

More Than
Dominoes: Cold-
War Strategic
Defence Before
Vietnam

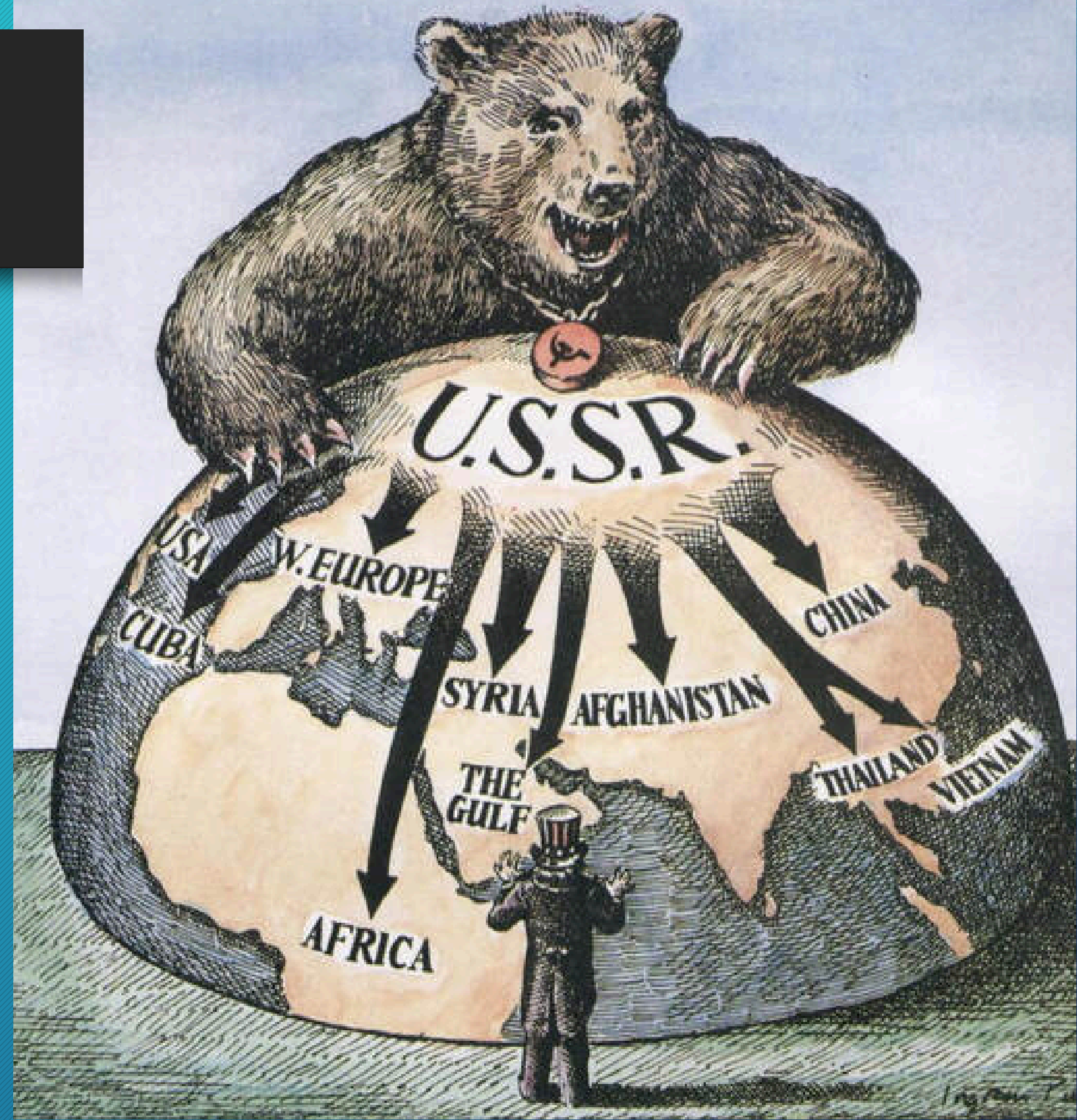
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I N S T I T U T E

The Reality of the Dominoes

- Blitzkrieg & Japanese advance serve as examples of rapidly falling dominoes
- Descent of 'Iron Curtain' show communist intent
- Victory of Chinese Communist Party establish China in a position to act as a Stalin in an area which was just as politically destabilised as Eastern Europe
- While Truman had backed containment in Greece & Turkey, 'Domino Theory' phraseology not popularised until 1954



Forward Defence as Australia's Strategy

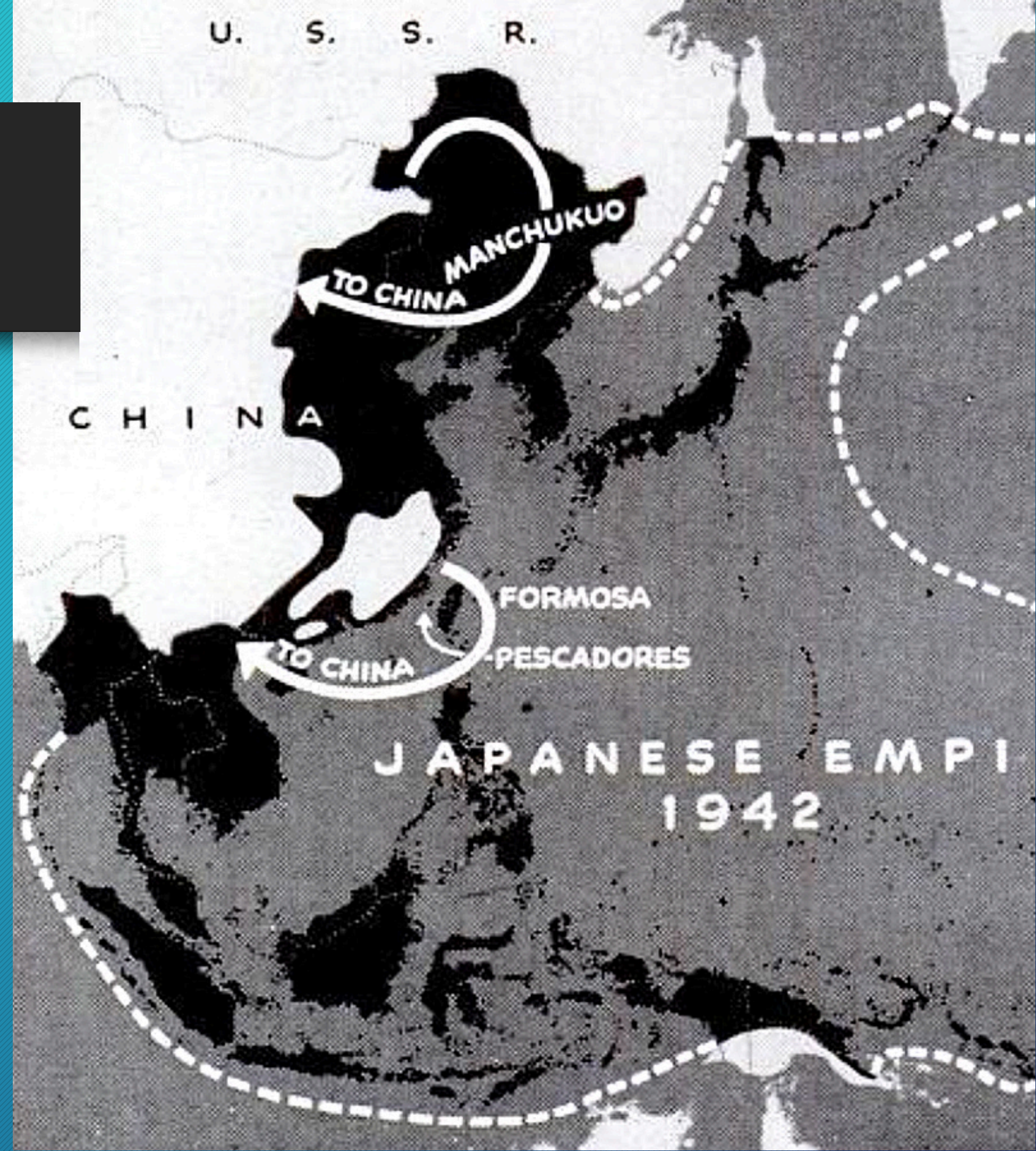
Key Points to forward defence:

- Must be in the region
- Must involve a 'great and powerful friend'
- Limited resources = insurance policy
- Preferably act as part of an international coalition
- Must be asked, no 'regime change'



The Fractured Landscape of Post-War Asia

- Shaped by the legacies of colonialism and Japanese conquest, nations were often arbitrary constructs
- Ousted colonial regimes try to reassert themselves, or offer path to independence
- Nationalism & communism, ironically European in origin, seized political imaginations
- Identifying who was legitimate a fraught task



Australia's Position

- WW2 confirm Australia's isolation complex
- 'Look to America' fleeting
- Aware of its own weakness, Australia had tried to steer clear of post-colonial conflicts in Dutch East Indies & even Hong Kong
- Chifley's cautious approach carried over by Menzies
- Colombo Plan of extensive foreign aid show commitment to 'hearts & minds' not just weapons



Korean War

- Seem to confirm communist expansionism, backed by the Chinese Communist Party
- Menzies reluctant to commit to distant war
- Ideal situation of having both g&p friends plus UN backing
- MacArthur as the embodiment of American recklessness
- Economic crisis lead to £200mill military spending cap



ANZUS and its Limitations

- Price of 'soft' peace, allow for Middle East role
- 'A superstructure built on a foundation of jelly'
- US reliance on nuclear deterrent for Asia
- Addition rather than replacement for Britain



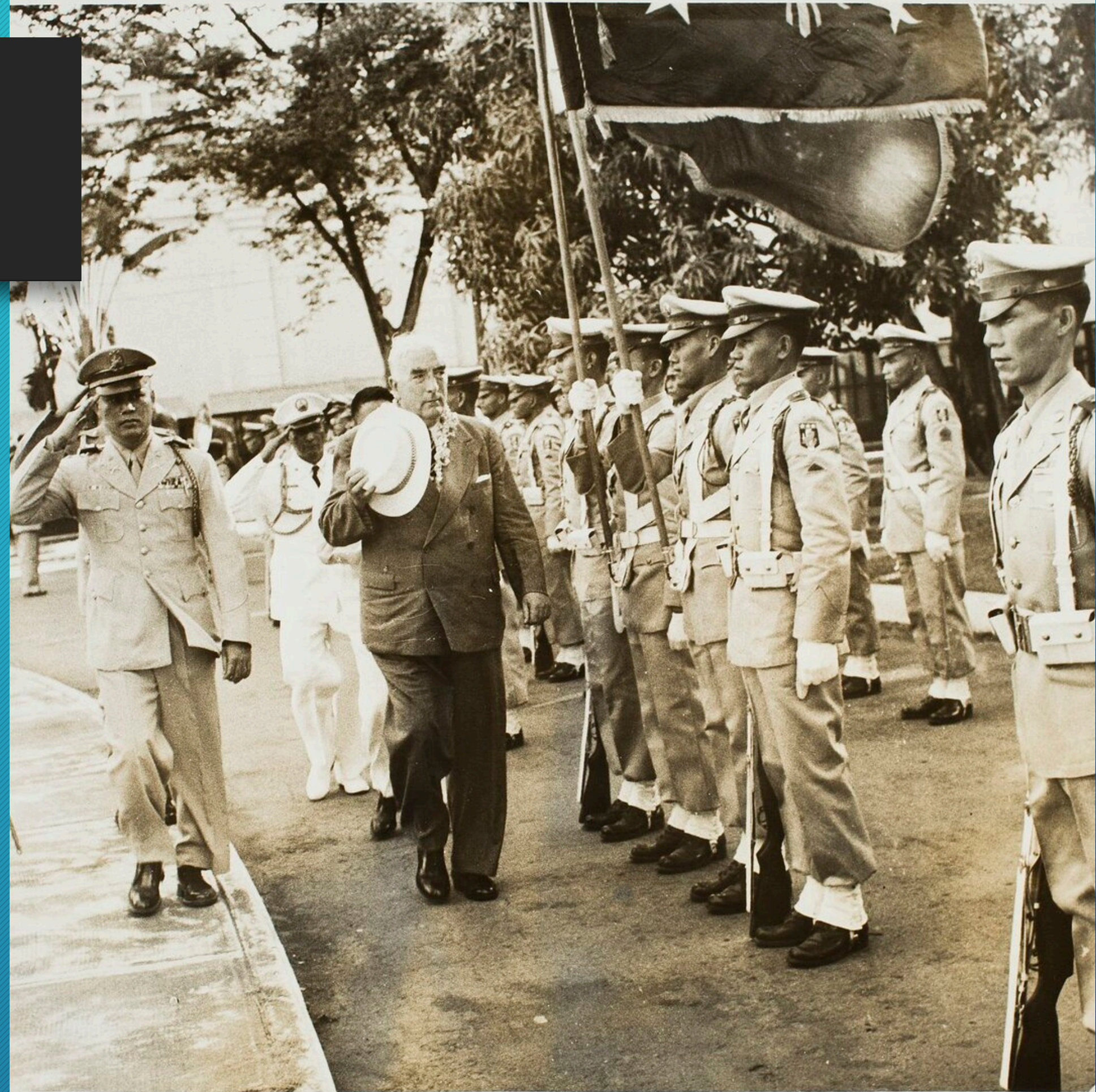
Malayan Emergency

- On 16 June 1948 three British estate managers in northern Malaya were assassinated by MCP guerrillas
- Concern that a 'militaristic policy' would be unpopular both domestically and in the region lead to Australian caution
- Britain & US split over Malaya & Indochina reveal limits of dominoes
- Malaya as model of counterinsurgency



SEATO

- Signing of treaty in 1954 by US, UK, NZ, France, Thailand, Philippines, Pakistan
- US remain committed to nuclear deterrent, but Australia adopt a 'fire brigade' approach
- Suez Crisis raise prospect of complete UK withdrawal



West New Guinea Dispute

- Considered a vital buffer zone
- Indonesia receive Soviet submarines and planes
- Minister for External Affairs Richard Casey accused of 'appeasement'
- 1959 The Defence Committee recommend that Australia 'should be prepared to act independently at least for a time' in limited war against Indonesia, and that 'our forces ... should be designed primarily with the ability to act independently of allies'



Konfrontasi

- 1961 proposal to create the Federation of Malaysia, which would combine the current states of Malaya, Singapore and the British territories of North Borneo (to be renamed Sabah), Sarawak and the Sultanate of Brunei
- Indonesia hope to replicate WNGD
- Kennedy's extremely limited assurance that ANZUS would apply



Graduated Response

- Nuanced approach orchestrated by Minister for External Affairs Garfield Barwick
- Initially refuse the request for military assistance, then offer to relieve troops serving elsewhere in Malaysia, & finally make a commitment of a battalion & SAS troops to be 'eyes and ears'
- Olive branches: cooperating on the demarcation of the border between Papua New Guinea and West New Guinea, Indonesian students welcome under Australian training programs, development aid continued under the Colombo Plan, small number of Indonesian army officers remained enrolled at the Australian Army's Staff College



The Sudden Death of Indonesian Communism

- Late 1964 Sukarno speaks of a Beijing- Jakarta- Hanoi- Phnom Penh- Pyongyang axis, move a full brigade of Indonesian troops to Borneo border
- Australia commit to increasing its standing army by 5000 men & embark on a major upgrade of its air force
- Night of 30 September-1 October 1965 botched coup
- In March 1966 Suharto took many of the presidential powers from Sukarno, but let him retain the title; in March 1967 Suharto became Acting President; and only in March 1968 did he formally become President, the office he would hold for the next 30 years
- Confrontation only officially ended August 1966

