

Anglo-US Relations in the Formation of SEATO

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Introduction

The relationship between the United States of America and the United Kingdom has long been considered unusually special, encompassing strong cultural, economic, and political ties. After being born out of victorious collaboration in two world wars in less than half a century, the Anglo-American alliance faced a number of challenges in the mid-1950s, culminating in the Suez crisis of 1956. A major undertaking of this period was the promulgation of a treaty for the collective defense of Southeast Asia in September 1954, the creation of which required close transatlantic co-operation and agreement. The establishment of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization, dubbed SEATO, proved to be a strenuous task for the United States and Great Britain, one where contrasting regional strategies were exhaustingly reconciled. This paper will examine the relations of the American and British governments from March to September 1954 in pursuit of a comprehensive security arrangement for Southeast Asia. The nature of their disagreements will be analyzed first and followed by a determination of how they were overcome.

Shaping the domestic and international political climates for these negotiations were a number of contextual events and trends. Most broadly, the SEATO negotiations took place in the post-Second World War period when a new system of alliances was formed, the United Kingdom, together with a host of other Western powers, formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in

1949, pitting the communist bloc and the capitalist democracies against each other in the Cold War. In that same year, Communists overthrew the Nationalist Kuomintang government of China and renewed the Sino-Soviet Alliance soon after. The major powers on each side of this ideological divide, in the years that followed, continued to conclude a series of alliance treaties. The United States reached agreements with Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Australia and New Zealand, while the Soviet Union negotiated treaties with an array of Eastern European countries, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), and communist Vietnam. The SEATO alliance was yet another of these plentiful alliances, though multilateral in scope.

The mid-1950s also saw the beginnings of the decades-long process by which the European powers granted independence to their colonies around the globe. By the conclusion of the Second World War the process of complete de-colonization was all but inevitable. By 1954, however, only a handful of states had been created in the preceding decade. In July 1946, the United States at last granted its sole major overseas possession, the Philippines, its independence after years of delay. French and British League of Nations mandates in the Middle East were granted independence between 1943 and 1948 while in South Asia, Britain reluctantly released India from its empire in 1947. The territory immediately split into Muslim Pakistan and Hindu-dominated, but secular, India. Finally in Southeast Asia,

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Indonesia secured its independence from the Netherlands in a four-year struggle ending in 1949, but Britain retained its possessions in Malaya, Singapore, Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei. Most significantly to the development of SEATO, France struggled to re-establish its authority in its Indochinese colonies of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos after the Japanese withdrawal; it was ultimately forced to relinquish these possessions by the Geneva Conference in 1954. This conflict occurred in the wider context of the de-colonization, of which the United States was a primary champion, and was a key impetus for the creation of SEATO.

In Indochina, France was unable to control the tumultuous internal forces demanding independence.

The opposition forces, led by Ho Chi Minh, promoted both nationalism and communism, and thus garnered the support of the Soviet Union and China. The United States aided its ally France through sizeable

military aid and moral support, hoping not to preserve France's colonial possessions, but to prevent the spread of communism in Southeast Asia through independent and democratic states. Like in the Korean War of 1950-1953, the two sides were divided by fundamental and unwavering ideological opposition, pitting each superpower against the other in proxy wars that epitomized the Cold War. An implied corollary of these conflicts was the staunch support of each side's allies in the stand-offs; however as the case of SEATO will show, this was not always the case.

A further characteristic of the 1950s international system that bared a great influence on the formulation of SEATO was

the climate of domestic politics in the United States. The prevailing national obsession was fear of communist encroachment abroad and infiltration at home. Firstly, the idea of communist victories likened to "falling dominoes" was a widely accepted justification for American involvement in Indochina. Even if Indochina was not considered intrinsically valuable, its collapse could threaten allies or possibly the United States itself. Secondly, the anticommunist hysteria whipped up by Senator Joseph McCarthy had a profound affect on the formulation of government policies. The paranoia he induced in American politics between 1948 and 1956 limited the ability of the government to moderate its policies

regarding combating communism; having one's patriotism questioned by Senator McCarthy was the death knell of any political career in those extraordinary times. These political trends weighed heavily in the domestic political climate in

which the United States sought to contain communism through SEATO.

The final principal element of the political environment in which the SEATO negotiations took place was an ongoing debate in Europe over the creation of a European Defense Community (EDC). The proposal rose out of the insistence by the United States to rearm Germany in order to bolster the defense of Western Europe against a newly nuclear Soviet Union. French Prime Minister René Pleven first proposed an EDC whereby Germany would be allowed to rearm, considered quite a dangerous prospect at the time, within the formalized structure of a European Army under the aegis of the NATO alliance.¹ Furthermore, it appeared to

“ **EVEN IF INDOCHINA WAS NOT CONSIDERED INTRINSICALLY VALUABLE, ITS COLLAPSE COULD THREATEN ALLIES OR POSSIBLY THE UNITED STATES ITSELF.** ”

¹ Anthony Eden, *Full Circle: The Memoirs of The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden* (London: Cassell, 1960), 31.

be a natural complement to the nascent economic integration of Western Europe, such as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) of 1951. Despite a successful treaty summit at Bonn in 1952 and the support of the American government, the EDC proposal failed to be ratified by the very government that proposed it. Concerned about being overburdened by both the war in Indochina and requisite military commitments of the EDC, as well as objecting to the provision that French troops would be placed under foreign command, the French National Assembly declined to ratify the treaty creating the EDC on 30 August 1954.² Both the British and American government found this deeply disappointing and frustrating, representing a major internal split among the Western alliance's three leading members. The ensuing "EDC crisis", which raised fears of American withdrawal from the Continent, was ended in late September by a British proposal for the creation of the Western European Union (WEU). The elements of French reluctance to adopt the EDC played significant roles in the evolution of the SEATO proposal.

Having set out a broad outline of the political climate and the major ongoing debates of the mid-1950s, a thorough examination of the formation of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization is now possible. In pursuit of exploring and analyzing the natures and causes of the rift in Anglo-American relations in the establishment of this body, this paper will first look at the failure of a proposal for "united action" to rescue the French forces from imminent defeat at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam. This short-lived option, offered by US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in March 1954, failed to garner the support of America's allies and even its own

government. The precipitous decline of the prospects for French victory and the establishment of the Geneva Conference in April 1954, charged with reaching a peaceful settlement to the conflict, largely mooted the idea in the end. In this first part of the analysis, there will be an examination of the various aspects of the proposal and the motives behind it. Following this will be a look at the responses this controversial idea elicited from within the US government and from its allies, and how each came to reject the possibility of any joint military intervention to assist the French forces in Indochina.

The second part of the paper will cover the creation of an alternative, long-term system for halting the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. Though an immediate military response to this regional crisis was impossible, the United States and Great Britain each sought a means to protect their vital interests there in line with their foreign policy strategies. One the hand, there will be a review of the various conferences and meetings of government representatives that eventually put forward a study on the treaty creating SEATO. On the other, there will be a thorough analysis of the key areas of debate that dominated the conferences and intergovernmental communications between April and September of 1954. These salient and contested aspects to the collective defense organization were the timing of announcing and creating the body, its membership, the obligations and commitments it required, and its very purpose. It was in these numerous debates that the deep rifts in American and British perspectives and priorities manifested themselves.

From these areas of contention will be

² Kevin Ruane, *The Rise and Fall of the European Defence Community: Anglo American Relations and the Crisis of European Defence, 1950-55* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 5.

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drawn a set of themes that characterize the nature and roots of Anglo-American discord in these negotiations. The most fundamental of these themes is the fundamentally divergent positions each had in relation to communist China. The US and British governments were dissimilar in their relations with the communist government as well as the possible threat it posed to regional and national security. A second source of transatlantic friction was the contentious relationship of each state's chief diplomats, the British Foreign Secretary Sir Anthony Eden and American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. Though both men worked together frequently, their divergent styles of diplomacy posed a real a hurdle for the achievement of compromise solutions to the issues at hand. A third theme to be examined will be disparate regional strategies of the two allies in Southeast Asia. America was firmly committed to stemming the spread of communism and seeing an end to colonialism; Great Britain, on the other hand, was concerned with the security of its regional territorial interests and maintaining a good working relationship with its fellow Commonwealth members.

Despite these issues, the United States and Great Britain were able to agree to a compromise text for a treaty. Honest compromise and the desire to remain close allies allowed them to overcome their major obstacles. Joined by Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand, they signed the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty in Manila on 8 September 1954. In a document annexed to the treaty, protection was extended to South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, but they were not themselves allowed to join the organization in accordance with the agreements reached at Geneva. SEATO,

despite its similar name, was much less ambitious and articulate than NATO, owing to the disparate goals and limited aims of its members.³ As stipulated by the treaty, the organization's consultative council met annually in Bangkok, Thailand until 1977 when it was officially disbanded following Pakistan's withdrawal in 1968, the defeat of the United States in its war in Vietnam in 1973, and France's suspension of its membership in 1975.

“United Action”

This chapter will track the rise and fall of Secretary Dulles' proposal for “united action”, from its inception in March 1954 to its becoming futile a month or so later. There will be an in-depth analysis of the various aspects of the proposal the rationale behind it. Finally there will be an analysis of how and why “united action” failed to garner the support of the British and French governments and fell from favor within the American government. “United action”, due to its intentional vagueness and the presumption of belligerence, rendered itself dead on arrival. This idea failed to bring the Western powers closer to an acceptable solution to the crisis at Dien Bien Phu and only caused substantial political damage to the Anglo-American relationship in the process. It was promoted for its expediency but drowned in uncertainty and anxiety.

The perilous situation of the French military struggling to preserve its tenuous control over Indochina prompted the United States to reconsider its existing policy of financial support in March of 1954. The status quo whereby France received unconditional military aid, though not through direct allied intervention, was deemed insufficient to prevent the collapse of its garrison at their fort in Dien Bien Phu. In

³ Coral Bell, *The Debatable Alliance: An Essay in Anglo-American Relations* (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1964), 37.

order to bolster French morale and inspire allied support for the French cause, Dulles declared in a speech to the Overseas Press Club of America on March 29, 1954 that “the imposition on Southeast Asia of the political system of communist Russia and its Chinese communist ally...should be met by united action.”⁴ He added that such a course “might involve serious risks” but urgency required immediate action to save the French forces from collapsing under the Viet Minh pressure.⁵

Dulles aimed to achieve a number of things in his provocative speech. Firstly, he sought to send a clear warning to the Viet Minh and communist Chinese that the United States was willing to intervene on behalf of the French. Dulles believed that China had thousands of troops ready to intervene on the side of the Viet Minh and a superior threat of force would be a useful deterrent.⁶ Secondly, he hoped the speech might muster domestic support for the possible deployment of troops in Indochina.⁷ The American people had yet to appreciate the value of Indochina to the national interest of the US to the extent their government did, though increasing talk of the “domino theory” and widespread anti-communist sentiment helped. Thirdly, Dulles hoped to convince the French to continue fighting instead of opting for a negotiated settlement.⁸ Such a course would no doubt involve ceding territory to communists, an

unacceptable outcome for the US government.⁹ Broadly speaking, Secretary Dulles, with the President’s blessing, was preparing the path for a war in Indochina leaving immediate surrender as the sole acceptable option for the Viet Minh.¹⁰

At the time, the prospect of “united action” appeared for Dulles to be the most straightforward method by which the United States government’s two goals for Southeast Asia could be met. The American government sought both the independence of France’s Associated States, as Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos were then called, and the purging of communism from the region.¹¹ Continuing to fight the war by proxy through France compromised the prospects of the former while letting the French seek a negotiated settlement made the latter impossible. The exact means to achieve these goals through “united action” were quite unclear, however. Dulles, it appears, purposely chose the vague term so as not to commit the United States to any specific course of action, but to nonetheless suggest that a coalition of willing states must make a collective effort, with the option of military intervention, to stem the spread of communism.¹² The press and others instead met the vagueness with immediate suspicion and confusion.¹³ It was believed, however correctly, to be a euphemism for military intervention, the viability of which had not been established.

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⁴ John Foster Dulles. “The Threat of a Red Asia,” *Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS], 1952-54, XII, Pt. 1, (YEAR), 400.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Lawrence S. Kaplan, “Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954-1955,” in Lawrence S. Kaplan, Denise Artaud and Mark R. Rubin, eds., *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954-1955*, (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1990), 87.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁸ Dulles to the United States Delegation (Geneva), *FRUS, 1952-54, XVI, 731.*

⁹ Melanie Billings-Yun, *Decision Against War: Eisenhower and Dien Bien Phu*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 61.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹¹ Director of the Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs to Dulles, 8 April 1954, *FRUS, 1952-54, XII, Pt. 1, 405.*

¹² Kaplan, 87.

¹³ Billings-Yun, 64.

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Members of Congress also entered the debate, adding their own interpretations of the term, but generally expressed confusion about the proposal. Senators and Congressmen demanded clarification from the White House regarding Dulles' intentions when he called for "united action;" the best the White House could offer was to define it as "such action as might become necessary...as circumstances indicate."¹⁴ This unhelpful response added to the claim that American intentions were being kept decidedly ambiguous, but it is unclear whether out of secrecy, uncertainty or self-doubt.

In the ensuing days and weeks, Dulles was charged with the task of gathering allied support for the "united action" proposal. British Foreign Secretary Eden writes in his memoirs that he "had no objection to strong American words, but [he] wanted to make sure that they meant what they appeared to say."¹⁵ The British government had been promised the United States had no intention of intervening in Indochina, and Eden feared that Dulles' speech might have implied that Britain, as America's most important ally, would intervene in Indochina too.¹⁶ Eden counseled Dulles to avoid taking any quick decisions in favor of military action writing, "Allied intervention, military or otherwise, or of any warning announcement before [the] Geneva [Conference]...would require extremely careful consideration."¹⁷ His reservations about premature action before or during the upcoming Geneva Conference became the hallmark of British policy with regards to "united action". Eden predicted that such a course would surely jeopardize the

possibility of reaching a suitable settlement at the Conference.

In putting the proposal before the French, Dulles made two key stipulations to the proffering of American military forces. The first required that France push for greater independence of the Associated States, retaining only a measure of control over their security and defense lest they fall immediately into communists' hands.¹⁸ The second required that the military operations in defense of Indochina must no longer be comprised solely of French troops and commanders. The United States government was consistently frustrated by their inability to influence their French counterparts in the execution of the war in Vietnam.¹⁹ Dulles hoped the lure of complete victory, not partition or withdrawal, would be enough to convince the French to overcome their reservations with the plan.²⁰

At the same time as this diplomatic effort was being undertaken, a debate within the Eisenhower administration was also taking place. The President and Secretary Dulles consulted with the Joint Chiefs of Staff regarding the status of the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu and the prospects for a military victory. They, like Congress, were quite concerned with the price at which such a victory might come. The proposed method of intervention, dubbed Operation Vulture, would rely substantially on air and naval power, and was thus expected to be supported by the US Air Force and Navy, finding the increased prestige and budgets quite favorable. The chiefs of the Army and Marine Corps, however, were less favorable toward the plan fearing a high price in human costs

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 65 (quoting the New York Times).

¹⁵ Eden, 91.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁸ Billings-Yun, 77.

¹⁹ Dulles to Embassy of the Philippines, 9 April 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-54, XII, Pt. 1, p. 409.

²⁰ Special Adviser to the United States Delegation (Geneva) to Dulles, *FRUS*, 1952-54, XVI, p. 653.

of any land component.²¹

When Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a key proponent of “united action”, called a special meeting regarding the issue on March 30, he failed to get the support of any of his colleagues.²² In retrospect, it is surprising that both Radford and Dulles had such great confidence in the ability of the American armed forces to achieve victory in such unfavorable circumstances in the wake of the less-than-decisive end to the Korean War just a year prior. In Radford’s meeting, each service chief rejected the plan for intervention in Indochina. Air Force Chief General Nathan Twining, though supporting the idea of eventual intervention, balked at the haste with which Radford desired action.²³ The other chiefs were more forceful in their disapproval, failing to be convinced that victory was achievable in Indochina and wary of the interference by French military commanders. The chiefs also cited the possible expansion of the conflict to a full-scale international war, further worsening the prospects of achieving the objective. The professional opinion of the American military, shunning both the precipitations and cost of intervention, did not bode well for securing Congressional approval for the employment of “united action”.

In the end, neither the French, nor the British, nor the American governments came down in favor of “united action” as the appropriate response to the Dien Bien Phu crisis. By April 1954 the French government of Prime Minister Joseph Laniel was perilously weak. The government was under

increasing domestic pressure to find a way out of the costly fighting in Indochina. It clung to the hope that America would offer military support, if necessary, but was ultimately unable to swallow the conditions the US government required. For Laniel, allowing the American military to command and fight its war, considered an internal struggle, would be far too embarrassing to accept.²⁴ They instead chose to cut their losses and put their stock in the upcoming Geneva Conference, previously agreed to at the Berlin Four-Power Conference in February of that year. A negotiated settlement had been a long-term goal of the French government, but it had hoped to enter the peace negotiations on the most favorable of military terms.²⁵

The British government, never very supportive of seeking a military solution to the crisis, also declined to support “united action” worrying about the wider implications and consequences of expanding the war.²⁶ The government felt Britain could not, and would not, be able to contribute any forces to allied initiative finding its troops already overextended around the empire and in NATO commitments. Moreover, the American government had even assured Prime Minister Churchill that intervention would not happen, and he expected his ally to keep to its word.²⁷ The British government favored a negotiated settlement for other reasons as well, not least of which was Eden’s preference for diplomatic engagement and compromise.²⁸ Additionally, Eden’s central role in the Geneva Conference as co-chair with the Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov, led him be optimistic, some say

²¹ Billings-Yun, 69.

²² *Ibid.*, 70.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Kaplan, 51.

²⁵ National Security Council, 20 May 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-54, XII, Pt. 1, p. 499.

²⁶ Eden, 105.

²⁷ Billings-Yun, 67.

²⁸ Undersecretary of State to Department of State, 5 May 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-54, XII, Pt. 1, pp. 450-451.

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overly, about the prospects for finding a widely acceptable settlement there.²⁹

The British also had a vested interest in avoiding an antagonistic relationship with communist China. The precarious location of Hong Kong made the colony reliant on access to food and raw materials from the Mainland essential to its survival, which could easily be jeopardized by an overly bold policy choice like “united action”.³⁰ Furthermore, the large Chinese populations of its colonies of Malaya and Singapore, if seriously agitated, could threaten the internal stability of these areas.³¹ Intervention by the United States, with or without allied support, Britain feared might lead communist China to invoke the Sino-Soviet alliance precipitating a third world war in a century.³² For Eden, Dulles’ proposition was far too risky and unlikely to produce any valuable results. Britain’s concern of its regional interests likely agitated American policy-makers for being short-sighted, self-interested, and failing to appreciate the importance of saving Indochina to the survival of the free world.

Arguably the most important government’s position regarding “united action” was that of the United States, for even if France, Britain, and others supported the initiative, it would have been meaningless. As it turned out, the Europeans were not willing to adhere to the US plan, and the US was not keen on the idea of going in alone.³³ A unilateral intervention by the United States, while marginally different militarily from a multilateral one, would have smacked of neo-

colonialist aggression. Despite requesting exploratory findings on various forms of intervention, President Eisenhower decided against the proposal in favor of giving the Geneva Conference a chance. Full-scale armed intervention did not fit with Eisenhower’s leaner “New Look” policy, which favored more efficient use of military force in protecting America’s national security.³⁴ He even managed to avoid making any explicit decision by sending the matter to Congress while letting situation at Dien Bien Phu deteriorate unabated.³⁵

Privately, President Eisenhower was not as fundamentally opposed to the conclusion of peaceful negotiations at Geneva as Dulles, viewing “united action” as a bit of a bluff rather than actual intent.³⁶

“**THE ADMINISTRATION DULY CHANGED ITS FOCUS FROM THE UNSALVAGEABLE FORT...**”

Any agreement would certainly have guaranteed the independence of the three Associated States, fulfilling at least one major

goal there. Furthermore, the alternative of continuing to operate solely through the French military was unacceptable and already proving unproductive. As the French hold of Dien Bien Phu worsened, a military victory seemed an ever more distant possibility. The administration duly changed its focus from the unsalvageable fort to the long-term security of the non-communist peoples of Southeast Asia.

“United action” as a viable foreign policy option never got its legs. The furor and confusion surrounding its announcement mired the initiative in controversy and

²⁹ Ruane, 199.

³⁰ Eden to Minister of Defence, 1 Oct. 1952, *Prime Minister’s Office: Minutes and Papers, 1951-64 (PREM 11)*, PREM 11/648.

³¹ T.N. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 89.

³² Eden, 94.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Saki Dockrill, *Britain’s Retreat from East of Suez: The Choice Between Europe and the World?* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 95.

³⁵ Billings-Yun, 82-83.

³⁶ Kaplan, 96.

suspicion. Its principle elements, first the ceding of French control of the military reins to the Americans and second the determination that a decisive victory was possible, were never realized. For the British, its mere suggestion made them worry the United States would not follow up on its previous commitments. Eden was alarmed by Dulles' choice of the word united implying he spoke for America's allies when he had not been briefed on the idea. The haphazard manner in which Dulles handled the situation placed his relations with his allies on a poor footing for the commencement of the Geneva Conference. His numerous reincarnations of an intervention plan, even as the Geneva Conference got underway, continued until the complete defeat at Dien Bien Phu on 7 May 1954. He would immediately thereafter need their support in the negotiations for a long-term security organization for Southeast Asia.

Formation of a collective defense organization

On 26 April 1954, representatives of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, the Soviet Union, communist China, and from each of the Associated States began negotiations in Geneva to reach a settlement on the war in Indochina, concurrent with a parallel conference on the question of Korea. This conference was in fulfillment of a compromise plan agreed to by the major powers at Berlin in February of 1954. The United States was worried that agreeing to negotiate with China at Geneva would involve implicit recognition of the communist government; the United States, until January 1979, only recognized diplomatically the Nationalist government in Formosa as the government of China. This tension with Chinese inclusion, and the Great Power status it implied, was continually

irritating to the American government and affected its conduct at Geneva. The problem was skirted by carefully wording the agreement in Berlin.³⁷

Also meeting around this time were the Prime Ministers of five newly independent Asian countries, namely India, Pakistan (comprising both current-day Pakistan and Bangladesh), Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Burma (now Myanmar), and Indonesia, in Colombo from 28 April to 2 May 1954. Each was steadfastly neutral in the Cold War, and all save Indonesia were former British colonies though Burma was not a member of the Commonwealth. The views held by the Colombo Powers, whose meeting is viewed as the genesis of the non-aligned movement, were of the utmost importance to and a guiding principle for the British government regarding SEATO.

Though the negotiations for the creation of SEATO took place separately from the Geneva Conference, the debate there had a great impact on the relations among the allies and with their communist counterparts. Thus, by extension, the progress of the conference and the ongoing EDC debate were important factors in shaping Anglo-American during the SEATO negotiations. For example, the British disapproval of many US proposals at Geneva was often the result of being deemed unlikely to be accepted by the Soviets; this disapproval was not, as the Americans may have believed, out sympathy for the communists, but instead a more realistic approach to achieving a compromise. The British were far more committed to compromise whereas the Americans concerned themselves with appearances.

The beginnings of drawing up a proposal for the collective defense of Southeast Asia began before "united action" had been completely discarded as a policy option.

³⁷ Eden, 89.

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Eisenhower had originally envisaged an organization with this express purpose before the announcement of the interventionist alternative.³⁸ On the other hand, Sir Anthony Eden points to a discussion with French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman in June 1952 in which he “proposed the creation of a permanent military organization [sic] to...plan the measures which could be taken for the defense not only of Indo-China but of the whole region.”³⁹ Nevertheless, at a US National Security Council meeting on March 25, 1954, just four days before Dulles’ speech at the Overseas Press Club, Eisenhower suggested a means by which the long-term security of Vietnam could be guaranteed. He suggested that Vietnam could appeal to its neighbors and Western powers to form a set of defensive alliances. This would have the added benefits of removing the “taint of French colonialism” and allowing the United States to share the burden of protection with its allies.⁴⁰ As the utility of “united action” faded, the proposal returned to the fore and began to take shape.

The first detailed initiative resembling a multilateral security organization was put forth just weeks prior to the commencement of the Geneva Conference. The US government proposed the formation of an *ad hoc* coalition of countries to act together, in accordance with the Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, to end Chinese interference in the war in Indochina.⁴¹ Dulles envisaged the participation of the United States, Great Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, the Philippines, and the three Associated States in this group. Interestingly however, Article 51 of the Charter upholds the “right of individual or

collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations.”⁴² Seeing as Cambodia and Laos did not join the United Nations until 1955 and Vietnam not until 1977, the United States government must have been willing to suppress its anti-colonialist principles in considering Chinese interference as an armed attack against France by way of her overseas possessions.

The British government expressed its strong opposition to this proposal. While recognizing the benefits that such a security agreement would bestow on its regional possessions, such an action was deemed “unlikely to help [Great Britain and her allies] militarily, and would harm us politically.”⁴³ A premature threat of employing armed force in Indochina, Eden feared, would jeopardize the Geneva Conference before it even began and could easily provoke China into war, not deter her from it. By the time Dulles and Eden discussed the matter in person on 11 April, Eden was relieved to hear that the Americans had softened their stance and backed away from a pre-Geneva announcement threatening to use force. It was then too that Dulles confided in Eden the reasoning of the American government regarding Indochina, and again pitched “united action” to him. The US government judged France incapable of handling the situation in Indochina and immediate allied action must be sent to reinforce French forces. In rebuffing “united action” on the grounds that immediate action was unnecessary in light of the Geneva Conference, Eden nonetheless gave his support to studying a collective defense organization. It must be emphasized Eden only wish to endorse “the most careful

³⁸ Ibid., 84.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Billings-Yun, 53-55.

⁴¹ Eden, 92.

⁴² *Charter of the United Nations* (1945), Chapter VII, Article 51.

⁴³ Eden, 93.

thought and study” of such an organization, finding no need to hurry things.⁴⁴

The first formal meeting of interested parties to discuss the creation of SEATO took place on 20 April 1954, just less than a week before Geneva was set to open. Dulles convened the meeting, comprising the ambassadors of the group of countries from his aforementioned *ad hoc* coalition, to gauge their willingness to join such an organization and to discuss the methods its creation.⁴⁵ Again, Eden wrote in his memoirs of his discomfort with the haste with which Dulles pushed this initiative. Dulles had not consulted him before the meeting was announced, and Eden was dismayed that it was too late to be cancelled. Moreover, he found it troubling that drawing up a select list of countries this early would make others, particularly India, feel excluded from expressing her views. Eden would have preferred informal and secret

“ AGAIN, EDEN WROTE IN HIS MEMOIRS OF HIS DISCOMFORT WITH THE HASTE WITH WHICH DULLES PUSHED THIS INITIATIVE. ”

preparatory discussions among the interested parties regarding possible members before any official public announcement. In an attempt to soften the negative impacts, Eden was able to convince Dulles to recast the meeting as “a general briefing conference on the coming negotiations at Geneva.”⁴⁶ For Eden, the damage had already been done, the membership all but crystallized.⁴⁷

In these early weeks of the Geneva Conference when both Eden and Dulles were in attendance, Dulles repeatedly approached his counterpart about the need to help the French cause. Dulles lamented the poor state

of French morale and sought Eden’s support in making a gesture of some kind to boost their spirits. Eden rejected making any threat of force or even giving “moral support” to such an American move.⁴⁸ While he sympathized with Dulles’ pleas, he could not support any action that would hinder their negotiating position. Dulles switched his efforts to a swift formation of SEATO as the most feasible means of aiding the French, but again Eden urged patience and supported only secret negotiations on the matter.⁴⁹

During a visit to Washington in late June 1954 by Churchill and Eden to their American counterparts, the structure of the planned organization took shape. In meetings he had with Dulles, Eden suggested that SEATO be a collective and reciprocal defensive arrangement, whereby members guaranteed the security of others in the event of attack. Its membership would be open to those willing to commit to

take military action in the face of aggression. Eden said the organization would be like the Locarno Pact of 1925, in which a coalition of European countries, including Great Britain, France, and Germany, guaranteed each other’s territorial integrity in the wake of the First World War. Unfortunately for Eden, however, the use of Locarno evoked the memories of appeasement among the Americans; he did leave Washington confident his intended meaning was understood and even supported, however.⁵⁰

Also convening in late June was the study group proposed two months earlier by the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 96.

⁴⁵ Eden to Cabinet, 14 June 1954, PREM 11/649.

⁴⁶ Eden, 98-99.

⁴⁷ Eden to Cabinet, 14 June 1954, PREM 11/649.

⁴⁸ Eden, 135.

⁴⁹ Eden to Cabinet, 14 June 1954, PREM 11/649.

⁵⁰ Eden, 132-133.

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United States. They again met in Washington to prepare a report on the key aspects regarding the structure and competencies of the collective defense initiative. A month later on 17 July, the working group submitted its findings to their governments for review and further negotiation. This was also the point at which the agreement that would bring a successful end to the Geneva Conference was in sight; it did finally come on 21 July 1954. The United States, Great Britain and their allies continued negotiations on the SEATO proposal through the summer. The British focused their energy on securing the support of the Colombo Powers, and if not, preventing their outright disapproval. The Americans, on other hand, were most intent on selling the organization as an effective measure of containment. For their efforts, only Pakistan, beyond those at the Washington meetings, agreed to join SEATO; the other Colombo Powers found joining the organization a violation of their professed neutrality.

Throughout these negotiations between the US and Britain, the primary authors of the SEATO treaty, there were a number of key, interrelated debates that dominated their correspondence. Rather than give a detailed chronological account of these negotiations, a more concise and coherent understanding can be achieved through a thematic analysis of each. The four prominent areas of discussion were the timing, composition, commitments, and purpose of the organization, each of which has been touched upon already. Though the first two dominated the volume of the correspondence between London and Washington, the latter two dealt with more fundamental aspects of the alliance, affecting what type of grouping SEATO would become.

Even before the failure of “united action”, the United States government began pushing for the rapid formation of a coalition as a bulwark against communist aggression in Southeast Asia. The immediacy for its creation was only enhanced by the rejection of “united action” and the desire to demonstrate Western unity and support for the French. Meanwhile, the British position regarding the timing of creating SEATO was always one of caution, patience, and hesitation. Essentially, the disagreement between these transatlantic allies centered on the appropriateness or necessity of establishing SEATO while negotiations for a peace settlement were proceeding, and to a lesser extent on garnering the most widespread support.

The driving force behind American position on this issue was largely diplomatic vanity. First, the US had no intention of subscribing to whatever agreement the parties at the Geneva Conference reached. Doing so would in effect have meant that the US government consented to the ceding of territory to communists.⁵¹ Such an act was unacceptable in the domestic political climate of the 1950s. Thus, if an immediate announcement were to negatively affect the outcome of Geneva, so be it. In fact, Eden reported to the Cabinet in July 1954 that the US delegation at Geneva “attempted to interfere with the successful completion of the Conference’s work.”⁵²

Second, Dulles was consumed by the desire to show Western solidarity in the face of the communist threat. A Five-Power Staff Conference was convened in early June 1954 by the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, and New Zealand in this vein; its purpose was not only to discuss SEATO, but also to show a united front,

⁵¹ Anita Inder Singh, *The Limits of British Influence: South Asia and the Anglo American Relationship, 1947-56* (London: Pinter, 1993), 177.

⁵² Eden to Cabinet, 24 July, 1954, PREM 11/650.

however fictitious it was.⁵³ The creation of a multilateral anti-communist alliance would be an excellent demonstration of cohesiveness and determination. Finally, Dulles repeatedly prodded Eden about making some symbolic gesture to help the French in their political and military predicament. The ongoing debate in France regarding the ratification of the EDC raised serious doubts about their abilities to participate in so many arenas simultaneously. As Dulles desired both French ratification and a continuation of the effort in Indochina, he figured a gesture by France's allies could boost morale and guarantee the aforementioned goals. The immediate formation of SEATO would, Dulles surmised, lessen the military burdens of France in the region.⁵⁴

The British government, by contrast, did not feel bound to act by this same sense of urgency. Instead, the guiding principle of their policy on the timing of SEATO was to wait until the Geneva Conference had run its course, after which the situation could then be reassessed. Any premature action was sure to hamper the negotiations, in which Eden was investing a great deal of time and diplomatic effort. Another negative impact of a hastily contrived organization would be the inability to expand membership beyond the core group the US originally envisioned. Britain knew it would take considerable time and consultation to get India and the other Colombo Powers to agree to the organization.⁵⁵ Their exclusion from all of the preliminary conferences effectively guaranteed their exclusion. For the Americans, this tactic of deferring to Asian opinion was merely a ploy by the British to

delay action on the initiative.⁵⁶ Though the Americans "let the cat out of the bag", so to speak, in their April announcement of a Washington conference on SEATO, the British successfully delayed the actual formation to approximately six weeks after the conclusion of peace settlements in Geneva.

The debate regarding the composition of the collective defense system, in addition to being closely related to its timing, was in itself quite complex. The inclusion of certain countries, by some logic, would imply the necessary inclusion of others or be detrimental to existing ones. The ultimate determinant in the selection of which countries would, or could, be included in the arrangement was the value their participation offered to the strategy of the US or Britain. Each found particular members to be especially advantageous to their regional and global foreign policy strategies.

The core and undisputed members of the SEATO alliance were the three Western and democratic stalwarts of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. The form and purpose of the alliance was almost wholly their design, which at the very least kept the negotiations much simpler and straightforward. This arrangement, however, posed a serious problem for the way in which the rest of the world would perceive the organization; a Western-dominated alliance appeared to many critics to be an act of neo-colonialism. The American and British governments took seriously this image problem and sought, though with varying degrees of commitment, to secure the membership of as many Asian countries as possible. As Eden noted, it is necessary

⁵³ UK Geneva Delegation to Foreign Office, 22 May 1954, PREM 11/648415.

⁵⁴ Kaplan, 126.

⁵⁵ Inder Singh, 178.

⁵⁶ Kaplan, 129.

“because the United States cannot subscribe to a white man’s club in Asia.”⁵⁷

British participation in the security pact was both significant and necessary due to its colonial holdings in the region. Great Britain had troops stationed in their colonies of Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak, Brunei, and Singapore; there were also large naval bases in Singapore and nearby Hong Kong.⁵⁸ The creation of SEATO would contribute significantly to the defense and security of these possessions as well as provide the alliance with potential bases.⁵⁹ Like France, Britain was feeling the pressures of being extended militarily around the globe and such a defensive system would allow for crucial burden sharing. Furthermore, Britain intended that, upon independence, these territories would themselves join the alliance in their own right; none of them, however, ultimately chose to do so.⁶⁰

Adding to the unfortunate dominance of Western countries were the memberships of Australia and New Zealand, former British colonies and newly formalized allies of the United States. Their membership was ostensibly for the sake of providing a southern anti-communist bulwark for the region and in deference to the intimate concern they had with the spread of communism in their neighborhood. Britain found their membership especially advantageous which “would remove the anomaly of [British] exclusion from the A.N.Z.U.S. Pact,”⁶¹ the alliance formed by the United States with the Australia and New Zealand in September 1951. This treaty marked an important shift for these countries,

allying themselves with the US over their traditional partner in Britain. In a letter to the Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) in July 1954, New Zealand’s Foreign Secretary justified this move. He wrote, “neither alone nor together are the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand in any position to meet the threat that might develop in South East Asia. We need the help of the Americans.”⁶² For the British government, the creation of SEATO was effectively an expansion of the ANZUS alliance in which it now had both a voice and an ear. The United States was pleased to have such eager and reliable partners.

The two remaining members that the United States had originally intended to participate in SEATO were Thailand and the Philippines, who were crucially themselves actually in Southeast Asia. Thailand, the only country in the region never to have been colonized by a Western power, had a reliably anti-communist and Western outlook. After the Second World War, the US provided assistance to the recently occupied country and supported its independence. Bordering Cambodia and Laos, Thailand was arguably the most strategically important member of SEATO, being the front line against the flow of communism. Similarly, the Philippines, a former a colony the United States to which independence was granted in 1946, is located just several hundred miles from Vietnam across the South China Sea. Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Field, vestiges of its colonial past, were key US military installations in the region and would be integral to the defense of Southeast Asia.⁶³

⁵⁷ Eden to Cabinet, 6 Oct. 1953, PREM 11/404.

⁵⁸ George Modelski, ed., *SEATO: Six Studies* (Melbourne: Cheshire for the Australian National University, 1962) 4.

⁵⁹ Eden, 93.

⁶⁰ T.B. Miller, *International Security in the Southeast Asian and Southwest Pacific Region* (New York: University of Queensland Press, 1983), 267.

⁶¹ Eden, 93.

⁶² UK High Commission in New Zealand to CRO, 21 July 1954, PREM 11/650239.

⁶³ Peter Lyon, *War and Peace in South-East Asia*, (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs - Oxford University Press, 1969), 148.

The Philippines, like Thailand, would benefit from the economic and military aid from the US that accompanied SEATO membership.⁶⁴

The most controversial and troubling potential memberships were those of the Colombo Powers, India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Indonesia, and Burma. Though the US found their participation generally advantageous, the British government's preoccupation with their opinion, and the delay this required, was a serious thorn of contention between these allies. The eventual inclusion of Pakistan appears to have proved more detrimental to the alliance than its absence would have been. Throughout the negotiations regarding the formation of SEATO there was a very large volume of correspondence between the British Foreign Secretary and his High Commissioners in New Delhi, Karachi, and Colombo. Eden was committed to keeping these Commonwealth governments abreast of the proceedings at Geneva and the development of the SEATO proposal. He was reaffirmed in his preference for patience and thoroughness from these governments, and often acted as a spokesman for their views to the United States.⁶⁵

This relationship, whereby Eden gave so much deference to the opinion of the Colombo Powers, seems somewhat odd in light of the actual correspondence. Indeed while Burma was considered on the front line of the defense in that it bordered Vietnam as well as China and thus was a strategically desirable member, the British government itself admitted the limited military

contribution India, Pakistan or Ceylon could make to the SEATO alliance.⁶⁶ It is also true that while they were symbolically important as both Asian and neutral powers, their participation always seemed an unlikelihood in the face of America's unabashed anti-communism. Ceylon's government for example, cited "the spirit in which [SEATO] has been...conceived" when objecting to participation in the agreement.⁶⁷ Another curiosity is that in spite of the negative comments the British Foreign Office tended to receive from these countries on the SEATO proposal, Eden more often categorized their responses as "on the whole encouraging" or something similar.⁶⁸ In fact, the more significant symbolic gesture was Britain's apparent concern with the priorities of its Commonwealth partners; perhaps this was a means to demonstrate this relationship could be friendly and productive despite their colonialist past. The alternative of acting in merely Britain's own self-interest risked alienating these countries, countries that remained in many other ways of great importance to Great Britain.⁶⁹

To further complicate this matter of Colombo Group membership was the lone accession of Pakistan to the organization. First, its hostile relationship with India and its explicit desire to acquire Western arms seems to have precluded any eventual membership by India.⁷⁰ Second, many member governments expressed concern about Pakistan citing its SEATO membership in calling for help in the event of an armed attack

“ THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL AND TROUBLING POTENTIAL MEMBERSHIPS WERE THOSE OF THE COLOMBO POWERS... ”

⁶⁴ Kaplan, 157.

⁶⁵ UK High Commissioner in Ceylon to CRO (undated), PREM 11/650266.

⁶⁶ UK Geneva Delegation to Foreign Office, 22 May 1954, PREM 11/648415.

⁶⁷ UK High Commissioner in Ceylon to CRO, et al., 10 September 1954, FO 371/111888.

⁶⁸ Eden to Cabinet, 14 June, 1954, PREM 11/649.

⁶⁹ Kaplan (1990), 129.

⁷⁰ Inder Singh (1993), 179.

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by India.⁷¹ For all of Britain's diplomatic efforts, the results were much less than satisfactory for all concerned. In any event, Pakistan left the SEATO treaty in 1968.

The expansion of membership to the South Asian countries also posed a problem for the United States, which figured there would be pressure to similarly extend the treaty area east and north to Formosa, or even Japan and South Korea.⁷² This widening of the scope of membership and the area of concern, surmised the US, would unnecessarily complicate and overburden the alliance. Eden correctly noted that these countries were not comparable; Formosa's attitudes toward China and communism, for example, were of a vastly different scope and intensity than India's.⁷³ Nonetheless, this problem posed the question of determining where to limit the area in which countries would be committed to act in the event of communist aggression. Article VIII of the SEATO Treaty, in rectifying this problem says, "the 'treaty area' is the general area of Southeast Asia, including the entire territories of the Asian Parties, and the general area of the Southwest Pacific not including the Pacific area north of 21 degrees 30 minutes north latitude."⁷⁴ The prescribed line of latitude effectively excluded all of Formosa, as well as Hong Kong, from the treaty area and kept the focus on Southeast Asia alone. This debate over membership had little to do with the practicalities of defending Southeast Asia and more to do with politicking.

Those aspects of this Southeast Asian collective defense system, which were arguably the most important, namely its

commitments, functions, and purpose, were in fact the least disputed. Due to the relatively little correspondence or significant mention in Eden's memoirs one must assume that there was a quick consensus reached on these more substantive matters. The treaty calls for maintenance of peace and security in the region through the employment of several means. Beyond the mere military solidarity and commitment to the common defense, the treaty also stipulates that the parties promote democracy through the rule of law and individual liberty in addition to economic development through mutual assistance.⁷⁵ To the cynic this merely reads that the wealthy Western powers would be buying the cooperation of and access to the countries in the region; Thailand and the Philippines were legitimately and rightly concerned with their security and the threat of communism, however.

The only question of concern regarding the commitments that members were obliged to meet was when and the extent to which military forces would be employed. For all members including even the United States, the creation of SEATO was a means to share the military burdens of defending the region. Great Britain and France were especially concerned about having to commit a dedicated portion of their military forces to the body, much like those required by NATO, but the United States made no such insistence in this case.⁷⁶ As stipulated in the treaty, a member is required to act only upon unanimous agreement of the members and in "accordance with its constitutional processes."⁷⁷ Thus the arrangement was left

⁷¹ UK High Commissioner in Australia to CRO, 16 Sept. 1954, *Foreign Office Information Policy Department Files (FO 371)*, FO 371/111888.

⁷² Eden to Cabinet, 14 June, 1954, PREM 11/649.

⁷³ Eden (1960), 97.

⁷⁴ South East Asia Collective Defence Treaty, 8 Sept. 1954, *Foreign Office Protocols of Treaties (FO 93)*, FO 93 1/515.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Matthew Jones, *Conflict and Confrontation in South East Asia, 1961-1965: Britain the United States and the Creation of Malaysia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 21.

⁷⁷ South East Asia Collective Defence Treaty, 8 Sept. 1954, FO 93 1/515.

loose and flexible, keeping the costs of membership relatively low.

From this litany of disagreements and differences of opinion, several themes can be observed that point to the roots of this transatlantic discord. The most important issue that affected these allies was their divergent views on the threat posed by communist China to the security of Southeast Asia. Britain, on the one hand, took the position that China must be dealt with diplomatically. This was in part due British reliance on Chinese benevolence with regard to Hong Kong as previously mentioned, but also its government's preference for peace through engagement. Thus at Geneva, Eden welcomed Chinese participation in the Conference and held many private talks with Chou En-Lai to reach a compromise on Korea and Indochina. The United States, on the other hand, was loath to associate with the communist regime, especially due to China's Korean War aid to the North, allowing the US to disregard the Geneva Conference out of hand.⁷⁸

The crux of this issue, however, was the threat that China posed to the peace and security of Southeast Asia. While the aid it provided to the Viet Minh was no secret, the United States government judged full-scale intervention to be imminent and inevitable. This was the reason behind advocating both "united action" and the SEATO alliance as measures to deter the Chinese from entering the conflict. The British government judged the situation to be almost exactly the opposite. Such provocative and hasty actions would certainly, in its opinion, draw China into the conflict that could then rapidly escalate into a global war.⁷⁹ The speedy creation of SEATO might also alarm China

with the formation of a string of military alliances around it from Japan and South Korea, down through Formosa and Indochina, to India and Pakistan. With no imminent threat of a war with China in Indochina, the creation of SEATO could continue at a careful and slow pace in pursuit of Britain's long-term strategies for the region. The judgment of the United States dictated that delay was a perilous risk and immediate, demonstrative action was of the utmost importance to the containment of communism in Southeast Asia.

A second source of discord in the transatlantic relationship during the formation of SEATO was the poor personal relationship of John F. Dulles and Sir Anthony Eden, each country's chief diplomat. These two men, though forced by their government positions to work closely together on a wide range of global issues, simply did not

“ EDEN OFTEN WROTE OF HIS FRUSTRATION WITH DULLES' FREQUENT DISREGARD FOR BRITISH OPINION...”

get along; this is in surprising contrast to the affinity of their respective superiors, President Eisenhower and Prime Minister Churchill, dating from co-operation in the Second World War. Eden, a seasoned British diplomat, had a very astute and gracious manner in the conduct of his duties as Foreign Minister. This, unfortunately, did not mix well with Dulles' more haphazard manner of speech and hawkish tendencies. "My difficulty in working with Mr. Dulles," writes Eden, "was to determine what he really meant and in consequence the significance to be attached to his words and actions."⁸⁰ Eden often wrote of his frustration with Dulles' frequent disregard for British opinion, as well as that of the Commonwealth, and being outmaneuvered by his secret dealings and

⁷⁸ Bell, 36.

⁷⁹ Foreign Office, 'Draft Basis for Discussion by Military Committee', 28 June 1952, PREM 11/648.

⁸⁰ Eden, 63.

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machinations.⁸¹ For example, while at Geneva, Eden read of deal reached between the American and French governments on the terms of a possible intervention in Indochina in the Swiss newspapers and not from their governments; this clearly insulted him deeply.⁸²

On the other hand, Dulles was frustrated by Eden's all too frequent citing of the Commonwealth's opinion in his reasoning for delay and his stubborn commitment to the Geneva Conference which the latter was co-chairing.⁸³ It seems rather evident that such a poor relationship would hamper the ability of these two men to reach a consensus when such important issues were at stake. On the other hand, it is possible that this animosity was the result of each advocating conflicting policy choices in their negotiations, thus automatically setting them at odds. In either case, the Dulles-Eden relationship was an integral aspect of political dynamic in which SEATO was created, and was a manifestation of the troubles in the Anglo-US relations during this period.

The disparate strategies that Great Britain and the United States employed for Southeast Asia in the post-Second World War world were a third basis for diplomatic friction in the formation of SEATO. The United States had a grand strategy to tackle the menacing spread of communism, namely the principle of containment. The creation of a mutual defense system for Southeast Asia followed its previous bilateral relationships with a host of Asia-Pacific states that shared the commitment to anti-communism. SEATO was also fully in accordance with the domestic political pressure in the United

States to take a firm, if not provocative, stance against communism, to keep the dominoes standing as it were. Britain was incentivised to create the SEATO system for a series of individual goals and was less moved by any grand motives. The organization would improve the security of its regional possessions, lessen the pressures of its global military reach, correct the anomaly of its ANZUS exclusion, underwrite the Geneva Accords, and provide an institutionalized means to influence the formation of US policy in the region.⁸⁴ The six months of negotiations and diplomatic wrangling were the reconciling of these different approaches.

In addition to these broad influences on Anglo-American relations were two prominent international issues that contributed to strained diplomacy. First, the continued debate concerning the creation of the EDC consumed a great deal of time, energy, and diplomatic effort. Its failure and the scramble to develop an alternative disappointed the American government adding to transatlantic tensions and requiring a strategic reappraisal of American military strategy with regard to Europe.⁸⁵ Second, Anglo-American relations were further strained by the developments in Guatemala, which had a government with communist leanings. The US government threatened to search any ship heading for Guatemalan ports, including British ones, without warning if necessary to prevent Guatemala's government from amassing weapons. This possibility outraged the British government demanding that no "forcible action" be taken against British ships by their American allies.⁸⁶ Later in the crisis, Britain,

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 119.

⁸³ Kaplan, 129.

⁸⁴ Dockrill, 20.

⁸⁵ Bell, 29.

⁸⁶ Eden, 135.

together with France, abstained from a key vote in the UN Security Council keeping the situation off of the Council's agenda at the request of the United States who preferred handling the crisis through the Organization of American States (OAS). These additional events put further pressures on the Anglo-US relationship during their SEATO negotiations.

Manila Conference and Conclusion

On 8 September 1954, the representatives of eight countries met in Manila, capital city of the Philippines, to sign the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty establishing SEATO, as well as the Pacific Charter, which promoted economic and cultural co-operation and respect among the signatories. The final topic of debate to be sorted out was the determination of which threats would invoke the alliance. This issue epitomized the core differences in British and American disagreement over SEATO. The British government argued against making restrictions on the types of aggression, which would surely undermine the broadly defensive nature of the treaty. America's insistence on narrowing the threshold to just communist aggression, the organization's *raison d'être*, was based on a desire neither to mince words nor to be drawn into other regional conflicts, which were of less concern. The British correctly predicted that such a move would most certainly preclude any neutral countries from subscribing to the treaty. The resulting compromise reached relegated the specification of communist aggression to an addendum of the treaty as an "Understanding of the United States of America."⁸⁷ In essence, the British capitulated to the Americans for the sake of the alliance. For all their foot-dragging, the British mostly fostered animosity with the US as well as suspicion from India.

This process of forming a lasting defense arrangement for Southeast Asia proved long and arduous for both British and American diplomats. The number and significance of their disagreements were rather unusual for would-be allies. "In fact," writes Coral Bell, "if one had to base one's estimate of the strength of an alliance on the degree of consensus between the parties as to the nature and seriousness of the threat...one might have difficulty in establishing the existence of an Anglo-American alliance in this part of the world despite the formal legal tie of SEATO."⁸⁸ Radically different views on the threat posed by communist China led to contradictory assessments on the necessity for "united action" and an immediate defensive coalition; Britain feared provocation with it and America intervention without it. Contrasting appraisals for the security needs of the region, based on interests and responsibilities for different areas, affected the shape and scope of the defense system. Britain sought to secure its colonial possessions and curry favor with the Colombo Powers, whereas America was most imminently concerned with the advance of communism in Indochina.

To further muddle this debate was the abrasive relationship of each side's chief negotiator and spokesman. The personal rapport of Eden and Dulles was consistently poor and unproductive with neither taking much stock in the other's priorities. Each was consumed by the image perceived by others in the formation of SEATO; the groups they sought to please were vastly different. The American government, above all else, had to remain staunchly anti-communist in its diplomatic activities, for both domestic and international reasons. It sought demonstrative and immediate overtures to this end through

⁸⁷ South East Asia Collective Defence Treaty, 8 Sept. 1954, FO 93 1/515.

⁸⁸ Bell, 37.

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intervention proposals and Western solidarity in its support of France. Secondly, it had to maintain its support for the independence of Europe's colonies and the establishment of democracies in them; Britain's were no doubt a source of embarrassment for the US government.⁸⁹ In contrast, Britain sought no immediate end to those colonial ties and moreover sought to placate its Commonwealth partners through regular updates and negotiating in their interests. Britain strove to preserve her status as a world power, being actively engaged around the globe, and acted as force for peace through its negotiating position at Geneva.

In spite of these disadvantages and hurdles, Britain and the United States were able to agree in a matter of months to a mutually acceptable organization. Britain was successful in delaying the actual formation of the pact until after the completion of Geneva, but the form and composition of the organization was mostly what America had intended all along. What bridged the gap was largely British acquiescence to the demands of its more powerful ally. Beyond the inclusion of certain states or the timing of initiative, the most important aspect of the

entire ordeal was Britain's seat at the negotiating table, Eden having Dulles' ear. Recognizing the unequal nature of their alliance, the British could best maximize their influence through fiercely defending their position, but at the end of the day striking the best compromise possible so as not to be deemed unnecessary. So, for as long as Britain remained the ally to which America turned first for advice, consultation or co-operation, than there would at least one goal was achieved, the preservation of the alliance. SEATO provided for Britain "an informal power base by means of which it could exert its influence over world affairs alongside the US the Soviet Union."⁹⁰ If Britain were to have a grand strategy to match America's containment of communism, it would be the maintenance of Anglo-American solidarity and ever-close co-operation. As Eden writes, "If allies are to act in concert only when their views are identical, alliances have no meaning."⁹¹ The United States and Great Britain spent much of 1954 with differing views but eventually were able to find satisfaction in a compromise. This would not be repeated a mere two years later in the dramatic Suez Crisis of 1956.

⁸⁹ National Security Council, 20 May 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-54, XII, Pt. 1, p. 499.

⁹⁰ Dockrill, 10.

⁹¹ Eden, 138