

3.5 Australia and the Cold War

As an ally of the United States during World War II, and a nation that held similar beliefs about democracy and free-market capitalism, Australia sided with the US during the Cold War. Because of fear of communism and to demonstrate support, Australia signed security treaties with the US and fought in their wars.

The fear of communism

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s there was a genuine fear of communism within Australia. Prime Minister Robert Menzies (Australia's longest serving leader), warned of the loss of prosperity and personal freedoms if the 'Red Menace' (communism) took hold. Australians took some comfort in their close relationship with the US. Conservative politicians of the day, however, warned that the threat was not just invasion but infiltration from within. They warned that communist sympathisers within Australia were spreading their ideas within trade unions and the Labor Party.

In 1954, in the lead-up to the federal election, Menzies announced that Vladimir Petrov, a Russian diplomat, had asked for and been granted political asylum. Petrov handed over documents claimed to indicate that Soviet spies were active in Australia. His wife, however, was held under virtual house arrest by Soviet officials. A week later they forced her onto a plane headed for Moscow. When the plane landed in Darwin for refuelling, ASIO held them for taking weapons onto the plane. Mrs Petrov was granted political asylum and reunited with her husband. Australians were outraged by this event. Although no evidence of a 'spy ring' was ever revealed, Menzies used the affair successfully to frighten voters during the 1954 election campaign (which he won in May) and he continued to use fear of communism to win support in subsequent federal elections.

Treaties

Australia signed two major treaties that tied us to the US during the Cold War.

- The ANZUS Pact (1951) was a three-way alliance between Australia, New Zealand and the US, under which each state agreed to cooperate on defence matters and pledged to come to the aid of the other if attacked. Despite New Zealand's withdrawing from the treaty in the mid 1980s, ANZUS remains the cornerstone of Australia's foreign policy today.
- The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was signed in 1954. The members of this alliance were Australia, France, New Zealand, Thailand, Pakistan, the

Source 1 This photograph, showing Soviet agents 'escorting' an evidently reluctant Mrs Petrov onto her flight for Moscow, shocked Australians.



Philippines, the United Kingdom and the US. Intended to complement the anti-communist collective defence role played by NATO in Europe, SEATO proved to be ineffective because of internal disputes and was disbanded in 1977.

The domino theory and forward defence

Australia's main objective with these alliances was to block the spread of communism through South-East Asia to Australia. The Menzies government believed in the 'domino theory' — that if one country fell to communism, neighbouring countries would also fall, just like dominos. To prevent this, it believed Australia had to support non-communist governments. According to the forward defence strategy, we had to fight communism wherever it was to be found, rather than waiting for our enemies to attack us. Based on these beliefs, Australia supported the Malaysian government against communist rebels by stationing troops in Malaya between 1955 and 1963. Australia also fought in two major wars in the name of anti-communism.

Military action

Korea

Korea became the focal point of the Cold War in Asia. When Japan was defeated, Korea, a former Japanese

Source 2 The domino theory in action



colony, was occupied by Russian troops in the north and American troops in the south. The 38th parallel (the line of latitude 38 degrees north) divided the two forces. In 1947 the United Nations (UN) divided the country between north and south along this line, with the eventual aim to form one united country. The Soviet Union set up a communist government in the north (the People's Democratic Republic of Korea), while the US-backed, non-communist Republic of Korea (ROK) was established in the south.

Each government claimed to be the legitimate government of the whole

of Korea. Following several border clashes, and with the backing of the newly created communist China, North Korea invaded the south in June 1950.

The UN responded by condemning North Korea for its aggression and called on member nations to send forces to assist the ROK. The US led this force, contributing half the land forces and the vast majority of naval and air forces. Fifteen other countries, including Australia, also sent forces.

The war was fiercely fought in harsh conditions. The battlefield ebbed and flowed. The initial

Source 3 An Australian soldier stands guard over the frozen waters of the River Han.



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Did you know?



Why did the Soviet Union not veto the UN Security Council Resolution to support South Korea? The Soviets were boycotting proceedings in protest because China's UN seat was held by the ousted Nationalists rather than by its Communist government, and so the Soviet Union missed the vote.

Source 4 A map showing the progress of the Korean War



communist attack nearly captured the entire peninsula by September. The UN counterattacks pushed North Korean forces right back into China by November, but Chinese intervention saw the UN pushed back again. When the **armistice** was signed in 1953, the 38th parallel was again the divide between the two sides. The armistice is still in place today. No formal peace treaty was ever signed, and Korea remains divided along the 38th parallel.

The Korean War led to the death of more than 1.5 million South Koreans and an estimated 3.5 million from the North and China. Australia contributed ground, air and naval