draft paper prepared by Clarke and some proposals advanced by Sir Edmund Hall-Patch, an under secretary in the Foreign Office and chairman of the OEEC's Executive Committee, set the tone for the Working Party's deliberations.

Clarke promoted the view that the continuing organization for the Commonwealth aid project be modelled on the OEEC. Hall-Patch suggested that it was essential to emphasize the connection between the two programmes in the OEEC Third Report. Britain, he argued, had always 'claimed that great advantages accrue[d] to the OEEC' from its Commonwealth links, without demonstrable proof. The Third Report offered the opportunity, and the Colombo Plan 'a good card to be played in Paris.' Moreover the Americans were unlikely to support an aid programme sponsored separately from the OEEC. Since the British delegation in Paris was already discussing aid matters with the Americans and the Canadians, playing up the connection between the two programmes, and securing the OEEC's endorsement, could only advance the course of the Asian project.

The E.D.S.A. agreed that there was indeed a connection between the two programmes. Still its Foreign Office members feared that adopting the proposals could create political and diplomatic problems. Commonwealth governments were likely to ‘misunderstand’ if the Asian aid programme was linked ‘too closely with OEEC.’ There was ‘a real risk of arousing bad feeling between European countries and South-East Asiatic states with which they associated if there [was] any implication that the development scheme [was] to be run by OEEC.’ And most importantly, it was likely to put His Majesty’s government in the awkward position of having its policies and programmes appraised by other European states, a situation ‘strongly objectionable to the Colonial Office.’

In the light of these objections the Working Party resolved that little should be said about the Colombo Plan in the U.K. submission. The Third Report should merely acknowledge the importance of South and Southeast Asia to the European recovery and of British efforts and initiative in the region. Clarke was unable to sway the members of the E.D.S.A. to support his premise for modelling the Colombo Plan’s continuing organization. On the contrary the Working Party decided that it was important to (1) ‘avoid too slavish an imitation of O.E.E.C. precedent’; (2) oppose any tendency to create too powerful an organization otherwise ‘the U.S. Government might be tempted, should there be an organization of sufficient power, to use it to influence the policies of the governments participating in the Colombo Plan’; (3) ‘avoid entrusting the organization with duties which it would be unable to perform’; and (4) ‘above all

avoid trying to fix the outline of the organization to administer the Colombo Plan until the nature of the Colombo Plan is much more clearly defined.⁹¹⁹

These decisions, echoes of the British approach to the OEEC, put an end to Clarke's attempt to model the Colombo Plan on that organization. By the time Commonwealth ministers assembled for the London conference the British had, to quote LePan once more, 'entirely rid themselves of the mistaken notion that the problems of economic development in South and South-East Asia could be seen not so very differently from the problems of Europe under the Marshall Plan.'⁹²⁰ The British now conceded that the Colombo Plan was not Asia's Marshall Plan. Yet considering the two programmes' long association in the corridors of Whitehall it is hardly surprising that the Commonwealth aid project also became a Plan, in name, even though in organizational structure and in its modus operandi, it was not a plan. From the Marshall Plan the word moved symbolically through Jayewardene's Commonwealth Economic Plan, the Spender Plan until it found a resting place, by association, in the title of the London report— The Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia.

INSTITUTIONAL AND OPERATIONAL MECHANISMS

In chapter 2 we noted that there were two components to the Colombo Plan— the capital aid programme, with a life-span of six years (July 1951 to 1957), and a complementary three-year programme of technical assistance

which began in July 1950. Two institutions were created for the technical assistance programme— a Bureau for Technical Cooperation located in Colombo, and its supervisory agency, the Council for Technical Cooperation. For the main programme the architects wanted a loose organization of participating governments ⁶which could review progress, which could draw up periodic reports, and which could serve as a forum for the discussion of development problems in South and South-East Asia.⁹ A decision on the actual structure of this organization was to be made in the future when the sources of external finance became clear, i.e., when the United States clarified its position.²¹ Eventually no new organization was created. The Consultative Committee evolved into the implementation machinery for the whole programme. What principles shaped its organization? How was it structured and what were its functions? What was the nature and course of its evolution? How did the other institutions of the Colombo Plan operate? The rest of the chapter will be devoted to exploring these questions.

Principles of Organization

The Commonwealth operates on the basis of consultation and cooperation. It is not a formal organization and has no institutional structures. It does not take collective decisions and the members are not expected to take united action on any issue. Commonwealth conferences may *only* make recommendations to governments. The Secretariat does not perform executive

functions and serves merely to foster intergovernmental cooperation and a fuller exchange of views among the members.

These were the organizational ideas which the United Kingdom applied to the OEEC. The same principles determined the structure and functions of the institutions of the Colombo Plan. It was not by accident that the implementation mechanism was called, from the outset, the Consultative Committee.

Surprisingly, the Truman administration's expectations for a continuing organization for the Colombo Plan mirrored those of the British government, possibly because Asia was secondary to Europe on the list of American strategic priorities, and did not, therefore, attract the sort of policies and objectives which the U.S. wanted for the OEEC. (This will change in 1954 as we will see when we discuss the Stassen Plan.) "The United States Government", its aide memoire announcing its participation in the programme stated, "believes that emphasis should be placed on continuing consultation and not on a formal organization as such. It believes that it would be undesirable to contemplate a substantial full-time secretariat. Periodic meetings of participating Governments should be the means by which reviews of progress and other exchanges of information would be accomplished rather than through services of a permanent central staff."⁹

Unlike the OEEC the United States would not support a centralized organization, much less one with executive authority. It made its participation contingent upon the acceptance of these conditions.²² It need not have worried, however, for its

stipulations conformed with the ideals of the Commonwealth, and the desire of its members for a loose organization to implement the Plan.

Another American condition, one already inherent in the organization of the Colombo Plan, was the principle of bilateralism. Since there was no central plan, or a central organ or secretariat to coordinate aid flows the only alternative was for this to be done on a bilateral basis. With the exception of New Zealand which proposed a pooling arrangement (i.e. multilateral aid) under which its very small contribution, its widow's mite, was made available through a central pool from which assistance could be offered to the recipient states, most participants clearly favoured the bilateral approach.²³ There were additional reasons for the support which most participants gave the bilateral principle. The Americans offered aid directly to countries which met the criteria attached to their various programmes, such as those for Point IV and the Mutual Security Program. The recipient countries were said to be 'shy at having to submit their economic plans to the scrutiny of a national (sic- international?) body'. The donor countries wanted 'to secure from the recipients safeguards appropriate to their own domestic Parliamentary assistance' [sic]; the British contribution, consisting mostly of release of the sterling balances, could only be made on a bilateral basis.²⁴ Another reason, perhaps the most cogent one, was conveyed to the US embassy in London by the Foreign Office:

British state [the Embassy reported to the State Department] that use of organization to pressure contributors particularly US can be avoided by maintaining principle that aid is determined and administered bilaterally. They point out that participation of contributing Commonwealth Governments in conference

with recipients has committed them to support programme in principle but there is no commitment to contribute any specific amount to any country or to ensure that any country can carry out its particular program.²⁵

The bilateral principle is significant because it captures the philosophical and operational essence of the Consultative Committee— that of form over function. Functionally the Committee was no more than a shell. Once it had lined up a number of potential donors its continued existence, and its role, had little impact on the pattern and channel of aid flows. It could not determine who was to give or receive aid, when such aid was to be offered or sought, in what form, or how much, could be offered or accepted. It could not coordinate or reconcile either the request or the response. It could not indicate the priority of need for development assistance as between aid recipient countries nor the amount of assistance any given country should receive.⁹ These were the prerogative of each government. Both ends in the bilateral chain made their decisions without reference to the Committee. Donor countries retained total freedom of action in determining the necessity for given projects.⁹²⁶ Each recipient country had to determine what form of aid - capital, equipment or technical assistance - it needed and then find the donor country able and willing to meet them, in part or in full.

This explains why the preparation of development programmes was so cardinal to the operation of the Colombo Plan. It enabled the recipient countries to determine as precisely as possible what form of aid they required, and gave the donor countries the opportunity to review how a particular request fit into the

receiving country's overall plan. Still the recipient country *had* to initiate the contact and hope that the donor would respond positively. The procedure was simple: the appropriate government department submitted a proposal to the embassy of a potential donor which then forwarded it to its home government for consideration. In cases where the donor had no representation in the recipient country (Australia, Canada, and New Zealand had no embassies in Burma, for instance) the request was transmitted through another member, usually the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that the existence of the Committee had great symbolic value. The fact that it was there at all was an expression of the willingness of the donor members to assist the Asian countries in their effort to improve the living standards of their teeming populations. And, of course, it issued periodic progress reports.

The Consultative Committee at Work

The Committee's real work was completed at the London conference with the publication of the Colombo Plan report. At its next meeting, convened in Ceylon in February 1951 to review progress since the report was issued, members decided to meet annually and publish annual reports. These meetings provided a forum where the recipients could interact and associate with the donors and where all could decide, using the unanimity convention, on the admission of new members. They provided the opportunity, the Committee claimed in its annual reports, "for the Colombo Plan member countries from both

within and outside the region to review progress, exchange views and share ideas and experiences in the field of cooperative economic and technological development.⁹²⁷ They offered the donors the opportunity to share: ‘the task of policing aid.’⁹²⁸ They provided avenues, according to the Foreign Office, for ‘bringing discreet pressure to the newly independent Asian countries to accept outside advice and assistance in development planning. . . a means through which some advice [could] be offered in a palatable form.’⁹²⁹ Once a year (and biennially from 1978) the Committee transformed the bilateral chain into a sphere in which the donors and recipients meeting in a member’s capital on a rotational basis, presented a record of their activities and achievements in the last Colombo Plan year (July- June). These were then compiled into annual reports divided into country chapters, at which point the sphere reverted to its lateral orientation.

The preparation of these reports became in effect the pivot around which the annual meetings revolved. Since the Committee had no secretariat or operating budget the host country undertook full administrative and financial responsibility for organizing the annual meeting.³⁰ The format and procedures employed at these meetings did not vary fundamentally from those used at the Sydney and London conferences. The Ministerial Meeting (i.e., the Consultative Committee) was preceded by the Preparatory Meeting of Officials which was in reality two separate sets of meetings - that of the Preliminary Working Group, and the Officials’ Meeting - held seriatim. The former was made up of relatively

junior officials who met for one or two weeks to prepare and edit the material submitted by members for the country chapters in the annual report. They constituted themselves into three working groups, each preparing a preliminary draft for the countries represented within it. Thereafter, and until the practice was abandoned in 1956, all the working groups, meeting together as the Preliminary Working Group, approved the draft amendments before passing them over to the Officials' Meeting.

The Officials' Meeting where most of the work of the Consultative Committee was done employed a more sophisticated committee and working group system to conduct its proceedings. Each working group had a mix of representatives from donor and recipient states. There were two main committees— the Business Committee and the Drafting Committee. The Business Committee was constituted by the heads of official delegations or their alternates and was presided over by the chairman of the Officials' Meeting, by convention the leader of the host country's delegation. It functioned like a steering body with oversight responsibilities for all conference activities. It determined the procedures for the meetings, the composition and terms of reference of the working groups and subcommittees, and the format for the report. It also made recommendations to the ministers on the organization of future meetings and on general improvements to the operation of the Consultative Committee.

The Drafting Committee, together with its working groups - the Country Chapters Working Groups and the Contributions Chapter Working Group - were appointed by the Officials plenary to review the work of the Preliminary Working Group. Each group appointed its own chairman, balancing the need for broad representation with individual knowledge and competence. The Drafting Committee prepared the general descriptive and analytical sections - chapters 1 and 2 - of the report which provided an overview of development trends in the Colombo Plan area. In the first and second annual reports these were titled "Historical Background" and "Economic and Financial Background". In the third and subsequent reports these became "Review of Economic Progress" and "The Task Ahead" and were designated as Part 1. Each Country Chapter Working Group, consisting of three officials one of whom was from a donor country, prepared the chapter on a fourth regional member. The Contributions Chapter in which the donors (regional and non-regional members) reported their aid activities in the last Colombo Plan year was prepared by the Contributions Chapter Working Group.

Other subcommittees dealt with topical issues. The earliest of these was the Subcommittee on Technical Assistance which drafted the chapter on technical assistance. It reviewed the progress of the technical cooperation scheme, and was expected to make suggestions for improvement taking into cognizance the views of all participating countries. In performing this task the subcommittee made use of the report of the Council for Technical Cooperation,

and that of the director of the bureau. At the 1964 conference in London the subcommittee was renamed the Technical Cooperation Committee. In addition to drafting the chapter on technical assistance the Committee was now expected to review 'the availability, the means and the efficacy of technical co-operation in the [Colombo Plan] area.'³¹ In 1966 the director of the Bureau for Technical Cooperation began attending the ministerial meeting in an advisory capacity. At the twentieth meeting in 1969 the Consultative Committee decided to invite him to participate fully in its deliberations.³²

A Committee on the Form of the Questionnaire was appointed whenever necessary to review and modify the questionnaire which regional members used in preparing their submissions for the country chapters. Its work was aimed at improving the quality and content of the report. At the 1953 conference in New Delhi the Indian delegation submitted a proposal for the establishment of an information unit to publicize the aid programme. The American delegation objected, ostensibly because the activities proposed for the unit would conflict with the information programmes of their aid agencies. In their view publicity for the Colombo Plan could be more effectively handled by individual countries. Since the United States was not a member of the Council for Technical Cooperation under whose aegis the unit was to operate, the Americans decided not to block the proposal if it had majority support. Ministers did eventually approve the recommendation for the establishment of a small information unit, to be attached to the bureau, 'to assist member countries in promoting in their

territories knowledge of the Colombo Plan.⁹ The unit was to establish direct channels of correspondence with information departments of member countries, collect, collate, distribute, and maintain a central pool of information on the programme. An Information Committee at Colombo, made up of representatives from the various embassies, was to direct the unit's activities.³³

Once the unit became operational in March 1954 a new Subcommittee on Information became a regular feature at the Officials' Meeting. Its main task was to review the activities of the Information Unit taking into consideration the views of the director of the bureau and of the information officer, and submit proposals on future publicity for the aid programme as it saw fit.³⁴ At the Melbourne conference in 1962 the Subcommittee suggested that a conference of national information officers should be held in 1963 to consider ways of improving publicity for the Plan. After consideration by the Business Committee the Officials' Meeting recommended to the ministers that in 1963 the Subcommittee on Information should be constituted as a committee of the whole to combine its usual functions with that of a conference of national information officers. Following a similar decision in London in 1964 the Information Committee was constituted as a committee of the whole in 1966, in Karachi, to 'discuss the role of information and mass communications in economic and social development.'³⁵ The Committee on Information was again combined with a national information officers conference in 1969 at which point the Consultative Committee decided to employ the format periodically at future meetings.³⁶

In 1956 the Business Committee drew the attention of the Consultative Committee to the possibility of discussing topics of special interest to members at the annual meeting. The proposal received ministerial attention at the Kuala Lumpur meeting in October 1961 when the Consultative Committee decided that from the next meeting a topic of special interest and concern to the regional members should be discussed by a new Subcommittee on Special Topics. Members were to submit in advance of the meeting papers on each year's topic reflecting their experience.³⁷ The Subcommittee reported its comments and suggestions to the Consultative Committee for its consideration and for subsequent publication in the annual report (see Table 5). From 1964 the Special Topic Committee (a committee of the whole) replaced the Subcommittee.

Major changes to the procedures employed at the annual meetings began in Karachi in 1966 when the Drafting Committee was reconstituted into a Committee on Economic Cooperation and Review (CECR) to 'review in the light of material submitted by member countries the entire range of economic development including the availability and use of both internal and external resources within the framework of the Colombo Plan.'⁹ Stripped of its arcane language this reaffirmed the Committee's primary function-- that of drafting Part 1 of the report.³⁸ At the Victoria, Canada, meeting (1969) the CECR and the Business Committee were integrated, structurally and functionally, into a new Business and Economic Review Committee.

The Consultative Committee decided, again in Victoria, to discontinue the Preliminary Working Groups, restrict the Officials' Meeting to one week and the Ministerial Meeting to a maximum period of three days. Governments were henceforth to present their Country Chapters to the host government in publishable form, subject only to minor editing before publication. They were also to submit Brief Country Papers highlighting their development and aid programmes, to be used by the host government in drafting the first two chapters of the report. These drafts were then to be used as a basis for discussion at the Officials' Meeting. The special topic chapter was also to be drafted by the host government. Since the Country and Contributions Chapters were no longer subject to detailed consideration by officials a notation (a disclaimer?) was appended showing that they were 'the responsibility only of the originating country.'⁹ These procedural changes were aimed, according to the Committee's communique, 'at streamlining future meetings and increasing the effectiveness of its annual discussions.'⁹ ³⁹

Did these changes make the meetings more efficient? This is doubtful. The changes appear instead to have re-affirmed the need for strict adherence by officials to the bilateral and centrifugal character of the Colombo Plan. The Officials' Meeting had evolved over the years a multilateral, interactive procedure, however transient, for the production of the annual report. This was now abandoned; the chapters were no longer to be drafted by officials working together in committees and working groups. Like their precursor, the London

Report, the annual reports were to become a collection, rather than the sum, of each country's activities.

The three-day limit imposed on the Ministerial Meeting is further evidence of the Committee's intention. In a classified supplement to their report on the Ottawa meeting back in 1954 the American delegation had observed as follows:

In regard to the Ministerial Meetings, one week may be too short a period for adequate consideration of substantive issues. With the fourteen nations participating at Ottawa and with only minimum participation on the part of some of the countries, there was time for only two rounds of comprehensive statements and little time for discussion of the statements made... This shortage of time for discussion will become more acute with seventeen nations participating instead of fourteen. . . the extension of the Ministerial Meeting to cover a ten day period would be worthwhile.⁴⁰

When the Committee made the procedural changes in question in 1969 its membership stood at twenty-four requiring more time to accommodate all the speeches and statements, and even more if there was to be any meaningful discussion of a programme which had been in operation for almost two decades. Hence the American delegation's observations would be even of greater relevance in 1969 than they were in 1954. If a week was deemed to be insufficient for a smaller number of countries one cannot but wonder how eliminating the Preliminary Working Group, restricting the Officials' Meeting to one week, and that of Ministers to three days could increase the effectiveness of the annual meetings. And as if to demonstrate the diminishing importance of the meetings the Consultative Committee began holding them biennially starting from 1978.

That year's meeting, held in Washington, was significant in other ways. The one volume compendium of Colombo Plan activities, the annual report series, was published for the last time. This was the Twenty-Fourth Report and it contained *only* the conclusions of that year's meeting. A new publication, "Development Perspectives", began that year, presents the country issue papers in greater detail. In 1980, a new series, "Proceedings and Conclusions" which presents the record of proceedings, the conclusions, the communique, and the special topic paper for each meeting, replaced the report. (The special topic has been published as a separate volume since 1986.) The Washington meeting also established a working group of senior officials to review the future role of the Colombo Plan. The group met in Colombo in December 1979 and after reviewing memoranda on the subject from member governments, recommended that the programme should continue in its existing form. At the Jakarta meeting in 1980 the Consultative Committee extended the life of the Plan indefinitely.⁴¹

This was unusual, but hardly significant. The Plan was expected to run for six years, July 1951 to June 1957, and had survived for almost three decades. Over the years it had been extended several times, beginning in 1955. At that year's meeting in Singapore, the Committee undertook a general review of the programme, and concluded that the terminal date was no longer of special significance. It decided to continue the Plan until 1961 because although "considerable progress" had been made, much more needed to be done to raise living standards in the region.⁴² A second review in 1959 arrived at the same

conclusion, necessitating another five year extension. In 1964 it was extended again for five years, in 1969 it was extended to 1976, and in 1974 the terminal date was moved to 1981. In 1977 the Committee changed the name of the programme to "The Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific" to reflect the geographical spread of its membership and the scope of its activities. And then came the Jakarta decision which granted the programme indefinite lease. Similarly, the Technical Cooperation Scheme, originally intended to run for three years, was extended in 1952 to 1957. It was made coterminous with the Colombo Plan in 1955 and has been extended accordingly.⁴³

Observers at Consultative Committee Meetings

A number of international institutions have maintained observer status at Consultative Committee meetings. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), identified as one of the principal sources of finance for the Colombo Plan, has participated in all meetings since 1951. The bank has maintained very intimate relations with the Committee and was not granted full membership only because all other members were sovereign governments.⁴⁴

In 1952 the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, ECAFE, (now Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific, ESCAP) an agency of the United Nations charged with investigating the technical problems and constraints on development in the area, was invited to send observers to the

Table 5**Consultative Committee Meetings, Annual Reports and Special Topics**

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Venue</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Annual Report</u>	<u>Special Topic</u>
1st	Sydney	May 1950		
2nd	London	Sept 1950	Colombo Plan	
3rd	Colombo	Feb 1951		
4th	Karachi	March 1952	First	
5th	New Delhi	Oct 1952	Second	
6th	Ottawa	Oct 1954	Third	
7th	Singapore	Oct 1955	Fourth	
8th	Wellington	Dec 1956	Fifth	
9th	Saigon	Oct 1957	Sixth	
10th	Seattle	Nov 1958	Seventh	
11th	Jogjakarta	Nov 1959	Eighth	
12th	Tokyo	Nov 1960	Ninth	
13th	Kuala Lumpur	Nov 1961	Tenth	
14th	Melbourne	Nov 1962	Eleventh	Techniques and Institutions for the Mobilization of Domestic Savings for Economic Development
15th	Bangkok	Nov 1963	Twelfth	Manpower Planning for Economic Development
16th	London	Nov 1964	Thirteenth	Development Problems of Rural Areas
17th	Karachi	Nov 1966*	Fourteenth	The Relationship between Population and Economic Development in the Colombo Plan Area
18th	Rangoon	Nov 1967	Fifteenth	The Availability and Use of Resources for Increasing Agricultural Production in the Colombo Plan Area
19th	Seoul	Oct 1968	Sixteenth	Export Promotion
20th	Victoria	Oct 1969	Seventeenth	Administration for Cooperative Aid under the Colombo Plan
21st	Manila	Feb 1971*	Eighteenth	International Assistance for Education for Development
22nd	New Delhi	Nov 1972	Nineteenth	The Loss of Skilled Personnel from Developing Countries: Its Incidence, Effects and Measures for Control

23rd	Wellington	Dec 1973	Twentieth	Joint Ventures between Foreign and Domestic Capital and Technology: their Role in Economic Development and their Relationship to Aid Programmes
24th	Singapore	Dec 1974	Twenty-First	New Dimensions of International Technical Cooperation
25th	Colombo	Dec 1975	Twenty-Second	The Role of External Assistance in Increasing Agricultural Production and Improving Food Distribution in the Colombo Plan Area
26th	Kathmandu	Dec 1977*	Twenty-Third	Problems Relating to the Transfer and Adaptation of Technology to and among Member Countries of the Colombo Plan Region with Special Reference to Technical cooperation Among Developing Countries
27th	Washington D.C.	Dec 1978**	Twenty-Fourth; Development Perspectives	Development Programmes and Strategies for Economic Cooperation for Meeting Basic Human Needs and Raising Incomes and Standards of Living with Emphasis on Rural Areas
28th	Jakarta	Nov 1980	Proceedings and Conclusions; Development Perspectives	International Cooperation for Development of New and Renewable Energy Resources Appropriate for Rural Utilisation and their Implications for the Environment
29th	Tokyo	Nov 1982	Proceedings and Conclusions; Development Perspectives	Governmental and Private Sector Strategies to Develop Human Resources for Promotion of Industries in the Colombo Plan Region with Special Reference to Small-Scale Enterprises in the Fields of Agriculture, Fisheries, Mining, Industry
30th	Kuala Lumpur	Nov 1984	Proceedings and Conclusions; Development Perspectives	Technology Transfer and Development of Human Resources for Increasing Productivity and Enhancing Industrial and Agricultural Linkages
31st	Sydney	Nov 1986	Proceedings and Conclusions; Development Perspectives	Removing Constraints to Economic and Social Development: a Review of Recent Developments in Colombo Plan Countries
32nd	Dhaka	Nov 1988	Proceedings and Conclusions; Development Perspectives	Mobilisation of Domestic Resources in Colombo Plan countries: Problems and Prospects
33rd	Bangkok	Nov 1990	Proceedings and Conclusions; Development Perspectives	Rural Natural Resources Management

* There were no meetings in 1965, 1970 and 1976

** From 1978 the Consultative Committee began to meet biennially

Sources: Colombo Plan Annual Reports, 1962 -78; Proceedings and Conclusions, 1980-90.

Karachi meeting. This was not surprising since the Commission's activities complemented that of the Colombo Plan: ECAFE studied the problems and proffered solutions, the Consultative Committee offered avenues for the countries to receive development aid. Both were working toward the same goal—economic development of Asia. Relations between them ought therefore to have been as intimate as that between the Committee and the IBRD. That this was not so was a reflection of the ideological polarization in the membership of ECAFE.

The Soviet Union was a member, as was Australia, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. The western countries believed that the Soviets were using the Commission "to align Asiatic countries against non-Asiatic states" and were using its meetings "for propaganda attacks on the United States and other "colonial powers". They had "succeeded in rendering it [ECAFE] quite ineffective for any purpose but that of propaganda speeches."⁴⁵ In 1950 such opinions had disqualified ECAFE as the organization to implement the aid programme.⁴⁶ The prevailing view in 1952 was that the Colombo Plan "serve[d] certain political purposes not all of which the interested (Western) powers would wish to promote through E.C.A.F.E." It was therefore essential to insulate it from "polemical interference from the Russians."⁴⁷ In short, western nations were distrustful of ECAFE and were unwilling to encourage too close a cooperation between it and the Consultative Committee. All the same, it was difficult to insulate one organization totally from the other. The convergence in their activities, and their cross-membership, made

this impossible. It could not be averted when the ECAFE Executive Secretary, Dr. Lokanathan, requested that his Commission “be invited to send a representative to meetings of the Consultative Committee in the same way as does the International Bank.”⁹⁴⁸ And so ECAFE was granted an observer status at Consultative Committee meetings.

The IBRD and ECAFE remained the only two international institutions represented at the annual meetings of the Consultative Committee throughout the 1950s. Then in 1960 the United Nations Technical Assistance Board (now United Nations Development Programme, UNDP), whose liaison officer in Colombo had attended the meetings of the Council for Technical Cooperation since 1951, was invited to send an observer to the Tokyo meeting. The Asian Productivity Organization got a similar invitation in 1963. The Commonwealth Secretariat began sending observers to the meetings in 1966, the Asian Development Bank and the International Labour Organization in 1967. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development/General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (UNCTAD/GATT), and the Joint International Trade Centre (JITC) were invited to Seoul in 1968. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization attended the 1969 meeting in Victoria, Canada. In 1971 the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) were invited to the Manila meeting because their programmes were adjudged to be relevant to that year’s special topic

"International Assistance for Education for Development".⁴⁹ Since then the Committee's meetings have been attended by these and other international organizations whose operations could contribute to meeting the objectives of the programme— economic development in Asia and the Pacific.

The Council for Technical Cooperation

The Council for Technical Cooperation in South and Southeast Asia was established in Colombo in 1950 to coordinate the Colombo Plan's £8 million three-year Technical Cooperation Scheme. The Bureau for Technical Cooperation, also in Colombo, serves as the Council's secretariat and assists it in the performance of its functions.

Membership is open to any member of the Consultative Committee. Countries seeking to participate in the scheme first had to join the Committee (see Table 4). Subsequent changes to the Committee's procedures (in 1977) unified membership of the Colombo Plan to cover both institutions. Each participating country appoints one of its diplomats (usually the ambassador) in Colombo to represent it on the Council and pays his expenses. In the early years Canada was represented by its Trade Commissioner while those with no diplomatic missions in Colombo sent representatives from their capitals to attend the Council's meetings, especially the two policy sessions. One of these is held between June and July, at the beginning of the Colombo Plan year, to approve the bureau's budget and its report on the progress of the scheme. The second

policy meeting takes place shortly after the meeting of the Consultative Committee to discuss the latter's recommendations and to elect the president of the Council. (The position is by convention reserved for the regional members.) The director of the bureau convenes the meetings with the approval of the president, whenever necessary. He also prepares the minutes for each meeting. No quorum is specified for the Council's meetings. Since it has no powers of legislation or compulsion, its decisions, even though they are made on the basis of the unanimity convention, are non-binding except as they relate to its oversight responsibilities over the bureau. The Council could however recommend to governments measures to facilitate the operation of the scheme.⁵⁰ The United Nations Technical Assistance Board maintained close liaison with the Council as did the United States until it became a full member in January 1959.

A careful reading of the Council's original constitution, approved by the Consultative Committee in London in 1950, shows that it was expected to play a more intrusive and proactive role in the operation of the scheme. It was to 'organise the provision of technical assistance' in the form of experts to assist in training, research or development in the requesting country; training places in higher institutions and industry in donor countries; and equipment for training and research. The Council was also to investigate obstacles or difficulties in the implementation process and help remove or mitigate them. It was to determine, for the participating governments, the working conditions, remuneration and

allowances of experts and trainees, and, finally, it was to keep adequate record of the progress of the scheme.⁵¹

In practice the Council, with its bureau, performs *only* the last of these functions. The principle of bilateralism, which was in fact affirmed in the constitution, applies with equal force to both the Consultative Committee and the Council. Technical assistance, like capital aid, could be organized *only* on a government to government basis. The Council merely facilitates and records this bilateral exchange. This dissonance between constitutional stipulation and practice may be attributed to the haste with which the technical assistance programme was launched— before the principles of the Colombo Plan could be articulated and its structures created. When it began in July 1950 there was no formal institution to operate it, only a recommendation from the Sydney conference that a bureau be established in Colombo ‘to receive statements of requirements for technical assistance within the area and to attempt to match them with availabilities in member countries.’⁹ Until the bureau could be created its functions were performed by a standing committee whose primary purpose was to prepare a constitution for the bureau and submit proposals for further administrative arrangements.⁵² By transferring most of the functions it performed on behalf of the bureau to a new organ - the Council for Technical Cooperation - the standing committee created the dissonance in the constitution.

Since all the members were comfortable with the bilateral principle the Council's constitutional functions could be ignored without prejudice to the

scheme's smooth operation. It was not until the Victoria meeting in 1969 that the Consultative Committee appointed an *ad hoc* committee to revise the constitution ⁶to conform with changes in policy and in practice.⁵³ The Council's "clearing house" functions were abandoned in the new constitution. In their place the new constitution affirms its supervisory role over the information dissemination and record keeping functions of the bureau. The Council no longer "provides" or "organize[s] the provision" of technical assistance, it "promotes". It may also identify important issues in the region for consideration by the Consultative Committee and monitor the implementation of the latter's decisions by the bureau.⁵⁴ With little or no power beyond its monitoring functions the Council's usefulness may well lie in the fact that through its regular meetings it promotes the spirit of cooperation among its members.

The Colombo Plan Bureau

As noted earlier the Bureau for Technical Cooperation in South and Southeast Asia (the only permanent organ of the Colombo Plan) was established in 1951 to service the meetings of the Council for Technical Cooperation and to assist it in the discharge of its functions. When the information unit was integrated into the bureau in 1957 it was renamed the Colombo Plan Bureau. This transformed it into a record office for the whole programme, rather than merely an appendage of the Council for Technical Cooperation. The bureau issues periodic progress reports, prepares the Council's annual report, arranges

seminars and workshops, and provides information and publicity for the Plan. Its quarterly newsletter highlights the programme's aims and achievements. It is led by a director who is appointed for three years from a non-regional member country (since the Council's president is from the region).⁵⁵ The Council formally appoints whoever is put forward by the nominating country. The director controls a small budget, to which participating governments contribute equally.

A small number of specialist international officers assist the director in the bureau. The principal information officer and the information officer were appointed when the information unit was created in 1954. An adviser on intra-regional training was appointed in April 1964, and a drug adviser in August 1973. The bureau got an adviser on technical cooperation in July 1979, an economic adviser (July 1981), an adviser on development cooperation (January 1984), and a technical cooperation and training officer in May 1987. These officers are appointed by the Council, on the recommendation of the director, for two years, with a possible extension, 'when the interest of the organisation requires' of a maximum period of one year.⁵⁶

The drug adviser is the only international officer whose title does not fit easily into the activities of the bureau. The position was created when the Consultative Committee decided in 1972 (the New Delhi meeting) to launch a Drug Advisory Programme (DAP) as an expression of the members' concern over the growing incidence of drug abuse in the region. In running DAP the drug adviser is expected to 'consult with governments, assist in the organisation of

seminars, workshops and similar activities, and help develop cooperative programmes designed to eliminate the causes and to ameliorate the effects of drug abuse.⁵⁷ He also runs a DAP Fellowship Scheme and training courses for personnel from Colombo Plan countries involved in drug abuse and control. These programmes are funded through voluntary contributions, principally from the United States, Japan and Australia. Regional countries also contribute, as does the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC). The adviser coordinates DAP activities with those of international institutions and non-governmental organizations to develop a regional approach to the drug problem. One result of this was the formation in 1981 of the International Federation of Non-Government Organizations for the Prevention of Drug and Substance Abuse (IFNGO) in Malaysia. IFNGO now enjoys a Category II status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.⁵⁸ These activities notwithstanding the bureau remains, in the main, the record office for the Colombo Plan.

VENTURES INTO MULTILATERALISM

Most international organizations develop peculiar characteristics and a dynamism over time. This process of "growth" often propels them in directions, or stimulate changes, which may fall outside, or exceed, their operational profiles. Such changes may be aimed at meeting a new challenge, or directed at filling a gap which was not anticipated in the beginning. They may result from organizational necessity, or they could be in response to external stimuli. They

TABLE 6**Presidents of the Colombo Plan Council**

Date	Country	President
Dec 1950 - Oct 1953	Sri Lanka	Mr. Raju Coomaraswamy
Oct 1953 - Nov 1954	India	H.E. Shri C.C. Desai
Nov 1954 - Nov 1955	Pakistan	H.E. Haji Abdus Satter Saith
Nov 1955 - Jan 1957	Indonesia	Mr. J. D. de Fretes
Jan 1957 - Dec 1957	Burma	H.E. U. Ba Lwin
Dec 1957 - Jan 1959	Sri Lanka	Mr. Raju Coomaraswamy
Jan 1959 - Dec 1959	India	H.E. Shri Y.D. Gunadevia
Dec 1959 - March 1961	Pakistan	H.E. Mirza Hamid Hussain
March 1961 - Jan 1962	Indonesia	H.E. Asa Bafagih
Jan 1962 - Sept 1962	Burma	H.E. Situ Dr. Htin Aung
Sept 1962 - Feb 1964	Philippines	H.E. Eduardo L. Rosal
Feb 1964 - May 1965	Sri Lanka	Mr. Tilak Gooneratne
May 1965 - Feb 1966	India	H.E. Dr. Bhim Sen Sachar
Feb 1966 - March 1967	Pakistan	H.E. Enver Murad
March 1967 - Nov 1967	Burma	H.E. Wunna Kyaw Htin Sao Boonwatt
Nov 1967 - Jan 1969	Philippines	H.E. Yusup R. Abubaker
Jan 1969 - Jan 1970	Malaysia	H.E. Enche Mohammed Soviee
Jan 1970 - March 1971	Indonesia	H.E. Abdoel Hamid
March 1971 - June 1971	Maldives	H.E. Ahmed Hilmy Didi
July 1971 - July 1972	Sri Lanka	Dr. H. A. de S. Gunasekera
July 1972 - Nov 1972	India	H.E. Shri Y. K. Puri
Nov 1972 - March 1973	Pakistan	H.E. M. S. Shaikh
March 1973 - April 1974	Burma	H.E. U. Ohn Khin
April 1974 - May 1975	Philippines	H.E. Librado D. Cayco
May 1975 - June 1976	Malaysia	H.E. Mr. M. M. bin D. Mahmud

June 1976 - June 1977	Indonesia	H.E. Adlinsjah Jenie
June 1977 - Oct 1977	Bangladesh	H.E. Justice Abdul Hakim
Oct 1977 - May 1978	India	H.E. Shri Gurbachan Singh (Acting President)
Feb 1978 - Sept 1978	Sri Lanka	Dr. Lal Jayawardena
May 1978 - April 1979	Indonesia	H.E. Adlinsjah Jenie (Acting President)
April 1979 - April 1980	Thailand	H.E. Miss Ampha Bhadranawik
April 1980 - April 1981	Korea	H.E. Dr. Young Kya Yoon
April 1981 - April 1982	India	H.E. Thomas Abraham
April 1982 - April 1983	Burma	H.E. U. Maung Maung Gyi
April 1983 - June 1984	Pakistan	H.E. Bhaktiar Ali
June 1984 - June 1985	Malaysia	H.E. Anthony K. S. Yeo
June 1985 - June 1986	Indonesia	H.E. Suffri Jusuf
June 1986 - June 1987	Bangladesh	H.E. Mr. A. S. Noor Mohammad
June 1987 - June 1988	Maldives	H.E. Mr. Ahmed Abdullah
June 1988 - Sept 1988	Philippines	H.E. Mr. Antonio L. Ramirez
Sept 1988 - June 1989	Sri Lanka	Mr. Ronnie Weerakoon
June 1989 - June 1990	India	H.E. Shri L. L. Mehrotra
June 1990 -	Thailand	H.E. Mr. Apinan Pavanant

DIRECTORS OF THE COLOMBO PLAN BUREAU

Date	Country	Director	Date	Country	Director
1950	Britain	Mr. E. J. Toogood (Interim Administrator)			
Aug 1951-Sept 1953	Britain	Mr. G. M. Wilson	June 1969-Aug 1973	Canada	Brig-Gen A. B. Connelly
Sept 1953-Feb 1956	Australia	Dr. P. W. E. Curtin	Aug 1973-Dec 1975	New Zealand	Mr. I. K. McGregor
April 1956-Aug 1957	Canada	Dr. N. Keyfitz	Jan 1976-Jan 1979	Britain	Miss Lenore E. T. Storar
Aug 1957-Aug 1959	New Zealand	Mr. R. H. Wade	Jan 1979-Jan 1982	Japan	Mr. Noboro Yabata
July 1959-Dec 1961	Britain	Mr. J. K. Thompson	Jan 1982-Feb 1985	Australia	Mr. Erik Ingevics
Dec 1961-Jan 1964	Japan	Mr. S. Matsui	Feb 1985-Jan 1986	USA	Mr. Donald R. Toussaint
Jan 1964-March 1966	Australia	Mr. J. L. Allen	July 1986-July 1991	USA	Mr. Gilbert H. Sheinbaum
March 1966-June 1969	USA	Mr. D. Alan Strachan	July 1991	New Zealand	Mr. John Ryan

could also be fostered from within, either collectively or by a powerful member of the organization. Other participating countries may accept or reject, and generally react to the changes according to their particularist interests.

The Consultative Committee is no exception. We have already seen one instance of this, the establishment of DAP, a programme which could not have been anticipated in 1950. The need for it emerged in the 1970s. It was accepted because the problem it was to address affected all the members, and did not require a deviation from the fundamental principles of the Colombo Plan. Other innovations were more controversial. The Committee's ventures into multilateralism, the subject of this section, struck at the heart of the Plan's operational mechanism, and were bound to generate strong reaction, not least among the regional members. Three such ventures were initiated. Only one, the establishment of the Colombo Plan Staff College for Technician Education, was realized. It provides an example of the successful application of institutional multilateralism in a bilateral environment. The other two, initiated by the United States to promote Asian regionalism, did not materialize. One was institutional, involving the establishment of a Colombo Plan Atomic Energy Training Centre in the region. The other was functional: the Colombo Plan was to be transformed into a new organization to promote regional economic cooperation in Asia.

The college project succeeded because it could be accommodated within the existing mandate and operational profile of the Plan. There was clearly a need for it, and it did not place any strain on the organization's cohesion, even though it was

a venture into multilateralism. More importantly, it did not threaten any member's interest. On the contrary, it was beneficial to the region while its sponsors could point to it as one more example of their commitment to promoting economic and technological development in Asia. The same cannot be said about the ventures into economic and atomic multilateralism. The latter was functionally superfluous in a region of endemic poverty and underdevelopment. Channelling atomic aid through a programme designed to provide basic human needs could not but raise the suspicion of the potential beneficiaries. Success therefore required adroit diplomacy and sensitivity to Asian sentiments, but the Americans were found wanting on both counts. And to use the Plan as an instrument of regional economic cooperation would have destroyed its essence— bilateralism. It would require a fundamental transformation of the Plan and its institutions. The alternative was rejection, and it was indeed rejected. This, the first venture into multilateralism, was the Stassen Plan.

The Stassen Plan

On the last day of the Consultative Committee meeting in Ottawa (October 1954) Harold Stassen pledged an increase in American aid to the non-communist countries of Asia. As the director of the Foreign Operations Administration, FOA, (the agency in charge of the United States' mutual security programme) Stassen's appearance in Ottawa, on the second to the last day of the conference, had created some excitement and some anticipation. The conference was already abuzz with

rumours about a "Save Asia" plan in the works in Washington. The director was expected to be the harbinger of this extraordinary news but, as the Canadian hosts recorded, what he said was 'fairly routine in nature.'⁵⁹

The United States, Stassen announced, wished to apply some of the savings from the ending of the Indochina war to projects under the Colombo Plan. It was interested in regional cooperation in Asia and was considering restructuring the Colombo Plan into an Asian economic organization to handle American and western aid to the region on a multilateral basis, just as the OEEC had done in Europe for the Marshall Plan. To the disappointment of those expecting a spectacular "Save Asia" plan Stassen offered no details, emphasizing instead that the proposal was just that— a proposal. Apparently, his purpose was to notify the Asian members of the Consultative Committee of a scheme that had already been discussed extensively within the Eisenhower administration, and between American and British officials.

The American proposal, called the Stassen Plan in Colombo Plan documents⁶⁰, would appear rather familiar if we recall our earlier discussion on the Colombo Plan and the OEEC. It was simple and, sad to say, unrealistic: the Colombo Plan would be built up into an Asian economic organization, one similar in structure and function to the OEEC, to funnel American aid to the region on a multilateral basis. The new organization would perform three main functions: employ external finance - short-term credits and grants - and technical assistance to promote an integrated investment and development strategy in the region. It

would foster freer trade among the non-communist countries, and link Japan's industrial economy with the raw material producing countries of South and Southeast Asia. (It was not by accident that the United States pushed for and secured Japanese membership in the Consultative Committee at the Ottawa conference in 1954). It would have a permanent secretariat, and a central corps of technical consultants. Like the OEEC it would be in permanent session and serve as the primary agency for distributing American aid to the region.⁶¹

The Stassen Plan's crystallization can be traced to the Eisenhower administration's reaction to the defeat of the French in Indochina in 1954. Both the President and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, had a conception of Cold War geopolitics which was at best simplistic and Manichean. They saw in the defeat a potent symbol of the resurgence of communism in Asia, a threat to the strategic interests of the United States. The domino principle echoed throughout the administration forcing a reevaluation of American defence and foreign economic policy. It also focused the attention of policymakers on the needs of the Third World.⁶²

The Manila Pact (South East Asia Collective Defence Treaty) which gave birth to SEATO in September 1954 was a consequence of this. SEATO offered military deterrence but was limited as a tool against the subtler, more insidious tactics the communists appeared to have adopted following their victory in Indochina. They were now exploiting the political and economic weakness of free Asia to attain their objectives.⁶³ According to reports by the Canadian ambassador

in Washington, officials of the Eisenhower administration believed that the Cold War was entering a period of “competitive coexistence” in which economics would take primacy over overt military action. They were concerned that the rapid rate of capital formation in the Soviet Union and China was giving the Kremlin the resources to launch an extensive economic offensive in the Third World. For instance, at the sixteenth session of ECOSOC in July 1953 the Soviet Union had announced a contribution of four million rubles to the United Nation’s Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance. Its aid to China was more than the West was offering to India and other countries in the region.⁶⁴ It was offering financial and technical assistance to India for steel development (a construction contract was signed in February 1955). Under the Peking Accord of October 1954, it offered a credit of 400 million rubles to China, more technical assistance, and a pledge to withdraw its forces from Port Arthur and Sinkiang. It was playing this up as proof that, unlike the West, it was not an imperialist power. This had a lot of propaganda value, and was attracting headlines in the international media.⁶⁵ Hence, something more was needed to supplement SEATO— “something”, as *Business Week* described it, “to stamp out the underground fires of Communism before they flare[d] above ground in armed conflict, something to match the Communist promise of rapid economic development.”⁶⁶ Such was the mind-set that produced the Stassen Plan: to transform the Colombo Plan into a multilateral organization through which American aid, about \$1.7 billion of it, would launch Asia on the road to regional development!

The problem was that the plan, as conceived by Stassen, did not enjoy much support in the administration. Admittedly, all the other key agencies, especially the State Department and the National Security Council (NSC), shared the FOA's concern about the need to use America's and the West's economic might as a countervailing instrument against the Communist bloc in the Third World. Both agencies favoured increasing aid to South and Southeast Asia. But they disagreed with the FOA on the scale and dimension of such aid. State and the NSC favoured a moderate increase, certainly not to the tune of \$1.7 billion, the figure which, according to the British, Stassen claimed was already available under various pieces of legislation 'for a bold and imaginative scheme' for South and Southeast Asia. That amount breaks down as follows: \$300 million in agricultural surpluses for famine relief; \$700 million of surplus which could be sold for foreign currency; and \$700 million from the mutual security programme.⁶⁷

It may be interesting to note that this was not the first time Stassen would propose such a scheme. In 1950 he called for a "Marshall Plan for Asia".⁶⁸ In 1953 he favoured increasing economic aid to the non-communist countries opposed to signing a formal military alliance with the United States.⁶⁹ To no one's surprise, nothing came out of these proposals. All the same they offer proof of Stassen's mind-set and provide a precedent for the Stassen Plan.

On the other hand, it is impossible to ignore the fact, reported by Burton Kaufman, that on this plan at least his motives were in part self-serving. Stassen's world view differed substantially from that of his cabinet colleagues (he was from

the liberal wing of the Republican party). His "self indulgence and independent action", according to Kaufman, alienated most of his colleagues and other senior officials in the administration. In 1954 he was literally struggling to prevent the dissolution of his agency. According to the Mutual Security Act of 1954 this was due to happen in June 1955. Kaufman contends that the Stassen Plan was aimed in part at securing a new lease of life for the FOA.⁷⁰ (The FOA did get dissolved, its functions transferred to a new agency, the International Cooperation Administration, ICA.) In any case, in January 1955, Secretary Dulles announced that the administration would increase aid to Asia but definitely not on the scale of the Marshall Plan. In the end \$200 million was appropriated for what became known as the President's Fund for Asian Economic Development, otherwise known as the Stassen Plan.

Our interest in this scheme is not in the game of numbers as it was played out in the inner sanctums of Washington officialdom. It is rather in the choice of the Colombo Plan as its implementation mechanism. What the United States wanted was "a vehicle through which, in view of the sensitivities of the countries of Southeast Asia particularly, aid will be politically more acceptable and less fraught with the danger of appearing to seek the domination of the recipient countries."⁷¹ Such a vehicle could be an existing organization, adapted for the scheme's purpose, or a new one could be created from scratch. Expediency made the first option attractive. The choice was among three existing organizations— ECAFE, SEATO and the Colombo Plan. ECAFE was ruled out immediately because it was

‘merely a talking shop.’ Moreover the Soviets were likely to ‘obstruct proposals designed to protect the free world against communism.’⁷²

SEATO received considerable attention. After all, the very factors which gave birth to it also engendered the Stassen Plan. It was inevitable that the two would cross paths. Its Asian members were already calling for action under the Manila Treaty's Article 3 which expressed the desire of the signatories to promote economic development and a higher standard of living. For instance, Pakistan, supported by Thailand and the Philippines, was demanding increased aid to meet the extra burden which SEATO membership imposed on the Asian countries. The Philippines was advancing the theory that SEATO's Asian members should have a privileged access to western aid— a proposition which the British opposed because it was ‘certain to arouse resentment among the non-signatories and intensify their suspicions both of the objects of the Manila Treaty itself and of the whole motives behind the aid programmes of the western nations.’⁹ The Philippine request, the British argued, would extend into the economic field the divisions which SEATO had created in the political and military field. Any aid channelled through SEATO on the basis of Article 3 could not be divorced from military commitments, and would therefore ‘be regarded as having very positive "strings" attached.’⁹ Such aid would not induce other Asian countries whose economic development was equally important for regional stability to join a western military alliance.⁷³

These arguments closed the SEATO route, leaving only the Colombo Plan. In contrast to SEATO and ECAFE, the advantages of using the Colombo Plan were

quite obvious. All the neutralist countries of Asia, countries like India, Ceylon and Burma, whose participation was deemed essential to attaining the objectives of the Stassen Plan, were already in the Colombo Plan. With the recent admission of Japan, the Philippines and Thailand most of the countries of South and Southeast Asia were now in association with the West— to the exclusion of any communist country. The Colombo Plan was the first, and so far, the only organization to have done so. It had a good image in Asia and had engendered goodwill for the West in the region. Building on it, the Foreign Office noted, would avoid all the political difficulties associated with other organizations, or even of a new one.⁷⁴

Still the British cautioned against transplanting wholesale the OEEC model into a region whose problems, political atmosphere and the administrative abilities of its governments were totally different from that of Europe. Even if the western donors were willing to divest themselves of the control over their aid (which they were not) the Asian countries, in the opinion of Her Majesty's government, could not possibly do the allocations themselves. The OEEC model was therefore impracticable.⁷⁵ The Canadians shared these concerns. They were apprehensive that the Americans might be attempting to introduce an integration formula similar to the one which they had unsuccessfully sponsored in the OEEC.⁹ The ambassador to Washington warned that a "Pacific OEEC" (the label the Canadians gave the Stassen Plan), could damage Canada's commercial interests in South and Southeast Asia. On the other hand the Canadians supported the Plan's objective - that of strengthening Asia against communism - and chose in the end merely to

draw the attention of the State Department to the limitations of duplicating the OEEC in Asia.⁷⁶

London and Ottawa were uncomfortable with the Stassen Plan's OEEC model because it would transform the Colombo Plan into an instrument of functional multilateralism. Neither favoured abandoning the operating principles of the Colombo Plan, especially bilateralism. The British in fact insisted on this. If the Colombo Plan was to become the vehicle for the Stassen Plan it "must provide for direct bilateral negotiations between contributors and recipients. . . the contributors should retain control over the time and manner of the assistance they give." To meet the scheme's emphasis on regionalism, they proposed establishing a "common advisory and technical staff", drawn mostly from western countries, which would be familiar with the problems of the region, and could conduct a technical examination of applications for assistance. This new body would be grafted on the existing structures of the Colombo Plan. To avoid endangering the goodwill which the Colombo Plan had already created, any changes to it for the purpose of the Stassen Plan should be guided by the views of the Asian countries themselves, the British advised. This was the only way to avoid charges of American or British "imperialism".⁷⁷

The Americans did not disagree with the issues raised by the British. Both Stassen and Dulles had already concluded in favour of using the Colombo Plan as the implementation machinery for the new scheme, and on the need to seek the views and the support of the Asian countries. The announcement in Ottawa was,

as we noted previously, to put the Asian states on notice. The next step was consultation. Between February 21 and March 13, 1955, Stassen and officials from State, Treasury and Commerce Departments undertook a tour of seven Asian countries— Thailand, India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Philippines, Korea and Japan (in that order). The trip revealed that although the Asian countries desired more aid they were not very enthusiastic about a regional organization. The delegation concluded that the impulse to make such an organization effective would have to come from the United States and its western allies ‘once the initial steps are [were] initiated by Asian members.’⁹⁷⁸

India did initiate the first step by convening a meeting of the Asian members of the Colombo Plan to consider the Stassen Plan. This was the Simla conference, held in Simla, India, from May 9 - 13, 1955. It was attended by Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaya, North Borneo and Sarawak. Only Burma and Ceylon declined the invitation. The conference was, strictly speaking, a meeting of officials— it could not make decisions, only recommendations. All the same its conclusions are instructive and, for the Stassen Plan, devastating:

the common objective of regional economic development would not be furthered by the establishment of a regional organ such as the OEEC;

a clear preference was expressed that country aid programs should be on a bilateral basis;

funds likely to be available were not sufficient to provide seasonal credit to finance trade;

the conference welcomed the allocation of aid funds within bilateral country programs to projects having a regional significance;

no need was found for additional European countries to have membership in the Colombo Plan or for the OEEC to have observer status.⁷⁹

The Simla conference buried the Stassen Plan. Multilateralism had little attraction for the Asian countries and so the Colombo Plan did not become a vehicle for Asian regionalism. It continued as before, a loose organization operating on the principle of bilateralism. The Stassen Plan fizzled out much like its architect's other proposals.

Colombo Plan Atomic Energy Training Centre

The failure of Stassen's plan did not stop his successor, John B. Hollister, director of the International Cooperation Administration (ICA), the new American aid agency, from initiating his own programme for Asian regionalism— a proposal to establish a Colombo Plan Atomic Energy Training Centre. The scheme was the practical expression of the ideals outlined by President Eisenhower in his atoms-for-peace speech to the United Nations on December 8, 1953. Although the programme outlined in the speech did have definite strategic goals i.e., that of ‘delaying the presumed Soviet march toward a nuclear capability that could knock out U.S. industrial capacity in a war’, it also embodied certain normative principles— international cooperation, assistance to less developed countries, and technological advancement for the benefit of humanity.⁸⁰ The President's speech gave birth to the International Atomic Energy Agency, a series of bilateral atoms for peace agreements between the U.S. and its ANZUS, SEATO, and CENTO allies, and, of course, the venture into atomic multilateralism.

On October 6, 1955, the State Department, which regulated the ICA's operations, asked for the support of the British government to promote an atomic energy scheme for the Asian Colombo Plan countries.⁸¹ Hollister (as head of the U.S. delegation) did make the offer on October 20, at the Consultative Committee meeting then holding in Singapore. The United States, he announced, was willing to establish and contribute substantially to an Asian nuclear centre which could make available more extensive facilities to Colombo Plan countries than was possible under limited bilateral agreements. If the Asian countries were willing to support it, the U.S. would consider further steps to implement the project, including the question of location. The objectives of the scheme, the State Department explained subsequently, was (1) to help the friendly nations of Asia to acquire knowledge and experience in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and (2) strengthen Asian regional development and cooperation.⁸²

The British government responded very favourably to the scheme. Some Foreign Office officials in charge of the Asian desk were in fact quite ecstatic. 'A gift of an atomic reactor', the Commissioner General in Southeast Asia enthused, 'would fire the imagination of the [Asian] public and demonstrate more strikingly than any other single project American interest. . .and confidence in their future.'⁸³ In a memorandum to S. T. Charles of the Treasury, Tomlinson echoed the Commissioner General's sentiments: 'We for our part would see very great advantage in associating ourselves practically with the United States project. Atomic energy is the sort of thing that catches the imagination, and an all-out effort

with the Asians would yield considerable political benefits, not the least of which would consist in giving the Colombo Plan something spectacular to do.⁹⁸⁴ Her Majesty's government was willing, the Americans were informed, to contribute materially to the project provided it received the support of the Asian countries.⁸⁵

What killed British enthusiasm was the choice of location for the scheme. On October 17, three days before Hollister made his announcement, he informed Lord Reading, the British delegate to the Consultative Committee meeting, that the administration had decided on the Philippines rather than Ceylon, the site originally mooted by the State Department.⁸⁶ Hollister's claim in Singapore that the issue of location was still open for discussion was therefore untrue. But this was the least of the problems created by the decision.

The Philippines was a SEATO member and any project associated with that organization immediately took on a strategic and political connotation. SEATO had a polarizing effect in Asia and it was to avoid this that it was rejected, largely on the advice of the British government, in favour of the Colombo Plan as the implementation mechanism for the Stassen Plan. The British offered similar advice to Hollister: placing 'the Centre in a SEATO country [was] likely to arouse deep suspicion among the non-SEATO Asian members of the Colombo Plan and diminish its general utility in Asian eyes.'⁹ It was likely to detract from 'the disinterestedness which [had] hitherto characterised the Colombo Plan.'⁹⁸⁷

This time the advice was ignored. Hollister and other officials of the administration rejected the British argument that most Colombo Plan countries

would prefer a site in a non-SEATO country. Their stubborn refusal to consider alternative locations led the British ambassador, Sir H. Graves, to quip, in exasperation, that ‘on questions affecting the Philippines, the Americans' mind are hardly open to persuasion’.⁸⁸ Faced with a choice between a SEATO and a non-SEATO country the Eisenhower administration decided on the basis of American strategic interests. This may explain why Walter S. Robertson, Assistant Under-Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs took ‘great offence’ when he was informed about India's objection to the choice of the Philippines. ‘If India now claimed that S.E.A.T.O. States were not fit locations for the atomic centre’, he is reported to have exploded, ‘the State Department would wish to meet the issue head-on.’ His views on India, Graves noted, were ‘exceptionally choleric.’⁸⁹

Head-on collisions are of course often fatal, and this one was no exception. It doomed the project even before it began. The American insistence on a particular location without consultation was at variance with the operating spirit of the Colombo Plan. The organization had succeeded in gaining acceptance in Asia because its economic orientation and organizational principles - unanimity, informality, and consultation - masked its strategic purpose. The fact that American action, some will say diplomatic folly, was pushing strategic issues to the fore made the western Commonwealth countries uncomfortable; it aroused the suspicion and sensitivity of the Asian countries. A.M. MacKintosh of the Colonial Office captured the import of this in a letter to S.T. Charles of the Treasury:

We fear that they [the Americans] may have seriously under-estimated the vigorous disappointment with which the decision to fix upon Manila will be greeted, and that no

matter how sincere may be their intentions to make this a genuine Colombo Plan project it may be felt that arguments of security and strategy have prevailed rather than that Manila has any intrinsic advantages over, say, Ceylon or Singapore. If these feelings predominate - and this is not unlikely since we to some extent share them ourselves - it is not impossible that the scheme will fall through as a Colombo Plan project, or else be so little more than a purely U.S./Philippine affair that we might be ill advised to associate ourselves with it too closely.⁹⁰

Rather than take action to counteract the impressions the project's location had generated American officials presented what was clearly a disingenuous and unconvincing explanation— the excellent educational facilities available in the Philippines. But as the British ambassador in Manila noted, the Philippines' so-called educational standards were ‘shockingly low’. When Asian Commonwealth students at the University of the Philippines, the best in the country, were asked how that institution compared with others in Pakistan and Ceylon, ‘they have only been able to smile.’⁹¹

If the Americans, strange as it may seem, were convinced of the power of this explanation, the Asians were not, and neither were the western Commonwealth governments. Most of the Asian countries, but in particular, Ceylon, Japan, Pakistan, Singapore, and Thailand, had made strong representations to host the centre and could hardly be expected to accept the implication of the U.S. explanation i.e., that their educational facilities were not as good as those of the Philippines. How was a country such as India, which in the mid 1950s had a considerable scientific and technical capability, with a nuclear programme directed by the eminent physicist , Dr. Homi Bhabha, to react to the American explanation? In a region in which neutrality and nonalignment were the preeminent foreign policy principles, where governments were highly sensitive to, and suspicious of aid

strings, the least the Americans could have done was to endorse a Foreign Office suggestion to dispatch an ICA technical mission to all the Asian countries as a means to demonstrating that their claims had received full consideration. The State Department rejected this and chose instead to instruct its diplomats in the region to explain the Philippines' technical suitability to Colombo Plan governments.⁹²

If ever there was any policy decision calculated to attract minimum returns this one came very close. In Britain officials began to warn against allowing U.S. methods to mess up the Colombo Plan's cooperative spirit.⁹³ Pakistan decided to concentrate on its bilateral arrangements with both the United Kingdom and the United States. It intensified its negotiations with Washington for the establishment of a research reactor under the U.S./Pakistan atomic energy agreement.⁹⁴ On April 28, 1956, India signed a nuclear agreement with Canada under which Canada offered, as part of its Colombo Plan aid, to help India build a research reactor, the so-called Canada-India Reactor or CIR.⁹⁵

It was against this backdrop that the State Department decided, eventually, to send a survey team from the Brookhaven National Laboratories, a quasi-private American scientific institution, to explain the functions of the Asian nuclear centre to Asian governments. The team toured the region in May 1956 and was later to admit that it had not realised 'just how "un-Asian" the Philippines appear[ed] to other countries in the area.'⁹ The question of location made its task an impossible one.⁹⁶

In a move reminiscent of a game of atomic poker India invited Burma, Ceylon, Egypt, and Indonesia to a meeting in Bombay, on July 24 and 25 (shortly after the survey team had passed through the region), to discuss closer cooperation in nuclear energy. Reports of the meeting passed to the British ambassador in Rangoon by the director of Burma's Atomic Research Institute provide us with additional insights into India's attitude to the nuclear centre. The project, the Indians asserted, was calculated solely to enhance American prestige and was certain to be an obstacle to the aspirations of the Asian countries to develop independent nuclear programmes. Other Asian countries would do well to follow the Indian example and launch their own programmes, tailored to meet their specific needs. Asian countries did not have the resources to pursue an effective and meaningful research programme of their own while simultaneously participating in the American project. If they did they would soon discover that they were engaged in work which was not only irrelevant to their needs but one over which they had little control. If the Asian countries found it necessary to seek the assistance of western nations it was better to send their trainees to London and Washington and not to a half-way house in the Philippines.⁹⁷ It is hardly surprising that the State Department saw the meeting as an attempt by the Indians to drum up opposition to the nuclear centre.⁹⁸

The United States launched its counter move at the Consultative Committee meeting in Wellington in December with a proposal to establish a working group to discuss the problems associated with the centre.⁹⁹ The following May, the State Department invited Colombo Plan countries to send representatives to a two-week

working group meeting in Washington beginning on July 8.¹⁰⁰ The first few days of the Washington meeting revealed the extent of opposition to the project. It is perhaps better to allow M.I. Michaels, the British delegate, to describe the situation.

On the first day, it was clear that the Indians were strongly opposed to the American conception and that they would carry Ceylon with them. . . On the following morning the Indonesians showed their dislike of the scheme and then by an unfortunate turn of events the Canadian, New Zealander and myself spoke almost one after the other. Since each of us made clear that we would not be able to provide either men or money for the Centre and that we were not happy about the form of the proposed scheme, the Americans may have been left with the impression that there had been some prior Commonwealth discussions behind the scenes.¹⁰¹

At subsequent plenary sessions Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom made statements favouring a bilateral over a multilateral approach. Both Australia and New Zealand had by then, on June 22 and June 13, 1956, respectively, signed bilateral atomic energy agreements with the United States. Since most Asian countries were also opposed to the centre it appeared that, as with the Stassen proposal, the Colombo Plan's operating principle - bilateralism - reasserted itself. Members favoured an independent course in atomic energy development and were unwilling to support attempts to push the Plan into ventures in multilateralism. By the time the Washington meeting ended the Americans were beginning to admit in private conversations with other western delegates that they were considering abandoning the scheme.¹⁰²

Delegates to the Consultative Committee meeting in Saigon in October expected the Americans to raise the subject, but they did not. The State Department briefing paper for the delegation attending the 1958 meeting recorded the final decision on Hollister's scheme: "the U.S. suggestion was subsequently dropped

because the Asians, while interested, were not prepared to financially support the proposed center.⁹¹⁰³ The Eisenhower administration had apparently decided to drop the proposal to establish an Asian nuclear centre quietly. Its second venture into multilateralism through the instrumentality of the Colombo Plan also failed, thanks in large measure to its diplomatic imprudence.

The Colombo Plan Staff College for Technician Education

The proposal to establish a regional centre for technician education emerged from the discussion of the special topic for the Consultative Committee's meeting in New Delhi in 1972. The topic "The Loss of Skilled Personnel from Developing Countries: Its Incidence, Effects and Measures for Control" explored the problems and consequences of the "brain-drain" (the emigration of skilled labour from what the Committee called talent-losing to talent-gaining countries) on the Colombo Plan region. The discussions ended with a recommendation to establish a Colombo Plan Staff College for Technician Education in Singapore. (Was the Committee attempting to produce more experts who could emigrate to the talent-gaining countries?) A Draft Memorandum of Understanding, prepared by the Colombo Plan Bureau for consideration by participating governments, was adopted at the Wellington meeting in 1973.¹⁰⁴ A constitution for the college was adopted at a special meeting in Singapore on April 22, 1974. It received its final approval at the 24th Consultative Committee. In March 1975 the college opened its doors for business. It was, the Committee recorded proudly, "the Colombo Plan's first ever

multilateral institution.⁹ The adviser on intra-regional technician training was directed, thereafter, to move from Colombo to Singapore.¹⁰⁵

The college's constitution states its purposes as follows: "to assist the member countries of the Colombo Plan in the improvement of the quality of technician education and training in the countries of the region". It is to provide programmes in staff development and training, advisory and resource service, conduct research, and serve as a regional forum for discussions on technician education. Its programmes and facilities are to be made available to all participating countries on an equitable basis. It is an autonomous regional institution with a governing board comprising one representative from each country, with the directors of the bureau and the college as *ex-officio* members. The board is expected to conduct its business in accordance with the cooperative spirit of the Colombo Plan, maintain close liaison with the Council, and submit an annual report on the college's activities to the Consultative Committee.¹⁰⁶

The operating costs, fellowships and core faculty are met through contributions by member countries, on a pro-rata basis. For example, for the financial year 1984-85 Japan made the highest contribution, US\$56,572. Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States each contributed US\$47,805. India, Indonesia, Iran, South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand contributed US\$36,543. Papua New Guinea paid US\$18,266 while the least developed members - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, Fiji, Maldives, and Nepal - each contributed US\$1,710.¹⁰⁷ The college also

receives aid for fellowships from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Education while individual governments sometimes finance full time faculty experts for a year or short-term visiting specialists. In 1987 the college was relocated to the Philippines where the heads of member countries' diplomatic missions in Manila constitute the governing board.

Conclusion

The Colombo Plan's very peculiar architecture distinguishes it from other multilateral or international institutions. It is called a "plan" even though it does not possess any of the features normally associated with plans. It is rather like a shell for an aid scheme operating on the basis of the bilateral principle. Yet its membership is multi-national. Structurally, its institutions - the Consultative Committee and the Council for Technical Cooperation - lack any organizational coherence. Functionally they lack executive authority; their procedures are based on informality, consultation, and unanimity. These peculiarities were accepted by all the members from the outset because they offered advantages both to the programme's western sponsors and to the Asian countries. By masking the Plan's strategic purpose they neutralized the fear and suspicion which the Asian states had about the "strings" attached to western aid. They offered the western countries an organizational medium to promote the containment of communism in the Asia/Pacific region.

The ventures into institutional and functional multilateralism had the potential to derail this delicate balance. The college project succeeded because it was the least destabilising. It was strategically neutral. It was difficult to attribute any political purpose to it. At least this was not immediately apparent. Unlike the other ventures it did not require a radical transformation of the Plan's organizational and operating principles. It was also functionally useful to the Asian countries. Like other Colombo Plan projects it was designed as a self-help and mutual assistance venture. Its purpose - to train Asian technicians - could be justified within the operating mandate of the Plan. In essence, it was a form of technical assistance.

The Stassen Plan (or non-plan) and the Asian nuclear centre project did not fit this paradigm. Both required organizational centralization and a multilateral mechanism, the very antithesis of the Colombo Plan. These changes, to paraphrase the epigraph at the beginning of the chapter, were likely to overload the structure and bring about its collapse. Moreover, the strings attached to them were too visible. The fact that the initiative for the two schemes came from outside the region made their strategic purpose apparent. Whereas the decision to establish the college for Asian technicians was made within the institutional framework of the Consultative Committee, by *all* its members, the Stassen non-plan and the nuclear centre were to be foisted on the Colombo Plan by the United States. The Asian countries were naturally suspicious especially when American diplomacy proved to be so inept, tactless and insensitive. The United Kingdom and other western Commonwealth countries were also uncomfortable with the fact that the ventures

could place in jeopardy the goodwill which the Colombo Plan had generated for the West in Asia. Commonwealth states, the original architects of the Plan, found it necessary to preserve its operational essence. This was after all what gave the programme its strength and enduring quality. The need to protect it from the American ventures into multilateralism doomed the Stassen Plan and the Asian nuclear centre project. The Colombo Plan remained firmly rooted in the traditions of the Commonwealth.

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forum for an exchange of views on current specific development problems, including bilateral aid matters which delegates may wish to discuss informally amongst themselves; (5) to review the activities of the Colombo Plan Council, the Colombo Plan Bureau and the Colombo Plan Staff College for Technician Education; and (6) to take decisions about the organization of Consultative Committee proceedings and other questions relating to the Colombo Plan.

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37. See **Meetings in Wellington of the Consultative Committee, 1956**, p. 185; **Eleventh Annual Report of the Consultative Committee, Melbourne, November 1962**, Cmnd. 1928. (London: HMSO, 1962), pp. 7-8.
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The Colombo Plan is undoubtedly a classic example of the victory of form over function, of appearances over substance. Yet it has survived while SEATO (and CENTO in the Near East), the other international institution which linked the West with Asia, and shared membership with the Plan, has disintegrated. In the Cold War competition for influence in the Asia/Pacific region the Plan's unique architecture, its organizational contradiction, offered the West a useful and enduring medium for the pursuit of its geopolitical goals.

The Plan's design reflects its origins in the Commonwealth. In a postwar international system in which Britain was now a secondary power (a senile state, as the Japanese say) there were severe limitations on its ability to influence the behaviour of states, even its former colonies. Informal structures and channels were the *only* means through which Her Majesty's government could exercise influence. (It took the postwar Labour government time to admit this.) These were what made the accretion of the Commonwealth's membership possible. The same organizational principles made the Colombo Plan acceptable to the participating countries. The fact that American finance was deemed essential to the realization of the Plan's objective merely reinforced what was already inherent in its architecture (and that of the Commonwealth)— the limits of British power and influence.

How should the Colombo Plan's peculiar structure, its inherent paradox, its organizational and operating principles, be assessed? Does the fact that the programme has endured for more than four decades attest to the efficacy of this structural paradox? Is this why most of the countries in the Asia/Pacific region (with the exception of communist Vietnam) have retained their membership? Why did the Commonwealth take the initiative in establishing the programme, and to what purpose?

Colombo Plan: Weapon Against Reds

“The Colombo Plan was premised on the relationship between misery and poverty and communism”, Professor Robert Bothwell asserts in his book Nucleus.¹ In an article published in the *Financial Post* of November 10, 1951, Nik Cavell, the administrator of Canada's Colombo Plan aid, explained the rationale for the programme thus: “The Colombo Plan was created to help improve the living standards of these [Asian] people . . . We have a duty . . . to see that they do not fall, through ignorance and poverty into the ever open lap of Mr. Stalin.”⁹ The article was titled appropriately “Colombo Plan: Weapon Against Reds.” Bothwell's conclusion, and Cavell's explanation, capture the central argument of this thesis— that the Colombo Plan was a weapon against communism. It was the Commonwealth's contribution to western efforts to contain communism in South and Southeast Asia in the early Cold War.

The Plan was initiated at a time when the United States, the leader of the “free world” and the driving force behind containment, was not fully engaged in the region. Until the outbreak of the Korean War the Truman administration regarded South Asia as the strategic responsibility of the United Kingdom. Its efforts in the region were concentrated on Japan, the Philippines and support for the actions of its European allies, principally the United Kingdom in South and Southeast Asia and France in Indochina. The victory of communism in China in the fall of 1949 did not produce any immediate or radical change in American policy towards the region. Policy analysts like George Kennan in the State Department and others in the CIA saw in China the possibility of the emergence of “Tito” tendencies along the lines of the breach in the Soviet bloc created by President Tito of Yugoslavia in 1948. China’s economic and military weakness also made it unlikely for it to pose any immediate threat to the vital interests of the United States. As the 1940s came to a close the prevailing view in Washington was that South and Southeast Asia was important but not vital to the security of the United States.

In the context of Cold War geopolitics the strategic equation in the Asia/Pacific theatre was highly fluid. Unlike Europe there was no *modus vivendi* or mutually acceptable spheres of influence in the region. Whereas containment had by the late forties established a balance of power in Europe, in Asia there was a strategic vacuum created in part by the unravelling of the European empires. Local and international communism found a fertile ground to fester in

this vacuum. Widespread poverty and underdevelopment, rapidly expanding population, the strong sense of nationalism and anti-colonial and anti-imperial sentiment together formed a witch's brew on which communism could feed. Many Asians, liberated from colonial control, found communism with its promise of a socialist eldorado - rapid economic development and the eradication of poverty - very attractive. Communist insurgents were already active in Malaya, Indonesia, Burma, and Indochina. In August 1949 communists in Australia engineered a strike by 600,000 workers, paralysing all industrial activity. Marxist parties were serious contenders for power in Ceylon. India had a strong communist party, and similar cells were active in New Zealand, in the Philippines, and in other countries in the area.

The victory of communism in China gave momentum to the activities of communists throughout the area, generating a corresponding increase in regional tension. Since China could justifiably describe Southeast Asia within its strategic and security orbit its efforts at destabilization were likely to be concentrated in that arena. The regime in Beijing could exploit its links with the Chinese communities scattered throughout the region (as it was doing in Indonesia and Malaya) to subvert its non-communist neighbours. It could, if it chose, subject them to irredentist pressures. In short, communism posed a serious threat to regional stability, and to the security of the non-communist states in the region, even if it was yet to impinge directly on America's vital interests. Commonwealth countries, especially Australia and the United

Kingdom, with vital economic and strategic interests in the region, could not ignore this reality.

The Menzies government that took power in Canberra in December 1949 formulated its foreign policy principles around Australia's geography and regional geopolitics. "We are indeed a Pacific Power", Percy Spender, its minister for external affairs, asserted before parliament. "We have deep and far reaching interests in the Pacific. We have similar interests, strategic and otherwise, in the South and South-East Asian area. No nation can escape its geography. This is an axiom which should be written deep into the mind of every Australian." As a Pacific power Australia had to take measures to counteract the threat posed by communism, and China in particular, to regional stability, and to its own security. Its security and economic interests required assisting the non-communist countries in the region to defend themselves "against the effective penetration of Communist imperialism."²

The instruments which the government employed to translate its principles into concrete action were military and economic. The first led to the creation of ANZUS which extended America's security umbrella over Australia and New Zealand. The economic instrument gave rise to the Colombo Plan which Spender proposed at the Commonwealth foreign ministers' conference in Colombo in January 1950. The fact that Australia's policy had a regional focus explains why membership in the Plan was not restricted to the Commonwealth alone but was extended to all the non-communist states in the Asia/Pacific

region. It also underlines the importance which Canberra attached to American participation. While ANZUS shielded Australia from any military threat Washington's economic power could be deployed to promote Canberra's objective in the Colombo Plan— regional stability. The Plan received the support of all the western and Asian Commonwealth countries (minus South Africa) because even those like Canada which had no strategic interests in the region shared the Menzies government's concern about communism. And none could ignore the fact that a politically stable region with access to development aid would offer extensive opportunities for commerce.

The interaction of strategic issues with economics was what made the Colombo Plan such a useful instrument of British policy. The Attlee government's determination to maintain Britain's status as a world power, its desire to retain and possibly extend the country's residual influence in South and Southeast Asia, the need to promote economic development in the region to counteract the growing threat of communism, the limitations imposed on these efforts by Britain's economic weakness, and the problem of the sterling balances, found their conjuncture in the Colombo Plan. The programme, with its promise of American aid to the Commonwealth countries in South Asia, offered a means to resolve the contradiction between Britain's strategic goals and its economic weakness. Such aid could provide some relief from the burden of the sterling balances, and allow Britain to pursue its strategic goals in the region.

Not unexpectedly, Her Majesty's government was actively involved in the establishment of the programme, and in the expansion of its membership.

Britain and, to a limited extent, Australia played the key role in the diplomatic game to win the support of the United States and the non-Commonwealth states in the Asian/Pacific region for the Plan. Still, it would be wrong to attribute the success of the politics of expansion to the astuteness of British diplomacy, or even of British influence. The United States' decision to participate in the programme was in response to the strategic issues raised by the invasion of South Korea by communist North Korea. The conflict raised the strategic profile of Asia in Washington, transforming the region from an *important* to a *vital* arena of the Cold War. In this new dynamic, Asian countries, especially those in the Indian subcontinent which had hitherto received little attention and aid from Washington, became potential recipients of American aid. Since the key states in the subregion, India, Pakistan, and Ceylon, were also the Commonwealth members whose development needs were the object of the Colombo Plan, the United States decided to participate in the programme. The Plan offered Washington a convenient avenue to promote its interests in South Asia.

All the non-communist countries which accepted membership in the Plan's implementation machinery, the Consultative Committee, did so because they shared the West's analysis of the dialectic between poverty and communism. They needed aid to promote development. Their suspicion of the

strings attached to aid, their anxiety about the political price they would have to pay for western aid, was allayed by the Plan's distinctive feature— its peculiar architecture.

In spite of its multi-national membership the Plan operated on the basis of the bilateral principle. Structurally and functionally, it lacked any centralized mechanism or a coherent organizational framework. Its operations were based on such Commonwealth principles as consultation, informality and unanimity. The fact that the members, at least in theory, were not divided into donors and recipients, but were all supposedly involved in a cooperative, self-help and mutual assistance endeavour to promote development in the region made the Plan acceptable to most Asian countries, even those like Burma and Indonesia with strong neutralist policies. By the time the politics of expansion had run its course the Colombo Plan had twenty-six participants, five western nations and twenty-one Asia/Pacific states: Afghanistan; Australia; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Cambodia; Canada; Fiji; India; Indonesia; Iran; Japan; Korea, Republic of; Laos; Malaysia; Maldives; Myanmmar (Burma); Nepal; New Zealand; Pakistan; Papua New Guinea; the Philippines; Singapore; Sri Lanka; Thailand; the United Kingdom and the United States.

A Success Story?

Can the Colombo Plan be described as a success story? Is the Plan's extensive membership an indication of this? Is the fact that it has endured for

more than four decades a measure of its success? How does one assess the success or otherwise of a programme with such broad and amorphous objectives as political stability and economic development; one whose modus operandi was bilateral, with little or no input from its implementation machinery— the Consultative Committee? How can one determine the significance of Colombo Plan “aid” to the development of the economies of its Asian members if aid was negotiated and offered through bilateral channels?

Should the parameters for such an assessment be political or economic, or both? Should the conclusion reflect the expectations of the western members, or those of Asia? The western nations who sponsored the programme were after all motivated primarily by politics— to contain communism by providing assistance to the economic development efforts of the Asian countries. Economic development was for them a means to an end, whereas for the Asians it was the goal. Have both group of nations achieved their objectives?

According to figures presented in the Consultative Committee’s annual reports the aid that the western donors have provided their Colombo Plan partners is quite substantial (see Table 7). Yet as with all statistical data, the figures may not tell the whole story. They include export credits, loans, grants, food aid, technical assistance, sterling balances, and assistance to Britain’s territories under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act. World Bank loans and contributions to such multilateral institutions as the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme have been reported and

are recorded in the Consultative Committee's annual reports as Colombo Plan aid.

As R.H. Scott of the Foreign Office noted in 1951 "any contribution from outside sources. . . automatically ranks as a contribution towards the Colombo Plan."³ And so Britain's contribution to the Asian Commonwealth countries' first six-year programmes was in the form of releases of their sterling balances. India was to get about £210 million, Pakistan about £60 million, Ceylon about £42 million while the non-Commonwealth states were expected to receive about £30 million over six years. (By way of contrast Canada appropriated \$25 million for capital aid and \$400,000 for technical assistance for the first year of the programme, and equivalent amounts in subsequent years. Australia pledged £25 million for six years, and New Zealand £3.5 million).⁴ Would Her Majesty's government have withheld the balances if there was no Colombo Plan? Can the balances be described as aid when they belonged to the Asian countries in the first instance? The United States had no specific appropriations for the Colombo Plan. It offered its aid through its various agencies and programmes – the ECA, TCA, ICA, FOA, Food for Peace (Public Law 480), A.I.D. – but reported this to the Consultative Committee as Colombo Plan aid if the recipient country was a member.

These aid profiles point to some of the peculiarities of the Plan's architecture, which not only distinguish it from other international organizations, but make it almost impossible to arrive at a definitive conclusion on the

programme's contributions and achievements. The greatest difficulty in this regard arises from the operation of the bilateral principle. If aid was offered bilaterally, did the Consultative Committee facilitate this exchange? The evidence, as adduced in the thesis, is that it had no input whatsoever in the process.

The fact that the Committee's annual meetings provided a forum where the donors and the recipients could interact informally is noteworthy, but hardly relevant to the process of negotiation which was carried out through normal diplomatic channels. This being so, even if we accept, as the Asian countries did, that western aid in its various forms, including the sterling balances, constituted Colombo Plan aid, it hardly follows that the aid was offered because of the Plan. Such a proposition would at best be conjectural, not a priori. In short it is impossible to determine the extent to which the existence of the Plan facilitated the bilateral exchange.

A more useful index of the Colombo Plan's contribution to the development of Asia is in the area of technical assistance. As the figures in tables 8 and 9 demonstrate numerous Asians have received training in western institutions, and a substantial number of Western experts have been dispatched to the region. There is no doubt that this form of aid resulted directly from the existence of the Colombo Plan. Put differently, the donors offered this assistance because the Colombo Plan provided the framework through which they could do so. And, more importantly, it did not require much capital outlay. (When it started

in 1950 the total commitment over the first three years was £8 million sterling). Not surprisingly, it is the only part of the programme to which the Asian countries themselves could make direct contributions; where they could feature as donors and not merely recipients of western aid. Technical assistance offered the means to actualize the Plan's theoretical framework— self-help and mutual aid. It made the whole venture worthwhile to the Asian countries, and may therefore have contributed significantly to the programme's durability. It is not by accident that the Colombo Plan's permanent institutions, the bureau in Colombo and the college for technician training in the Philippines, deal with technical assistance. Still, even if the technical assistance programme is described as a success, its impact on the economic development of Asia is unquantifiable, like much else in the Colombo Plan.

It is rather difficult to attach any serious purpose or significance to a programme in which the United States and Iran (two mutually antagonistic states) were expected to cooperate in a mutual aid venture; one which could accommodate the murderous Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia (1975-1979). The Plan's enduring quality may also be a function of institutional inertia. If the Consultative Committee plays no role whatsoever in the bilateral exchange its continued existence may be a measure of its insignificance— the Plan has survived because it imposes so little burden on the members.

TABLE 7**AGGREGATE DISBURSEMENTS BY THE MAJOR DONORS TO
THE COLOMBO PLAN, 1950 - 1970**

Australia	\$A 283,187,400*
Canada	\$US 919,000,000*
New Zealand	\$NZ 37,000,000 [∧]
United Kingdom	\$US 1,767,000,000 [∇]
United States	\$US 27,854,400,000 [♣]

* Figure includes capital assistance (grants, loans, export credit), technical assistance, and food aid.

[∧] Figure is for capital aid and technical assistance.

[∇] Figure includes sterling balances releases, grants, loans, export credit, and technical assistance.

[♣] Figure includes development loans, technical assistance, supporting assistance, Food for Peace, Peace Corps, and Export-Import Bank loans.

Source: ***Eighteenth Annual Report of the Consultative Committee, Manila, February 1971*** (Colombo: Colombo Plan Bureau, 1971), pp. 367-467.

TABLE 8**COLOMBO PLAN TRAINEES, 1950-1980**

DONORS		RECIPIENTS	
Country	1950-1980	Country	1950-1980
Non-Regional Donors		Afghanistan	3,229
Australia	19,474	Australia	10
Britain	17,237	Bangladesh	2,694
Canada	5,305	Bhutan	263
Japan	27,585	Britain	4
New Zealand	3,835	Burma	2,917
United States	44,820	Canada	6
Total	118,256	Fiji	779
Regional Donors		India	15,404
Bangladesh	21	Indonesia	14,625
Burma	37	Iran	1,681
India	7,339	Japan	20
Indonesia	26	Cambodia	1,378
Republic of Korea	1,263	Korea, Rep. of	6,059
Malaysia	184	Laos	4,016
Nepal	2	Malaysia	9,133
Pakistan	654	Maldives	228
Philippines	64	Nepal	7,190
Singapore	948	New Zealand	1
Sri Lanka	105	Pakistan	8,656
Thailand	369	Papua New Guinea	3,392
Total	11,012	Philippines	9,935
Grand Total	129,268	Singapore	3,658
of which, Training outside the region:	109,347	Sri Lanka	5,973
Training within the region under bilateral		Thailand	16,622
arrangements :	11,012	Vietnam	11,047
Third Country arrangements:	8,909	Regional and Other	348
		Total	129,268

Source: *Colombo Plan Council: Annual Report 1980/81* (Colombo: Colombo Plan Bureau, 1981), p. 84.

TABLE 9
COLOMBO PLAN EXPERTS, 1950-1980

DONORS		RECIPIENTS	
COUNTRY	1950-1980	COUNTRY	1950-1980
Australia	10,951	Afghanistan	796
Britain	3,729	Australia	2
Canada	861	Bangladesh	1,188
India	1,480	Bhutan	18
Indonesia	1	Burma	951
Japan	15,786	Fiji	839
Korea, Rep. of	68	India	2,235
Malaysia	1	Indonesia	7,144
New Zealand	1205	Iran	620
Pakistan	19	Cambodia	495
Philippines	1	Korea, Rep. of	1,512
Singapore	4	Laos	1,095
Sri Lanka	4	Malaysia	2,829
Thailand	30	Maldives	39
United States	10,284	Nepal	2,264
Vietnam	1	Pakistan	2,439
TOTAL	<u>44,425</u>	Papua New Guinea	6,123
		Philippines	3,054
		Singapore	1,033
		Sri Lanka	1,380
		Thailand	5,785
		United States	1
		Vietnam	2,463
		Regional	120
		TOTAL	<u>44,425</u>

Source: Colombo Plan Council: Annual Report 1980/81 (Colombo: Colombo Plan Bureau, 1981), p. 65.

The British understood the programme best, having nursed it into being. They offer us the best assessment: “The Plan appears to have been highly successful as a technical [assistance] operation and as a first-class piece of Western propaganda in the best sense.”⁹⁵ And that indeed was all that the Plan was about, a piece of western propaganda— loud, attractive, hollow.

ENDNOTES

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3. ***R.H. Scott to R.L. Speaight***, April 9, 1951, FO 371/93044, FZ1102/328, PRO.
4. See ***M.T. Flett, Minutes: Colombo Plan***, November 21, 1950, FO 371/84593, FZ11013/262A, PRO; ***Foreign Office Memorandum: United Kingdom Contribution to South and Southeast Asia Development***, September 14, 1950, Foreign Office Paper E.P.C. (50) 88, FO 371/84585, FZ11013/87, PRO; ***Aide Memoire from Hugh Gaitskell, Treasury, to R.G. Menzies, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia: Colombo Plan Finance***, January 9, 1951, FO 371/93037, FZ1102/74, PRO; Nik Cavell, ***Asia and the Free World***, n/d, RG 19, Vol. 4272, 8055-03, PAC.
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The thesis is a synthesis of multiple themes - the Cold War, inter-state relations, Commonwealth relations, Australian and British foreign policies, American foreign economic policy, the West and Asia, foreign aid, and the Colombo Plan - and these are reflected in the diverse nature of the bibliography.

The main sources are archival materials in three countries— Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Most of these are already open, although the occasional encounter with sanitized documents can turn the researcher's imagination in unpleasant directions. Reflecting the United Kingdom's central role in the Commonwealth, and the Colombo Plan's Commonwealth origins, the Foreign Office series (FO 371) in the Public Record Office in London are a rich and indispensable source for any meaningful work on the Plan. The documents generated by the Department of External Affairs and International Trade Canada (RG 25) at the Public Archives in Canada, Ottawa are also crucial. Some very useful pieces, "missing" in the department's files, can be found in the papers of Douglas LePan and Lester Pearson in the manuscripts division. The Canadian documents are invaluable because where they cover the same subjects and themes as the British documents they serve as a check on the latter. When the two are used interactively and comparatively the researcher can often recognize, and discard where necessary, the parochial perspectives and nuances of each country.

State Department documents (RG 59) in the National Archives in

Washington, and others in the Truman and Eisenhower Presidential Libraries are useful sources on the Cold War and on American foreign economic policy. The annual reports and other publications of the Plan's institutions - the bureau, the Consultative Committee, and the Council for Technical Cooperation - are a rich source on the programme's architecture and operations. The memoirs of the Australian foreign minister, Percy Spender (1969), and Douglas LePan (1979) provide an insider's account of the origins and creation of the Colombo Plan. These give a "human touch" to the arcane and aseptic language of the documents. They are useful in helping to re-create the "atmosphere" of conference diplomacy. Still the researcher must be wary of self-adulation, especially in Spender's account.

There are very few secondary sources on the Colombo Plan. Those on the Cold War are vast and a representative sample is provided in the bibliography. The interpretative works of Professors John Lewis Gaddis and Melvyn Leffler on the origins of the Cold War have been used extensively in this thesis. Since it is clearly impractical to visit the archives of all the twenty-six member countries of the Colombo Plan secondary sources have been used to explore their interactions and to augment the archival materials.

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611.51G	611.90	611.90B	611.90C	611.90D
611.91	611.914	611.96	689.00	689.90
690D.93	691.00	743.5 MSP	744.00	746E.2
746E.5	746E.5MSP	746E.55	751G.00	756D.13
756D.2553	756D.5	756D.5MAP	756D.5 MSP	790.5 MSP
790.5	790B.00	790B.5 MSP	790B.56	790B.5621
790C.5	790D.5	790D.5 MSP	790D.5621	791.5
791.5 MAP	791.5 MSP	792.5 MSP	796.5 MAP	796.5 MSP
811.0056D	811.0090B	811.0090D	811.0091	811.90C
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71851	82935	83012	84545	10146
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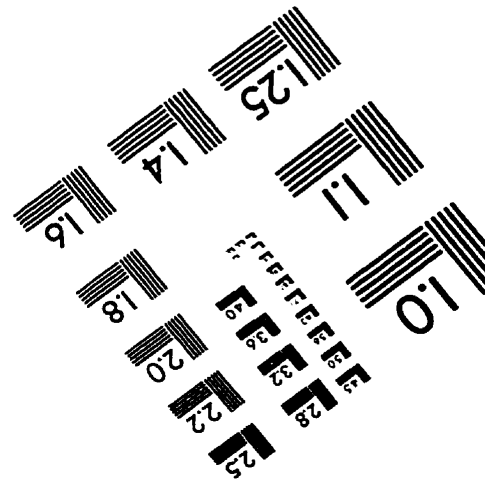
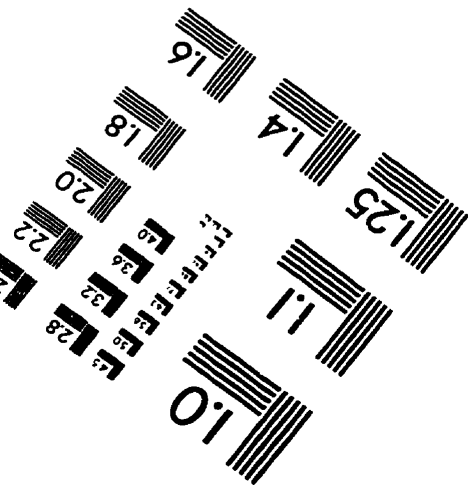
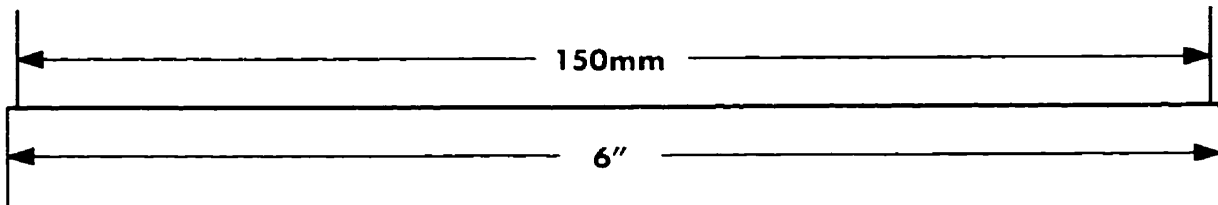
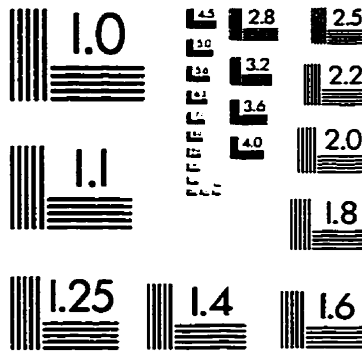
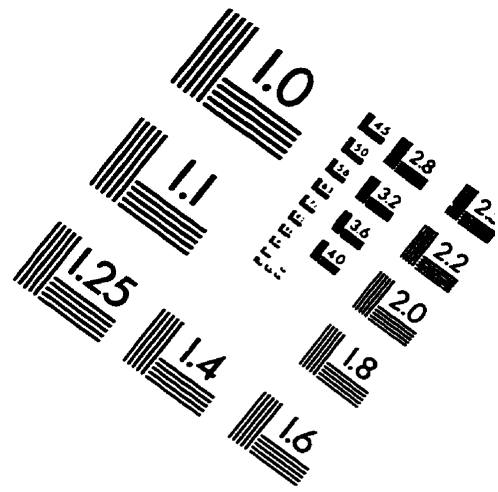
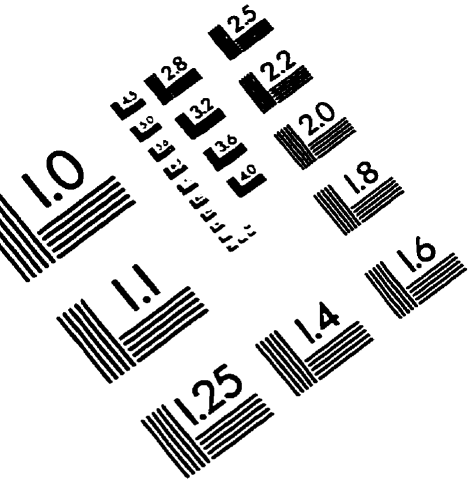
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