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UNWITTING PARTNERS: RELATIONS BETWEEN TAIWAN AND BRITAIN, 1950–1958

 Steve Tsang

On 6 January 1950, Britain became the first major Western power to recognise the Communist People's Republic of China (PRC) under Mao Tse-tung. This required Britain to end formal diplomatic relations with its wartime ally, the Republic of China (ROC), which by then had relocated its government to Taipei on the island of Taiwan. It did not, however, lead to a cutting of all ties between Britain and the ROC (or Taiwan).¹ As this paper will demonstrate, the ROC and Britain continued to maintain non-diplomatic relations in important ways in the 1950s. They had a common objective in denying Taiwan to the Chinese Communists, albeit for different reasons. They also shared the wish to prevent Hong Kong from falling to the Communists and to continue their mutually beneficial economic relations, mainly in trade and shipping. However, the relations between them were set against a background of considerable differences. Even in regard to the issue on which they were at one, namely, the need to save Taiwan from Communism, they disagreed over the best means to achieve this goal. To London, the most important issue was to prevent the Taiwan question from becoming a cause for a general war in the Far East, particularly after the outbreak of the Korean conflict in June 1950. In contrast, Chiang Kai-shek's government in Taipei would have liked to ride the crest of a general war on the Asian mainland in order to recover the ground which it had lost to the Chinese Communists. Likewise, London kept all options open for a future solution to the problem of Taiwan, ranging from independent nationhood, a United Nations trusteeship, to a continuation of the existing Kuomintang government under Chiang. Taipei, for its part, would not consider any solution which did not involve the maintenance of Chiang's firm grip on the island in the name of the ROC. To Chiang in the 1950s, the independence of Taiwan or self-determination by the Taiwanese was anathema. In British eyes, while the ROC was already a part of history, Taiwan was a political reality which should

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¹ The ROC controlled not only Taiwan but also the so-called offshore islands and the Penghu islands, even after the mainland and Hainan island came under full PRC control in mid-1950. However, since the British ceased to recognise the ROC in January 1950 and British documents since then customarily referred to it as Formosa or Taiwan, in this paper its modern name 'Taiwan' is generally used in the context of British references to the ROC. Exceptions are made when central provincial government officials are mentioned, with the former described as the ROC Minister of Defence, for example, to /OVER

/the 'ROC Minister of Defence, for example to distinguish them from the Taiwanese provincial officials. 'Taiwan' rather than 'Formosa' is used throughout, except in quotations and footnotes, for consistency. 'China' is used as a politically neutral term to include both the PRC and the ROC.

be dealt with on that basis. To Taipei, Taiwan existed as the last redoubt of the ROC in its long struggle against Communism. Notwithstanding their many differences, the strategic imperative ensured that the ROC and Britain, towards the end of the 1950s, became unwitting partners in pursuit of their common object.

This paper examines the intricate relations between the ROC on Taiwan and Britain, from the ending of formal diplomatic relations in January 1950 to the conclusion of the Second Taiwan Straits Crisis in late 1958. It highlights the basis of the ROC's policy towards Britain and vice versa, and reconstructs the framework for the conduct of relations in the absence of diplomatic recognition. It scrutinizes the major attempts which were made to improve relations and build up a partnership of a kind. Finally, it explores the thorny question of how Taipei and London dealt with the future of Taiwan, the one issue which divided them most and yet eventually formed the basis of a passive partnership.

The Basis of the ROC's Policy towards Britain

² The equivalent of Permanent Under-Secretary in Britain. Yeh became Foreign Minister in 1949 and stayed until July 1958. Chang T'ien-chiao, *Wen-hsueh, i-shu, wai-chiao: Yeh Kung-ch'ao chuan* (Taipei: Chintai Chung-kuo Ch'u-pan-she, 1988), p.165.

³ Public Record Office (Kew), British Government Foreign Office archives FO371/92208, R. H. Scott's minutes, dated 2 March 1951.

⁴ FO371/120881, A. A. E. Franklin to S. Lloyd, dispatch dated 7 June 1956; FO371/127484, Franklin to P. G. F. Dalton, letter dated 15 January 1957.

⁵ Foreign Ministry archives (Taipei), Waichiaopu 305.22, George Yeh to Yen Chishan, no.10108, 20 January 1950.

⁶ FO371/99259, Lloyd's minutes of 8 February 1952 (recording the gist of his meeting with Han Lih-wu); and FO371/127484, Franklin to Dalton, letter dated 15 January 1957. See also below, "Major attempts at building a partnership," for details.

In Taipei, Chiang Kai-shek, even before formally resuming the Presidency of the ROC in March 1950, held ultimate control over foreign policy. Yeh Kung-ch'ao 葉公超, or George Yeh, as he was better known in the West, was Foreign Minister for virtually the entire period under study, but he treated Chiang as if the latter were the real incumbent and contented himself with playing the role of an administrative deputy.² According to Han Lih-wu (Hang Li-wu 杭立武), Chiang considered Britain's importance to the ROC as second only to that of the United States.³ After all, Britain had emerged from the Second World War as one of the three genuine great powers, a world leader and the second most powerful country in the non-Communist camp, while the British Empire was still a force to be reckoned with in East Asia in the early 1950s. Chiang also thought that Britain's policy of recognising the PRC was misguided, based on short-term expediency and against Britain's long-term interests, which would suffer from the expansion of the Communists.⁴ In this Chiang was supported by his foreign policy experts, who felt that Britain's decision to recognize the PRC was motivated by an opportunistic desire to protect its interests in the Far East, which were still so enormous at the beginning of 1950 that they overshadowed Britain's basic anti-Communist stance.⁵ They included, according to the Waichiaopu (Foreign Ministry), the need to avoid provoking a Chinese Communist attack on British dependencies such as Hong Kong, and the desire to protect the vast British investments on, as well as trade with, the mainland of China. In the 1950s Chiang did not give up the idea that once the British had realised they had made a serious mistake in recognising the Communists, they could be persuaded to reverse their policy towards the PRC.⁶

It was partly for this reason and partly because of other practical considerations that Chiang and the Waichiaopu decided to retain relations other than diplomatic ties with Britain after the British recognition of the Communist regime in Peking. Once the British had demonstrated their preparedness to “maintain *de facto* relations with the local administration” in Taiwan, the Waichiaopu argued that this would be in line with the ROC’s interests.⁷ It called for the continuation of non-diplomatic links so that commerce and communications between areas under ROC control and British territories could be maintained.⁸ While the practical advantages were clearly an important factor behind this policy, the fact that Britain was the only power to be permitted to keep a consulate in Taiwan after it recognised the PRC indicates how much importance was attached to relations with it by Chiang and the Waichiaopu.⁹

Notwithstanding Taipei’s recognition of the importance of Britain, its attitude towards Britain was also strongly coloured by a sense of betrayal, which manifested itself in resentment and bitterness. In early 1950, as the Waichiaopu was busily trying to work out practical arrangements for the conduct of relations in the absence of diplomatic recognition, the Garrison Command in Tanshui (Tamsui to the British) repeatedly let its soldiers harass the British Consulate there, while the police sent to protect the Consulate adopted a deliberately relaxed approach to such incidents. A stop was finally put to this when the Waichiaopu made strong internal representations in favour of the British Consul. Within the Kuomintang, too, there were strong calls for the punishment of the British for their betrayal through a boycott of British goods.¹⁰ Chiang himself found the British attitude unsatisfactory in 1950, and later (in 1957) told a British journalist that while he could overlook Britain’s mistakes in the past, he would not forget or forgive Britain if it was indeed actively supporting a two-China policy.¹¹ Even though the private cries to punish the British went unheeded by Chiang’s government, petty officialdom in Taiwan remained hostile to the British.¹² Every now and then British Consulate personnel would be subjected to petty harassments. As one of the British consuls summed up, during his two years in Tanshui, Britain “was the object of a wholesale contempt, never expressed but plainly felt.”¹³ He added that “[t]hough there was no anti-British incident, [and] no ill-use of British subjects happened, British prestige was on the decline.” Apparently, even will-wishers thought that Britain was “following bad policies for good but mistaken reasons.”¹⁴

However strong the undercurrent of a sense of resentment towards Britain was in the ROC, its government’s policy towards Britain was by and large ruled not by sentiment but by *Realpolitik*. It accepted that Britain would not support any military attempt on its part to reconquer the Chinese mainland, and recognised that

⁷ Waichiaopu 305.2, Yeh to K. C. Wu, letter dated February 1950.

⁸ Waichiaopu 305.2, Waichiaopu to Kuofang-pu, no.10253, 14 January 1950.

⁹ See Hsieh Chiao-chiao, *Strategy for survival: the foreign policy and external relations of the Republic of China on Taiwan, 1949–1979* (London: Sherwood Press, 1985), pp.186–7.

¹⁰ Waichiaopu 305.2, Submission to Chiang Kai-shek from Li Shih-ying, Tang Chun-po and Chang Shi, 12 January 1950; see also *Fang-kung pan-yueh-kan*, 5 August 1950, p.510.

¹¹ Waichiaopu 305.2, Wellington Koo to Yeh, telegram 4593, 15 September 1950; FO371/127484, Franklin to Dalton, letter dated 15 January 1957.

¹² FO371/120928, Franklin to C. T. Crowe, letter of 22 October 1956.

¹³ FO371/114987, Herman to H. Macmillan, dispatch 41, 26 October 1955.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Figure 1

Yeh Kung-ch'ao, returning from America, being met by Chiang Ching-kuo at Taipei airport, 13 October 1961 (source: Fu Tsao-hsiang, Yeh Kung-ch'ao chuan – Yeh Kung-ch'ao ti i-sheng [Taipei: Mou-lien Wan-hua Chi-chin, 1993])



Britain would not support its claim to represent China at the United Nations. It nonetheless tried to ensure that Britain would, if not side with the United States in support of the ROC in its struggle against Communism, at least maintain a benevolent neutrality generally and at the United Nations in particular. The bottom line, as Chiang made clear, was that Britain should not work actively for the permanent separation of Taiwan from China. Seen from Taipei, Britain was a staunchly anti-Communist power, which would qualify it to be, if not immediately, at least potentially a partner of a kind. It was thus treated on that basis.

The Basis of Britain's Policy towards Taiwan

¹⁵ FO371/99218, Scott to Sir Gladwyn Jebb, letter of 18 April 1952.

¹⁶ FO371/75801, Far Eastern Department paper, "Formosa," dated 8 February 1949.

¹⁷ FO371/83235, J. S. Shattock's minutes dated 28 June 1950.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; FO371/83014, Franklin's minutes dated 16 September 1950.

¹⁹ FO371/88015, Scott's minutes dated 13 December 1950.

²⁰ FO371/83299, General headquarters, Far East Land Forces to Minister of Defence, telegram 122732, 20 August 1950.

²¹ FO371/83015, Prime Minister's note, undated, 1950; see also FO371/92225, Extract from Prime Minister's speech to the House of Commons on 14 December 1950.

²² FO371/114974, Anthony Eden's minutes dated 19 July 1955.

²³ Ritchie Owendale, "William Strang and the Permanent Under-Secretary's Committee" in John Zametica, ed., *British officials and British foreign policy* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), pp.223. For a more detailed and penetrating analysis of Anglo-American disagreements over China in 1949 and 1950 see Edwin W. Martin, *Divided counsel: the Anglo-American response to communist victory in China* (Lexington, Ken.: University of Kentucky Press, 1986).

²⁴ FO371/92067, P. Dixon's minutes dated 2 January 1951.

²⁵ FO371/110231, Minutes approved by Eden, dated 16 September 1954.

²⁶ FO371/92067, Sir William Strange's minutes of 3 January 1951.

²⁷ FO371/92067, Dixon's minutes of 2 January 1951; FO371/92219, Scott to Sir Christopher Steel, letter of 20 December 1951.

Unlike the United States or, for that matter, the Soviet Union, which were self-evidently important countries for British foreign policy in the 1950s, Taiwan was a small territory located in a far-away region of only peripheral importance to Britain.¹⁵ However, the PRC intervention in the Korean War in 1950 forced the British to attach considerable importance to Taiwan. Hitherto, Britain had simply taken a legalistic view on the status and, therefore, the future of Taiwan. As London saw it, both the Cairo Declaration (1943) and the Potsdam Declaration (1945) were merely statements of intent, neither of which could result in an automatic transfer of sovereignty from Japan to China.¹⁶ The status of Taiwan was consequently unsettled and it technically remained a piece of enemy (Japanese) territory under Allied (Chinese) occupation—a matter which could only be settled by a peace treaty with Japan. Following its recognition of the PRC on 6 January 1950, Britain basically continued to follow this policy. It kept all the options open, ranging from maintaining the status quo, through some form of UN trusteeship over Taiwan, to returning it to the legitimate government of China which, according to British obligations in international law, would be the PRC from the date of its recognition.¹⁷ In practice, Britain preferred not to see Taiwan fall under Communism if possible, and it thus took the position that the status of Taiwan should be determined after the restoration of security and order in the Pacific.¹⁸

The Korean War had a major impact on British policy towards Taiwan. The idea of allowing Taiwan to fall to the Chinese Communists had transformed itself from an undesirable but acceptable outcome into "an unwarranted military risk."¹⁹ In the light of the restoration of American support for Chiang Kai-shek after June 1950, the PRC determination to 'liberate' Taiwan, and Chiang's wish to recover the Chinese mainland (which in British eyes could only be achieved as part of a general war), a local conflict over Taiwan had the potential to trigger a general war involving the PRC and the US—one in which Britain might not be able to avoid involvement.²⁰ Before the close of 1950, Taiwan had become "one of the most difficult and troublesome" problems facing Britain in the Far East.²¹

In the 1950s it was as one of the most serious potential causes of instability

or of a general war that Taiwan commanded an important place in British foreign policy calculations.²² As such it was also closely linked to Britain's relations with the United States and the PRC. Until Anglo-American co-operation was torn asunder in the Suez Crisis of 1956, the area of greatest disagreement between the two powers was the Far East.²³ The question of Taiwan, which was inextricably tied to that of China as a whole, was part of this: while they shared the common objective of denying it to the Chinese Communists, both disagreed strongly over what to do with Kinmen and Matsu, the small chains of islands off the coast of the Chinese mainland occupied and fortified by Chiang's forces. To the British, the United States was too new to being a super-power, was unable to put things into perspective, and had failed to see that the most important issue in the Far East was to avoid war with the PRC.²⁴ They felt that, rather than assisting Chiang in the defence of Kinmen and Matsu, the Americans should have used their leverage to compel him to evacuate his forces from the islands, which were deemed to be of no strategic or military value to the defence of the West or indeed of Taiwan.²⁵ However, the British accepted the limits of their power and of their influence over American policy in the Far East. They tried to steer American policy over Taiwan onto a more rational course, yet knew the futility of this, recognising the need to maintain with the United States some kind of a united front in the matter.²⁶ The private laments among British diplomats over American immaturity in foreign policy reflected their sense of frustration as well as realism.²⁷

British relations with the PRC also influenced its policy towards Taiwan. In London's eyes, the existence of a Communist PRC and its alliance to the Soviet Union were facts, however unpleasant they might have been.²⁸ Indeed, the British recognition of the PRC in January 1950 was primarily the result of practising *Realpolitik*.²⁹ The British government did recognise, despite earlier doubts, the Communist nature of Mao Tse-tung's regime at least by early 1949, but its wish to protect British investments on the Chinese mainland and in Hong Kong also initially imposed limited restraints on Britain's policy towards the two Chinese regimes.³⁰ The need to safeguard British investments on the mainland, however, quickly became irrelevant as the PRC had squeezed most of them dry by 1950.³¹ As to the threat of a Communist invasion of Hong Kong, the British government was concerned but not seriously worried.³² It felt that its demonstration of a determination to defend the Colony by massively reinforcing its garrison—from one brigade to about 30,000 men in 1949—would deter the Chinese Communists, whose *de facto* representative in Hong Kong (Ch'iao Kuan-hua 喬冠華) had, in any event, given private assurances that the status quo there would not be challenged.³³ Britain's assessment of the Communist military threat to Hong Kong was in fact correct.³⁴ The PRC accepted the British presence there because it was useful to its "economic reconstruction," and would make the British more susceptible to PRC pressure and thus less likely to co-operate with the Americans.³⁵ More generally, Britain thought that the Soviet-PRC alliance would lead to a PRC attempt to spread Communism in Asia under

²⁸ For a detailed account of Britain's policy towards the recognition of the PRC, see James Tang, *Relations with a revolutionary power* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), particularly pp.31–68.

²⁹ See Tang, *Relations*, and D. C. Wolf, "To secure a convenience': Britain recognizes China—1950," *Journal of Contemporary History* 18 (1983), pp.299–326.

³⁰ The British assessment of the nature of Mao's revolutionary movement can be found in CAB129/32, appendix to CP(49)39, 4 March 1949. The personal views of some members of Attlee's Labour Cabinet that the Chinese Communists were not hard-core Communists did not have a strong impact on British policy in this period. Chinese Communist documents obtained by the British in Hong Kong, which were submitted to the Cabinet, proved beyond reasonable doubt that Mao's party was as Communist as its sister party in the Soviet Union.

³¹ For the PRC's policy in this matter see Beverly Hooper, *China stands up: ending the Western presence 1948–50* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986), pp.85–108; and Noel Barber, *The fall of Shanghai* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1979).

³² See Sir Alexander Grantham, *Via ports: from Hong Kong to Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1965), pp.139–53, 164–73.

³³ The most immediately relevant Cabinet papers on the defence of Hong Kong are CAB129/35, CP(49)118 of 25 May 1949, and CP(49)134 of 17 June 1949; Chinese assurances are in FO371/75779, confidential memorandum of H. C. Bough. For PRC views and general analyses of the subject see Tseng Jui-sheng (Steve Tsang), "Ying-kuo 'fang-wei Hsiang-kang cheng-ts'e' ti en-pien," *Kuang-chiao-ching* (May 1989), pp. 68–80; and Steve Tsang, *Democracy belated: Great Britain, China, and attempts at institutional reform in Hong Kong, 1949–1952* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1988), pp.86–7, 124–30, 134–6.

³⁴ In 1949 Yeh Chien-ching, for example, ordered Tseng Sheng, commander of the PLA column, to march on to the Sino-British border, to avoid provoking any incident.

³⁵ CO537/4798, Colonial Political Intelligence Summaries for March 1951; and Hsu Chia-tun, *Hsu Chia-t'un Hsiang-kang hui-i-hu* (Taipei: Lien-ching Ch'u-pan-she, 1993), vol.2, pp.473–4.

³⁶ FO371/127239, undated Foreign Office paper “China” (1957).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ FO371/105179, brief for the Secretary of State for Cabinet meeting of 30 December 1952; FO371/110258, minutes of W. D. Allen dated 17 September 1954.

³⁹ FO371/75804, E. T. Biggs to E. Bevin, dispatch 44, 27 September 1949.

⁴⁰ FO371/83014, Franklin’s minutes of 16 September 1950; FO371/83233, Biggs to Bevin, dispatch 14, 19 January 1950.

⁴¹ FO371/83238, undated Foreign Office note “Formosa” (1950).

⁴² FO371/92225, Jacobs-Larkcom to Scott, letter of 25 June 1951.

⁴³ FO371/105179, minutes of Scott dated 5 December 1952; FO371/114987, minutes of Sir I. Kirkpatrick dated 6 December 1955.

⁴⁴ FO371/120912, “The problem of Formosa and Chinese representation in the United Nations,” 28 September 1956.

its leadership though not to commit military aggression.³⁶ British policy, therefore, was to recognise this fact and try to frustrate the PRC’s objective. To do this, the British believed that it would be necessary to build up the uncommitted countries in Asia so as to enable them to stand up against Communist subversion and diminish the PRC’s appeal to fellow Asian and anti-imperialist nations. They felt that a PRC shunned by the West and bullied by the United States over Taiwan or Kinmen and Matsu would make it appear an “injured innocent” and increase its appeal.³⁷ Hence, Britain adhered to its policy of recognising the PRC notwithstanding periodic reviews, and favoured an evacuation of the off-shore islands by Chiang’s forces, since these islands were indisputably Chinese territories and were not covered by any of the wartime declarations. However, the relatively greater importance to Britain of the United States and the PRC did not mean British policy towards Taiwan was always made subservient to that towards these two great powers. In the 1950s, Britain’s policies towards them were intertwined in order to promote its primary goal in the Far East—peace and stability buttressed by Anglo-American co-operation—which involved safeguarding Taiwan and preventing Chiang Kai-shek from attacking the Chinese mainland.³⁸

While cold reality dictated Britain’s policy towards Taiwan, it should be noted that not a few British officials involved felt a sense of responsibility towards and sympathy for the Taiwanese.³⁹ The general sentiment was that it would be wrong to hand the Taiwanese, who were not consulted before the Cairo or the Potsdam Declarations were made, to the Chinese Communists.⁴⁰ After some initial hesitation over Britain’s obligations under the Cairo Declaration, which declared that Taiwan should be handed back to China after the defeat of Japan,⁴¹ British officials preferred to see the wishes of the Taiwanese being taken into account in any solution.⁴² Gradually this turned into a preference to see an independent Taiwan, recognised by the Chinese Communists and forced upon Chiang Kai-shek.⁴³ No-one, among makers of British foreign policy in the 1950s, was sentimentally attached to Chiang or felt he was indispensable to Taiwan. However, they were equally prepared not to work actively for an independent Taiwan as it was not a matter of prime importance to Britain, and any such move would be very problematic and likely to cause a rift in Anglo-American relations.⁴⁴ In the end, practicality forced Britain to adopt a policy of letting the position across the Taiwan Straits drift towards a *de facto* two-China situation, avoiding war on the one hand and preventing Taiwan from falling under Communism on the other.

It was not British policy to form a partnership with the ROC in the 1950s, but as the PRC launched an intensive attack on Kinmen in 1958, Britain found itself inadvertently becoming a passive supporter of the ROC. Although a majority of the China hands at the Foreign Office would have preferred to see the ROC abandon the offshore islands and defend only Taiwan proper, they were overruled by both the Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, and the Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan, as the United States supported the defence

of Kinmen. MacMillan's consideration was that "the most important thing now was to stand by the Americans both in the interests of interdependence and in order not to give comfort and encouragement to our enemies."⁴⁵ Thus, Britain found itself behaving like a partner to the ROC in maintaining the status quo across the Taiwan Straits.

The Framework of Relations

As pointed out earlier, when Britain recognised the PRC, both Britain and the ROC were keen to continue their association in practice. The relations both sides had in mind were more than "commerce and communications" between territories under their control. In response to Britain's recognition of the PRC, Taipei merely announced that it would withdraw its diplomatic representation from London, and deliberately avoided any mention of a break-off of relations.⁴⁶ It also set out to explore the possibility of maintaining some kind of liaison with Britain.⁴⁷ Britain, for its part, retained a Consulate in Tanshui near Taipei. Taipei's decision to permit the British Consulate to continue was predicated not on reciprocity but on political and practical considerations. Hence, even when it became clear that the ROC could not retain an official representative, either diplomatic or consular, in British territories including Hong Kong, the Tanshui Consulate was allowed to remain and to enjoy all the usual privileges due to such a mission. Gradually an unusual framework for the conduct of relations was developed, with the British Consulate at the core, supplemented in some ways by unofficial ROC liaison officers stationed in London and in Hong Kong, and by occasional unofficial meetings of senior office-bearers either in London or elsewhere.

Britain retained its Consulate in Tanshui ostensibly "in accordance with normal practice" for contact "with the provincial authorities in matters involving the protection of British subjects and interests."⁴⁸ The consulate certainly fulfilled these functions in the 1950s. However, Britain also expected it to play a role that was wider than usual consular functions.⁴⁹ Successive consuls there did not restrict themselves to meeting with Taiwan provincial government officials only, or handling purely consular matters. One is known to have had direct dealings with the ROC Air Force and another called on the ROC Minister of Defence.⁵⁰ A third had discussions with the ROC Deputy Foreign Minister on a range of subjects including the representation of China at the United Nations.⁵¹ More generally, successive consuls regularly participated in debates among British officials on the making of policy towards Taiwan and the PRC. These diverse duties which they discharged were normally associated with heads of diplomatic missions rather than consuls.

Another indication of the uses of the Tanshui Consulate, apart from performing the usual consular duties, was that it retained the Assistant Naval Attaché in a new capacity as Naval Liaison Officer when formal diplomatic relations ended. In early 1950, the British Admiralty intended him to serve

⁴⁵ FO371/133529, Minutes by Dalton, 9 September 1958.

⁴⁶ Waichiaopu 305.22, Statement by Yeh, 6 January 1950.

⁴⁷ Waichiaopu 305.2, Cheng Tien-hsi to Yeh, letter of 31 January 1950.

⁴⁸ FO371/83235, Shattock minutes of 28 June 1950.

⁴⁹ FO371/75804, Biggs to Bevin, dispatch 44, 27 September 1949.

⁵⁰ FO371/83450, Governor of Hong Kong to Secretary of State no.321, 6 March 1950; and FO371/120864, "Fomosa: annual review for 1955."

⁵¹ Waichiaopu 305.21, Record of meeting between Deputy Foreign Minister Shen and British Consul Hermann on 12 July 1954.

⁵² FO371/83561, "Naval representation in Formosa" (1950).

⁵³ "Lieutenant-Colonel Davidson" is "Tai Wei-hsun chung-hsiao" in the original Chinese document. The person involved was probably in fact Lieutenant-Commander W. W. Dennis, who was the Naval Liaison Officer attached to the Consulate at the time.

⁵⁴ Waichiaopu 305.2, Chief of Staff to Foreign Ministry no.368, 27 October 1951.

⁵⁵ Yung T'ai-sheng, *Chia tsai T'ai buo-tung pi-bsin* (Taipei: Lien-ching Ch'u-pan-she, 1991), p.169.

⁵⁶ FO371/83561, "Naval representation in Formosa" (1950); FO371/120864, "Formosa: annual review for 1955."

⁵⁷ Waichiaopu 305.2, Cheng to Yeh, telegram 21 of 19 December 1949.

⁵⁸ Waichiaopu 305.2, Cheng to Yeh, letter of 31 January 1950.

⁵⁹ Waichiaopu 305.2, Cheng to Yeh, letter of 17 March 1950; and Y. M. Lee to Yeh, letter of 16 October 1950.

⁶⁰ Waichiaopu 305.2, Cheng to Yeh, letter of 17 March 1950.

three functions, namely, to assess the likelihood of ROC naval ships defecting to the PRC, to gauge the effectiveness of the ROC closure of mainland ports, and to report on the prospect of a Communist invasion of Taiwan.⁵² The Naval Liaison Officer's role developed as the situation in the Far East changed after the outbreak of the Korean War. In 1951 the British Consul E. H. Jacobs-Larkcom and one of his staff, a Lieutenant-Colonel Davidson,⁵³ made a secret offer to the Taipei authorities for Britain to supply them with intelligence on PRC naval activities.⁵⁴ The Ministry of Defence in Taipei welcomed this proposition, though the exact nature of their co-operation in intelligence matters cannot be ascertained.⁵⁵ In any event, it is clear that successive British Naval Liaison Officers kept in close contact with their ROC colleagues, and enjoyed direct access to the ROC naval Commander-in-Chief.⁵⁶ The decision to give a new title to the former Assistant Naval Attaché, who was strictly speaking part of the Naval Attaché's office at the former British Embassy in Nanking rather than a regular member of the consular staff, and keeping him on in Tanshui, was quite irregular. Indeed, his contacts with the ROC naval high command cannot by any stretch of the imagination be construed as a practical liaison with the provincial authorities or, indeed, as falling within normal consular functions.

The apparent 'counterpart' of the British Consul in Tanshui was an unofficial liaison officer of Chiang's government in London, Lee Yun-ming (Li Jun-ming) 李潤明. Lee was a First Secretary at the Chinese (ROC) Embassy in London until the mission was withdrawn by Taipei. His appointment was negotiated in early 1950 by the former Chinese Ambassador to London, Cheng T'ien-hsi 鄭天錫, who stayed on in Britain in a private capacity after diplomatic ties were cut. In December 1949, as Cheng sensed that the date for the British recognition of the PRC was near, he tried to persuade British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin to maintain *de facto* relations with the Nationalist Government after Britain extended *de jure* recognition to the PRC.⁵⁷ After the termination of formal diplomatic relations between the ROC and Britain, Cheng continued to negotiate with the head of the Far Eastern Department at the British Foreign Office on behalf of the Waichiaopu for it to appoint a confidential agent in London.⁵⁸ By late April a mutually acceptable agreement was reached by which Cheng was to nominate Lee to be an unofficial liaison officer for Taipei, which was duly approved by the Foreign Office.⁵⁹ The British position was that Lee's appointment was strictly unofficial, that he enjoyed no standing whatever, and that Britain would only communicate with Taipei through the British Consul in Tanshui.⁶⁰ As the future of Taiwan was hanging in the balance at that time and a Communist takeover was looming on the horizon, the arrangements appeared to be little more than a temporary expediency, especially since there was no provision for Lee to be succeeded. In any event, Lee formally started work in his new capacity on a part-time basis (he was also engaged in private business) on 21 April 1950. He was still occupying this position at the end of the period under review.

Lee was not considered a diplomat or a consul by Britain and did not enjoy any privileges of the kind to which the British Consul in Tanshui was entitled. He did nevertheless try to function as Taipei's representative in London, but with only limited success. Shortly after he took up office, in May 1950, Lee tried to arrange for Hollington Tong (Tung Hsien-kuang 董顯光), a special emissary of Chiang Kai-shek, to call on British officials at the Foreign Office, which the British duly declined on the grounds that the object of the exercise was too overt.⁶¹ The British did, however, accept from Lee a note which Tong had been charged to deliver. Having learned this lesson, Lee subsequently proceeded on a more discreet basis, limiting himself to providing logistical support to Han Lih-wu when he acted as Chiang's special emissary to London on two later occasions.⁶² In the early half of the 1950s, Lee enjoyed access to middle-ranking British diplomats whom he knew, meeting on neutral ground but not at the Foreign Office. He also wrote periodically to inform the Waichiaopu of events in Britain with his own observations, in a format similar to that of political reports by a diplomatic head of mission. As his acquaintances at the Foreign Office were rotated out of the Far Eastern Department Lee gradually faded out of the picture. By 1957 he had lost all direct contacts with the Foreign Office, engaging himself mainly in publishing a typewritten bulletin entitled "Free China Information," and was described within the Foreign Office as Taipei's "information" representative.⁶³ Despite the British government's preference for what was in effect a two-China policy, it lived up to its promise of not taking the initiative to communicate with Taipei through Lee, and made no attempt to strengthen the ROC's representation in London. This was partly because the legalistic and cautious British did not want to risk ROC personnel provoking a crisis between Peking and London by indiscretions in London, where PRC diplomats would be monitoring contacts between British and PRC personnel. In any event, the British government preferred to rely on its Consul in Tanshui who served its purposes extremely well.

Hong Kong presented a special case in the relations between Britain and Taiwan. Geographically part of the province of Kwangtung, vulnerable to aggression from the Chinese mainland, and sandwiched between the two belligerents in the Chinese civil war, British Hong Kong was potentially an explosive factor in Anglo-Chinese relations. To the British, it was an important and valuable colony whose stability and good order could only be maintained by adhering to strict neutrality in the unconcluded Chinese civil war. At the same time British Hong Kong also recognised that while the greatest threat to its survival was the PRC, the more immediate source of instability was the activities of local Kuomintang supporters who were not as well-disciplined and discreet as the local Communists. Thus, while Hong Kong would have liked to see practical relations with Taipei preserved, it could not permit the ROC to retain its quasi-consul who had been stationed there between 1946 and January 1950 in the guise of a Special Commissioner of the Waichiaopu.⁶⁴ Taipei understood Hong Kong's predicament and

⁶¹ FO371/83298, F. S. Tomlinson's minutes dated 9 May 1950.

⁶² See details of Han's mission in the following section.

⁶³ FO371/127484, Dalton to Franklin, draft letter of February 1957.

⁶⁴ FO371/83375, W. P. Montgomery (HK) to Board of Trade, letter T/191/104/43, 3 January 1950. T. W. Kwok was the only person who served in this capacity as Special Commissioner.

⁶⁵ Waichiaopu 305.2, T. W. Kwok to Deputy Foreign Minister, telegram 17, 23 February 1950.

⁶⁶ FO371/83298, "Basis for conversation on Sino-British relations," undated.

⁶⁷ Waichiaopu 301.13, Yeh to Alexander Grantham, letter of 16 January 1956.

⁶⁸ FO371/83298, Circular no.057, 1 June 1950. See also FO371/133513, N. C. C. Trench to N. Niblock (Monrovia, Liberia), letter of 16 October 1958.

⁶⁹ FO371/127484, A. E. Lambert to Dalton, letter of 24 May 1957. The Foreign Office's approval of Lambert's practice is conveyed in *ibid.*, Dalton to Lambert, letter of 21 June 1957.

⁷⁰ Waichiaopu 305.2, Notes of a conversation with Sir Edmund Leo Hall-Patch at a luncheon on 20 January 1955.

Figure 2

Sir Alexander Grantham, G.C.M.G., Governor of Hong Kong, 1947–1957 (source: *Alexander Grantham, Via ports – from Hong Kong to Hong Kong* [Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1956])



accepted that the value of denying Hong Kong to the Communists would outweigh this disadvantage. Hence, Taipei put aside the proposition of recovering Hong Kong from Britain, about which Chiang had secured in 1942 a British undertaking to enter into negotiations after the defeat of Japan, and which had remained a matter under consideration by Chiang's government until 1949. Accepting that any representative in Hong Kong would have to be there on an unofficial and strictly secret basis,⁶⁵ Taipei made a formal proposal to the British Hong Kong government in mid-1950.⁶⁶ The upshot was a tacit understanding with the Governor, Alexander Grantham, for a strictly non-official agent of Taipei to be stationed there. Unlike the arrangements in London, Taipei could actually rotate its liaison officer in Hong Kong, and it would inform the Governor in advance of the arrival and departure of its successive representatives.⁶⁷ The resident agent was appointed jointly by the Waichiaopu and the Kuomintang, and acted as a liaison officer, handling practical matters including the deportation of Kuomintang secret service operatives uncovered and arrested by the Special Branch, Hong Kong's counter-intelligence organisation. The British acceptance of an unofficial representative of Taipei in Hong Kong was merely a recognition of reality, similar to their acquiescence in the presence of the Hsin Hua News Agency as the PRC's unofficial representative office there. British Hong Kong basically followed a policy of strict neutrality regarding the two Chinese states. This was valuable to Taipei as it allowed scope for its secret service to operate covertly in Hong Kong against the PRC, provided it did not let the Hong Kong Government know that its laws were being broken.

Apart from their contacts in Tanshui, London and Hong Kong, British and ROC diplomats also met in third countries or in international bodies such as the United Nations where they were both represented. ROC diplomats were generally keen to exchange views with their British colleagues whenever they found the latter receptive, whether in Bangkok, Athens, Washington, or New York. The British, on their part, by and large abided by London's instruction that while they could not, and therefore should not, shun all informal contacts with their ROC colleagues in third countries, they should avoid attending each other's official functions and "all contacts with special emissaries of the Chinese Nationalists."⁶⁸ In practice, individual British missions did allow a degree of flexibility, taking into account the special local circumstances. In Athens, for example, the British head of mission A. E. Lambert continued to keep in close personal touch with his ROC counterpart Wen Yuan-ning 溫源寧, who had been there since 1947 and was considered a friend of the British mission, though meetings at formal occasions were avoided.⁶⁹ In Washington, Edmund Hall-Patch went further and actually held discussions with his old friend George Yeh, the ROC Foreign Minister, about a range of issues including relations between the two countries.⁷⁰ The significance of such contacts lies as much in the actual exchange of views as in the fact that they were allowed to occur. They represented a realistic though irregular approach to meeting the unusual situation in which the two countries had to and wished to conduct relations without diplomatic links.

Major Attempts at Building a Partnership

In the period under survey, several major attempts were made by Chiang Kai-shek to improve relations and, if possible, to build up an undefined form of partnership with Britain. The principal means of doing so was by sending special emissaries to London, supplemented by other minor initiatives.

The first such mission was that of Hollington Tong, a trusted aide of Chiang Kai-shek, who visited Hong Kong, Singapore and London in the summer of 1950. This mission was undertaken before the interposing of the American Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Straits dashed the PRC's hope of 'liberating' Taiwan. Tong's mission was to awaken the British authorities "to a realisation of the dangers in South East Asia," as Taipei saw it, to explain its position, to collect information on British opinion, and "to enlist assistance, moral and material."⁷¹ The visit was at best a very limited success. In Hong Kong, Tong was met by the Governor, Alexander Grantham. In Singapore, the British Commissioner-General for South East Asia, Malcolm MacDonald, avoided him, Tong seeing only his deputy, John Stemdale-Bennett. In London, as mentioned before, Lee Yun-ming's approach to the Foreign Office on Tong's behalf was turned down for being too transparent. Nevertheless, the messages which Chiang wanted Tong to convey to the British were transmitted and were duly examined there, though to little avail.

Following in Tong's footsteps, Han Lih-wu, who had been Minister for Culture and was then a Presidential Adviser to Chiang, went to Hong Kong in June 1950, where he met Governor Grantham.⁷² He told the British that Chiang was "anxious to establish and maintain friendly relations with Great Britain and in particular to lay the foundations for long-term relations in order to meet the time of the eventual fall of the Communist regime."⁷³ He also proposed that the British "place a Foreign Office Representative in Formosa unofficially if desired or if preferable to be resident in Hong Kong with free entry and exit into Formosa."⁷⁴ While this specific suggestion of Han was ignored by the British, it would appear that he was instrumental in securing a tacit understanding with Governor Grantham regarding Taipei's non-official liaison officer in Hong Kong.

The more important attempts were a series of two very discreet missions to London undertaken by Han Lih-wu. Han, aware of British sensitivity, focussed his attention on achieving the objects of his missions, and avoided the mistake which Tong and Lee had made in 1950. In the spring of 1951, Han spent six weeks in London and returned for a longer stay in the following December. On both occasions he called on his wartime acquaintance Robert Scott, then the Assistant Under-Secretary supervising Far Eastern affairs at the Foreign Office. Han met Scott several times as a friend but also made it clear to him that he was in Britain as a "personal emissary of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek."⁷⁵ Britain took a pragmatic yet diplomatically defensible approach to Han's visits. While Scott and Han had extensive discussions on a wide range of subjects of mutual interest and reported them in full to their respective governments, Scott firmly declined to introduce Han to any of his

⁷¹ FO371/83298, J. C. Stemdale-Bennett to M. E. Denning, letter of 5 May 1950.

⁷² While Governor Grantham was prepared to meet his friends from Taipei, some of his deputies were more reticent and correct about such meetings. When Grantham was on leave in August 1950, for example, the then Officer Administering the Government, John Nicoll, refused to meet Han who was again in Hong Kong. FO371/92208, Hong Kong (OAG) to Secretary of State, Savingram no.107, 29 August 1950.

⁷³ FO371/83298, Air Headquarters, Hong Kong to Air Ministry, telegram MAA007, 23 June 1950.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ FO371/92208, Scott's minutes of 2 March 1951.

Figure 3

Han Lih-wu in 1948 (source: P. van der Meerssche, A life to treasure: the authorized biography of Han Lih-wu (London: Sherwood Press, 1987))



⁷⁶ Amery's retrospective views of his friendship with Han can be found in his foreword to P. Van de Meerssche, *A life to treasure: the authorized biography of Han Lib-wu* (London: Sherwood Press, 1987).

⁷⁷ FO371/99259, Scott's minutes of 8 February 1952.

⁷⁸ FO371/99259, Lloyd's minutes of 8 February 1952.

⁷⁹ FO371/92208, Scott's minutes of 2 March 1951; FO371/99252, Scott's minutes of 5 January 1952.

⁸⁰ Waichiaopu 305.2, copy of Han's telegram from England dated 12 March 1951.

⁸¹ FO371/92208, Scott's minutes of 4 April 1951.

⁸² Waichiaopu 305.2, copy of Han's telegram from England dated 12 March 1951.

⁸³ FO371/99259, Scott's minutes of 5 January 1952.

⁸⁴ Waichiaopu 305.2, Han to Wang Shih-chieh, telegram from Washington Embassy dated 23 January 1952; and FO371/99259, Scott's minutes of 5 January 1952.

⁸⁵ Butler Library at Columbia University (New York), Papers of Wellington Koo, Box 219, no. 31, Diary entry of 5 November 1953.

colleagues in the Foreign Office. On the occasion of Han's second visit, in early 1952, Han tried to arrange for a meeting at the ministerial level through Julian Amery, MP, an old friend of his and a long-time supporter of Chiang.⁷⁶ The Foreign Office raised no objection to this request provided it was a "social" meeting.⁷⁷ As a result Han did meet Selwyn Lloyd, a Minister of State in the Foreign Office, at a luncheon hosted by Amery in his house, and engaged in serious discussions regarding the improvement of bilateral relations.⁷⁸ Thus, while substantive discussions at a high level were conducted, the British upheld diplomatic protocol, and prepared themselves to dismiss any criticism as groundless since the meetings between Scott and Han could be construed as being between friends, while that between Lloyd and Han was "accidental" and was, in any event, "social" in nature.

The main thrust of Han's discussions with Scott, Lloyd and other British dignitaries, including members of the two houses of Parliament and former ministers, was to see if Britain could be persuaded to backtrack from its recognition of the PRC or, failing that, to work out a *modus operandi* for at least passive co-operation in matters of great concern to Chiang.⁷⁹ Han's first visit was primarily exploratory in nature. The PRC intervention in the Korean War and Britain's failure to establish full diplomatic relations with the PRC more than a year after recognising it prompted Taipei to inquire whether Britain would review, or even reverse, its China policy.⁸⁰ In his meetings with Scott, Han was told in no uncertain terms that while the British were discontented with Peking, there would be no reversal of Britain's recognition of the PRC.⁸¹ Han nonetheless rightly concluded that Britain was then reviewing its China policy,⁸² though this resulted in no changes. Han's second mission, less than a year after the first, was made because Chiang believed a return to power in Britain of the Tory party under Winston Churchill would lead to a significant change in British policy towards China.⁸³ Once Han accepted that neither Prime Minister Churchill nor Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden had time to review their Labour predecessor's China policy which, in all probability, would be continued in the near future, he turned to raising three specific points with the British.⁸⁴ First and foremost, Han wanted to ensure that Taiwan would not be treated as a pawn in the course of negotiations to end the Korean War, as it could involve the survival of the Taipei government and the question of Chinese representation at the United Nations. He also expressed the wish that Britain would not place any obstacle in the way of Taipei's concluding a peace treaty with Japan, since the ROC would not be a party to the San Francisco Treaty and a peace treaty with Japan could have important implications for the status of Taiwan. Finally, Han offered Britain Taipei's goodwill in directing its considerable influence over overseas Chinese, many millions of whom lived in the British Empire, to take a positive attitude to the British. As British policy towards Taiwan was closely intertwined with its policies towards the PRC and the United States in the Pacific, Han's *démarche* was noted but not taken seriously. Han himself finally accepted, towards the end of 1953—more than a year later, that Britain would not change its China policy.⁸⁵

DR. HAN LIH WU

FC 1024/17

Mr. Julian Amery came to see me this morning. He had known Dr. Han in Chungking in the war and Dr. Han, who is now in London, has been to see him. Dr. Han is anxious to meet a Minister before he leaves England and Mr. Amery came to ask what I thought about this.

2. Mr. Amery emphasised that he was not pressing this as he knew that it raised all sorts of difficult political issues. His sole interest, he said, was that having known Dr. Han he did not wish to be too discourteous to him.

3. I said that as Mr. Amery knew the Secretary of State and the Colonial Secretary had felt unable to meet Dr. Han. I mentioned that Dr. Han had been here last spring when he had visited several old friends and had also met Lord Jowitt and possibly Sir Hartley Shawcross when they were members of the last government.

4. Mr. Amery wondered whether it would be possible for him to arrange a party at which Dr. Han could perhaps meet the Minister of State. I suggested that he should speak to the Minister of State about this.

5. The facts about Dr. Han are set out in the attached papers. A record of my conversation with him early in January is contained in FC 1024/1.

6. Mr. Amery told me this morning that Dr. Han would like to establish some kind of system whereby messages from the Nationalist Government in Formosa could be conveyed to the British Government but I told Mr. Amery that Dr. Han had made a similar suggestion to me last spring but that I had refused to have anything to do with it. There were informal contacts between our Consulate in Formosa and members of the Nationalist Government and if the Nationalists wished to present their case more effectively in this country it might be possible for them to do so through the press.

7. I told Mr. Amery that I still thought that it would be inadvisable for a Minister to receive Dr. Han though I do not think that the same objection would apply, for example, to a Minister casually meeting Dr. Han at someone else's party at which they were both guests.

8. I promised Mr. Amery that I would report our conversation to the Minister of State so that the latter would be aware of the ~~point~~ in case Mr. Amery tackled him in the House.

H. H. Scott

4th February, 1952.

Permanent Under-Secretary

Copy to: Minister of State
Parliamentary Under-Secretary
China and Korea Dept.

Figure 4

Minutes of R. H. Scott, Assistant Under-Secretary of State, concerning Han Lih-wu, 4 February 1952 (FO371/99259), Crown copyright, reproduced with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office)

Several more attempts were made by Chiang, through other intermediaries, to improve relations with Britain, but Han's visit to London in the winter of 1951–52 represented the most important and successful mission. All of Chiang's subsequent initiatives, taken mainly between 1955 and 1957, took place outside Britain. While Han had failed to achieve his primary objective of influencing Britain's policy towards Taiwan, he did at least manage to conduct high-level dialogues with the British in London, albeit in the guise of private and social meetings. His frank exchanges with the British helped to clear the air. Thus, even though Britain did not respond to Han's proposition to develop a *modus operandi*, his missions were instrumental in the gradual emergence of a kind of passive co-operation over the status and security of Taiwan between London and Taipei.

One China or Two?

⁸⁶ For a detailed analysis of Chiang's policy in this regard see Steve Tsang, "Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang's policy to reconquer the Chinese mainland (1949–58)," in Steve Tsang, ed., *In the shadow of China* (London: Hurst & Co., 1993), pp.48–72.

It is ironic that the one issue—the future of Taiwan—which divided Britain and Taiwan most was also the one which formed the basis of their passive partnership in the late 1950s. The question of the representation of China at the United Nations, the Taiwan Straits Crises of 1954–55 and 1958, and Chiang's avowed determination to reconquer the Chinese mainland were all part of this problem. The crux of the matter was whether the reality of Taiwan as a political entity was to be formally accepted and regularised, or whether the idea of only one China was to be upheld even at the cost of a major war.

The fundamental objective of Chiang's foreign policy from 1950 to 1958 was to preserve the ROC in a way that would enable it to launch a military or political campaign, either singly or in collaboration with the 'free world', to liberate the mainland of China from the Communist yoke.⁸⁶ Chiang was particularly committed to this policy in the earlier half of the 1950s. This required his government to acquire the means or at least the outside support to defend the ROC from a Communist invasion, to uphold the claim that it was the only legitimate government of China—of which Taiwan was merely a part, and to retain the right to be the sole representative of China at the United Nations. From London's point of view this would have involved leaving in Chiang's hands a means of reigniting the Chinese civil war, which could drag the United States into a wider conflict with the PRC and also involve Britain—an intolerable state of affairs. Indeed, to the British, Chiang's avowed objective was as unacceptable as it was unrealistic and dangerous. In their eyes, the survival of Chiang's regime depended on American power, and the basis of its legitimacy as the government of all China had been removed when Chiang lost 'the mandate of heaven' on the Chinese mainland. As far as the British were concerned, Chiang's regime did not deserve the right to China's seat at the Security Council, though they had no wish to force it out of the United Nations. Britain felt that, repugnant as the idea might

be, the Communist PRC was a reality and the world's most populous country, and its admission to the Security Council would be conducive to solving its differences with the West, or at least induce it to exercise greater self-restraint and not throw its weight about irresponsibly.⁸⁷ Britain, as explained earlier, would also have preferred to see an independent Taiwan, an option that was anathema to Chiang. Since these were the differences which divided Britain and Taiwan in the early 1950s, it was understandable that Han Lih-wu's missions were futile.

In practice, however, the unrealistic nature of Chiang's goal to reconquer the mainland gradually reduced the gap between Taipei and London. If the British, or indeed anyone, ever needed to be reminded, the two Taiwan Straits crises demonstrated that Taiwan was more likely to suffer invasion from than to invade the Chinese mainland. Chiang's determination to hold Kinmen and Matsu was deemed by the British an ill-advised attempt based on an unrealistic policy.⁸⁸ After the crisis of 1954–55 was defused, Britain gradually came to see that the problems between the United States and the PRC were much wider than the Taiwan question, and the chance of their stumbling into war over Taiwan was remote.⁸⁹ To the British, Chiang had by then been reduced to not much more than a passive risk to the maintenance of peace in the Far East, though still a major irritant to Anglo-American co-operation there.⁹⁰ The desire to maintain Anglo-American relations, the PRC's failure to respond positively to repeated British offers to support its entry to the United Nations, and the ROC's supportive stance over the Suez Crisis, all worked to weaken the British wish to see the ROC vacate the Chinese seat at the Security Council.⁹¹ The progress Chiang's government was making on Taiwan, keenly observed by successive British consuls and regularly reported to London, also lessened British dislike of Chiang. Gradually the British view changed from regarding Chiang's government as a renegade Chinese regime which had imposed itself on the hapless people of Taiwan in 1950 to one which had earned grudging endorsement by the Taiwanese through its relatively efficient if authoritarian rule.⁹² Thus, maintaining the status quo across the Taiwan Straits became acceptable to the British.

Taipei also settled into a more realistic assessment of its own future. As the 1958 Kinmen crisis came to a close, Chiang issued a joint communiqué with the American Secretary of State John Forster Dulles, which amounted to giving up the goal of reconquering the Chinese mainland by force.⁹³ While Chiang continued to reiterate periodically his determination to recover the mainland primarily by political means, he was in fact, for all practical purposes, merely defending the status quo. This removed Britain's worry that Chiang's government was a major source of instability in the Far East. London and Taipei continued to disagree over the representation of China at the United Nations, but it had become less of a problem as Britain had, by the latter part of the 1950s, resolved that it would have to side with the United States on this matter.⁹⁴ Taipei's success in winning strong American support

⁸⁷ FO371/133532, Dalton's minutes of 10 September 1958.

⁸⁸ FO371/133530, Commonwealth Relations Office to Ottawa, telegram no.1488, 20 September 1958.

⁸⁹ FO371/120912, "The importance of Formosa as seen by the Americans here," 13 February 1956.

⁹⁰ FO371/120912, Franklin to Crowe, letter of 13 January 1956.

⁹¹ FO371/133532, C. P. O'Neil's minutes of 10 September 1958.

⁹² FO371/83233, Biggs to Bevin, dispatch no.14, 19 January 1950; FO371/127239, undated (1957) paper, "China."

⁹³ Eisenhower Library (Abilene, Kansas), Papers of D. D. Eisenhower, White House Office Files: Special Assistant to the NSC Box 22, "Report on NSC 5723," 15 April 1958, annex B, NSC 5523—Taiwan.

⁹⁴ FO371/129914, Crowe's minutes of 3 December 1956.

⁹⁵ FO371/133529, Dalton's minutes of 9 September 1958, and Sir F. Hoyer-Millar's minutes of 10 September 1958.

also had an impact on British policy during the 1958 crisis, as the British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary felt that Britain had to close ranks with the United States in order not to show weakness or division in the face of aggression from the Communist common enemy.⁹⁵

In the course of the 1950s, the differences which separated British and ROC policy-makers over the future of Taiwan became less important, as they were being rendered less relevant and immediate. By the time of the Second Straits Crisis, their immediate interests in regard to Taiwan had converged. Both wanted to prevent Taiwan from falling to the Communists, and neither could see any practical alternative to maintaining the status quo across the Straits. Britain's preference for an independent Taiwan did not become part of its policy. By the late 1950s, the British would still have preferred to see Taipei vacate the Chinese seat at the Security Council. However, they were also prepared to work to keep Taiwan in the General Assembly of the United Nations, without the question of one China or two being decided. It was an outcome which, in the long term, would have suited Taipei's best interests. However, it was not acceptable to Chiang's government in the 1950s and was not pushed forcefully by London, as it was not an issue of great or immediate concern once the situation across the Taiwan Straits had stabilised.

By 1958 both countries focussed their attention on their minimal goal, which was to keep the status quo across the Straits. Chiang's earlier hope and enthusiasm to forge a partnership with Britain had been scaled down, though he remained interested in securing British co-operation and support. The British, for their part, had not wanted a partnership in its true sense with the ROC. However, the strategic imperative in East Asia for the British, and indeed for the ROC as well, which required forestalling Communist expansion there by presenting a united front in the face of Communist aggression, resulted in the two powers behaving unwittingly as partners of a kind over the future of Taiwan and its security.

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