

New Zealand signs Manila Pact

8 September 1954



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The South-East Asia Collective Defence Treaty, or Manila Pact, aimed to contain the spread of communism in the region. The South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) was the institutional expression of this treaty.

The signatories to the Manila Pact were Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States. The treaty was signed in the same year that US President Dwight Eisenhower made his famous 'Domino Theory' speech, in which he outlined growing concern over communist influence in Indochina and the wider region. The US urged its allies in the region to stand up to the communists.

New Zealand had already felt the impact of the Cold War and its associated armed conflicts. In the Korean War, which erupted in 1950, New Zealand showed its commitment to the United Nations and collective security, and to US attempts to contain the spread of communism. In signing security treaties such as ANZUS (1951) and the Manila Pact, New Zealand pursued a policy of alliance-based security.

SEATO was established in February 1955. Its combination of outside powers and pro-Western nations within the region was to some extent an attempt to establish a South-East Asian version of the NATO alliance. But unlike NATO, SEATO had no joint command or standing forces. An attack on one member was not automatically seen as an attack on all. Each member could in effect block any collective SEATO action. With French and British interest in the region declining, SEATO's effectiveness as a collective security organisation was dubious. When war broke out again in Indochina, SEATO was unable to reach a consensus on intervention.

The US tried unsuccessfully to make the Vietnam War a collective defence issue for SEATO. While the US, Australian and New Zealand governments used SEATO to justify their involvement in Vietnam, some of its members opposed the war.

SEATO was dissolved in June 1977.



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