

CHAPTER 1

RAIDS OR INVASION? 1905-1939

The burden of the Brisbane Line controversy of 1942-43 lay in the allegations made by Eddie Ward, outlined previously. In order to explain the origins of the controversy it is necessary first to examine Army plans for the continental defence of Australia that were drawn up, or alleged to have been drawn up from 1910-1939. Furthermore, it is also necessary to examine Ward's charge that previous conservative governments failed to make adequate provision for Australian home defence from 1931 to October 1941. The accuracy of this latter charge, so far as it pertains to the pre-World War II period, and the nature of plans for home defence up to 1939 will be examined in this chapter. The 'blue water' strategy and the Singapore strategy, are seen as components of this defence preparedness in this period.

The earliest date given for the creation of the Brisbane Line during the 1943 controversy was 1910. E.M. Hanlon, Queensland Minister for Health and Home Affairs, in 1943, alleged in State Parliament that Lord Kitchener, when visiting Australia in 1909 in response to an invitation from Alfred Deakin, the Liberal Prime Minister, 'to advise this Govt. [sic] upon the best means of developing and perfecting the land defence of the country',^{1a} had been author of the Brisbane Line strategy. According to Hanlon Kitchener had suggested the Maroochy River, just north of Brisbane, as a place where a small army could mount an effective defence against an invading army.^{1b} Hanlon's allegation was later supported by General Sir Iven Mackay, GOC Home Forces from September 1941 to March 1942, who claimed that the Kitchener Brisbane Line was the only Brisbane Line of which he ever had knowledge.^{1c}

Deakin had instructed Kitchener that he wished particularly

to make you acquainted with our country and its coasts
and thus enable you to form an opinion upon the best
method of meeting a hostile landing on our shores ...

^{1a} MS 1540/15/3875. Series 15. VII. Defence. Deakin to Kitchener. 9.7.1909. NLA. Except where otherwise indicated, all Deakin papers are from this series.

^b C. Lack, *Three Decades of Queensland Political History*, Brisbane, [c.1962], p.220.

^c I. Chapman, *Iven G. Mackay, Citizen and Soldier*, Sydney, 1975, pp.287-288.

it will not be necessary for you to leave your steamer before reaching Brisbane, if she calls at more Northern ports, but we will advise you later probably by cable.²

The Prime Minister's letter is the only contemporary evidence that even remotely suggests Kitchener contemplated establishing a line of defence near Brisbane. If he did indeed make that suggestion, it seems to have been implanted in his mind by Deakin. No further advice to the, by then, Field-Marshal about landfall north of Brisbane is extant. The allegations made in the 1940's that Kitchener had been the first general to envisage a 'Brisbane Line', are of extremely tenuous foundation. As the basis for the origin of a *Brisbane Line* strategy, they should be rejected.

Australian fears that their continent was a target of Asian invasion were encapsulated in 1891, by Henry Parkes at the National Convention called to discuss a Federal constitution. Parkes warned that the Chinese were 'awakening to all the power which their immense population gives them in the art of war' and predicted the Chinese might establish themselves in some less populated area of the country from which it would be extremely difficult to evict them.^{3a} Behind these fears lay the bigoted race prejudice of the time, echoed in the *Bulletin*, whose editors once described a Chinese man as

something half brute and half-human, a grovelling wretch, soaked in opium,³ degraded by vice, ignorance and superstition ...^{3b}

Parkes' imagination painted the Chinese as potential invaders. That view was not held seriously of the Japanese until after Japanese victories in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905.^{4a} Captain W.R. Creswell, Director of Naval Forces wrote to Deakin, then in his second term as Prime Minister, in early 1907 of the possibility of 'German, Jap and Chinese colonies' being 'carved out of the North and West of Australia'.^{4b} The increase of Japanese naval strength in the Pacific area, partly as a result of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, initiated in 1902 and renewed in 1905, and the 1908 visit of the United States Pacific Fleet to Australia, at Deakin's invitation, helped all political parties decide on the need to establish Australia's own navy.^{4c} However, conservative politicians held that

2. MS 1540/15/3991. Deakin to Kitchener, 10.8.1909. NLA.

3.^a Henry Parkes, cited in E.M. Andrews, *Australia and China, The Ambiguous Relationship*. Melbourne, 1985, p.20.

^b *The Bulletin*, cited in *ibid.*, p.18.

'Australia as part of the Empire is secure from invasion while the Imperial navy has command of the sea.'^{4a} This policy of priority for the Navy so established itself as a non-Labor tradition that to doubt it almost became an expression of disloyalty.^{4c} The Australian Navy would defend the various naval bases and harbours. The Army was to make safe 'the seaward cities in which so large a part of industrial life centres, and which also are our naval bases, harbours of refuge and whaling ports.'

In 1911 Britain again renewed the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. By early 1914, Joseph Cook, the Liberal Prime Minister, was complaining about British failure to establish a Far Eastern Fleet in Pacific waters, where Japan more than held the balance of power over Britain, Australia and the United States.⁵ Soon after the outbreak of war with Germany in August 1914, as Australian forces operated against German territories in the South Pacific, the Japanese Navy, at Britain's request, seized the German North Pacific territories, the Marshall, Caroline and Mariana Islands. Under the terms of the capitulation of German New Guinea these had been surrendered to Australia. Japan refused to give them up. Australian authorities, convinced of Japan's future aggressive intent, and concerned at the ousting of Australian trade from the newly occupied territories, confirmed Hughes' belief that Japanese aims were predatory and expansionary.⁶

William Morris Hughes, as leader of the United Australia Party from late 1941 to 1943 was to figure largely in the Brisbane Line controversy. From his entry into Federal politics in 1901 he had been a strong advocate of the White Australia policy.^{7a} Minister for External Affairs under Watson, Australia's first Labor Prime Minister, he had been impressed by the problems Japanese migration had caused in the United States and Canada.

4. a. A.T. Yarwood, *Asian Migration to Australia. The Background to Exclusion 1898-1923*. Melbourne, 1964, p.91.

b. Creswell to Deakin, 6.3.1907 quoted in Neville Meaney, (ed.) *Australia and the World, A Documentary History from 1870's to 1970's*. Melbourne, 1985, pp.164-167, esp. p.166.

c. Unspecified General File : AA MP 729/1. File OS/5018. Memorandum by the Minister of State for Defence submitted to the Council of Defence 12.5.1905. [J.W. McCay] quoted in Meaney, *op.cit.*, p.159.

d. George Fairbanks, 'Isolationism v. Imperialism : the 1937 Election' in *Politics*, Vol. II, No. 2, 1967, p.246.

e. Deakin, quoted in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12.6.1905, in Meaney, *op.cit.*, p.187.

5. Joseph Cook, Prime Minister to Lord Denman, Governor General, 28.6.1914. AA CP 290/15/2 enclosed in despatch Lord Denman to Lewis Harcourt, British Colonial Secretary 3.3.14 quoted in Neville Meaney, *Search for Security in the Pacific 1901-1914*. Sydney, 1976, p.204.

6. Robert Thornton, 'Invaluable Ally or Imminent Aggressor? Australia and Japanese Naval Assistance 1914-1918' in *Journal of Australian Studies*, 12, 1983, p.14.
Ibid., pp.18-20.

As Prime Minister since October 1915, he feared Japan might switch its loyalties to the Kaiser in mid-war, because of Japanese press criticisms of the Allies and their open sympathy in Government and military circles with Germany.^{7b} In New York in June 1918, now leader of the pro-conscription Nationalists, Hughes appealed for American support of Australian claims to German territories in the Pacific at the end of the war. In Britain he advised Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister that Australia had 'a deeply rooted mistrust of Japan'. Their claim to 'the Marshalls, Caroline and Ladrone's' was 'a menace to the trade and safety of Australia and the Empire'.^{7c} At the Paris Peace Conference he followed the same line, and argued against and defeated a Japanese attempt to include a claim guaranteeing 'equality of nations and equal treatment of their nationals' in the proposed League of Nations Covenant, because of the clause's potential to threaten the White Australia policy.^{7d} The mandatory system arrived at as a compromise in Paris gave the Japanese possession of the North Pacific Islands, but precluded them from using them as military or naval bases.^{7e}

Apprehension about Japan's military and economic ambitions increased after Versailles. Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Jellicoe, in 1919 warned in a report to the Australian Government that a clash between Britain and Japan, though unlikely 'for some years to come' was 'almost inevitable', when Britain was involved in Europe.⁸ By 1920, a conference of Australia's most senior officers advising on future military requirements concluded Japan remained Australia's 'only potential and probable enemy'.

Based on the realization that Australia needed to have a land army capable of preventing 'an invading enemy from obtaining decisive victories' before help arrived from other parts of the British Empire, that report is instructive on Australia's preparedness against invasion, and on the disposition of troops for home defence. Both aspects were significant in the later Brisbane Line controversy.

7a-L.F. Fitzhardinge, 'William Morris Hughes' in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* 1891-1939. Vol. 9, 1983, pp.394-395.

b.Thornton, *op.cit.*, pp.18-20.

c.*New York Times*, 1.6.18, cited in Meaney, *Australia and the World*, p.251. Letter, W.M. Hughes, Prime Minister to David Lloyd George, British Prime Minister 4.11.18 in *ibid.*, p.262.

d.Fitzhardinge, *op.cit.*, p.398.

e.Enclosure, *Daily Mail* (Paris) 30.1.19 in Meaney, *Australia and the World*, p.279.

8. Jellicoe Report on Naval Defence. Vol. 4 (secret), pp.221-3 cited in Meaney, *Australia and the World*, p.286.

Its authors recommended, among other things, an emergency organisation of the demobilised AIF and 'the immediate acquisition of arms, armaments, equipment and ammunition' and 'the preparation of coast defences' to meet the needs of the immediate future. They believed a scheme of 'gradual development' of defence powers would be valueless, should a danger arise in the near future. The actual total strength of the Army far exceeded that required by High Command. Nevertheless the bulk of troops were concentrated in New South Wales and Victoria. Attention was concentrated on the preparation of coast defences, with priority given to the Naval bases at Cockburn Sound in the west and Port Stephens in the east, then fortification of Sydney, Newcastle, Melbourne, and Hobart. 'The need for concentration of the maximum force at places whose decision is likely to be sought, e.g. in the vicinity of Sydney and Melbourne is primary.' It was foreseen that inhabitants of other low priority areas might protest. To counter that it was intended to organise the Army so a 'certain measure of local protection to all States is ensured'.⁹ The low priority defence of Western Australia and Queensland was to be a perennial dilemma for the Army, because of the possibility of protest, which reached its apogee in the Brisbane Line controversy.

For the politicians, notably Hughes, and George Pearce, the Minister for Defence, the defence of Australia was primarily a naval problem. As a consequence the naval disarmament agreement emerging from the Washington Disarmament Conference of 1921-22 Australia developed an illusory sense of security about Japan. There was a public expectation of reduction in defence expenditure, since she no longer needed to be feared.^{10a} The Army, for example, was reduced from 128,000 in 1921 to 37,000 in 1922. Requirements for the politically unpalatable compulsory military training scheme were modified.^{10b}

However, it was soon realized that

As a result of the Washington Conference and the abrogation of the Anglo Japanese Alliance the strategic position in the Western Pacific has been adversely affected ... should Japan unfortunately become aggressive in the future ... the Four Power Pact between the United States of America, France, Japan and the British Empire may not save us from becoming involved in war.¹¹

9. MS 1827/14. G. Pearce Papers. *Report on Military Defence of Australia*. Vol. 1. 6.2.1920, p.22. NLA.

10a.R. Thornton, 'The Semblance of Security : Australia and the Washington Conference 1921-22'. *Australian Outlook*, 32, 1978, pp.78-81.

10b John Barrett, *Falling In Australians and 'Boy' Conscription, 1911-1916*. Sydney, 1979, pp.267-268.

11. George Pearce, *CPD 1922 Session*. Vol. XCIX, pp.821-823, July 1922. quoted in Meaney, *Australia and the World*, p.329.

At the Imperial Conference of 1923 guiding principles were laid down on Imperial defence co-operation. Each dominion was primarily responsible for its own local defence. Nevertheless, British sea-power, now limited to a minimum standard of Naval strength, equal with the Naval strength of any foreign power, safeguarded the maritime communications, trade and defence routes of the Empire and provided Naval bases for the fuel and mobility of the fleet. A naval base was mooted for Singapore 'essential for ensuring the mobility necessary to provide for the security of the territory and trade of the Empire in Eastern waters'.¹²

Australia's representative at the Imperial Conference was Stanley Melbourne Bruce, Prime Minister since 1922. When Bruce was informed of the British Labor Government's decision, in March, 1924 to stop the construction of the Singapore Naval base, begun but five months previously, he protested strongly that the Singapore base was imperative as it provided that mobility that was the strength of the British Navy for the Pacific. Abandonment of the base, Bruce argued would have the effect of increasing 'the ambitions of lesser powers'. The appeal was to no avail.^{13 b.}

The optimism that had followed the successful conclusion of the Washington Conference was fading. Australian Army officers in any case, had continued to centre their plans around the possibility of a Japanese invasion.^{14 a} Some intelligence sources even posited that the Japanese intended to mount a small scale campaign against the Newcastle area and coastal Northern New South Wales coalfields.^{14 b} The popular press saw the Japanese building up of warships within the confines of the Washington Naval Treaty as a threat to Australia.^{14 c} Bruce's military and naval advisers urged a return to the maintaining of defence on a pre-war scale. These factors, and Bruce's own perception of Australia as a white outpost in the Pacific likely to come under threat from 'teeming millions' in other countries who had no outlet for their population - the state of affairs in Japan - combined with the British Government's decision to concentrate on the building up of the Royal Air Force, and to abandon the Singapore base plan, determined him to restore the savage defence cuts instituted by Hughes in 1922.^{14 d}

12. Thornton, 'The Semblance of Security...' in *op.cit.*, pp.81-83.

13. Cablegram (Secret) Lord Foster, Governor-General to J.H. Thomas, British Colonial Secretary 11.5.24. AA CRS A 981. Item Singapore Naval Base, Part 1, in Meaney, *Australia and the World*, pp.341-343.

The Government saw the defence of Australia as 'a naval problem', but was 'not unmindful of the fact that seaborne defence must be supplemented by adequate land and air forces'. To this end they initiated a five year defence programme, the first of a series, for developmental projects, and cruiser and submarine construction, in addition to ordinary annual defence expenditure.^{14a} Attention was also paid to munitions supply. Construction of factories to this end had not, generally, advanced sufficiently for large-scale manufacture by late 1925. But at least the necessity to improve the state of both the Army, and the Navy, and to 'create an adequate Air Defence for Australia' had been realized.^{14b}

The Government were singularly unclear about the needs of the Army, despite their recognition that something had to be done. Their main emphasis on 'the scale of defence necessary to protect Australian ports' was a naval emphasis. To a great extent Government thinking was shaped by naval advice.^{15a} Once Britain again began work on the Singapore base in 1926, this influence was undoubtedly strengthened. Confident of Singapore's role as the key to Imperial defence in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the Navy saw little or no threat from Japan. Any attack on Australia, they argued, would only be in the form of minor raids.^{15b}

This assessment was unacceptable to the General Staff, who were sceptical the Singapore base would actually be completed, and if it were, doubted its capacity to hold out against the Japanese until the British fleet arrived. There was not any guarantee that Britain would send a fleet to the Far East if an emergency did arise, nor any certainty that it would defeat the Japanese Navy. Hence the General Staff advocated preparation against invasion.

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14. The above two paragraphs are based on^a Horner, 'Estimates of the Japanese Threat' p.144;^b Robert Walton, 'Japanese Espionage in Australia, 1909-41: a preliminary survey of types and methods'. *Australian War Memorial History Conference 11-15 February 1985*, pp.12, 22, 29.
^c E.L. Piesse, 'Japan and Australia', *Foreign Affairs*, IV, (April 1926), pp.486-8 in Meaney, *Australia and the World*, p.355;^d CPD 1924 Session, Vol. CVII, pp.1702-3, 27 June 1924 in *ibid.* and^e Thornton, 'Semblance of Security', *op.cit.*, p.80;^f AA ACT CRS A5954. Shedden Papers, Box 2901. 'Australian Defence' 29.9.25. This is possibly a draft of a speech by the Minister for Defence, George Pearce, P.1, pp.6-7/
 15 ^a J. McCarthy, *Australia and Imperial Defence. A Study in Air and Sea Power 1919-1939*. St Lucia, 1976, p.51.
^b AA ACT CRS A5954. Shedden Papers. Box 2401, 'Australian Defence', 29.9.25.

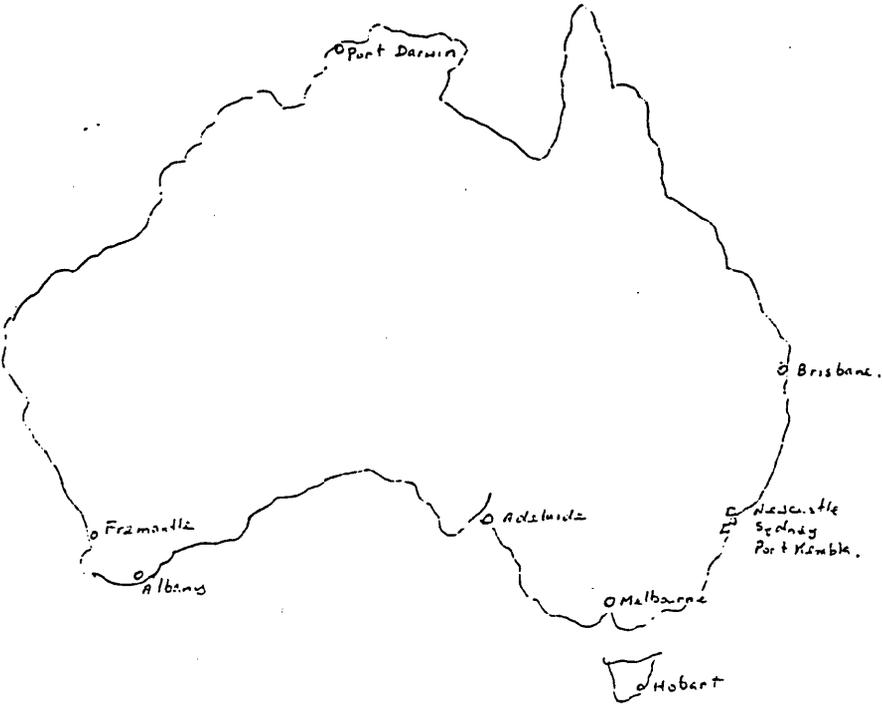


Figure 1

Location of (a) vital areas □
 (b) sufficiently important areas ○
 most likely to be raided according to
 D.M.O. & I. 1929.

It is necessary to examine in some detail the Army plans for defence against invasion since, as we shall see, the revelation of these plans by Eddie Ward as they existed in December 1942 contributed to the confusion that made up the Brisbane Line controversy.

Several appreciations were drawn up by the Directors of Military Operations and Intelligence, General Staff Branch, in 1929 and 1930. In essence, these appreciations worked on the common-sense assumption that the enemy objective of invasion was certain to be limited to a 'compact, vulnerable area, the resources of which are necessary to the economic life of Australia'. Initially these conditions were applied to Sydney and the Newcastle-Maitland area. The two regions were not expected to be attacked simultaneously as this would cause the enemy to dispose his forces and thus lead to his easy defeat.^{16a} In December 1933 Lieutenant-Colonel V.A.H. Sturdee, in a lecture given to officers participating in an exercise testing the plans for the defence of these vital areas, added Melbourne as a potential target of attack. While other capital cities were 'important to local state interests their loss was not likely to disorganise economic life'. The principal aim of military war plans, therefore, was to prevent the seizure of Sydney and Newcastle which could be considered 'almost as one'.

Hobart and the Western Australian ports of Fremantle and Albany would defend themselves with locally raised troops, though some Tasmanian troops might be withdrawn to the main centre of concentration. Few problems were envisaged with the defence of Adelaide and Melbourne. Brisbane defence was considered important, but not in the sense that Sydney, Newcastle and Melbourne were, despite its vulnerability because of closeness to Japanese bases and remoteness from other Australian centres of population. Darwin was particularly ill-defended, relying only on fixed defences and a battalion stationed at the port. There would not be time either for adequate mobilisation or training or for the completion of Army equipment, as, in the light of the Japanese behaviour in 1905 against Russia, a declaration of war was not expected.^{16b} (See Figure 1)

16a. AWM 54. 243/6/159. *General Staff Appreciation and Outline Plan designed as basis concentration of troops. Sydney Newcastle-Ballarat areas 1929-30.* 'Appreciation: The Concentration of the Australian Land Forces in time of War. 20.9.29, pp.1-14.

b. AWM 54 243/6/170. Senior Officers' Course. Lecture on the Plan of Concentration by Lieut. Colonel V.A.H. Sturdee, D.S.O., O.B.E., Director of Military Operations and Intelligence. pp.1-6.

Two points emerge from these appreciations. Army planning neither intended nor was able to defend the whole of Australia in the event of invasion. And it was not predicated upon the existence of a Brisbane Line.

Sturdee was distinguished by his service in the Middle East and France during World War I. In 1921 he had attended the Staff College at Quetta in India for two years, after which he returned to Australia as an instructor at the Royal Military College, Duntroon. In 1929 he was again posted overseas on exchange duty to the General Staff at the War Office, London, then spent some time studying at the Imperial Defence College. After serving as Military Representative at the Australian High Commission, he returned to Australia to take up as DMO & I. Like Colonel J.D. Lavarack, his predecessor, he was not convinced of the wisdom of the Singapore strategy and saw the main threat to Australia as coming from Japan.¹⁷

Sturdee had based his December 1933 exercise on the assumption that Australia might have seven weeks warning of invasion if it were lucky. If the Government was indecisive about ordering mobilisation a hostile landing could occur before troops were concentrated. He warned that the Army might find itself with a 'hastily thrown together' force 'with very little training, short of artillery and probably of gun ammunition' pitted against three divisions of 'fanatics who like dying in battle' and who were 'fully equipped and trained for operations.'¹⁸

Sturdee's lecture notes were passed on for comment to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Montgomery-Massingbird, in London, for comment. To him, the Australian forecast was optimistic. He assessed the estimated warning time of a Japanese invasion as 31 days. Hence the importance of an early decision to mobilize and concentrate the Australian forces. Moreover he expected the Japanese army arriving on Australian shores to consist of 20,000 men, twice the force estimated by Sturdee. Finally, he believed Sturdee's estimate of six weeks to achieve mobilization and concentration exceedingly long and dangerous.¹⁹

His comments alarmed the General Staff. They could see no way, with the limited periods of annual training, the small nucleus peace establishment and the absence of a reserve, that they could prepare ill-trained raw recruits

17. J.P. Buckley, 'Lieutenant-General Sir Vernon Sturdee', *Defence Force Journal of the Australian Profession of Arms*, 41, July/August 1983, pp.24-30.

18. cf. f/n 16.

to meet an attack of fully-trained regular troops. British comments brought to the surface a lack of faith in present mobilization arrangements which the General Staff then seriously considered scrapping.^{19b}

The question of the responsibility for that lack of Army defence preparedness evident to the General Staff was to become a key issue in the 1942-1943 Brisbane Line controversy. The origins of that lack can be traced back to the 1930s. They need to be briefly canvassed as they will elucidate part of the foundations of the war-time controversy which is the subject of this thesis.

The first, and most obvious cause was the reduction in defence expenditure forced on the newly elected Scullin Labor Government by the onset of the Great Depression. Labor had come to office federally under James Scullin in October, 1929. He had been elected party leader in 1928. Among his colleagues in Government were John Curtin, passed over for the Ministry because he was a lapsed Catholic and because of his alcoholism.^{20a}^{20b}

Labor wanted to reduce expenditure and balance the budget. In defence they proposed to end compulsory military training, moribund in any case, and introduce other heavy cuts. At the Defence Council Meeting where these measures were announced, Scullin queried 'the real value of the ... Army', given the lack of development of fixed defences and the inadequate reserves of munitions.²¹

19. ^aAWM 54. 243/6/46. *CIGS - CIGS to CGS Australia*. Extract from periodical letter no. 2/1934 CIGS to CGS Australia. Montgomery-Massingbird to CGS. 18.4.34.

^b *Ibid.*, CGS to Montgomery-Massingbird, 7.8.34.

20. ^a Russel Ward, *A Nation for a Continent. The History of Australia 1901-1907*. Melbourne, 1977, p.175.

^b Colin A. Hughes, *Mr Prime Minister. Australian Prime Ministers 1901-1972*. Melbourne, 1976, pp.79-80 and p.122.

21. 'Summary of Proceedings of the General Meeting of the Council of Defence held on 12 November, 1929,' AAMP 1049/9 File 1851/4/17 in N. Meaney (ed.) *Australia and the World. A Documentary History from the 1870's to the 1970's*. Melbourne, 1985, pp.369-373.

Partly his thinking was shaped by current moves being undertaken by the League of Nations for a Disarmament Conference. The World Disarmament Conference which opened in Geneva in October 1931, also influenced the attitude of the newly-elected United Australia Party, under A.J. Lyons, elected in December that year.^{22a} In February 1932, Pearce, again Minister for Defence, announced a new defence policy 'based on the provision of defence against raids' only with the provision for a nucleus expeditionary force for overseas service to be raised within three months. However, the reductions in Army strength the new party required were so considerable that Pearce ordered none were to take place pending the outcome of the Disarmament Conference.^{22b}

The main cause of defence unpreparedness affecting the Army throughout the 1930's was the Government's adherence to the 'blue-water strategy' and the naval belief that 'it would be quite impossible for Australia to raise and maintain the enormous military and air forces which would be necessary for the adequate protection of her soil from invasion'.^{23a} A report sought by Scullin in 1931 from the Committee of Imperial Defence on 'the invasion of Australia and priority for defence' had been unsatisfactory to the new Chief of General Staff, J.H. Bruche, who apparently took advantage of the change of Government to leave the incoming Prime Minister in ignorance whether the Committee thought Australia was liable to an invasion or sporadic raid.^{23b}

Yet on 25 September, 1933, Pearce delivered a speech at the Millions Club which raised doubt about his total commitment to policy enunciated the previous year. Japanese aggression in China, and Hitler's rise to power in Europe had created a public demand for a more vigorous defence policy and the acquisition of extra defence funds for which Pearce had fought hard, made its prosecution possible.

22a. W.J. Hudson, *Australia and the League of Nations*. Sydney, 1980, p.109.

AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 1014. 'Defence Policy. A Review of its Financial Basis. 28.1.34.

b. AWM 54. 243/6/46. Chief of General Staff to Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingbird, War Office, Whitehall. 7.8.32, p.2.

23c. AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 1014. Chief of General Staff to Minister for Defence in article in *SMH* on National Defence. 10.7.33.

b. AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 1014. Defence Policy. Preparatory work for Use by Minister. 6.3.34.

While much of the speech was an exposition of the concept of the Navy as the first line of defence and adjuncts of a 'raids only' policy, such as the requirements of coastal defence, Pearce also announced an update in military equipment and training, encouraged young men to enrol in the militia, and permitted the Army to concentrate on large camps. The latter had been discouraged because of cost. Explicitly, he stated

if the co-operation of the Main British Fleet is not available, should an enemy attempt a large scale attack or invasion of our shores, then it is on the Army and the manhood in the mass that we must depend to drive off the invader.

Inherent in Pearce's policy speech was the recognition that it was the task of the Army and Air Force in particular to defend 'vital ports', 'commercial ports' and 'centres of production'. These, he inferred, were all 'points at which any enemy would have to strike to obtain a decisive result'.²⁴ For reasons of national security and politics, he could not specify outright the vital south-eastern areas or major naval ports. Nor could he reveal that in terms of national defence Brisbane (in the early 1930's) and Hobart were not vital areas and that the defence of Northern Australia had been virtually ignored. Yet these were the implications of his statement. He was giving approval to the strategy devised by the DMO & I, even if his Government was not able to finance it adequately.

The shadings of Pearce's policy speech may have been suggested by reports submitted to him by Frederick Shedden. Secretary of the Defence Committee, Shedden was an exceptionally talented civil servant and a graduate of the Imperial Defence College in London. Entering the Defence Department in 1910, he had been favoured by three permanent heads. During World War I he had served as a Divisional Paymaster in London and France. On returning to Australia he had completed a part-time Commerce degree at Melbourne University and impressed the 1927 Minister for Defence, Sir William Glasgow. Glasgow had sent him abroad for special training in higher defence policy. After graduating from the Imperial Defence College, Shedden had studied financial administration at the British War Office under Sir Maurice Hankey, the Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence. 25.

24. MS 1827. Pearce Papers. Statement of the Government's Policy regarding the Defence of Australia delivered at Sydney by the Minister for Defence, Senator The Rt. Honorable Sir George Pearce, K.C.V.D. 25.9.33. ANL.

Hankey, also Secretary to the British Cabinet, became Shedden's model. Shedden set out to obtain a similar kind of power within the Australian defence bureaucracy, by quietly developing his professional competence as a defence expert.^{25a} After a brief period of service at the Australian High Commission in London, he returned to Australia. Selected as head of secretariat of the Australian Delegation to the 1932 Geneva Disarmament Conference, his experiences there convinced him of Australia's need to build up her own defence capability, but within the framework of imperial defence policy.^{25c}

Within the Army Pearce's September 1933 policy speech had caused confusion. Its indication of defense against invasion had contradicted the 'raids only' policy announced in February 1932. Accordingly Bruche sought advice from the Minister about the Government's intentions and 'what organisation the Army should follow'.^{26a} In an exchange of letters, Bruche hinted at instituting the drastic reductions in staff inherent in the 'raids only' policy, and stressed that a great deal of work had gone into preparation of existing plans for defence against invasion. Pearce directed that planning was to continue on present lines, and the question of defence against raids was referred to the Navy. The consequence of this continuation of Army planning against invasion meant they were 'on a *raid* policy for defence ... but on an organisation designed against *invasion*'. This was formally recognised at a Council of Defence meeting in June 1935.^{26a} But Government direction for priority against raids was re-affirmed. The re-armament of fixed defences, and the strengthening of the formations allotted for their support, sought by the Chief of General Staff in January 1934, as part of a three year defence plan temporarily brought to a halt the strategical dispute between Navy and Army staffs.^{26b}

25a. Peter Heydon, *Quiet Decision. A Study of George Foster Pearce*. Melbourne, 1965, pp.113-114.

b. A.B. Lodge, 'Lieutenant-General Sir John Lavarack : From Chief of General Staff to Corps Commander' in D.M. Horner (ed.), *The Commanders. Australian Military Leadership in the twentieth century*. Sydney, 1984, p.131.

c. J.P. Buckley, 'Sir Frederick Shedden, K.C.M.G., O.B.E., Defence Strategist, Administrator and Public Servant', *Defence Force Journal*, 50, Jan./Feb. 1981, pp.23-25.

26a. AWM 54. 243/6/46. CGS to Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingbird, 7.8.34. My italics.

b. AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 762. Council of Defence Meeting, 19 June 1935, Query in Summary of Proceedings.

The implied ministerial support for Army plans to counter invasion changed subtly with the appointment of Archdale Parkhill as Minister for Defence in October 1934 following the UAP's second electoral victory.^{27a} Parkhill initially accepted wholeheartedly British assurances given by Sir Maurice Hankey that even in the case of Britain being involved in Europe and the Far East, a capital fleet of superior battle strength would be despatched to Singapore.^{27b} This premise was undoubtedly reinforced by Shedden, who had some small part in the formulation of the Three Year Defence Plan, as Pearce, when Minister, relied on him more and more in preference to the less efficient Secretary of Defence, M.L. Shepherd.^{27c} The General Staff remained sceptical.

Lavarack replaced Bruche as Chief of General Staff in April 1935. As DMO & I, before Sturdee he had been a persistent critic of the Singapore base. His persistent lobbying against the base finally forced Parkhill to remind him that any remarks on the certainty or otherwise of the British Main Fleet being despatched to a war in the Far East 'concurrent with possible complications in Europe' were 'of a higher political nature' and so beyond his province.²⁸

Wynter, another member of the General Staff, had been so perturbed by Government defence priorities that in an address to the United States Institution he warned that Australia was likely to be attacked only when Britain was engaged elsewhere. John Curtin obtained a copy of this speech and used it to attack Government Defence policy in Parliament. Wynter was demoted by Parkhill for expressing his opinion.²⁹

In his first major policy speech in December, 1935, Parkhill emphasised priority of provision 'for the units whose function will be to deal with raids by landing parties'. The remainder of the Field Army was to be maintained at the existing defence vote. Priority would be given to the defence of Sydney, Newcastle, Fremantle and Brisbane. The speech signified Parkhill's rejection of the Army argument for preparation against invasion.^{30a} By October 1936, he was in acrimonious argument with Lavarack in the Defence Committee, when the latter pushed for development of the

27 a. Ward, *op.cit.*, p.214.

b. Lodge, *op.cit.*, p.130.

c. Buckley, 'Shedden ...', *op.cit.*, p.25.

28. Lodge, 'Lavarack ...', *op.cit.*, pp.129-132.

29. D.M. Horner, *High Command's Australian and Allied Strategy. 1939-46.* Canberra, 1952, p.12.

Field Army rather than expenditure on fixed sea-coast defences. Lavarack's intention was to build up the Army forces to invasion strength but he succeeded only in reviving the rivalry for funds between Navy and Army brought to an end by the Three Year Plan.^{30b} Clearly, up to this point lack of home defence preparedness was a consequence of Government policy reliant on the blue-water strategy and the efficacy of the yet to be completed Singapore base, regardless of the acknowledgement previously made by Pearce of the need to organise against invasion.

A notional Brisbane Line

Parkhill's policy speech failed to include the northern regions of Australia in the areas given priority. This failure elicited a resolution from the 20th Annual Congress of the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia

That the Federal Authorities be asked to institute inquiries with a view to increasing the various Arms of the Defence Forces in Northern Australia.

The R.S.S.I.L.A. wrote to Parkhill, seeking his observations.

Upon requesting advice from the Defence Committee, Parkhill was advised in a report dated 21 February 1936, that Northern Australia 'should be taken as the area of Australia north of Brisbane's parallel of latitude', clearly a notional Brisbane Line. Its defence could not be improved or solved by the raising of a small number of Defence Forces above the parallel; nor could it be divorced from 'the general system of defence for the whole of Australia'. Any 'few defence units' raised

would offer little deterrent to an enemy who decided to occupy any portion of Northern Australia ... Further, the occupation of a portion of Northern Australia would not vitally affect the bulk of the Australian people who reside in the southern and eastern portions of the continent.

If only the North were to be occupied, defence resources could 'be mobilised with a view to turning out the invader' and that, 'in any case, such an occupation would not occur unless the British Fleet were not available

30a Archdale Parkhill Papers. Speech on Australian Defence Policy. 2.12.35. NLA.

b. AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 887. Interpretation of the Government's defence policy for the Army. October 1936.

for operation in Eastern waters'. That fleet 'might be released from circumstances ... preventing its despatch' to Australia's aid. Moreover, invasion of the North, unlike that of any of the vital strategic centres, would not force the Government to sue for peace. The report concluded that the strengthening of the Navy and Army, in terms of personnel and equipment, and the expansion of the Air Force, would do more as a whole for the protection of Australia, Northern Australia included, 'than the raising of a few scattered units'. Sturdee, as DMO & I was a co-signatory of the report.³¹

Shedden, as Secretary of the Defence Committee, was well aware of the conclusion of the sub-committee appointed to deal with the R.S.S.I.L.A.'s resolution. Essentially, the judgement of that sub-committee was that most of Northern Australia north of latitude Brisbane was not going to be defended if invaded, because of lack of military resources, if such a defence affected adversely the security of the vital south-eastern industrial region. Belief in the efficacy of the Imperial Navy as a first line of defence, in any case, convinced the Government's defence advisers that such an invasion was far beyond the realms of possibility. Perhaps Shedden's influence, steadily growing paramount, helped such an assumption to be adopted. And if the worst case scenario did occur, with the north alone occupied, the armed services would turn them out.

The R.S.S.I.L.A. was not, of course, informed that it was in fact defence policy to permit Northern Australia to be occupied north of Brisbane in the belief it could be easily won back, over time. Parkhill instead, wrote them that while strategy 'in the first place' was concerned with the protection of those vital centres 'whose loss would compel submission or imperil the capacity to offer resistance' 'the relation of North Australia is prominently before the Government and its advisers'. It was pointed out that forces were located in Queensland and the Northern Territory, and under the Three Year Defence Plan attention was being paid to Darwin and Brisbane.³²

31. AA ACT CRS A5954, Shedden Papers, Box 887, Report by Sub-Committee appointed by the Defence Committee to investigate the question of increasing the Defence Forces in North Australia 21.2.36.

32. *Ibid.*, Archdale Parkhill to Gen. Sec. RSSILA 22.4.36.

Possibly through the R.S.S.I.L.A., the low priority for the defence of Northern Queensland came to the attention of E.M. Hanlon, who was Minister for Health and Home Affairs in W. Forgan Smith's Labor Government in Queensland. Hanlon served under both Smith and Frank Cooper, before becoming Queensland Premier himself in 1946. He had served with the AIF in France, entering politics in 1926. At an Anzac Day gathering in 1936, he queried the North's defence status. But several days earlier, Parkhill had given the R.S.S.I.L.A. assurances that the Government was mindful of the North's defences and Hanlon's warning was treated with derision.³³

This report is the only concrete evidence that there was an Australian Brisbane Line. Yet this particular plan was never revealed in the later controversy. The reasons why it did not will become evident as the thesis progresses.

The political dimension, 1935-39

Just as the Brisbane Line controversy had its origins in the military planning and defence policy of the 1930's, so too were its political dimensions shaped in those years. We need now to delineate the careers of some of the main actors.

One of the Labor casualties of Scullin's defeat in 1931 had been the Western Australian, John Curtin. Under Scullin, Curtin was unable to cope with the emotional strains of the Government's break-up. He resorted once more to drink. After his electoral defeat he eked out a living as a free-lance journalist, and got his alcoholism under control. At the 1934 elections he regained his old seat of Fremantle.

When Scullin retired as leader in 1935, Curtin was asked to stand. He won the leadership narrowly, over the Deputy Leader, Frank Forde, essentially because he was seen as capable of re-uniting the fragmented Labor party, split between Official Labor and the New South Wales Langites.^{34a.}

Forde had entered Federal Parliament in 1922 as member for the Queensland seat of Capricornia. Initially he had served as an assistant Minister in the Scullin Government. With the defection of Lyons he became Minister for Trade. Surviving the 1931 election, he was appointed Deputy

33. C. Lack (ed.), *Three Decades of Queensland Political History 1929-1960*, Brisbane, [1962], p.220, p.631, p.652.

Leader of the ALP in February 1932. On Curtin's election as leader he once more agreed to serve as deputy. His ambition for the leadership was postponed. It was to motivate him peculiarly when Curtin became Prime Minister,^{34b} and played a major part in developments in the Brisbane Line controversy.

Curtin immediately set about re-unifying the Party, beginning the process with the special Federal Conference in Adelaide in 1936. He succeeded in temporarily bringing the disaffected Langites back into the Labor fold.^{35a} Jack Lang, after much factional turmoil, had in 1923 become the New South Wales State Labor leader, leading Labor to victory at the 1925 State election. Henceforth he consolidated his power within the branch to dictatorial proportions, only to lose office in 1927. Back in power in 1930, he split the Federal Labor Party, his splinter - Lang Labor Group successfully engineering Scullin's defeat in the House. Lyons, unlike Scullin, refused to temporize with the maverick Labor Premier who had refused to co-operate in a national effort to alleviate Depression. Lang's refusal to obey Federal legislation to honor financial agreements led to his sacking by the Governor, Sir Philip Game. From 1931 to 1938 he slowly lost influence in the party.^{35b}

Labor's most formidable opponent, Robert Gordon Menzies, had entered Victorian politics through the Legislative Council, after considerable success as a barrister. After a stormy career in State politics, he transferred in 1934 to the Federal arena at Lyons' insistence. Instrumental in persuading Lyons to desert the Labor Party, he was soon Deputy Prime Minister as well as Attorney-General. His coruscating wit, tactless frankness and overweening arrogance soon made him unpopular within his own party. A visit to England in 1936 awakened a strong imperialist sentiment in his heart. By that time, he had already established a reputation as strongly anti left wing, with his unsuccessful attempt to have Egon Kisch, an anti-Fascist Czech writer, deported.³⁶

34a. C.A. Hughes, *op.cit.*, p.122.

b. *Ibid.*, pp.133-4. This view of Forde is not the traditional one, which pictures him as a loyal deputy if somewhat inept. Later chapters will justify it.

35a. *Ibid.*, p.122.

b. Bede Nairn, 'Jack Lang', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 9. 1891-1939, Melbourne, 1983, pp.661-666.

36. Hughes, *op.cit.*, p.106. See also Brian Carroll, *From Barton to Fraser. Every Australian Prime Minister*, Melbourne, 1978, p.94.

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Under Curtin's leadership, after the 1936 Federal Conference, 'adequate home defence against possible aggression' became part of Labor's fighting platform.^{37a.} This thinking was more closely allied with that of the General Staff than the UAP's dependence on the Imperial Navy as the first line of defence.^{37b.} Preparedness became a major issue of the September-October 1937 Federal election. On the hustings Curtin called for priority in the building up of Australian defence industries until all the requirements of self-defence were provided for within the Commonwealth.^{37c.} He repeated an earlier call, made in Parliament in 1936, for more docks, more aerodromes, more oil reserves, more landing bases and an expanded air force. 'Self-defence' had 'become a question of preparedness'.^{37d.} One of the major causes of this emphasis was the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in July 1937, and its associated atrocities. One Melbourne newspaper warned that the rape of Nanking in central China, was a 'fearsome warning' for the peoples in the Pacific region, Australia included.^{37e}

The UAP responded by invoking the cause of imperial defence. Lyons painted Labor's isolationist thinking as dangerous, while Menzies insinuated if Singapore was attacked, the Labor Party was unlikely to come to Britain's aid. The campaign resolved itself into a debate between isolationism and imperial co-operation, the relative roles of naval and air defence, and through Jack Lang, the issue of conscription. Labor was defeated, but made substantial gains in the Senate. Parkhill lost his seat to the Independent, Percy Spender, and Pearce lost his place in the Senate.³⁸ Nevertheless, in a sense, the 1937 campaign was a harbinger of a time when defence preparedness would be a major item on the political agenda. The issue reached its culmination in the Brisbane Line controversy.

37a. MS 4875. ALP Secretariat 1936. Box 1185. Folder 32. S4. 1939 Federal Conference Report (contains statement of 1936 policy).

b. D.M. Horner, *Crisis of Command. Australian Generalship and the Japanese Threat, 1941-43*. Sydney, 1977, pp.21-23.

c. John McCarthy, *Australia and Imperial Defence. 1918-1939. A Study in Air and Sea Power*. St Lucia, 1976, p.129.

d. Curtin quoted in A. Chester, *John Curtin*. Melbourne, 1943, pp.58-60.

e. E.M. Andrews, *Australia and China : The Ambiguous Relationship*. Melbourne, 1985, pp.75-76.

38. George Fairbanks, 'Isolation and Imperialism : The 1937 Election'. *Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1967, pp.250-255.

Perhaps the Army had hoped for a Labor victory. In November they refined their plans for mobilisation, taking into account planning for defence against raids, the Government policy, and against invasion.^{39a.} The latter plans were intended to facilitate the expansion of the Army that would be required should the general mobilization needed to combat invasion be ordered. A review was carried out of places of mobilization.^{39b.}

Labor's defence policy had an ally in Billy Hughes. He had embarrassed Lyons in 1935 when he had published a book expressing doubts about Australia's ability to resist attack from Japan, and the surety of protection from the British Navy.^{40a.} At a Defence Council meeting in July 1938 he became alarmed when he discovered coast defences were virtually useless because of a lack of component parts for 9.2" guns. He could not accept that the raids only policy, dependent on Naval defence, precluded the purchase of further tanks for the Army, and insisted Australia 'should be prepared to meet an attack from an invading force'. Nor was he pleased about delay in the fulfilment of orders placed in the United Kingdom for air and military equipment, since this created 'a hopeless situation', especially for the Air Force.^{40b.}

Hughes' outburst was motivated by his deep conviction that Japan was a dangerous threat to Australia, and by the realization that his colleagues had to match the rhetoric of the Labor party with its emphasis on the development of the Army and Air Force, through which Curtin had made gains at the 1937 election. The Government had gone some way towards this the previous May, when for the first time, the Air Force received a greater total vote in the defence allocation than did the Navy.^{40c.}

Lyons conceded Hughes' argument on the need for the United Kingdom to place Australian defence orders on a higher priority, but Brigadier

39. AWM 54. 422/7/8. (243/6/11) General Staff Memorandum on the Policy regarding the Preparation of War Plans. 1937. 12.11.37.

b. J.J. Dedman, Defence Policy Before Pearl Harbour. *Australian Journal of Political History*, 13, 3, 1967, pp.331-332.

40. Fairbanks, *op.cit.*, p.246.

b. AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 762. Summary of Proceedings Defence Council Meeting. 13.7.38, pp.3-9.

c. J.J. Dedman, 'Defence Policy before Pearl Harbour', *Australian Journal of Political History*, 13, 3, 1967, pp.331-332.

General Thomas Blamey, recently seconded to the Council, told Hughes that it was generally accepted by the Committee of Imperial Defence that the danger of invasion of Australia was 'not a real one' and that Australia's efforts should be directed towards provision of adequate defence against raids. His comment disregarded the low recruitment rate for the militia, shortage of equipment, and state of coast defences indicated that preparedness was not even up to that level.⁴¹

Blamey had been brought into the Defence Council through the influence of Frederick Shedden, Secretary of Defence since 1937.^{42 a} The secretive new secretary, intensely conservative in outlook, was convinced Blamey was the man to replace the disputative Lavarack as leader of the Australian Army in time of war.

From 1925 after retiring from the Army at 41, Blamey had been Chief Commissioner of the Victorian Police. In 1936 he had been forced to resign after being caught lying in an attempt to protect the reputation of a fellow policeman. He had in his earlier military career established himself as a brilliant staff officer during World War I. His experience of actual command though, amounted to only nine weeks at battalion and brigade level. At war's end he had served for a time as Second Deputy Chief of Staff.^{42 b}

Just as in the early thirties disarmament provided reason for failing to look to home defence, in the late thirties, the Government's attitude was shaped by its support of appeasement; appeasement towards Japan over her war in China because of her connections through the 1936 Anti-Comintern Pact with Italy and Germany and appeasement towards Hitler, because this was the policy Britain followed.^{43 a}

Menzies, abroad in Europe, was one of the foremost exponents of this policy. He discounted German military posturing against Czechoslovakia. On a visit to Germany he was impressed by the way young Germans were willing to serve the totalitarian Nazi state. It was not, he admitted, an appropriate system for those of British stock.^{43 b} German demands in the

^b
41. cf. fn. 40 above.

42 a. D.M. Horner, 'Field-Marshal Sir Thomas Blamey : Commander-in-Chief, Australian Military Forces' in Horner (ed.) *The Commanders*, p.204.

^bJ. Hetherington, *Controversial Soldier*. Canberra, 1973, pp.66-70.

Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia rapidly escalated in September, 1938 towards a threat of war.^{43c} Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, sought a compromise at Munich.^{43d} In Australia, on Shedden's advice a recruitment drive was planned with Blamey at its head as Controller-General. The Army was instructed to prepare to meet invasion, feared from the Japanese mandated islands, and allocated the highest share of the defence vote.^{44a} Lavarack, the Chief of General Staff,^{44b} advised that no sufficient military preparation could be made to meet the threat, and that the Air Force would not meet defence needs for three years.^{44c} An increasingly anxious Lyons was not reassured by a Defence Council report revealing deficiencies in aircraft supply, delays in the provision of ammunition, Bren guns and machine guns, lack of preparedness in artillery requirements and lack of trained staff to instruct militia recruits.^{44d}

Within days of the Munich crisis Menzies made a speech to the Constitutional Association in Sydney, calling for firm and inspiring leadership in the face of the troubled international situation. Lyons' supporters construed the call as an unsubtle bid by Menzies for leadership of the UAP.^{45a} In the public eye he gained further opprobrium when, at Port Kembla, wharf-labourers refused to load scrap iron for export to Japan. Neither wanting to support Japanese depredations in China nor willing to provide iron they feared would come back as bombs on Australia, they persisted in their stand until January 1939 when the Government promised it would review the export of pig-iron in the future. For his anti-union stand, Menzies earned the soubriquet 'Pig-Iron Bob'.^{45b}

Dissatisfaction with Lyons' continued irresolution over defence preparedness and the Government's failure to introduce a promised National Insurance Scheme provided Menzies with the excuse he sought for resignation on 14 March, 1939. But Lyons' death of a massive heart attack on Good

43 a. Andrews, *Australia and China*, p.85.

b. E.M. Andrews, *Isolation and Appeasement in Australia. Reactions to the European Crisis 1935-39*. Canberra, 1970, p.137.

c. *Ibid.*, pp.121-123.

d. *Ibid.*, pp.137-139.

44 a. D.M. Horner, *Crisis of Command*, p.204.

b. J. McCarthy, *op.cit.*, pp.82-83.

c. Lodge, 'Lavarack ...', pp.132-133.

d. AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Consideration of Agendum No.3/1939. Report on the Progress of the Current Defence Development Programme. 1937/1938 to 1940/41. Council of Defence. n.d., pp.8-13.

45 a. Ward, *op.cit.*, pp.228-229.

b. Andrews, *Australia and China*, pp.86-87.

Friday, 7 April, 1939 curtailed an open battle for the Prime Ministership. Earle Page, a close friend of Lyons, became interim Prime Minister until the UAP had chosen a new leader.^{46 a.} Unwilling to serve himself or permit his Country Party to serve under Menzies, Page launched a vicious parliamentary attack on Menzies. Page succeeded only in weakening his position in his own party and ultimately prepared the way for Arthur Fadden, who had disassociated himself from Page's anti-Menzies tirade, to become eventually the new Country Party leader.^{46 b.}

On 24 April Menzies became Prime Minister.⁴⁷ In May at the Fiftieth Federal Labor Conference held in Canberra, the spectre of the Brisbane Line had its first airing.⁴⁸

Seconding a motion proposed by W. Forgan-Smith, the Queensland Premier, that Labor in Government would defend all States, E.M. Hanlon told Conference that he had been informed by R.S.S.I.L.A. members that there was no provision for the defence of Northern Queensland in current defence preparations. He had been asked, by high ranking military officers 'to prepare a plan for the total destruction of all property in Northern Queensland in the event of an attack by an aggressor. Specifically, he alleged Australia's 'first line of defence commenced a few miles outside of Brisbane'.^{49 a.} Clearly he was privy to the secret results of the Defence Committee deliberations of February, 1936.

At a press conference the next day he announced that there was no air defence in Northern Australia, and that successive requests for the establishment of a base in Queensland had been turned down because 'the work did not justify the expense'. He seems to have intended to suggest by this that in some way the Menzies Government was derelict in its preparations for home defence.^{49 b.}

A.W. Fadden, the Country Party member for Darling Downs, who had been a strong advocate of front-line defence for the North from his days in State Parliament, several weeks later made similar allegations in the Federal Parliament.^{50 a.} The *Brisbane Telegraph* wrote there were grounds for

46 a. Enid Lyons, *Among Carrion Crows*. Sydney, 1977, pp.65-66.

b. Ulrich Ellis, *A History of the Australian Country Party*. Melbourne, 1963, p.243.

47. Hughes, *op.cit.*, pp.99-100.

48. MS 2396/13/57. Ward Papers. Typed Note. Extract from *Brisbane Telegraph*, 5.5.39. NLA.

49. c. Lack, *op.cit.*, pp.652-653.

b. MS 2356/13/89; MS 2396/13/128. Ward Papers. Typed Note. 6.5.39. NLA. These revelations of Hanlon's were eventually noted by Eddie Ward, MP for East Sydney, though perhaps as late as 1942-43 when Ward possibly drew on Hanlon's claims while gathering information he could use as information against Menzies and his colleagues. Ward had a dirt-file

fears that the defence of Australia would begin at Sydney or at least Brisbane. Little more was heard publicly.^{50b} Government response to the concern of Queensland members was very muted.^{50c} The debate faded as quickly as it arose. The long-feared European war was on the horizon.

* * * * *

Some strands of the later Brisbane Line controversy can be discerned in the years between Federation and the outbreak of World War II. Firstly, there was a belief, even when Japan was a Great War ally, that in some fashion the Japanese would be a military threat at some time in the future. This anti-Asian fear inherent in the White Australia policy, was one Eddie Ward was to exploit cleverly in later years.

Secondly, this perception was one held by all Australian military planners. To counter a possible Japanese invasion, they sensibly posited that the enemy would attack the vital industrial areas of Newcastle and Sydney, while the British navy was engaged in a war in Europe. Consequently, defensive strategy concentrated on those regions. It was believed unlikely that the Japanese would invade the North, so little consideration was given to plans for its defence. Later misunderstandings would confuse this strategy of concentrating forces for the defence of the vital south-eastern areas with a 'Brisbane Line'.

There was a 'Brisbane Line', of a type clearly indicated in a Defence Committee report dated 21 February, 1936, which was given brief, and hardly noticed, publicity in May and June 1939. Frederick Shedden, the Secretary for Defence, and V.A.H. Sturdee, DMO & I were its architects. It would not arise again as part of the Brisbane Line controversy. The earlier Kitchener Line did not exist.

Apart from the definite allegation of the existence of a Brisbane Line, one of the other major components of the controversy was that the Menzies Government and its predecessors were guilty of failing to look

49 (contd) equal to Wilson Tuckey's today. At the time of the Brisbane Line controversy, Hanlon claimed credit for revealing the Brisbane Line's existence in 1939, and that Ward had taken the idea up from him. (cf. Lack, *op.cit.*, pp.220-221)

50. *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*. Vol. 159, pp.630-634. 23.5.39.
 MS 2396/15/58. Ward Papers. Typed Note 23.5.39. NLA.
The Times, 5.5.39.

adequately to the preparation of Australian home defence before World War II. The charge, so far as the Lyons Government was concerned, was unfair, when one considers that that Government's defence policy was primarily reliant on the 'blue-water' strategy and the efficacy of the Singapore base. There was no reason not to suppose that the British Navy would not stop the Japanese at sea before their invasion force reached Australia, or that the continent would suffer little else but heavy raids. Nevertheless, Lyons' failure to lay the basis for a home army or for an air force, in retrospect, and certainly during World War II, did, in 1943, seem derelict. This said, it should be noted that the Scullin Government during the Great Depression, also made its contribution to the lack of defence preparedness, and appeared to be willing to rely on the might of the British Navy. Thus, the question of responsibility remains open, in regard to the pre-war years.

We shall see, later, that the Brisbane Line controversy to some extent was concerned with the role of personalities, notably Robert Menzies. While there is no evidence to suggest that Menzies was pro-Fascist, he was disposed favourably before the outbreak of war, to Hitler's regime insofar as he believed it suited Germany. Similarly, British policy of appeasement of the dictators and Japan, followed by Australia, meant neither he nor Lyons were to take a hard line with either. Consequently Menzies created an impression among some members of the electorate, much of the labour movement and many ALP voters, that he was pro-Fascist. It was a perception that Eddie Ward was to use effectively in 1943.

Events during the European War reinforced those impressions. More importantly, they provided stronger ammunition for Menzies' Labor enemies to allege he and the UAP had neglected home defence. To these, and other factors, we must now turn our attention.

CHAPTER 2

A QUESTION OF PREPAREDNESS 1939-MAY 1941

Some attention needs to be paid to relevant people and events at home and abroad affecting policy and strategy from September 1939 to May 1941. This chapter explores whether there was any basis for Eddie Ward's charge that the Menzies and Fadden Governments left Australia defenceless in the face of a potential Japanese invader. It assesses how far key figures in the Parliamentary Labor Party assented to the policy of their conservative rivals.

Defence and Appeasement

Menzies broadcast to the nation at 9.15 p.m. on 5 September, that as a result of Britain's declaration of war on Germany Australia was also at war.^{1a} In the early days of September a Chiefs of Staff Committee was established to advise the Government on operational and strategic measures.^{1b} By mid-September Menzies had established a War Cabinet. Shedden was appointed the secretary, with a War Cabinet Secretariat responsible for minuting and documenting War Cabinet business.^{1c}

Before the outbreak of War, Cabinet had expressed doubts about continuing Japanese neutrality, in the event of conflict with Germany. The Defence Committee which still advised on defence policy as a whole, recommended to Cabinet that preliminary naval measures be taken in defended ports, that half of the 80,000 militia be called up for a month's training at a time and that the Air Force be organised on an emergency basis, with the impressment of a greater number of comparatively unsuitable civil aircraft.^{2a} Cabinet decided a greater Australian contribution to Empire defence depended on advice they received about Japan's attitude to Britain. But the sad fact was that there were very few militia in Australia sufficiently equipped or trained to cope with an enemy attack, nor staff sufficiently experienced in war to train them.^{2b}

1^a Hasluck, *Government and the People, 1939-41*, p.152.

^b *Ibid.*, p.440.

^c *Ibid.*, p.204.

2^a AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 233. Defence Committee Meeting. Minute 81/1939. Basis of Preparation by Services. 7.9.39.

^b AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 233. Cabinet Agenda.

Australia's War Effort. Basis of Preparation by the Services Defence No.6/1939. 11.9.39.

The raising of the 6th Division, intended for service either at home or abroad, exacerbated the equipment and personnel problems of the AMF which was liable for service only in Australia and its territories. Many of the AIF transferred from the militia and preference was given to ^{3 a.} equipment and transport requirements of the potential expeditionary force. Though Menzies intended the Empire Air Training Scheme whereby Australian pilots were based in Canada for action in the Northern hemisphere as a way of ultimately training airmen for Australian defence, that Scheme in fact gravely weakened the local air defence arm. ^{3 b.}

He was most unwilling, despite pressure from the British Admiralty and Foreign Office to commit the 2nd AIF overseas until Japan's inaction was guaranteed and doubts about British intentions to reinforce Singapore with a capital ship fleet were resolved. Eventually, these reassurances, with a vague allusion to United States commitment to war with Japan, were given by Whitehall. ^{4 a.} Pressure from the Country Party, all for sending every available man overseas, and the despatch of troops to Europe by New Zealand, India and Canada, finally forced Menzies' hand. ^{4 b.} In late November 1939 Cabinet had committed the AIF as an overseas expeditionary force. Only one division would be despatched to the Middle East, from whence they could return to Australia if needed. ^{4 c.} So, Menzies was not, as Labor later claimed, leaving the country defenceless with the despatch of the AIF, but was too reliant on British promises, of forces and alliances that would be the means of defence. ^{4 d.}

The decision, nevertheless, raised considerable criticism from the Labor Opposition. Eddie Ward, the member for East Sydney went so far as to accuse the Government of being 'either consciously or unconsciously guilty of a traitorous act'. ^{5 a.}

3 a.-AWM 54. 246/6/184. *Australian Wartime Activities. Information for the United Kingdom Government. Part 1. 1940.* Section 3(B) Army Progress, p.5 and AWM 54. 243/6/15. *Government Decisions on the Outbreak of War.* 10.10.39.

b.-AWM 54. 243/6/97. *War Measures Instituted Since the Outbreak of War.* 20.11.39.

4 a.-P.G. Edwards, 'Menzies and the Imperial Connection 1939-1941' in C. Hazlehurst (ed.), *Australian Conservatism. Essays in 20th Century Political History*, Canberra, 1978, p.198; b.C. Bridge, 'R.G. Casey's contribution to Australian War Policy 1939-42 Some Myths', *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, 9, 1986, p.82; c.G. St Barclay, 'Australia Looks to America' in *Pacific Historical Review*, 46, 25, 1977, p.254; d.J.J. Dedman, 'Defence Policy before Pearl Harbour' in *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 13, 3, 1977, p.336.

It was characteristic Ward invective. He had joined the Labor Party at seventeen in 1915, and early opposed Hughes' 1916 conscription proposals. Briefly gaoled for refusing to register for military service when he came of age, Ward, a railway worker, was victimised by the Nationalist Holman Government after the 1917 New South Wales railways strike. Not until 1924 was he reinstated, in the tramways service, swiftly emerging as a force to be reckoned with in the Tramways Union. A fervent Lang supporter, Ward became increasingly involved in City Labor politics. In March 1931 he won a by-election for the Federal seat of East Sydney as a Lang candidate. The bitterness that followed Langite withdrawal of support for the Scullin Government led to Ward's defeat in the 1931 Federal election. He won the seat back in a by-election in early 1932, easily retaining it in the 1934 elections. Reconciled to the Federal Labor Party when Lang's group was designated the official New South Wales branch of the Labor party in 1936,^{5b} Ward by the beginning of the Second World War, encouraged by Curtin, had embarked on a series of virulent attacks on the Menzies Government's war effort.^{5c}

Government policy remained one of defence against 'raids only'. Behind the scenes, Menzies was critical of the United Kingdom stance that Japanese entry into the war was unlikely, and privately was aware that the strategical situation in the Middle East and the Far East was not necessarily to the advantage of Australia's security. He did not express these views publicly.⁶

While the General Staff were mindful a Japanese attack on Australia was 'by no means impossible' they considered it 'improbable'. They accepted that during 1940 there would be 'little or no expenditure incurred to implement' a plan against that possibility. It was more a case of keeping an eye on home defence lest a change in the war in Europe provoke Japan to a southward move. Nevertheless, they thought the lack of arrangements against invasion on any scale forced on them by the 'raids only' policy was 'extremely risky'. For that reason, Army headquarters, on 29 April 1940

5.a Ward quoted in Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1939-41*, Canberra, 1954, p.209; b Elwyn Spratt, *Eddie Ward, Firebrand of East Sydney*, Adelaide, 1965, pp.12-13; 20; 44-49; c B. Nairn, 'Jack Lang' in *Australian Dictionary of Biography 1891-1939*, Vol. 8, Melbourne, 1983, pp.665-666.

6. W.J. Hudson and H.J.W. Stokes (eds) *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937-49. Vol. IV. July 1940 June 1940*. (Hereafter Hudson and Stokes *DAFP* Vol. IV). Introduction p.xix.

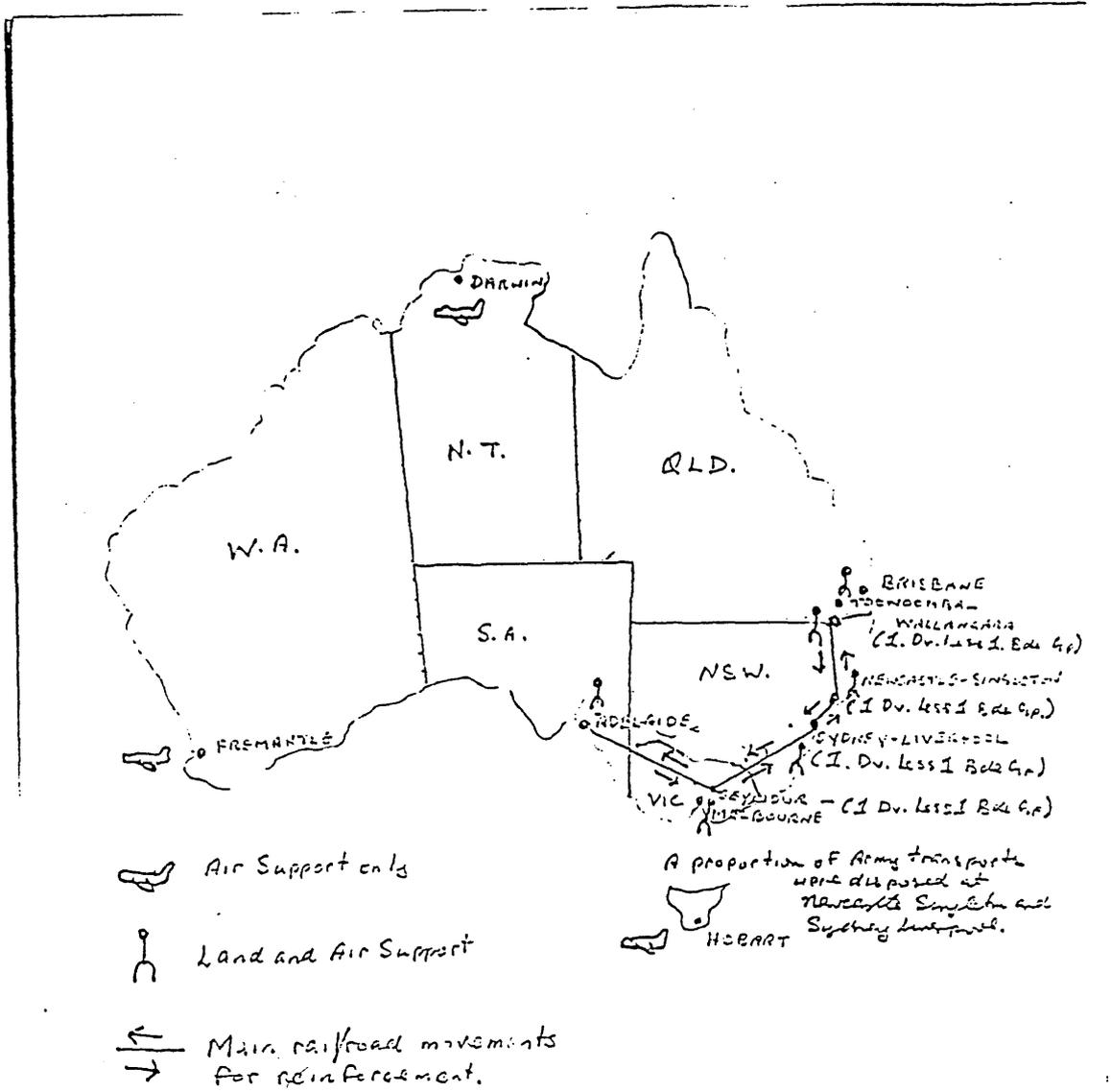
prepared a memorandum aimed at fitting preparations for defence against invasion into existing defence schemes with a minimum of modification. The plan was not, at this stage, operational.

Basically this memorandum repeated the idea that local forces should defend distant areas, suggested in the 1936 Defence Committee report. Because a RAAF striking force of up to 150 bombers and fighters was expected to be available by June 1940, to launch a counter-attack against sea-borne forces the AMF allotted to defended ports and the major industrial areas could be reduced. Reserves could be deployed over a wider area than previously contemplated. These reserves would not be concentrated in one command until enemy intentions were disclosed, but would be spread over a wide front to provide local aid and high flexibility for subsequent concentration. This made good strategic sense, and avoided the 'considerable political opposition' concentration in one command would engender. Clearly, the General Staff recognised that Northern politicians in particular would not look kindly on the sole disposition of forces to the vital south-east industrial areas, unless they were attacked. Reserves would reinforce by rail and road any threatened area. A Field Force of four divisions, less than 75,000 men would be pitted against an expected Japanese force of ten divisions. At least two Japanese divisions were expected to attack north-east Australia. Darwin, Hobart and Fremantle were not likely to be reinforced by land. At those ports assistance against attack was limited to air support.⁷ (See Figure 2.)

General R.E. Jackson, GOC Northern Command, was shocked that half the forces raised in his command were to be transferred to New South Wales in the event of invasion. In the belief that he was the 'fighting commander of the North' he had organised his command to a point where it was adequate for the defence of Southern Queensland. Writing in 1948, he described the limit to this organisation as 'the farthest point north where troops from the southern States might be used' and labelled it 'the Brisbane Line'. It is unclear whether he drew the term from the 1942-43 controversy or the Defence Committee report of 1936.⁸

7. AWM 54. 243/6/160. *Memorandum on Employment of AMF for Defence of Australia in Event of Japanese Attack. April-May 1940.* Memorandum on the Employment of the AMF for the Defence of Australia. G.S. MOI/P3. 20.4.40, pp.1-5.

8. Jackson quoted in Horner, *High Command*, pp.20, 26. Jackson claimed he went on, in August 1940, to prepare plans for an obstacle belt throughout Queensland, the improvement of rail and road communications in the far north, and re-organisation of the command generally. The then new CGS, Sturdee never replied to any of these proposals, according to Jackson. To an extent, his evidence is unreliable because he was engaged in a personal feud with Sturdee, and very biased against him. It should be noted also that Sturdee was no longer DMO & I at this date. See Horner, *ibid.*, for details.



The following are the main rail and road movements necessary:

Adelaide-Seymour	One Bde Gp. (less 1 Bn)
Seymour-Liverpool	Three Bde Gps.
Sydney-Newcastle	Two Bde Gps.
Newcastle-Wallangara	One Bde Gp.

Figure 2 Disposition of the Australian Field Force 29.4.40, showing also Defended Ports unable to be reinforced by land in the event of a Japanese attack, in relation to regions receiving land and air support.

After the fall of Norway and the Lowlands and the invasion of France,^{9a} Menzies appointed Essington Lewis, the head of Broken Hill Pty Ltd, as Director-General of Munitions Supply, with the authority to press into service civil as well as Government factories for munitions production. Mindful of the political threat to Australia, because of Japanese interest in the Netherlands East Indies, he asserted these new measures 'would prevent a wholesale invasion of the British Empire and Australia in particular'.^{9b} Curtin suggested the stationing of troops on the North and Northwest coasts as a stabilizing measure.^{9c} The next time the Labor leader, in West Australia, showed a special interest in the defence of the Northwest, it would be in the context of the Brisbane Line controversy.

Army headquarters now required decisions on policy about their outline plans as 'a matter of urgent necessity', since they needed to know if their plans^{10a} were generally acceptable or would be rejected. On the advice of the new Chief of General Staff, Brudenell White, War Cabinet remained wedded to the 'raids only' policy. Hughes was the only Cabinet member to warn that now was the time to prepare against Japanese invasion.^{10b}

The Labor Party, moved by allied disasters in Europe, and with an eye to the election due in September, called a Special Federal Conference on 18 and 19 June. That Conference resolved that if elected the Party would devote all its efforts to winning the war. It would support compulsory military training for home defence, and the reinforcement with volunteers of existing AIF divisions. This included the newly raised 8th Division, which had Sturdee as its commander.^{11a} The sterling effort he undertook to satisfy the new division's requirements did not pass unnoticed by Curtin, Menzies, or the Treasurer, Percy Spender. The 8th Division's role was earmarked for defence of Australia, which the Labor conference had announced would have priority, not withstanding its commitment to support participation in the European war by a volunteer Army, that participation to be governed

9a. Hasluck, *Government and the People*. 1939-41, p.211.

b. *Ibid.*, pp.213-214.

c. A. Chester, *John Curtin*. Melbourne, 1943, pp.78-79.

10a. AWM 54. 243/6/160. *Memorandum on the Employment of the AMF for the defence of Australia in the event of Japanese attack*. April-May 1940.

Lt. Col. MOGI to DMO & I, 30.5.40.

b. Horner, *High Command*, p.36.

by circumstances as they arose. The majority of delegates rejected a motion for Labor to participate in a National Government, proposing instead that the ALP form an Advisory War Council. Menzies rejected the offer.^{11 b.}

He was considerably disturbed by advice from Winston Churchill, now British Prime Minister, that ^{Australia} would have to rely on the United States to protect British interests in the Pacific. Britain's interest demanded after the loss of the French Navy in the conquest of France, the retention of the fleet in the Mediterranean to watch both the Italian and German Navies.^{i 2 b} Unfortunately, Churchill's hopes of American intervention did not accord with the idea of American strategic planners who doubted the value of the Singapore fortress, and were not in the business of supporting 'the British Commonwealth' or Britain's 'post war interests, commercial and military', with American blood. At this stage the United States military were more concerned with the potential danger from the large German communities in South America and the German threat to the Atlantic which would militate against effective action against Japan in the Pacific.^{12 c}

The combination of these circumstances forced Menzies to cable Churchill to accede to Japanese demands for the withdrawal of the British Garrison from Shanghai, the closing of the Hong Kong frontier and until September the closure of the Burma Road, over which the United States provided war materials to China. 'The alternative' was 'a grave risk of war against Japan, which cannot be contemplated in our present position'.¹³

This position was forced on Menzies by home defence inadequacies. Temporarily he favoured sending the 7th Division to Malaya when the suggestion was put to him by Britain.^{i 4 a} Early in July, before Britain had agreed to the Japanese demands, the Chiefs of Staff Committee advised him the despatch of the Division would 'seriously hamper training of the remainder of the AIF being raised' and hinder the equipment of the necessary forces for home defence'. Moreover the obligation to equip that part of the 6th Division in the Middle East meant only an ill equipped force would be sent to Malaya.^{14 b.}

11. a. Hasluck, *Government and the People. 1939-41*, pp.246-247.

b. Buckley, 'Sturdee', *op.cit.*, p.31.

12 a. G.H. St Barclay, 'Australia Looks to America' in *Pacific Historical Review*, 46, 25, 1977, pp.254-255.

b. AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 625. Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Prime Minister's Department, 22.6.40.

c. Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun : The American War with Japan.* 1984, p.67. *Ibid.*, p.60.

13. Hasluck, *Government and the People. 1939-41*, p.228.

14 a. AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 625. Cablegram C840. 1.4814.

Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to War Cabinet. F.S. Shedden (n.d.)

b. AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 625. 'Employment of Australian Land and Air Forces in Malaya'. Annex B. COS to Secretary, Dept. of Defence Co-ordination, 2.7.40.

The United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff, in collusion with Churchill, put pressure on the Australian War Cabinet to reverse the decision not to send a Division to Malaya. They were dismissive of the threat to Australia at the present time, and stressed the necessity of an Australian commitment to the defence of Malaya.^{15a.} Churchill, in a covering note, expressed his disbelief in a southward advance by Japan, as this would leave the Japanese homelands open to an American fleet. He promised that if Japan 'set about invading Australia or New Zealand on a large scale' the British fleet would come to Australia's aid. General Sir Brudenell White was against the despatch of a division to Malaya, and did not think Japan would invade Australia even if she took Singapore and inflicted a naval defeat on Britain in the Far East.^{15b.}

The Government meanwhile, established a Volunteer Defence Corps (VDC) whose main duties were internal security, guarding internment camps, and closely protecting coast and beach defences.¹⁶

But White's death, along with Sir Laurence Street, Gullett and Fairbairn, all members with military experience, in a tragic air crash at Canberra airport in August, altered the counsel being offered about the posting of a division to Malaya.^{17a} The Chiefs of Staff were prepared to send the 7th Division to Malaya, because of the importance of the Singapore base to Australia's security, but did not want to make further naval or air commitments. Service squadrons in Australia were 'barely sufficient to meet training requirements' for the five squadrons stationed overseas and 'Australian air defence requirements'.^{17b.} On 28 August, War Cabinet reluctantly agreed to the military recommendations but refused to take up a further suggestion that Australia should enter into a unilateral agreement to go to the assistance of the Netherlands East Indies if it should be attacked by Japan.^{17c} Ultimately, the commitment of the 7th Division was altered to the Middle East. That theatre was considered more vital to Australian

15 & AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 625. Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to U.K. High Command. Cablegram 1. 6672. 11.8.40, p.2.
 b. *Ibid.*, Circular Z214. Pt. IV, p.3. 11.8.40. Guy Verney, 'General Sir Brudenell White : The Staff Officer as Commander' in Horner, *Commanders*, pp.41-42.
 16. D. McCarthy, *op.cit.*, p.3.

security because of the need to protect the Suez route, essential to Australian trade.^{17 d.}

Thus Menzies and his colleagues were caught between paying the Imperial premium and the need for home defence. This, and the sudden bereftment of the Cabinet of men experienced in military matters, and thoughts of an election looming on 21 September may have all contributed to a virtual stasis in making up shortcomings in home defence requirements.

Both the ALP and UAP-UCP campaigned on who was best fitted to lead the nation in war. The result of the 1940 election was eventually crucial to the outcome of the later Brisbane Line controversy. When the poll was declared the coalition and the ALP had gained thirty-six seats each, with the balance of power being held by two independents in the House of Representatives, Alex Wilson and Arthur Coles.^{18 a.} In the Country Party Fadden became compromise acting leader.^{18 b.} When Menzies reconstructed his Cabinet on 28 October, he gained the Treasury from Spender, much to Spender's ire. Spender was made Minister for the Army.^{18 c.}

First elected to Parliament as an Independent in 1937, by October 1938, Spender had been persuaded by Menzies to join the UAP, but maintained his practice at the bar. With the exclusion of the Country Party from Government in late April 1939, Spender gained a post as Assistant Minister to the Treasurer. On 3 November he was appointed Acting Treasurer, and early the following year Treasurer, to be supplanted by Fadden after the September 1940 election, and made, as already noted, Minister for the Army. He was soon to find 'Treasury was almost a quiet spot' in comparison.¹⁹

The Labor Party faced problems militating against political unity, as three seats were gained by Lang's ALP (Non-Communist) Party. Over home defence policy, however, they were in accord. Both parties believed

17. Hasluck, *Government and the People. 1939-41*, pp.243-244.

b. AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 625. Far Eastern Position. Appreciation by United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff. Report by Australian Chiefs of Staff. 22.8.40.

c. AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 625. War Cabinet Minute (459) Agendum No.186/1940 Strategical Appreciation in relation to Empire Co-operation and Local Defence. Employment of Australian Forces in Malaya. 28.4.40.

d. Hasluck, *Government and the People. 1939-41*, pp.225-226.

18. C.A. Hughes, *op.cit.*, pp.108-109 and 115-116.

b. Hasluck, *Government and the People. 1939 41*, p.256.

c. A. Fadden, *They Called Me Artie*, Brisbane, 1969, p.45.

19. P.C. Spender, *Politics and a Man*, Sydney, 1972, pp.13, 40, 74.

primary consideration had 'to be given to Defence within the Commonwealth'.²⁰

Seeking a way out of the political difficulties created by the independents holding the balance of power, Menzies once more approached Curtin to form a National Government. Curtin responded by suggesting the Labor proposal of an Advisory War Council. After some negotiation the parties arrived at an agreement, whereby the Labor party promised to co-operate with the Government in its attempts to strengthen the war effort, look to internal security, and to post-war preparations. It would not use its numbers in the Parliament to embarrass the Government in that war effort.^{21^a} All members of the Council, Menzies, Fadden, Spender and Hughes for the Government, Curtin, Forde, Makin, and Beasley, the latter for Lang Labor, would be 'sworn in to respect all confidences'.^{21^b}

With the election over, and the Opposition more likely to be co-operative in the conduct of the war, War Cabinet, at the urging of the Northern Territory Administrator, C.A. Abbott, reviewed the defence position of Darwin. Abbott had been panicked by the signing of the Tri-Partite Non-Aggression Pact between Japan, Germany and Italy on 28 September, 1940.^{22^a} Minor actions were taken to improve Darwin's defence problem, notably the provision of rolling stock to supply the town by rail and road, if Japan declared war. Because of assumed Japanese control of the sea, it was thought the town could not be reinforced by the Navy.^{22^b}

20. P. Weller and B. Lloyd (eds) *Caucus Minutes*, Vol. VIII, 1932-1949, Melbourne, 1975, p.247. The Labor view was contradictory in part to Menzies' view, which emphasised 'the adequate defence of Australia ... by the raising and training of armed forces' and 'the development of munitions and material production' to the 'greatest practicable means of self-sufficiency'. By implication the purpose of this policy was 'the rendering of all possible assistance to Great Britain and our sister Dominions in the fight overseas, the measure, time and place of such assistance to be determined in the light of the circumstances'. cf. *ibid.*, p.247.

21.^a Hasluck, *Government and the People. 1939-41*, p.270, p.580.

^b Fadden, *op.cit.*, p.45.

22.^a AA ACT CRS A 2670. Defence Department. War Cabinet Secretariat. Agendum 189/40. 14.11.40.

^b *Ibid.*, Minute 617. Darwin, Evacuation of Civilian Population in Emergency. 4.11.40 and AA ACT CRS A 2670. *Defence Department. War Cabinet Secretariat. Agendum 189/40. Review of Strategic and Operational Importance of Darwin and Scale of Defences.* (c.14.11.40). Date comes from that in Agendum 189/40. Document is undated, and AA ACT CRS A 2670. Defence Department. War Cabinet Secretariat, Supplement 4 to Agendum 189/40. Hospital Accommodation at Darwin. 22.11.40.

War Cabinet continued to see reliance on the stopping of the Japanese in Malaya, and the control of the seas by the British Navy from Singapore as the mainstay of Australian defence. A Far Eastern Defence Conference in Singapore from 22 to 31 October, attended by the Australian Deputy Chiefs of Staff and staff officers from Britain and New Zealand, concluded that

in the absence of a Main Fleet in the Far East, the forces and equipment at present available in this area for the defence of Malaya are totally inadequate to meet a major attack by Japan

and that Malaya was in no position to defend itself against direct attack because of deficiencies in numbers and equipment in the Army and Air Force. Unenthusiastically, War Cabinet assented to the despatch of a Brigade Group from the 8th Division there, on the understanding that the troops were to be relocated in the Middle East as soon as possible.^{23 a.} Menzies, on 1 December advised Churchill of the War Cabinet's decision. He urged him to make Singapore 'as secure as we can make it', a process to which Australia, because of home defence deficiencies, and Cabinet commitments to Middle East requirements, could contribute little. Particularly worrying to Menzies was the need for Britain to 'remedy deficiencies in Army and Air Force both in numbers and equipment ... all important in view of the inadequacy of Naval Forces'.^{23 b.}

Roosevelt, with a Presidential election looming, was chary of even allowing the United States to participate in staff talks with Britain and her Dominions and the Dutch.^{24 a.} At this stage, unbeknown to the Australians, the American President was being advised by Admiral Harold ~~Stack~~^{Stack} that, if America became involved in the war they should put the bulk of their effort into helping Britain defeat Germany. Strategy for the Pacific, against Japan was to be strictly defensive, and any offensive in that theatre limited.^{24 b.}

23 a-AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 625. War Cabinet Minute Agendum No.254/1940. Report of Singapore Defence Conference. 1940. Review by Chiefs of Staff 26.11.40.

b. *Ibid.*, Report by Chiefs of Staff 26.11.40, p.1. Commonwealth Government to Lord Cranborne, 1.2.40 in Hudson and Stokes (eds) *DAFP*, Vol. IV, pp.285-287.

24 a. Menzies to Casey 22.10.40, in *ibid.*, p.233.

b. Spector, *op.cit.*, p.66. (In the event this is not what occurred after the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941. In terms of allocated resources the Pacific theatre received more men, planes, carriers and battleships than the European theatre; *ibid.*, p.298. Nevertheless, the concept of a limited defensive war in the Pacific, and the principle of the Beat Hitler First Policy, agreed on in late

Both Cabinet and the Advisory War Council were now extremely worried by the potential threat from Japan. Menzies decided he must visit the United Kingdom to impress personally upon Churchill the Japanese danger to Australia.^{25a.} Another cable from the British Prime Minister in Christmas week was not reassuring. He thanked Menzies for the Australian contribution to Malayan defence, but was deliberately vague as to the numbers of planes to be committed to the Malaya region. Reinforcement of Singapore, if the Japanese attitude changed for the worse, was a lame last after the demands of the Middle Eastern and Balkan theatre.^{25 b.}

So, on 24 January, accompanied by Frederick Shedden, Menzies departed Australia for London via the Netherlands East Indies, Singapore and the Middle East. He was determined to induce Churchill to be specific how he intended to reinforce Singapore and drew up a plan for the defence of the Far East. He wanted, too, an exact explanation from Churchill as to how he would make good his pledge of defending Australia from Japanese invasion.²⁶ Clearly Menzies was not derelict in looking to the needs of continental defence, albeit, sensibly, he was concerned at preventing the Japanese from arriving on Australian shores in the first place.

Singapore and the Pacific at Risk

We have seen that home defence policies of the UAP-UCP were based on an assumption that Australia would be subjected to raids only, while the Labor Party thought it was more likely Australia would be subject to invasion. These conflicting perceptions were to an extent, at the root of the later Brisbane Line controversy. They surfaced at an Advisory War Council meeting on 5 February, 1941 when Fadden, Acting Prime Minister in Menzies' absence, presented Labor members with warnings from the British Ambassador to Japan that Japan saw the Netherlands East Indies, Thailand, Indo-China and Burma as appropriate areas for southward expansion.

24 (contd) 1940, early 1941, was accepted by both Menzies and Curtin, and, apparently, axiomatic to General MacArthur. Curtin and MacArthur did not hesitate to use the *idea* of a holding war in the Pacific in their rhetoric. We shall see it played a crucial part in the evolution of the Brisbane Line controversy.

25 a. R.G. Menzies, *Afternoon Light*. Melbourne, 1967, p.20.

b. Hasluck, *Government and the People. 1939-41*, p.299.

26. 'Introduction' in Hudson and Stokes (eds), *DAFP*, Vol. IV, p.xi.

In the discussion that followed Spender suggested that there was every possibility of Japan making a move against Australia in the next three months but that unless her own territories were involved, United States intervention was doubtful. The immediate effect of a war with Japan would be on Australia's sea-borne trade. Military advisers, he told the Council, did not think invasion likely, but realised 'serious dislocation and harm would be done by continuous and effective raids'.

Curtin countered that not only could Japan use her navy to immobilize Australian economic and industrial life, but might also attempt 'temporary occupation ... of some part of Australia's territory'. He wanted the Defence Programme enlarged so 'the Army effort could be made as large as possible', so there would be an increase in training of naval personnel and so that the RAAF's resistance to attack could be strengthened. If the Navy and Air Force failed, 'the Army would be brought into full action'.

The Chiefs of Staff were consulted. They reassured Council members that maximum effort was being made to ensure the naval and air defence of Australia but was being held back by industrial problems in shipyards and dockyards to the point where there had been a 25% lag in output over recent months.²⁷

Later that evening the Council drafted a press statement, issued by Fadden with Curtin's whole-hearted approval. It concluded with a warning partly directed at striking boilermakers, iron-workers and munitions workers who had been protesting at new taxes imposed on overtime money that

... Australia, equally with the Empire as a whole, is now entering upon a period in which its very existence is at stake and that great responsibility rests upon all sections of the community to ensure that the maximum effort is exerted to carry us through the vital months ahead to ultimate victory.²⁸

Over the next week the situation worsened. On 8 February Commander Henry Burrell, Australian Naval Attache to the United States, who was attending the Anglo-American Staff Conference in Washington as an observer for the Australian Government, cabled Fadden that that Conference had decided in the event of Japan entering the war the British and Americans would treat the European theatre as the decisive theatre. General policy

27. Advisory War Council Minute 119, Melbourne, 5.2.41. cited in Hudson and Stokes (eds), *DAFP*, Vol. IV, pp.362-365.

28. Council Press Statement, cited in Hasluck, *Government and the People. 1939-41*, pp.316-317.

was to defeat Germany and Italy first and then deal with Japan - the 'Beat Hitler First' policy. No United States Fleet would be sent to Singapore, despite the British pressing for such action. As a last resort the United States would abandon the Far East in order to ensure the maximum concentration of forces in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean.²⁹

War Cabinet met on the morning of 13 February to discuss this unsettling policy, which threatened the abandonment of Australia by both Britain and the United States until the war in Europe was decided. They wanted Australian naval forces to be returned swiftly for service in home waters, a demand over which the British had been dilatory, and a definition of those actions Britain would consider a *casus belli* with Japan.^{30a} The likelihood of Japanese action against Hong Kong, Thailand or Indo-China, or direct attacks on Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies were obvious causes for war.^{30b} They cabled Menzies in Cairo to find out from Churchill how Britain intended to counter Japanese moves, and more importantly, exactly what was the naval strength available in the Far East, actual and proposed, if war came?^{30c} Immediately after Cabinet met Fadden briefed the press that Australia was in danger of action on or near her coastline - war with Japan was inevitable.^{30d}

Perhaps at this juncture, Fadden told Curtin of the information he had received from Burrell. At the Advisory War Council meeting that followed the Cabinet meeting Curtin alluded to United States commitment in the Atlantic in a way that suggested Fadden had kept him informed. Curtin told the Council that the transfer of American Naval Forces from the Pacific to the Atlantic was 'disastrous for Australia'.

News of the 'Beat Hitler First' strategy possibly prompted Curtin to call for a full test mobilisation to ensure the efficiency of the Air Force against enemy attack and to highlight the paucity of anti-aircraft protection. Implicit in Curtin's remarks was a criticism of the Government's 'raids only' policy. But Spender opposed the call for full

29. C. Bridge, 'R.G. Casey and the Origins of the Pacific War 1940-42'. *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 1982, p.184.

30a. Fadden, *They Called Me Artie*, p.50.

b. Horner, *High Command*, pp.56-57.

c. AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 625. Fadden to Menzies via Sir Miles Lampson, H.M. Ambassador, Cairo, 13.2.41 and *ibid.*,

Fadden to Menzies. Cypher telegram 57, 13.2.41.

d. Fadden, *op.cit.*, pp.52-53.

mobilisation fearful of its effect on industry.³¹ Spender had not had an easy time politically since his return from the Middle East and Singapore in mid January.

In Singapore he had made a broadcast on Japanese-Australian relations, wherein he said Australia had 'no quarrel with Japan'. For this he had been castigated as an appeaser of Japan, and accused of not regarding Japan as an aggressor. On 22 January, he released the news that Tobruk had fallen before it had been officially confirmed, only having to retract the statement later that day. When Tobruk did fall 22 hours later 'the Press had a field day' at his expense. Again on 26 January, Spender was attacked in the *Sydney Morning Herald* by Special Correspondent Ross Gollan. Gollan's article canvassed a wide part of Spender's political career. He was painted as a political enemy of Menzies, blamed for appeasement in Singapore, accused of insinuating the AIF in the Middle East were not well-equipped, and mocked, as the 'Baron of Bardia', for purportedly claiming he had taken some part in preparing AIF plans for the successful attack on Bardia in December 1940, while visiting Cairo.³²

He was not in any position to make further political gaffes, and feared he had enemies enough in the UAP, a party dependent on big business interests. Instead he told the Opposition requirements for a partial mobilisation would cover those parts of Australia which 'would be vital ... and ... where the greatest danger would lie'. Plans along these lines would be put before the Cabinet on the morrow by the Chief of General Staff, General Sturdee. Only 'an immediate attack on Australia would bring about the necessity for complete mobilisation'. This was acceptable to the Council, who recommended to the War Cabinet that mobilisation plans be taken in hand, so Australia could be put on a war footing if necessary. Labor members assented to 'effective preparatory measures' being taken, and so informed the public in a press statement after the meeting.³³

31. Advisory War Council Minute No.145. 13.2.41 in Hudson and Stokes (eds) *DAFP*, Vol. IV, pp.390-396. That Curtin was possibly aware of the situation on 13 February was first raised by Bridge, 'Casey ... Origins of the Pacific War', pp.183-184. It has been argued by Horner, *High Command*, pp.86-87 that Burrell's cable was not sighted by Fadden until late on 13 February, after the Advisory War Council meeting. Curtin's comment at the Council meeting, however, appears to paraphrase parts of the cable, indicating he saw it before the meeting. For the argument that Australia did not find out about 'Beat Hitler First' until May 1942 see J.R. Robertson, 'Australia and the Beat Hitler First Strategy, 1941-42: A Problem in War-Time Consultation', *Journal of Imperial Commonwealth History*, 11, 3, (1983), pp.300-321.

32. Spender, *op.cit.*, pp.86-89.

33. Advisory War Council Minute No.145. 13.2.41 in Hudson and Stokes (eds) *DAFP*, Vol. IV, pp.390-396.

Regardless of whether those measures entailed either full or partial mobilisation, it is clear that military strategy would emphasise the defence of those vital south-eastern industrial areas essential to the continuation of war. Labor members of the Council knew this, and agreed to the strategy. We shall see that they enforced the strategy themselves when in Government, because they recognised it as the only effective means of defending the continent. Thus, when it became common knowledge during the Brisbane Line controversy, Opposition members were justifiably enraged at Curtin's attempt to lay the blame for its adoption entirely on their shoulders.

Partial mobilization, in any case, did not occur in February, 1941. At the War Cabinet meeting the next day Sturdee revealed the Army had sufficient equipment to maintain the 7th and 8th Divisions overseas in the Middle East and Rabaul respectively. That part of the 8th Division which remained at home could not be fully equipped because equipment to maintain the AIF and AMF at full war establishment was not available in Australia. Sir Robert Brooke Popham, Commander-in-Chief, Far East, who was on a brief visit to Australia for talks with the New Zealand and Australian Governments, also attended this meeting. He reassured Cabinet members that should the Japanese attack the Singapore base it could hold out until a relieving battle ^{34a} fleet arrived. Measures were instituted for continuous manning of ^{34a} coast and anti-aircraft defence, half the AMF was put into training at any one time, and the 8th Division was allotted operational roles. Ten thousand mechanical transport vehicles were impressed. With all these instructions, the Advisory War Council concurred. Cabinet further decided the 8th Division would not proceed to the Middle East, but be used for the defence of Australia and the Far East. ^{34 b.}

Within the Parliamentary Labor Party Curtin faced severe criticism for his association with the joint warnings when Fadden was forced to justify his statements against the charge that he was a panic merchant. Eddie Ward, rather than making claims about home defence unpreparedness, labelled the warnings a hoax. ³⁵ The Government was doing something, however slight. Still, faith in the effectiveness of Singapore fortress was the lynch-pin of conservative defence policy.

34a. Horner, *Crisis of Command*, p.21. ^b AWM 54 243/6/42. *Army Headquarters Operation Instructions No.14 and 20. April to December 1941.* Priority in Army Defence. AHQ.Op.Inst. No.12, 24.2.41.
Horner, *High Command*, p.57.

35. Fadden, *They Called Me Artie*, p.55.

In London, Menzies was discovering how ineffective was this reliance on Singapore, and its reinforcement by British forces. At the Foreign Office he ^{found} ~~found~~, to his alarm, that the British had reservations about reinforcing Singapore with aircraft to guard against war in the Far East, because of the risk this would create with the European war. Nor would they engage in war with Japan unless American intervention was guaranteed. He warned the British that if the Japanese invaded the Netherlands East Indies, 'the whole Australian defence policy and plans would have to be recast'. ^{36a} An *aide-memoire* provided him for his meeting with the U.K. Chiefs of Staff on 27 February revealed that Britain considered the Netherlands East Indies virtually indefensible, and that no binding assurance had been given to the Dutch that Britain would assist them if they were attacked by Japan. From that document he learnt that the United States would not reinforce Singapore. This knowledge compelled him to insist on fighters to reinforce the British naval base and query if the shortages in equipment there were being made good. ^{36b} Nor did the meeting provide a solution to conflicting British and Australian plans for use of the Australian and New Zealand ships to be returned from overseas. Britain wanted to use them to protect the ocean routes across the Tasman, while Australia wanted them concentrated in the Tasman sea to protect vital areas. Despite discussions on the problem at the Defence Conference ^{36c} soon to be held in Singapore no solution was found to this impasse. The lack of a co-ordinated naval plan for Far Eastern waters caused some anxiety for Fadden and his war Cabinet at home. ^{36d}

36 a. Menzies, *Afternoon Light* quoted in Cameron Hazlehurst, *Menzies Observed*, Sydney, 1977, pp.209-210.

b. CA 46 CRS A 5954. Box 625. *P.M. Visit Abroad. Discussions in Brief. Pt. 1 (ii) Strategy*, COS (41) 44 (O) *Aide Memoire* for meeting with Prime Minister of Australia 25.2.41, pp.1-3, 4-5, and 7. (The *Aide Memoire* is dated 25.2.41 but the COS meeting took place on 27.2.41.)

c. *Ibid.*, Minutes of a Meeting between the Prime Minister of Australia, Ministers, and Chiefs of Staff, 27.2.41.

d. *Ibid.*, Fadden to Menzies, 27.3.41.

Menzies attempted to influence a change in the Foreign Office attitude at a luncheon speech to the Foreign Press Association on 3 March. Publicly, he reiterated the views he had expressed to the Foreign Office, calling for frankness with Japan and a 'proper blend of friendliness and plain statement'. Australia, he warned, would nevertheless, defend herself and her vital interests.^{37c}

In Australia, to his disgust, Curtin, Beasley and the press accused him of minimising the seriousness of the position in the Pacific, and contradicting the warnings issued in February by the Advisory War Council.^{37b} At home, the effect for the Prime Minister was unfortunate, for it reinforced the impression he was an appeaser not only of Germany, but also still 'Pig Iron Bob' the appeaser of Japan. Before long, more preposterous allegations would, through such impressions, appear increasingly credible to the Australian public.

After advice from the Admiralty Churchill told Menzies that the sending of a substantial British Fleet to Singapore and the Far East 'would not be practicable until after the lapse of a considerable period and might not be possible even then'.³⁸ Menzies had no alternative but to accept that a definite plan for naval reinforcement East of Suez could only occur on a progressive basis, dependent on the outcome of events in the Mediterranean. He had to be content with the recognition that a skeleton fleet consisting only of a battle-cruiser and a carrier should be sent to the Far East, but ability to do more depended on the situation at the time.

Menzies accepted this position. During March and April his efforts turned to building up Australia's air defence, which had been Labor's policy since Curtin's accession to leadership. Unfortunately, the damage caused by recent air raids to British air production meant Britain could not be pressed unduly to meet Australian requirements. This especially affected the supply of Beaufort fighters and Hudson Reconnaissance planes. Brewster general purpose aircraft, even if provided from the United States, were likely to be delayed in delivery, since American deliveries were often greatly in arrears of the promised date.³⁹

37a. MS 4936. Menzies Papers. Series 13. Folder 3. Book B. Entry for 3.3.41. NLA and *The Times*, 6.3.41.

b. AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 625. Menzies to Fadden, MS, 5.3.41 and MS 4936. Menzies Papers. Series 13. Folder 3. Book B. Entry for 5.3.41. NLA.

38. Churchill quoted in R.J. Bell, *Unequal Allies: Australian American Relations and the Pacific War*. Melbourne, 1977, p.19.

39. MS 4936. Menzies Papers. Series 31. Box 496 b (Box 2.F.12) Menzies to Fadden 11.4.41. NLA. For example, 12 Beaufighters were being delivered by December 1941 and a further 42 in instalments by March 1942. These were the only aircraft which met Australian Air Staff requirements of a high-performance 2-seater fighter. British contracts of Hudsons would not be provided until early 1942. Brewster type general purpose aircraft from both British and American sources would not meet the full requirement of 243 until May 1942.

The United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff did not recognise a threat to Australia from Japan, and thought that the scale of attack on the continent was negligible, and likely to be restricted to the vicinity of Darwin.^{40a.} Their failure to review the objectives of the strength of forces in relation to the general defence position in the Far East, which Menzies had sought from them, alarmed Shedden. But at least, he told Menzies, Australia now knew where it stood, had been made aware of the degree to which it had to rely on its own efforts, and of the necessity for expanding them to the utmost. He recommended Australia produce its own Beaufort bombers and Beaufighters 'so much as we are able to, as quickly as we can'. About forecasts of Australia's munitions production rate, he was optimistic. The view of the U.K. Chiefs of Staff that 'the threat of direct air attack on Australia would not be a serious one' he found unacceptable, since it was based on present Japanese air strength and aerodrome facilities, which could be subject to change during a long war.^{40b.}

By 25 April, Menzies, still waiting to discuss strategical questions affecting Australia with the U.K. Defence Committee, advised Fadden of the U.K. Chiefs of Staff's replies.^{41a} As far back as February, he had, with some anxiety, concurred in Australian military participation in the Greek campaign, only to face not only the general opposition to an overseas force at home, but also to that campaign in particular.^{41b} Throughout March 1941 it became increasingly obvious that the forces from the 6th Division committed to Greece were facing an 'extremely hazardous nature of operation in view of disparity between opposing forces both in number and training'. Lack of British air support contributed to a forced evacuation of Crete, following a heavily fought rear guard action.^{41c}

Equally Menzies was perturbed by the German advances in Libya and the bottling up of the 9th and 7th Divisions in Tobruk. That crisis

40a AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 625. U.K. War Cabinet Chiefs of Staff Committee. Reply by Chiefs of Staff to Memorandum by Prime Minister of Australia, 11.4.41, pp.4-6.

b AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 625. Strategical Questions and Objectives. Shedden to Menzies, 14.4.41.

Note: C. Day, in *Menzies and Churchill at War*, London, 1986, argues that a great part of Menzies' visit to London was pre-occupied with efforts to supplant Churchill as British Prime Minister. I do not agree with this interpretation. Menzies' visit to London was undertaken primarily to attempt to persuade Churchill to safeguard Australia's security.

persuaded him on 15 April to remain in London 'for another week or two',^{41 d} consistent with his belief that outside of Churchill, he was the only Minister who would question the views of Sir Archibald Wavell, Commander-in-Chief, Middle East.^{41 e} Partly as a sop to the Australian opinion that Australian troops were being sacrificed by 'incompetent Imperial Generals',^{41 f} Blamey was appointed Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Middle East; a promotion which, however, did not substantially increase his authority.^{41 g}

The disquiet in London about Australia's home defence was mirrored in Australia between February and April. While Menzies attempted to gain resources for Australian defence from Britain, the Queensland Minister for Home Affairs, Hanlon, was perturbed about the security of his State. On 25 February 1941 he wrote to Fadden canvassing the possibility of enemy landings there. He listed eighteen coastal towns and cities as vulnerable to attack or invasion, from Cooktown to Maryborough, demanded increased protection of 'at least' Cairns, Bowen, Mackay and Gladstone by the mounting of six or eight inch guns, the detachment of some portion of the defence force to Queensland and machine guns for the VDC. He demanded the Defence Department state 'definitely' the cities they proposed to defend, the role of civilians in that defence, and road and rail transport requirements, so the State could plan the partial or complete evacuation of civilians. The absence of harbour patrols in the important coastal towns, the vulnerability of small sea-port towns to sorties by the Japanese in motorised sampans, the lack of air reconnaissance in the Gulf of Carpentaria, of an effective communications to report suspicious activity and of protective and camouflage measures for North Queensland businesses all gravely disturbed him.⁴² (cf. Figure 3)

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41. MS 4936. Menzies Papers. Series 13. Folder 13. Book C. Entry for 29.9.41, NLA; AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 625. Extract from the Minutes of the Defence Committee (Operations), 29.4.41; a cable, similar in content dated 27.4.41 was also sent to Fadden; c. Cablegram 153. Menzies to Fadden, 25.2.41, cited in J. Robertson and J. McCarthy (eds), *Australian War Strategy 1939-1945. A Documentary History*, St Lucia, 1985, pp.90-91; Fadden to Menzies, Cablegram 123, 10.3.41, cited in *ibid.*, p.123; *ibid.*, pp.102-103; Dill to Wavell, Cablegram 62362, London, 19.4.41, cited in *ibid.*, p.103; Menzies to Fadden, Cablegram M59, London, 15.4.41 cited in *ibid.*, p.101.
42. AA ACT CRS A 816. 14/301/238. *Defence of Queensland. 1942*. Copy of memo 82/713/4. Hanlon to Fadden, n.d. [c.25.2.41.]

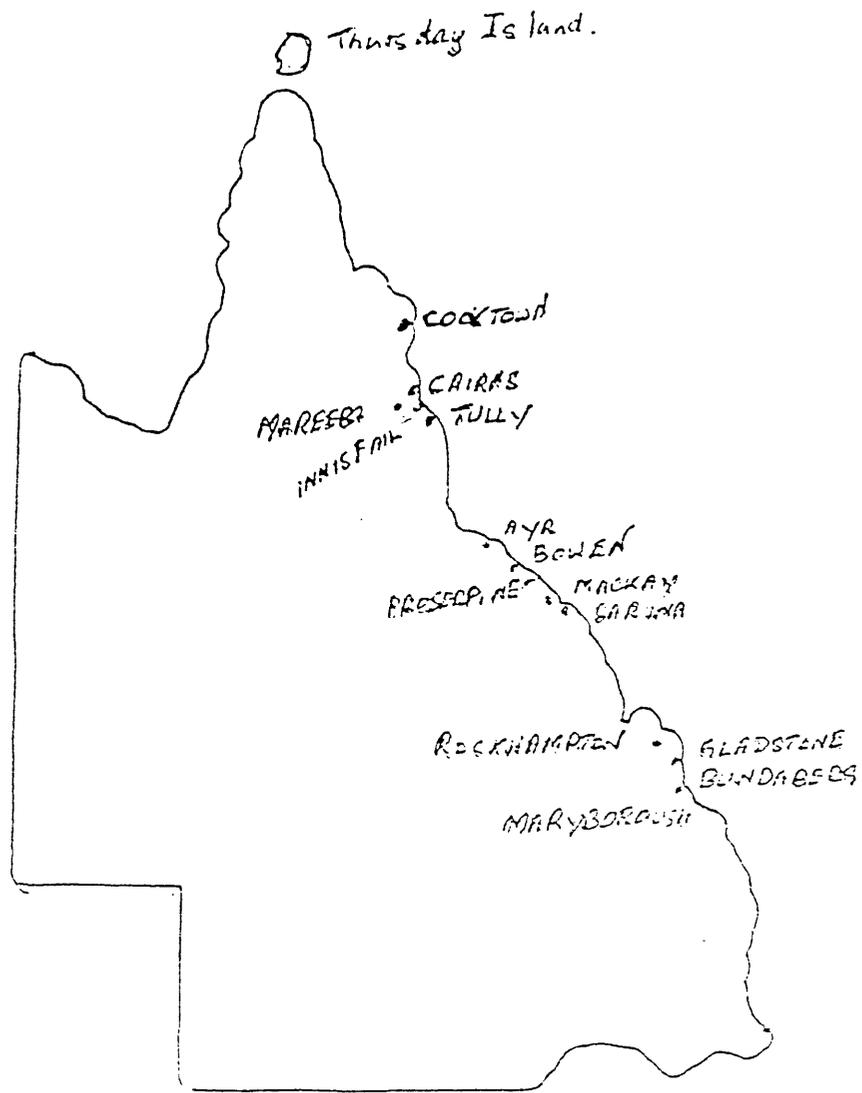


Figure 3. Towns considered by Queensland Minister for Home Affairs as vulnerable to attack or invasion. 25.2.1941.

Fadden took up the problems raised with Spender, who referred them to the Department of Defence Co-ordination and Navy. ^{43a} The Defence Department, after consulting with Headquarters Northern Command, would not comment on the list of vulnerable towns or cities, or on coast defence artillery for Thursday Island, Townsville or Brisbane. Otherwise the problem of increased protection for coastal towns was receiving attention as armaments became available. In the event of invasion, troops had been allotted for the defence of Brisbane, Maryborough, Rockhampton, Townsville and Cairns areas. Other areas were dealt with by the roles of the reserves and disposition of the VDC. A warning was issued against 'uncontrolled and quite unnecessary mass evacuation' which, by probably causing chaos and panic, could impede the movement of troops. Evacuation would be co-ordinated in co-operation with the appropriate civil authorities. The military authorities stressed they were fully aware of the points raised, and that 'with the resources at his disposal the GOC will make the best possible dispositions'. ^{43b} The Naval response was of a similar tone. ^{43c}

The significance of this query, and the responses to it, was that Percy Spender, the UAP Minister for the Army, at the latest by April 1941 was aware of the limited defence plans for Northern Queensland. So, to an extent, his later ^{protestation} of innocence over claims that it was not intended to defend North Queensland were inaccurate.

At a secret parliamentary session, held on 12 March, to discuss the Japanese threat perceived by Cabinet and the Advisory War Council, Fadden explained how, with Labor's co-operation the February warnings had helped achieve industrial peace. He reassured the Parliament if there was war with Japan, all Australian ships would return to the home station. Already steps were being taken for the defence of the outlying islands, and the garrisons of Rabaul, Port Moresby, the Solomons and the New Hebrides, and Darwin ^{were} being reinforced. Full of praise for Australia's ^{munitions} effort, he noted there had been delays in obtaining shipments

43a *Ibid.*, Fadden to Hanlon, 26.2.41.

b. *Ibid.*, Department of Defence to Secretary, Department Defence Co-ordination, 5.4.41.

c. *Ibid.*, Navy Office of Department of Defence Co-ordination, 21.4.41.

of munitions from the United Kingdom and the United States. Australia's munitions production would not go overseas unless Australian requirements had been satisfied or unless there were 'sound strategic reasons for sending out of Australia certain types of ammunition'.⁴⁴

The calling of the secret session had not been without drama. Curtin had achieved a reconciliation between Lang and Official Labor, which resulted in H.V. Evatt being appointed as a Labor representative to the Advisory War Council, and John McEwen, for the Country Party.^{45a} The turmoil in Labor's ranks emanated from its Left Wing. Eddie Ward's refusal to give an undertaking to keep secret matters disclosed in the closed session, resulted in his being ejected from the House.^{45b} His attitude was characteristic of his conviction that the Menzies-led coalition was not fit to govern, and should be attacked on any grounds regardless of the dangers to national security. His small regard for national security over political gain would be amply demonstrated in the Brisbane Line controversy.

The full extent of deficiencies in equipment was not brought home to Spender until he called for an assessment of the increased demands on Australia's manpower and industrial output on 21 April, after Allied setbacks in the Middle East and Greece. To his alarm he discovered that the Manpower Committee had conserved manpower, rather than directing it according to the best use in the national interest. The political danger of implementing manpower controls prevented such controls from being put in place. The rate of production and delivery of equipment, for example tanks, (of which the AMF had none,) and other essential equipment was contradictory to the optimistic outlook Fadden had given to parliament. Up to 95% of existing AMF requirement was not being met. Many of the plants shown in the production schedule were not in production. Spender warned Fadden that policy in this area needed to be clarified immediately and the list of reserved occupations revised, regardless of the political danger.⁴⁶

44. MS 4936. Menzies Papers. Series 31. World War II. Box 496 a. Fadden's speech to Secret Session 12.3.41. NLA.

45. Norman Makin, *Federal Labor Leaders*, Sydney, 1961, p.111. Fadden, *They Called Me Artie*, pp.55-56.

46. MS 4875. Spender Papers. Box 8. Papers and Documents 1939-49. Spender to Fadden 21.4.41, pp.1-7.

On 23 April the Spender letter was placed before the Advisory War Council. Labor members did no more than reiterate their usual policy differences with the UAP-opposition to commitment of the AIF beyond the Far East, and calls for the need to deploy a strong air-force at home.^{47a} A Cabinet sub-Committee was created to report 'on some of the issues raised', but the process of enquiry was prolonged.^{47b} This failure of Labor criticism implied acceptance of the situation as it stood. During the Brisbane Line controversy, however, Curtin did little to dissuade Ward from alleging inaction over preparations for home defence, of which the Advisory War Council, at the time, had been well and truly aware.

Menzies was unaware of the goings-on in Australia. On 29 April he at last had his promised meeting with the U.K. Defence Committee. Alarmed by the meeting's pre-occupation with Allied setbacks in Egypt, he wanted to know what answers he should give the Australian War Cabinet about forthcoming plans 'if things went badly'. Churchill insisted that minds had to be kept on victory. A heated discussion between the two followed, Churchill adamant Japan would not enter the war unless England was invaded successfully. Setbacks in the Middle East would not encourage Japanese entry, as Japan would be aware the Empire could send more reinforcements to the Far East. He was confident Japan would not declare war on Britain if this was likely to cause the United States to join the Allies, which they would surely do if Japan came in.^{48a}

To the irascible Churchill, Menzies, with his insistence on Far Eastern defence was a nuisance. Thus, when the British War Cabinet met to discuss what advice to offer the United States about shifting the Pacific Fleet to the Atlantic the Australian Prime Minister was not consulted. This failure to consult caused the two men to argue seriously yet again.^{48b}

A cable from Fadden, probably prompted by Spender's 21 April revelations, asking Menzies to take up with the United Kingdom Government

47^a AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 458. Advisory War Council Minute 289. Position of Local Defences. 23.4.41.

^b MS 4875. Spender Papers. Box 8. Papers and Documents 1939-49. Spender to Fadden 21.4.41.

48^a AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 625. Extract from the Minutes of a Meeting of the Defence Committee (Operations), 29.4.41;

^b MS 4936. Menzies Papers. Series 13. Folder 3. Book C. Entry for 30.4.41. NLA.

the possibility of getting 'for training requirements and for possible use for war in Australia', two hundred or more M3 light cruiser tanks from the United States, with machine gun ammunition for each tank, met with no response. ^{49a} Very disillusioned with Churchill, Menzies, empty handed, was on the point of leaving London for Washington. ^{49b}

Opposition members of the Advisory War Council had sought information on the proposed role of the Services in the event of war with Japan. On 6 May the Defence Committee, Vincent Quealy, Acting Secretary in Shedden's place, outlined for the Council the general tasks laid down for the Navy, Air Force and Army. The Navy and Air Force were to defend sea communications, with the Army securing the bases from which they would operate. Both Navy and Air Force would prevent the Japanese securing bases from which they could threaten Australian interests. The Army would secure those bases necessary for the Navy and Air Force to conduct such operations, and, with Naval and Air Force co-operation, provide final defence against invasion. ^{50a}

Individual plans of the forces showed that the north-west and northern areas of Australia were particularly vulnerable to attack. The Navy concentrated on protecting the Tasman Sea trade routes, and on preventing the establishment of enemy bases on islands to the north-east of Australia. Forces were not initially available if the north-west, south-west or Darwin areas were attacked, but would be redistributed if an attack developed in that area.

Air Force plans were limited by the shortage of planes. The Air Force could not fully forewarn of the approach of the enemy from the Timor-New Guinea-Solomons-New Hebrides arc, nor, because of the lack of aircraft for routine patrols, could it guarantee coastal shipping routes and focal areas from attack. There were few air base facilities in outlying islands to meet Japanese attacks from Port Moresby and Rabaul.

Army plans were of the kind previously discussed with forces concentrated at Townsville, Brisbane, Newcastle, Sydney, Melbourne, Hobart, Adelaide, Fremantle and Darwin. Apart from these forces, the mobile Field

49. & MS 4936. Menzies Papers. Box 31. Folder 14. Fadden to Menzies, 1.5.41; *ibid.*, Series 13. Folder 3. Book C. Entry for 1/2.5.41. NLA.

Army was to defend Commands against any form of attack.⁵⁰ (See Figure 4.)

Both the War Cabinet and Advisory War Council knew that there was no mention of a Brisbane Line in these plans. But the disposition of naval, air and land forces was such that Eddie Ward, later, was able to construe, correctly, that parts of the North and North West were not likely to be defended.

* * * * *

Essentially, the claims made by Eddie Ward during the Brisbane Line controversy that Menzies had not prepared Australia to meet Japanese invasion arose from differences in policy. Labor gave priority to home defence, and later, forward defence in the Far East theatre, Menzies to imperial defence. The latter was based on a faith in the might of the British Navy, which, if Japan made war, would be despatched to the invincible Singapore base. Labor believed preparations should be made on land and in the air for defence against invasion, partly because Curtin was convinced invasion would occur. Menzies and his colleagues believed that because the Japanese would be stopped at sea, the main naval ports and major industrial centres would suffer medium to heavy raids, but would not be invaded. Curtin believed war with Japan was inevitable. Because we were not at war with Japan Menzies reluctantly committed Australian troops to the Middle East, and later, equally reluctantly, to Malaya. In these theatres they were serving Australian interests, first in protecting the vital Suez trade route, and secondly, as troops committed to forward defence in the event of war with Japan. Yet in both instances he was aware the commitments weakened Australian continental defence.

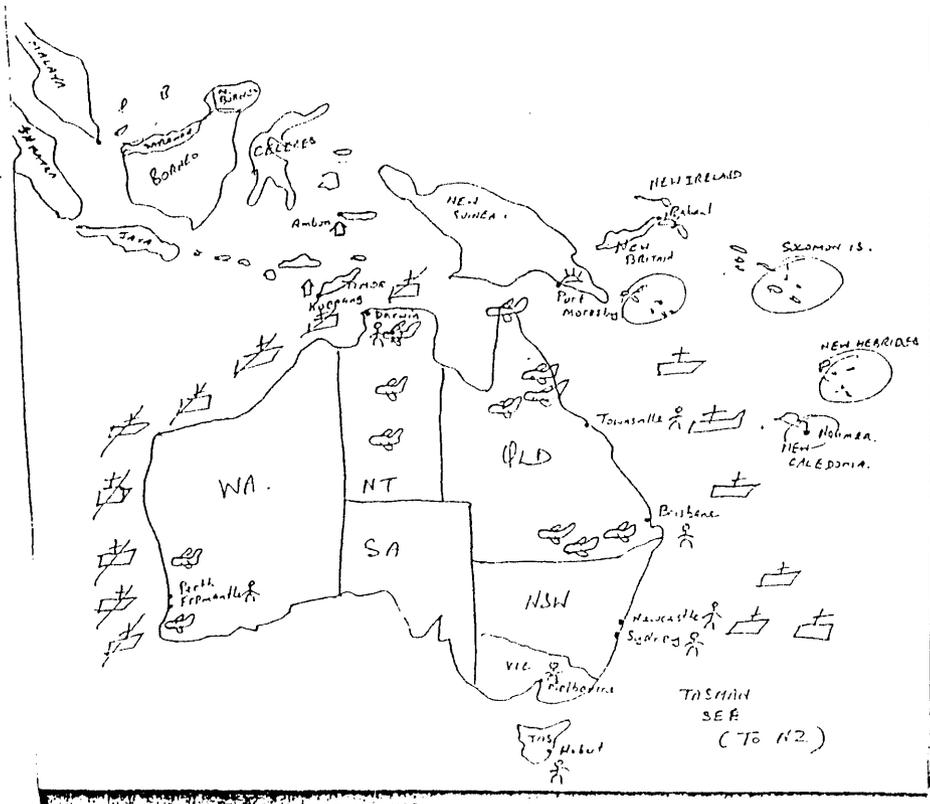
The outbreak of war in September 1939, and the formation of the AIF resulted in a severe depletion in the ranks of the AMF, the home army, because so many of the latter signed up for voluntary overseas service. We have seen, in Chapter One that the deficiencies of home defence requirements, especially in the Army, had their origins in the 1930's.

50. The above paragraphs are drawn from AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 568. Minute by Defence Committee at meeting held Tuesday, 6th May, 1941. Attachment Role of Navy, Army, and Air Force *ibid.*, Minute by Defence Committee at meeting held Tuesday, 6th May, 1941. Joint Planning Committee. Far Eastern Combined Appreciation. Co-ordination of War Plans. Supplement 1 to Agendum No.14 of Defence Committee, 7.4.41.

Figure 67 Individual Army
 Naval
 Air Force plans to Defend Australia. 6.5.41.

KEY

- ARMY CONCENTRATION 
- NAVAL CONCENTRATION 
- AREA NOT DEFENDED USUALLY 
- AREAS LACKING AUSTRALIAN AIR BASES 
- AREAS FROM WHERE IT WAS POSSIBLE TO MEET AIR ATTACK IN OLD, N.T., W.A. IF PLANTS WERE AVAILABLE 
- AUSTRALIAN ADVANCED AIR BASES TO BE CONSTRUCTED 
- POTENTIAL JAPANESE BASES 
- TOWNS AND CITIES  • Sydney



The need to equip the AIF in the early months of the war further depleted the home force capability, while adherence to the Empire Air Training Scheme was deleterious to the home air force. However, these shortcomings, while a direct result of Menzies' defence policy, were permitted on the understanding that Australian forces overseas would be returned to the homeland if it was threatened by war in the Far East. Between late 1939 and mid 1941 it was by no means certain that Japan would not remain neutral. There was not a need for a large home defence force, in Menzies' view, unless there was war in the Far East, and a consequent threat to Australia.

To contain that potential threat, up to May 1941, Menzies resorted to diplomacy, by giving in to Japanese demands in July 1940, and by asserting a policy of firmness and friendliness with the Japanese in March 1941. The latter was specifically intended to force some commitment from Britain to Far East defence. He perceived Britain as allowing itself to drift into a war in the Far East, and doing little to prevent it. Whether he was right or wrong in this belief is not at issue in this thesis. What is relevant is that his diplomatic overtures were seen as appeasement by his colleagues at home. Thus, unwittingly, he created for himself further evidence in the public mind that he was not prepared to look adequately to home defence issues. Eventually, this perception allowed Eddie Ward to suggest that Menzies was not prepared to defend the Northern half of Australia in the event of war with Japan. Menzies, thus, was seen by the electorate, as capable of such a plan. Percy Spender, his Minister for the Army, expressed pro-Japanese views in Singapore in early 1941 that created the impression the Menzies Government was friendly to Japan, which, possibly made allegations of a Brisbane Line more credible. These kind of impressions were the stuff of myth, and out of them, the Labor Party later fashioned very damaging political allegations.

Yet, the reality was that Menzies did look to Australian home defence, in the context of imperial strategy. When the vulnerability of Singapore, as revealed at the 1940 Singapore Conference was brought home to him, he went to London specifically to persuade Churchill to look to the defence of Malaya, to provide a fleet at Singapore for the defence of the Far Eastern region, and to contribute to Australia's air defence requirements from British production. He was unable to shake Churchill's conviction

that there was no danger to Australia from Japan, or that, if by some remote possibility there were, the United States would come to Australia's aid. Menzies tried to ensure Australia's defence. He did not succeed. To allege, as Labor did, in 1942-43, that he was indifferent to home defence requirements, was unfair. His efforts failed because he was a victim of the fortunes of war in Europe, not because he failed to act.

The strategy for defending the continent was still based upon the assumption that if the Japanese did invade, they would aim at the major industrial area Sydney to Newcastle. Military planners were reluctant to concentrate all their forces in one command prior to attack despite this assumption, because of the potential political outcry from undefended areas, most notably in North Queensland. Even the GOC Northern Command, in April, 1940, had complained that forces might be taken from Brisbane to defend Sydney. E.M. Hanlon, Queensland Minister for Home Affairs, had queried the Government about evacuation plans in the North and demanded to know precisely which far Northern towns would be defended if the Japanese attacked. The military responded to this query as they would continue to respond in future. Evacuation of civilians in target areas was undesirable because it hampered military operations. They held to the doctrine that isolated areas had to rely on local defence forces, and the VDC. They realised revelation of this strategy to the general public would not only give the enemy an advantage, but would cause panic, and possibly, political pressure, to the detriment of the general defence plan for Australia. We shall see that this is exactly what happened in 1942.

Finally, we have seen that from September 1940, the Labor Party participated in defence policy decisions through the Advisory War Council. Consequently, they were aware of the deficiencies in men and equipment, they knew of Menzies' efforts in London to overcome them, they accepted equipment deficiencies, and most importantly, they broadly accepted that the strategy for continental defence was one of concentrating the main force in the vital south-eastern industrial areas. Because they had this foreknowledge, and agreed with the plans for continental defence (as opposed to commitments in Greece and the Middle East), it was not surprising that the UAP Opposition became enraged in 1942-43, when they were blamed as having sole responsibility for such plans, in the context of the Brisbane Line controversy.

CHAPTER 3

WAS THERE A BRISBANE LINE UNDER
THE MENZIES-FADDEN GOVERNMENTS?

Earlier chapters have looked at specific military plans and the broad perspective of responsibility for not sufficiently preparing Australia against Japanese invasion. This chapter examines those events which were the basis for allegations made by Ward, Curtin, and others about the existence of a Brisbane Line plan under the Menzies-Fadden Governments. From this point the thesis adopts the Cowlingite perspective outlined in the Preface.

* * * * *

The encouragement that Allied set-backs in Northern Africa and Greece, where the AIF 6th Division had lost 15,000 men would give Japan to move south played on Spender's mind. He saw, too, that Australian defeats overseas did not augur well for the Government's popularity and were disastrous for Army morale. So, on 26 April he attempted to persuade the War Cabinet to appoint a Commander-in-Chief of the AMF to be designated 'Commander-in-Chief Australia'.¹

Sturdee had advised him against the appointment of a Commander-in-Chief Home Forces under the present system of a Military Board. A GOC Home Forces would have command of the AMF, restricted to operations in Australia and its territories, thus duplicating the Military Board's function. In an emergency the Government would have a tendency to seek advice from both the Board and GOC Home Forces. Such an arrangement was likely to produce disaster. An appointment of a Commander-in-Chief, Australia, on the other hand, would mean Military Board members would act as Principal Staff Officers to the Commander-in-Chief, much as they were doing at the moment, under the Chief of General Staff, who was responsible for co-ordinating all activities with military operations and plans.

Spender intended to retain the General Staff structure, because the Commander-in-Chief would have to spend a considerable time with troops

1. AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 265. War Cabinet Agendum. Appointment of Commander-in-Chief Australia, 26.4.41.

and Commands away from Army Headquarters. The Commander-in-Chief would not always be available for War Cabinet meetings, though his advice was always to be sought in matters of major policy. Following a submission Spender had instructed Sturdee to draw up for him, Spender recommended, as well as the appointment of a Commander-in-Chief, the abolition of the Military Board, the appointment of Sturdee as Commander-in-Chief, Australia, and of Major-General Northcott as Chief of General Staff.

Sturdee was careful to point out to the Minister that in submitting his name as appointee, he had merely been complying with Spender's bidding, but himself had made no recommendation as it was a matter entirely for Cabinet. He was 'prepared to serve in any capacity the Government may decide'.² But perhaps his expectations had been raised. If so, they were to create confusion in channels of communications between the Chief of General Staff, the newly-appointed GOC Home Forces, and the politicians, that played its part in laying the ground work for the Brisbane Line controversy.

3 a

The matter came before War Cabinet again on 9 May, but the Cabinet remained indecisive following opposition to the suggestion from the Military Board and the Defence Committee. Still, Spender pressed for 'at least the appointment of the GOC of the Field Army'. That suggestion was adopted to counter strong political pressure being applied in the Advisory War Council by Labor members about the need to look to Australian defence, rather than emphasising Imperial commitments. The stratagem temporarily quelched Labor protests.^{3 b}

Menzies was not impressed when Fadden cabled him in Washington about the decision.^{4 a} Perhaps it made him suspicious that Spender had pretensions to the leadership of the UAP. Roosevelt was giving him optimistic news about the definition of a *casus belli* if Japan moved southward. He convinced himself that America would 'NOT stand by and see Australia attacked' even though he had not been so advised.^{4 b} His optimism did not last the flight home to Australia ten days later. The thought of political rivalries in Canberra created in him 'a sick feeling of repugnance and apprehension ...'.^{4 c}

2. AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 265. Sturdee to Spender, 27.4.41.

3. a AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 265. War Cabinet Minute (1055) Agendum 146/1941. Appointment of a Commander-in-Chief, Australia, 9.5.41. b. *Ibid.*, Notes on Agendum No.146/1941. Appointment of a Commander-in-Chief Australia, 30.4.41.

4. a MS 4936. Menzies Papers. Series 31. Box 496b (Box 2. F.11) Menzies to Fadden 12.5.41. NLA. b. MS 4936. Menzies Papers. Series 13. Folder 13. Book C, pp.194-195. Entry for 15.5.41. NLA.

c. *Ibid.*, p.205. Entry for 25.5.41. NLA.

Crete, where the survivors of the Greek campaign had rallied, was being overwhelmed by invading German forces. Eddie Ward immediately accused Menzies of being responsible for the massacre of Australians.^{5a} At a secret Parliamentary session on 28 May Spender told members that under present circumstances, with the lack of an adequately equipped armoured division, it would take only one enemy armoured division to overrun Australia. Ward, this time attending, noted the statement for future use.^{5b}

On 3 June 13,000 British, Australian and New Zealand troops were lost in the battle for Crete. The Australian press was warning about the danger from Japan.^{6a} Spender continued pressing Cabinet, unsuccessfully, for the appointment of a GOC in C until, on 10 June, his suggestion was openly opposed, in Menzies' presence, by Sturdee and Colvin. Perhaps in pique at the delay forced upon him by the Service chiefs he asked if there were 'any existing ... joint operational plans ... to meet specific forms of attack on Australia'. Told no such plans had been drawn up, Cabinet directed the Defence Committee to examine the question and 'draw up appropriate plans for dealing with specific forms of attack on Australia'. Colvin assured them that this would be done.^{6b} This Cabinet instruction was a political time bomb of the Government's own making.^{6c}

^{5a} Hasluck, *Government and the People. 1939-41*, pp.339, 370.

^b MS 2396/13/74. Ward Papers. Handwritten Note. May 1941. Secret session. Spender quoted.

^{6a} Hasluck, *op.cit.*, p.339.

^b AA ACT CRS A 2671. item 146/1941. Appointment of an Army Commander-in-Chief in Australia, 4.6.41 and, ACT AA CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 265. War Cabinet Minute (1146) Supp. No.1 to Agendum 146/1941. Appointment of Commander-in-Chief, Australia, 10.6.41.

^c AA ACT CRS CA46. A 3954. Shedden Papers. Box 568. Co-ordinated Defence Plans. Extract from War Cabinet Minute 10.6.41 (1136) Agendum 2A/1341. Weekly progress Reports by Chiefs of Staff (No.71) Week ended 7 June 1941 (c). Weekly Report by Chief of Air Staff; and MS 2396/13/127. Ward Papers. Handwritten Note re 10.6.41.

At this time Spender drafted a letter to Menzies regarding manpower control, expansion of war production, speeding up of equipment deliveries and the rationalization of the civil uses of war resources of men, equipment and materials. It was a follow up to his 21 April letter to Fadden. He thought his original draft 'too long and too direct' and instructed one of his ministerial staff to redraft it, as he knew 'what the P.M.'s mind is like'.

In the original draft Spender warned that he was not prepared to guarantee that the Australian Military Force 'could adequately defend Australia in all the eventualities which information from overseas suggests may arise'. There was a lack of a 'comprehensive programme and timetable of actions in relation to underlying issues of Budgetary, exchange, employment and economic policy' which had necessitated his letter to Treasurer Fadden. Contrary to the Manpower Committee report to Cabinet, he saw a looming manpower crisis 'if the AMF was involved in fighting' 'in view of the possible military developments of 1941 and 1942' (that is, war with Japan). Policy needed to be ^{suitably} defined and controls introduced to expand urgently local war production for local needs. No 'real action' had been taken to render the AMF capable of defending Australia. The Government was reluctant to impose the electorally dangerous manpower controls. ^{7a}

Neither Major H.V. Howe, or the anthropologist, E.M. Stanner, both on Spender's staff, were impressed with this lack of action. Stanner felt like telling Spender 'If it is so [—] obvious why have they waited so long to put it into effect'. Howe, a strident Labor supporter, ^{7b} undoubtedly agreed with such sentiments.

Howe had recently undergone surgery. The operation left him in a confused state. Out of that confusion arose one of the most crucial allegations of the Brisbane Line story. In 1943 Howe recollected that Sturdee had submitted to Spender an appreciation which Spender had rejected

which provided for:-

- (1) Primarily defending Australia against invasion along a line running slightly north of Brisbane to slightly North of Perth.

7. ^aAWM 51. Item 131. Correspondence Minister for the Army and Prime Minister Menzies. Draft letter. Spender to Menzies. 10.6.41.

^b *Ibid.*, Note in Stanner's handwriting 12.6.41.

For Howe's anti-UAP sentiments cf AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 1300. Howe to Forde. Re Brisbane Line Strategy. n.d.

- (2) In the event of the fall of Western Australia the above mentioned line to be withdrawn to one slightly north of Brisbane to the head of either Spencer's Gulf or St Vincent's Gulf -'

he forgot which, but had the impression 'the line was intended to hold in the first instance from about Maryborough (Queensland) to Geraldton (W.A.)'. It involved the sacrifice of troops at Darwin 'and also any others north of that line'. He was 'very forcibly struck by the fact that the plan included no measures at all for evacuation of the civil population from the areas to be abandoned'. This plan we shall call 'The Maryborough Plan' (cf. Figure 5). Howe allegedly remonstrated with Spender that if this 'was the best the CGS could put up, the Government should dismiss him and appoint someone else as nobody could have done worse'. Sturdee's appreciation was merely a reiteration of plans previously prepared, some of which he had read.⁸ Perhaps Howe had seen the Defence Sub-Committee Report of 21 February, 1936. More likely, he was referring to local defence schemes.

Certainly plans for local or general evacuation in North Queensland, in mid-June were virtually non-existent. There was a general confusion as to the extent of the authority of civil bodies to order a general evacuation, or the destruction or transfer of stores from one locality to another, as well as reluctance to undertake any kind of local evacuation. Volunteer Defence Corps members in areas where no militia were stationed were without weapons for training, and worried about the welfare of their families should they have to resist an initial enemy landing. The officer in charge of internal security at Northern Command, Townsville, recommended measures be taken to look after wives and children of the home guard without delay. (See Figure 6.)⁹

But neither were such plans any further than the formative stages on a national level. Insofar as evacuation had been considered at all, it was in relation to air raids precaution planning, which had existed before the outbreak of war in Europe. Menzies had made clear to the

8. For evidence of the Maryborough Plan see AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 1300. Howe to Forde re Brisbane Line Strategy, n.d.

9. AWM 54. 883/2/24. Report of Progress of Internal Security Headquarters by Lieutenant Colonel S. Fortescue, D.S.O., M.C., V.D., 13.6.41.

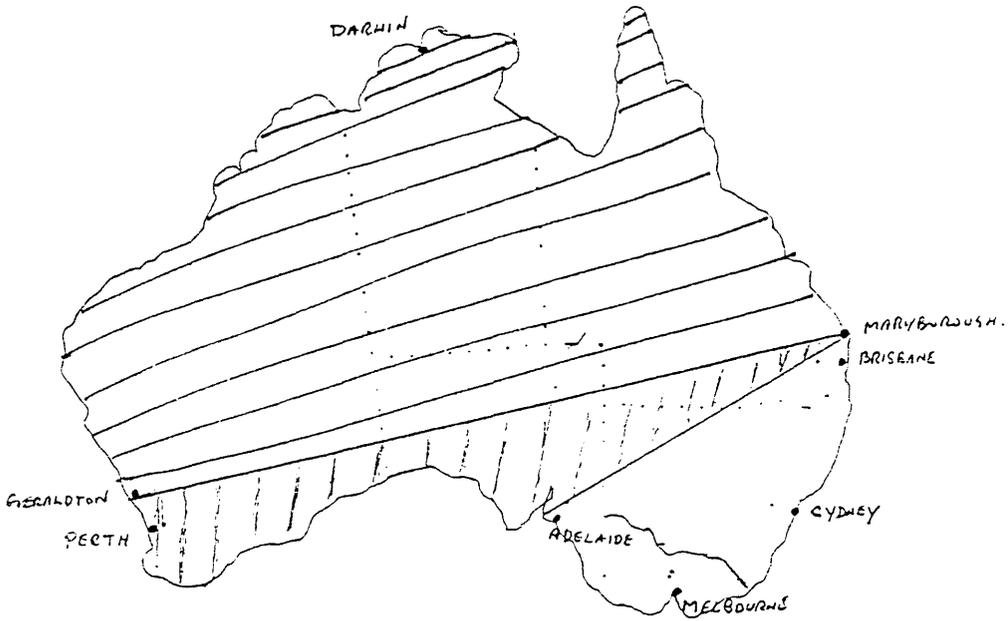


Figure 5. THE 'MARYBOROUGH PLAN'

 First area to be abandoned. (Includes Darwin.)

 Second area to be abandoned (exclusive of Maryborough and Geraldton.)

• Towns, Cities.

 Area to be defended.

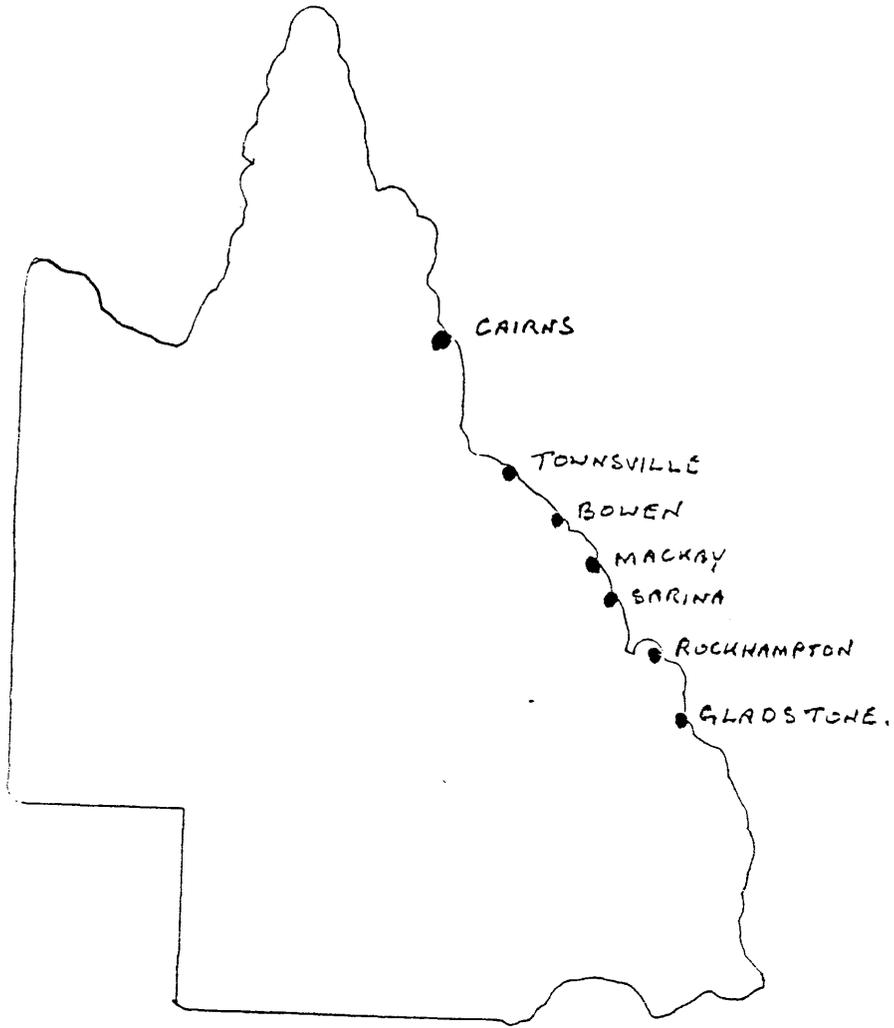


Figure 6. Towns in North Queensland where no general evacuation plans had been prepared on a local level as of 13 June, 1941.

State Premiers that planning for the evacuation of women and children in the major industrial areas was a State responsibility. Sturdee had listed this as one of the main defence priorities for Air Raid defence planning. No plans had yet been finalised but the intention to draw up plans existed. ^{10a}

On this basis, Howe's charge that Sturdee's alleged 'Maryborough Plan' 'made no provision for the evacuation of civilians' was technically correct. But given the still formative state of national planning for evacuation, his bias against the Menzies Government coloured his point of view. He gave a misinformed view of what was actually happening.

Nevertheless, Curtin, Forde and Ward, when they learnt of the Maryborough Plan's existence, accepted Howe's account at face value. It became, as we shall see, the basis of Ward's accusation that a document pertaining to the Brisbane Line was missing from official files. ^{10b}

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Menzies made the decision on 13 June to free himself from the pressure of administrative duties to better 'exercise a general supervision over the war effort on the military and economic fronts'. This culminated in his public broadcast on 17 June, exhorting the Australian public to an 'all-in' effort. ^{11a} Spender's revelations about the nation's lack of preparedness may at last have been bearing fruit. On the 26th, Menzies re-organised his Cabinet. But the Cabinet reconstruction brought into the open ^{Dissension} within the UAP about Menzies' leadership especially from those who had been passed over for a portfolio. ^{11b}

Within the Advisory War Council Curtin and Beasley had continued to urge the Government to look more to Australia's defence than to the African and Mediterranean theatres, without success. ^{12a} Fearful that naval

10. For the above paragraphs, see: AWM 54. 243/6/115. *Instructions Passive Active Defence*. Menzies to McKell, A 39/1/2, 17.6.41; ^b *ibid.*, Extract from Prime Minister's Secret Letter, No. ZA 357/1/1 of 19th April, 1939. Relating to 'Suggested Scale of attack to be taken as the basis for Air Raid Precaution Schemes'. Prime Minister to Premiers of all States, 19.4.39; The acceptance of Curtin, Forde, Ward and others of Howe's evidence is examined in detail in later chapters.

11a MS 4956. Menzies Papers. Series 31. Box 3. Folder 6. Extract from notes from speech on Menzies' decision to free himself from supervision of war effort. NLA.

^b Hasluck, *Government and the People*. 1939-41, pp.491-493.

defeat in the latter would mean Singapore would not be reinforced, and would fall to the Japanese, Curtin had argued in Parliament that Singapore 'instead of becoming a bastion for Australia would become merely a service station for the enemy'.^{i 2 b} The danger was intensified with the German invasion of Russia on 22 June, which increased the risk of Japan's move southward because the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact eliminated any possibility of Russia moving against Japan while Japan was engaged in a southward thrust.^{12c}

On the 27th Eddie Ward seconded a Caucus motion 'that in the interests of the people and *for the safety of the nation*' the Labor party pledge itself to defeat Menzies in the House 'not later than the next Budget'. It was nullified by a Curtin-supported amendment.¹³ Ward's move indicated the strength of his feeling that the Menzies Government was derelict in looking to Australian defence. It foreshadowed allegations he would later make during the Brisbane Line controversy.

Japan at about this time made the decision to strike southward as feared by the Australian Government. At the latest by 5 July this information was passed to Canberra by US Naval Intelligence who had broken the Japanese diplomatic codes.¹⁴

On 7 July, Menzies instituted action to remedy 'the state bordering on chaos' existing in Darwin in connection with the handling of freight and lack of buildings for stores. Fear of Japanese moves southwards seems to have been a factor in this action, since the Government had neglected the problem since December 1940, when it had first been informed about it.¹⁵ Local evacuation plans and failure of the local commandant to provide hastily details to the Navy about problems related to beach mines, fixed obstructions, aerodrome static defence and the immobilization of Port and Fortress facilities suggest there was no great expectation initially on the part of local authorities that Darwin could be held

12a MS 4875. Spender Papers. Box 8. Miscellaneous Papers and Documents 1939-41, 12.6.41.

^b Hasluck, *Government and the People*. 1939-41, Curtin quoted, p.360.

^c *Ibid.*, pp.357-358.

13. Weller (ed.) *op.cit.*, pp.280-281.

14. Horner, *High Command*, p.130.

15. For Menzies and Darwin see: AA ACT CRS A 2671. Item 289/41. Notes of a conference between the Prime Minister and Board of Business Administration on 7.7.41; and AA ACT CRS A 2671. Item 289/41. War Cabinet Minute (1175) Co-ordination of Defence Works and Services - Darwin and Port Moresby, 9.7.41.

successfully. But there was a determination, on the Navy's part, at least, to regain the town, if lost, because of its strategic and geographic attributes as a naval base that rendered its defence 'essential to the maintenance of sea-trade communications'.¹⁶ These conflicting service assessments were to assume some importance in the early months of 1942.

On 11 July 1941 the War Cabinet finally approved Spender's proposal for the appointment of a GOC in C, Australia. They did so without any determination of the appointed authority,¹⁷ and did not seem to realise that the chosen officer would have his authority circumscribed by the Military Board and Sturdee, the Chief of General Staff. His role, militarily, was therefore likely to be ineffective.

Menzies chose Major General Sir Iven Mackay for the post, after having his suitability confirmed by Blamey. That suitability was due not only to his military skill, but also to his public acceptability. After his acclaimed victory over the Italians at Bardia in January 1941, where over 20,000 Italian prisoners were captured, Mackay was one of the best-known of the Australian commanders. That achievement was swiftly followed by the surrender of Tobruk to Mackay's 6th Division, the seizure of Derna, the victory of Beda Fromm and the fall of Benghazi. In Greece he had performed creditably. Inability of Australian troops there to withstand superior enemy air strength had convinced him of the need for a strong air arm to ensure both protection and victory for land forces under his command.

With Spender Mackay formed a close friendship when the Army Minister had visited Libya prior to the Battle of Bardia. Menzies too, had formed a good impression of him when he had visited the Middle East

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16. AWM 54. 243/6/41. *Darwin Defence Scheme. July 1941* and AWM 54. 825/7/90. Brig. 7 MD to Naval Cdr. 1.8.41, and N OIC to HQ 7 MD, 7.8.41, and AWM 54 625/7/90. *Immobilization Scheme. Darwin Environment. 25.8.41.*
17. AA ACT CRS A 2761. War Cabinet Agenda 146/1941. Supplement 1. Appointment of a GOC in C Australian Military Forces.

in January 1941.¹⁸ Politically he was considered reliable by the UAP Government. In the years between the wars, while on the academic staff at Sydney University, he had been approached several times by the Nationalists to enter politics. Wisely, he had declined. But his political preference for the conservatives may have sat ill with him when Labor came to power in October 1941.

By temperament, Mackay was not entirely fitted for his new command. He was a plain, blunt, soldier, adverse to political manoeuvring. The new post demanded some measure of political skill. In civil life he had not displayed this. He had been forced to resign as headmaster of Cresbrook in the late 1930's, partly because of his inability to work with the parents of his pupils. At the same time, Sturdee recalled Major-General Sydney Rowell, Blamey's Chief of Staff, to become Deputy Chief of General Staff.¹⁸

Mackay, in Cairo, told Blamey he would not accept the posting unless he was granted direct access to the Minister.^{i9 a} Menzies cabled approval of the condition and urged Blamey that Mackay leave for Australia ^{i9 b}swiftly, 'as it is urgent he should take up duty as soon as possible'. Mackay arrived in Townsville on 21 April, with illusions about the scope of his command.

During a broadcast over Townsville radio he described himself as 'Commander-in-Chief', in full expectation of co-operation with 'the Staff, Commanders, and troops'.^{i9 c} In fact Sturdee, overseas for military discussions in Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies, had telegraphed Mackay, once he got to Sydney, that he should take leave until 1 September, when both men could confer about details of future arrangements.^{i9 d} An

18. For the above paragraphs see: AWM 3 DRL. 6850/115. Mackay Papers. Menzies to Blamey, 24.7.41; *ibid.*, Blamey to Menzies, 26.7.41; Ivan D. Chapman, *Ivan G. Mackay, Citizen and Soldier*, Melbourne, 1975 : For Bardia, pp.185-189; Tobruk, etc., pp.196-212; Greece, esp. air support, p.237; approached to enter politics in 1920's, p.126; militia, regular army rivalry, pp.150-152; - Menzies, p.126, also pp.247-249; For friendship with Spender cf. AWM 3 DRL 6850/116 Mackay Papers. Spender to Mackay, 6.10.41; Menzies was not particularly close to Mackay, but the two men seem to have got on well enough, cf. AWM 3 DRL. 6433. I.Chapman, Personal Papers for Mackay biography. Chapman to Menzies, 18.4.68; political ineptitude, D.M. Horner, 'Lieutenant-General Sir Sydney Rowell : Dismissal of a Corps Commander' in Horner (ed.) *The Commanders*, pp.226-227.

accompanying letter urged Mackay to 'work closely together' with Sturdee.^{19e} It emphasised that the new job was 'political and not a tidy military organisation'. Sturdee wanted Mackay to 'fend off' Spender if Spender wanted Mackay to finalize his duties. It would only be so Spender could put it in the papers.

Indeed, the political necessity that the Government be seen doing something for the defence of the continent had intensified since April. On 28 July a joint Franco-Japanese protectorate was declared over Indo-China,^{20a} and Australia, following the lead of Britain and the United States, froze Japanese assets. Forde and Makin, in the Advisory War Council, on 29 July forced the Government on the defensive about its policy of concentrating Australia's defence in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, in the face of Japanese bellicosity. Spender pointed out the Government had despatched brigades of the 8th Division to Malaya and Darwin, had taken steps to call up 35,000 men in the home forces for full-time duty, including four detachments at Rabaul and Thursday Island and had instituted a new and more efficient training programme for the militia^{20b} less than a week before. Spender's argument ignored the chronic equipment deficiencies within the AMF, of which the Labor men had recently been informed.^{20c}

The Government also had difficulties with the Queensland Minister for Home Affairs, Hanlon, after it had formally advised that the Commonwealth would accept responsibility financially only for specified air raid precaution measures within defined vital areas. At the Interstate ARP Conference in Melbourne from 25-26 August, Hanlon argued

19. ^aAA ACT CRS A 2671. War Cabinet Agendum. Appointment of GOC in C. AMF. 4.8.41.

^bAA ACT CRS A 2671. War Cabinet Minute 5, August, 1941 (1296). Supplement No.2 to Agendum 146/1941. Appointment of GOC in C Australian Military Force.

^cAWM 3 DRL 6850/115. Mackay Papers. Broadcast from Townsville, 21.8.41.

^d*Ibid.*, Cable from Sturdee to Mackay, 19.8.41.

^eSturdee, cited in Chapman, *op.cit.*, p.244.

20. ^aH.P. Willmott, *Empires in the Balance. Japanese and Allied Pacific Strategies to April 1942*. London, 1982, p.64.

^bAdvisory War Council Minute 431. Agendum No.102/1941. Review of International Position. 29.7.41 cited in Hudson and Stokes (eds) *DAFP*, Vol. V, pp.30-35.

^cAWM 54. 245/6/154. (No other identification on document.)

heatedly for funding and manpower for civil defence requirements in Queensland outside the vital areas of Brisbane, Townsville and Thursday Island. The view only served to feed the State's suspicion that the Federal Government had no intention of defending the North.²¹

Menzies, meanwhile, was having serious problems within the UAP. At the end of July he had fended off a challenge to his leadership exacerbated by calls from within the Labor Party for him to be overthrown.^{22 a} Despite pressure from Dr H.V. Evatt, who had pronounced himself Curtin's natural successor when it appeared the Labor leader might lose his seat in the 1940 election,^{22 b} and from Beasley, Curtin refused to commit himself publicly to that course. Menzies grew more pre-occupied with attempts within his own party to overthrow him, less able to give full attention to grave matters before him.^{22 c}

At the suggestion of some of his Cabinet colleagues he put forward the idea that he might go again to London, so the Australian voice could 'be directly heard in the place in which the major decisions are inevitably made' - the British War Cabinet. Hughes, his eyes on the Prime Ministership, yet again, was one of the more forceful advocates of this course.

But Labor, holding the balance of power in the House of Representatives, would not give the assent Menzies required for the visit. They believed the Prime Minister should be in Australia to direct the administration of the war effort, and knew Menzies would fall if forced to stay in Australia.^{23 a}

Less than a week later, Menzies drew up War Cabinet agenda for the Co-ordinated plans for the defence of Australia, based on the deliberations of the Joint Planning Committee, as directed by the Defence Committee on 18 July. This operational planning directive formed a crucial part of Eddie Ward's later Brisbane Line charges.^{23 b} By the time the matter came

21. AWM 54 243/6/43. Passive Active Defence. Copy of Letter from Prime Minister to the Premier of each State dated 15.8.41, Financial relations between Commonwealth and States regarding air raid precautions. Lack, *op.cit.*, p.221.

22 a Hasluck, *Government and the People. 1939-41*, p.493.

b *Sydney Morning Herald*, c. 21/30.9.40.

c E. Holt, *Politics is People*. Sydney, 1969, p.29. and C.A. Hughes, *op.cit.*, pp.109-110.

before Cabinet, Menzies was no longer Prime Minister. On 28 August, after consulting his wife and parents, he bowed to intra-party pressure; and resigned, leaving the way open for Fadden, who was a candidate, it was thought, more acceptable to the electorate.^{23c} Fadden had no illusions about the task before him. He made no changes in the Menzies Cabinet, but, determined to call on Menzies' expertise, he allowed him to retain the portfolio of Defence Co-ordination.²⁴

Both Rowell and Mackay took up their positions on 1 September.^{25a} Immediately, Sturdee himself set out to prescribe Mackay's powers as GOC in C Home Forces, publicly stating that Mackay would come under his direction.^{25b} The *Daily Telegraph* claimed post-haste 'an attempt is being made to water down Sir Iven's job and limit his scope to the training of the home defence army'.^{25c} Sturdee and Spender then tried to clear public confusion amid allegations of friction between Sturdee and Mackay.

To end press debate, Spender issued a release on 8 September that Mackay had known about the terms of his appointment, placing him subordinate to Sturdee, before he had accepted it.^{25d}

This was not the case. Mackay expected his authority to extend to the forward areas of Northern Territory and New Guinea. He thought he would be responsible for the defence of Australia. A substantive promotion promised him was disputed. Sturdee's objections may have borne weight here. Mackay was junior to Sturdee in the Army List. Sturdee as Chief of General Staff may have wanted to ensure Mackay remained his subordinate.

In an effort to scotch rumours of disagreement between the two commanders, both Spender and Sturdee issued statements that Sturdee and Mackay were old friends who had worked together in the past. There was no danger of friction or misunderstanding. The goodwill between the two men, who mixed socially, papered over the cracks.^{25e} Behind the

23. a E. Holt, *op.cit.*, p.29; b AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 568. War Cabinet Agenda 286/1941. Co-ordinated Plans for the Defence of Australia, 26.8.41; c C.A. Hughes, *op.cit.*, pp.109-110.

24. Fadden, *They Called Me Artie*, pp.64-66.

25. a AWM 54. 243/6/154. Australia's War Time Activities. Information for U.K. Government. Pt.2. 1940-41. Cablegrams 645, 2.10.41 and 572, 2.9.41, resp. Prime Minister's Department to Secretary of State, Dominion Affairs; b D. McCarthy, *Southwest Pacific Area: The First Year*, p.5; c *Daily Telegraph*, cited in Horner, *Crisis of Command*, p.25; d Chapman, *op.cit.*, p.244 for Sturdee and Spender's response; e Buckley, 'Lieutenant General Sir Vernon Sturdee', p.33.

scenes, the friction remained. In the press speculation continued on the limits of Mackay's command. On 3 September, Mackay met with the Advisory War Council, at the Opposition's request. Little seems to have come of the meeting, except Labor members became aware of the limits of his authority.²⁶

Wrangling between the generals over the limits of authority were the least of Fadden's worries. At a conference of fire-fighting authorities in Melbourne from 1 to 3 September, the Commonwealth and State authorities squabbled about the small number of regions classified as vulnerable. Queensland especially, wanted all the important coastal towns from Thursday Island to Bundaberg, and Warwick to Toowoomba, classified as vulnerable. (See Figure 7.) All in all, the States were left with the impression that areas they considered vital and in need of protection were being neglected by the Commonwealth. The Defence Committee's classification of vulnerable areas demonstrated with few exceptions, that only the capital cities and some major industrial areas were being protected. This was fuel for later charges by Labor that Fadden intended to defend neither the north nor north-west.²⁷

On 3 September, 1941, too, Fadden's War Cabinet discussed the information they had received about co-ordinated plans for the defence of Australia, as per the instruction of 10 June 1941. The Cabinet approved the suggested machinery to effect a co-ordination of joint planning, and directed that joint operational plans for the defence of Australia be completed as soon as possible. The Chiefs of Staff were to review the organisation of the Army and Air Force for co-ordinated control of operations, and for Naval co-operation in local defence measures.^{28a}

The Joint Planning Committee had advised the Cabinet that while the invasion of Australia was unlikely as an initial operation for Japan, deemed to be at probable war with the British Empire, an attack on Malaya, Singapore, Borneo or the Netherlands East Indies was the first step to a

26. AA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 265. Advisory War Council Minute (477) GOC Home Forces, 2.9.41.

27. Joyce Fisher, Appendix I. 'Civil Defence Organisation' in Hasluck, *Government and the People, 1942-1945*, pp.647-648.



Figure 7. Commonwealth and State Perceptions of Vulnerable Areas.

- Areas classified as vulnerable by Defence Committee, 1-3.9.41.
- ◻ Additional areas which State Governments wanted classified as vulnerable at Melbourne Conference of Fire-Fighting Authorities, 1-3.9.41.

NOTE: Port Moresby and Rabaul were also classified as vulnerable by Commonwealth authorities.

These details taken from Joyce Fisher, Appendix I, 'Civil Defence Organisation' in Hasluck, *Government and the People, 1942-1945*, Canberra, 1970, pp.647-648.

major attack on Australia. Japan might first seize 'outlying centres such as New Guinea, Papua, Thursday Island, Pacific Islands, Darwin and Fremantle'. Then it would attempt a decisive result in the Newcastle-Sydney-Port Kembla region, with simultaneous attacks on other centres. The occupation of isolated areas such as North Queensland and North-west Australia was considered less likely. ^{28 b}

Cabinet was formally advised of the Army decision, made the previous April, that

The Army should not cater for meeting the enemy at all points during the process of landing as such a policy would result in ruinous dispersion of our Army Forces.

Attempts to determine the set of beaches the enemy may use may well result in incorrect solution with disastrous consequences. ^{28 c}

Each commanding officer was 'responsible for the defence of his command, with the resources placed at his disposal by Army Headquarters'. To date, only one division had been stationed in Queensland. ^{28 d}

The plans for the defence of Australia henceforth were ultimately in the hands of the Joint Planning Committee and the Chiefs of Staff Committee, not in the hands of the politicians. The guidelines for these plans were approved by the War Cabinet, insofar as no member of Cabinet objected to them. The Labor men were ignorant of the Cabinet approvals of 3 September, 1941, but of little else. These approvals authorised tacitly the concentration of troops in vital South-eastern areas as the only sound strategy for the defence of Australia. Curtin did not, once in Government, rescind these decisions.

In response to Menzies' request of June 10 for a co-ordinated defence plan, the Military Board seems finally to have drawn up broad parameters affecting the Army's role in the defence of Australia. General Mackay was instructed as GOC in C Home Forces on 20 September 'To provide with Naval and Air Force co-operation, final opposition to raids and invasion'. ^{29 a} Spender was told on 23 September, that Mackay's role was,

28. ^aAA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 568. War Cabinet Minute (1528) Agendum 286/1941. Co-ordinated Plans for the Defence of Australia, 3.9.41; ^bAA ACT CRS A 5954. Shedden Papers. Box 1300. Brisbane Line Strategy. Summaries of War Cabinet Agenda 286/1941, and 96/1942, 19.5.43 for Joint Planning Committee advice to Cabinet. For April date of Army warning against ruinous dispersion see, ^cAWM 54. 243/6/42. *Army HQ Operation Instructions No.14 and 20. April to December 1941. Priority in Army Defence*, Op. Inst. No.13, 8.4.41; ^dFor Army advice to Cabinet of this decision, see Summaries of War Cabinet Agenda, 286/1941 and 96/1942.

under the Chief of General Staff, to 'exercise operational command over all military forces, including the Volunteer Defence Corps, allotted to the defence of mainland Australia and Tasmania', except those areas Sturdee chose to withdraw from his control from time to time. Acknowledging this, Spender decided Mackay should submit a report of his activities each month, along with any recommendation he saw fit to make. This requirement still stood with the accession of Labor to power in early October. Mackay was to take the right to make recommendations to the Minister too literally, as shall be shown.

In blunter terms, Mackay was told privately by Sturdee, that his role was that of Sturdee's underling. Sturdee, not Mackay, was responsible for the defence of Australia. The Chiefs of Staff had directed 'the vital part of Aust. [sic] was the area Port Kembla-Newcastle, and while this was held, Australia could continue to fight the war', a far cry from the vague description rendered to Spender.

Shortly before Coles, on 3 October crossed the floor of Parliament, giving the majority to Curtin's Labor party and bringing down the Fadden government, Eddie Ward gave a hint of the shape of things to come, when he told the House:

any man no matter what position he occupies is justified in disclosing information if he is able to show that the Government or any member of the Government is engaged in activities detrimental to the welfare of the country. In such circumstances it is his duty to make that information available to the public.^{30 b}

The problems with Mackay's rank, salary and allowances were not resolved until late October. Then, Cabinet promoted him to Lieutenant-General. Forde, the new Army Minister, confirmed the instructions outlining Mackay's responsibilities. But he was not able to get the powers and functions of the GOC in C Home Forces defined in Army Military Regulations, thereby clearly indicating Mackay's tasks in time of war. Had Cabinet

29.^a Cited in Horner, *Crisis of Command*, pp.25-26; ^bAWM 3 DRL 2/6850/115: Mackay Papers. Instructions for General Officer Commanding Home Forces, n.d.; ^c*ibid.*, Sturdee to Spender, 23.9.41; ^dAWM 3 DRL 6850/116. Mackay Papers. Spender to Secretary Military Board. Appointment of GOC Home Forces, 29.9.41 for Spender requesting Mackay to report to him regularly; ^eAWM 54 577/7/32. *Documents and notes used in the writing Vol. 5 Army. SWPA First Year*, Mackay to Long, 4.6.43.

30.^a For Coles' withdrawal of support from Fadden's Government cf. Hasluck, *Government and the People. 1939-1942*, pp.516-518. ^b For Ward's statement in Parliament see MS 1633/867-8 Page Papers, Typed Note. n.d. on Ward, NLA.

approved this proposal, the critical 4 February 1942 memorandum may not have been submitted to Forde, for Mackay would have been clear as to where he stood in relation to his tasks and to the Cabinet.^{31 b}

* * * * *

Under Menzies, emphasis remained on Australian commitment to the war in the Middle East. Home defence preparations were centred on the protection of the capital cities, and the vital south-east industrial areas. Plans for evacuation, primarily a State responsibility, were formative only. Probably they could be expected to be little else, as Australia was not yet faced with war with Japan. As in previous years, there was little intention to defend the Far North. Even plans for the defence of Darwin seemed based on the assumption that Darwin could be lost to the enemy.

Against this general framework, particular events occurred that had bearing on the later Brisbane Line controversy. Spender was thought to have seen and rejected a plan based on a line drawn initially from Maryborough to Geraldton, thence from Maryborough to Spencer's Gulf or St Vincent's Gulf. In conjunction with lack of preparation for evacuation in Queensland, a natural state of affairs given the international situation, this plan, if it existed at all outside of Major Howe's recollection, was described as the 'Brisbane Line'. Eddie Ward, when told of its existence in 1943, firmly believed such a line existed. It would seem that this belief was based on a misunderstanding.

Further confusion arose over a Cabinet directive on 10 June 1941 to the Armed Services to draw up joint operational plans to meet specific forms of attack on Australia, and to institute machinery measures for combined operational planning in each State. Not until after Menzies' fall, when Fadden was Prime Minister, were the guidelines for these plans given Cabinet approval. At the same time Cabinet was informed of the military necessity to protect the vital south-east areas. Under Curtin

31. For the above two paragraphs see: aAWM 3 DRL 6850/116. Mackay Papers. Spender to Mackay, 6.10.41 for Mackay's sympathy for Spender, and Spender's final attempts to resolve the salary/rank impasse. For its resolution, and Forde's unsuccessful attempts to define Mackay's powers, see: bAA ACT CRS A 2671. War Cabinet Minute Agendum 146/1941. Supplement 4 Appointment of GOC in C Home Forces, 29.10.41 and 30.10.41.

these decisions were not changed, but accepted by Labor.

Under Menzies and Spender, the foundation was laid for complications in the command structure with the appointment of General Sir Iven Mackay as GOC in C Home Forces. Mackay remained subordinate to the Military Board and the Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant-General Sturdee. Thus both soldiers shared responsibility for the implementation of the strategy of concentration of forces in vital areas. Mackay, however, in applying that strategy, was following the instructions of his superior.

Though both commanders were friendly, there appears to have been some mutual professional rivalry between them, particularly over Mackay's right of access to the Minister. The lack of clarification about Mackay's exact standing, never properly sorted out by Spender when he held the Army portfolio, chiefly because of lack of time, was carried over into the Labor administration. Attempts were made to have Mackay's regular reports perused by the Military Board before submission to Cabinet. Because of Mackay's perception of his own importance, these were not always successful. Their non-implementation would, during February 1942 have long-standing repercussions in the Brisbane Line controversy.

The things that the Menzies-Fadden Government had done and left undone paved the way for allegations that they had not adequately looked to the defence of Australia, and that they had a plan to abandon the North of Australia to the enemy. In substance these charges do not fit the facts. But sufficient decisions had been made that were open to such a misinterpretation.