

# Britain and australia, the fall of singapore and the great betrayal in 1942 and o...

[Parts of the World](#), [Australia](#)



One of the important characteristics of international relationship is the ability of one country to trust the word of their partners that their partners would look after the best interest of their partners, especially after mutual action plan is being executed and undertaken. There is the proverbial thought about how political bed partners involved in global country alliances are expected scratch each other's backs.

The failure of a partner to look after and protect the interests of the other partner is a very strong incident that easily breaks the trust that binds countries together in friendship, cooperation and alliance. One of the significant setbacks of Australia during the Second World War was the fall of Singapore after the British forces, which Australia trusted to protect this Asian country from being overrun by the enemy. The prevailing feeling that surfaced after the incident was made public was the feeling of betrayal among Australians towards Britain and the British army.

Even disregarding the fact that Singapore is an important foothold in the Australian dominion, Australia felt betrayed because they were sent to fight in another location under Britain's bidding to salvage an important British interest with the guarantee that British forces will look after Australian interests in the Asia-Pacific Region. It was something which they failed to do in a manner that did not provide the British with even a semblance of consolation, just mere indignation over what happened.

Britain's surrender at Singapore in February 1942 can be considered as tantamount to the Great Betrayal of Australia's Empire because many critics and historians believe that Britain simply betrayed Australia when the British

forces surrendered at Singapore at during the Second World War, considering that the same level of justification of the idea of betrayal was attributed to the concept of the " Great Betrayal of Australia's Empire".

Karl Hack provided a scathing verdict on the Singapore 1942 issue between Australia and Britain, supporting the belief of political analysts and historians who believe that Britain's action in Singapore in 1942 was indeed an act of betrayal towards its ally Australia. " In one sense the fall of Singapore had represented a betrayal of Australia, and so catapulted Australia into an American embrace . Hack's position in this issue was that the British act of betrayal towards Australia's dominion in 1942 is the contribution towards the loss of one of Australia's important foothold in the Asian region. This is because the British poorly and inadequately attended to the military concerns involving the defense of Singapore, explaining that " Britain had encouraged Australia to commit forces to the Mediterranean, and then provided inadequate defences for Singapore . "

Gerhard Weinberg made the same observation about the question of British betrayal of Australia, explaining that the betrayal is found in the inability of the British to come to the aid of the country which is its ally in its time of need, especially with the fact that there was an understanding between the two nations about the providing of support and assistance; Australia can help the British military strategy and at the same time provide ample and sufficient forces that can protect Australia as well as Australia's other footholds and territories in the Asia-Pacific region. In both Australia and New Zealand, the war had somewhat similar repercussions.

Both felt deserted by the home country in their hour of greatest danger; it may be an exaggeration, but not a completely unjustified one . " Singapore fell on February 1942, but as early as January, the Australian government has already impressed upon its British allies that they would consider the fall of Singapore, which was under their watch, as an " inexcusable betrayal. The telegram that travelled from Australia to London indicated how Australia was hoping that Britain would indeed hold true to its promises and " all the assurance we have been given ," including an solid fortress that will wait for the arrival of the British fleet that will support land efforts to defend Singapore . This telegram was received by Winston Churchill, the contents of which something that Churchill was not very happy or appreciative to read or be the recipient of such note.

The reported efforts of the British to save Singapore from falling (including the sending in of the 18th Division) was later regarded as a wrong move for the British, definitely unmindful and not caring anymore about the idea of betrayal that Australia might feel. " The phrase ' inexcusable betrayal' greatly annoyed Churchill, and he could not easily forget it.

The minutes of the British War Cabinet's meeting, which reviewed events the day after Singapore's surrender recorded that it now seemed a pity that Britain had sent the 18th Division to Singapore . " With this information, can it be now assumed that the British leaders during the war indeed betrayed Australia by showing very little consideration or little cause of concern for the interest of Australia and were just focused on winning their own goal?

If this was true, then the Singapore debacle was similar to the Great Betrayal of Australia's empire, since in both occasions, the similar idea was that Australia was abandoned by its ally Britain and left close to being helpless, defenseless and alone. This is because it trusted an ally that was not sincerely looking and protecting the interests of its allies which it relied for help during the height of the battles in the Asia Pacific Theater of Operation during the Second World War.

Churchill's oversight in what was poor defences set up in Singapore one month prior to the fall of Singapore and the planning to evacuate and not fortify the defences were also pointing to the fact that the British was not planning on holding on to Singapore, not even for the sake of the country's alliance with Australia, to which Singapore and its defense is important. " At this late stage, Churchill now gave urgent consideration to the evacuation of all the Allied troops at Singapore to prevent what could now be foreseen as widespread disaster...

Any evacuation of Singapore would have appalled Australians; indeed it would be difficult to exaggerate the effect to national morale of such an apparent betrayal . " The idea of selfishness and being self centered by the British military operation in the Asia Pacific during World War II that resulted to the idea of Britain's betrayal of Australia in Singapore and in the whole of the Asian WWII conflict was also supported by other instances that saw Britain manipulating Australia and its resources without any consideration to the Australian government, the Australian sovereignty and the Australian interests.

Hamill talked about the incident wherein the returning Australian divisions from the Middle East was redirected, without approval from Australia, to Rangoon where Britain was hoping to save its interests in Burma, which was foiled since Australian Prime Minister Curtin directed the troopship to head straight for Australia instead . The presence of the sense of betrayal by Britain of Australia as a consequence of the 1942 Singapore debacle

The justification of the feeling of betrayal of Australia by Britain can be found in how analysts try to put together actions of both countries in international organizations involving the two. Most of the time, analysts point to the reason that Australia cannot again fully trust Britain especially when concerns involve security and military owing to the presumed betrayal by the British of its Australian allies in Singapore in 1942. For Australia's resort to the 1951 ANZUS Pact has sometimes been seen as a decisive turning away from Britain, the result of British betrayal at Singapore . " Critics believe that actions particularly that of Australia was always towards the minimalization of dependency on other countries, or forging alliances with countries except Britain. " ANZUS symbolised Australia's new-found willingness to enter agreements which excluded Britain . "

The feeling of betrayal by Britain of Australia has an effect that rippled all the way across towards the more contemporary times. While some believed that the memory of the betrayal of Britain of Australia and its territorial interests in the global stage, there are also those who used the idea and feeling of betrayal of Britain of Australia as a rallying point for Australia to justify the movements that it is making today, pointing to a decision making paradigm

that highlights important historical notes as a guide towards future political actions.

One of which is the lesson of the betrayal and what Australia seeks to gain, and lose, when it trusts Britain again. The betrayal somewhat became an important cornerstone towards the growth of Australian nationalism in the country, among its people and its political leaders. “ Keating’s parliamentary speech accusing Britain of betraying Australia at Singapore in 1942 displayed with dramatic clarity the influence of Jack Lang’s aggressive Australianism . Oddly, when the news of how the Australian prime minister poked at the British government fifty years later about the betrayal in 1942 during the visit of the Queen of Britain, the focus of the news content was about how the Queen was treated disrespectfully, the news hardly making effort to defend the country from the accusations and was merely outraged by the scandalous treatment of their Queen. “ The London tabloids are in a frenzy over Mr.

Keating’s charge that Britain abandoned Australia during World War II ,” while others took the instance to make political appraisal of Paul Keating, saying that “ In his seemingly off-hand remarks about the monarchy and his tilt at Britain’s alleged betrayal of Australia in 1942, Paul Keating is moving to place himself firmly in the tradition of the great Labor Party nationalists... nor has he forgotten Britain’s alleged sins of 1942 . ”

While some historians do not actually support Britain when it comes to the issue of the Singapore debacle in 1942, these writers also try to put into consideration the contribution of Australian forces defending Singapore,

particularly the aspect of Australian desertions at the height of the efforts to save Singapore from Japanese forces and the number of surrendering Australian soldiers who easily surrendered and gave up the defense of Singapore.

“ Some British historians questioned the performance of Australian troops in Singapore... hether Singapore could have been saved as late as 15 February, and whether Australian desertions accelerated the final surrender . ” But some historians believed that the emotional repercussion resulting from the collapse of Singapore, particularly the feeling of betrayal, was not a very important issue at all, since the most important concern of Australia was not really the fall of Singapore but the fact that the Japanese forces are inching closer and closer to Australia. “ Though these incidents created great ill-feeling at the time, the lasting damage done to Anglo-Australian relations was small.

The differing reactions of Australia and New Zealand to the collapse of the Singapore strategy stemmed in part from the more immediate danger which the Japanese line of advance appeared to present to the Australians . ”

**CONCLUSION** Was Britain’s action in Singapore an act of betrayal tantamount to the concept of Great Betrayal of Australia’s Empire? It looks like this is just the one and only time that the Australian government felt they were betrayed by Britain that resulted to the loss of their former empire.

If such was the case, then it can be argued that the Singapore collapse by Britain was indeed tantamount to the Great Betrayal of Australia’s Empire. But as what information from related literary sources reveal, historians and



politicians chose to attack Britain solely for the Singapore oversight and misdeed. It was rarely pointed as the turning point for the crumbling of the empire, or was the action synonymous to such similar vein of thought or idea.

But at some degree, the proposition of similarity in the aspect of betrayal can be accepted, and can also be argued against as well. The act of betrayal by one country towards another country especially in time of dire need, like in times of war, is something which maybe heavily discussed and analysed in many different history books. But this does not mean that it makes it easy to identify if there was indeed an act of betrayal and which country was guilty of such act of betrayal.

For one, the concept of betrayal is very subjective and is very difficult to objectify since it is difficult to define a socially accepted concept of betrayal, given the existing situation. The resources and options available and the considerations that decision makers have to make upon reaching the decision which was to be the root of the controversy on the act betrayal. Secondly, the aspect of ethnocentricity will often eclipse or seriously affect the objectivity of historians and book authors tackling about this particular World War II issue.

There will be Australian writers and historians who will insist that their country was indeed betrayed at Singapore in 1942 and that the action was tantamount to the Great Betrayal of Australia's Empire. While on the other hand, there will be British historians and writers who will say otherwise, that the British military action in Singapore in 1942 happened as it is after careful

consideration of important priorities that somehow superceded whatever it is that other people felt was left high and dry during this particular episode in the relationship of Australia and Britain.

There will also be comments, analysis, comments and discussions about Britain's actions in Singapore in 1942 and the possible interpretation of such action and how it is similar and leading to the Great Betrayal of Australia's Empire coming from historians and writers who are neither British nor Australian, attacking the issue from a neutral standpoint sans the impact and effect of the sense of national pride or indignity and social justification.

These were reflected earlier in the paper, as the paper, in the effort to discuss the different important sides of this issue, provided several different ideas about the issue lifted from related and credible literature. In hindsight, what can be deduced is that there was no shared opinion about how this particular event would be assessed and remembered.

The split in the opinion about the presence of the act of betrayal hinged largely on the fact that neither the British nor the Australians would yield with regards to this particular issue, each country standing firm about its position that it did everything that was necessary to preserve a much greater goal and to achieve a more important objective.