

Willy Bach thesis: Australia, SEATO and Laos (pp. 25-39; page breaks as in original)
The SEATO Treaty (South East Asia Treaty Organization)

Former Polish diplomat and Member of the International Control Commission, Marek Thee, also known as Gdański, argued that the SEATO Treaty preceded the 1954 Geneva conference agreements on Indochina. Thee argued that the signatories had planned to breach those Geneva agreements. A meeting took place in Paris on 14 July, with Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden and John Foster Dulles, which produced a secret Anglo-American position paper one week before the Geneva conference. This agreement was augmented, with the inclusion of Pierre Mendès France and became the Anglo-American-French agreement, signed in the US Embassy in Paris. Thee called it "The Secret Western Understanding". The SEATO Treaty was signed that September in Manila by the US, France, Britain, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan. The Alliance never had a coherence to the shared interests of all parties and was formally disbanded in 1977.¹⁰⁴

US Foreign Office documents stated that The SEATO Treaty was:

Lacking a clearly defined role, it instead propounded broad principles, declaring the signatories' aim of upholding "the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and declaring that they will earnestly strive by every peaceful means to promote self-government and to secure the independence of all countries whose people desire it..."¹⁰⁵

If peaceful means failed, however, the treaty made provision for military assistance:

Each party recognises that aggression by means of armed attack in the treaty area against any of the Parties or against any state or territory which the Parties by unanimous agreement may hereafter designate, would endanger

¹⁰² Ibid., Diagramatic map.(Date accessed: 15 June 2007)

¹⁰³ Terry W. Colvin, "Re. U.S. Army in Thailand", Thailand and Laos Brotherhood, <http://tlc-brotherhood.com/Forum/index.php?topic=76.0> (Date accessed: 26 May 2015)

¹⁰⁴ Marek Thee, *Notes of a Witness: Laos and the Second Indochinese War* (New York, Random House, 1973), 38-40.

¹⁰⁵ "Foreign Office Files: United States of America, Series Two: Vietnam, 1959-1975, Part 4: SEATO, South East Asia General and Thailand, 1959-1963 " US Foreign Office, http://www.ampltd.co.uk/digital_guides/fo_files_usa_series_two_part_4/Publishers-Note.aspx (Date accessed: 17 June 2009).

its own peace and safety, and agrees that it will in that event act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes...¹⁰⁶

The effects of the Treaty's implementation demonstrated no commitment to self-determination, especially as covert military actions had preceded these pronouncements of intent. Another serious flaw with the treaty was the exclusion of Cambodia, Laos and Việt Nam, the three countries most at risk from internal subversion and outside interference. The agreements reached at Geneva, aiming to keep Indochina neutral, forbade these countries from joining in any military alliances. Nevertheless, an ambiguous protocol to the SEATO agreement did "designate for the purpose of Article IV of the Treaty the States of Cambodia and Laos and ...Vietnam" as special areas that if threatened, would endanger the "peace and security" of the signatories, thus justifying SEATO intervention in certain circumstances.¹⁰⁷ US documents also acknowledged:

Such open-ended sanctions were regarded by many countries as little more than a *carte blanche* for Western intervention in South East Asia. The Chinese and North Vietnamese were particularly opposed to SEATO, believing, not entirely without justification, that it was little more than an American instrument to thwart the neutrality imposed by the Geneva Accords and to legitimise the establishment of an independent, pro-western, southern Vietnamese republic.¹⁰⁸

Former British Ambassador, Sir Anthony Rumbold, whose appointments included Sài Gòn and Bangkok, correctly predicted that SEATO would have a short life.¹⁰⁹ David McKnight described how the US unilateral policies led to *increased conflict* in Indochina, pointing to, "... a number of internal tensions within Western intelligence and between them and Asian security bodies... the difficulty in employing counter-subversion strategies when they impinge on democratic rights... [noting that SEATO

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ "Protocol to the Manila Pact, September 8, 1954," US State Department, *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*, Yale Law School http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/usmu004.asp (Date accessed: 9 June 2009)

¹⁰⁸ "Foreign Office Files: United States of America, Series Two: Vietnam, 1959-1975, Part 4: SEATO, South East Asia General and Thailand, 1959-1963 " US Foreign Office, Adam Matthew Publications http://www.ampltd.co.uk/digital_guides/fo_files_usa_series_two_part_4/Publishers-Note.aspx (Date accessed: 17 June 2009)

¹⁰⁹ Michael Alexander, British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998), <https://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/media/uploads/files/Alexander.pdf> electronic. (Date accessed: 19 November 2015) 28.

⁶⁹ David McKnight, "Western Intelligence and SEATO's War on Subversion, 1956-63 " *Intelligence and National Security* 20, No. 2 (2005): 288-303

was] increasingly by-passed by the United States, which pursued a more unilateral course culminating in the Vietnam War".¹¹⁰

The application of the SEATO Treaty in Thailand was described by David A Wilson in his 1963 report for the Rand Corporation. Thailand had a special role as an exemplar of the development paradigm promoted by the US government and its agencies and as hosts to the large US military bases then being assembled. Communist insurgency in the Northeast of Thailand led the authoritarian government Field Marshal Sarit Dhanarajata to focus its efforts on internal security, which they applied forcibly.

Thailand's Community Development Department, operated as a subsidiary of the Department of Interior, controlling Education, Agriculture, Public Health, US-funded Pilot Projects, 'agrimetro' and the village-based Volunteer Defense Corps. The (Dean) 'Rusk formula' was negotiated as Wilson described here:

[Dean] Rusk (Secretary of State):

The Foreign Minister and the Secretary of State agreed that Southeast Asia Treaty provides the basis for the signatories collectively to assist Thailand in case of Communist armed attack against that country. [and that] ... this treaty obligation is individual as well as collective.¹¹¹

The Thai government was also bound to the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, signed in Manila on 8 September 1954, upon which it could call. "Thailand deposited its instrument of ratification Dec. 2, 1954; the remaining signatories (the United States, Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, and the United Kingdom) deposited their instruments Feb. 19, 1955". The Treaty provided for a US response to aggression which was intended to "apply only to communist aggression but affirms that in the event of other aggression or armed attack it will consult under the provisions of Article IV, paragraph 2". The Protocol to the Manila Pact, 8 September 1954 additionally mentions:

¹¹¹ David A. Wilson, "Thailand - 1962," (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1963), 7.

“Article IV of the Treaty the States of Cambodia and Laos and the free territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam”.¹¹²

US Foreign Office documents showed Thailand’s significant role in US strategic planning as events developed in Laos. All of these treaties acknowledged the United Nations Charter, the UN Security Council and peoples’ aspirations to self-determination. Yet the Pacific Charter document also mentioned the already contentious entities of “the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland” There is also the statement that signatories were, “... determined to prevent or counter by appropriate means any attempt in the treaty area to subvert their freedom or to destroy their sovereignty or territorial integrity.”¹¹³

Yet none of these Treaties were invoked in regard to US military and intelligence actions in Laos; nor were the United Nations Charter or the UN Security Council.

When the Pathet Lao moved into northwestern [Sic.] Laos in March 1962 ...

Two months later, US troops were stationed in Thailand in response to the deteriorating situation in Laos. The arrival of these forces in May 1962 was seen by the Thai government as confirmation of the United States commitment to preserve Thailand’s independence and integrity against communist expansion. On the other hand, despite continual pressure from the Americans, Sarit refused to entertain ideas of democratic reform.¹¹⁴

Australian General Sir John Wilton, Chief of the SEATO Military Planning Office, 1960 till 1962, fully understood the implications of working closely with undemocratic regimes that were being challenged by peasant discontent and insurgency. He also understood the limitations of the SEATO Treaty.¹¹⁵

In May 1962 the Pathet Lao overran the Lao town of Luang Nam Tha. This also led to SEATO air and ground units being deployed to northern Thailand, led by US forces, including Commonwealth troops. On 21 May 1962, US President John F. Kennedy issued a

¹¹² US State Department, "Protocol to the Manila Pact, September 8, 1954". *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School* http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/usmu004.asp (Date accessed: 9 June 2009)

¹¹³ "Pacific Charter, September 8, 1954", *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School*, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/usmu005.asp (Access date: 18 October 2015)

¹¹⁴ "Foreign Office Files: United States of America, Series Two: Vietnam, 1959-1975, Part 4: SEATO, South East Asia General and Thailand, 1959-1963 " US Foreign Office, Adam Matthew Publications, http://www.ampltd.co.uk/digital_guides/fo_files_usa_series_two_part_4/Publishers-Note.aspx (Date accessed: 17 June 2009)

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

statement of intent to deploy US military power, which was transmitted to all outposts of the British Foreign Office from the Embassy in Bangkok.

The despatch of United States forces to Thailand was considered desirable because of recent attacks in Laos by Communist forces ... We are in consultation with SEATO Governments on the situation. I emphasize that this is a defensive act on the part of the United States and wholly consistent with the United Nations Charter... In the spirit of that Charter, I have directed that the Secretary General of the United Nations be informed of the actions we are taking. There is no change in our policy toward Laos, which continues to be the re-establishment of an effective cease-fire and prompt negotiations for a Government of National Union.¹¹⁶ [Excerpt]¹¹⁷

The reference to the UN Charter and informing of the UN Secretary General were acts performed only as a formality, in the wake of the huge movement of forces. These forces were being deployed to established bases in Thailand. There was no evidence that the Pathet Lao would have had the capacity or intention to carry out any virtually-impossible ambition to overwhelm Thailand.

SEATO: The Cold Warrior

The counter-insurgency prescription that was applied in Indochina and in Thailand pervaded life throughout South East Asia. The Cold War paradigm was evident in the reports of proceedings of SEATO meetings. Delegates concerned themselves with infiltrators' reports of trade union meetings in Wellington, New Zealand; student union meetings in Oxford University, England; Ceylonese tea workers' disputes over wages and the 1965 Nanyang Chinese University language demonstrations in Singapore (which were about student demands for the continued use of the Chinese language as the medium of study).¹¹⁸ All of these seemingly unrelated events in disparate locations around the world were regarded by SEATO researchers as evidence of a skilfully-orchestrated global Communist threat.

As was shown in this SEATO document dated from 16 January 1966, the tendency to perceive threat in *any* dissident group was a challenge to civil liberties in Britain too:

¹¹⁶ "Foreign Relations, 1961-1963, Volume XXIV, Laos Crisis," *US State Department Archive*, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedy/jf/53979.htm> (Date accessed: 27 July 2012)

¹¹⁷ John F. Kennedy, "192 - Statement by the President Announcing the Dispatch of Additional U.S. Forces to Thailand," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8657> (Date accessed: 16 June 2015)

¹¹⁸ SEATO, "South-East Asia Treaty Organization – Trends and Highlights," (1 December 1965) *NAUK*, B1, C4, C1, (16 January 66) C3, C5, (1 February 66) B4.

“This edition includes (C1) An example of Communist exploitation of neutrality:

Communist delegates to the recent council meeting of the British National Union of Students (NUS) gained a temporary victory when they persuaded delegates to the meeting to reject a motion that the NUS should join the non-Communist International Students Conference (ISC). Communist activities at this meeting, which was held from November 26 to 29, provide an excellent example of Communist aims and tactics in similar movements throughout the Free World.¹¹⁹

The pages in the SEATO “Themes and Highlights” report showed that Oxford students were subjected to the same communist infiltration anxieties as the other groups of Ceylonese tea workers and New Zealand dock workers. Their civil liberties were also threatened by the presence of informants.

US Navy Commander, Jack H. Harris referred frequently to this SEATO document in his 1966 thesis for the US Army War College, underlining the importance he placed on the SEATO reports of Communist subversion.¹²⁰ By contrast, it was claimed in the British House of Commons, in 1971, by Mr Roland Moyle, then Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, that there were only three copies “distributed in Great Britain through official channels”.¹²¹ Such vital information was so secret that few British decision-makers could read it.

In newly independent Singapore and Malaysia authoritarian governments made extensive use of the Internal Security Act (ISA), modelled on British colonial security legislation originated in 1957 by General Sir Gerald Templer during the Malayan Emergency and renewed in 1960 (In Malay: Akta Keselamatan Dalam Negeri). The ISA was then and is at the time of writing, used to suppress all varieties of dissent. It provides for detention without trial, euphemistically called ‘preventive detention’. In 2005 David McKnight reiterated the dilemma within SEATO caused by the organisation’s tendency to prescribe authoritarian governments throughout Asia. As McKnight explained.¹²² It was, in essence, a dismal

¹¹⁹ SEATO, “South-East Asia Treaty Organization – Trends and Highlights (1 December 1965) *NAUK*, B1, C4, C1, (16 January 66) C3, C5, (1 February 66) B4.

¹²⁰ Jack H. Harris, “What Next after Ho Chi Minh?” (US Army War College, 1966), 32, 52, 54-57.

¹²¹ Britain, House of Commons, Written Answers, Foreign And Commonwealth Affairs, “S.E.A.T.O.

Publication “Trends and Highlights”, HC Deb 22 February 1971 vol 812 c15W, 1803–2005

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1971/feb/22/seato-publication-trends-and-highlights (Date Accessed: 15 October 2015)

¹²² McKnight, “Western Intelligence and SEATO’s War on Subversion, 1956-63 ” 185.

doctrine for post-colonial Asians to inherit, which failed to offer the hope of achieving democratic governance.

“Stabilisation of the situation in South East Asia by military means”

The proposed US and SEATO invasion of Laos planned in readiness for 1962 and current till 1968 was to be portrayed as the ‘stabilisation of the situation in South East Asia by military means.’¹²³ Under SEATO Plans 4, 5, 6, and beyond, 28 Commonwealth Brigade Group was to assist US forces to acquire the river crossings from Thailand; occupy the Mekong towns as “enclaves of importance”; hold all areas then under Royal Laotian Army control and not yet under Pathet Lao control; partition Laos at the 17th parallel, (forming a direct line from North of Mukdahan in Thailand to Hué on the East coast of Việt Nam. Further North, US and allies were to hold Xayaboury Province, preferably with SEATO but not Thai troops (as their presence could provoke a response from the PRC); and “Hold vulnerable salients ... extending many miles beyond the outskirts of the towns themselves... including Vientiane and Thakhek”.¹²⁴

The file described “...a single, short partition line ... a division of Laos *favourable to the West* [Italics added] and forming a defensible, viable and united anti-communist state.”¹²⁵ Commonwealth allies were reluctant to commit to the Plan without clarification from US military planners, and they sought this. There was a high risk that ‘mission-creep’ would present them with runaway obligations and costs, with thousands of troops bogged-down in close-quarter counterinsurgency fighting in the difficult terrain of Laos. There was also discussion of the real likelihood that the presence of foreign troops in Laos could stimulate recruitment to the Pathet Lao, thereby worsening the military situation for the Royalist government.

The plan required the Brigade Group plus supporting units to mobilise 13,000 men, with another 3,000 reserved in Britain for rotation plus Australians and New Zealanders. This major undertaking required the investment of much Cabinet time on their Laos policy. The British Cabinet meeting on 2 May 1961 demonstrated disinclined support for the SEATO invasion plan. The preference was to contribute as *little* as possible, and *only* because they were asked by the US and sought to maintain the ‘special relationship’ through necessary

¹²³ "SEATO Planning for Military Intervention," British Defence Chiefs of Staff, *NAUK*, n.p.(ANNEX A TO COS.1145/13/8/62 (Concluded)) and (JIC(61)50(FINAL))

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

demonstrations of willingness. No UN approval had been sought for the invasion; nor was there an invitation from the Royalist Laotian government, as was mentioned in the discussion. Busch described British reluctance to commit to the SEATO Plan and doubts about prospects for success of the invasion as an attitude of “dismay”.¹²⁶

A considerable effort was made trying to arrange for SEATO to do only just what had to be done. An example of this was found in CAB 195/19 notes for the British Cabinet Meeting 2 May 1961. Limiting the operation to “...a perimeter around Vientiane” was also postulated. Worse still, Australian field commanders would not be able to participate in decisions and their troops could have been commanded “...by U.K./U.S. mil. Only.” This was especially relevant, as shown in 2 May minutes.”¹²⁷

At that time New Zealand agreed to deploy an HQ and two troops of SAS soldiers to Thailand, as shown in Telegram No. 260, dated 22 May 1962, though carefully differentiating New Zealand’s contribution as “token”:

“...flown in New Zealand aircraft from here to Thailand” and “wholly under New Zealand command though they would act as necessary in general support of the United States forces. Three Bristol freighters of 41 Squadron would proceed to Bangkok, and would be available for whatever jobs required to be done. H.M.N.Z.S. TARANAKI would also be available if required.”

“...New Zealand Government policy remains firmly in favour of a non-military settlement there. *New Zealand force is going into Thailand and not into Laos*”.¹²⁸
(Italics added)

Ron Crosby’s book on the NZSAS agrees with the New Zealand government telegram. He correctly recorded inasmuch as officially the NZSAS did not cross the Mekong into Laos. There remained questions as to whether official accounts are entirely truthful. Crosby acknowledges that his book was thoroughly checked by government officers to ensure the maintenance of security, which, at the time of writing, could not be further resolved. For rigorous accuracy this question remains. Crosby stated:

¹²⁶ Peter Busch, *All the Way with JFK? Britain, the US and the Vietnam War* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2003), 20.

¹²⁷ "Cabinet Minutes C.C.(60) 30th Conclusions – C.C.(61) 45th Conclusions," British Cabinet Office (London: 1960), *NAUK*, (CAB 195/19 2 May 1961) n.p.

¹²⁸ Acting High Commissioner Wellington, "Inward Telegram to Commonwealth Relations Office No. 260 Laos," Foreign Office (British government, 1962), n.p.

At the request of the Royal Thai Government a detachment of 30 men were stationed in Thailand from 2 June to 16 September 1962 during the Laotian crisis. The detachment was split into two Troops, with one working with United States Special Forces and the Marines at Udon in the north-east and the other deployed with a reinforced United States Army battle group at Khao [Sic.] in the central region. Neither Troop took part in any operations involving action against the enemy, but the deployment provided the detachment with an opportunity to train in jungle and mounted operations while working with American and Thai forces.¹²⁹

One puzzling question regarding New Zealand's role that remained at the time of writing can be found in an Australian document, however. New Zealand requested special fuel for its planes, (Bristol freighters) for the Laos invasion. This needed clarification, since the fuel was to be supplied to SEATO allies by the US.¹³⁰ Under the heading: "NZ POL Requirements" New Zealand queried that: "...compounding of additional charges which is not acceptable to the New Zealand Government... [and sought] clarification of the units of measurement ie, whether United States or Imperial Gallons... [And in particular] an RNZAF special fuel requirement for Bristol freighters. 100U oil is required for these aircraft..." The negotiating would have been without purpose if New Zealand was not going into Laos. In addition, Australia probed the medical facilities at USAF Korat, which were not sufficiently prepared to treat casualties evacuated from the anticipated battles in Laos. They cited "... lack of surgical cover in Korat from T to T + 7 [first week of the military operation] ... appears to be a serious weakness in the medical plan ...very doubtful whether it would be acceptable to Australia..."¹³¹ Another Australian document detailed the military planning for the invasion and outlined the uncertainties of success and a long list of Australian military objections.¹³²

Nuclear Weapons

This invasion force and its undertaking was momentous. Britain as a member of the select group of nuclear weapons nations, had adopted nuclear deterrence doctrine and

¹²⁹ Ron Crosby, *NZSAS - the First Fifty Years* (Melbourne: Penguin / Viking 2011), 13-14, 134.

¹³⁰ "JIC [Joint Intelligence Committee] - SEATO Military Intervention and Its Likely Effect on the Situation in Laos", Joint Intelligence Committee, Department of External Affairs (Canberra: 1961), *National Archives of Australia, Canberra* A1838, TS666/61/72, n.p.

¹³¹ "Draft ANZAM Plan No 1 (Buckram) - Part 4 ", Australian Department of Defence (Canberra: 1961-62), *National Archives of Australia, Canberra*, A1945 15/4/9, 2.

¹³² Joint Intelligence Committee, "JIC [Joint Intelligence Committee] - SEATO Military Intervention and Its Likely Effect on the Situation in Laos ". *National Archives of Australia*, A1838, TS666/61/72

normalised considerations of nuclear weapons use in military doctrine, as Hiroyuki Umetsu explained, inevitably the 1954 crisis in Indochina, brought about by the French defeat at Điện Biên Phủ, involved Australia and New Zealand as ANZAM partners in the British Commonwealth Strategic Reserve.¹³³ British military planners also expressly included the possibility of nuclear weapons use in Laos in their scenario assumptions. In the *Declaration of Forces* for SEATO Plan 4 and 5, for the US-led SEATO invasion of Laos, Britain agreed to contribute “*Eight light bombers with nuclear capability...*” (Italics added)¹³⁴

Peter Edwards accessed many previously unavailable Australian Cabinet documents and described the several crises which could have propelled Australia into a war in Laos.

Of the 1962 crisis, Edwards noted:

The talks indicated that the American and British military advisers were envisaging a SEATO operation under which about 14 000 men would seek to hold significant bridgeheads, notably airfields and Mekong River crossings.¹³⁵

"The Australian Chiefs [of Staff] ... felt that the current plan did not take sufficient note of the ease with which DRV could openly intervene with formed PAVN units in response to SEATO action, with further support from China and the Soviet Union. They argued that it would be dangerous to deploy such a relatively small force to several widespread bridgeheads. The chiefs recommended that, unless SEATO members, especially the United States, were prepared to cope with any intervention in Laos, the plan should instead be given to developing two other SEATO plans - Plan 6, which provided for the defence of the protocol states against DRV forces, and Plan 4, for the defence of Southeast Asia against an attack by both the DRV and China. These plans, which were being developed in a somewhat desultory fashion in the SEATO machinery, envisaged limited war, a scale of conflict markedly higher than counter-insurgency for which Plan 5 was prepared, but still short of global war.¹³⁶

¹³³ Hiroyuki Umetsu, "Australia's Response to the Indochina Crisis of 1954 Amidst the Anglo-American Confrontation," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 52, no. 3 (2006): 398-416.

¹³⁴ "The State of the Alliance," British Ministry of Defence (London: 1962), *NAUK*, Refers to: War Office Current Affairs Discussion Brief Number 77, 2-10

¹³⁵ Peter Edwards, "Australia and the Crises in Laos, 1959-61," *Australian National University. Strategic and Defence Studies Centre Working paper*; no. 219 (1990): 19.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

Edwards further noted:

...the possibility of escalation, with the intervention of DRV and Chinese forces... could lead to a military demand for the use of nuclear weapons. The [ad hoc] committee stated that the first use by a Western power of nuclear weapons against an Asian country would risk the most disastrous consequence[s] both politically and militarily. Therefore plans for intervention in Laos should not contemplate or need to rely on the first use of these weapons.¹³⁷

Garry Woodard spelt out in detail the deliberations of Australia's political leaders who were very opposed to any consideration of the use of nuclear weapons. Any use of nuclear weapons in Laos by either the US or Britain would severely impact on Australia's long-term acceptance as a neighbour in South East Asia. This is only one of many statements to this effect:

On 22 September Cabinet asserted its authority over its military in stating that use of nuclear weapons was not a military matter. It was a political question of supreme and lasting importance ...

Australia was prepared to risk displeasing the American military by both stating this position and advising the UK of it.¹³⁸

It should be noted that Australian documents referred to SEATO Plan 5 by the name, Plan Buckram.¹³⁹ Buckram then cascaded into a shifting series of code names, starting with TAPPY.¹⁴⁰ Edwards explained "The significance of the Laos Crises" and the undemocratic departures from Cabinet procedure by which then Prime Minister Menzies and some of his Cabinet Ministers sought to conceal plans to deploy troops to Laos from the Australian public and media:

On three separate occasions - in September 1959, March 1961 and May 1961 - Cabinet decided in principle that Australia would be prepared to participate in a military intervention in Laos under United States leadership, preferably in a

¹³⁷ Ibid., 20.

¹³⁸ Garry Woodard, *Asian Alternatives: Australia's Vietnam Decision and Lessons on Going to War* Chapter 2, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004), <http://www.mup.unimelb.edu.au/ebooks/0-522-85143-6/index.html> electronic. 27. (Date accessed: 15 November 2010) (site discontinued 14 January 2013).

¹³⁹ "SEATO Plan 5 Barcode 1183672," Australian Prime Minister's Office (Canberra: 1961), *National Archives of Australia, Canberra*, 1183672, n.p.

¹⁴⁰ Australian Department of Defence, "Draft ANZAM Plan No 1 (Buckram) - Part 4", *National Archives of Australia*, A1945 15/4/9, 2. n.p.

SEATO context. On each occasion the crisis eased, quite fortuitously, immediately after the decision. While there were numerous hints and suspicions that some major decisions were impending, no firm announcements were made.¹⁴¹

Britain's inclusion of nuclear weapons in preparations for an invasion of Laos in the 1960s would have been regarded as routine by the Macmillan government at any time after 1954, as they struggled to reduce their military spending, reduce their military presence East of Suez and placed greater emphasis on deployment of Britain's nuclear weapons as a deterrent to any attacks by the USSR and PRC. The British nuclear strategy was understood in Washington, as long as the British held no more than their place as a 'middle power' that normally acted only at the request of US governments. Martin Stephen Navias' thesis explained the complexities of this strategy.¹⁴² When then British Secretary for Defence, Duncan Sandys addressed the media in Melbourne in 1957, his message was designed to assuage the abandonment anxieties of Australian audiences. He exaggerated his message with tough Cold War rhetoric, as *The Canberra Times* reported on 21 August,¹⁴³ and on 2 September:¹⁴⁴ He was linking Britain's nuclear weapons to SEATO and the plan to invade Laos, whilst also hinting that the storage of the weapons would be in Singapore, which is how Singaporeans received this. Jones made it clear that the SEATO Plans were very much part of this contingency, albeit that Britain needed a lead from the US and was poorly provided with refuelling and target selection.¹⁴⁵ The plans to invade Laos could escalate into a regional war, which could include attacks on targets in Southern China.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Edwards, "Australia and the Crises in Laos, 1959-61," 21.

¹⁴² Martin Stephen Navias, "The Sandys White Paper of 1957 and the Move to the British New Look: An Analysis of Nuclear Weapons, Conventional Forces and Strategic Planning 1955-57" (PhD, King's College, London, 1989), 395-414.

¹⁴³ Duncan Sandys, "Mr Sandys Says, Nuclear Arms Planned for SEATO Sector," *The Canberra Times*, 21 August 1957 1957, 1.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/91596458?searchTerm=sandys%20AND%20nuclear&searchLimits=> (Date Accessed: 2 August 2015)

¹⁴⁴ "World Faces Threat, Says Sandys," *The Canberra Times* 2 September 1957, 1.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/91597351?searchTerm=sandys%20AND%20nuclear&searchLimits=> (Date Accessed: 3 August 2015)

¹⁴⁵ Matthew Jones, "Up the Garden Path? Britain's Nuclear History in the Far East, 1954-1962," *The International History Review* 25, no. 2 (2003): 322.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 322-6.

Alarm over the US response to developments in Laos, and the hope of influencing the United States's [sic.] approach to Far Eastern questions, governed Britain's appraisal of its nuclear contribution to SEATO during this period.¹⁴⁷

In September 1957, Sandys visited Singapore and delivered a non-committal answer to questions from *The Straits Times* as to whether Britain planned to store nuclear weapons at RAF Tengah or other facilities in Singapore or Malaya, for both journalist, David Tambyah on 15 September,¹⁴⁸ or the paper's Editor on 16 September.¹⁴⁹ British documents showed that the answer Sandys gave to Singaporeans was a more problematical and secret one. Singaporeans were unwittingly taking on a nuclear target on the cusp of their independence. The document read: "Closed extracts: Folios 33, 38-41, 43-45, 51, 52/1, 53 - Closed For 70 years - International Relations – prejudice – till 2030."¹⁵⁰ As Matthew Jones stated, the weapons were indeed in Singapore.¹⁵¹ As Richard Moore observed, "There was never any possibility that nuclear weapons would be tested in Britain, itself a small and densely-populated island."¹⁵²

SEATO Exercises

SEATO exercises were designed to rehearse a real war scenario of the invasion of Laos. The Canberra bombers from RAF Tengah, also participated, as documented by US Navy historian, Edward J. Marolda, noting the importance of the exercise for the war in Indochina and particularly Laos: "In May 1962 ... SEATO air and ground units [were] being deployed to northern Thailand, commanded by US forces, including British, Australian and New Zealand allied troops."¹⁵³ Kev Darling explained the fact, possibility and rationale for British bombers to carry nuclear weapons.¹⁵⁴ Military exercises tested military strategy and tactics and characterised future opponents and scenarios. They were not only about 'preparedness',

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 323.

¹⁴⁸ David Tambyah, "Singapore Will Remain Britain's Main Military Base in the Far East and the Bulk of the 40,000 Strong British Troops Will Remain in Malaya, Defence Minister Duncan Sandys Said Yesterday," *The Straits Times*, 15 September 1957, 1 and 5

¹⁴⁹ Editor, "Defence in S.E. Asia," *The Straits Times*, 16 September 1957, 5.

¹⁵⁰ "Singapore: Visits of Duncan Sandys, Secretary of State for Defence, to Singapore, August and September 1957 and April 1959," British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (London: 1957), *NAUK*, FCO 141/14707/1

¹⁵¹ Jones, "Up the Garden Path? Britain's Nuclear History in the Far East, 1954–1962," 306-33.

¹⁵² Richard Moore, "Where Her Majesty's Weapons Were," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 57, no. 1 (2001): 6.

¹⁵³ Edward J. Marolda, *By Sea, Air, and Land: An Illustrated History of the U. S. Navy and the War* (Washington DC: Naval Historical Center, 1994), 13-19.

¹⁵⁴ Kev Darling, *Avro Vulcan, Part 1*, RAF Illustrated (Raleigh, NC: Lulu.com, 2007), 55.

but also intentionality. SEATO allies conducted one or more exercises annually. Below are listed some of these exercises and their magnitude:

Exercise Pony Express, April 1961 included RAF, RAAF and RN planes from Butterworth (Malaya), Tengah, Seletar, Sembawang (Singapore) and Far East Fleet, Captain H.R.V. Janvrin, who commanded HMS Victorious, mentioned British planes that participated in this exercise: the Armstrong-Whitworth Single-Seater Scimitar and the De Havilland Sea Vixen FAW.2 XP919.¹⁵⁵ In his book, *HMS Cavalier*, Patrick Boniface explained that on 4 April 1961 the RN ship left Singapore en-route to Hong Kong in order to participate in exercise Pony Express, which "... involved six nations, sixty ships and one hundred aircraft".¹⁵⁶ The HMS Victorious and Seventh Fleet tank landing ship, USS Windham County were also participants. Australian aircraft carrier, HMAS Melbourne, Fleet Air Arm aircraft carrier, HMAS Bulwark, guided missile destroyer HMAS Hobart, were included, according to Marolda.¹⁵⁷

Exercise Dhanarajata, June 1963 (named after Thai General Sarit Dhanarajata) was mentioned in the Australian War Memorial records, testifying to the participation of 79 Sabre Squadron RAAF, and recorded in the RAE Corps history journal, This huge exercise inevitably involved British forces.¹⁵⁸ Participating units included the US 2nd Airborne Battle Group, 503rd Infantry from Okinawa and the British [Commonwealth] 28th Brigade from Malaya (including the Australian B Co, 2 RAR Group).

The exercise was of such significance that British documents showed Meeting Number 29 of 1963 with Department of Defence heads, placed Dhanarajata at agenda item 2 and notably, nuclear strikes in overseas theatres at item 3, which showed that there was a possibility that RN and/or RAF forces may have carried nuclear weapons with them, though 'neither confirmed nor denied' and that US forces were likely to have operated under a similar doctrine. Comments suggesting that any nuclear attack was anticipated from the PRC were not made known to this researcher:

US Major General F. T. Unger reported troop strengths, contributing nations and the sources from which these units were drawn to the US State Department on 4 June 1963:

¹⁵⁵ H. R. V. Janvrin, "HMS Victorious 1960-62," *n.k.* (1962): 9-19.

¹⁵⁶ Patrick Boniface, *HMS Cavalier* (Penzance: Periscope Publishing Ltd, 2004), 52.

¹⁵⁷ Marolda, *By Sea, Air, and Land: An Illustrated History of the U. S. Navy and the War*, 15-20.

¹⁵⁸ Malcolm van Gelder & David Crosby & Alan Hodges & Gordon Chave & Tom Thornton, "A History of 2 Field Troop RAE Chapter Seven Views from the Top," *A History of 2 Field Troop RAE* 2004, 73-86.

SEATO Forces in Thailand During June 1963

1. During the period 11–24 June 1963, a total of some 25,000 military personnel from all SEATO nations will participate in Exercise Dhanarajata [sic.] in Thailand. These include 17,000 Thais, 7,449 US (in addition to the 4,218 US military personnel now stationed there), and approximately 1,000 from the Commonwealth nations (United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand) and the Philippines, France and Pakistan.
2. US forces participating in the exercise consist of one infantry battle group from Hawaii, one airborne brigade from Okinawa, one tactical fighter squadron (18 F-400), tactical reconnaissance fighters (4 RF-101), and transport aircraft (14 C-130). In addition, 315th Air Division and MATS aircraft will be entering and leaving the country during deployment, exercise, and redeployment to provide airlift to all Services.
3. For the exercise, a Commonwealth brigade (one rifle company each from Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, each representing a battalion), with fighter, bomber and transport aircraft will participate. France, Pakistan and the Philippines are supplying headquarters staff officers. The Philippines are also sending elements of ordnance and engineer units. The Thais are using four regimental combat teams, special forces units and aircraft.
4. It is planned that the US battle group from Hawaii will remain in Thailand until some time after 5 July 1963, for further training and area indoctrination.¹⁵⁹

Dean Rusk also authored a document on the subject of Exercise Dhanarajata¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ F. T. Unger, "Foreign Relations of the United States, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963 Volume XXIII, Southeast Asia, Document 478," US Department of State, Office of the Historian, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v23/d478> (Date accessed: 14 April 2015)

¹⁶⁰ Dean Rusk, "Foreign Relations of the United States, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963 Volume XXIII, Southeast Asia, Document 477," US Department of State, Office of the Historian, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v23/d477> (Date accessed: 14 April 2015)