

Western Friends and Eastern Neighbours:
West New Guinea and Australian Self-
Perception in Relation to the United States,
Britain, and Southeast Asia, 1950-1962

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian
National University.

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July 1999

Acknowledgements

I must firstly thank Hank Nelson, my Supervisor, for his encouragement and criticism, and for always returning my work promptly. Thanks must also go to: History RSSS for accepting me as a candidate, the administrators in the Division for their help in miscellaneous areas; those in the Division who generously enabled me to travel to the US and UK; and staff at the National Archives of Australia. Finally, thanks to my wife, Tamara, for putting up with me and the thesis for so long.

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This thesis is my own original work.

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Abbreviations

A2, United States National Archives (II), Maryland.
ANZAM, Australia, New Zealand, and Malaya area command structure.
ANZUS, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States treaty.
CRO, Commonwealth Relations Office, Britain.
CSC, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Australia.
DAFP, Documents on Australian Foreign Policy.
DC, Defence Committee, Australia.
DEA, Department of External Affairs, Australia.
DNG, Dutch New Guinea.
DT, Department of Territories, Australia.
ENG, East New Guinea.
FC, First Committee, United Nations General Assembly.
FO, Foreign Office, Britain.
FRUS, Foreign Relations of the United States.
GA, General Assembly Plenary Meetings, United Nations General Assembly.
GC, General Committee, United Nations General Assembly.
GOI, Government of Indonesia.
JIC, Joint Intelligence Committee, Australia.
JPC, Joint Planning Committee, Australia.
Liberal Government, Liberal-Country Party Government of Australia.
NAA, National Archives of Australia.
NATO, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.
NG, New Guinea.
NNG, Netherlands New Guinea.
NSC, National Security Council, United States.
NZ, New Zealand.
Parliamentary Debates, Australian Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives.
PKI, Communist Party of Indonesia.
PNG, Papua and New Guinea.
PMD, Prime Minister's Department, Australia.
PRO, Public Record Office, London.
PRRI, Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia.
Republic, Republic of the United States of Indonesia, Republic of Indonesia.
SEA, Southeast Asia.
SEATO, South East Asia Treaty Organisation.
UAP, United Australia Party.
UK, United Kingdom.
UN, United Nations Organisation.
UNOR, United Nations Official Records.
UP, United Press.
US, United States of America.
WNG, West New Guinea.

Note: Inverted commas (‘’) are added by me (except in regard to the names of articles) to emphasize particular words or phrases. Quotation marks (‘‘’’) indicate genuine quotations.

Abstract

Historians of Australian foreign policy have neglected the WNG dispute. This is unjustified because it was a major preoccupation of the Menzies Government between 1950 and 1962. The neglect has also had an unfortunate consequence; generalizations by historians regarding Australian policy in SEA during the 1950s and 1960s are questionable. Specifically, the common notions that Australia was afraid of SEA, and therefore saw itself as being dependent on Britain and America, are in need of scrutiny.

Examination of Australian policy between 1950 and 1957, with particular reference to the years 1950 and 1954, shows that Australia was not afraid of its principal adversary on WNG – Indonesia. Australians thus did not pursue dependence, or perceive themselves as dependent, on their two principal allies. Rather, Australians viewed their nation to be the ‘imperial’ power of the area south of Singapore.

With the perceived growth from late 1957 of a communist threat in Indonesia, Australia began to lose its sense of invulnerability from Jakarta. Policy on WNG shows that this anxiety led, in stages, to greater dependence on the United States and United Kingdom, and loss of faith in the concept of Australia as a middle power able to assert influence in its north. By the time the British and Americans decided to force a transfer of WNG to Indonesia, this faith had been almost completely destroyed, although the circumstances of the *fait accompli* from London and Washington added insecurity to dependence. Fear of Indonesia, accompanied by an insecure form of dependence, which stood in contrast to the fearlessness and independence exuded for much of the 1950s, is important to an understanding of Australian activities and attitudes in the SEA area during the 1960s.

The detailed archival work on which this thesis depends also allows numerous corrections and additions to be made to available reminiscences and partial accounts on WNG.