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THE UNITED STATES AND BRITISH SOUTHEAST ASIAN SECURITY POLICY 1950 – 1955

The fall of China to Communism in 1949 and the subsequent Sino-Soviet Treaty of Alliance, Aid, and Mutual Assistance signed in Moscow in 1950 brought great impacts to the US and British policy in Asia. This article analyses the growing tension involving the Western powers with the Communist and the intensifying of the Cold War in the Asian region. The Anglo-American relations faced its trying times during this period as differences of approaches arise between the US and Britain in the issue of the containment of Communism in Southeast Asia. This article aims to discuss actions and policies taken by the United States and British towards Southeast Asia in response to the advancement of communist in Asia. The methodology of this works utilizes documents analysis, predominantly through published governments records and secondary sources. This article revealed that the Americans were more into military approach whereas the British were more interested in the economic aspect. By September 1950, American officials began planning about the formation of a defence pact for Southeast Asia. This defence pact came to materialise in 1954 with the formation of Southeast Asia Treaty Organization or SEATO. SEATO was signed at a time when international Communism was making great inroads into Indochina and anti-colonialism was rampant. British supported the formation of SEATO and achieved its objective to commit the United States to defend Southeast Asia which previously was the responsibilities of Britain and France. The period of 1950 – 1955 also mark the starting point for the American to be involved actively in the security affairs of Southeast Asia.

Keywords: *US Foreign Policy, Communism, British Foreign Policy, Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, Colombo Plan.*

Introduction

The period of 1950 – 1955 temporarily shifted the attention of the United States from Europe to the Southeast Asian region. In contrast with European issues, Asian issues never entered deeply into the Anglo-American relationship until the Korean War. Britain seriously viewed the alarming situation in Asia as a threat to its economic interest and alerted the United States of the dangers of Communism in this area. Britain also hoped to secure the American

commitment to the Southeast Asian area which was considered to be in the British sphere and for the overall defence of the free world. The period of 1950-1955 was also important to the Southeast Asia region because during this time important events that shaped the future of this region took place. International events such as the Korean War and the formation of SEATO, gave a big impact on the Anglo-American relations vis-à-vis the Southeast Asian region.

The vast literature on United States diplomacy and its involvement in Southeast Asia provides a good background for this article. One of the earlier books on the United States involvement in Southeast Asia is Russell H. Fifield in *American in Southeast Asia, The Roots of Commitment*, describes the problems in Southeast Asia that had just emerged from colonialism.¹ Fifield also explores the relations of the United States with the former European colonial power in Southeast Asia especially Britain. Akira Iriye in *The Cold War in Asia*, provides a balanced and provocative interpretation on the shaping of Americas Asian Policy during the 1940s.² The Cold War and the aftermath of the Korean War led the United States to strengthen its position and its influence in Southeast Asia. Andrew Roadnight in his study *United States Policy towards Indonesia in the Truman and Eisenhower Years* examines the US policy towards Indonesian nationalism concludes that Truman's support for independence was based on his Cold War priorities and not principled backing for self-determination.³ Phillip Darby in *British Defence Policy East of Suez 1947-1968*, provides reader with the British defence policy post World War II in Asia.⁴ This book is based on the author's research in primary documents and personal consultation with the political and service authorities. Karl Hack in his work entitled *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia*, explains why British defence policy and practice emerged as it did in the period 1941-67, by looking at the overlapping of colonial, military, economic and Cold War factors in the area.⁵

This article put an emphasis on the primary sources especially *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) published by the government of the United States. First is *Foreign Relations of the United States 1950 Vol VI East Asia and the Pacific* and second *Foreign Relations of the United States 1955-1957 Vol XXII Southeast Asia* published respectively in 1976 and 1989. Documents from the British government especially *Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series II, Vol IV, Korea June 1950-April 1951* were consulted to provide outlook on the actions taken by the British.

By examining the records from both the American and the British, and the secondary sources available, this article will provide us with a balanced point of view regarding the policies taken by both countries.

The Asian Stage

The Asian stage of the Cold War opened with the communist success in China. On 1 October 1949, the People's Republic of China was proclaimed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), led by Mao Tse Tung. The Soviet Union extended its formal recognition a day later and accepted the Chinese revolution as the model for Asia.⁶ The victory, coupled with the Russian atomic bomb was a blow to the West. The American policy makers were deeply affected and concerned with the Sino-Soviet encouragement to Southeast Asian Communist insurgencies. The US believed that the pattern of Soviet post-war expansion in Eastern Europe was to be repeated in Asia with China serving as Russian's partner and the Asian base.⁷

The fall of China into the Communists hands left the Truman administration with two major options. Many China experts argued that the United States should accommodate the Chinese revolution and attempt to negotiate with the Communists. These experts believed that the open-door policy would be served best by attempting to influence the Communists as friends, rather than by cutting off communications and leaving Mao to pursue alliance with others. From 1944 to 1949, this group of American officials such as General Joseph W. Stillwell, American Chief of Staff in China during the World War II, diplomats John Carter Vincent, John Paton Davies and Ambassador John Leighton Stuart, proposed the United States to ease its support for Kuomintang under Chiang Kai-shek and to open negotiations with the Communists. None of these officials wanted a Communist-dominated China but all of them argued that negotiations with the CCP offered the best opportunity to achieve Americans' goals there. This group also urged that the United States encouraged Chiang to enter a political coalition with the CCP simply because Chiang could not destroy the Communist on the battlefield. Many American businesspeople, missionaries, journalist, and scholars supported these officials and their ideas.⁸

Other group of policymakers however, believed that it was already too late. These policy makers saw Communism as malevolent and expansionist. They believed that there was nothing left to do but quarantine China and resolved to prevent the revolution from spreading out.⁹ President Truman and his chief advisers agreed with this group of policy makers and believed that the Soviet Union and the Communist China were revolutionary powers, expanding in response of the demands of the communist ideology and were on to conquer the world.¹⁰ The assumption on communist ideology was the reason the negotiation option was quashed each time it was raised. The administration believed that any serious overture to the communists would be inconsistent with the fundamental principles of containment.¹¹ Besides this assumption, these policies were also based on the conclusion that the Chinese Communists would become part of the Communist world in which the United

States involved in Cold War.¹²

In January 1950, the United States proceeded to develop the hydrogen bomb in response to the Russian atomic bomb explosion in September 1949.¹³ The United States' containment policy also drastically changed following the events in China. Secretary of State Dean Acheson defined the American line of defence in the Pacific. Acheson described the line of defence as running from the Aleutian Islands southward to Japan and then on southward to the Philippines.¹⁴ Korea was not included in this line of defence as the US had withdrawn its forces from South Korea in the previous year. Later in the spring of 1950 came National Security Council policy guideline NSC-68, which proposed tripling of defence and military spending. The United States was blocking Communist China's admission to the United Nations, the Jessup committee found no support for a Pacific military pact to oppose "Communism's" expansion after touring the region. The Americans were also resolved to aid the French struggle against the Vietminh.

With the fall of China, the United States felt a new urgency to restore the role of Japan which was the key to the entire American position in the Pacific. Japan would now take China's place as an anti-communist defence in the Far East. Within the framework of the containment policy, efforts would be taken to strengthen Japan in order to contain China.¹⁵ However, Japan's economic weakness prevented it from becoming a great power. To fully recovered, Japan needed foreign trade, through which it could obtain food and raw materials in exchange for manufactured goods. Before the war, China had been Japan's principal trading partner, but as a Communist state, China could not fulfil this role. The United States would have to find other trade partners for Japan. Taiwan, South Korea and Southeast Asia were good alternatives for the Japanese. Japan would manufacture industrial goods and textiles; it might trade then with Southeast Asia for the raw materials and food it needed so badly. The United States hoped that Japan would be self-supporting economically, then self-sufficient in defence, and become a contributor to collective security in East Asia. The final status of Japan was formalized in the Peace Treaty and the American Japanese Security Treaty of 1951.¹⁶

The 'loss' of China to Communism also saw British and American approach to China diverged.¹⁷ In November 1949, Malcolm MacDonald recommended recognition of China. Britain would like to avoid provoking Chinese pressures on Hong Kong. At the same time British also wanted to avoid driving China deeper into Soviet's sphere. When London considered recognizing Peking in the autumn of 1949, the Cabinet explained to the Americans that continued support for the Kuomintang would only drive the Chinese Communists in the direction of Moscow.¹⁸ Britain extended recognition to China on 6 January 1950. The United States, constrained by its record of supporting the Kuomintang and by powerful China lobby, instead demanded China first recognised its international obligations. As the 'loss' of

China was a hot issue in American politics, British recognition brought Anglo-American relations in the Far East to a low point. The United States even said that the British tactic was as an echo of the 1930's appeasement policy.¹⁹

Before the Chinese issue was settled; the Korean War erupted in 1950. On 25 June 1950, North Korean forces invaded the Republic of Korea. The United States immediately tabled a resolution to the United Nations Security Council recommending that members of the United Nations provide assistance to the Republic of Korea to repel the armed attack.²⁰ The resolution was approved on 27 June, two days after the war had just begun (the Soviet Union had not attended the Security Council since January in protest against the exclusion of Communist China, and did not use its right of veto).²¹ The same day, President Truman issued a statement indicating that he had ordered United States air and sea forces to give support to troops of the Republic of Korea under the command of Mac Arthur. The civil war in Korea now had turned into a global crisis.

The significance of the Korean War, then, lay in the fact that its outbreak coincided with two crucial developments – China's unification by the Communists, and a more vigorous American policy in Asia. Besides this, the United States was also alarmed with developments in the communist world. In February 1950, the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Alliance, Aid, and Mutual Assistance was signed in Moscow. This treaty had a great impact on the United States policy and seemed to confirm the US belief that China was the Russian partner in Asia. The Truman administration began to reanalyze what had happened in China and Korea. It concluded that the Chinese Communists intended to establish a whole new perimeter ranging from Korea in the north and Indochina in the south.

The United States through its responses in 1950 made it clear that it would redefine the structure of Asian-Pacific international relations on the basis of three principles: the revitalization of Japan once again as a power, the extension of American power in Southeast Asia, and the detachment of Taiwan from mainland China.²² The development of the war in Korea has a special importance in the history of the Cold War, for it is the only instance in which the Communists have resorted to direct conventional military aggression.²³

The outbreak of Korean War in June 1950 had a deep impact to the British and put an end to the idea that its overseas forces might gradually be reduced.²⁴ Although the British main concern was for Europe, the war confirmed British perception of the Communist threat in the Far East and the Middle East.²⁵ The British thought that world Communism was on the march and a consolidation of Britain's position was necessary. In Britain and as well as in the United States, the war was seen as an indication that Communist policy had hardened towards the West.

The British decision to support the United States against North Korea was also mainly prompted by the belief that a failure to resist Communist

aggression anywhere in the world would encourage further Soviet moves, and that support of the United States in the Far East was needed to guarantee American involvement in the defence of Europe.²⁶ The British also felt that the least that Britain could do was to assist its ally in its attempt to resist aggression and thereby prevent further communists' encroachment: if action was not taken in Korea now, then Indochina, Hong Kong and Malaya would soon be the next target on the communists' list.²⁷ Describing North Korean action as 'naked aggression' British Prime Minister Attlee, authorised British naval forces to assist those of the United States in Korean waters. The first air strikes were launched from a British carrier on 1 July.²⁸

On 11 September, President Truman signed a directive prepared by the National Security Council allowing MacArthur to drive beyond the 38th parallel.²⁹ The decision to cross the 38th parallel was a shift from the policy of 'containment' as defined by President Truman in 1947 to a policy of 'liberation' or the rolling back of Communism. On 27 September, President Truman instructed General MacArthur to move through North Korea if he did not encounter Chinese or Russian resistance and if he was certain of success in the field. MacArthur accepted this instruction as an invitation for him to march to the border of China at the Yalu River. Although China gave a stern warning to the United States that it would not "sit back with folded hands and let the Americans come to the border".³⁰ On 21 November the American troops reached the Chinese border at the Yalu River. Five days later, on 26 November the Chinese moved across the Yalu in mass, trapping and destroying large numbers of United Nations troops, including 20,000 Americans and Koreans at the Chosin Reservoir. Two further mass Chinese Communist Force offensives, aimed at the conquest of South Korea, in April and May 1951 were smashed by the United States troops in a battle around the Parallel. Defeated on the battlefield, the Communists sued for peace on the basis of *status quo* in the July armistice negotiations that began at Kaesong, and later transferred to Panmunjom. The truce agreement was signed at Panmunjom on 27 July 1953, after Dulles had threatened Peking through Indian diplomatic channels that atomic war might soon be carried to Mainland China. This armistice confirmed the partition of Korea based on the battlefield of July 1951.³¹ Communist China had fought the United States to a standstill.

The decision to cross the 38th proved exceptionally costly to the United States. Four-fifths of all American casualties in the war occurred after United Nations forces crossed the parallel.³² The total casualties of the war were four million, including of 140,000 US casualties. The war froze the United States into a Cold War posture for the next two decades, paralysing particularly American-Chinese relations.

Although Britain supported the United States in the Korean War, the British differed on certain issues regarding the war. The British believed that they saw an opportunity to develop a Sino-Soviet split. They also feared that

the Far Eastern war would divert American attention and efforts from Europe. Finally, the British worried that American truculence or ‘MacArthurism’, would trigger World War III.³³ Throughout the war, British showed herself more interested in negotiation than victory and more worried about confronting the Chinese than the Americans. Shortly after the war, the British Ambassador in Moscow explored the possibility of a return to the status quo ante. He reported, and Foreign Secretary Bevin passed the words on to the Americans, that while the Soviet seemed favourable they would probably link a ceasefire with the withdrawal of American protection from Taiwan and the bestowal of UN membership on Peking. President Truman and Acheson reacted with anger, and firmly refused to negotiate on these items “under the duress and blackmail then being employed”. Reluctantly the British dropped the project.³⁴

The British also argued that the coordination of Anglo-American policy was virtually non-existent and in the Far East the American policy has paid least regard to the interest of other powers. As a consequence, the Americans enjoyed the least sympathy and support in the Far East.³⁵ The British added that the unilateral American action in preventing Chinese invasion of Taiwan, on the grounds that Communism must be contained in Asia, increased the distrust amongst Asians of American motives in Southeast Asia and could provoke a pan-Asian reaction in the minds of the Governments and people of that area.

On the other hand, the British shared the happiness which followed MacArthur’s counter-offensive after the Inchon landing in September.³⁶ At the same time however, the British became uneasy about possible Chinese intervention in the war. Foreign Secretary Bevin urged Acheson to issue a statement reassuring China and to permit participation by Peking in UN debates on Korea. Acheson responded to that “we should not be duly frightened at what was probably a Chinese Communist bluff” and later Bevin did not press the point.³⁷ The British generals even suggested that the American stopped at the narrow waist of North Korea, Churchill and other Conservatives publicly endorsed the idea, but the Labour Government refused to criticize MacArthur’s advance.

In the wake of the Korean War, the British government then embarked on a major rearmament programme in fear of a general war. In September 1950, the revised expansion programme was announced. It was directed towards strengthening the three services (the army, the air force and the navy) for the global conflict after the style of the Second World War.³⁸ On 17 May 1951, President Truman approved a National Security Council policy statement, which asserted that the United States should “maintain the security of the offshore defence line: Japan-Ryukyus-Philippines-Australia and New Zealand. Deny Taiwan to any Chinese regime aligned with or dominated by the Soviet Union and expedite the strengthening of the defensive capabilities of Taiwan. Attempt by all practicable means to forestall communist aggression

in South and Southeast Asia". It had flatly stated that "Soviet control of the off-shore islands in the Western Pacific, including Japan, would present an unacceptable threat to the security of the United States".³⁹

Although the war was limited to Korea, President Truman and Secretary of State, Acheson used the war as an opportunity to develop new American policies around the globe. Because of these American initiatives, the six months between June and December 1950 ranked among the most important period of the Cold War era. Truman and Acheson moved to the offensive globally for two particular reasons: the Korean War gave them an opportunity to silence their critics at home and to take advantage of new openings abroad.⁴⁰

Later on 20 August 1954, a policy statement of the National Security Council under President Eisenhower called for maintaining the security and increasing the strength of the "Pacific off-shore island chain" – Taiwan was included – as "an element essential to the United States security".⁴¹ The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed the American effort, if undertaken, should be part of a collective action by the United Nations in conjunction with Britain and other friendly government. President Eisenhower on 16 January 1954 approved a policy declaration of the National Security Council calling for fitting American military action against Communist China if Peking made an overt armed attack against Malaya.⁴² As dependencies of Britain, Malaya and Singapore had no independent voice in the Korean War or the Japanese peace settlement. However, British embargo on rubber to the People's Republic of China as part of the United Nations effort in Korea clearly affected Malaya and Singapore.⁴³ The American was clearly interested in showing its military strength as military power is closely allied with political power. Military power provides the element of terror and this element "can be used to overcome threats from outside as well as from subject within the polity."⁴⁴

Seato

By 1954, the United States and its allies began to subscribe to the 'Domino Theory' to justify its involvement in Southeast Asia. This theory believed that if one country in the region fell into the communists, the other would follow like toppling dominoes. With this theory in mind, the United States began seriously planning for the defence of Southeast Asia with its allies.

The idea of a defence pact for Southeast Asia was first mentioned by Representative Jacob Javits of New York, a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in mid-1950. By September 1950, John Foster Dulles began openly talking about such an alliance. However, the Southeast Asia Collective Defence Treaty or Manila Pact under which the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization or SEATO came to materialise only on 8 September 1954. It was widely believed that the formation of SEATO was a product of the

bloodshed at Dien Bien Phu and of the Geneva settlement on Indochina.⁴⁵ It was signed at a time when international Communism was making great inroads into Indochina and anti-colonialism was rampant.

From 21 July when the Geneva Conference ended to 8 September when the Manila Treaty was concluded, intense and complex negotiations were conducted in various capitals on the terms and membership of SEATO. Although modelled after NATO, SEATO lacked the binding commitments to the use of force because the signatories agreed only to consult in case of aggression.⁴⁶ SEATO was a device whereby three great powers – the United States, Britain and France – have undertaken to support and protect a number of small states of Southeast Asia – Thailand, the Philippines, and Pakistan together with South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia against the extension of the influence of other great powers, principally Communist China and the Soviet Union.⁴⁷ In line with the Geneva agreements, Cambodia, Laos and South Vietnam were designated as territory protected under the treaty ('protocol states'), but could not be participating members.⁴⁸

One of the explicit purposes of SEATO was to counter communist subversion in Southeast Asia.⁴⁹ The United States also saw SEATO as a device to give it military access to the region.⁵⁰ Besides this, SEATO was also a form of psychological warfare to support the allies, rather than a defensive organization alone.⁵¹

The United States was the most important power in SEATO and was the acknowledged leader of the group. American support for the small states of Southeast Asia in the form of military protection and economic aid unfolded independently of SEATO. Britain and France also played an important part in founding the organization, but had since been increasingly occupied in the affairs of Europe, had reduced their responsibilities in Southeast Asia.⁵² Britain's purposes of participating in SEATO were to defend its economic interest; access to the raw materials, and trade routes to and from their sources, and beyond to and from Australia and New Zealand.⁵³ The British also viewed the Southeast Asian Defence Treaty as a way of avoiding British commitments by means of American deterrence.⁵⁴

The problem of containing Communist expansion in Asia continued to worry the Eisenhower administration. In August 1954, the National Security Council concluded that the Geneva accords on Indochina had been a 'disaster' that "completed a major forward stride of Communism which may lead to the loss of Southeast Asia".⁵⁵ The French had simply sought to save face in agreeing to the elections scheduled for 1956, which they realized would probably result in a victory for Ho Chi Minh. Dulles, determined to save at least half of Indochina, persuaded Eisenhower to accept the NSC recommendations for extending military, economic and political aid to the Vietnamese nationalists in the south led by Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem. Direct aid to South Vietnamese meant that the United States had now taken

over the French role in Indochina.⁵⁶ France quickly lost interest in SEATO soon after 1954 and in military matters its contribution had been small and of necessity.⁵⁷

With reference to China, prior to 1954, the British opposed the strategies which called for large-scale attacks. The British feared that any American action might escalate and trips a new world war involving the nuclear attack. The Australian, New Zealand and Malayan Area (ANZAM) meeting in Singapore in December 1954 acknowledged that the United States would almost certainly use nuclear weapons in attack against mainland China. In 1955, the threat to Malaya was again reassessed on the assumption of American attack against China. The Australian defence machinery which was coordinating the Commonwealth war plans in the Malayan Area when pressed by Britain to proceed with the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve stated that it required American cooperation in planning Malayan defence. Britain also hoped that the formation of a Commonwealth Strategic Reserve might help secure the United States interest in Malayan defence.⁵⁸

By January 1955, Admiral Radford, Chairman of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, reassured Admiral Lambe, Commander – in – Chief of British Far Eastern Fleet, that, in global war, American air action would leave only a limited threat to Malaya. In March, Radford stressed that the defence of Malaya was the ‘last ditch’. The American nuclear interdiction would eliminate any Chinese thrust towards Malaya and possibly put China on the defensive. However, on 14 March, President Eisenhower stated that Malaya was of integral importance to Southeast Asian defence and Australia would be eligible for American aid. The defence of Malaya received another good news on 15 March when Secretary of State Dulles told Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies that American believed the Kra position was necessary if Thailand became communist and the Australian would receive American support if the operation to occupy Kra position was deemed necessary.⁵⁹

The British also announced its defence policy in Southeast Asia in March 1955. Malcolm Macdonald, the Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia stated that the British envisaged three lines of defence; first, local peoples and governments who were ‘by nature hostile to Communism’, but lacking in confidence; secondly, supporting SEATO and encouraging the Colombo Plan and economic assistance; thirdly, encouraging the ‘benevolent neutrality’ of the Colombo Powers.⁶⁰

The United States, by June 1955, acknowledged that the rising tide of Communist subversive activity in Singapore as a direct reflection of developments elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Frank G. Wisner, Deputy Director for Plans of the Central Intelligence Agency in a memorandum to the President’s Special Assistant, Rockefeller mentioned that since the fall of Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Conference, there had been a marked acceleration of Communist-inspired and directed activities in Singapore and to a lesser extent

in Malaya.⁶¹ Britain and the United States agreed that communist subversion was the primary threat to Southeast Asia and both countries agreed that most assistance would be bilateral.

The Federation of Malaya and the State of Singapore had close links with Britain but remained outside SEATO. Singapore was the main British base east of Suez from which forces could be deployed in case of a SEATO emergency. The Federation of Malaya had a defence agreement with the United Kingdom, which authorized, among other things, maintenance of Commonwealth troops and bases. But despite its own internal security problems, the close links with Thailand, after independence in Malaya had declined to enter SEATO.⁶² Malaya's refusal to join SEATO partly because it has a defence pact with British through the Anglo-Malayan Defence Pact formalised during the independence in 1957.⁶³ Malaya also maintained a very close relationship with other Commonwealth countries especially Australia and New Zealand. In 1960s this closed relationship was further strengthened, and Australia even promised to send its military forces to defend the newly formed Malaysia in *Konfrontasi* with Indonesia.⁶⁴

Conclusion

The period of 1950-1955 shifted the attention of the United States and Britain away from Europe to the east of Asia. The fall of China and followed by the Korean War gave a very deep impact on the United States foreign policy, especially towards its perception of the communist. Here, the communist was seen as an expansionist power and on the way to conquer the world. The fall of China into the communist hands also shattered the hope of making China one of the 'Big Four' to police the post war world in the East and economically it also closed the China market for the United States goods. A sense of crisis also developed in Washington as officers in the State Department tried to find the best way to deal with Communist China. The policy of containment was at last adopted by the Truman administration and all negotiations options were rejected.

The Anglo-American relationship also differed in opinion and approach towards Communist China. Britain continued to place greater emphasis on America on the need for a political approach to the Cold War in Asia. While the United States pursued the policy of containment and suspected that appeasement would be interpreted as weakness, the British on the other hand recognized Communist China in early 1950. This step was probably taken to save British colony of Hong Kong from the communists. The British also hoped to separate China from the Soviet Union. During the Korean War, despite differences in opinion on how to tackle the North Korean invasion, the British supported the military action led by the United States under the United Nations mandates. Britain also sought an allied strategy,

combining military and political policies.

The British decision to support the United States in Korea was also based on a [rather more] calculated assessment of the risks and benefits involved. Of particular importance in this context was the belief that, if Britain wanted continuous American support in Europe in the future, then it would have to provide a clear demonstration of its moral and material commitment to the defence of the free world. Britain also assumed that by joining the United States in the Korean campaign, it would be better able to restrain the Americans from taking a course of military action that might lead to an escalation of the conflict and jeopardizing its colony of Hong Kong or Malaya. The British aims at the Geneva Conference on Korea and Indochina, was to create a buffer of non-communist countries as far to the north of Malaya as possible; and to avoid committing its own resources, or too many of its allies' resources. British perception of its role at Geneva also reaffirmed the belief that Britain had an important regional role to play. The British hoped that South Vietnam could be neutralized, defended by diplomacy and not by military intervention. With this, Britain hoped to create a regional stability for Malaya and Singapore, with their importance dollar earnings and to Anglo-Australian relations.

With the formation of SEATO, British achieved its objective to commit the United States to defend Southeast Asia which previously was the responsibilities of Britain and France. Besides persuading the American to be involved in the affairs of Southeast Asia, Britain had a very distinct policy in Malaya. The British government was determined to restore order in Malaya and to guide Malaya towards self-government within the Commonwealth. The security and defence of Malaya was of very great importance and Britain felt that any reduction of effort or sign of weakness would be a great encouragement to the Communists.

The differences of approach towards Communism in Asia were seen from the early 1950s. The US started its military containment in Vietnam in May 1950, a month before the Korean War erupted. Its policy of military containment continued with the sending of Melby-Erskine Mission also known as the MDAP (Mutual Defence Assistance Programme) and lastly the US sponsored SEATO. Britain however, focussed more on the economic aspect of the containment. The British believed that the economic conditions in Southeast Asia then were favourable for the spread of Communism and suggested "an Asian equivalent of the Marshall Plan and the Atlantic Pact".⁶⁵ The Colombo Plan was later formed by British and the Commonwealth countries to provide economic and technical assistance to the Asian countries. This Plan unfortunately failed to achieve its long-term objective to improve economic and social conditions in Southeast Asia. Britain's position as a great power continued to decline after 1955, with the Suez Crisis that forced British to evacuate the Middle East. Britain became more dependent on the United

States for economic recovery and for the defence of its territories overseas.

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