British participation in the SEATO was mainly a continuation of her interest in the South East Asian region, arising out of her historic relations with these countries and the demands of national interest. Even after British withdrawal from this part of the globe, "since 1948 and even before" Britain had been pursuing the idea of "a wider agreement for the defence of the Pacific and of South East Asia". (1) The advent of Communist China had only stepped up this trend of thinking. The Korean crisis confirmed this belief. It was amply reflected, when the British Foreign Secretary of State, Sir Anthony Eden, while addressing the Columbia University (New York) on 11 January 1952 said:

It should be understood that intervention by force by Chinese Communists in South East Asia - even if they were called volunteers - would create a situation no less menacing than that which the United Nations met and faced in Korea. In any such event the United Nations should be equally solid to resist it. (2)

SEATO was a product of joint Anglo-US endeavour. Although the initiative for its formation was taken by the U.S., the idea was nothing new for Britain. (3) One writer holds that the

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(1) The United Kingdom's Secretary of State for the Colonies Oliver Lyttleton's address to the Association of British Chambers of Commerce on 27 May 1954, International Survey (London), 2 (17 June 1954) 56.


SEATO idea itself was born in Britain. (4) However, the concept of an "organisation of a collective defence in South East Asia" was welcome to Great Britain since apart from the fact that it "would contribute to the security of Malaya and Hong Kong", it would also "remove the anomaly" of her "exclusion from the ANZUS pact". (5) But the British experience of American diplomacy during the Korean crisis, when the United States consulted the UK only after moving in, (6) had left her sore. This sense of irritation not only lingered on during the stage of negotiation for SEATO between the two countries, but even acquired the character of an "acute dispute". (7)

On 29 March 1954 the United States Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, set the ball rolling. He discounted the possibility of any success at the Geneva Conference in settling the Indo-China war satisfactorily. Pleading for a collective action by the Western Powers Dulles said:


(5) Anthony Eden, Memoirs: Full Circle (London, 1960) 93. Commenting on the SEATO Treaty The Times wrote: "Ever since the spring of 1951 this country has wished to be associated with the ANZUS Pact... In substance, that desire, which at times caused much heart burning and mis-understanding, is now being met", The Times (London), 8 September 1954.


Under the conditions of today, the imposition on South East Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally, by whatever means, would be a grave threat to the whole free community. The United States feels that that possibility should not be passively accepted but should be met by united action. (8)

Anglo-American Discord

However, according to Anthony Eden, the then Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, American approach to the Powers concerned in this region with this proposal, meant in affect, a solemn declaration before the Geneva Conference, "of their readiness to take concerted action, Under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter against continued interference by China in the Indo-China war...." (9) On 5 April 1954, President Eisenhower in a message to the British Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, "urged him to fall in line with the American plan" and suggested that "Dulles might fly to London within a few days to discuss the proposal". (10) America's attachment of less importance to the Geneva Conference could not be accepted by Great Britain without any qualms, since the latter "viewed Geneva as a real opportunity to negotiate freely with the Communists in the classical atmosphere of give and take". (11)

(9) Eden, n. 5, 92.
(10) Ibid., 93.
There was also the lurking suspicion in the British mind that they might be "hustled into injudicious military decisions". (12) British hesitancy to follow the American strategy stemmed also from her assessment of India's role in Asia vis-a-vis China, (13) which was at quite variance with that of the United States. It was not only in the context of the Geneva Conference that Britain held the view that India's opinion should be taken into consideration, but in any scheme of a defence pact for this region, British opinion was inclined to believe that much would depend on India's attitude. (14)

Britain made a distinction between the two aspects of the proposals put forward by Dulles, "the long term issue of collective security in the South East Asia and the more immediate question of 'united action' in Indo-China". Welcoming the first

(12) Eden, n. 5, 93.

(13) "Doubts as to the wisdom of the current trend in American policy were increased by the effects it was producing on Indian opinion. In measuring our chances of success at Geneva, it felt strongly that the outcome would depend to a considerable extent upon the position taken by India... I knew that China will be reluctant...to align India against her and would make considerable efforts to conciliate Asian opinion. India had an abiding interest in the outcome of the conference and could play a considerable part at Geneva behind the scenes... It was essential not to alienate India by our actions in a part of the world which concerned her closely", Ibid., 94.

(14) "British support of any proposal for a regional pact for South East Asia today must depend on the attitude to it of India and the other countries closely concerned. Britain is, therefore, most unlikely, to take the initiative to secure such a pact herself", A.S.B. Olver, Outline of British Policy in East and South East Asia 1945 - May 1950 (Mimeograph), (London, 1950) 6. See also New Statesman and Nation (London), 29 May 1954.
point, the British authorities pleaded for "careful thought and study particularly on the question of membership". (15) But they were opposed to "any hasty allied action in Indo-China" (16) and subsequently made it clear to the United States authorities. Britain had her own misgivings as to "whether the situation in Indo-China could be solved by purely military means". (17)

Anglo-US Talks in London

On the arrival of Dulles in London, talks began with the U.K. Government on 12 April and continued till the next day. After the discussions were over, Dulles and Eden issued a joint statement dealing with their policy in South East Asia, in which they agreed "to take part, with the other countries principally concerned, in an examination of the possibility of establishing a collective defence,...to assure the peace and security and freedom of South East Asia and the Western Pacific". They also believed that the prospect of allied unity would help the process of negotiation to culminate in an honourable settlement in Indo-China. (18) From the joint statement, it appears that the British Government had reversed from its previous stand of opposition to immediate talk on the idea of a pact, to that of an agreement to examine "the possibility of establishing a collective defence". Americans reciprocated by expressing a "hope

(15) Eden, n. 5, 96.
(17) Eden, n. 5, 96.
that the Geneva conference will lead to the restoration of peace in Indo-China" and by not insisting on immediate "united action". But according to Eden, he could "agree to no more than to engage in preliminary discussions on the possibility of forming a mutual security system in South East Asia". (19) Explaining the British stand in the House of Commons on 13 April 1954, he said: "...what I am committed to is an examination. The effective outcome of that examination, in its turn, will be greatly influenced by what happens in Geneva". (20) However, the left-wing of the Labour Party Opposition in parliament was very critical of the position taken by the Government. (21) During the discussions with Dulles, Eden always emphasised that if countries like India and other Asian countries choose to remain outside such defence arrangement, they should be given "every opportunity to participate and should be kept well informed". He advised Dulles not to turn them hostile. To this Dulles argued that any plan to include India in the pact would create a strong demand in the US to extend the security system eastwards to include Nationalist China and Japan. (22) Thus in spite of agreement on the "principle" of organising a

(19) Eden, n. 5, 97.


(21) Aneurin Bevan said: "The interpretation that may be placed...is that we shall assist in establishing a NATO in South East Asia for the purpose of imposing European colonial rule upon certain people in that area...." Ibid., col. 971.

(22) Eden, n. 5, 97-8.
defence pact for South East Asia, there seemed to be wide divergences of opinion with regard to its composition. Neither the linking up of the "effective outcome of the examination" with the Geneva conference by Britain nor the US concurrence. This became evident from the fact that Dulles had decided to convene "a meeting on the 20th April in Washington of the Ambassadors of the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, France, the Philippines, Thailand and the three Associated States" of Indo-China, (23) a week before the Geneva conference was supposed to meet. This decision outraged the British Government. Prime Minister Churchill declared in the House of Commons on 27 April 1954, that "Her Majesty's Government are not prepared to give any undertakings about United Kingdom military action in Indo-China in advance of the results of Geneva. We have not entered into any new political or military commitments". (24) Eden considered such a "mass meeting at this stage" insulting to India and Burma, who were not only not invited but not even consulted, and was also harmful in its effects on the Geneva conference. (25) In concluding his message to the UK Ambassador in Washington, Eden described the deteriorating state of relationship between the two countries quite poignantly in these following words:

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(23) Ibid.
(25) Eden, n. 5, 98.
Americans may think the time past when they need consider the feelings or difficulties of their allies. It is the conviction that this tendency becomes more pronounced every week that is creating mounting difficulties for any one in this country who wants to maintain close Anglo-American relations. (26)

However, at the instance of Eden the meeting was transformed into that of the Powers concerned with the Korean conflict. (27)

The UK Yields to American Pressure

On 4 May it was announced that the United States and Britain had agreed to begin military staff conversations on the defense of Asia in the near future. "These were not to be negotiations on an alliance per se but rather strictly technical discussions to consider various aspects of the developing situations in South East Asia". This move had grown out of the 2 May meeting of the ANZUS Council. (28) President Eisenhower in a Press Conference on 5 May, declared that "meanwhile plans are proceeding for the realisation of a South-East Asia security arrangement.... Most of the free nations of the area and others directly concerned have shown affirmative interest, and conversations are actively proceeding". (29) This statement of the President contradicted that of the British Minister of State, Selwyn Lloyd, which he made on 5 May 1954, in the House

(26) Ibid., 98-9.
(28) Lercbe, n. 7, 465. See also The Times, 29 May 1954.
(29) The Times, 6 May 1954.
of Commons in reply to a supplementary question. He said: "No discussions have been arranged at all.... No arrangements have been made for discussions". (30) But the External Affairs Minister of New Zealand, Clifton Webb, in a statement on 13 May in London confirmed that "the Western allies had agreed in principle to military staff talks envisaging a South East Asian defence pact". (31) Military talks on South East Asia at Chiefs of Staff level was to open on 1 June in Washington. (32) From these reports, it appears, that Great Britain was gradually giving ground to American diplomatic pressures. Senators of the Knowland school seemed to interpret the President's statement as meaning that even without Britain a "security arrangement" in Asia would be pushed forward, for "any other course would be to let London veto" American foreign policy. (33) But, in the US Democratic Party discussions on foreign policy, an awareness was reflected of the fact that America was isolating herself from her friends "just about as fast as the Administration can grind out new policy statements". (34) While, on the other hand, the British Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, in a statement to Parliament on 17 May declared: "...Until the outcome of the conference is known, final decisions cannot be

(33) The Times, 7 May 1954.
(34) Ibid.
taken regarding the establishment of a collective defence in
South East Asia and the Western Pacific.... Her Majesty's
Government have not embarked on any negotiation involving
commitments". However, he expressed the Government's "eagerness
to examine when the outcome of the Geneva conference is clearer,
the possibility of establishing a system of collective security
and defence in South East Asia and the Western Pacific within
the framework of the United Nations". But the "immediate task",
he felt, was, "to do everything we can to reach an agreed
settlement at Geneva for the restoration of peace in Indo-
China". (35) Churchill's accent on "an agreed settlement at
Geneva" and the desire to wait till the "outcome of the Geneva
conference is clearer" it seems, was not shared by the State
Department in Washington. This became obvious when the American
President Eisenhower indicated at the possibility of having "a
workable South East defence pact without Britain". Anglo-
American relationship could not have become any worse than that.
Authorities in London were bewildered by this suggestion. They
were "already extremely worried over the deterioration of the
co-operation and consultation between the British Government and
the Administration in Washington". (36) This concern was more
due to the bilateral negotiations between the United States and
France on the future of Indo-China. Fear was expressed that it

(36) See Drew Middleton's despatch from London, New York
Times, 20 May 1954.
might become a precedent, and Britain might be shut out of all future discussions including those between the United States and the members of the Commonwealth. (37) "This new show of force" in Anglo-American relations had created adverse reactions in allied circles. The New Zealand External Affairs Minister Clifton Webb politely refused to participate, when he said, that "he could not conceive of a satisfactory South East Asian alliance which did not include Britain". (38) What was, however, resented most in the Government circles in Great Britain, was the tendency in Washington to conduct diplomacy through "press conference", (39) a method, which could have been used only in case of the absence of bilateral contacts.

**Beginning of the End of the Episode**

"This marked the end of the episode; no more was heard of the idea of a South East Asia alliance without Britain". (40) The British were not prepared to "await the end of whatever period the Communists may wish to set for the Geneva conference before redeeming their pledge in the joint Anglo-American communique of 13 April". (41) Describing the British policy to

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(37) Ibid.
(39) See n. 36.
(40) Lerche, n. 7, 469.
Dulles, Foreign Secretary Eden pointed out that "if a settlement were achieved at the conference \[at Geneva\], the United Kingdom would be prepared to join in guaranteeing it. If the conference failed, we would be ready to examine the situation afresh, but we were not willing to take part in armed intervention now". (42) Short of military intervention, Britain seemed to be agreeable to give the idea of a military pact for South East Asia every consideration. She could not support the proposal for military action in Indo-China for three reasons. "First...that air action alone could not have been effective. Secondly, any such military intervention could have destroyed the chances of a settlement at Geneva. And thirdly, it might well have led to a general war in Asia". (43) Eden detailing his views on the whole question of South East Asian defence handed to Dulles at Geneva a memorandum, (44) which had largely

(42) Eden, n. 5, 108.


(44) The memorandum handed to Dulles by Eden at Geneva read as follows:

(1) Communism in Asia cannot be checked by military means alone. The problem is as much political as military; if any military combination is to be effective, it must enjoy the widest possible measure of Asian support.

(2) We should aim to get the support of Burma as well as Thailand, as the immediate neighbours of Indo-China. But Burma will not come in unless the project commands some sympathy from other Asian countries, particularly the Asian members of the Commonwealth.

(Contd. on next page)
guided the formulation of British policy on this problem. The Foreign Secretary did not believe that the danger of communism could be met only by military means. He wanted to secure the "benevolent neutrality" of the Asian nations, if their support to a regional pact could not be enlisted. The memorandum

(3) If we cannot win the active support of all the Asian countries of the area, it is important that we should, at the very least, secure their benevolent neutrality.

(4) To secure this widely-based Asian support, we must prepare the ground carefully for what is, in any case, intended to be a lasting defensive organisation, not a hastily contrived expedient to meet the present crisis.

(5) This does not mean that we desire to delay. On the contrary, we have already been actively using our influence, particularly with the Asian members of the Commonwealth, with encouraging results. Pakistan and Ceylon have already promised not to oppose a South-Eastern collective defence on the lines we envisage, and we have succeeded in diverting Nehru from his original intention of condemning it root and branch. We have thus averted the danger that the Asian Prime Ministers at Colombo would unite in condemning our project, and have grounds for hoping for the actual support of some of them.

(6) Nehru's latest statement shows that his ideas have moved closer to our own. With persistence we may even secure his endorsement of the kind of negotiated settlement in Indo-China that would be acceptable to us.

(7) While we do not believe that a French collapse in Indo-China could come about as rapidly as the Americans appear to envisage, this danger reinforces the need to lay the foundations of a wider and viable defence organisation for South East Asia.

(8) We propose therefore, that the United States and the United Kingdom should begin an immediate and secret joint examination of the political and military problems in creating a collective defence for South East Asia, namely:

(a) nature and purpose;
(b) membership;
(c) commitments.

Eden, n. 5, 109-10.
referred to the little bit of success, that was achieved in this direction. Finally, it pleaded for "an immediate and secret joint examination of the political and military problems".

A Locarno for Asia

While speaking in the House of Commons on 23 June Eden threw the ball into the American court, when he suggested (apart from a 'defensive alliance such as NATO is in Europe') "a reciprocal arrangement in which both sides take part, such as Locarno" for South East Asia. (45) Explaining in his Memoirs, the reasons, for the new idea of a Locarno Pact for South East Asia, Eden expressed the view that, "a guarantee to be implemented only by collective action would be unacceptable. No one would then act unless all acted. This was the Communist idea and it amounted to giving them a veto on action". Therefore, he believed, that "some other system of the Locarno type would be much better, so that if the settlement were broken, guarantors could act without waiting for unanimity". (46) Sir Winston Churchill described the "Locarno Idea" as "the plan of everybody going against the aggressor, whoever it may be, and helping the victim, large or small. That is no more than the United Nations was set up to do". Referring to a big difference between the old Locarno Treaty and the proposed new variety, he said: "Well, America was not in the Locarno Treaty in 1925, and

(46) Eden, n. 5, 132.
if any treaty is to be made now which is to...be of any real help to the bewildered world, I think that omission will have to be made good". (47)

Eden's proposal for a Locarno Pact for South East Asia received instant support from the Labour Party in the House of Commons. (48) It had also created favourable repercussions in India in the beginning. (49) But it was obvious that any scheme that envisaged the participation of Communist China in a defence


(48) Welcoming Eden's suggestion for a Locarno Pact for Asia, the leader of the Opposition, Clement Attlee said: "I was attracted by the idea...of a kind of Locarno in Asia, an all-in pact, not with two great blocs lined up against each other but a kind of security pact among all these countries of Asia so that they should avoid what happened so often in Europe - the tearing up of the whole continent by war". UK, H of C, Parl. Deb., n. 3, col. 444.

(49) Commenting on the idea of a Locarno Pact for Asia The Statesman, on 26 June 1954, wrote: "This [the Locarno Pact] is a better suggestion than mere bellicosity, and it also recognises that a settlement in Indo-China is unlikely to endure if serious trouble breaks out in a neighbouring country". Another influential daily Times of India (Delhi) wrote on 26 June 1954 in a leading article: "In respect of both substance and timing, Anthony Eden's proposal for a Locarno security system for South East Asia is sufficiently significant to have many incalculable consequences.... Locarno...is more in accord with the Asian point of view as expounded by Nehru". Later on, the Locarno Pact idea was opposed by Nehru, the Indian Prime Minister, in his letter to the Ceylonese Prime Minister, Sir John Kotelawala, in view of the fact that ceasefire was achieved in Indo-China as a result of the Geneva Conference. See The Hindu (Madras), 25 July 1954.
pact for Asia, would be rejected by the United States of America. Some American Congressmen felt, that the Eden plan would even "guarantee" communist conquests in Asia, and hence, they asked for a re-examination of the whole concept of mutual security. (50) President Eisenhower reacted very sharply against the proposal and declared that the USA would not be a party to any treaty which made anyone a slave. (51) As a critic has pointed out, "the whole idea of non-aggression pacts with communist nations was anathema to the United States.... Britain had forced an unpalatable alternative upon Washington. Dulles... would abandon the military pact rather than accept the non-aggression guarantee". (52)

The Foreign Secretary's important foreign policy statement

(50) "Twelve of the 30 members of the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee have advised President Eisenhower to reject the British plan for a non-aggression pact in Asia - or face complete review of foreign aid.

"...In a letter to the White House the Congressmen said that the British Foreign Secretary's call for a non-aggression treaty with Asian Communists 'shatter' the American policy of using aid to weld free nations together to stop communist aggression.

"They held that the plan proposed by Eden would not only accept Communist conquests but 'guarantee' them.

"The letter...said, '...Unless during or at the conclusion of the present Eisenhower-Churchill talks it is made unmistakably clear that the USA will not follow or support the policy proposed by Eden, the whole mutual security concept and programme must be re-examined'", New York Times, 27 June 1954.

(51) Ibid., 1 July 1954.

(52) Lerche, n. 7, 471.
in the House of Commons on 23 June was preceded by an earlier decision of the Cabinet to approve the proposed visit by Sir Winston Churchill and Eden to Washington on 25 June to join the week-long conference with President Eisenhower and other US authorities to safeguard South East Asia and the West Pacific against further communist advances. (53) Announcing the conference, Churchill made it clear that "decisions" regarding the defence of South East Asia can no longer be delayed. (54) Perhaps, it appears, the British acceptance of the US proposal to have a military pact in South East Asia, had been coupled with the suggestion for a Locarno pact for Asia with a view to secure a bargaining advantage at the negotiating table vis-a-vis the USA. Although, Eden has claimed that the Americans had begun to appreciate his idea of a Locarno Pact as a result of his talks with them, (55) subsequent events showed that the idea did not influence very much the formulators of the South East Asian Defence Treaty Organization.

The SEATO Negotiations at the Summit Level

Talks began in Washington on 26 June between Prime Minister Churchill and Eden, on the one hand, and President Eisenhower and Dulles, on the other in a situation when divergences

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(54) Ibid.
(55) Eden, n. 5, 133.
between the countries seemed to have widened further. The purpose of the visit, according to Eden, was to persuade the United States Government at least to give the French a chance of reaching a settlement at Geneva. (56) The joint statement issued on 28 June suggests, that during discussions, both the eventualities of "the conclusion of an agreement on Indo-China" and the "failure to reach such an agreement" had been taken into consideration and accordingly, the plans for collective defence had been chalked out. (57) Presumably, the fall of Dien Bien Phu loomed large over the deliberations between these statesmen of the two big Powers. Giving his interpretation of that part of the joint statement dealing with Indo-China and the defence of South East Asia, at a Press Conference held in Washington on 28 June, Churchill said:

The statement deals with preparing plans for dealing with these contingencies and that work will be pressed forward now immediately, so that we shall have our own ideas ready whether or not an agreement is reached on Indo-China. And, of course, if no agreement is reached, our ideas might well be different from what they would be if an agreement is reached. (58)

At the conclusion of their deliberations at Washington on 29 June, the British Prime Minister and the American President made a common declaration that,

we will continue our support of the United Nations and of existing international organization that have been established in the spirit of the Charter

(56) Ibid., 131.


(58) Ibid., 141-2.
for common protection and security. We urge the establishment and maintenance of such associations of appropriate nations as will best, in their respective regions, preserve the peace and independence of the peoples living there. When desired by the peoples of the affected countries, we are ready to render appropriate and feasible assistance to such associations. (59)

In the Washington conference of these two big Powers, each gave ground to the other to preserve the much desired unity in the Western camp. As a commentator observed, "both nations had made major concessions on the issue of timing. The United States gave up the idea of an immediate pact while Britain ceased objecting to immediate action at the working level". (60) A new British policy with respect to South East Asia, of starting the actual preparation for a South East Asian defence pact, as well as, of carrying on the Geneva negotiations in right earnest, that seemed to have emerged out of the Washington conference, was described by a critic as 'double-decker policy'. (61) However, the outcome of the high-level talks in Washington was received by people in Great Britain with a feeling of success. (62)


(60) Lerche, n. 7, 472. *The Statesman*, 29 June 1954 reports: "The USA has reluctantly bowed to Britain's refusal to start immediate negotiations for a South East Asian defence pact. In their talks with President Eisenhower...Sir Winston Churchill and Eden have stuck to their view that this is not the time for the negotiations."

"But in deference to the US desire for a speedy 'hands off Asia' pact Sir Winston and the Foreign Secretary have prepared the ground for formal negotiations by exchanging ideas about the eventual terms and membership of such an alliance".

(61) Dorset, n. 4.

Secret Study Group Discussions

Following the meeting of the two big Powers, the representatives of the ANZUS defence alliance (USA, Australia and New Zealand) met in Washington on 30 June and declared their agreement on the need for immediate action to bring about the early establishment of collective defence in South East Asia. (63) On 7 July, as arranged by the Churchill-Eisenhower talks, representatives of the United Kingdom and the United States opened their secret discussions in the American capital "to lay foundations for a defence alliance in South East Asia". (64) Robert Scott, Minister at the British Embassy in Washington and specialist in Asian affairs represented Britain. Walter Bedell Smith, Under Secretary of State, was the US representative. While this Anglo-American Study Group on South East Asian defence was carrying on its deliberations in Washington, Foreign Ministers of the USA, Britain and France held a crucial meeting in Paris on 13 July centering on the problem of establishing a collective defence organization in South East Asia. The ANZUS Powers and Britain were going ahead with plans for a South East Asia defence organization. It was also expected that the pact would be ready for signature in a fortnight. American leaders, working with a sense of urgency, felt that the negotiations that were being carried on in Washington might be too late should the

(64) *The Statesman* (New Delhi), 9 July 1954.
Geneva Conference fail to effect a cease-fire and if the Communists broadened their offensive and carried the conflict into Laos and Cambodia. (65) Hence they wanted Britain to declare, jointly with America, their determination to meet further Communist aggression. But Britain was still of the opinion that the proposed SEATO pact should be properly negotiated, if it were to be effective. British experts were wary of any hasty action which could seriously prejudice the delicate negotiations between France and the Communists. Owing to these differences, talks could not be carried on further "until the outcome of the Indo-China negotiations at Geneva".

On 17 July the Study Group submitted its report to the United States and the UK Governments. The report reveals various points of divergences between the two Powers. "Two major points of contention were fundamental. The first concerned the membership of the projected alliance. Great Britain insisted upon the widest possible representation of Asian States, whereas the United States was willing to contemplate a treaty whose only Asian adherents were Thailand and the Philippines. More fundamental was the disagreement over the nature of the pact. The United States was thinking in terms of a military alliance of the NATO-ANZUS type; the British were pressing a program which would deal more with 'the complex economic, social and cultural problems of the area'. "(66) As a result of the explanations

(65) Ibid., 18 July 1954.

put forward by the British expert in the Study Group, Eden claimed, the Americans agreed first to approach the Governments of the five Colombo Powers. (67) Accordingly on 31 July, Eden sent a very persuasive message to the Prime Ministers of the five Colombo Powers [Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia and Pakistan] seeking their support for the Anglo-American plans for collective security in this region. Failing that, he sought an understanding from them of Britain's attempt "to go ahead with such countries as are willing to join". (68)

The Statesman (New Delhi), 21 July 1954, in an exclusive communication from The Times, London, reports: "...There is no denying...that 'helpful' or not the two sides have been unable to come to any satisfactory agreement concerning what form the collective defence arrangement in South East Asia should take. "From the British viewpoint there were all kinds of complex difficulties relating to the social, cultural and economic problems affecting the area: it was by no means a hard and fast military plan to be drawn up in a hurry.

"The Americans' view,...was that speed was of the utmost urgency. They produced a draft plan which in some quarters was considered hasty and ill-conceived. It was essentially a military one...."

"To this the British delegation could not agree. It was thought that the idea of South East Asian NATO was hardly suitable for the area concerned. The preamble to the North Atlantic Treaty talks of 'common heritage and civilization of their peoples' and no one would claim that the proposed members of SEATO have such a common heritage".

(67) Eden, n. 5, 143.

(68) Following is an extract from the message: "Your participation would do much to determine the nature and policies of the projected organization. I have always hoped to see the Asian Powers play a leading role in the defence of South East Asia. The area is of such importance and its peace is as yet so insecure, that we feel it vital to safeguard its peaceful development and ensure its stability.

"Even if you feel that you must stand aside, therefore, I am sure you will understand why we for our part, shall feel

(Contd. on next page)
The Terminal Point

Successful efforts were made in the following weeks at the diplomatic level to bring out a joint plan by the USA and the United Kingdom for a multi-nation conference on South East Asian defence. The signing of an armistice in Indo-China at the Geneva Conference on 21 July made British participation in the negotiations for a South East Asian defence scheme easier. Right from the beginning of the conference on 26 April, the British Foreign Secretary had followed a consistent policy with regard to creating a stable South East Asia. The policy had three facets:

(a) to help stop the 'hot war' in Indo-China;

(b) to associate the Colombo Powers and other friendly nations with an Indo-Chinese armistice; and

(c) to persuade them to join Britain and the United States in an effective defense to halt further Communist aggression. (69)

The first two purposes had been realised, but the third had not been achieved. To gauge the South East Asian opinion and to ensure their participation, if possible, the British Foreign Under Secretary Douglas Dodds-Parker undertook a "goodwill mission" visit to Pakistan, India, Burma, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia and Ceylon. On 14 August, in the capitals of the

it right to go ahead with such countries as are willing to join with us. Though we should still do our best to take account of your views, our task would be far more difficult without your participation, at least in some form". Ibid., 144.

eight participating countries (the USA, the UK, Pakistan, New Zealand, Australia, Thailand, the Philippines and France) the official announcement was made of the conference to be held on 6 September in the Philippines "to examine the present situation in South East Asia and to establish foundations for an agreement to assure the peaceful development of the states concerned and mutual security in this part of the world". (70) The official announcement was the "terminal point" of the long controversy between the two chief architects of the South East Asia Collective Defence Treaty Organization. (71)

A Cautious Reception

The announcement to hold the SEATO conference received cautious reception in unofficial quarters in Great Britain. The Manchester Guardian, a leading Liberal daily, pointing out to the dangers of the SEATO conference stated: "The danger at Manila is that we may concentrate on making plans to deter China from frontal assaults upon its neighbours when really China is preparing tactics for which different remedies are needed". It emphasised the familiar British suspicion of a purely military approach to a political problem. Suggesting an Asia-wise strategy, it commented that "The purpose of the Manila Conference is to provide for the security of South East Asia. It is the limitation of the area which may cause us to go astray. For Asia must be seen as a whole, and strategy must be made as a

(70) See n. 63, 264.
(71) Lerche, n. 7, 475.
a whole". Warning the SEATO Powers against possible alienation of the Colombo Powers, it finally concluded that, "it is a good thing that the Manila Conference should be held, but it must not be a conference at which the Colombo Powers are ignored, viled and goaded into the arms of the other side". (72) While on the other hand, Griffiths, Colonial Secretary in Britain's last Labour Government called for a Commonwealth Prime Ministers conference to discuss South East Asian defence before any "irrevocable step" was taken. He feared that "if Pakistan became a member of such an organization and India and Ceylon refused, there would be a danger of a serious breach within the Commonwealth". (73)

In spite of the British agreement to participate at the Manila conference, Governmental enthusiasm for SEATO was subdued. This was illustrated in the non-participation of Eden in the Manila deliberations. (74) The British delegate to the conference, The Marquess of Reading, was at pains to clarify the British standpoint. Addressing the delegates to the eight-nation conference he said...

(72) Manchester Guardian, 30 August 1954.

(73) The Statesman, 30 August 1954. Later on the Labour Party spokesman Kenneth Younger said on 8 November 1954, in the Commons: "A Commonwealth meeting before this step was taken would have been more appropriate. It is...unfortunate that we should find ourselves taking part in a treaty which admittedly includes three other members of the Commonwealth, but to which yet other members are either lukewarm or...positively hostile". See UK, H of C, Parl. Deb., 532 (1954), 939.

(74) See Times of India (Delhi), 11 September 1954. Commenting on the SEATO Pact The Times wrote on 8 September 1954, "A minor mystery is that the South East Asian Treaty Organisation should be taking shape so swiftly, so smoothly, and with such a lack of public interest in it...."
SEATO conference, he said: "If there have been in any quarter suggestions that the UK has lost interest in this particular area of the globe or in the particular cause which brought us here or at best desires what I may call a Toothless Treaty, I can only assert positively that nothing could be farther from truth". Moreover, he considered that the provision of economic stability was of prime consideration. (75) The British emphasis still continued to be different from that of the United States. Britain did not want the treaty to be specifically against "Communist aggression" so much as against "aggression" of all sorts. (76)

The signature of the treaty produced varied reactions in Britain. The Times saw an anti-climax in the suggestion of the US Secretary Dulles that "in case of aggression, the treaty partners should respond 'in accordance with their constitutional processes,'" instead of "a treaty with automatic commitments". It recommended consistent and effective economic help to the treaty areas and serious military planning by Western and Commonwealth partners to make the treaty a stabilizing force. (77) While on the other hand, New Statesman and Nation, representing the Left-wing viewpoint believed that the purpose for which the Manila conference was called, was "to save Western


(77) The Times (London), 8 September 1954.
face after what was held in Washington to be a dangerous Communist victory in Indo-China". However, it took satisfaction in the fact "that broadly, the British view has been accepted particularly in the... provision that 'no action on the territory of any designated state should be taken except by the invitation or consent of that state". British commitment in the treaty was considered to be nothing more than its obligations to the United Nations to resist aggression. The only difference is that SEATO circumvents the Russian veto. (78) The Left-wing Labourites felt that the SEATO as a pact for security was "sheer humbug" and characterised the attempt to divide the world into two armed camps as "suicidal madness". (79) But the Labour Party decided that "the opposition should neither oppose the SEATO... nor table their proposed amendment or addendum to the Government motion asking the House to approve the Treaty". (80) The Leader of the Opposition, Attlee lent his mild support to SEATO when he observed, "there is no doubt about the dangerous tension and that tension comes about from fear on both sides. It is no good saying these fears are illusory. They are grave fears". (81) But the Left-wing Labour leader Aneurin Bevan regarded the Labour Party's tacit support to SEATO, "an Asian Pact from which Asia

(80) The Times, 5 November 1954.
(81) Ibid. Earlier John Baird, a socialist M.P. remarked that "if Attlee had opposed in the House of Commons the American proposal for a South East Asia military pact, he would have found a united party behind him", Daily Telegraph (London) 29 April 1954.
was to be excluded" as a "grave mistake". (82) Subsequently, Bevan resigned from the shadow cabinet of the Labour Party owing to differences with the official leadership over policies in South East Asia. (83)

Enunciating the Government's policy regarding South East Asian defence in the House of Commons on 25 October 1954, Foreign Secretary Eden declared that the treaty supplemented the work of pacification and stabilisation begun at Geneva. (84) Later, seeking approval of Parliament for the Government's dual policy of arranging "a reciprocal international guarantee that would cover the settlement itself" and "a South East Asian Collective Defence Treaty to balance the existing Sino-Soviet Treaty", he cautioned against starting any new adventure "on a miscalculation which could lead to war". (85) The Government spokesman described the treaty as "purely defensive" and in accord with the Charter of the United Nations and also with the Geneva agreements. (86) It was also stressed that to make the Manila treaty successful "assurance of military security and positive encouragement of economic help" must be given to the area concerned. (87) So far as the US reservation on "Communist"

(82) *The Hindu* (Madras), 1 October 1954.
(83) *Daily Telegraph* (London), 9 November 1954.
aggression was concerned, the Foreign Secretary made it clear that "whatever one may think about communism...treaties should deal with aggression and an aggressor, whatever his particular colour happens to be". (88) However, there was a firm recognition in Britain of the "need to associate the United States with the defence of areas to which the United Kingdom could no longer be sure of devoting adequate resources". (89)

While the Conservative Party gave a solid backing to the Government policy, the Labour Party presented a divided mind. Left-wingers were totally opposed to the SEATO. But the chief spokesman of the party on this issue in the Commons, Kenneth Younger feared, that the treaty, which he described as "unconvincing" and "in some respects anomalous", was a result of the American wish to retrieve what had undoubtedly been a diplomatic setback for them in the area. (90) Yet, the party supported the treaty for three main reasons.

First, even if some of the most important Asian countries have stayed out of the treaty, it is nevertheless true that some have joined in and it would be rather hard to deny participation in such a defensive treaty to any country which desired to join in. Secondly, if there is to be an agreement for possible action, for consultation and for military and other planning in an area where the United Kingdom is so deeply involved, it is better that we should be a party to it.... Thirdly, even if we do not think that a treaty of this kind, which is based upon an

(88) Ibid.

(89) See Kenneth Younger, a Labour M.P's statement at Melbourne, The Times, 3 August 1955.

(90) See n. 85, col. 938.
assumption that there may be aggression... is the most useful contribution to peace at this moment, nevertheless we do not want to give the impression... by a negative vote... that if there were aggression we should fail in our obligations. (91)

The Labour Party's self-contradictory stand helped to give the Government's South East Asian defence policy a 'bi-partisan' character. Perhaps it was too difficult a task for the party to free itself of its commitment to the idea of collective security. As Noel-Baker puts it rather bluntly, "it would be impossible to disapprove it without disavowing NATO too". (92)

Disinterestedness in SEATO

Although Britain has been regularly sending her representative to the SEATO Council meetings held from time to time, not much interest did SEATO evoke either in Parliament or even outside. Rather it continued to doubt its efficacy to meet the dangers in that area. (93) It had also been her anxiety to

(91) Ibid., col. 940.


(93) In reply to a question in the Commons, on SEATO Council's deliberations held on 5 February 1956 in Karachi, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said: "The Council's general exchange of views on matters affecting the Treaty area took place against the background of recent Soviet actions in Asia. These have undeniably been among the most significant developments affecting the Treaty area since the Council last met. I do not claim that SEATO in itself provides or can provide the complete answer to those moves". UK, H of C, Parl. Deb., 550 (1956) col. 798. R.H.S. Crossman of the Labour Party circulated to his partymen a secret Paper on International Situation. In the 'Regional Pacts' section it said: "Indeed, SEATO and the Baghdad Pact are 'really no more than paper edifices, hurriedly put together under the pressure of the cold war". Observer (London), 17 June 1956.
prevent SEATO getting involved in any intra-Commonwealth dispute. (94) Perhaps Whitehall's lack of interest in SEATO in the late fifties was due to the fact, that the bitter struggle between communist forces and democratic forces that was continuing for the last decade in South East Asia, had entered into a new phase with the cease-fire in Indo-China. This new phase was more political than military in character. "The Communists will probably try to gain their ends, to make further advances by economic and political methods.... Behind it will loom the dark shadow of communist divisions in China, ready for massive employment...." (95) Therefore, according to Malcolm MacDonald, "the most potent weapons against communism" would be "not big guns, sharp bullets and swift aircraft, but good wages, adequate supplies of food, social security and personal liberty". (96) Following the Suez crisis, Britain made certain adjustments in the deployment of defence forces in the SEATO area, although Lord Home, the then British Secretary for Commonwealth Relations

(94) Replying to another question on the desirability of discussing Kashmir dispute in the SEATO Council meeting held on 5 February 1956, in Karachi, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Selwyn Lloyd said: "Kashmir was not put upon the agenda...and...it was not appropriate to discuss the merits of the Kashmir dispute at the SEATO meeting", Ibid. The Labour Party also held a similar opinion. Referring to the question of SEATO's attitude to Kashmir the Labour M.P., Kenneth Younger, who was Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in the previous Labour Government, said: "We would not like to see defensive military alliances become involved in regional disputes of this kind". Dawn (Karachi), 26 March 1956.

(95) See UK Commissioner General in South East Asia, Malcolm MacDonald's speech to the National Press Club in Washington on 8 October 1954, International Survey, 2 (18 November 1954) 127.

(96) Ibid.
assured that this would not involve reduction of fighting strength. (97) These adjustments had to be made owing to Britain's inability to pay, what Sandys, the Minister of Defence, described as, "more than fair share of the general burden". (98) The financial strains on British economy, resulting from its defence commitments added to the existing doubts in the Labour Opposition about the military pacts in Asia. (99)

Meanwhile, Sandys created a furore by declaring at a Press Conference at Canberra "that nuclear weapons would be available for the defence of the SEATO area". (100) The wisdom of such a plan was questioned in the United Kingdom itself. (101) It was a well known fact, that Asian opinion was vehemently against any such proposal. However, some commentators felt, that Sandys statement was nothing more than "an official British kite to test public opinion generally in the SEATO region". (102) It was the result of strong public opinion against this proposal, that Sandys changed his earlier stand and said: "We shall continue to make our major contribution to the defence of the world in conventional forces. (103) Afterwards nothing more was heard of the proposal.

(97) Manchester Guardian, 14 March 1957.
(98) The Times, 17 April 1957.
(100) Ibid., 21 August 1957.
(102) See Albert E. Norman's despatch from Canberra, Christian Science Monitor (Boston), 29 August 1957.
(103) The Times, 16 September 1957.
Conclusion

Britain has all along been wary in her support to SEATO. Her role in the South East Asian collective security negotiations had been one of cautious restraint on US enthusiasm for quick action. This had, at times, even resulted in some strain on relations between the two countries. Humanity has benefited from the success that British foreign policy-makers achieved in cooperation with some other countries, in preventing Indo-China conflict from spreading into a world-wide conflagration. But the authorities in Britain had not been guided any less, for that matter, by the considerations of pure national interests in formulating their policy. British differences with the US State Department had been due also to the conflict of national interests.

It is essential...to remember that her economy is entirely dependent on trade and that her trading interests are world wide. Her first interest is therefore, to create and maintain conditions all over the world in which trade will flourish. Britain shares an interest in physical security with other nations, but it differs...both in kind and in intensity. (104)

In the treaty area both her trade and security interests were involved. Considerations of security with regard to Malaya and other territories, were fairly matched by the anxieties to preserve Hong Kong as the British trade centre in East and South East Asia. The Geneva conference provided the UK, apart from other advantages, with direct bi-lateral contacts with Communist

(104) Olver, n. 14, 1.
China. As a result of the conference, Anglo-Chinese relations considerably improved. (105) She did not want to forgo this advantage by completely siding with America against China.

Britain had a vital interest in maintaining the tranquility of the Indian Ocean, which had been for "hundred years or more before the second world war...a lake held at peace by the British Navy". (106) For, "the Indian Ocean theatre...furnished the United Kingdom with essential supplies of wool and livestock products, rubber and tin, jute and tea and manganese". Later on uranium was added to the list. (107) An enemy incursion into the Indian Ocean arena would have seriously affected British interests in Africa, economic riches in Malaya and the route to Australia and New Zealand. (108)

Moreover, British foreign policy was also subjected to the cross-pulls of "considerations of interests and policies of the Commonwealth countries most concerned in the area" and "the need to retain the friendship of France and Holland for reasons of European defence". (109) It was a hard task for British diplomacy to reconcile the two divergent interests. The former consideration might have also affected her prospects as a power


(106) Sir Charles Webster and others, United Kingdom Policy - Foreign, Strategic, Economic (London, 1950) 54.


(108) Webster, n. 106, 54.

(109) Olver, n. 14, 2.
factor in South East Asia. The Commonwealth countries and other former British-colonial territories in this region were more or less the British areas of influence. She could not have relished, ungrudgingly, the passing of this area to another Power's area of influence, however mighty and friendly the latter might have been. It was only in a loose Locarno type 'all-in' pact in this area, that Britain with the help of other Commonwealth countries, could have made her influence formidable for her allies. However, this was not to be, chiefly because of the nuclear superiority of the USA in relation to all other Powers in the mid-fifties. (110) This was again the reason why Britain could not escape the effect of "the diplomacy of the fait accompli". The British attitude during SEATO negotiations and after, seems to have been an unsuccessful bid to assert herself as a power factor, when in the realm of nuclear power relations, her role was gradually being reduced to marginal relevance. This must have been a hard realisation on her part, though not a new discovery.

(110) Describing the effect of the US nuclear superiority on the deliberations at Geneva Conference Eden wrote: "This was the first international meeting at which I was sharply conscious of the deterrent power of the hydrogen bomb. I was grateful for it.... Its effect was least on United States policy. This was natural, since America could not at that time be reached by bombs from Soviet Russia, and the Chinese had none anyway.

"...We were sharply conscious of what the spread of an Indo-China conflict must mean. Soviet Russia would have the grim choice of leaving her ally to her fate and half the Communist world to its destruction, or plunging herself into the abyss of nuclear conflict. We can argue as to which would have been her choice, had she been compelled to make it. It was certain that she would at least consider a compromise arrangement to avoid it. If we could bring about a situation where the Communists believed that there was a balance of advantage to them in arranging a girdle of neutral states, we might have the ingredients of a settlement". Eden, n. 5, 123-4.