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‘NOT A MATTER  
FOR NEGOTIATION’:  
AUSTRALIA’S COMMITMENT  
TO MALAYSIA 1961–1966

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MOREEN DEE

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# Preface

This monograph is the second in the series *Australia in the World: The Foreign Affairs and Trade Files* prepared by the Historical Publications and Information Section of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The series is a set of ad hoc studies based on detailed historical research of government files held in the National Archives of Australia and is designed to increase public understanding of Australia's role in international relations. The Minister for Foreign Affairs approves the choice of topics taking into account the recommendations of an Advisory Committee, which also ensures that the work has been written and edited according to scholarly and bipartisan practice.

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*The only real dispute was over Malaysia's right to exist.*

*This was clearly not a matter for negotiation.*

*The Malaysians could hardly be expected to accept any form of conciliation unless it were clearly understood that aggression would stop and Malaysia's sovereignty would be respected.*

Tom Critchley  
Australian High Commissioner to Malaysia  
UN New York, 10 September 1964

# Introduction

Immediately following World War II, the United Kingdom began a process of decolonisation in South and Southeast Asia. By 1957, independence had been granted to India, Pakistan, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Burma (Myanmar) and the Malay States. The Crown Colony of Singapore became self-governing in 1959, with the prospect of independence when its constitution was reviewed in 1963. Only the future of the smaller territories of Sarawak, British North Borneo and Brunei was undecided. When Singapore raised the question of attaining its independence through a merger with Malaya, the United Kingdom began to see a wider federation concept as a means of settling the future of the Borneo dependencies. In an area that had seen continuous conflict, political uncertainty and social change since the end of the war, the proposed new state would promote stability and form a barrier against the southward progress of communist influence. The neighbouring states of Indonesia and the Philippines, each for its own reasons, did not agree. When the Federation of Malaysia was established on 16 September 1963, Indonesia's opposition crystallised into a 'Crush Malaysia' (*Ganjang Malaysia*) campaign. 'Confrontation' (*Konfrontasi*), as Indonesia's policy became known, threatened the security and stability of the Southeast Asian region until its demise in August 1966.

The establishment of Malaysia and the ensuing Confrontation campaign posed a number of challenges to Australian defence and foreign policy interests. Malaysia was a fellow member of the Commonwealth with which Australia had long-standing important defence links. On the other hand, Australia's bilateral relationship with Indonesia, its closest neighbour, was in the process of rebuilding after the difficulties arising out of Australia's opposition to Indonesia's claim to the former Dutch territory of West New Guinea. Australia was faced with conflicting objectives in two of its major regional relationships. With a prime focus on maintaining stability in its immediate strategic environment, Australia's response to the political and military consequences of the formation of the Federation of Malaysia marked a significant period of regional policy-making initiatives and engagement.