

## **Australia-India relations in insecure times: Malcolm Fraser's engagement \***

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The Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Meetings (CHOGRMS) held in Sydney in 1978, New Delhi in 1980 and Fiji in 1982, were one key to Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser's engagement with India. They are, however, largely forgotten in the current field of overlapping forums reaching from the Indian Ocean rim to the small Pacific Islands and beyond. The CHOGRMs emerged from interesting pathways based on a developing bilateral relationship, evidenced at annual India-Australia consultative talks held alternately in Canberra and Delhi in preceding years.<sup>1</sup>

This paper evolved from an initial focus on Malcolm Fraser's development of Australia's political relationship with India and his security initiatives for the Indian Ocean during his period as Defence Minister between 1969 and 1971, and Prime Minister from 1975-1983. It became clear, however, that an aspect of his forward thinking, in part a response to the Nixon Doctrine that determined Australia's defence rebalancing, embraced the Commonwealth states of South, South East Asia and Australia's Pacific region, and merited examination. India's close Commonwealth connection<sup>2</sup> was key to his plan.

After some two decades of Liberal Government, Australia confronted realist regional politics in the late 1960s. Britain's progressive withdrawal from its bases east of Suez and the Indian Ocean's place in the Cold War calculations of the great powers, suggest this paper's inclusion of the following aspects: first, Fraser's defence policies which addressed Indian Ocean strategy and its domestic aspect, security planning based in Western Australia, are relevant to this discussion as a

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<sup>1</sup> Held at the National Archives of Australia, "India – Political relations with Australia – Consultations", specific references occur in the text below.

<sup>2</sup> S.C. Gangal (ed) *Indian Foreign Policy: A documentary study of India's foreign policy since the installation of the Janata Government on 24 March 1977*. New Delhi: Young Asia Publications, 1980, p. 33

\*This paper was written with the support of the Australian Prime Ministers Centre, Museum of Democracy, Old Parliament House, Canberra, ACT

springboard for Fraser's Indo-Pacific engagement: second, the developing bilateral relationship with India that Fraser, as Prime Minister, forged with Indian Prime Ministers Morarji Desai, elected in 1977, and Indira Gandhi re-elected in 1980, despite potential crises in the relationship in 1971, 1974 and 1975: finally, Fraser's determination to draw into a close connection the emerging Commonwealth member states in Australia's maritime region. Australia and India formed the 'bookends' for this aspect—democratic stalwarts for economically emerging states.

This paper does not address less successful aspects of Australia's bilateral relationship with India: its protectionist trade policy and the less than anticipated increases in trade and industrial cooperation. Further barriers were India's highly regulated economy, and their differences on alignment - non-alignment, referred to in Indian Ocean and regional contexts. Nonetheless, "According to all reports, Fraser achieved both personal and diplomatic breakthroughs in India."<sup>3</sup>

Each aspect raised in this paper recognises that beyond bilateral trade as a driver of stability, independent Australian thinking on foreign and defence policy was demanded. The immediate considerations for Australia and independent India resided within a broad geopolitical frame. The Vietnam War, the dissolution of SEATO (South East Asian Treaty Organisation), and the longer-term ramifications of the 1962 Sino-Indian war are briefly discussed to review the aligned - non-aligned divide. Other issues of geo-strategy - matching means to ends - include Australia's new-found place as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN's) first Dialogue Partner in 1974 while India remained economically isolated, its 'Look East' policy many years away.<sup>4</sup> Australian economic potential grew with the expansion of South East Asia-Australian relations, cementing links with that quadrant of the Indian Ocean. In the Ocean's western sphere, in the wider regional context, the emerging Iran-Iraq War, the threat to energy supplies, and the Russian intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 re-energised the Cold War with impacts for both countries.

While Australia's alliance-based foreign policy drew it towards US positions and saw its active support for the war in Vietnam, India supported Vietnam's independence from France, opposed

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<sup>3</sup> Meg Gurry, *India: Australia's Neglected Neighbour? 1947-1996*. Queensland: Griffith University, 1996, p. 65

<sup>4</sup> C. Raja Mohan, "India in the Emerging Asian Architecture", William Tow & Chin Kin Wah (eds) *Asean India Australia: Towards Closer Engagement in a New Asia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009, Ch 3, pp. 42-45

American involvement and supported the unification of Vietnam. Although not a member until 1976, Vietnam was a supporter of the non-aligned movement - thus India's Vietnam policy operated within that context, at the forefront of decolonisation struggles. Nehru, Indian Prime Minister in the post-independence years had promoted his "One World" ideal as opposed to power blocs<sup>5</sup> and abhorred multilateral defence agreements such as SEATO that cast a "deep shadow" over Indian hopes for an area of peace in South East Asia, while pro-alliance Prime Minister Menzies saw SEATO as "the keystone of our Pacific structure".<sup>6</sup> It was finally dissolved in 1977, leaving Australia outside its comfort zone. In the wake of the 1969 Nixon Doctrine - and with decidedly less faith in the ANZUS Treaty, its moves towards self-reliant defence were taken forward by Fraser as Minister for Defence.

India too confronted change. Despite Chou en-Lai's much-celebrated visit to India and his successful appearance at the Indian-organised Bandung Conference in Indonesia in 1955, India's differences with China grew and undermined that brief prospect for Asian unity. Malik suggests that "The biggest obstacle to Sino-Indian amity is that both countries aspire to the same things at the same time on the same continental landmass and its adjoining waters".<sup>7</sup> Their differences over Tibet and the failure to demarcate a common border between them devolved into the Sino-Indian war in 1962, and border disputes continued. Diplomatic ties were not re-established until 1976 and in the intervening years India received military help from the United States and the Soviet Union with the shared objective of defending India against China.<sup>8</sup> How did this sit with non-alignment? Thakur suggests that Indian policy switched from "equidistance" to "equiproximity" after 1962.<sup>9</sup> Arguably it loosely fits with one of the non-aligned movement's principles adopted in the Joint Communique following the Bandung Conference that clarified the commitment to friendship and cooperation,<sup>10</sup> and, to use popular contemporary expressions, it clearly allowed hedging and balancing.

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<sup>5</sup> *India's foreign policy: selected speeches, September 1946 – April 1961. Jawaharlal Nehru.* Bombay: The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1961, p. 47

<sup>6</sup> R.G. Casey, *Friends and neighbour.*, Michigan: Michigan University Press, 1958, Ch 12

<sup>7</sup> M. Malik, *China and India: Great Power Rivals.* Boulder: Colorado, FirstForumPress, Lynne Reinner Publishers Inc. 2011, p. 9

<sup>8</sup> R. Thakur, *The Politics and Economics of India's Foreign Policy.* London: C Hurst & Co, 1994, p. 27

<sup>9</sup> R. Thakur, *The Politics and Economics of India's Foreign Policy,* p. 27

<sup>10</sup> Ravindar Kumar & H.Y. Sharada (eds), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru.* Second Series. New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1999, Vol. 28, 1 February to 31 May, 1955, p. 137

India adhered to its policy of friendship without alliance throughout the period of this paper and beyond, while Australia was faced with the necessity to shift its long-held reliance on western allies.

### **The necessary shift**

Policy development during Fraser's periods as Defence and Prime Minister are discussed in the context of balancing power in the Indian Ocean in potentially insecure scenarios.<sup>11</sup> As Defence Minister for example, he was advised on strategy to meet Australia's defence weaknesses in a series of papers and reports that included a Defence Report in 1970, a *Strategic Basis* Paper in 1971 and also that year, a Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs' assessment of great power activity in the Indian Ocean, and points of vulnerability for Australia.<sup>12</sup> Such points, raised in the Joint Committee's report predictably involved the Soviet Union, particularly the importance of the Indian Ocean as the only all-year sea route between its east and west, and the influence of its permanent presence on disaffected or uncommitted regional nations.<sup>13</sup> Attention was also drawn to the lack of protection on "our western flank" and the growing strategic and economic importance of Western Australia, with discussion about the proposed plan to increase security by construction of a naval facility at Cockburn Sound and extend aircraft facilities at Learmonth.<sup>14</sup>

When Fraser was Prime Minister, the 1976 *Australian Strategic Analysis and Defence Policy Objectives* (a renamed *Strategic Basis* paper) and a Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence Report on Australia and the Indian Ocean Region, continued to identify regional and international interest in the Indian Ocean. The latter reported that Australia's national interest lay in the stability of oil supplies and the security of trade routes, best served by achieving a balance of superpower naval power, and it re-stated the future value of the Cockburn Sound naval base. It enunciated clearly the shortfalls for Australia in the ANZUS Treaty in

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<sup>11</sup> Defence shifts ran in parallel with the government's moves to engage with India

<sup>12</sup> Defence Report 1970, Parliamentary Paper No 171; Defence Committee, *Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy*, March 1971, Report from the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs on the Indian Ocean Region, 1971, Parliamentary Paper No. 258

<sup>13</sup> Report from the Joint Committee ... on the Indian Ocean Region, 1971, Parliamentary Paper No 258, p. 35

<sup>14</sup> Report from the Joint Committee ... on the Indian Ocean Region, pp. 2 & 38

discussing the defence of territorial waters and territories in the Indian Ocean: “The ANZUS Treaty is related specifically to the Pacific Area ... and it needs to be held in mind that a large segment of Australia’s metropolitan territory is on the Indian Ocean”.<sup>15</sup> While the Committee went on to say it envisaged no immediate threat, these were salutary warnings and Fraser had taken heed. Indeed, in an evaluation of what has been described as the “Fraser Government’s seminal Defence White Paper, *Australian Defence*” presented to Parliament in November 1976, Dibb pointed out that

the area of Australia’s primary strategic concern was the adjacent maritime area—the countries and territories of the South West Pacific, PNG, Indonesia and the Southeast Asia region ...[and] that the primary requirement was for increased self-reliance.<sup>16</sup>

In its third chapter *Australian Defence* discussed self-reliance as a primary requirement in a climate where “we owe it to ourselves” to be able to call on a national defence effort.<sup>17</sup> This, however, was not to say that Australian self-reliance meant ruling out contributions to operations elsewhere. Indeed a critical appraisal suggested that Fraser “seized on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in Sept 1979” to return to the “rhetoric if not the substance of forward defence ...” and that the incoming Hawke Government “immediately returned” to the Whitlam defence policy by committing Australia to greater self-reliance.<sup>18</sup> This appraisal ignored the pre-Whitlam Defence Report in 1970 when Fraser was Minister. It had stated that Australian forces must be prepared for the “direct defence of Australia” and deployment in the region of which “Australia is a part”.<sup>19</sup>

Fraser’s 1970 Ministerial Statement announced that his aim was to achieve direct defence capability, argued for in the *Defence Report* later that year: “You do not make South East Asia or the Indian Ocean disappear by turning your back on them”. Furthermore, the region and the

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<sup>15</sup> Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. Reference: Australia and the Indian Ocean Region, Canberra, 1976. Summary, Annexure A – 9, Section 14 & Part IV, Australia’s Defence Interests, Annexure A – 30, Section 59. Evidence taken in May.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Dibb, 2006, Ch 1, “The self-reliant defence of Australia: The history of an idea”, *History as Policy: Framing the debate on the future of Australia’s defence policy*. The Strategic and Defence Studies Centre’s 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary seminar series. <http://epress.anu.edu.au/>

<sup>17</sup> *Australian Defence*, Parliamentary Paper No 312/1976, 4 Nov 1976, p.10

<sup>18</sup> David Lee “Australia’s defence policy: a historical overview”, Mohan Malik (ed), *Australia’s Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1999, Ch 2, pp. 27-28

<sup>19</sup> *Defence Report 1970*. Parliamentary Paper No. 171, 17 Sept 1970, p. 6

Pacific and Indian Oceans “comprise our environment”, and that it would be “irrational” to continue to engage in trade and aid, designed to contribute to political stability and economic growth in our region while “refusing to contribute to military security”.<sup>20</sup> Public concern about Indian Ocean security had emerged and did not abate. One instance of its being raised was an editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in August 1967 entitled “Russian Presence and the Indian Ocean” and, referring to “the Ocean gap”, argued that while there was no immediate threat to Australia, foundations for a defence system should be laid.<sup>21</sup> In another instance, Fraser, in Opposition in 1973, in a speech to the Defend Australia Committee, said that the general expectation of a decade free of direct attacks on Australia ignored conflict in South East Asia that might affect strategic links between the Pacific and Indian Oceans through the Straits of Malacca. He went on to say that the Australian navy should be expanded so that it can “survey two oceans”.<sup>22</sup> A Two-Ocean policy was more than a decade away, but a “trend” was emerging.<sup>23</sup>

Dibb went on to say of the 1976 Defence White Paper that it was a “revolutionary breakthrough” in independent Australian thinking and that subsequent documents, including the 1979 and 1983 *Strategic Basis* papers, endorsed the importance of Australia’s capacity in defence matters.<sup>24</sup> Neither moved conceptually from the 1976 defence policy settings nor, indeed, from the 1971 *Basic Paper’s* focus on the regional area that underscored changing American expectations following the Nixon (Guam) Doctrine: its assistance “in time of need” would look first at Australia’s capability to help itself, and that the “speed and scale” of US assistance under the terms of the ANZUS Treaty would “depend on many factors ...”.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD), House of Representatives (HoR), Vol. 66, 10 Mar 1970, p. 234

<sup>21</sup> Fraser, John Malcolm (Rt Hon) Malcolm Fraser Archive, Melbourne University, 107/23, Box 14, formally NAA Series M1369, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 Aug 1967, (no pg no.)

<sup>22</sup> Address by The Hon Malcolm Fraser M.P. to the Defend Australia Committee, Melbourne, Malcolm Fraser Archive, Box 107/8, 16 Nov 1973, pp. 2 & 21

<sup>23</sup> An interview with Mr Fraser on 16 Mar 2012 included discussion about the expansion of facilities in Western Australia. He said that his policies were not the start of a two-ocean strategy, but the start of a “trend” or “pattern”

<sup>24</sup> Paul Dibb, 2006, Ch 1 “The self-reliant defence of Australia ...”. <http://epress.anu.edu.au/> Budget constraints, however, limited defence spending

<sup>25</sup> Defence Committee, *Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy*, March 1971, paras 19, 29. Other paragraphs also suggested caution: 17, 23, 27. Fraser re-articulated his long-held concern that reliance on ANZUS was a risk, and one not yet tested, in a conversation with the author on 16 March 2012, and in his Whitlam Oration at the Whitlam Institute, University of Western Sydney, 6 June 2012.

The Report on the Indian Ocean Region tabled in December 1971 by the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs set out the key difference between Australia and India: The Lusaka Conference of non-aligned countries, held in September 1970 declared that all states should regard the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace from which great power rivalries are excluded,<sup>26</sup> in contrast to Australia's balance of power preference. The Report went on to assess the military profiles of other powers with a presence in the Indian Ocean and their objectives. It noted that amongst the Soviet Union's aims was military assistance to areas of the region where it sought greater influence. This included India, and the Report appended a copy of the recently signed Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-operation between the Soviet Union and the Republic of India, seen in Canberra as one of the impediments to a closer Australia-India bilateral relationship. In assessing the interests of external powers in the Indian Ocean the Report noted that the United States played a large economic role but had a low military profile in the Indian Ocean Region,<sup>27</sup> the latter an assessment not accepted by India.

India was aware that American naval vessels were present in West Australian waters in a surveillance capacity and had access to port facilities: controversial, but also accepted by the Whitlam Government. The 1970s debate on Australia taking ownership of the American North West Cape listening post played out during Whitlam's prime-ministership, but gave way in the end to the importance of keeping the ANZUS card in play—as occurs today.<sup>28</sup> While the American presence gave Australia an arms-length involvement in Indian Ocean security, protection of the West Australian coast was prominent in Fraser's *Indian Ocean Reports*' advice in 1971 and 1976, with recommendations that naval and air facilities at Cockburn Sound and to the north should be made operational as soon as possible, addressing security concerns.

A balance of power in Australia's interest was carried forward with with qualified Labor Party support for American plans to extend its facilities on Diego Garcia.<sup>29</sup> The presence of naval powers in the Indian Ocean, 'India's lake', however, remained anathema to India and fed Indian

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<sup>26</sup> *Report on the Indian Ocean*, 1971, Appendix H, p. 103

<sup>27</sup> *Report on the Indian Ocean*, 1971, para (4), p. 3

<sup>28</sup> *Report on the Indian Ocean*, 1971. There was a dual intention here: that Cockburn Sound should be made available to "friendly powers", an item which remained on the agenda for successive AusMin meetings, the most recent in Perth in November 2012.

<sup>29</sup> The Whitlam Government did not unequivocally support Washington's intention to upgrade its facility at Diego Garcia anticipating a reciprocal move by the Soviet Union. It supported an Indian Ocean Zone of Peace.

insecurities. Gandhi's preference for an Indian Ocean Zone of Peace was also Whitlam Government policy: but not acted upon. That position versus a balance of power across the Indian Ocean was an ongoing point of difference with India that ameliorated across the annual consultative talks from the mid-1970s. The Senate Standing Committee's 1976 Report had noted that proposals to make the Indian Ocean a neutral zone had little chance of success without great power agreement,<sup>30</sup> a point often ignored in Australian commentary. At the United Nations where India played a key role, it co-sponsored the resolution on the Zone of Peace for the meeting in 1972, disregarded thereafter by the permanent members of the Security Council who maintained a presence in the Indian Ocean.<sup>31</sup> Plans for the Indian Ocean to be nuclear free waned with India's 'peaceful' nuclear tests in 1974 - perceived as another impediment in the path of improved bilateral relations with Australia.

### **Forging links with India**

While not to say there was a reversion to the exciting bilateral progress of the first years of Indian independence led by Nehru, Evatt, Chifley and then Casey, regular meetings were held at Ministerial level under Liberal Party Governments, and were enhanced when agreement on annual meetings between Foreign Secretaries and their senior staff was reached in 1966. Records of the "Indian-Australian Officials' Talks"—the annual consultative meetings—show the range of international and regional security issues, together with trade, education, scientific and cultural projects discussed in an open exchange of views that recognised opportunities and tackled differences. The Indo-Pacific aspects discussed led to action, as said, with the institution of the CHOGRM meetings, the first in February 1978. The Officials' Talks, catalogued as "India – Political – Relations with Australia – Consultations",<sup>32</sup> were held alternately in Canberra and New Delhi from 1968 until 1971 when, following the Whitlam Government's election, a hiatus

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<sup>30</sup> Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, 1976. Reference: Australia and the Indian Ocean Region. Official Hansard transcript of evidence, Annexure A – 9.

<sup>31</sup> Raj Narain Misra, *Indian Ocean and India's security*, Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1986, pp.31-32

<sup>32</sup> National Archives of Australia, (NAA): India – Political relations with Australia – Consultations; A1838, 169/10/1/1 Parts 1-15, 1967-1983.

occurred, delaying the late 1972 meeting until February 1974. The meetings resumed on an annual basis from 1975 and records held in the National Archives of Australia are, in the main, open.<sup>33</sup>

The annual meetings were put in place when Sir Arthur Tange was Australian High Commissioner to India from 1965 to 1969, after which he became Fraser's Secretary of Defence, and worked again with Fraser from 1976 until his retirement in 1979.<sup>34</sup> Throughout this period the importance of India to Australia was clear in the focus on regional issues, the Indian Ocean and emerging Pacific states during the annual officials' talks - held regardless of periodic upsets in the relationship. Much of their success may be attributed to the way Tange worked while in India. Despite the ideological divide—non-alignment or western alliance—that allowed no quarter between Menzies and Nehru, Tange established links across communities, spent time observing parliament, talking with politicians, heads of departments, military officers and working Indians outside the main centres. His purpose in India, he said, was to understand it.<sup>35</sup> An illustration of this included the ceremony and formality appropriate to the first visit of an Indian Prime Minister to Australia—Mrs Gandhi's—and he was, at times, critical of a lack of depth in the proposed program in 1968. He made the point: "Being Prime Minister of India is a man-size job and she performs it like a man in any other country".<sup>36</sup> The Australian media made

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<sup>33</sup> National Archives of Australia (NAA): India – Political relations with Australia – Consultations; A1838, 169/10/1/1 Parts 1-15, 1967-1983. For some years there is more than one Part and access status varies from 'Open' to files addressing sensitive issues - 'Open with exception' (OWE), and 'Not yet examined'. Part 15 1980-1983 has multiple files, OWE and 'Not yet examined'

<sup>34</sup> During the Whitlam Government Tange became "The Defence reformer ...", the title of the 11<sup>th</sup> Chapter in Peter Edwards, *Arthur Tange: Last of the Mandarins*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2006, p. v

<sup>35</sup> Peter Edwards, *Arthur Tange: Last of the Mandarins*, p. 159. Mrs Gandhi's visit to Australia in 1968 was organised by Tange with elaborate attention to detail and protocol. NAA: A1838, 742/1 Part 18. India - Political – Relations with Australia. Visit by Mrs Gandhi to Australia. 1968.

<sup>36</sup> NAA: A1838 742/1 Part 18, Tange to the Secretary, Dept of External Affairs, Memo No. 610, 16 Apr 1968, p. 2. Digitised version.

much of her visit and her speeches were hard-hitting, clear on both differences and the few similarities including that both “are vibrant democracies ...”,<sup>37</sup> an important element in Fraser’s 1977 CHOGRM proposal.<sup>38</sup>

### **Negotiating across the Indian Ocean**

At the annual consultative meetings debate on the Indian Ocean was a constant. Always an agenda item, the discussion followed familiar partisan tracks but did not derail progress towards what became Australia’s and India’s shared aims for small Pacific Island states within the Commonwealth. The Indian Ocean debate reflected their aligned–non-aligned international policies but did not deflect their main purpose, to enhance the bilateral relationship. The debate included a degree of dissatisfaction on India’s part with the Labor Party’s lack of progress on the Zone of Peace ideal.

The fourth consultative meeting between S.K Banerji, Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs and Sir Keith Waller, Secretary, Department of External Affairs, held in Canberra between 19 and 22 October 1970<sup>39</sup> saw Tange in his new appointment as Fraser’s Defence Secretary. There is no indication that either took part in the meeting, although aspects of Indian Ocean security discussed had been raised in Fraser’s March 1970 Ministerial Statement. Australia did not have an Indian Ocean policy as such, but the Government’s looking at extension of naval installations on Australia’s west coast was a starting point. India restated its basic principle, that the Indian

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<sup>37</sup> *The Australian*, 20 May 1968 and the *Age* on 21 & 24 May 1968. *The Canberra Times*, 23 May 1968, reported Mrs Gandhi’s argument in support of India’s refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. Cited in Meg Gurry, *India: Australia’s Neglected Neighbour? 1947-1996*. Queensland: Griffith University, 1996, pp. 38-39

<sup>38</sup> Tange, born in 1914, was 15 years older than Fraser when he was appointed Secretary of Defence in 1970 following his time as High Commissioner in Delhi. He was Fraser’s choice from amongst the officers suggested. There is, however, no clear evidence that they had had much contact previously—his reputation and standing led to Tange’s appointment. Nonetheless, fresh from India, with Fraser’s interest in security in the Indian Ocean (his March 1970 ministerial statement), and the annual Officials’ Talks ongoing, it is likely that progressing the relationship with India and across the Indo-Pacific engaged them both. As his biographer, Ayers, recorded Fraser said, “I’ve got to have somebody [as Secretary of Defence] who’ll argue, otherwise we won’t get the right answers”. P. Ayres, *Malcolm Fraser: A Biography*. Melbourne: William Heinemann, Australia, 1987, p. 147

<sup>39</sup> The first was held in 1967

Ocean should be free of all navies, although its own navy was “not inconsiderable ....”<sup>40</sup> The presence of navies in the Indian Ocean was again discussed in 1971. Foreign Secretary T.N Kaul reiterated his point that the Indian Ocean should be free of all bases, but that Australia and India “could play useful and positive roles in the Indian Ocean ....” In response to Australia’s question about what constituted a base and should be excluded, the Joint Secretary noted that anything that supported a naval presence was a base. Waller queried whether littoral states like India and Australia could have their own bases, and was answered in the affirmative. A brief discussion followed on the relative costs of keeping the Nicobar Islands supplied as a civil post rather than a naval base, and the development expenses attached to Cockburn Sound<sup>41</sup> indicating an awareness of each other’s thinking in “an exchange of views in an atmosphere of frankness ....”<sup>42</sup>

On great power roles more generally, Australia agreed with India that the Nixon Doctrine had resulted in a reduction in the United States’ commitments in Asia, and that there was a likelihood of an increased Soviet presence—the Indo-Soviet Treaty was one aspect of this—and Australia accepted India’s judgement that it was important to India.<sup>43</sup>

Kaul set out the 1971 Treaty’s boundaries

- Treaty for a 20 year period thus not a “temporary expedient” to meet a particular situation.
- It was not contrary to India’s non-alignment policy.
- Non-alignment did not mean neutrality and it did not preclude a country from protecting its own national interests.
- It did require that independence of action be preserved.
- The Treaty was not a military pact.

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<sup>40</sup> NAA: A1838, 169/10/1/1 Part 5, Fourth Consultative Meeting between the Ministry of External Affairs, India and the Department of External Affairs, Canberra, Oct 1970. Agenda Item 3 – Indian Ocean Security. Paras 3, 29, 12 & 9. The Senate Standing Committee On Foreign Affairs and Defence 1976 Report, “Australia and the Indian Ocean Region”, noted that India had the “largest navy numerically” in the Indian Ocean, India: Para 40, Annexure A - 23

<sup>41</sup> NAA: A1838, 169/10/1/1 Part 6, Fifth Consultative Meeting, New Delhi, Oct 1971. Agenda Item 3(e) – Indian Ocean. Paras 19, 10,13,14.

<sup>42</sup> NAA: A1838, 169/10/1/1 Part 6. File No. 1481/99/1, 26 Aug 1971

<sup>43</sup> NAA: A1838, 169/10/1/1 Part 6. File No. 1481/99/1, 26 Aug 1971, Para 18

- There was no commitment by either side to provide bases for the other.<sup>44</sup>

Waller's response was encouraging, indicating that Australia looked forward to a "normal and cordial relationship with the USSR"<sup>45</sup> and, demonstrably, with India.

Discussion moved to the territorial integrity of small powers with particular reference to the South Pacific island states and their need for support "of the kind which more mature democracies could give them."<sup>46</sup> Australia and India agreed that Fiji, in which India had a special interest, Nauru, Tonga and other small independent states, also members of the Commonwealth, should be supported, and India recorded that Australia and India could co-operate in the region.<sup>47</sup> Arguably this was the first interest expressed in an idea that became the basis of the CHOGRMs, proposed by Fraser to Indian Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), in London in 1977.

The delayed Officials' Talks after Whitlam's 1972 election were held in Canberra in late February 1974. The focus shifted to cultural exchanges, trade expansion, and India's development plans as well as a range of international and bilateral issues. Discussion on the Indian Ocean, led by India's Foreign Secretary, Kewal Singh argued for the Zone of Peace concept and against the Diego Garcia base. The Whitlam Government's support of the Zone of Peace, but failure in its undertaking to act, brought some discord. Grant, High Commissioner to India during Whitlam's prime ministership, saw the possibility for constructive diplomacy on Indian Ocean issues fade in the reality of confronting conflicting aligned–non-aligned issues, noting that "... the pragmatism of Australian politics, is often an excuse for doing nothing".<sup>48</sup>

India's nuclear policy was also the subject of a discussion between Australian Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, and Mrs Gandhi in late February 1974, mere months before India peaceful nuclear explosions (PNEs). The Prime Minister's message was that India intended to continue to develop

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<sup>44</sup> NAA: A1838, 169/10/1/1 Part 6, Fifth Consultative Meeting, Agenda Item 1 – General Survey of the International Situation, Para 21

<sup>45</sup> NAA: A1838, 169/10/1/1 Part 6, Fifth Consultative Meeting, Para 32

<sup>46</sup> NAA: A1838, 169/10/1/1 Part 6, Fifth Consultative Meeting, Para 43

<sup>47</sup> NAA: A1838, 169/10/1/1 Part 6, Fifth Consultative Meeting, Para 51

<sup>48</sup> Bruce Grant, *Gods and Politicians: Politics as Culture - an Australian View of India*. Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 49

its nuclear program because China was a nuclear power, although it had no intention of developing weapons. But, the impression was left that it could be an option for the future.<sup>49</sup> China's nuclear tests in 1964 issuing in what has been described as an "Asian nuclear age",<sup>50</sup> resonated in the still-uneasy relationship between India and China.

At the last of the Whitlam Government Officials' Talks held in New Delhi on 3-4 April 1975 the nuclear issue dominated following India's PNE's in May 1974. Mr Rahman, Indian Additional Secretary, challenged suggestions that India had breached bilateral arrangements, that India's PNEs would lead to proliferation, and that India planned nuclear weapons development, suggesting the issue was a matter of confidence in India's future policy.<sup>51</sup> Australia urged India to join the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) "with all its faults", as a "common sense" solution to a nuclear weapons future,<sup>52</sup> but there was no middle ground. The South Pacific and Indian Ocean were eclipsed by the PNEs debate: however, brief discussion highlighted the rapid approach to self-government of many Pacific territories and the Australian Government's support for regional initiatives and co-operation. In unusually brief discussion also, India did not think Australia's idea of mutual restraint between the super powers in the Indian Ocean would resolve tension as pressure for bases on littoral states was increasing.

At the 1976 meeting following Fraser's election, discussion about Indian Ocean power rivalry was taken up between Jagat Mehta, Indian Foreign Secretary, and Tange who remained Defence Secretary. Mehta claimed that "the psychological effect" on India of Australia's "new posture" (support for the United States), would be averse. Tange suggested that that super power rivalry was not likely to be provoked by anything that Australian political leaders might say, and Mehta remarkably re-set the Indian Ocean debate allowing that cooperation in ship visits and staff training undertaken by India and Australia, were not threatened by any "fundamental conceptual differences on the matters of alliances".<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> NAA: A1838, 169/10/1/1, Part 9, Grant to the Foreign Secretary, 19 Mar 1975, Record of Conversation, Governor-General and Mrs Gandhi, 27 Feb 1975

<sup>50</sup> Australia India Institute Task Force on Indian Ocean Security, *The Indian Ocean Region: Security, Stability and Sustainability in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, March 2013.

<sup>51</sup> A1838, 169/10/1/1 Part 10, Seventh Consultative Meeting. Pages 12-13.

<sup>52</sup> Bruce Grant, *Gods and Politicians*, p. 84

<sup>53</sup> NAA: A1838, 169/10/1/1 Part 12, Eighth Consultative Meeting. Paras 3, 4 & 2

The idea that India and Australia might pursue similar policies in offering aid to countries in the region without interference by outside powers developed into a discussion about India “groping for a useful role” in South East Asia, and what might be collaboratively possible there.<sup>54</sup>

Regional organisations in the South Pacific and their role moved the discussion back to India’s degree of interest in the region and its desire to develop relationships with such countries.<sup>55</sup>

Non-proliferation drew a frank exchange of views, the first since Fraser became Prime Minister. Mehta pointed out that the discrimination India experienced placed an unfair restriction on India’s right to “the indigenisation of a particular field of scientific research” that provided energy. He added that India was conscious of the alarm and criticism roused by its peaceful nuclear explosion, and was “surprised and hurt at being treated as if it were not considered a responsible nation”. The importance of the NPT to Australia was reiterated,<sup>56</sup> and again at the 1977 meeting.

Regardless of their individual opinions, India’s 1974 nuclear tests were no longer a barrier to the progress of the bilateral relationship. But Australians had been again unsettled by Indian insecurities driven this time by Mrs Gandhi’s declaration of a state of emergency in June 1975. Threats to national security after a war with Pakistan, the 1973 oil crisis, and claims that strikes, protests and internal disturbances had paralysed the country were cited as justification for the suspension of civil liberties and mass detentions. Elections were postponed until March 1977 when the Emergency ended, and at the polls Mrs Gandhi and the Congress Party lost to the Janata Party led by Morarji Desai.<sup>57</sup> Mrs Gandhi had dealt the western international community two blows, the 1974 PNE’s followed by the State of Emergency, damaging relations including with Whitlam’s Government. The progress in the bilateral relationship at the Officials’ Talks, however, and the change of Government in India left Fraser with his interest in India intact and receptive to Morarji Desai when he met him at the CHOGM in London in June 1977. There he raised, to an enthusiastic response by Desai, his CHOGRM proposal.

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<sup>54</sup> NAA: A1838, 169/10/1/1 Part 12. Paras 6 & 11

<sup>55</sup> NAA: A1838, 169/10/1/1 Part 12. Paras 38,39 & 44

<sup>56</sup> NAA: A1838, 169/10/1/1 Part 12. Paras 121 & 123

<sup>57</sup> Amongst the vast writings on the Indian Emergency, two accounts (not without bias) appear in Katherine Frank, *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi*. London: Harper Collins, 2001, pp. 376-385 and Bruce Grant, *Gods and Politicians ...*, pp. 144-154

In Delhi in September 1977, however, the discussion at the Talks resumed in the same vein: Australia's aim remained achieving a balance of forces in the Indian Ocean, "limitation rather than demilitarisation": this time it elicited a shift in the Indian position to one that saw balance as one phase in the process of removing foreign military presences in the Indian Ocean.<sup>58</sup> Vellodi, India's Acting Secretary, in commenting on United States access to the Australian naval base at Cockburn Sound in Western Australia, said that while India would not do so, it was the Australian Government's business. India's concern was with foreign bases.<sup>59</sup> The debate continued with small areas of agreement achieved.

In Canberra in 1978 talks were held in August, five months after the first CHOGRM meeting held in Sydney in late February, and the focus was on its success. A statement about the change of government in India to the Janata Party under Prime Minister Morarji Desai, was positive: the Janata Party had no legacy of relations with its neighbours and this assisted in accelerating the rapprochement begun under the Gandhi Government. The avenue for future cooperation would be the region and its stability.<sup>60</sup>

India's crucial role in Fraser's Indo-Pacific engagement was demonstrated in the strength of the bilateral relationship at the 1978 CHOGRM. Fraser's visit to India in January 1979, invited to the Republic Day celebrations as guest of Desai, was seen as greatly strengthening the relationship and an opportunity to extend cooperation across a number of fields discussed at preceding years' Officials' Talks: science, technology, agriculture and energy.<sup>61</sup> At the 1979 talks, held in Delhi in August following Fraser's visit, Indian officials endorsed the meetings as "informal, frank, cordial and in-depth. The relationship was now not only more relaxed but more relevant."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> NAA: A1836, 169/10/1/1, Part 13, Ninth Consultative Meeting. Para 42

<sup>59</sup> NAA: A1836, 169/10/1/1, Part 13. Para 44

<sup>60</sup> NAA: A1836, 169/10/1/1, Part 14, Tenth Consultative Meeting. Para 2

<sup>61</sup> NAA: A1836, 169/10/1, Part 37, India – Relations with Australia – Prime Minister's visit to India

<sup>62</sup> NAA: A1836, 169/10/1/1, Part 14, Eleventh Consultative Meeting – Summary Record. Records of the Annual Consultative Talks from 1980-83 have not all been examined and opened.

## Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings

Accounts of the organisation and negotiation behind the first CHOGRM, agreed at CHOGM in London in July 1977, are drawn in part from Fraser's biographer, Philip Ayres, and Fraser's memoir written with Margaret Simons, as well as from official records.

CHOGRM was a Fraser initiative and he chaired the first meeting from 13 February 1978 in Sydney.<sup>63</sup> He had first raised the idea with the Commonwealth's Secretary-General, Sonny (Shridath) Ramphal, soon after he became Prime Minister, and met with some resistance. Ramphal considered that a regional meeting might detract from Commonwealth unity, "that you didn't want to construct a 'bloc' in the Commonwealth". Nonetheless he came on board and worked out "ground rules" with Fraser.<sup>64</sup> Fraser's vision was to give the leaders of the small island states opportunities to debate issues that affected them at meetings where they would not be overwhelmed by influential long-term Commonwealth members.<sup>65</sup> The intention inherent in setting up CHOGRMs - the importance of regional stability - carried forward, as said, at annual Australia-India talks in discussions on the Pacific states and a shared role for Australia and India.<sup>66</sup>

Prime Minister Desai, as said, gave his strong support for the regional meeting at the CHOGM in London in June 1977, and was present in Sydney—the second visit to Australia by an Indian Prime Minister within a decade.

Fraser was in the Chair and the meeting was attended by the Prime Ministers of Fiji, India, Malaysia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Tonga and Western Samoa, and the

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<sup>63</sup> The bomb blast outside the Sydney Hilton Hotel in the early hours of that morning is perhaps the most-remembered event of the first CHOGRM. With the agreement of delegates, the meeting went ahead as planned.

<sup>64</sup> Philip Ayres, *Malcolm Fraser*, p. 349

<sup>65</sup> Malcolm Fraser & Margaret Simons, *Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs*. Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2010. "The head of government in Tonga might well feel inhibited in arguing with the British Prime Minister". p. 497.

<sup>66</sup> Prime Minister Hawke in closing down the CHOGRM meeting series at the 4<sup>th</sup>, held in PNG in 1984, said "they were largely a wasteful duplication of the South Pacific Forum meetings". Bob Hawke, *The Hawke Memoirs*. Melbourne: William Heinemann Australia, 1994, p. 265. Press comments on that CHOGRM meeting did not endorse Hawke's memory of the event. See *The Age*, 9 Aug 1984, Michelle Grattan, "Meeting on the meeting".

Presidents of Bangladesh, Nauru, and Sri Lanka. The Heads of Government present valued their opportunity to discuss matters of shared interest at a regional level and from their varied viewpoints and perspectives, and included airing their frustrations at being unable to escape poverty. They noted that the countries represented contained nearly a fifth of the world's population and were "scattered over a hemisphere of the earth's surface".<sup>67</sup> Discussions were broad and canvassed a range of issues, from the dangers of great power rivalry in the Indian Ocean to regional appraisals by the leaders and appreciation of the agreement to oversee and monitor negotiations on the New International Economic Order proposals, agreed at the recent (32<sup>nd</sup>) UN General Assembly.

Amongst the subjects addressed were terrorism, disarmament, trade policy, industrial development, energy, rural development and drug trafficking, and follow-up action saw agreement that a Consultative Group on trade would be coordinated by Australia, on energy by India and Working Groups on drugs and terrorism by Singapore and Malaysia respectively.<sup>68</sup> The latter was predictable after a bomb exploded at the entrance of the Hilton Hotel, Sydney where the meeting was to be held. The presence of demonstrators had convinced Fraser to move the arrival point to a side door. The Heads of Government, at Fraser's opening address, decided that the meeting should go ahead. It was generally agreed that it had been a success, and the final communiqué was optimistic. It was also agreed that they would meet again in Delhi in 1980 "to renew their conversations" and review progress on the tasks identified.<sup>69</sup>

A statement by Desai on his return to the Indian Parliament on 24 February was a solid and enthusiastic endorsement of the CHOGRM. From his welcome for Fraser's proposal in London the previous year to his conclusion that from Australia's point of view CHOGRM helped to confirm our (India's) position "as a well-intentioned and responsible country in the Asian/Pacific area ...", Fraser's bilateral aims were vindicated. In terms of public impact, India saw an additional benefit; "CHOGRM helped to inform and educate Australians about the nature of our region" and its concerns.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> NAA: A1838, 625/13/5 Part 4. CHOGRM communiqué, 16 Feb 1978, p. 1

<sup>68</sup> NAA: A1838, 625/13/5 Part 4, pp. 16-23

<sup>69</sup> NAA: A1838, 625/13/5, Part 4, p. 23

<sup>70</sup> NAA: A1838, 625/13/5, New Delhi / File 216/9/1, Statement by the Indian Prime Minister, 24 Feb '78, pp. 1&3

From India's point of view, the conference brought together the leaders of the Commonwealth countries in the Asia and Pacific region, some of whom Desai had not previously met. In summing up he praised the Sydney meeting for its regional and functional approach to cooperation without subsuming the roles of other regional agencies,<sup>71</sup> and he looked forward to following up the working group activities "in order to make the Delhi meeting in 1980 a worthy successor".<sup>72</sup>

Mrs Gandhi, back in power, chaired all sessions at the second CHOGRM in Delhi on 4-8 September 1980 attended by the Prime Ministers and Presidents at the Sydney meeting and four new participants, the Prime Ministers of the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, and the President of Kiribati. Fraser's statement to the House of Representatives on 11 September recorded that the very successful meeting in Delhi made it clear that the regional meeting was one of the most useful policy initiatives undertaken by Australia.<sup>73</sup>

Following the President of India, N.S. Reddy's, inaugural address in which he welcomed functional regional cooperation, an outcome of the 1978 meeting, Mrs Gandhi's address of welcome somewhat dramatically brought the Indian Ocean to centre stage. Referring to the continuing Afghan crisis and a potential oil crisis, she saw the Ocean as "churning with danger" due to the increasing pace of "militarization" and that "tension has built up because of the collapse of détente and the resultant renewal of the cold war ...."<sup>74</sup> Fraser referred obliquely to great power rivalries in the Indian Ocean and focussed his opening remarks on deteriorating relations between states in the region and strained resources due to the mass movement of refugees.<sup>75</sup> Endorsing the perception of impending crises, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew spoke of the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, two

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<sup>71</sup> ASEAN, 1967, South Pacific Forum, 1971, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), 1974, previously ECAFE

<sup>72</sup> NAA: A1838, 625/13/5, New Delhi / File 216/9/1, p. 3

<sup>73</sup> HoR, Vol 119, 19 Aug – 18 Sept 1980, 11 Sept 1980, p. 1199

<sup>74</sup> NAA, M 1268, 25 Part 1, Personal Papers (PP) of the Prime Minister (PM). Visit to the United States and India, 4-11 Sept 1980. CHOGRM Provisional Record of the Opening Session, pp. 4-5

<sup>75</sup> NAA, PP of PM, CHOGRM, Provisional Record of the Opening Session, 4 Sept 1980, pp. 10-11

communist governments moving armies across international boundaries in violation of the UN Charter.<sup>76</sup>

Threats to regional stability could not be ignored, and Mrs Gandhi invited a free-ranging discussion on world and regional political trends in the final session on 5 September. Discussion inevitably returned to the escalation of great power presences in the Indian Ocean and India's support for the Zone of Peace. Fraser argued that despite different government perceptions this did not necessarily mean different solutions, inferring that parity between the Soviet Union and the US was an option.<sup>77</sup> The ensuing discussion among leaders recognised the danger of expansion of regional conflicts.<sup>78</sup>

The Second and Third Sessions on 4 September, and the Fourth on 5 September, addressed economic issues. Two documents<sup>79</sup> were tabled and discussion was wide ranging—put briefly, it emphasised the special development needs of small island states in the Pacific and supported Fiji's proposal for a Pacific Regional Advisory Service. Mrs Gandhi summed up progress by the Consultative Groups.<sup>80</sup>

At a news conference in Singapore on 10 September Fraser said that the first meeting in Sydney was an innovation that carried its own momentum, but the Delhi meeting under Prime Minister Gandhi has “cemented [a] regional grouping of permanent significance”.<sup>81</sup> In his Ministerial Statement on 11<sup>th</sup> September Fraser's final remarks about the New Delhi meeting pointed to its significance as a “further step in developing our relationship with India ... too long neglected

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<sup>76</sup> NAA, PP of PM, CHOGRM, Opening Session, p. 12

<sup>77</sup> NAA, PP of PM, CHOGRM, Provisional Record of the Fifth Session, 5 Sept 1980, pp. 1 - 7

<sup>78</sup> The Provisional Record of the Fifth Session contained interesting views from CHOGRM leaders on regional issues not relevant specifically to India, Australia or the Indian Ocean, pp. 14-24

<sup>79</sup> “The World Economic Crisis: A Commonwealth Perspective” prepared by a Commonwealth group of experts that led by Prof Hannah Arendt (ANU). She was present at the Third Session on 4 Sept. Andrew Peacock, Australia's Foreign Minister and Pranab Kumar Mukherjee, the 13<sup>th</sup> and current President of India also attended the economic sessions.

<sup>80</sup> The Provisional Reports of the Second and Third Sessions on 4 Sept and the Fourth on 5 Sept contain detailed discussion on the topic the International Economy and may be read at the National Archives of Australia in the file cited above.

<sup>81</sup> NAA, PP of PM, CHOGRM. File note, news conference in Singapore, 19 Sept 1980.

....”<sup>82</sup> Their satisfaction at the progress of the bilateral relationship was aired again by Fraser in a letter to Mrs Gandhi after his return.<sup>83</sup>

Mrs Gandhi came again to Australia for the CHOGRM held in Melbourne in 1981, and to CHOGRM in Fiji in October the following year where much of the discussion again focussed on unresolved regional tensions and progress on economic development—a debate amongst a group of Commonwealth friends.

Fraser faced a question in Parliament on 20 October 1982 about whether he had committed further funds for similar meetings in the future.<sup>84</sup> His answer was in the negative, but the push to end the CHOGRMS had begun with reservations about the meetings’ usefulness expressed by Sir Robert Muldoon, then Prime Minister of New Zealand. He argued that duplication of other South Pacific forums “could have created some concern in Wellington and Canberra that their special relationships were being undermined ....”<sup>85</sup> Hawke picked up the baton and the CHOGRMs ended at a one-day meeting in Port Moresby on 8 August 1984.

## **In conclusion**

During Fraser’s term of office substantial agreements in trade and commerce between Australia and India were not achieved. Australia’s high-tariff regime and India’s economy, not liberalised until the 1990s, were on-going barriers. Friendships and awareness at political levels, however, reached extraordinary levels. But while commerce, trade and people-to-people interaction have grown exponentially since, an off-again - on-again political relationship has marked the three decades since Fraser’s prime-ministership,

Australian interest in India and recognition of its importance had grown with the institution in 1966 of annual Officials’ Talks, held alternately in Canberra and Delhi that discussed areas of

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<sup>82</sup> HoR, Vol 119, 19 Aug – 18 Sept 1980, 11 Sept 1980, p. 1201. Fraser tabled the final communiqué of the New Delhi meeting, and it followed his Ministerial Statement, pp1201-1206. He noted that the Heads of Government had accepted the Prime Minister of Fiji’s invitation to meet in Suva in 1982

<sup>83</sup> NAA, PP of PM, CHOGRM. File note, letter from Fraser to Mrs Gandhi, date obscured or not included.

<sup>84</sup> HoR, Vol. 130, 26 Oct – 14 Dec 1982, Mr Holding on notice to Prime Minister. 8 Dec 1982, p. 3189.

<sup>85</sup> *The Straits Times*, 8 August 1984, p.3. Malcolm Fraser had lost office on 6 March 1983 and Mrs Gandhi was assassinated on 31 October 1984

bilateral interest, and continued to do so during the Fraser years. A strong focus on security in the Indian Ocean developed and drew opposed policy positions by Australia and India, moderated over the time span discussed in this paper. Debate at the annual talks included recognition that the economically fragile emerging small Pacific States were a security risk and could be aided collaboratively by Australia and India, in a rapport-building process. Officials present also addressed and managed divisive policy stances to come to some compromise and a degree of cooperative understanding on issues with the potential to derail the emerging bilateral collaboration: these included Indian Ocean security, India's Treaty of Friendship with Russia, India's PNEs and its state of emergency. These negotiating skills were often lost in the post-Fraser years. Issues that did, at least temporarily, derail the bilateral relationship were Australian-initiated: the sale of Mirage jet fighters to Pakistan in the early 1980s; the over-reaction to India's 1998 nuclear tests; the on-going refusal to sell uranium to India across governments until recently, and the dumping in 2008 of the proposed quadrilateral agreement that included India.

Under Fraser's, Desai's and Gandhi's prime ministerships, the meetings of their new Commonwealth regional grouping, CHOGRM, held in 1978, 1980 and 1982, brought together heads of Indo-Pacific states at different stages of development. These dialogues built successful bilateral and multilateral relationships not previously achieved. In the post-Fraser years when meetings devolved to broad Pacific groupings,<sup>86</sup> the idea of the Indo-Pacific as a coherent region disappeared from Australian foreign and security policy until it re-emerged in the mid-1980s in another form, Australia's two-ocean policy. It touched both oceans, but was still close to two decades away from the shift in geopolitical realism to the logic of the Indo-Pacific connection.

The CHOGRMs established the close Commonwealth connection that Fraser envisaged with Australia and India working together in a collaborative way, not previously attempted. Fraser was joined enthusiastically in this experiment by Desai and Gandhi, and department heads in both countries, equally determined that Australia and India could work together across the Indo-Pacific, cementing their relationship in the process and demonstrating an unusual working bilateral relationship.

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<sup>86</sup> Further research may explore the reasoning behind the Muldoon-inspired Hawke push to close down the CHOGRM meetings, as happened at the Papua-New Guinea meeting in August 1984.

