

NEW ZEALAND DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: THE 1950s AND 1960s

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I believe that the quality of New Zealand's representation in Asia is outstanding ... there are practical limits to the speed with which we can expand, but it is our policy to move steadily in this direction. ... Taken together, the changes that have occurred since I became Minister ... represent a virtual doubling of our diplomatic strength overseas, and the process continues.²

Those comments by Prime Minister and External Affairs Minister Keith Holyoake in November 1967 were made barely ten years after New Zealand's first office had been established in the Asian region.

Holyoake was responding to some pointed criticism from New Zealand journalist, Nicholas Turner, then based in Saigon who had suggested New Zealand's 'woefully-inadequate representation ... dictated partly by financial considerations [was] a false economy'.³ Turner said New Zealand could not be taken seriously by Asian countries when it was unable to staff embassies and in particular to send a special representative to the inauguration of South Viet Nam's new president, Nguyen Van Thieu. 'This is merely one small example of our off-hand attitude to Asia.'⁴

This paper, which traces some of the developments in those early years, was first prompted by an invitation to take part in a conference that celebrates the life and work of Emeritus Professor Nicholas Tarling. Apart from his renown as a scholar of the region, he was also, to my personal good fortune, a close and encouraging colleague during my recent tenure at the

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² *External Affairs Review* (EAR), 16 November 1967, pp. 19-20.

³ *Evening Post*, 14 November 1967.

⁴ *Ibid.* Turner records that nominee Sir Stephen Weir, Ambassador to Thailand and South Viet Nam, but based in Bangkok, became ill, which left the gap.

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In one of his more recent publications, Professor Tarling reminds us that Britain's interest in Southeast Asia was less imperial in the classic sense and more focused on its economic place and strategic location for commerce.⁵ Instead of viceroys and governors, we find agents, commissioners and consuls-general.⁶ That reminded me that 'Commissioner' was the name also used for New Zealand's first representative in Southeast Asia. Armed thus, and also conscious that March 2006 will witness the 50th anniversary of a New Zealand diplomatic office in Bangkok, it seemed a good time to look back at those early years of our representation in the region.

The context for these observations, on which I do not need to dwell given their extensive treatment elsewhere, is the political and security environment in the years after World War II (1939-45) that saw the intensification of United States involvement in the region and that also produced pacts that excluded ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand United States) and included SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation) Asian countries, while Asia, or parts of it, was enduring fundamental upheaval—national evolution, post-war reconstruction in Japan, the war on the Korean peninsula, the troubles of the 1950s and war of the 1960s in Viet Nam, and the confrontation process in other parts of Southeast Asia. At one level, there was the developmental hand of friendship extended through the Colombo Plan, and on the other expressed concern about the advance of insurgency and the threat to our security.

It was the Colombo Plan that had been established by Commonwealth Foreign Ministers at their meeting in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in January 1950 to promote bilateral assistance to countries in the South and Southeast Asian region, rather than military involvement, that was critical to the New Zealand concept of relations with the countries of Southeast Asia.⁷ The debate over whether we were 'part' of the region, still continuing today with the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the East Asian Summit, was certainly a matter for vigorous debate 50 years ago—and not only around involvement in that most defining of moments for New Zealand: its sending of forces to fight in Viet Nam.⁸ At the time of Turner's critical article, New Zealand forces were approaching their peak (reached in 1968 with over 500 personnel), and while there was an embassy in Saigon, the ambassador was accredited from Bangkok.

Historian Malcolm McKinnon cites a British scholar writing in the early 1970s, and—as it transpired—on the eve of British entry to the European Economic Commission (EEC), that New Zealand's involvement in

⁵ Nicholas Tarling, *Imperialism in Asia*, Auckland: New Zealand Asia Institute (NZAI), 2005, pp. 75-6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p 83 (in relation to James Brooke).

⁷ Malcolm McKinnon, *Independence and Foreign Policy: New Zealand in the World Since 1935*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1993, pp. 135-6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 173-5.

Southeast Asia owed less to its own trading requirements, for which the United States, Europe and Japan were priorities, and more to responding to the express desire of Britain that New Zealand be there.⁹

That British scholar's comment, while having some truth to it, offers a rather narrow interpretation. Although the 'where Britain goes, we go' philosophy cast a long shadow, at least until the late 1960s, there is plenty to suggest that New Zealand involvement in Southeast Asia—military, developmental and diplomatic—in fact had a much sharper national focus.¹⁰ And, in respect of the last of these, the origins lie in the immediate post-war years. But the parsimony around involvement and representation—whether in the Colombo Plan or participation in SEATO (as noted by McKinnon¹¹)—had its parallels in many a debate over the cost and value of government offices in the region. Some of this is covered below, but suffice to note that the departmental files of the period often seem as full of messages about costs of offices and housing as they were then about the substance of the work.

Between 1948 and 1955

In September 1948, an unsigned External Affairs paper put the case for New Zealand to have its own representative in Singapore. Noting that national interests covered security, political, economic and social developments, trade, the welfare of New Zealand nationals in the region, and that the only representation in Asia was confined to trade representatives in Bombay and Tokyo, plus a sprinkling of honorary agents, the paper argued that a representative could undertake a variety of service liaison work, as well as report back to New Zealand agencies on relevant political and economic developments.¹²

The reaction to this paper is not recorded. But, in early 1950, Hunter Wade, who had returned to Wellington in 1949 after several years in the South Pacific Commission in Sydney, and later the New Zealand High Commission in Canberra, to take up the position of Head of Eastern Section in the Department of External Affairs, put together a strong case for

⁹ Ibid. There was certainly some pressure from the United Kingdom and the United States (see below).

¹⁰ For example, see Anthony Smith, 'Introduction', in Anthony Smith, ed., *Southeast Asia and New Zealand*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS); Wellington: New Zealand Institute of International Affairs (NZIIA), 2005, pp. 1-6. Smith's contributors offer useful detail on the opening of diplomatic links with a number of Southeast Asian countries.

¹¹ McKinnon, *Independence and Foreign Policy*, p. 116.

¹² PM 62/455/1 Part 1, W4627/950 Box 1749, National Archives (NA).

establishing a New Zealand diplomatic post in Asia.¹³

‘New Zealand’s position in the Pacific’, Wade suggested, ‘makes our relations with the countries of Asia a matter of increasing and inescapable importance to us.’ To avoid misunderstandings, at least one post should be established in Asia to cover defence and military intelligence, political and economic information, publicity on New Zealand ‘paying special attention to the position of the Maori’, representing national interests ‘especially in the new Asian Dominions where the United Kingdom is no longer willing to do this for us’, strengthening Commonwealth bonds and assisting in playing a proper part in the Colombo Plan.¹⁴

Interestingly, Wade’s recommended order of priority for a mission was: New Delhi, Singapore, Bangkok, Tokyo, Jakarta and Peking¹⁵ (Beijing). New Delhi was at the top because it was the strongest and most important nation in Asia then, and carried a lot of weight with its fellow Asian countries. It was also a centre of Asian politics. The sole disadvantage, Wade suggested, was that Pakistan would be sensitive to a post not also being opened in Karachi. Second was Singapore, centrally situated, the headquarters of the British defence organisation, and a valuable listening post. The drawback was that it was still a British Crown Colony. Bangkok, on the other hand, offered the advantage of being the recognised United Nations (UN) centre for Asia, namely it headquartered the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE), although it did not offer the same bilateral priorities that other Asian nations did. The value of a post in Tokyo would lie in being able to monitor Japan after the American occupation concluded, while Jakarta was not deemed as important for New Zealand as it was for Australia. As for Peking, the change of government the previous year ended the commitment to set up a legation in Nanking (Nanjing), meaning that pressure to exchange representatives was ‘not a problem we are likely to have to face for the present’.¹⁶

Again there is no record of how this paper was received. The choice of New Delhi was hardly surprising, given India’s relatively recent independence, its adherence to the ‘new’ Commonwealth, as well as Prime Minister Walter Nash’s own attachment to Indian aspirations; and the matter of Tokyo (outside the scope of this paper) was addressed relatively quickly

¹³ Ibid. Also see Shanahan Papers 7/2/92, Part 2, held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Box 1598), National Archives (NA). Wade was later appointed New Zealand Commissioner in Singapore in 1962 and High Commissioner to Malaya in 1963.

¹⁴ PM 62/455/1 Part 1, W4627/950 Box 1749, NA.

¹⁵ The spelling of Chinese names conforms to usage at the time. The present rendition is indicated in parentheses.

¹⁶ References to the previous Chinese government’s pressure to establish a legation in China (and its prioritisation over posts in places like France or Belgium) can be found in a note dated 19 May 1948 from J. V. Wilson to Secretary of External Affairs Alister McIntosh on PM 62/46/1, Part 1, W4627/950, NA.

(and as the first post in Asia). In fact a High Commission in New Delhi was not established until 1958; and the focus instead remained on Singapore. In 1951, it was noted that trade opportunities were not being exploited and that it was the Australian Trade Commissioner in Singapore who was receiving (and probably not handling) trade enquiries about New Zealand.¹⁷

In May 1954, the Minister of External Affairs, Clifton Webb (later to be High Commissioner in London) wrote for a French periodical about the importance of the European and Commonwealth links but noted too the more recent developments in Asia and the establishment of the Colombo Plan. Summarising the current state of New Zealand foreign policy, he suggested the four key areas were: support for the United Nations, cooperation with the Commonwealth, maintenance of ties with Europe and 'sympathetic assistance towards the awakening countries of Asia in their struggle for peaceful evolution'.¹⁸

The calls for a presence in the region were growing. The Returned Services Association (RSA) Dominion Council had passed a remit in late 1953 for steps towards adequate diplomatic representation to ensure New Zealand was well-informed about defence and security needs. The UN Association passed a similar remit at the beginning of 1954. Government MPs Duncan Rae (later to be the first Consul-General to Jakarta) and Eric Halstead called publicly for a diplomatic mission in Singapore; such calls were echoed by a number of New Zealand newspapers.¹⁹

In August 1954, External Affairs Secretary Alister McIntosh informed Minister Webb, ahead of his visit to the region, that New Zealand's interests in Asia 'would best be served by the development of posts at New Delhi, Singapore and Tokyo'. The first two were seen as having almost equal priority, while Tokyo, already in service as a legation, needed to 'be developed properly'.²⁰ In a lengthy attachment, the Minister was advised that the country could:

No longer abrogate, even in favour of its closest and most powerful friends, the responsibility for decisions of importance upon international affairs ... in the Asian area ... geo-political considerations make it impossible that we can ever be regarded as an appendage of the European system. ... Japanese participation in the last war opened a steady diplomatic progression, through the Canberra Pact, the Colombo Plan and the ANZUS Treaty, which may soon

¹⁷ Note on New Zealand Representation in Asia, 10 May 1951 on PM 62/455/1, Part 1, NZ W4627/950, NA.

¹⁸ EAR, May 1954, pp. 19-22.

¹⁹ 'Note on requests for representation in Southeast Asia', Department of External Affairs, July 1954, in PM 62/455/1, NA.

²⁰ McIntosh to Webb, 30 August 1954, PM 62/455/1, NA.

culminate in the conclusion of a South East Asian security organization. It is likely that this may be taken to mark the final watershed of full New Zealand involvement.²¹

The paper went on to note the marked increase in public calls for missions to be established, many influenced by the threats of Communist subversion. Additionally, increasing trade opportunities and the work of the Colombo Plan had provided extra focus.

Just over six months later, and following his own visit to the region, Prime Minister Sidney Holland informed Parliament during the External Affairs Adjournment debate that because of the growing importance of Southeast Asia and the changed international affairs situation, it was time for New Zealand to have closer links of its own. He paid tribute to Britain for what it 'has done for us up to the present in this matter of representation. She has maintained very large and expensive establishments which have provided us with all the information Britain gets, and we have been charged nothing whatever for it'.²² Government thinking, he added, was leaning towards a post in Singapore, with an outstation office in Bangkok. Opposition Leader Walter Nash followed as the next speaker, indicating support for representation of that nature, and also advocating up-scaled coverage in Japan.

Premier Holland's comments came hard on the heels of a decision, taken following Commonwealth discussions in London in February, that New Zealand should deploy its forces to Southeast Asia in any global war, and in that context take steps to contribute two frigates and forces to the Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve.²³

Singapore

By early 1955, the issue was less *where* but rather *when* and *who*. McIntosh reported to his new minister, T. L. Macdonald, in March that while the latter had legal responsibility for an appointment, it was a matter that the prime minister or cabinet might want to address. In a somewhat forthright manner, McIntosh urged the appointment of a career officer (something he had obviously raised previously in oral submission), noting the impact on morale in the department if this did not materialize. No career officer had been appointed head of a diplomatic mission since Carl Berendsen became High

²¹ Paper attached to *ibid*.

²² New Zealand Parliamentary Debates (NZPD), 24 March 1955.

²³ Ian McGibbon 'The Defence of New Zealand 1945-1957', in *New Zealand in World Affairs 1945-1957*, Wellington: New Zealand Institute of International Affairs (NZIIA), 1977, p. 159.

Commissioner in Canberra in 1943 and then appointed to Washington in 1944. Furthermore McIntosh added that Paris and Tokyo also lacked heads of mission, and he offered names for all three positions.²⁴

While McIntosh had the ear of Macdonald, it took some time to persuade Prime Minister Holland. In May, Macdonald wrote to the prime minister accepting his argument that External Affairs Deputy Secretary Foss Shanahan was 'indispensable' to the prime minister and cabinet but adding that there was some embarrassment that meetings of SEATO were taking place without New Zealand being represented.²⁵ On the same day, McIntosh wrote in exasperated tones to the British Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia in Singapore, Nick Larmour, that 'we are very cast down here by the failure of the Government to make any appointment to Singapore. The rock upon which we foundered was Foss [Shanahan] ... The Prime Minister just can't be induced to let him go'.²⁶ He then added confidentially that the other problem was that the prime minister wanted to send the Chief of General Staff, Major-General W. G. Gentry 'and I have maintained an obdurate opposition, so nothing is done'.²⁷

McIntosh (and Macdonald) prevailed; and Shanahan's appointment as Commissioner in Southeast Asia, with responsibility for Singapore, Malaya and British territories, was announced in early June. He was also to be accredited to SEATO in Bangkok. Macdonald noted the importance of filling a 'long-felt' gap in New Zealand's representation and the need to be able to report first-hand on defence and other issues and to make national views known to governments in the region. Shanahan's past experience as cabinet secretary, and work with previous ministers on defence issues such as the ANZUS negotiations in 1951 made him an ideal representative, Macdonald said.²⁸ It was expected that in time, the Commissioner Shanahan would be accredited to other countries as well. Singapore was the most suitable central location for a post. *The Dominion* commented that this marked a first career appointment and Shanahan had the distinction of 'having broken the 'sound barrier' in an appointment that would give a boost to departmental morale.²⁹

Indeed, much of the press coverage of this appointment, while welcoming the fact of the appointment itself, focused on the choice of a

²⁴ 15 March 1955, PM62/455/1, Part 1, NA. McIntosh suggested Foss Shanahan for the new post in Singapore, J. V. Wilson for Paris (or Tokyo), J. S. Reid for Singapore if Shanahan could not go or for Tokyo, and George Laking, then minister in Washington, as a possible alternative for either Singapore or Tokyo.

²⁵ 2 May 1955, PM62/455/1, Part 1, NA.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Gentry retired as CGS in August 1955 after a three-year term.

²⁸ *Evening Post*, 3 June 1955. Also see EAR, June 1955, pp. 3-4.

²⁹ 7 June 1955. McIntosh wrote to George Laking about Shanahan's appointment 'striking a blow for the career officer'. Ian McGibbon, ed., *Unofficial Channels*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1999, pp. 184-5.

career officer. *The Press* (8 June 1955) referred to the precedents of bad political appointments, and the *Auckland Star* (4 June 1955) noted that the department had recently lost several men it could ill afford to lose, some from the frustration over political appointments.³⁰ Interestingly, there was no carping, at that point at least, about the cost of running posts overseas, something that was to arise in later years.³¹

When Shanahan arrived in Singapore in July, he spoke about the important Commonwealth and Colombo Plan imperatives for the post, as well as to the recent commitment of New Zealand forces to Malaya as part of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve.³²

Shortly after his arrival, Shanahan met his United Kingdom counterpart, Malcolm MacDonald. In a personal note to McIntosh, Shanahan said he had explained to the UK Commissioner New Zealand's desire to see Malaya and Singapore achieve self-government within the Commonwealth and its concern with developments in the region. He had asked MacDonald to be kept fully informed and consulted. The response was positive enough although MacDonald noted that 'while there was an increasing recognition of the interest of these territories to Australia and New Zealand, this had not wholly registered with all elements of the Government at home'.³³

No doubt Shanahan had his work cut out in terms of the relationship with his British counterparts. In a carefully-worded broadcast to Radio Malaya after a SEATO meeting in August 1955, he outlined the goals of the new treaty for the free countries of Asia in terms of resisting aggression and added:

Your interests under SEATO are now represented by the United Kingdom. But we in New Zealand are also deeply interested in the problems of your security and your economic progress. As members of the Commonwealth we enjoy a special link with you. ... As self-government develops, so too will your responsibilities. I hope, therefore, that we may find you in an active partnership with us in the

³⁰ See various reports on PM 7/2/92, Part 2, NA. McIntosh had bemoaned the loss of staff in a letter to Frank Corner on 27 July 1954. McGibbon, *Unofficial Channels*, pp. 168-9.

³¹ Estimated costs of running the post were in the order of £40,000 plus about £20,000 initial capital outlay. Paper attached to McIntosh/Webb memorandum of 30 August 1954 on 62/455/1, Part 1, NA. Four staff left with Shanahan, two of whom were diplomats. See EAR, July 1955, p. 69. A trade commissioner was appointed at the end of that year. EAR, December 1955, pp. 4-5.

³² Copy on PM 62/455/1 Part 1, NA.

³³ 11 August note of discussion attached to letter to McIntosh in Shanahan papers 24/5/5 Part 1, NA. Note that 'MacDonald' refers to the British Commissioner (son of former Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald) while 'Macdonald' to the then New Zealand Minister.

common task of trying to keep South East Asia an area of free peoples.³⁴

This is not the place to cover the detail of the work of the post; but the importance of Singapore, its constitutional, political and economic development, and strategic situation, were stressed in an article in *External Affairs Review* in February 1958, shortly before Shanahan left for his new post as High Commissioner to Canada (and concurrent permanent representative to the UN in New York). The article concluded by noting the interest in Singapore's peaceful evolution and recalled the decision to establish the first New Zealand post there was due to its special advantage as a centre and listening post for the area as a whole.³⁵

Bangkok

As noted above, the case for representation in Bangkok had been made some years earlier and was based primarily on its place as a UN centre, rather than for intrinsic bilateral reasons. Shanahan's appointment in Singapore referred to the SEATO connection but made no mention of accreditation to the Royal Thai Government.

But Shanahan's appointment nevertheless raised its own pressures. A few months after his arrival in Singapore, the New Zealand Embassy in Washington reported on a conversation with US authorities about SEATO during which General Douglas MacArthur recalled that Secretary of State John Dulles (1953-9) was concerned at SEATO's lack of progress and that it was time to 'breathe life into the blue baby', a need more acute in the light of Soviet activity in the region.³⁶ In a side message from Laking, MacArthur was reported as reflecting Dulles' concerns about insufficient member government drive for SEATO and the need for each member to be adequately represented in Bangkok. Laking commented that 'New Zealand and Pakistan are particularly vulnerable to criticism by Asian members'.³⁷ A separate report from Shanahan in Bangkok noted that US concern was such that the Americans and British were thinking of a joint pressure on New Zealand and Pakistan to open offices, and added that the Australians were intending to raise the status of their office to an embassy.³⁸

³⁴ EAR, August 1955, pp. 18-20.

³⁵ EAR, February 1958, pp. 1-9, and EAR, April 1958, p.41.

³⁶ NZ Embassy Washington to Minister of External Affairs 2 December 1955, PM 62/315/1 Part 1, W4627/950 Box 1743, NA.

³⁷ Laking to Minister of External Affairs, 5 December 1955. Ibid.

³⁸ Shanahan to Minister of External Affairs, 7 December 1955. Ibid.

On seeing these messages, Prime Minister Holland penned two notes. In the first, he said he did not 'think it is for the USA to tell us when we should establish overseas posts. There is a clear reluctance on the part of the New Zealand government to extend its existing list of overseas posts. Russia is also saying we should return to Moscow.' In the second, he wrote:

I very much doubt whether USA and/or UK would be unwise enough to apply pressure to NZ as to whether we should have a mission in Bangkok. I know one or two people who think NZ should have lots of o/s [overseas] posts. I am not in the number. SGH.³⁹

But Shanahan was expressing similar concerns as the Americans. Early in 1956, he proposed the establishment of an officer in Bangkok to cover SEATO and went on to suggest it would be appropriate to establish a mission fully accredited to Thailand with full reporting responsibilities, liaison with the various UN agencies, consular work and assistance with immigration and information about New Zealand.⁴⁰ Later in the month, in a personal note to McIntosh, Shanahan reported on a conversation with Thai Deputy Foreign Minister Major Rak in which he had told Rak of the constraints from the lack of suitable senior staff. However, Shanahan added, he could not easily go on spending ten days a month in Bangkok covering needs there.⁴¹

Shanahan sharpened his pen and put an extensive case to the minister of external affairs following up on an earlier conversation during Macdonald's visit to the region in October 1955. Some 70% of the time of two of his staff currently in Singapore was now being spent on SEATO, he wrote. Added to his own time in Bangkok, this meant he had been unable to visit Laos, Cambodia or the Philippines (all in his area of responsibility) and had only minimal time in Malaya.⁴² Clearly the expectations of cross-accreditation were unrealistic. Shanahan noted the failure of his office to report on significant political developments including 'the attitude of Chinese in South East Asia'. Moreover immigration, passport and information work was on the increase. He acknowledged that it would be some time before other missions could be established but pressed the case for more staff for Singapore and for a senior political officer to be stationed in Bangkok.

This time, the system moved relatively quickly. In February, cabinet authorised the establishment of a diplomatic mission in Bangkok under control of a Chargé d'Affaires. The cabinet paper dwelt on the SEATO responsibilities but drew attention to the desire of the Thai government that a full mission be established. The projected cost for the first year of operation

³⁹ Undated; attached to the December messages. Ibid.

⁴⁰ Memorandum to Secretary of Foreign Affairs, 16 January 1956. Ibid.

⁴¹ Shanahan to McIntosh, 23 January 1956. Ibid.

⁴² Shanahan to Minister of External Affairs, 28 January 1956. Ibid.

was £26,250.⁴³ Writing to Shanahan after the cabinet decision, Macdonald said cabinet had had no hesitation in agreeing to the recommendation to establish a full mission rather than just a SEATO office.⁴⁴

The Thai reaction was extremely positive, Shanahan reporting that Foreign Minister Prince Wan had indicated such an office would be welcome and for its part Thailand would look to opening an embassy in Wellington during the year.⁴⁵ He later wrote to thank the minister but cautioned that with Malaya's independence due in August the following year, pressure would inevitably mount to open an office in Kuala Lumpur too.⁴⁶

Announcing the opening of the office, Prime Minister Holland emphasised the link with the determination to have a stronger SEATO organisation but mentioned also he welcome the strengthening of links with the Thai government and the likelihood of their establishing an office in Wellington.⁴⁷ The matter was also referred to in Parliament in April. Speaking in the Address in Reply, Macdonald noted the occasional public criticism of SEATO but was optimistic that it would prove an important complement to ANZUS. It helped gain time for economic progress to operate, he suggested:

We have in the past been inclined to disregard Asia, and I would say seriously that we must change that attitude. We are close to Asia, and events there will inevitably affect our destiny. We must learn to understand the Asian people, and we must give them opportunities of learning to understand us.⁴⁸

Later that month, a mid-level career officer left for Bangkok with an administration officer to staff the post and they were followed by a senior counsellor, R. L. G. Challis, in June.⁴⁹ Challis was subsequently replaced in 1958 by Assistant Secretary of External Affairs Charles Craw.⁵⁰ The first resident ambassador was not appointed until 1961 (Sir Stephen Weir). It was subsequently to become one of New Zealand's larger posts in Southeast Asia.

⁴³ Cabinet CP (56) 77, 10 February 1956. Copy in *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ 16 February 1956 (drafted by McIntosh). *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ NZ Commissioner Singapore to Minister of External Affairs 20 February 1956. *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Shanahan to Minister 24 February 1956. *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ 27 March 1956, EAR, March 1956, p. 4.

⁴⁸ 11 April 1956, NZPD. Also see the Speech from the Governor-General, 4 April 1956.

⁴⁹ EAR, April 1956, p. 56, and EAR, June 1956, p. 30. Challis joined External Affairs from Tokyo, where he had been the trade representative.

⁵⁰ EAR, September 1958, p. 35.

Kuala Lumpur

As Shanahan had foreshadowed, the imminent independence of Malaya was a driver for a separate New Zealand presence in Kuala Lumpur.

Asked by the Canadians about New Zealand intentions for a post, McIntosh indicated in early 1957 that while the department thought of cross-accreditation from Singapore and, in time, a small post in Kuala Lumpur would be needed, the government had not considered the matter. The minister, he said, would be sympathetic, but he was less sure about cabinet and treasury.⁵¹

So it proved to be apparent. Cabinet, when asked in August 1957 on the eve of Malayan independence to note Shanahan's cross-accreditation to Kuala Lumpur and to agree in principle to the eventual establishment of a small office there, confirmed the first but deferred action on the second—this despite Laking having warned that to do the first without the second might be to run the risk of the Malaysians refusing to accept Shanahan. As it transpired, there was no refusal, and a few weeks after independence, Shanahan was accredited as the first New Zealand High Commissioner.⁵²

Shanahan's tenure was short, as he left the following year for Ottawa. In a farewell broadcast on Radio Malaya, he paid tribute to the 'political and economic rebirth of Asia', noting the way New Zealand troops had been made welcome, and the importance of the Colombo Plan in developing the skills to address shortages in the emerging economies.⁵³

With Shanahan's departure, the decision was taken by cabinet to open a resident post in Kuala Lumpur and to investigate the possibility of appointing former Maori battalion commander, Colonel Charles Bennett.⁵⁴ Instructed to ensure the Malaysians appreciated the significance of the appointment of a Maori, the post in Singapore reported back that Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman was delighted: 'I do appreciate that. That is a very graceful compliment'.⁵⁵

The appointment was announced in October and widely welcomed by Maori in New Zealand. Bennett took up his assignment at the end of January

⁵¹ Memorandum to NZHC Ottawa, 11 April 1957. PM62/23/2, Part 1, W4627/950, NA.

⁵² 24 September 1957. Ibid. Initial concerns about a High Commissioner in a country whose head of state was not the British monarch proved unfounded. Shanahan reported on a ceremony less formal than for non-Commonwealth missions and a conversation with His Majesty the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (King) about tennis (he had been a Malaysian champion).

⁵³ 26 May 1958. Text attached to memorandum to Secretary of External Affairs 30 May 1958. Ibid.

⁵⁴ CM (58) 45, 2 September 1958. Ibid.

⁵⁵ Wellington to Singapore telegram 25 September and response 2 October, plus memorandum of 3 October 1958. Ibid.

1959, remaining until late in 1962.⁵⁶ *External Affairs Review* reported on the eve of Bennett's arrival on the significance of opening an office in a country where New Zealand defence cooperation was extensive and where the bulk of New Zealand's Colombo Plan assistance was directed. The article also noted the growing imports from Malaya (rubber and tin especially) worth over £2m, while New Zealand exports, mainly dairy products, accounted for only £235,000.⁵⁷

Jakarta

Notwithstanding the early recognition of what was initially called the United States of Indonesia by New Zealand in 1950, the low priority accorded in 1950 to establishing an office was in the event borne out—though that forecast did not allow for the upheavals of the mid-1960s that were to further delay a full embassy.

The likely need for an office had been mooted in the late 1940s, Assistant Secretary of External Affairs J.V. Wilson noting that if a post was to be established in China, for which there was some pressure, it would be well nigh impossible not to do the same in India, Pakistan, Ceylon as well as in the Netherlands East Indies and Japan. This, he suggested, was a formidable prospect, but a single office established at the headquarters of ECAFE, once settled, would place New Zealand in touch with the technical problems of Asian countries and, 'If we did this I think we could rightly say that we have made a great step in our relations with Asia' and at the same time push back demands for a series of individual offices.⁵⁸

Relations with Indonesia did not get off to the best of starts, New Zealand's absence from the independence ceremonies being a matter that drew some public criticism and media reports that this absence had offended the Indonesians.⁵⁹ Although Colombo Plan assistance began in 1953 and a Colombo Plan office established in Jakarta in 1957, the idea of a full diplomatic office held little appeal. McIntosh wrote in 1957 that the Indonesians were 'most welcome' to establish an office here but there was no immediate prospect of doing so in Jakarta.⁶⁰ The Indonesians were accredited from Canberra from June 1958.

⁵⁶ EAR, October 1958, p.10. After a short gap, Bennett was replaced by R. H. Wade in mid-1963.

⁵⁷ EAR, December 1958, pp. 8-10.

⁵⁸ Note to McIntosh 19 May 1948. PM62/46/1, Part 1, W4627/950, NA.

⁵⁹ See Michael Green, 'Uneasy Partners: New Zealand and Indonesia' in Smith, *Southeast Asia and New Zealand*, pp. 150-1. Other aspects of New Zealand's representation are fully covered on pp 151-71.

⁶⁰ Memorandum to Canberra, 11 November 1957. PM 62/46/1, NA.

In late 1960, McIntosh told visiting Indonesian Ambassador Helmi that Jakarta was 'on the list'.⁶¹ With the imminent departure of the New Zealand Colombo Plan representative, he put a lengthy paper to the prime minister at the beginning of 1961 arguing the case for a regular post, designated as a consulate. This, he said, would remove anomalies from the current situation where the Colombo Plan representative, paid under Plan funds, was taking on work that went beyond his brief.⁶² Holyoake agreed, and in April, former National MP for Eden, Duncan Rae, was named as consul-general. In announcing the appointment, Holyoake stressed that for financial reasons a full diplomatic mission was not yet possible but that Rae would supervise New Zealand's Colombo Plan work in Indonesia as part of a much wider brief. He noted Rae's extensive experience in the education sector (head of the Auckland Teacher's Training College from 1929-47, before entering Parliament).⁶³

It was not a universally-welcomed appointment. The *New Zealand Herald* took the government to task, not for appointing Rae, but for having an office in a country with negligible trade, and a frustrating country in which to work with. Bonn or Brussels, with the rise of the European Common Market, would have been far more appropriate, it asserted.⁶⁴ Stung, McIntosh drafted a private letter for Holyoake to send the next day to the *Herald's* editor, O. S. (Budge) Hintz in which the importance of the Colombo Plan for Indonesia was set out. The irregular situation of the previous representative receiving Indonesian housing and a car but supervising the New Zealand programme was considered untenable. 'We did not want to set up a diplomatic post, but for various reasons we have found it necessary to take over from the British the consular and passport work which they are doing for us.'⁶⁵

Rae's appointment letter set out the broad responsibilities for the Colombo Plan work, political reporting and consular activity. Rae was charged with developing a programme to make Indonesians aware of New Zealand. Prophetically, it reminded him that Indonesia:

With its huge population and immense potential economic resources ... will come to affect the destiny of our whole area. No temporary frustrations or disagreements over particular policies should blind us to this over-riding fact that Indonesia will become one of the great world States, the main State of South East Asia, and—along with the United

⁶¹ Note for file 24 November 1960. Ibid.

⁶² 13 February 1961. Ibid.

⁶³ EAR, April 1961, pp. 21-2. *Dominion*, 8 April 1961. Rae had retired at the 1960 elections.

⁶⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, 10 April 1961.

⁶⁵ PM 62/46/1, NA.

States, India, China and Japan—one of the four great powers of the Pacific area.⁶⁶

Perhaps there was a change of heart at the *Herald* by 1963 when the post became a legation with Rae as Chargé d’Affaires.⁶⁷ It noted that with the deteriorating situation and the policies of the Sukarno government ‘the interests of New Zealand call for full diplomatic representation, at least as a precautionary measure ... New Zealand clearly requires a listening post in such a potential trouble spot, so that first-hand reports can be made on how developments are likely to affect our particular interests’.⁶⁸

Rae was succeeded in 1964 by Reul Lochore, with the title of minister. As the Indonesian domestic political situation worsened, he was moved to write to McIntosh that the country was going backwards and that New Zealand had no way of influencing the government. He considered that, without the same direct interests as Australia, some scaling back of activity merited, with resources better applied elsewhere in Southeast Asia.⁶⁹

This was a period of intense political turmoil within Indonesia. The cloud eventually lifted; Suharto replaced Sukarno, and Laking, now secretary of external affairs, suggested to Holyoake at the end of 1966 that the time was coming for a full embassy in Jakarta (that would be reciprocated in Wellington) ‘as a gesture of friendship and confidence [n]ow that confrontation has ended.’⁷⁰ Holyoake refused to agree though Laking noted to his deputy, Lloyd White, that this might be submitted again later.⁷¹ Indeed, a second submission, in September the following year (that noted the restoration of Malaysia and Singapore’s relations with Indonesia) was approved by the prime minister.⁷² The change was announced by the prime minister later in the month, although it would be another six months before the first ambassador, Challis, took up his assignment.

⁶⁶ 8 May 1961. *Ibid.* The instructions noted that New Zealand did not support Indonesian claims to West New Guinea but that that should not be allowed to prevent collaboration in other ways.

⁶⁷ EAR, January 1963, p.20.

⁶⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, 31 January 1963. It suggested Indonesia had so far shown little gratitude for the Colombo Plan assistance.

⁶⁹ Letter, 14 September 1965. PM 62/46/1, NA.

⁷⁰ 22 December 1966. *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Note 17 January 1967. *Ibid.*

⁷² 8 September 1967. *Ibid.* Also see the prime minister’s statement, EAR, September 1967, p 26. He also indicated in Parliament, in response to a government question, that New Zealand looked for closer relations with the new Indonesian government and would be looking again at how best it should be represented in Jakarta. NZPD, 7 September 1967. He warned however, that the cost of renting a house in Jakarta for the deputy, some £3,500 a year, was over £ 1,000 more than the annual salary of an MP.

Some Lessons

The Jakarta post completed the first round of representation in Southeast Asia. Sir Stephen Weir was cross-accredited from Bangkok to Saigon in 1962, but a resident mission was not established for another five years, after the commitment of an infantry battalion. As Roberto Rabel notes in his new work on New Zealand and the Vietnam War, the emphasis on defence commitment in the early 1960s remained with Malaya.⁷³ Indeed, it remained a priority for the Holyoake government, long after the end of the Malaya-Indonesia confrontation.

For the initial New Zealand posts, as with earlier British representation, protection of economic and security interests lay at the core. The administration of the Colombo Plan, that instigated the early opening of the post in Bangkok, also had a major part to play in the opening of the three other offices in Southeast Asia.

Perhaps most critical was that, notwithstanding Prime Minister Holland's rejection of bilateral pressure, it was indeed the changing nature of British and US involvement in the region that gave impetus for New Zealand itself to forge closer links. Similar to the Colombo Plan, it was ECAFE (and later United Nations Economic and Social Council for the Asia Pacific or ESCAP), and the security imperatives that provided a multilateral dimension for posts to be established. These initially far outweighed the case for bilateral relations, at least until the opening of the Kuala Lumpur office.

Defence considerations, including the stationing of New Zealand forces in the area, were also prominent in the opening of the Kuala Lumpur and Singapore offices. Moreover there were also growing consular responsibilities for New Zealanders in the region (though hardly on today's scale) and for immigration matters.

While costs were always an issue—though perhaps less than they might have been had Nash still been in office—the shortage of trained staff was apparent at each turn. There were some very able senior staff in the department, but head office responsibilities, as well as the need to send officers to other missions in the United States and Europe, also had to be addressed. Yet, with a mind to building a modern foreign ministry, McIntosh showed himself, resistant to some suggestions of appointees from outside.

What is apparent is the growing realization in the senior establishment of the foreign ministry, as well as with senior ministers, that Southeast Asia was an area of major and growing importance to New Zealand. Underpinned by the defence links, the emerging trade opportunities, as well as the development assistance programmes including the Colombo Plan, these

⁷³ Roberto Rabel, *New Zealand and the Vietnam War*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2005, Chapters 3 and 4; especially pp. 77, 83, 85, 89.

relationships called for greater effort and resource. As time was to show, some of this was relatively slow in coming and would be overshadowed by the growth of the North Asian economies in the following decades. But the reasons for developing early links in Southeast Asia after World War II were valid and firm foundations were laid for relationships that endure today as amongst New Zealand's most important.

As to whether representation in 1967 was outstanding (Holyoake) or 'woefully-inadequate' (Turner), history perhaps suggests that in the course of the 1950s and 1960s, some considerable effort had been made, within financial and personnel resource constraints, as well as against similar claims for attention in other parts of the world, to set New Zealand on a path towards appropriate diplomatic coverage of Southeast Asia. By April 1968, there were full diplomatic missions in Singapore, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta and Saigon. This accounted for a quarter of all full New Zealand overseas missions prior to 1970. In Southeast Asia, only two additions have been made since (Manila and most recently Dili) as well as the opening of a post in Hanoi in 1995 to replace Saigon.

As Turner acknowledged, running offices overseas was an expensive business. But that had to be offset against looking like a 'second-rate nation in the eyes of Asians.' In the event, the New Zealand government did take up what he had argued to be an important opportunity to expand and improve representation in major Southeast Asian capitals. The late 1950s and 1960s had seen considerable effort put in to offices targeted to meet specific national concerns, even if the pace had perhaps been slower than some would have wish.