EVEN in the most favourable circumstances the relationship between countries of sharply conflicting ideology is seldom an ardent one. But the acquaintance between Britain and the new China opened at a period when the cold war had already achieved its iciest temperatures. It started too at a time when the Chinese rulers, inheriting the same mood of bitterness and resentment towards the Western intruders as their forerunners, began to feel the power and confidence to give such sentiments effective expression; and when after twenty years of isolation in the wildernesses of North China, they were still unsoftened by any diplomatic graces which might have induced them to temper the expression of such emotions. The temperature of the relationship remained therefore, throughout its early years, a chilly one.

Realistic opinion in Britain had never assumed that dealings with the new State were likely to be cordial. Events quickly confirmed this judgment. Already in the months immediately following recognition a succession of small incidents served, taken together, to arouse disquiet in Britain about Chinese intentions. There was a series of clashes around the Hong Kong border. Chinese batteries opened fire on a British destroyer. The military head of the Kwangtung Provincial Government accused British warships, aircraft and infantry of violating Chinese territory. A part of the British Embassy compound in Peking was seized without warning by the Chinese authorities. Various British commercial properties were confiscated in retaliation for action taken against Chinese property in Hong Kong. A Chinese semi-official organization, accusing the colonial Government in Malaya of "inhuman treatment" and "barbarous atrocities" against the Chinese population, sent a telegram to the Colonial Secretary demanding visas to enter Malaya to investigate conditions there; and declared that all the Chinese people would support the persecuted people of Malaya in their struggle against colonialism.

There were a number of incidents involving British consulates in China. After the Communists first came to power, most of the
existing British consulates carried on as before. Thus at the begin-
ning of 1950 Britain had, in China as in no other Communist
country, about a dozen consulates in action, some in quite remote
parts of the country. But in November of that year, when China
entered the Korean war, the British consul in Mukden was expelled
by the local authorities for having sought to prevent Chinese
workers from constructing an air-raid shelter inside the grounds of
the Consulate-General without his authority. In February, 1951,
the British Consulate-General at Tihwa in Sinkiang was searched
by armed Chinese and the Consul-General and his staff deported
(both these moves were no doubt largely security measures designed
to remove British representatives from sensitive regions). In April,
1951, the British consul in Nanking was interrogated by the
authorities there and forced to write an apology in humiliating
terms for seeking to intervene on behalf of a British subject outside
the normal office hours of the bureaucracy. The British Consulate-
General in Canton was searched and some United States equipment
removed.

There was in any case less and less that the consuls could usefully
do. There were few British subjects left in China, especially in the
remote areas. Most of the British firms were doing little business.
And it was, besides, proving almost impossible to get entry visas
for replacements. Thus in time more and more of the consulates
had to be closed. One or two of the less important went out of
existence soon after the régime came to power. In March, 1951, it
was decided to close those at Chungking, Kunming, Hankow,
Nanking, Tsingtao and Amoy. In February, 1952, the Consulate-
General at Canton was closed (though it was long before the
Consul-General was finally given permission to leave). And in
November, 1952, the same decision was made for Tientsin. Only
Shanghai remained. And though it has never been officially recog-
nized as a Consulate-General, this office has continued to function,
as best it can in the prevailing circumstances, until the present day.

An even more serious aggravation of relations at this time was
brought about by the detention of some British residents in China.
Between 1950 and 1954 a large number of foreign residents of all
nationalities were placed under detention, more or less rigorous, on
a number of charges that were either fabricated or trivial. A large
proportion were missionaries. Others were businessmen or other
Western nationals who had, for whatever reason, aroused the
suspicions of the Chinese security authorities. Seven British subjects were at one time under arrest, besides one who had been tried and condemned under the Nationalists. None of them, so far as could be ascertained, received any trial or definite sentence, and the Chinese Government persistently refused to give any information about the whereabouts and welfare of those concerned. They could receive no letters. And the normal consular access to them was not permitted. One was a Catholic nun who had been in charge of a mission at Toishan; another a missionary of the Plymouth Brethren who was captured in Tibet; and a third a wireless operator, employed by the Tibetan Government, captured by the Chinese after their invasion, and imprisoned for four years on the picturesque, if implausible, charge of poisoning a Tibetan lama.

But Britain, since she had been asked to represent the interests of the United States, Canada and one or two other countries in China, was also concerned over the nationals of those states held in Chinese prisons. Because of the fanatical Chinese hostility to the United States, American nationals suffered more than those of any other nation. At one time over forty Americans were in Chinese prisons, as well as some under house arrest. Many of these were missionaries. The arrests seem to have been entirely arbitrary. Those concerned had mainly been guilty of no offence more heinous than their own nationality. There were about half a dozen Canadians in a similar situation. The British Embassy made a long series of representations, both in general terms on behalf of all those detained, and in relation to individual cases. These produced little discernible effect; normally not even a reply. But gradually, especially from 1953 onwards, most of the detained foreigners were deported. By 1955, the last British subject had been released.

These events, superimposed on the eviction of British missionaries and British business, could scarcely fail to create a mood of disillusionment. Perhaps even more disappointing ultimately were the foreign policies of the new Government. Some in Britain were prepared to make some allowance for Chinese intervention in the Korean war. Many at least understood the fears that underlay that action. They could even sympathize with the Chinese Government's fulminations over Formosa. But these had to be taken within the context of other Chinese actions. There was the Chinese intervention in Tibet, which aroused mild British protest; though since Britain had for over fifty years acknowledged ultimate Chinese
suzerainty, the British Government apparently accepted that such protests were impossible to sustain by direct representations, let alone to support with effective action. There were the never-ceasing onslaughts against imperialism and, in particular, the almost hysterical hatred let loose against the United States. There were the periodic diatribes against the governments of colonial territories such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaya. And there was the suspected support being given to colonial revolutions in Malaya and Indo-China. All these events in combination had the effect that, after two or three years of the new Government's existence, opinion in Britain was considerably less hopeful about the possibility of entering into a satisfactory relation with them than it had been when they first overthrew the Nationalists.

When, in November, 1951, the Conservative administration assumed power in Britain, there was some speculation on how far this would affect British policy towards China. It was felt that the new Government might adopt a somewhat more rigid attitude towards the Communist régime. It was even suggested in some quarters that the new Government might withdraw recognition from the People's Republic.

Sir Winston Churchill's Government soon showed that they were indeed anxious to do what they could to bring British policies more into line with those of the United States. In January, 1952, soon after their return to power, the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary paid a visit to Washington during which such problems were discussed. In a speech to a joint session of Congress Mr. Churchill said that in future British and American policy in the Far East "would be marked by increasing harmony". He asserted that Formosa must stay safely in non-Communist hands. And Mr. Eden, in a speech to Colombia University gave a stern warning against Chinese activities in South East Asia, especially Indo-China and Malaya.

There were insistent reports that during the visit the Ministers had agreed that should an armistice in Korea be reached and subsequently broken by the Communists, hostilities should no longer be confined to Korea, and that, in these circumstances, United Nations forces might embark on a blockade of the Chinese mainland and the bombing of Chinese bases. Such rumours were strengthened by Mr. Churchill's declaration in a speech to Congress that the United
Nations’ response in such an eventuality should be “prompt, resolute and effective”.

The Chinese reaction to these statements was violent. The press declared that Britain had given her “open support for the United States war policy in the Far East”, and had “publicly affirmed their friendship with the K.M.T. bandit remnants in Formosa”. The statements also aroused some apprehension in the British press and particularly among Labour members of Parliament. One left-wing Member declared that the United States had decided on war with Communist China and that Mr. Churchill had not resisted this intention. On February 26 the Opposition formally moved a resolution “that this House takes note of the Foreign Secretary’s statement, welcomes his adherence to the policy followed by the previous administration with regard to the Korean conflict and the relations between Great Britain and China, but regrets the Prime Minister’s failure to give adequate expression to this policy in the course of his recent visit to the U.S.A.”.

The Conservative Ministers denied that in fact there was any appreciable difference between their policies and those of their predecessors. Mr. Churchill himself accepted that it would be most undesirable for United Nations forces “to get bogged down in all-out war with China”. And they were able to reply to the Opposition charges about extending the Korean war by showing that the Labour Government had itself agreed, in secret exchanges with the United States administration, that in certain circumstances, such as heavy air attacks from bases on the mainland, the United Nations might have to have recourse to action “not confined to Korea”. The Government claimed that all they had done was to confirm that policy.

In fact it seems that Conservative Ministers in their public speeches in the United States had perhaps tended to overstate the degree of agreement reached over Far Eastern policy. When challenged by Members of Parliament in Britain they had, conversely, been inclined to minimize it. The truth would appear to be that the Conservative administration were more concerned than their predecessors to present an appearance of Anglo-American unity to the outside world, but that the substance of British policy towards China was little changed.

So long as the Korean war continued there was indeed little scope for a distinctive British policy towards China. Chinese public
statements remained bellicose and intransigent. When Mr. Eden paid another visit to the United States in March, 1953, during which Far East policy was again discussed, the *People's Daily* declared that the British Government had shown themselves "number one lap-dog of the American aggressors", and had openly proclaimed their intention to support them in a policy of enmity towards the Chinese people. Things were little better after the armistice was signed. There was an ugly incident in September, 1953, when a Chinese vessel, without provocation and without warning, opened fire on a naval launch from Hong Kong which, they claimed, had violated Chinese territorial waters, killing a number of British seamen.

The British Government expressed the wish to bring about an improvement in relations. In a debate in the House of Commons in November, 1953, Mr. Eden said that "it was the policy of Her Majesty's Government to work for peaceful relations with China" and they would be the first to welcome a reversal of current Chinese policy. He expressed the conviction that it must be "in China's own interests to keep open the lines of contact with the Western world" and declared that Britain would be ready to help her to do so. During the next year Britain did in fact have the opportunity to perform some such service for China.

The Korean armistice agreement had provided for an international conference at which China should be represented, to discuss the question of Korean reunification and other outstanding Far Eastern problems. As a result of disputes about representation and agenda at the meeting such a conference was never held. But during the Berlin conference early in 1954 Mr. Molotov made a new proposal—to convene a five-power conference, including China, to discuss world problems. The United States Government at first resisted this suggestion, being anxious not to admit the status of China in the discussion of matters not immediately affecting her. The British Government however were much in favour of the meeting and were supported by the French. It was finally agreed that a conference should be held, but that it should be confined to discussing Far Eastern questions. The principal matters the conference was to discuss were the "peaceful settlement of the Korean question"; and the situation in Indo-China.

But before the conference opened a new crisis had arisen in
Indo-China. The position of the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu became perilous. It began to appear that the Vietminh forces might conquer the entire country. The United States Government became intensely alarmed at this prospect. Mr. Dulles in a speech on March 29 declared that the imposition of the Communist system on South East Asia "should be met by united action". At the beginning of April he proposed to the British Ambassador in Washington that the Western Powers should issue a joint warning to China to desist from supplying aid to the Vietminh, under threat of naval and air action against the Chinese coast. Several aircraft-carriers sailed from Manila to the Indo-China coast. And Admiral Radford, the Chairman of the United States Chiefs of Staff Committee, was reported to be urging United States intervention in the Indo-China war by air and naval bombardment.

The British Government believed that a joint warning to China such as had been proposed was likely to be ineffective. The alliance would then be faced with the choice between risking world war by intervention, or a humiliating withdrawal. They informed the United States Government of their view that it might be more realistic to consider the possibility of some settlement in Indo-China than to risk finding themselves suddenly forced by military events, without time to co-ordinate their views, to accept some less favourable settlement as soon as the Geneva Conference opened.

At the beginning of April Mr. Dulles flew to London and Paris to discuss these differences. Mr. Eden informed him that the British Government had become extremely doubtful whether the Indo-China situation could any longer be solved by purely military means. They would be ready to co-operate in long term plans for some kind of collective defence in South East Asia. But they were reluctant to consider any suggestion of military intervention, or even a warning announcement to China, while the Geneva Conference was pending. British public opinion would certainly be opposed to any commitment that might involve Britain in the Indo-China war. The British Government therefore considered that the most that could be done at the present stage was to give a vague warning that the Western Powers would not allow the work of the conference to be prejudiced by Communist military action.

Towards the end of April Mr. Dulles, while in Paris for a N.A.T.O. meeting, told Mr. Eden that the French Government had received a request from the general commanding their forces in
Dien Bien Phu, asking for a powerful strike by United States air forces within the next seventy-two hours. He asked Mr. Eden whether the British Government would join in an undertaking to the French Government which would, in the last resort, have pledged the two nations to commit their troops to the defence of Indo-China. Mr. Eden was dubious. He flew back to London to consult the Cabinet. The Cabinet supported his own recommendation that the suggestion should be turned down. And a day or two later a similar request from the French Government to join with several other governments in a declaration proclaiming determination to resist further Communist expansion was similarly rejected.

The United States Government regarded the war in Indo-China as one element in a world-wide conflict with the forces of Communism. They saw the Vietminh purely as puppets of China. A warning directed primarily at the Chinese seemed to them an essential element in preventing any further deterioration of the situation that had arisen through Vietminh successes in the field. To the British, however, it was precisely the danger that the West might gradually find themselves increasingly entangled in all-out war with China, and perhaps beyond, which made a direct threat to China of the sort envisaged by Mr. Dulles so dangerous. They were no means as convinced as he that those who tread boldly to the brink of war always step back in the direction they intend. They realized that a threat, once made, would inevitably impel the parties towards its final execution. They were aware that world opinion, especially in Asia, would have seen such intervention as designed to bolster a tottering colonial régime. They knew that British public opinion itself would not have supported British involvement. And they felt that action of the sort proposed at a time when peace talks at Geneva were imminent would have appeared particularly provocative.

It does indeed, in retrospect, seem possible that, if the British Government had acceded to the proposal made to them, the West might have found themselves once more engaged in a struggle as bitter, as protracted, and perhaps as inconclusive, as that which had only recently ended in Korea. And, as then, they might well in the end have discovered themselves at war, not with North Vietnam, but China.

The Geneva Conference opened on April 26. The British and Soviet representatives were elected Co-chairmen. The first dis-
cussions centred principally on Korea. The Chinese and North Korean representatives put forward a proposal for the rapid withdrawal of foreign troops, and the holding of elections under a formula by which the existing North Korean régime, though having not much more than a quarter of the population of the country, would exercise an effective veto on the form such elections would take. The United States and South Korean delegates called for elections, under United Nations auspices, in the north only, and for the withdrawal of Chinese troops in that area. Mr. Eden suggested a solution about midway between these two proposals. He called for elections under international supervision, throughout both parts of Korea; for the formation of an all-Korean government that would reflect the balance of population between north and south; and for the discussion of conditions under which "foreign troops" might be withdrawn—he did not specify that the proposal should involve Chinese troops only.

It proved impossible to establish any agreement between these divergent views. Indeed the Communist Powers, by demanding the reduction of the armed forces of both north and south to exactly equal numbers and the abrogation of the South Korean defence treaty with the United States, moved even further from the position of the West. And on June 15, discussion of the subject had to be abandoned. The sixteen nations which had participated in United Nations action in Korea issued a communiqué reaffirming that unification should be attained by free elections, under United Nations supervision, for a national assembly in which representation should be in direct proportion to the population numbers in the two halves of Korea.

In Indo-China an entirely different type of situation was faced. In the first place the military position had become so critical for the French that a settlement began to be an urgent necessity. Next, discussion was made more difficult by the somewhat aloof attitude towards the discussion taken up by the United States representatives: Mr. Dulles in particular made no attempt to conceal his distaste for the entire proceedings, appearing with only the greatest reluctance at the same table with Chou En-lai, and in effect left discussion mainly in the hands of his deputy, General Bedell Smith. Thirdly, there was also a certain ambivalence about the position of China in the negotiations; for although not overtly a participant in the Indo-China war, it was generally accepted that her views would be crucial
to the attainment of any solution. Finally, a problem arose over the form in which the indigenous Indo-China states, all three of which were disputed between official French-recognized governments and by Communist, or Communist-supported rebel organizations, should be represented at the conference.

On this final point it was finally agreed that the three Associated States and the Vietminh should all participate in the discussions. The delegates next had to consider the political basis of a possible settlement. Mr. Eden had a number of private meetings with Mr. Molotov, his fellow chairman, and with Chou En-lai. Mr. Molotov was moderate in tone and seemed anxious to bring about a settlement. Chou En-lai was at first harsh and intransigent, but mellowed during the course of the conference.

Many of the important advances were made not at the plenary sessions but during the course of private discussions between the principal delegations. The British delegates, together with Indian representatives, had an important part to play as intermediaries between the two Communist leaders, particularly Chou En-lai, on the one hand, and the French, United States and Associated States representatives on the other. On May 29 the conference unanimously adopted a British plan for bringing about a preliminary cease-fire in Vietnam by direct negotiations between the military commands on the spot on both sides. As a result of a meeting between Chou En-lai and Mr. Eden, an agreement was reached by which the Vietminh were to withdraw from Laos and Cambodia, and the authority of the two royal governments recognized there, provided no United States bases were established in the two countries. And on June 19 there was agreement for a cease-fire in Laos and Cambodia on the same lines as that arranged for Vietnam. Between June 20 and July 10 the conference adjourned. After the conference reconvened on July 10 there was intensive discussion on the composition of the supervisory commission for the armistice, the provision for elections in the three states, and the line of demarcation in Vietnam. Compromise settlements on all these points were reached and on the night of July 20, which M. Mendes-France had set as a dead-line for coming to a settlement, agreements were signed covering all three countries.

The settlement provided for the establishment of an international supervisory commission, consisting of representatives of India, Canada and Poland, to police the cease-fire agreement in the
three states. Elections were to be held throughout Vietnam in July, 1956, to secure the unification of the country. Vietminh forces would be withdrawn from Cambodia. In Laos the Pathet Lao forces were to be regrouped in two north-eastern provinces. Both Laos and Cambodia declared that they would not enter into an alliance that was not in conformity with the "principle of the cease-fire agreements". Declarations by France, Cambodia and Laos provided that French troops should be withdrawn from those states by the agreement, and that free elections would be held in them during 1955.

The United States would not subscribe to any of these agreements. Their government issued a statement "taking note" of them, but at the same time did not conceal the disfavour with which they viewed a settlement that was regarded both by the administration and by a large number of the United States people as a moral victory for Communism.

The settlement that was finally arrived at provided in effect for the neutralization of Laos and Cambodia and for the partition of Vietnam. In his discussion with Mr. Eden, Chou En-lai had made it clear that he attached the greatest importance to ensuring that the states of Indo-China should remain "independent, sovereign, and neutral". That a final settlement was possible was no doubt due to the evident fact that China was more anxious to see these states neutral now than to seek to ensure, by a prolongation of the war, that they might later be Communist. Thus their Pathet Lao, Khmer, even to some extent their Vietminh allies, had to be sacrificed in order to reach a settlement on these lines. The most important immediate aim for China was to ensure that her own borders were surrounded by buffer states which could not serve as bases for potentially hostile United States or other Western forces.

But while China was able to insulate these immediately outlying areas from world alliances, she could not prevent the formation of a Western military pact further afield. The possibility of some kind of defence organization in South East Asia had been vaguely discussed between the United States, British and French Governments in June, 1952. In April, 1954, when the situation in Indo-China began to look precarious the idea was revived by the United States Government. The British Government in resisting United States requests for joint intervention in the Indo-China war made it clear that they would have no objection to the establishment of a
defence organization. They were anxious, however, that such a proposal should be discussed with the Governments of India, Pakistan, Burma and other countries in order to act in co-operation with the peoples of the area. The United States were not especially concerned whether the so-called neutralist powers joined the organization or not. But they were anxious that the committed anti-Communist nations of the area should be organized together as quickly as possible. The Governments of India, Ceylon, Burma and Indonesia in fact rejected the approaches that were eventually made to them. The pact was nevertheless concluded and at the beginning of September the South East Asia Treaty Organization, comprising the Governments of the United States, Britain, France, Pakistan, and Philippines and Siam was established.

The Chinese Government did not conceal their hostility to these proceedings. The preparations for the establishment of the Organization became known during the Geneva Conference. Chou En-lai told Mr. Eden that the Western Powers were splitting South East Asia in two by an anti-Communist alliance. The Chinese Government were especially apprehensive about the suggestion that the Indo-Chinese states might be included in the new Organization. If this had been done it is unlikely that the Geneva Agreements could have subsisted, since it would have violated the basis of the Agreements, the neutrality of the Associated States. Even without them, the pact aroused a violent reaction in the Chinese Press, which has been continued sporadically ever since.

In the event the Organization has achieved little. Military coordination has been of the sketchiest. There have been some attempts to co-ordinate anti-subversive activity in the member countries. The alliance may have had some effect in boosting the confidence of some of the countries of the area in face of Chinese expansion. But the most powerful and influential nations of the area have remained outside it. Many others regard it as a vestige of colonialism. And it is questionable how far it has acted as an effective deterrent against Communist aggression, since the Chinese must well have known that the countries that are members are those that would in any case inevitably have joined in any war in which they became involved in the area.

Britain had a particularly important role to play at the Geneva Conference. Partly because public and official attitudes in the United States both towards Communism in general and towards China in
particular, were at this time so impassioned, she played a key part in presenting a more moderate and realistic Western position. Having no national interests either in Indo-China or in Korea, she could perhaps see more clearly than those more intimately affected, or more emotionally committed, the advantages to be gained through some stabilization of the position in South East Asia. A failure to achieve an armistice in Indo-China at this stage could in fact only have meant an indefinite prolongation of the war. This would have led to a prolonged period of unrest and the increasing identification of Communist activity with national aspirations. And it could well have led eventually to the loss of all Indo-China. Thus even from the narrow standpoint of the Western tactical position, there was much to be gained by a settlement. A more important attainment was the abolition of the last important area of armed conflict then existing.

For relations between Britain and China the Geneva Conference was important for quite other reasons than the settlement of the war in Indo-China. During the conference Mr. Eden and Chou En-lai had discussions on a number of other questions affecting relations between the two countries. Chou En-lai showed himself ready to make concessions on a number of points. The Chinese Press and radio became more affable. There was a period almost of cordiality in the relations between the two countries. Chou En-lai agreed that China should open a mission in London, under a chargé d'affaires, corresponding to the British post in Peking. He undertook to see if something could be done to help British businessmen in China to close their businesses and leave the country. He agreed to review the case of a British subject, captured in Tibet and still held in a Chinese prison; and to inquire into the fate of a party of British sailors from Hong Kong who had disappeared while on a yachting cruise. And the month after the Conference ended, when a British civil aircraft was shot down by Chinese aircraft with the loss of ten lives during a period of tension in the Formosa Straits, the Chinese Government surprised the world by publishing an immediate apology and paying in full the claim for compensation subsequently put forward by the British Government.

One effect of this relaxation was a considerable increase in contacts between the two countries. From the beginning of the régime
these had almost entirely withered away. Visits in either direction were almost entirely confined to those known to be sympathetic to the Chinese authorities. In September, 1950, an informal delegation of Chinese, led by Liu Ning-i, a leading member of the Chinese Communist Party, had come to Britain, had been carefully shepherded by pro-Communist organizations and issued various statements attacking British policies. From that time there had been virtually no visits of any sort from China to Britain. In the opposite direction almost the only people able to visit China had been a few prominent British personalities ready to pronounce in favour of the Chinese cause (for example over the Korean war, or the accusations of germ warfare made against the United States), one or two left-wing trade union delegates and an occasional Labour M.P.

The British Council, though for a short time they reported that their offices were as well patronized as ever, were finally obliged to withdraw from China in August, 1952.

From the time of the Geneva Conference visits became much more frequent. There were regular delegations for the Chinese National Day and May Day celebrations. There were visits by Members of Parliament of both parties, businessmen, trade unionists, theatrical groups, university delegations and specialists in many fields, regardless of political beliefs. And there were a few visits of the same sort in the opposite direction.

The most important of these exchanges was probably the visit made by leaders of the Labour Party, including Mr. Attlee, Mr. Bevin, Dr. Summerskill (the Chairman of the Party), Mr. Morgan Phillips (the Secretary), and others, as a result of an invitation from the Chinese delegation at the Geneva Conference in August, 1954. The party had talks with Chou En-lai and Mao Tse-tung. Chou En-lai for the first time attended a dinner party in the British Embassy given in the delegation’s honour. Both sides agreed on the need for an increase in trade and diplomatic contacts. And after the visit Mr. Attlee made a statement declaring his belief that Formosa should be neutralized for a period before a final decision was taken on its future.

One or two visits were refused from the British side. In May, 1956, the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, the Chinese Parliament, invited a British parliamentary delegation to visit China. This invitation was turned down by the British Government. The British Government similarly rejected sugges-
tions that a parliamentary delegation from China should be asked to visit Britain.

The more amiable mood of China’s policy towards Britain from 1954 was a reflection of a general relaxation in her attitude towards the outside world at that time. This was exemplified in her readiness to reach some accommodation with many governments of the area that were by no means congenial in ideology. The Chinese leaders continued to cultivate relations with the major neutral powers of Asia. They even extended this policy to the royalist and anti-Communist Governments of Laos and Cambodia. And it received its clearest expression at the conference of Afro-Asian Powers at Bandung where Chou En-lai succeeded in impressing many with his conciliatory and undogmatic approach.

On matters that they considered of vital national importance, however, the Chinese Government continued to take up an intransigent, and even belligerent attitude. Thus, during the autumn of 1954, in the hey-day of the spirit of Bandung, they launched a heavy bombardment from Chinese coastal batteries against some of the islands off the mainland coast still occupied by Nationalist troops. They reaffirmed their determination to liberate Formosa. And they declared that they would “brook no foreign interference” in their efforts to carry out this intention.

The Nationalists replied with attacks by aircraft and warships on Communist gun-emplacements and other targets. A Nationalist destroyer was sunk by Communist torpedo boats. On August 24 Mr. Dulles issued a statement, pointing out that the United States 7th Fleet was committed to the defence of Formosa, and declaring that a number of other islands were “so intimately connected with the defence of Formosa” that the United States military authorities would be justified in defending them as part of their overall strategy. In December the United States Government signed a defence treaty with the Nationalist Government. But neither the terms of the treaty nor the various public statements made by United States spokesmen made it unambiguously clear whether the United States would intervene to defend the islands at that time under attack. It was evidently the policy of the United States administration to leave the matter in doubt in order to deter any possible attack without undertaking an irrevocable commitment.

On January 18, Communist forces captured Yikiangshan Island, about 200 miles north of Formosa, and close to the Tachen Islands.
which were also under attack. On the next day President Eisen­
hower expressed the wish for a cease-fire under United Nations
auspices. On January 27 the United States Senate at the President’s
request passed, by an overwhelming majority, a resolution giving
the President authority to employ United States armed forces as he
thought necessary for securing Formosa and the Pescadores, as well
as "related positions and territories of that area now in friendly
hands", against armed attack from without.

British public opinion had from the start of the fighting almost
unanimously taken the line that, whatever the merits of the Chinese
Government’s claim to Formosa, the situation in which the
Nationalists continued to cling to small islands, sometimes only a
few miles from the mainland coast, though often a great distance
from Formosa, could only be provocative; and that the best solution
would be one that brought about a Nationalist withdrawal from
such islands. There is little doubt that the British Government
shared such views. Thus, while the United States Government
sought so far as possible to obscure any clear distinction between
the islands and Formosa itself, the British Government in all their
public statements sought, on the contrary, to underline the differ­
ences in the status of the two. Thus Mr. Eden, speaking in the
House of Commons on January 26, drew a careful distinction
between the Government’s attitude towards Formosa, which during
the present century had never legally belonged to China, and the
offshore islands which "had always been regarded by us as a part
of China". In a written reply a few days later he went further,
saying "the Nationalist-held islands in close proximity to the coast
of China are in a different category from Formosa and the Pesca­
dores, since they undoubtedly form part of the territory of the
People’s Republic of China". And later he stated in categorical
terms that he "would like to see the Nationalists withdraw their
forces" from the coastal islands.

But though the British Government were more free than the
United States authorities to express openly their views as to the
action the Nationalists should take, they were, for the same reasons,
less likely to influence them towards the course of action they
advocated. There is little doubt that the United States Government,
whatever they said in public, did what they could behind the scenes
to induce the Nationalists to withdraw from their more exposed
positions. Meanwhile the British Government sought in the interna-
tional field to bring about a relaxation of tension. Mr. Eden, while he went out of his way to say that he "understood the position of the Chinese Government" and did not expect them to withdraw their claim to the islands, publicly declared that the first need was to stop the fighting. On January 28, the British Ambassador in Moscow was instructed to call on Mr. Molotov to ask him to use his influence to induce the Chinese Government towards moderation. When a meeting of the Security Council was called and the Chinese Government invited to attend, the British chargé d'affaires in Peking, informing the Chinese Government of the decision, similarly urged the need for a peaceful resolution of the dispute. When Mr. Eden paid a visit to South East Asia in the spring he discussed ways to bring about such an outcome with the Prime Ministers of Burma and India. And throughout the period the Government were reported to be doing all in their power to persuade the United States Government to use their influence with the Nationalists in favour of withdrawal.

The situation was still tense at the time of the Bandung Conference in April, 1955. During the conference Chou En-lai offered to sit down with United States representatives to discuss ways of relaxing tension in the area. Initial United States reaction was somewhat surly. The British Government were reported to have used their influence to bring about a reconsideration of this attitude. The British chargé d'affaires took part in discussions with the Chinese Government in Peking to find a form of words specifying the scope of the talks in terms acceptable to the United States Government. And Britain played an important part, with the Indian Government, in getting the talks going. These were finally successful. In July the negotiations were opened in Geneva; and have been proceeding, in desultory fashion, ever since. In the same month the British Prime Minister raised the subject with both U.S. and Soviet leaders during the Geneva Conference; trying, as he later wrote, "to persuade those present, and absent, of the peaceful intentions of the other side".

Meanwhile the situation in the straits had become calm again. But their discussion with the U.S. at Geneva brought the Chinese no nearer to the attainment of their demands. And in the summer of 1958 they again launched an attack on the islands. Again there was heavy bombardment of those islands nearest the Chinese coast and of convoys of ships sent to supply them. Mr. Dulles issued a
statement suggesting, in considerably more categorical terms than in 1955, that the United States might intervene to defend Quemoy and Matsu. While the President had not made any final decision to make use of the powers that he had been vested with by Congress, "we have recognized that the securing and protecting of Quemoy and Matsu have increasingly become related to the defence of Taiwan". A considerable United States naval force was sent to Formosa. United States warships were deputed to escort Nationalist supply convoys to the islands.

British public opinion again expressed its concern that the Western Powers might, if only by accident, find themselves involved in a war which, though it could be presented as a war against aggression, would in effect be interpreted as a war to secure the continued control by the Nationalists of a few small islands within a few miles of the Chinese coast. The British Government made clear that they had no obligation or commitment to take military action for the defence of Quemoy, Matsu or Formosa. But the British Foreign Secretary, now Mr. Selwyn Lloyd, made little attempt on this occasion to distinguish the position of the islands from that of Formosa. Nor is there any evidence that the British Government made any attempt to bring about a Nationalist withdrawal from the islands. British ministers in general supported the statements made by the United States Government. A Foreign Office statement regretted "the current indications that the Chinese Government wished to settle the problem of the offshore islands by force". The Prime Minister rejected a suggestion by Mr. Gaitskell, the Leader of the Opposition, on September 15, that the British Government should make plain that Britain would not join in a war for the defence of Quemoy, or if necessary, fly to Washington to make these views plain to the United States Government.

This alteration in the attitude of the British Government in part no doubt reflected the fact that the Government of Mr. Macmillan and Mr. Selwyn Lloyd were less willing than that of Mr. Churchill and Mr. Eden, especially since the sorry escapade at Suez, to adopt a policy independent from that of the United States. But it was in part a reflection of the general deterioration in the mood of British relations with China since the brief honeymoon period after Geneva. The more conciliatory attitude of the Chinese was maintained up to 1956. In July of that year the People's Daily said that there were "pleasant signs that Britain was taking the realistic path
of peaceful co-existence’. The Chinese Prime Minister attended the celebrations of the Queen’s Birthday at the British Embassy in Peking, and proposed the health of the Queen and the happiness of the British people.

He did not attend them in 1957. During that year the Hundred Flowers that were allowed briefly to blossom for a few spring weeks in China, were, from June, once more savagely cut down. A fierce anti-rightist movement was introduced. Early the next year Chou En-lai, usually considered pliable and conciliatory in his diplomatic dealings, was replaced as Foreign Minister. The alteration in the strategic balance between East and West from the end of 1957 may have encouraged a more forward policy. Mao Tse-tung declared his belief that “the East wind prevails over the West’’. Chinese attitudes to a number of external questions, both in Asia and beyond, showed a notable lack of the spirit of Bandung. Conversely, Britain continued year after year to support United States moves to postpone consideration of the admission of the People’s Republic to the United Nations. The British Government, Chou En-lai complained in an interview with a British correspondent, had abandoned the efforts of Sir Anthony Eden to improve relations, and now toed the American line on every matter. British goodwill perhaps began to seem of little value to the Chinese Government.

Chinese propaganda became considerably more hostile. It once again became difficult for any but congenial British visitors to get visas to China. The Chinese Prime Minister, in his annual report to the nation at the National People’s Congress in February, 1958, said that “if Britain does not change its double-faced attitude towards China . . . Sino-British relations would inevitably be adversely affected”. At the time of the revival of the offshore islands dispute, the Chinese Press claimed that “Lloyd and his like were openly conniving with and backing the United States policy of aggression and provocation against China”. There was particular indignation that the British Government, which had recognized China, should now make no attempt, as Sir Anthony Eden had done, to recognize the validity of Chinese claims to the islands. At the time of the British attack at Suez, the Chinese Government issued a statement, reminiscent of those published at the time of the Korean war, saying that China “could not stand idly by” while Egypt’s sovereignty was threatened; 250,000 Chinese “volunteers” were said to have
registered at offices set up all over China. Huge demonstrations were organized outside the British Embassy in Peking. When Britain sent troops to Jordan at the request of the Jordan Government in July, 1958, more massed gatherings took place and the Chinese Government presented a Note to Britain warning her that she faced "grave consequences" if she failed to withdraw her troops. And today the British are once more abused, in customary terms, as unregenerate imperialists.

British relations with the new Government of China have passed through three phases. At the time of recognition there were some in Britain who hoped that it might be possible, by preserving so far as possible previously existing ties and seeking to draw China into the world community, to establish with her a more satisfactory relationship than had proved possible with other Communist countries. In September, 1950, Mr. Bevin declared that Britain "did not intend to break her long-established friendship with China"; and would be ready to help China fulfil her destiny as one of the great powers. Chinese treatment of British business and other interests, her intransigent approach on many world problems, the ruthlessly totalitarian nature of her internal policies, and the opposition of the two countries in the Korean war for a time frustrated all such hopes.

By 1954 the war was over. China's policies began to be more conciliatory. British interests were now largely displaced, but there seemed a chance that some of the old contacts could be re-established on a new basis. From the time of the Geneva Conference therefore, there seemed once more an opportunity to put relations between the two countries on a better footing.

But this phase too did not last more than two or three years. From 1957 China's mood hardened again. The period of conciliation had not led to any improvement in her international status. She remained an exile from the world community. Whether for these or other reasons, her whole approach to the international scene became increasingly shrill and assertive. With Britain she had few subjects of common interest. Relations became once more remote. Neither any longer had much to gain from the friendship of the other.

The difficulties that have persisted derive partly from ideological divergences. These have necessarily entailed membership of oppos-
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ing power blocks. Partly they reflect the strident and uncompromising mood of China's new rulers. Still in an early, Stalinist phase of their own revolution, the Chinese leaders have tended to regard the world scene with a stern and unaccommodating eye; and they have perhaps sometimes, for purely internal reasons, welcomed the opportunity to beat the drums of nationalism. Partly the differences that remain are those of national self-interest. But as British power has begun to recede from the Far East, such clashes of material interest have become less acute than they were in former times. Though, therefore, the two countries today are in many ways more remote than they have been for over a century, they have perhaps, for this very reason, less immediate cause for altercation than at any time in their history.