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# The Anglo-French naval conversations of 1912: Prelude and aftermath

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**THE ANGLO-FRENCH NAVAL CONVERSATIONS OF 1912**

**PRELUDE AND AFTERMATH**

**A Thesis**

**Presented to the**

**Department of History**

**and the**

**Faculty of the College of Graduate Studies**

**University of Omaha**

**In Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirement for the Degree**

**Master of Arts**

**by**

**John H. Harrington, Jr.**

**January, 1967**

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Accepted for the faculty of the College of Graduate  
Studies of the University of Omaha, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts.

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Representative of the Graduate Faculty

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Whoever commands the sea, commands  
the trade, whoever commands the trade of  
the world, commands the riches of the  
world, and consequently the world itself.

Sir Walter Raleigh

## PREFACE

William II, upon ascending the throne of the German Empire, became the leader of the most powerful military nation on earth. With Bismarck as his Chancellor--indeed, the creator of that Empire--William stood at the pinnacle of power in Europe protected by an intricate web of treaties and alliances that made Berlin the center of Europe. Young and ambitious, he decided that he wanted to rule his nation, and, by interpolation, Europe. William could not do this while he was confronted by the prestige of Bismarck. In 1890, the differences that had sprung up between the Kaiser and the Chancellor came to a head; Bismarck went into retirement. William lost no time in decimating the protective treaties of Bismarck. One by one they fell. The Russian Reinsurance Treaty was followed closely by the rise of that Bismarckian nightmare, the Franco-Russian Alliance. Thus, France escaped the isolation within which she had writhed for some thirty years.

William then set out on a policy that was to destroy the natural affinity of England and Germany. By way of ambition for colonies and his admiration of the British Royal Navy, he decided that Germany had need of a fleet. By 1900,

he challenged the British in naval matters, the one area that guaranteed English response. Seeing herself challenged by Germany in addition to the Franco-Russian combination, England had to make a choice, for if she were forced into war by one group, the other remained to destroy her. Having determined that her traditional policy of isolation was no longer possible, she became an advocate of the balance of power. At that time she was faced by two power centers represented by Germany and the Triple Alliance, and the Franco-Russian Alliance; her weight would be sufficient to make one or the other the stronger.

The final collapse of the Bismarckian design occurred in 1904 with the Anglo-French Agreement. From this time on, Germany was determined to break up this friendship. Through the subsequent period, the actions of Germany forced the English to seek ever closer ties with France. The military conversations of 1906 bound the two nations closely, far closer than England realized but less finitely than the French would have liked. German actions helped the French secure the English virtually as allies.

It was the action of Germany in the naval sphere, as the result of a previous political encounter with England, that bound the French and English into the closest relationship they were to achieve prior to the outbreak of the Great

War. The Naval Conversations of 1912, while ostensibly establishing no commitment for either England or France, did, in fact, morally obligate England in the fateful first days of August, 1914. With full realization that the violation of Belgium was advanced by Sir Edward Grey as the immediate cause of the entry of Great Britain into the Great War, I submit that without the naval challenge leveled by Germany and the Anglo-French Naval Agreement caused by that challenge, the Belgium invasion could not have proved conclusive. Although innumerable books have been written dealing with the entry of Great Britain into the war and most acknowledge the importance of the Naval Agreement, none, to my satisfaction at least, gives it the importance it deserves. Thus, this paper attempts to show that the naval controversy between England and Germany was of prime significance as a cause of the deterioration of relations between those nations, and, further, that the Anglo-French Naval Agreement established a de facto alliance.

The Department of History of the University of Omaha has been most gracious and helpful in preparing me for the writing of this paper. Although the attention of the staff of the department has been most gratifying, I must acknowledge, perhaps more than most students, the guidance and understanding of the Chairman of the History Department,

Dr. A. Stanley Trickett. A distinguished scholar and teacher, Dr. Trickett provided much of the incentive and merit that, I trust, is in this paper.

Acknowledgment is also due to the librarians who have helped so much, especially Miss Ella Jane Daugherty who found much source material and who was ever ready to help. Special thanks are extended to Major Harry H. Bendorf, United States Air Force, who aided in recommending materials when encountered during his own thesis research and for reading many drafts of this paper. I am most grateful to Commander Sumner K. Moore, United States Navy, for the excellent translations of the French passages found in this paper. Finally, a very special accolade is due my wife who suffered through four years of studies to arrive at this point.

John H. Harrington, Jr.

Vienna, Virginia  
September, 1966.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

AUGUST 3, 1914

#### The Beginning and the End

It was on a Monday in the summer of 1914, a tense third of August, that Paul Cambon's labors of so many years were put to the test.<sup>1</sup> The previous day he had received a dispatch from his superior, M. Viviani, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, which began, "This morning, French territory was violated by German troops at Ciry and near Longwy."<sup>2</sup> So it had come at last, the impending storm that Cambon had feared--and, yes, anticipated--for more than a decade. He had confided his apprehension to Sir Edward Grey, England's Foreign Minister in 1906, asking ". . . whether France would be able to count upon the assistance of England

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<sup>1</sup>H. E. Barnes, The Genesis of the World War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), p. 453.

<sup>2</sup>Great Britain, Collected Diplomatic Documents Relating to the Outbreak of the European War (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1915), p. 234. (Hereafter cited as GB/CD.)

in the event of an attack upon her by Germany."<sup>3</sup> Cambon received the same answer that dominated Anglo-French relations from the time of their agreement in 1904 to that summer day in 1914.<sup>4</sup> Initially concerned after the change of British Governments in 1905, he said that ". . . it was of great importance that the French Gov(ernmen)t should know beforehand whether, in event of aggression against France by Germany, Great Britain w(oul)d be prepared to render France armed assistance."<sup>5</sup> The response was always the same-- England would only concede the diplomatic support stated in the agreement of 1904. Cambon pressed his point that even if England did decide to intervene on the side of France, she could not do so unless some previous military preparations between the two nations were made. Grey admitted this and authorized discussions between military and naval experts,<sup>6</sup> but refused to go beyond this concession and an opinion that England would support France only if France were not the

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<sup>3</sup>E. Grey, Twenty-Five Years (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1925), I, 76.

<sup>4</sup>J. E. Tyler, The British Army and the Continent, 1904-1914 (London: Edward Arnold and Co., 1938), pp. 28-29.

<sup>5</sup>Great Britain, Foreign Office, British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914, ed. G. P. Gooch and H. Temperley (11 vols.; London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1926), III, 170. (Cited hereafter as G & T.)

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., III, 169; Grey, I, 73; Barnes, pp. 454-455.

aggressor. Further, Grey warned that ". . . a personal opinion was not a thing upon which, in so serious a matter, a policy could be founded."<sup>7</sup> Cambon could reflect on years of opinions and statements that military and naval preparations did not commit either side; he had been unable to achieve the one thing he wanted--that England would stand by France in the face of the might of Imperial Germany.<sup>8</sup>

Paul Cambon was a shrewd and experienced diplomat who knew the English well. He had been French Ambassador to the Court of St. James for many years. He knew something of the character of the English Foreign Minister and understood where English sympathies lay; but he also was aware that he could not predict the reaction of the House of Commons. In fact, Grey alone had authorized the military conversations<sup>9</sup> and the Cabinet had not known of them until 1912.<sup>10</sup> More

<sup>7</sup>Grey, I, 78.

<sup>8</sup>In spite of Grey's reservations, Izvolsky stated in 1912 that the ". . . Anglo-French military convention is as settled and complete . . . as the Franco-Russian convention. . . ." Quoted from F. Stieve, Izvolsky and the World War, p. 90, by Barnes, p. 463. Cf. D. W. Brogan, France Under the Republic (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940), pp. 317-318.

<sup>9</sup>G & T, III, 169; as did Haldane, Campbell-Bannerman, and Asquith in due course of time. Cf. R. S. Haldane, Before the War (London: Cassell and Co., 1920), p. 30.

<sup>10</sup>Grey, I, 93-94; H. Nicolson, Sir Arthur Nicolson, Bart. First Lord Carnock: A Study in the Old Diplomacy (London: Constable and Co., 1930), p. 373; GB/CD, p. 80; Tyler, p. 160.

important, the House had no inkling of them at all. For Cambon, the situation was tense because Grey that afternoon must justify nine years of secret foreign diplomacy. On the House's decision hinged the fate of France. Understandably, Cambon was anxious about the outcome.

The French Ambassador knew that several events of the past would strongly influence the Commons' decision in his favor; one was the rise of the German Navy, another, the Mediterranean Agreement between France and England in 1912, and still another, the old treaty of 1839 that guaranteed Belgian neutrality. But he could also hear, unsaid, the words, "perfidious Albion." Cambon had seen Grey on the thirty-first of July and pointed out that their mutual letters of November, 1912 had stipulated ". . . if either Government had grave reason to expect an unprovoked attack by a third power, or something that threatened the general peace, it would immediately discuss with the other whether both Governments should act together to prevent aggression and preserve peace, . . ." <sup>11</sup> but Grey replied that the Cabinet could not give any pledge at that time. <sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Nicolson, pp. 373-374; Cf. G & T, X, Part II, 614-615.

<sup>12</sup>Nicolson, pp. 417-418; Grey, I, 329-331; GB/CD, p. 90; S. B. Fay, The Origins of the World War (2nd ed.; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1930), pp. 487-488. Sir Arthur Nicolson, the permanent Under Secretary of State, said to Grey, "You will render us a by-word among nations." (Nicolson, p. 419.)

By the first of August, Grey knew that he could not stem the tide, although he continued to try. Germany had declared war on Russia after the Russians had mobilized, and Germany, who considered mobilization tantamount to war, opened hostilities.<sup>13</sup> This event brought France to the center of the stage and Great Britain to the wings.

France had no intimate concern with the Balkan troubles that arose after the Sarajevo murders. Indeed, she had little interest in Balkan affairs save that thrust upon her by the obligations of the Franco-Russian Alliance.<sup>14</sup> In a word, Germany's declaration of war on Russia was casus foederis requiring French participation. For the Germans the way was clear--an advance on France was the keystone of their strategy.<sup>15</sup> They were, however, somewhat pressed to find a reason to attack France. Since they did not know the articles of the Franco-Russian Alliance,<sup>16</sup> they could only

<sup>13</sup>Nicolson, p. 418. Cf. Brogan, p. 458; Fay, pp. 479-480; J. S. Ewart, The Roots and Causes of the Wars, (1914-1918) (2 vols.; New York: George H. Dorans Co., 1925), I, 99.

<sup>14</sup>Brogan, pp. 315-316; Grey, I, 325.

<sup>15</sup>W. Goerlitz, History of the German General Staff (New York: Praeger, 1955), pp. 130-133.

<sup>16</sup>Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Outbreak of the World War, German Documents Collected by Kori Kautsky, ed. M. Montglas and W. Schucking (New York: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 440.

guess what the French were obligated to do. One thing was certain, they could not disregard France, hoping that country would not attack Germany as she turned on Russia. To do so would leave her rear unprotected with the second best army in Europe mobilized.<sup>17</sup> All this notwithstanding, it had been planned years before by the then Chief of the Great General Staff, Count Alfred von Schlieffen, that France was to be crushed first and then Russia. There was no provision for a war with Russia and not with France.<sup>18</sup> Germany settled for a combination of dubious charges of invasion against France and that France refused to guarantee neutrality<sup>19</sup>—then she marched. The moment of decision came next to England; Grey had publicly disclaimed many times any commitment to France and, of course, there were no commitments to Russia. England was a free agent and France agreed that she was.<sup>20</sup> But she was a very important free agent and while she was, in fact, legally free, there were other considerations. Cambon and his German colleague, Prince Lichnowsky, were apprehensive

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<sup>17</sup>G. A. Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 294.

<sup>18</sup>Fay, pp. 509, 526.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 529-530. Cf. Craig, p. 294.

<sup>20</sup>Fay, p. 538. Cf. GB/CD, p. 543; Ewart, I, 124.

of England's impending action.<sup>21</sup>

About three o'clock in the afternoon of August three, Grey, showing the strain of the past days, arrived at the House of Commons, and, when his hour to speak came, Europe awaited his disclosures knowing that the fate of nations depended on Great Britain's decision. At the Speaker's call, Grey arose from the ministerial bench and advanced to the table amidst great cheering. "Mr. Speaker," he began and proceeded to herald the end of an era:

Before I proceed to state the position of His Majesty's Government and what our attitude is with regard to the present crisis, I would like to clear the ground that the House may know exactly under what obligations the Government is or the House can be said to be in coming to a decision upon the matter.<sup>22</sup>

Sir Edward Grey's words were apropos; the House knew nothing--or at any rate--nothing official.<sup>23</sup> The Foreign

<sup>21</sup>Grey, II, 13-14.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., II, 308; The Times (London), August 4, 1914.

<sup>23</sup>Barnes, p. 463. Cf. G & T, X, Part II, 583 for Nicolson's reaction when he found out about the conversations. Grey had a great deal to answer for. On a number of occasions, questions were asked in the House about the existence of obligation to France. Barnes gives some examples in his Genesis of the World War, pp. 466-468 of these questions which were put to Grey and Asquith. All denied such a commitment. Grey had constructed English relations with France in such a way that he could, in the strictest sense of the word, state that there was no obligation. Grey was hiding behind this forever-present statement that the conversations and/or agreements did not commit either party. Grey was something less than honest in any case, doubtless because he felt that the end justified the



Minister traced the search for peace that was the mainstay of British policy since the Liberal Party's ascendance to office in late 1905. As he continued, his words carried the Commons back to the days when Germany was England's only friend on the Continent, to the days when France and England were enemies.

### The Anglo-French Entente

"There have been in Europe two diplomatic groups-- the Triple Alliance, and what became to be called the 'Triple Entente,' for some years past. The Triple Entente was not an Alliance--it was a diplomatic group."<sup>24</sup> His words echoed through the Commons, commanding reflection on the events that led to the division of Europe into two camps, for without that division, there would be no crisis.

A principal wedge that drove England from her hereditary friend, Germany, was the decision of Germany to build a

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means. Grey, however, was in collusion with a substantial number of cabinet ministers, *i.e.*, Campbell-Bannerman, Asquith, Haldane, etc., until 1912 when the entire cabinet was drawn in. On the other hand, the very fact that questions of this nature could be asked renders the possibility of a leak probable. Certainly enough people knew of the arrangements to suggest that security was not complete. As will be seen, Grey does not even tell the whole story in his August 3, 1914 speech especially when he continues to maintain that the House is completely free to come to its decision.

<sup>24</sup>Grey, II, 309; The Times (London), August 4, 1914.

navy and to set out on the road to world power.<sup>25</sup> Fourteen years had passed since the passage of the law by the Reichstag that was the fulcrum of naval matters in the period before the Great War.<sup>26</sup> This law, designed to make Germany a major sea power, was at the same time the cause of many changes, antagonisms, friendships, and divisions in the life of England, the world's foremost nation.<sup>27</sup>

Great Britain had arrived in the twentieth century surfeited with wealth, prestige, and colonial possessions. She had completed a four hundred year journey through war, civil strife, and imperial endeavor. During this time, she had transformed herself from an island kingdom of slight consequence into the world's mightiest empire. London, on the eve of war, was the hub of the financial world, and Great Britain had settled back to enjoy the fruits of her labor, the days of rapacity and expansion at an end. Nor did she consider herself a continental power in the east of Germany, France, Russia, and the rest. Indeed, England had, in a way, taken George Washington's advice much to heart: "It is our

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<sup>25</sup> B. E. Schmitt, England and Germany, 1740-1914 (Princeton: The Princeton University Press, 1916), p. 213.

<sup>26</sup> Brogan, p. 395. Cf. J. A. Spender, Fifty Years of Europe - A Study in Pre-War Documents (2nd ed. rev., London: Cassell and Co., Ltd., 1936), pp. 199-200.

<sup>27</sup> Spender, p. 183.

true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.<sup>28</sup> Since 1815 she had been able to avoid foreign entanglements<sup>29</sup>, but she had not been threatened to any degree and her resolve had not been tried by the fires of danger.

On the horizon of the new century, across the North Sea, the first whips of challenge to England's place in the world began to rise perceptibly. It was a rumbling in the East that boded ill for the British Empire. Germany, leader of the Triple Alliance and friend of England, had, ten years previously, rejected the masterful direction of her creator, Bismarck.<sup>30</sup> In the ensuing years, the young and ambitious Kaiser had confirmed the reins of power in his own hands. Highly nationalistic, at once envious of Great Britain and an ardent admirer of things British, he fixed his gaze on the fount of English power, the Royal Navy. How often he had come to Cowes for the Regatta and drenched himself in things

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<sup>28</sup>H. S. Commager (ed.), Documents of American History (6th ed., New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1958), p. 174.

<sup>29</sup>With the exception of the Crimean War.

<sup>30</sup>E. Brandenburg, From Bismarck to the World War, A. E. Adams, trans. (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 20.

naval.<sup>31</sup> By 1898, he made his decision to take Germany out of the restrictive category of a continental power. Germany strode out into the sun and sought world power.<sup>32</sup> This decision placed Germany alongside England and then shortly brought her into direct conflict with British interests. These things took place slowly and England was more concerned with her arch rivals, France and Russia.<sup>33</sup> For these nations, newly allied, looked at Great Britain with hostile eyes across a dozen frontiers. All the while Germany whispered how fortunate was England to have a friend like Germany in time of need.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, Britain was enveloped in a war with the Boers of South Africa and the war went badly. No--Germany was not a threat to Great Britain in 1900; the first indications were there,<sup>35</sup> but greater worries concealed

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<sup>31</sup>Too often, Queen Victoria could hardly get rid of him. Cf. A. Hurd and H. Castle, German Sea-Power (London: John Murray, 1913), pp. 100-106, 183; W. L. Langer, The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902 (2 vols.; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1935), II, 427-428, 431.

<sup>32</sup>Hurd and Castle, pp. 205-209; Schmitt, p. 173.

<sup>33</sup>Schmitt, pp. 178-179; Ewart, I, 97-98.

<sup>34</sup>Spender, pp. 177, 189. Cf. G & T, X, Part II, 586, "It was Germany's interest, and her constant endeavour, to accentuate and perpetuate a situation in which the enemies of the Triple Alliance were also the enemies of England, and although England refused to join that alliance, the international constellation gave British policy a natural leaning towards co-operation with its members."

<sup>35</sup>Brandenburg, pp. 41-51.

them from view. The indications were indeed there, for the Germans made no effort to conceal anything. The Memorandum attached to the 1900 Naval Law makes this clear:

To protect Germany's sea trade and colonies in the existing circumstances there is only one means--Germany must have a battle fleet so strong that even for the adversary with the greatest sea power a war against it would involve such dangers as to imperil his position in the world.<sup>36</sup>

The pronouncement had little effect initially but its message was to mount so that, by 1902, England saw that she must take action to improve her home defenses. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance allowed the withdrawal of the first contingent of British heavy ships from the Far East.<sup>37</sup> In her immediate vicinity, Great Britain discerned that the German fleet would be an additional hazard to her if joined with the Russian and French navies; this was a combination that she could not permit. She had to choose among the powers and she did--France.<sup>38</sup>

In 1904, the French Foreign Minister<sup>39</sup> approached his English colleague, Lord Lansdowne, on the possibility

<sup>36</sup>Hurd and Castle, p. 348.

<sup>37</sup>A. J. Marder, From Dreadnought to Scapa Flow (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 140-141.

<sup>38</sup>Nicolson, pp. 148-150; Brandenburg, p. 202.

<sup>39</sup>Delcasse, French Foreign Minister 1898-1905. Cf. A. J. P. Taylor, The Struggle for the Mastery of Europe, 1848-1918 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. 413-415.

of a general colonial settlement.<sup>40</sup> Both of these men agreed that it would be well worth while if their respective nations expanded in areas where there would be no mutual conflict. The agreement signed that year thus converted two longtime enemies into friends.<sup>41</sup> This was a colonial settlement; there were words of diplomatic support and no words of military aid. Even the secret articles did not suggest that armed help was an item of discussion.<sup>42</sup> From this time on, the tendency was to strengthen the ties made by this agreement. It did not have to be so. In its original state, the agreement settled Anglo-French affairs in many corners of the world and was ". . . to afford to one another their diplomatic support in order to obtain the execution of the clauses of the present declaration."<sup>43</sup>

Taken at face value, there was nothing prejudicial to Germany in this agreement as announced to the world; even

<sup>40</sup>Schmitt, pp. 178-179.

<sup>41</sup>Nicolson, p. 149; Taylor, p. 485. Cf. G & T, VI, 153: "It was an axiom of German diplomacy that France and England could never really bury their differences and make a solid peace. They succeeded in doing so in 1904, and the visit of President Fallieres has put the seal on the Entente."

<sup>42</sup>Nicolson, pp. 439-442. Cf. Spender, pp. 216-217. The secret articles were made public in 1911.

<sup>43</sup>Nicolson, p. 441. (Article IX of the Anglo-French Agreement of 1904.)

von Bulow<sup>44</sup> agreed, but then the secret clauses were unknown. Doubtless they were suspected, but Germany had little interest in Egypt<sup>45</sup> and Bismarck had told France to seek compensation for Alsace-Lorraine in North Africa. It was not so much what was said but rather the fact that England had eluded the snare. Whereas Germany had been telling England how fortunate she was to have a friend like Germany when confronted with the Franco-Russian Alliance, England had slipped the traces and reappeared, reincarnated, on good terms with the French.<sup>46</sup> To the Germans, this looked like a recurrence of the loss of Russia from the German bag.<sup>47</sup> The suspected secret articles made the Germans curious as to how far the agreement reached. Was it actually what it seemed or did it edge toward an alliance? Germany had to find out; shortly

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<sup>44</sup>Spender, p. 217. Cf. Brandenburg, p. 203; L. Albertini, The Origins of the War of 1914, ed. and trans. I. M. Massey (3 vols.; London: Oxford University Press, 1952), I, 149; A. W. Ward and G. P. Cochrane (eds.) The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy, 1866-1919 (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1923), III, 343.

<sup>45</sup>E. T. S. Duggale (trans.) German Diplomatic Documents, 1871-1914 (4 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1931), III, 192-193.

<sup>46</sup>Brandenburg, pp. 202, 206.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 27-30. The Kaiser's rejection of the Reinsurance Treaty was the first action that started the "encirclement" (or fed that belief) of Germany. Previous to this, Germany had treaties with all the major powers save France and England. France she wanted isolated and England as a friend.

she saw her chance.

When the Russians were defeated by Japan in 1905, France was isolated amidst the shambles of Russian arms.<sup>48</sup> Concurrently, France had determined to make Morocco a protectorate and her attempts to do this were in violation of the Treaty of Madrid. Signed in 1880, this treaty guaranteed a status quo and independence in Morocco. France carefully bought off Spain, Italy, and England, but Germany was neglected.<sup>49</sup> This was an affront to Germany and the Kaiser let it be known at Tangier (although much against his will).

. . . His Majesty claimed free trade and fully equal rights with other nations for Germany; when Count Cherisey generously prepared to admit this, His Majesty remarked that he would reach a direct understanding with the Sultan, who as a free ruler of an independent country enjoyed equal rights, that he would know how to give his justified demands their full weight, and that he expected these to be fully respected also by France.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup>Schmitt, p. 179; Spender, p. 239.

<sup>49</sup>A. Escher, Journals and Letters of Reginald Viscount Escher, ed. M. V. Brett (4 vols.; London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1934), II, 137. The Kaiser is quoted by Escher: "He could not object to the Morocco Treaty, that was a matter for England and France, and he added 'they certainly might have communicated it to me, but I cannot prevent people from being rude. I waited for a year, but when France acted as though the treaty bound other nations also, I too was forced to act. I have no doubt that everything will be arranged if England does not incite France.'"

<sup>50</sup>P. von Holstein, The Holstein Papers, ed. N. Rich and M. H. Fisher (4 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), IV, 330.



The Morocco episode arrived on the world scene at a particularly fine time from Germany's viewpoint. Not only was France in a poor legal position, but her ally, Russia, was in the final stages of a defeat at the hands of Japan. This gave Germany a chance to teach Europe the futility of standing in opposition to her and show the French that English diplomatic support was a poor substitute for German friendship. The opportunity had some other toothsome possibilities. Russia might take a dim view of the cavorting of her ally with England, the ally of Japan. In addition, it might have the effect of making Germany's sometime friend, Italy, a more useful member of the Triple Alliance. Yes, the time and conditions were right for Germany to cause the disintegration of the understanding between France and England.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps the future would even lend itself to the furtherance of Germany's great dream, the union of the Triple Alliance and the Dual Alliance.<sup>52</sup> Here was a goal that excited the Kaiser's imagination and, as he saw it, would assure the peace of Europe as nothing else. England could also see it and it spelled a continental combination under German hegemony. Consequently, the possibility was not only

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<sup>51</sup>Schmitt, p. 31.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.; Nicolson, pp. 168-169.

unacceptable to England, but it was against historic English policy. This condition had always caused her to stand four-square in the road against such a combination. Thus stimulated, England vigorously supported France.<sup>53</sup>

The French, on the other hand, feared that England would try to push them into war with Germany; the spectre of "perfidious Albion" arose lucidly in their mind's eye. France, fearful of Germany and without a strong ally, wanted peace.<sup>54</sup> Rouvier, the French Premier, was willing to settle not only the Morocco question but all outstanding Franco-German problems. If Germany wanted to disrupt the Anglo-French rapprochement at an embryo stage, this was the chance. She did not take it. Instead, Germany insisted on the dismissal of the French Foreign Minister, Delcasse, and on summoning the powers to a conference on the Moroccan question.<sup>55</sup>

Germany had won a resounding victory until the demand for a conference. She was not satisfied with victory; she was intent on humiliating France. England would not stand for this, and, it seems, neither would any of the other powers save Austria. Even Italy, ostensibly Germany's ally,

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<sup>53</sup>Nicolson, p. 163; Brandenburg, pp. 254-256; Dugdale, III, 171.

<sup>54</sup>Nicolson, p. 164.

<sup>55</sup>Spender, p. 245; Ward and Gooch, p. 342.

voted against her; from her victory, Germany reaped defeat.<sup>56</sup>

From the background of this encounter, several conditions previously indistinct became clear. Italy, for one, wanted France to get Morocco due to an earlier agreement by which France agreed Italy should have Tripoli when France possessed Morocco. This verified Italy's uselessness as an ally,<sup>57</sup> a fact of which Germany was already well aware. Moreover, it solidified the dependence of mighty Germany on weak Austria. Austria had emerged from the Algeiras Conference as Germany's only faithful ally.<sup>58</sup> England, while concerned with maintaining France as a Great Power, was also intent on keeping the Germans away from the Mediterranean in general and from Gibraltar in particular. Germany was looking intently at the Moroccan seacoast towns of Mazagan and Mogador; the British Admiralty was vehemently against any such acquisition.<sup>59</sup> Finally, Germany had been reduced from her grandiose scheme of European hegemony to a nation fearful of "encirclement," and the author of this tactic, she imagined, was the Kaiser's uncle, England's King Edward VII.

As an adjunct to this diplomatic debacle, Germany knew that she could do nothing in Morocco from a military

<sup>56</sup>Spender, p. 263.    <sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, Nicolson, p. 190.

<sup>58</sup>Spender, p. 263; Nicolson, p. 190.

<sup>59</sup>Schmitt, p. 32; Taylor, p. 430.

standpoint since it was over the sea, and once again she felt the need for a navy.<sup>60</sup> This time, however, it was not a navy for the protection of German commerce, as she had announced to the world, but one of a type and magnitude that would incur the respect of the greatest naval power. England, by her actions at Algeciras, had saved the Entente (as it had come to be called) but she had added fresh fuel to the fires of German animosity.<sup>61</sup> France, thus supported, refused to be frightened into friendship with Germany.

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<sup>60</sup>Spender, p. 199; G & T, VI, 118. Cf. A. R. Anderson, The Background of Anti-English Feeling in Germany, 1898-1902 (Washington: The American University Press, 1939), p. 309. Germany had a similar experience during the Boer War when she was frantic for want of a navy. Anderson quotes Tagliche Rundschau, No. 5, January, 1900: "Also the most stubborn opponents of the creation of a strong navy must clearly see the danger which exists daily for the German Empire because it is so powerless on the sea."

<sup>61</sup>Nicolson, p. 199.

## CHAPTER II

### UNITED WE STAND OR . . .

#### The Military Conversations of 1906

The change of governments in Great Britain in the latter part of 1905 disturbed the French. They felt that they could have counted on the backing of the Balfour Government in a military sense to some degree but with the Liberals they were not sure. There had been some exchange between Sir John Fisher, the First Sea Lord, and the French Naval Attache in previous months, but nothing to the extent that the French thought to be necessary.<sup>1</sup> Now they did not know whether or not these conversations would be continued. With this in mind, Major Huguet, then French Military Attache, dined with Lieutenant-Colonel Repington, the Military Correspondent of The Times. In the course of conversation, Huguet mentioned that:

. . . his Embassy people were worried because Sir Edward Grey, who had just taken over the Foreign Office, had not renewed the assurances given by Lord Lansdowne . . . but that if Sir E. Grey would broach the subject at the next diplomatic reception, the French Embassy would be

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<sup>1</sup>G & T, III, 169, 171.

much relieved. They knew our sympathies were with them, but they wanted to know what we should do in case Germany suddenly confronted them with a crisis.<sup>2</sup>

The reason, of course, for this apprehension was the conference at Algeciras was to meet on January 16, 1906. The French were realists enough to know that diplomatic support without some hint of military backing would be valueless. Huguet said that the subject should be brought up at the next diplomatic reception but Huguet undoubtedly knew his man. Repington lost no time in communicating with Sir Edward Grey who replied, "I am interested to hear of your conversation with the French Military Attache. I can only say that I have not receded from anything which Lord Lansdowne said to the French, and have no hesitation in affirming it."<sup>3</sup> At this juncture, the few that were to know the extent of the intimacies that existed between England and France were gathering at Grey's instance. Repington and Grey, then Huguet, Lords Escher and Ripon, and Sir George Clarke were informed. |  
Eventually there were more, but until August 3, 1914, the number would be small. Paralleling the beginnings of the military conversations that were to have such a bearing on England's subsequent momentous decision were undercurrents

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<sup>2</sup>C. A. Repington, The First World War, 1914-1918 (2 vols.; London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1920), I, 2-3.

<sup>3</sup>G & T, III, 119; Cf. Ewart, I, 528-529; Repington, I, 4.

that she might consider a certain violation as casus belli. Major Huguet ". . . said that the French did not realize, and had nothing to go on to make them realize, that a German violation of Belgium would automatically bring us [England] into the field, as I [Repington] believed it would."<sup>4</sup>

From this time on, this fact was filed away and was to appear prominently in French plans. So far as the conversations were concerned, Grey expressed only a personal opinion of his own, agreeing with Lord Lansdowne. He had consulted none of his colleagues; the elections were in progress and the Cabinet was dispersed. At some inconvenience, Grey arranged to meet with Haldane, the Secretary of State for War. Between themselves they decided to go ahead with the military conversations.<sup>5</sup> Shortly thereafter, Haldane sought out the Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, and received his concurrence. Campbell-Bannerman, a cautious man, suggested that the proposal be brought up before the

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<sup>4</sup>Repington, I, 5. This comment reported by Repington shows him to be something of a prophet or a man that applied the lessons of history realizing that England would never permit a powerful military nation to dominate the European coast opposite England. On the other hand, the book was written fourteen years after the time discussed and perhaps Repington's memory was faulty.

<sup>5</sup>Haldane, p. 30. Cf. Barnes, I, 459; Spender, p. 261.

entire Cabinet.<sup>6</sup> Grey sidestepped this recommendation neatly and by doing so opened himself to criticism to the end of his life.<sup>7</sup> Up to this time, the British Government was committed to "diplomatic support" only but the military and previous naval conversations edged the British toward an unofficial alliance. As time passed, the conversations bound the two nations closer together. All the while, the Government cries of "no commitment" echoed through the halls of Parliament.<sup>8</sup> It was not only the conversations that caused a drawing close of England and France; England was spurred on by the continuing growth of the German Navy, by German colonial demands and by a realization that it was not in her interest to have a strong and militant Germany across the Channel.<sup>9</sup> In France, fear of Germany was rampant but acquiescence to German demands could only make her a lackey.

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<sup>6</sup>J. A. Spender, The Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman (2 vols.; London: Cassell and Co., Ltd., n.d.), II, 253. "When would you like to have a Cabinet? Would 30th, 31st, or 1st do? Would you like the answer for the French to be confirmed by a Cabinet before it is given." Letter from Campbell-Bannerman to Sir Edward Grey, dated January 21, 1906.

<sup>7</sup>M. Hankey, The Supreme Command (2 vols.; George Allen and Ulwin Ltd., 1961), I, 45-46. Cf. Ward and Gooch, III, p. 347.

<sup>8</sup>F. Neilson, How Diplomats Make War (New York: B. W. Huebach, 1916), p. 185.

<sup>9</sup>Ewart, I, 148.



The Military Conversations were to continue to the eve of the war. Their very existence served to bring the nations together, all the more so since England stood staunchly by France in the Algeciras affair.<sup>10</sup> The military, having received the governmental nod, proceeded with dispatch and efficiency. Haldane had General Grierson open talks with the French Military Attache and then he:

. . . became aware at once that there was a new army problem. It was, how to mobilize and concentrate at a place of assembly to be opposite the Belgian frontier, a force calculated as adequate (with the assistance of Russian pressure in the East) to make up for the inadequacy of the French armies for their great task of defending the entire French frontier from Dunkirk down to Belfort. . . .<sup>11</sup>

Thus, Haldane had his marching orders for the subsequent reorganization of the British Army. Clearly, the armed forces of each country and the thinking and plans of their respective staffs were specifically geared toward cooperation between the two from this time forward. The only impediment that was placed in the way and the only item that prevented the conversations from becoming a defensive alliance<sup>12</sup> was the ever present preamble that the negotiations were to commit

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<sup>10</sup>Spender, Fifty Years of Europe, p. 263; W. S. Churchill, The World Crisis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), I, 27.

<sup>11</sup>Haldane, pp. 30-31. Cf. G & T, III, 172.

<sup>12</sup>Churchill, I, 116.

neither government to act. The non-commitment statement was conspicuous; the British insisted upon it and the French were always pressing the British to dispense with it. In subsequent years, some British statesmen thought this qualification to be visionary and restrictive. Nicolson, for one, believed that the conversations should be converted into an alliance for the good of Great Britain and for the peace of Europe.<sup>13</sup> It was not to be. In the mind of the British Government, England was free to aid France or not as the situation demanded. France, aided by the rise of German sea power and the recurring Anglo-German antagonisms, bided her time and inched closer as the years passed.<sup>14</sup>

### The British Fleet

Clemenceau once said that the Royal Navy was all that was desired by France since the British Army was not strong enough to be of help. He did not mean exactly what he said; he wanted the fleet but he also wanted British wealth, manpower, and industrial capacity. The most tangible was, of course, the navy, and that force more than evened up the

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<sup>13</sup>Brandenburg, p. 256; Churchill, I, 63.

<sup>14</sup>Brogan, p. 441.

inequalities when comparing the strength of France and Russia against that of the Triple Alliance.<sup>15</sup> He was, in addition, fully aware of the power of the naval blockade. In later years, he was asked by Lloyd George if he would admit that the single most important reason for the defeat of Germany was the blockade. He would and did.<sup>16</sup> Clemenceau was only too happy to subscribe to the British Navy for many reasons but for two in particular. The French Navy had deteriorated in the years since 1902,<sup>17</sup> and he knew that the beloved navy of Great Britain was the best inroad to British consolidation with France--all the more so, as naval rivalry dominated the relations of Germany and England with increasing intensity.<sup>18</sup>

Sir John Fisher had long been dissatisfied with the conditions prevalent in the Royal Navy when he was in command of the Mediterranean Fleet in 1899. By force of will,

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<sup>15</sup>Churchill, I, 16.

<sup>16</sup>C. Seymour (ed.), The Intimate Papers of Colonel House (4 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1928), IV, 179. Cf. for a discussion of the feeling of the British in reference to the blockade A. Hurd, "The United States and Sea Power: A Challenge," Fortnightly Review, CXI (January-June 1919), pp. 175-189.

<sup>17</sup>E. Halevy, A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, trans. E. I. Watkin (6 vols.; New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1961), VI, 209-210.

<sup>18</sup>O. J. Hale, Publicity and Diplomacy (New York: Appleton-Century Co., 1961), p. 327.

combined with administrative and organizing ability, Fisher strove to bring the navy into the modern era.<sup>19</sup> By 1904 he was the First Sea Lord; he and his ideas took the Admiralty by storm. Fisher, like his counterpart in Germany, Tirpitz, dominated his nation's navy. Reform came hard to the Fleet, but Fisher was determined that changes were necessary and had to be made.<sup>20</sup> The German challenge was not his major concern in the early days. After 1908, it was not only his and the navy's greatest concern, but Great Britain's also.

Early in the century, the British Navy was vastly larger than any possible combination of sea power that could confront it. At that time the threat was considered to be the combined French and Russian Fleets. The Germans had tried to convince Great Britain that the Dual Alliance was directly aimed at England.<sup>21</sup> It was, but no more than it was leveled at Germany herself. England, on the other hand, was

<sup>19</sup>Schmitt, p. 178. Cf. Fay, p. 235.

<sup>20</sup>Marder, chap. V. Cf. Hankey, I, 39-40; J. A. Fisher, Fear God and Dread Nought, ed. A. J. Marder (2 vols., London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), II, 22.

<sup>21</sup>Bismarck and the Kaiser were agreed that England should join the Triple Alliance to protect herself from France and Russia. England was favorable to the Triple Alliance and had no objection to an alliance with Germany but did not wish to become embroiled in Austria's Balkan problems. Cf. G. E. Buckle (ed.), The Letters of Queen Victoria (3 vols., third series; New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1931), II, 65; R. J. Sontag, Germany and England, 1848-1894 (New York: Appleton-Century, 1938), pp. 282-290; Holstein, I, 182.

willing to believe what the Germans said and then extended the suggestion by adding Germany to the list of possible enemies. After all, had she not heard rumors of the Germans trying to woo the French and Russians into an understanding with the Triple Alliance<sup>22</sup> and that German public opinion was distinctly anti-English during the Boer War,<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the appearance of the German Navy brought an unknown quantity into the British calculations.

These thoughts aided the British in their decision to concentrate a few more of their ships in home waters and pressed the negotiations of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance which signaled their withdrawal from traditional isolation.<sup>24</sup> The

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<sup>22</sup>During this period, Germany was trying to form a continental alliance of Russia, France, and Germany against England. The Kaiser's closest approach to success was the negotiation of the abortive Treaty of Bjorko. Cf. Brandenburg, pp. 233-235; S. Lee, King Edward VII (2 vols.; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927), II, 354-360.

<sup>23</sup>Anderson, pp. 308-309.

<sup>24</sup>A chief reason for concluding the treaty with the Japanese was the presence of a powerful Russian squadron in Asiatic waters. With the defeat of the Russians at Tsushima, the British Far Eastern Squadron was ordered home. Churchill, I, 15. The French, during the Russo-Japanese War, were placed in a dangerous position by their alliance with the Russians. The Russians made use of the French Indo-China ports when transporting their Baltic Fleet to Asiatic waters. This placed a strain on French neutrality. The danger arose with the possibility of a Russian victory over the Japanese. This would probably have led the Japanese to appeal to their ally, the English. Thus, the English and French would have been forced to war even in the face of their own rapprochement. The

Anglo-French Agreement of 1904 and the later defeat of Russia by Japan had left only one fleet with possible hostile intent in opposition to the Royal Navy. That the German fleet was hostile was conjecture, for the Germans vehemently denied that it was. The Kaiser ridiculed the idea saying:

The only answer to Lascelles' reproach (which is the general opinion among the Britons) that our fleet is designed for an attack on the English coast is that since the new British disposal of the ships 43 ships of the line and about 140 cruisers at their disposal as against our 14 ships of the line and 20 cruisers. Who then shall make the attack!?:<sup>25</sup>

To the accusations then made in England about the concentration of the fleet at Kiel, the Kaiser retorted:

The questions (1) why we build our ships and (2) why we keep them at home are to be answered: (1) because we had no more and required them and had at first to replace the old ones, (2) because we really did not know where in the whole world to put them! We had no Gibraltar, Malta, nor anywhere else in Europe!! Formerly we used to sail the

nation that would have gained would have been Germany and in two ways: (1) the North Sea would have been denuded to supply ships for the Far East; and (2) the rising German desire to separate the French and English would have been accomplished. See Fisher's comments on the Franco-Russian cooperation in Indo-China: Fisher, II, 55-56, 59-59. The disruption of Russian naval power by the Japanese was the occasion of the end of British fears of combined Franco-Russian naval power. Previous to that, the Admiralty recognized two naval power combinations: France and Russia, Russia and Germany. A superiority of ten per cent was deemed necessary over the strongest. A. J. Marder, Anatomy of Sea Power (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1964), p. 465. The French Navy, in its own right, continued as a factor in England's plans until 1906 when the Military Conversations began. Marder, Anatomy of Sea Power, pp. 469-471, 475. Cf. G. M. Trevelyan, Grey of Fallodon (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1937), pp. 134, 152-159.

<sup>25</sup>E. F. S. Dugdale, III, 213.

Mediterranean, but we gave that up in order not to be a nuisance to the British.<sup>26</sup>

These answers brought up a new question. If there was no place to put these ships, then why build them? The answer comes from the time that Germany decided that she was to become a world power and secure colonies. Colonies require a navy. Further, Germany found, during the latter days of the nineteenth century through the Boer War years, that:

The fact remains that the disregard of Germany because of her deficiency in sea-power has struck such roots in the minds of the British people that the commander of an English ship breaks international law when Germany is involved. Their lack of fear of our flag must be corrected now and fully, since there exists in it a dangerous fire which can lead to more serious developments. Also the most stubborn opponents of the creation of a strong navy must clearly see the danger which exists daily for the German Empire because it is so powerless on the sea.<sup>27</sup>

German nationalism refused to place Germany in a position of being beholden to the British fleet. The actions of

<sup>26</sup>ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Anderson, p. 309, cited by Tägliche Rundschau, No. 5, January, 1900. CF, G & T, VI, 147: "As far as I [Colonel Trench, British Military Attache in Berlin in 1908] can judge, there is a good deal of resentment in this country that Germany's present naval inferiority forces her to accept for the moment hinderances which she encounters in that world expansion which she considers her right and her duty, and this resentment is intimately bound up with a fixed determination to put up with these hinderances no longer than is absolutely necessary, to strain every nerve in every sphere of national and international activity to provide the necessary means and conditions for their removal and to employ these latter in the most profitable way."

the British Navy at the turn of the century made England an ally of the German imperialists. Combined with the astute direction of publicity by Tirpitz, the cause of German sea power advanced to the great satisfaction of the Kaiser. Having won the fight to construct a battle fleet after the passage of the Naval Law of 1900, the Kaiser selected as a model that navy with which he was the most familiar and was at the same time the mightiest of them all.<sup>28</sup> William II was an Admiral of the Fleet in the Royal Navy, an honor conferred by his grandmother, Queen Victoria, and one of which he was particularly proud. This contributed to the Kaiser's special preoccupation with the Royal Navy--"in a very special sense the German Navy is a child of the British Navy. . . ."<sup>29</sup> If imitation is the sincerest form of compliment, in this case the compliment was to run in both directions. Tradition in the Royal Navy had replaced fighting capacity with show. Dominated by "spit and polish," there was little resemblance to the navy of Nelson. But a fresh wind was to clear away the archaic and inefficient fogs that had grown up; the name of that wind was Sir John Fisher.

Fisher was a marvelously active man, a genius in his field, dedicated to the interests of the Royal Navy. While

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<sup>28</sup>Hurd and Castle, p. 205. <sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 94.



still a vice-admiral in command of the Mediterranean Fleet, Fisher was making changes--revolutionary changes--that were sometime later to sweep through the entire Royal Navy. Confronted by the naval ambition of the extremely efficient Germans, who were not bound by the thongs of tradition that sapped British strength, Fisher was frantic to prepare the navy for the day that he knew was coming.<sup>30</sup> Against the backdrop of British foreign policy and the startling changes in national alignments, he appeared, in 1904, in a position to carry through his reforms. As First Sea Lord, he was responsible for the fighting and seagoing efficiency of the Fleet.

While the international scene was changing with the constantly altered power structure, Fisher was preparing to add a technical revolution to the already complex situation. By 1906, the German challenge to British naval supremacy had developed sufficiently for public notice and concern, but it was not yet tense.<sup>31</sup> The British had a tremendous superiority

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<sup>30</sup>Fisher, II, 416. Fisher believed that October 21, 1914 was ". . . the date of the Battle of Armageddon." Cf. C. Hardinge, Old Diplomacy, The Reminiscences of Lord Hardinge of Panhurat (London: John Murray, 1947), p. 155; Hardinge felt that a war was coming but not until after 1913 due to the requirement for widening and deepening the Kiel Canal caused by the development of Fisher's Breadnought.

<sup>31</sup>Awareness of the naval situation is evident in reviewing The Times and Fortnightly Review, but there seemed to be a certain amount of satisfaction that England was well able to take care of herself. Keep in mind that even in the 1908-1909 period and the Agadir crisis, as reflected by the publications,

which the Germans could not hope to overcome. Fisher's actions on naval reconcentrations had left the balance in the English favor. Additionally, conversations that resulted from the Anglo-French Entente gave some credence to a joining of the French and British fleets.<sup>32</sup>

In late 1905, Fisher made his move for a new type of ship superior to any then afloat. It took courage, for it destroyed the British naval advantage in a stroke.<sup>33</sup> H.M.S. Dreadnought was the result of two considerations; long-range gunnery had just come into its own, as shown by the Russo-Japanese action at Tsushima, and long-range actions required that all guns of the main battery be of the same calibre since

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reaction was mild. Cf. Hale, pp. 327-419 for many examples of press releases.

<sup>32</sup>Fisher, II, 55. Letter to the Marquess of Lansdowne: ". . . All I hope is that you will send a telegram to Paris that the English and French Fleets are one. [Italics Fisher's] We could have the German Fleet, the Kiel Canal, and Schleswig-Holstein within a fortnight."

<sup>33</sup>Fisher had to build the H.M.S. Dreadnought. The Americans had two of that type already approved and the Germans and Russians were considering them. Cf. Pompeius, "HMS Dreadnought," Fortnightly Review, LXXIX (January-June, 1906), p. 894; Marder, Anatomy of Sea Power, p. 342. Fisher replaced the ships assigned to the North Sea with dreadnoughts first so that the strongest ships were in the ocean area opposite Kiel. The French, however, did not begin to build the new type immediately. Although France projected two ships by 1910, she did not have them by that date. Halevy, VI, 392-393. Churchill was informed in July of 1912 by the French Naval Attache that France had seven dreadnoughts building. G & T, X, Part II, 601-602. The lack of these modern ships unquestionably had a bearing on the French agreement to move out of the Channel to the Mediterranean.

the ranging was done by watching the splashes of the salvos. The main batteries were increased from four heavy guns to ten; the weight of metal fired was, of course, on the same order. General belief, therefore, was that a pre-dreadnought battleship could not successfully engage a dreadnought.<sup>34</sup> The impact of the appearance of this ship was dramatic; naval construction plans had to be recast by the admiralties of the world. Germany, for one, ceased her battleship construction for nearly a year and a half in order to prepare plans for the new type.<sup>35</sup> By the time that Germany was ready to commence building, Fisher had his lead and the Germans were never able to overtake the Royal Navy.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>G. B. Turner (ed.), A History of Military Affairs (Rev. ed.; New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1956), p. 307, reprints an excerpt from B. Brodie, Sea Power in the Modern Age (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943), stating: "Much of the pre-World War period is written in terms of the Dreadnought, which is supposed to have rendered pre-dreadnought types of little or no use--as though those types suffered a sudden extinction of firing power and mobility." Cf. Navalis, "Do Dreadnoughts Only Count," Fortnightly Review, LXXXV, (January-June, 1909), for the opinion ". . . the King Edwards, the Lord Nelsons and even the Royal Sovereigns are still formidable ships, and could render an excellent account of themselves. It will be many years before an enemy fleet will be composed only of dreadnoughts and be able to find opponents with whom they are evenly matched. Between two fleets, however, of equal number and equally well drilled--one of the dreadnoughts and one other of King Edwards--victory would declare in the favor of the dreadnoughts." Cf. Great Britain, 5 Parliamentary Debates (Commons), XXII, (1911), 1882.

<sup>35</sup>G & T, VI, 118.

<sup>36</sup>Fisher, II, 140.

The changeover from conventional battleships to those of the dreadnought class meant that England had voluntarily vacated the overwhelming lead that she had in battleships. Fisher found himself charged with leaving England open to invasion by giving the Germans an even start and for bringing about ". . . a period of greater strain in the rivalry of international arms."<sup>37</sup> It was also a costly venture; the new ships were more expensive since they were larger and more complicated. The requirement to expend millions on sea power did not set well with the Liberal Government that had recently come to power, for social welfare programs were its main interest. Money spent for ships could not be used in the social schemes so dear to its heart. From the time of its inception, the issue of the dreadnought was a running battle which was attacked continually.<sup>38</sup> In an effort to salvage their social welfare plans, the Liberals supported a move toward disarmament. This issue was thrust into the agenda of the Hague Conference of 1907. Disarmament was not to be; it captured no nation's fancy and was passed off with an innocuous resolution.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Harder, Dreadnought to Scapa Flow, I, 56.

<sup>38</sup>Harder, Anatomy of Sea Power, chap. XXVII; Hale, pp. 335-336.

<sup>39</sup>Halevy, VI, 226; E. L. Woodward, Great Britain and the German Navy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), pp. 121-122, 135, 141.

The naval question was becoming more and more pronounced in both England and Germany. Their respective presses were actively whipping antagonisms arising from the argument of whether the German Navy threatened Great Britain.<sup>40</sup> The Novelle of April 6, 1908, amending the Naval Law of 1900, triggered the first of two periods of marked tension that significantly affected relations between England and Germany. This act did not increase the number of ships to be constructed but rather lowered the replacement life of a ship from twenty-five to twenty years.<sup>41</sup> This had the effect of increasing the number of battleships to be constructed by an additional one for each year starting in 1908 and ending in 1911. British reaction came with the Naval Estimates of 1909; the Admiralty requested eight dreadnoughts be built and thus precipitated a governmental crisis. Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George, in their role as social reformers, harangued the country, saying there was no reason for an increase.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>G & T, VI, III; Dugdale, III, 281. Cf. Hale, pp. 327-365. The opening statement of this chapter of Hale sets the tone of the period thus: "From 1908 to 1912 every feature of Anglo-German relations was subordinated to the question of competitive naval armaments."

<sup>41</sup>Hurd and Castle, pp. 141, 336. <sup>42</sup>Churchill, I, 32-33.

<sup>43</sup>Churchill, I, 32-34. Churchill later said that he was right, "but although the Chancellor of the Exchequer and I were right in the narrow sense, we were absolutely wrong in relation

The most pointed question of the time was centered around how many dreadnoughts each nation would have in 1912. Count von Matternich, the German Ambassador to Great Britain, reported:

There were [sic] also a good foundation for the criticism which Mr. Balfour, the leader of the Opposition, applied to the Liberal Cabinet's naval policy. Ministers appeared embarrassed by the question whether by the end of 1911 Germany would have 13 ships of the Dreadnought class as against England's 12. . . .<sup>44</sup>

There was considerable lack of understanding as to what the German naval construction program was about. The German Government would admit nothing except that the construction was going along according to the Naval Laws and acts that had been published. The British, from various sources, continually deduced the idea that the Germans were stockpiling armor plate, gun mounts, and the like.<sup>45</sup> This material, once accumulated, would then be used to accelerate the construction program so that Germany could have more dreadnoughts in 1912 than England, the number being a function of how far the Germans would go in accelerating. The Germans refused to allow the British Naval Attache visitation rights to their shipyards thereby assuring the English that

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to the deep tides of destiny." Cf. Great Britain, 5 Parliamentary Debates (Commons), XXII, (1911), 1891-1892.

<sup>44</sup>Dugdale, III, 277.

<sup>45</sup>Woodward, p. 215.

they had uncovered dirty work.<sup>46</sup> The Germans, of course, owed the British no explanations. Asquith admitted that none was required; the Kaiser, in silent agreement, gave none. Meanwhile, Churchill and Lloyd George lost their case as they energetically placed it before the country. Public opinion's voice was clear--no nation was to get the chance to put English sea power in jeopardy.<sup>47</sup> No matter what the argument was on either side of the North Sea, the message was clear that England meant to retain her maritime supremacy. Fisher had done his work well and he had used every stratagem that he could devise to assure that the Navy maintained an overwhelmingly superior position--but he was never happy about the strength and sought to increase it constantly.<sup>48</sup>

Germany, in the person of Tirpitz, was at odds to understand why the English were so sensitive about their navy.

In a speech in the Reichstag (January 26th, 1908) Tirpitz said that the German Navy Bill ought not produce anxiety in England. . . . "England is actually more than three times as strong as we are, and she is in a position to build much faster than we are. . . ."<sup>49</sup>

There is truth in the Admiral's words, but all the same, England was concerned about the rise of German sea

<sup>46</sup>Dugdale, III, 292-293; Hale, pp. 343-365.

<sup>47</sup>Harder, Dreadnought to Scapa Flow, I, 184-185.

<sup>48</sup>Fisher, I, 190; Fisher, II, 196. <sup>49</sup>Dugdale, III, 272.

power and this concern created a pall over the relations of the two.<sup>50</sup> England was looking into the future at many aspects of the balance of naval power. Tirpitz was building a formidable naval weapon featuring highly trained crews and superbly built ships. The German Fleet, given time, would be in a position to provide a serious challenge, far more serious than any other fleet in the last hundred years had offered. The possibility of an increased number of German dreadnaughts in 1911 was, therefore, one of consuming interest to the British nation.

This situation, viewed by the British Government, is that whilst there is no thought of attributing hostile intentions to Germany or to any of Great Britain's neighbors nor of calling in question their right to build what ships they please, the supreme interest of the security of the British Empire requires that the standard and proportion of the British Navy to those of European countries, which has been upheld by successive British Governments, must be maintained.<sup>51</sup>

To these words of the British Ambassador in Berlin,<sup>52</sup> Sir Edward Grey added his own interpretation, thus: "There is no comparison between the importance of the German Navy to Germany, and the importance of our Navy to us. . . . To have a strong Navy would increase their prestige, their diplomatic influence . . . but it is not a matter of life and death to

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<sup>50</sup>Ewart, II, 682-686. Cf. Churchill, I, 33-36.

<sup>51</sup>Dugdale, III, 274. <sup>52</sup>Sir Frank Lascelles.



them as to us.<sup>53</sup> But the Germans were truthful; there was no acceleration. It was a scare without foundation. The Germans had not deviated from their published laws but a great deal of damage was done in the relations between the two countries.<sup>54</sup>

Once Fisher had the eight battleships authorized, he pressed forward. The fact that the Germans had not increased their shipbuilding was not clear in 1909; rather, it was 1912 before Robert McKenna was taken to task on the acceleration estimate.<sup>55</sup> McKenna was wrong but circumstances came to be in the ensuing years that made it a good thing for the nation that he forced the issue. Churchill subsequently said:

The greatest credit is due to the First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr. McKenna, for the resolute and courageous manner in which he fought his case and withstood his Party on this occasion. Little did I think, as this dispute proceeded, that when the next Cabinet crisis about the Navy arose our roles would be reversed. . . .<sup>56</sup>

### The German Navy

The navy that catapulted the Royal Navy into strenuous efforts of reorganization and reorientation<sup>57</sup> had its

<sup>53</sup>Trevelyan, pp. 244-245, quoted from Grey's speech in the House of Commons, March 29, 1909.

<sup>54</sup>Ewart, II, 691, cf. Churchill, I, 37.

<sup>55</sup>Woodward, pp. 504-504. <sup>56</sup>Churchill, I, 33.

<sup>57</sup>Hurd and Castle, p. 107.

roots deep in the maritime past of the Hanseatic League. Maritime supremacy had resided in the cities that made up the League until the seventeenth century when that ascendancy passed to Holland. In the eighteenth century, the trident came to England.<sup>58</sup> It was Germany's contention, when founding her navy, that she was actually regaining the position once held by the German Hansa cities.

William II, steeped in the arguments of Mahan and inspired by his early interest in and admiration for the Royal Navy, was initially an advocate of a cruiser fleet.<sup>59</sup> This was the commerce-destroying concept of naval warfare as opposed to the battle line philosophy.

The guiding hand of the modern German Navy first became prominent in 1894. Alfred Tirpitz had occasion to put forth his ideas for a battle fleet, and by 1897 he was able to win the Kaiser to his way of thinking.<sup>60</sup> Tirpitz was able to appreciate both schools of thought, but believed that Germany could best be served by the kind of sea power intrinsic in a battle fleet. He was convinced that it would be politically astute to have this form of sea power because it would

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., pp. 1-5.

<sup>59</sup>A. von Tirpitz, My Memoirs (2 vols.; New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1919), I, 75-76. Cf. Hurd and Castle, p. 97.

<sup>60</sup>Tirpitz, I, 121; Hurd and Castle, p. 111.

make Germany a more attractive ally.<sup>61</sup> The German continental position in 1894 had deteriorated from the days of Bismarck. Tirpitz believed that security and naval strength were synonymous for Germany. At the same time, he did not neglect the importance of commerce protection, saying that "the navy seemed to me to be an end in itself, but always a function of . . . maritime interests . . . the flag had to follow trade, as other states had realized long before it began to dawn on us."<sup>62</sup> Tirpitz considered that German commerce was operating throughout the world with the sufferance of British sea power.<sup>63</sup> He wanted German independence asserted, warning that:

. . . if people had not wanted to build the fleet but to go the way of renunciation from the nineties onward, then we should have been compelled to slacken trade and industry of our own accord; and to have allowed our foreign interests abroad to go to rack and ruin.<sup>64</sup>

The advent of ill feelings between England and Germany after the Kruger telegram incident, and the associated

<sup>61</sup>Tirpitz, I, 121: "German trade, the 'Open Door,' could no longer be protected by flying squadrons; we had to increase in general power all round, i.e. to qualify ourselves for an alliance with the Great Powers. But alliance value could only be achieved by a battle fleet." Cf. B. von Bülow, Memoirs of Prince von Bülow, Vol. I: From Secretary of States to Imperial Chancellor, 1897-1903 (4 vols.; Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1921), p. 479; Spender, Fifty Years of Europe, p. 236.

<sup>62</sup>Tirpitz, I, 77.      <sup>63</sup>Ward and Gooch, III, 279, 291.

<sup>64</sup>Tirpitz, I, 87.

impotence of Germany in the face of English sea power, rapidly centered England in the sights of the German Navy.<sup>65</sup>

The Royal Navy was too vast for Tirpitz to entertain the possibility of countering it alone. He anticipated that an ally could be found able to augment the future German fleet. The new fleet, however, was not directed against Great Britain. Indeed, it was against no nation in particular, but for the protection of German interests.<sup>66</sup> The first move to construct the navy was incorporated into the Navy Law of 1898. It will live in history because it was first, but the important law came in 1900. Riding the crest of hostility for Great Britain that arose in Germany during the Boer War,<sup>67</sup> Tirpitz was able to repeal the 1898 law and replace it with the Naval Law of 1900 which ". . . set up an establishment of almost twice the size of the former one. . . ."<sup>68</sup> The Kaiser gave his thoughts on the naval question thus:

The British proposal [an Anglo-German alliance] arises from anxiety about the consequences of our Navy Law. At

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 89; Hurd and Castle, pp. 121-122; Holstein, I, 159-164, 169-170. Incidentally, Holstein believed that the entire Anglo-German animosity began with the Kruger telegram. He also states that he did not think that commercial rivalry had anything to do with it.

<sup>66</sup>Tirpitz, I, 88; Bulow, I, 479-480.

<sup>67</sup>Ward and Gooch, III, 279.

<sup>68</sup>Hurd and Castle, pp. 119, 149.

the beginning of the next century we shall dispose of a battle fleet which in combination with others will threaten real danger to England in spite of her increased strength.<sup>69</sup>

In later years, Churchill commented, "If Germany was going to create a Navy avowedly measured against our own, we could not afford to remain 'in splendid isolation' from European systems . . . still less could we afford to have dangerous causes of quarrel open both with France and Russia."<sup>70</sup>

With the decision inherent in the Navy Law of 1900, Germany set out on the road to naval greatness with Tirpitz at the helm. In the days that followed, he was to elaborate on his naval philosophy, but he remained consistent with his basic precepts. Tirpitz refused to believe that the German Fleet was the cause of friction between England and Germany. When discussing the subject with Captain Dumas, he stated, ". . . his profound conviction that there was no possible grounds for any trouble between England and Germany except

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<sup>69</sup>Spender, Fifty Years of Europe, p. 183. As a matter of interest concerning the intent of the law in question, the Memorandum appended to the Navy Law gives an excellent statement of the mission of the fleet: "--to protect Germany's sea trade and colonies in the existing circumstances there is only one means--Germany must have a battle fleet so strong that even the adversary with the greatest sea-power a war against it would involve such dangers as to imperil his position in the world." Cf. Hurd and Castle, pp. 346-350.

<sup>70</sup>Churchill, I, 14.

trade rivalry and that he was sure couldn't be helped by resort to arms."<sup>71</sup>

One of the most frequently given reasons for the rise of the German Navy has been, as Admiral Tirpitz mentioned, trade rivalry.<sup>72</sup> The German Navy League put forth and stressed this reason; even the English agreed--up to a point. But a host of other persons believed that it was not a factor, or, at best, a minor one. Referring to England, Brandenburg shows that: "There was great fear of Germany, but no thought of attacking her; and this fear was based not so much on our population, or upon our commercial rivalry, or even upon anxiety for the balance of power, as upon the fleet."<sup>73</sup> In 1904, "Bernsdorff, [Germany's London] charge d'affairs, had written . . . that in his opinion the building of the fleet and the economic competition of Germany was the main cause of English ill feeling."<sup>74</sup> Holstein agreed, saying, "It is natural for our commercial rivalry to

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<sup>71</sup> G & T, VI, 115. Captain Dumas was the British Naval Attache in Berlin.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 116. The other great reason was a fear of invasion.

<sup>73</sup> Brandenburg, p. 283. Brandenburg quotes the Kaiser (p. 281) as saying, "They must accustom themselves to our navy. From time to time we must assure them it is not against them."

<sup>74</sup> Woodward, p. 86.

arouse a certain amount of antagonism in English commercial circles. But America is a far more formidable rival of England than we are. . . .<sup>75</sup> Even Bernhardt, an arch-nationalist, comments in reference to a supposedly generous and liberal English commercial policy that ". . . this policy is not dictated by generosity or by international courtesy. The English simply require [italics Bernhardt's] the German merchant. They cannot do without him. . . ."<sup>76</sup> Finally, the best argument against England attempting to forestall German commerce was that ". . . by 'destroying' Germany, Great Britain would deprive herself of the best foreign customer she has. . . ."<sup>77</sup> The German Navy was constructed to aid Germany to get along as a world power, to be used in any way that would further her national ends. The facts did not bear out trade rivalry as a major consideration.

It had long been contended by Germany that she was England's one friend in Europe, but every attempt the English made to turn this claim into an alliance was coldly rejected.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>75</sup>Holstein, I, 159-160.

<sup>76</sup>P. von Bernhardt, Britain as Germany's Vassal (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1914), pp. 1441-42. This book has an interest all its own. It sets forth an idea that appears regularly in the history of this time--that England had seen her best days and the world "plum" was ready to fall to Germany.

<sup>77</sup>Hurd and Castle, p. 283. <sup>78</sup>Holstein, I, 181-182.

Curiously, Germany was afraid that England would dominate any alliance. The Kaiser wanted to make sure that Germany was stronger than England. An aspect of German naval construction springs from this fear. William believed that England would have more respect for Germany if she had a powerful navy. He thought that England would value German friendship more as a result of the fleet,<sup>79</sup> in addition to being more amenable to German pressures in the colonial field. The fleet was to be the vehicle for assuring for Germany her place in the sun.<sup>80</sup> It was to be instrumental in accomplishing the Kaiser's designs vis-a-vis England, but when it came down to cases, he always balked and backed away muttering statements about "perfidious Albion." Instead of getting what he wanted, he drove England into the arms of France, then into the embrace of Russia.<sup>81</sup>

By the time the war began, the German Navy had developed into a formidable force. It was still smaller than the Royal Navy, but, unknown to either England or Germany, the German ships were distinctly superior to the British. Had the German Admiralty and other authorities directing the navy

<sup>79</sup>This is the Tirpitz thesis.

<sup>80</sup>The Times (London), August 28, 1911, p. 6, Emperor William's speech at Hamburg.

<sup>81</sup>Woodward, p. 150; Sontag, p. 301.



had more of an understanding in the strategic sense, the German High Seas Fleet might have won the sea war.<sup>82</sup> It was not Tirpitz's fault; he had faith in the instrument he created. His fleet, unfortunately for Germany, did not accomplish his desires; instead it was a direct cause of subsequent disaster.

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<sup>82</sup>Tirpitz, I, 173-175. For instance: ". . . a most carefully conducted examination shows that our Derfflinger could pierce the heaviest armour of the British Tiger at a range of 11,700 metres, whilst the Tiger could not pierce that of the Derfflinger until it was within 7,800 metres' range. A similar superiority in armament and armourplating, calculated to grip the imagination of any reflecting person, existed in the case of nearly all battleships of the same years." CE, Sir John Jellicoe's comment on July 14, 1914, quoted in C. Barnett, The Swordbearers (New York: Signet Library, 1963), p. 113, ". . . It is highly dangerous to consider that our ships as a whole are superior or even equal fighting machines."

### CHAPTER III

#### THE MEDITERRANEAN - THE LIVELINE OF EMPIRE

##### Aegdir

The ashes of the great naval crisis of 1906-1909 were still warm when Morocco again loomed ominously before the world. It was not expected; the Franco-German Agreement of 1909 supposedly laid that problem in its grave. In April of 1911 the spectre stood reincarnated, as dangerous as in 1906.

Germany, in 1909, had agreed to recognize the political preponderance of France in Morocco in return for economic concessions.<sup>1</sup> She did not get them. Understandably upset, Germany was particularly wary of any French moves to consolidate their power. In 1911 the crisis came; a disturbance in the city of Fez gave France the excuse to occupy the city with troops, giving as the reason the protection of foreign nationals.<sup>2</sup> The Germans, looking upon this as a subterfuge,

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<sup>1</sup>R. Poincare, Memoirs, trans. G. Arthur (New York: Doubleday, 1926), pp. 36, 38. Cf. Halevy, VI, 380; G & T, VII, 126-129, 830.

<sup>2</sup>G & T, VII, 186-187, 195; Spender, Fifty Years in Europe, p. 329. The question naturally arises whether there was, in fact, a danger to Europeans in this situation. The

quietly whispered "compensation" to the French. They were ignored. They received evasive answers, but no satisfaction.

Meanwhile, France's Entente partners looked on with apprehension; they had not been consulted and had no idea of her objectives. France assured the world that once the disturbance was settled, she would withdraw. No one believed this. If Fez was occupied, the consensus was that it would stay occupied. Germany had no objection, provided she received the compensation that she felt was her due. Germany was even reconciled to not being compensated in Morocco.<sup>3</sup> Some other area would do but it must be a reasonable settlement. Aware that France, and particularly England, would not permit her a base in Morocco either on the Atlantic or on the Mediterranean coast, Germany was disposed to be moderate in her demands.<sup>4</sup> Since she did not receive any consideration from the French with this approach, Kiderlen, the German Foreign Minister, sought another course. If the French

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question of protection is rapidly lost because of the Franco-German situation. The following is of interest from the British view: "April 25, 1911, House of Commons, Mr. Dillon: 'Has the Government any information which would give them cause for believing that there is any danger to Europeans?' Mr. McKinnon Wood: 'No, we have no such information.'" (G & T, VII, 201-202.)

<sup>3</sup>Spender, Fifty Years in Europe, p. 331; Dugdale, IV, 10; Tirpitz, I, 276.

<sup>4</sup>Spender, Fifty Years in Europe, p. 335.

continued to occupy Fez, they would violate the Algeciras Treaty,<sup>5</sup> so he decided to send a ship to an Atlantic port "to protect German nationals." Having patiently waited since the first days of April to receive some response from France, Kiderlen ordered the S.M.S. Panther to Agadir which duly arrived on July first.<sup>6</sup> Kiderlen got his long desired response.<sup>7</sup> Once again, the Germans found that they could not succeed with the same tactics so successfully used by the

<sup>5</sup>Dugdale, IV, 7-8; Churchill, I, 213; G & T, VII, 209.

<sup>6</sup>G & T, VII, chap. LIV, generally, but particularly p. 325: ". . . that the motives which prompted the dispatch of a German man-of-war to Agadir were the following:-  
1. German interest menaced by agitation of El Glawi in order to avenge his disgrace. An outbreak of this agitation was to be feared at any time. 2. Public opinion, which would not allow German Government to stand by while other Powers were dividing up country [sic]." (Count de Salis to Sir Edward Grey, July 2, 1911.) SMS Panther was closely followed by the light cruiser, SMS Berlin, and the gunboat, SMS Eber. Cf. Tirpitz, I, 275; H. H. Asquith, The Genesis of the War (London: Cassell and Co., Ltd., 1923), pp. 91-94.

<sup>7</sup>Fay, pp. 284-285. Cf. Ewart, II, 841-843. When the Panther was sent to Agadir, it caused the British to honor the provisions of the Anglo-French Agreement of 1904 and her reaction was the same as in 1906 to what she thought was a recurrence of the same situation. Barnes says that England acted in a bellicose manner (p. 82) but England resisted French pressure to send a ship in retaliation (G & T, VII, 333). While honoring her commitment to France, it seems that England appreciated the fact that Germany was afraid that France was making a grab for Morocco at the expense of Germany and in violation of the Algeciras Treaty. With the appearance of the Panther, the major confrontation was not between Germany and France but between Germany and England, first on the diplomatic level then with military overtones added.

French. At Algeciras, they used the threat of force and lost; on the occasion of the Fez incident, they were disposed to be reasonable but were unsuccessful. So if the French sent troops to Fez, they felt that they could dispatch a ship to Agadir.<sup>8</sup> Although France was the initial treaty violator, the onus of world opinion fell on Germany. As the Paris newspapers howled, the British Navy was alerted.<sup>9</sup> Sir Edward Grey informed the German Ambassador on July fourth that ". . . our attitude could not be a disinterested one in regard to Morocco."<sup>10</sup>

The days passed and no instructions were given the German Ambassador. British patience prevailed until July 21, 1911, when Lloyd George arrived at Grey's office. In one fell swoop, Lloyd rocketed himself into a place in English diplomatic history. He showed a speech to Grey which, if Grey concurred, he intended to give that night at the Mansion House. Grey agreed, noting that he thought it ". . . was quite justified, and would be salutary. . . ."<sup>11</sup> The result was an eruption in the German press;<sup>12</sup> the speech was

<sup>8</sup>Churchill, I, 39-40. <sup>9</sup>Ibid., 44. <sup>10</sup>Grey, I, 214.

<sup>11</sup>Grey, I, 216; G & T, VII, 387, also Nicolson's interesting comment (p. 396), "The speech of Lloyd George . . . was no sudden inspiration but a carefully thought-out one."

<sup>12</sup>Dugdale, IV, 16; The Times (London), July 22, 1911. Cf. the speech was generally taken as a warning to Germany,

considered a threat and an unjustified interference in the negotiations between Germany and France. Moreover, Lloyd George had aroused the apparition of national honor when he exclaimed:

. . . if a situation were forced upon us in which peace could only be preserved by the surrender of the great and beneficent position Britain has won by centuries of heroism and achievement, by allowing Britain to be treated, where her interests were vitally affected, as if she were of no account in the Cabinet of nations, then I say emphatically that peace at that price would be a humiliation intolerable for a great country like ours to endure.<sup>13</sup>

The effect of this pronouncement on Germany was especially great<sup>14</sup> since Lloyd George was considered to be a Germanophile and a Liberal associated with the radical and pacifist elements of his party.<sup>15</sup> After the speech, the tension mounted rapidly. Once again, Germany had selected the Morocco web as the way to aggrandisement; England reacted violently for several reasons. The act of sending a warship to Agadir threw the affair into the naval domain, particularly

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but Taylor believes that ". . . the speech was an answer to the French requests for support. . . ." (p. 471). According to him, the British feared that the negotiations between France and Germany might lead to a Franco-German reconciliation and England did not want this turned into an Anglo-German conflict. In addition, since the French (Caillaux, the French Premier) wanted a private settlement, England was warning that she was not to be left out of a possible partition of Morocco (pp. 470-471).

<sup>13</sup>G & T, VII, 399; Grey, I, 216.

<sup>14</sup>Churchill, I, 42-44.

<sup>15</sup>Halevy, VI, 427.

so since the Admiralty was against Germany's getting any naval foothold in Morocco. While they did not believe that Agadir held any German interests that needed protection, England was well aware the port could be made into a naval base.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, Germany made the same mistake that she made in 1906. In challenging France in Morocco, she had selected the one area in which England was pledged to provide France with diplomatic support.<sup>17</sup> Each time that France was thus endangered by Germany, England and France moved closer together--each even more convinced that Germany was a threat to their position in the world.<sup>18</sup> It is strange that both cases concerning Morocco saw Germany in a strong position. She could have, by deft handling, turned the Moroccan affair

<sup>16</sup>Fisher, II, 55.      <sup>17</sup>G & T, II, 392, 405.

<sup>18</sup>Taylor, p. 478; Brandenburg, pp. 281, 283, 289. From p. 283: "Fear of the German peril was the impelling motive of the whole Entente policy of King Edward." Cf. Woodward, p. 69, thus: "Here, in the settlement of differences with France, was the means of escape from the ever-recurring German demands. . . ."; and p. 71: "The 1904 Anglo-French Agreement . . . was bound to affect the question of Anglo-German naval rivalry."; Churchill, I, 13: "The determination of the greatest military power on the Continent to become at the same time at least the second naval power was an event of the first magnitude in world affairs." Further (p. 14), "The possible addition of a third European Fleet more powerful than either of these two [France and Russia] would profoundly affect the life of Britain. . . ."

to her advantage.<sup>19</sup> In both cases, she chose to provide a military challenge that frightened the two "Entente" powers and received the opposite reaction from that she desired.

In November the situation had eased,<sup>20</sup> an agreement was signed, and the Panther, having seen her day in the pages of history, passed out of Agadir harbor into oblivion. In her wake, the immediate seeds of the Great War had already begun to germinate. Tirpitz, having determined that Germany had suffered a diplomatic defeat, seized upon the occasion to press for another supplementary naval law, the Flottennovelle of 1912.<sup>21</sup>

The Agadir question was eventually solved by negotiations between Germany and France which resulted in France's achieving the preeminence that she desired in Morocco. The cost to France, although she advertised it as exorbitant, was not great considering the prize that she had won. Finally, after the humiliation of Algeiras,<sup>22</sup> the hopeful Treaty of

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<sup>19</sup>The sending of the Panther to Agadir was not deft handling and Germany knew it. Germany, on the other hand, seems to have considered war with England at this time (if a report of Tirpitz's views are to be believed). However, the Kaiser had no intention of going to war over Morocco and evidently Tirpitz decided against it, due to the Kiel Canal being incomplete and the mines off Helgoland not being ready. G & T, VII, 642. This opening of the Kiel Canal also fits Fisher's prediction of the day of Armageddon. Cf. Ewart, II, 840; Hardinge, p. 155.

<sup>20</sup>Dugdale, IV, 17.    <sup>21</sup>Tirpitz, I, 276-277.

<sup>22</sup>G & T, VI, 118.



1909, and the risks attendant the Agadir or Second Moroccan Crisis, Germany left Morocco in French control.

With this victory, France had opened Pandora's box. From the advantage of hindsight, it seems that the possibility of war between Germany and France was remote even in its most virulent stage. This was not the case with Great Britain; after the "Mansion House" speech, the danger of a war between Great Britain and Germany was a decided possibility.<sup>23</sup> It was, in fact, the low point of relations between these two nations, only surpassed by the actual declaration of war in 1914.<sup>24</sup> The obvious result of this occurrence was a further tightening of the relationship that had existed between England and France since 1904. England had won the gratitude of France in both Moroccan crises and stimulated confidence in France that she had a solid compatriot in time of troubles.<sup>25</sup>

From the German aspect, the affair was not viewed with joy. Though saved from a diplomatic defeat by the acquisition of some 100,000 square miles of French Congo and

<sup>23</sup>Taylor, p. 471; Spender, Fifty Years in Europe, pp. 334-335; Ewart, II, 855; G & T, VII, 823.

<sup>24</sup>Taylor, p. 473. A bone of contention. The failure of Haldane's mission could be argued as the point of poorest relations.

<sup>25</sup>Spender, Fifty Years in Europe, p. 337; G & T, VII, 591.

gaining two much desired river outlets for products of their Cameroon territories, the Germans had paid with the renunciation of their Moroccan rights.<sup>26</sup> They had not handled the affair with skill. Kiderlen had repeated, to a large extent, the errors of the first crisis. The diplomacy of Holstein reappeared, was enacted, and produced equally unsatisfactory results.<sup>27</sup> To the good side, it did wipe out Morocco as an area that could produce friction, but Germany had derived as much animosity as could be expected by poor diplomatic planning and ineptness. Looking back to 1904, a cardinal aim of German diplomacy was to separate England and France. She had only been able to cause the two nations to draw closer together, both looking with increasing suspicion on German designs. This inability, in turn, caused the Germans to be reassured that they were the object of encirclement.<sup>28</sup> Every move that Germany made pushed England more and more into the arms of France. It was the ancillary effects of the Agadir crisis that were to be particularly dangerous to world peace. These effects were many and varied. The chain of events that was to lead directly to the Great War was in the process of being forged. In the latter days of the Agadir

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<sup>26</sup>Ewart, II, 845. <sup>27</sup>G & T, VII, 197-198.

<sup>28</sup>Tirpitz, I, 261; Ewart, I, 159, 161, 494-497; Esher, II, 182.

crisis, the second link appeared, full blown, as Italy declared war on Turkey. Fearful of French reaction to her desire for Tripoli in spite of the Franco-Italian agreement of 1902,<sup>29</sup> the Italians determined to secure the territory before the French became entrenched in Morocco. The Italians had noted from bitter experience that the French could be difficult to deal with, especially for a weaker power. Mindful that the French could be forgetful of promises, Italy struck while the Moroccan affair still engaged the French.<sup>30</sup>

Italy, greedy for colonies and fearful of being left behind in the race, pounced on Turkey, giving a reason that was illusory at best. By November of 1911, she had annexed Tripoli and Cyrenaica, and had occupied the Dodecanese Islands. Great Britain and the other powers were anxious to bring the war to a close since Turkey, already weak, might be further weakened; tempting the small Balkan nations to strike.<sup>31</sup>

Italy was evidencing her usual ineptness in the military field, which, on some occasions, was close to comic.

<sup>29</sup>Halevy, V, 403-404. France had made an excellent bargain. Italy would support French desires for Morocco. In return, Italy was to get Tripoli when France achieved preeminence in Morocco. In addition, the agreement "... enabled the French to draw off a considerable number of troops from her Alpine frontier and to station them in positions more directly menaced." G & T, X, PART II, 620.

<sup>30</sup>Halevy, VI, 626-627. <sup>31</sup>Ibid. Cf. Grey, I, 251.

However, Italy was not inept in the areas of diplomacy. Germany and Austria were allies, France and Russia had agreed to the seizure by secret treaty and Great Britain remained aloof. Great Britain was not pleased by the occupation of the Dodecanese. Italy, though a weak nation, was a naval power--a naval power newly established in the North African littoral with the Aegean Islands across the Mediterranean. Great Britain looked askance at this development, for in addition to being strategically located in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Dodecanese controlled the approaches to the Dardanelles.<sup>32</sup> To permit this would be a departure from historic British policy, even though Italy had always proclaimed loudly that she would never allow a hostile Anglo-Italian situation to arise. The predominance of British sea power was, of course, the reason for Italy's consistent refusal to confront Britain, and maintenance of that sea power in the Mediterranean was Britain's reason for anxiety over Italian domination of the Dodecanese.<sup>33</sup> Further, England had decided to oppose any extension of Italian power, should Italy attack any other strategic point, such as Beirut, Salonika, or the Dardanelles. The possession of these strategic locations would endanger

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<sup>32</sup>Marder, Dreadnought to Scapa Flow, pp. 299-300.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

England's maritime trade beyond the limits of calculated risk.<sup>34</sup>

Although Italy and England had historically been friends, England could not overlook the position of Italy as a member of the Triple Alliance. The possession of territory on both sides of the Mediterranean harbingered a naval complex athwart England's vital trade routes. The fact that Italy and Austria were building dreadnoughts and the reality of German sea power, coupled with potential naval bases in the Eastern Mediterranean, were matters of growing concern to the British.<sup>35</sup> In the meantime, the subject of the Dardanelles, dormant since Isvolsky's abortive attempt to open the Straits in 1908, once again strode on stage. The question caused both Turkey and England anxiety. England had an historic role as Turkey's supporter. "If Russia gets what she wants, the Eastern question will have been settled in the traditional Russian sense, i.e., Turkey will be reduced to

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid. One of the fears was that Italy would turn over a major naval base to her ally, Germany, in either the Dodecanese or on the Tripolitanian coast. The fear was well founded, particularly in the face of the new German naval law and establishment of the German Mediterranean squadron. The hostility of the British toward Italian acquisition of the Islands caused Italy to move closer to the Triple Alliance than she had been for some time. Cf. G & T, X, Part II, 630.

<sup>35</sup>G & T, X, Part I, 231.

being a vassal state of the White Tsar."<sup>36</sup> In addition, the opening of the Dardanelles would free the Black Sea fleet to appear as a new force in Mediterranean politics. Moreover, the Russian formula would have created the Black Sea as a sanctuary, but ". . . hitherto . . . England would never allow the Black Sea to be a mare liberum for the Russian fleet and a mare clausum for all other fleets."<sup>37</sup> If England were to agree to change the axiom of her policy,<sup>38</sup> it seemed to the Germans that the Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907 might be an alliance. Baron von Marschall, the German Ambassador at Constantinople, warned, "We live in an era of secret treaties."<sup>39</sup> The revelation of the secret articles of the Anglo-French Agreement of 1904 in 1911 probably fortified German fears.

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<sup>36</sup>Dugdale, IV, 66. England had signed an agreement with Russia in 1907 similar to the 1904 agreement with France but without the guarantee of diplomatic support. Its major provision was the division of spheres of influence in Persia. Russia, however, was a difficult friend. There was no development of the affinity that grew between France and England. Though the Russians wanted to gain entrance to the Mediterranean, they did not succeed. In consequence, the Anglo-Russian rapprochement falls outside the bounds of this paper, save in a few isolated instances.

<sup>37</sup>Dugdale, IV, 66.

<sup>38</sup>Grey was willing to open the Straits to all at this time as he was in 1908. Grey, I, 172-173. Cf. Spender, Fifty Years in Europe, p. 476.

<sup>39</sup>Spender, Fifty Years in Europe, p. 345.

The chancelleries of Europe were polled by Isvolsky, hopeful of pulling off his favorite Dardanelles project. He achieved nothing. One of the principal reasons that emerged was the reluctance of any power to have the Russian Navy in the Mediterranean and, in Germany's case, the effect of such a move on her hard-won influence at Constantinople.<sup>40</sup> The obvious strengthening of Russia by such a concession would be detrimental to the precarious Austrian position in the Balkans.

Actually, the powers were placed in this position by the diplomacy of Italy. Germany, France, Austria, and England had all agreed to support, for various reasons, the Italian acquisition of Tripolitania and Cyrenaicia.<sup>41</sup> They were all against the Italian action when it came to pass, but were unable to stop it. This train of events that appeared in the wake of Italian military ambition was secondary in the sense that the resultant weakening of Turkey forged the Balkan link in the chain leading to the Great War.

The chemistry of the Balkan states was supplied with the Italian catalyst; the reaction was the preparations by Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece in order to strike at Turkey.

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<sup>40</sup>P. Magnus, Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1959), p. 254.

<sup>41</sup>Dugdale, IV, 58.

Meanwhile, as the Italians muddled through their rather inglorious campaign, the English and Germans were about to make their final attempt to resolve the naval rivalry that was poisoning relations between the two nations.<sup>42</sup>

### The Haldane Mission

The results of the Agadir incident did not please Tirpitz for he regarded them as ". . . our first diplomatic reverse since Bismarck's administration. . . ."<sup>43</sup> The Admiral, true to form, believed that Britain had flouted Germany because of her naval weakness.<sup>44</sup> The solution was the strengthening of the German Navy with a supplementary naval law (the Flottennovelle). The Chancellor was against an increase in the power but felt doomed to failure, since he did not have the stature in the Kaiser's eyes that Tirpitz had. He determined that the only way to lessen the naval bill's chance in the Reichstag was to gain some concession from England.<sup>45</sup> To this end, he was aided, in January of

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<sup>42</sup>K. Lichnowsky, Heading for the Abyss (New York: Payson and Clarke, Ltd., 1928), xxv. Cf. Ward and Gooch, III, 302.

<sup>43</sup>Tirpitz, I, 276.

<sup>44</sup>Murder, From Deadnought to Scapa Flow, p. 245. After Agadir, "the moral drawn was that the Fatherland must have a still bigger fleet in order to save herself from diplomatic reverses at the hands of Great Britain."

<sup>45</sup>Churchill, I, 96; Halevy, VI, 585-586.



1912, by two exceptional personalities, Albert Ballin and Sir Ernest Cassels. These men contrived to start negotiations by allowing Germany and England to understand that the other had assumed the initiative on the naval question.<sup>46</sup>

Ballin and Cassels, longtime friends, were worried that the naval controversy was leading to war. Each was influential in the councils of his own country. They visualized either Churchill or Grey going to Berlin to discuss mutual concessions.<sup>47</sup> Both England and Germany welcomed the idea but England demurred from sending Grey or Churchill. The Cabinet decided to send Richard Burton Haldane, the minister who had reformed the British Army, a man known to be friendly toward Germany. The choice seemed a good one in many ways; Haldane was educated in Germany, spoke the language, and admired much of German culture. It proved unfortunate because Haldane was versed in armies and was neither conversant in things naval nor a trained diplomat. In addition, the Germans were unduly expectant because they were convinced that the British were ready to offer major concessions. It seemed that the vindication of Tirpitz's policy was at hand.

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<sup>46</sup>Dugdale, IV, 71-72. Cf. Grey, I, 241, "I [Grey] never knew whether the suggestion had really emanated from a British or a German source."; Asquith, p. 98; Halcy, VI, 569; Haldane, p. 70.

<sup>47</sup>Churchill, I, 99.

The Kaiser was willing to meet the British half way but at a price--neutrality in a European war. Strongly as England wanted an agreement to permit the reduction of naval expenditures, she could not acquiesce to the Kaiser's desires.

On the twenty-ninth of January, 1912, Bethman-Hollweg noted in a memorandum that "the German Government welcomes with pleasure the step taken by the British Government through Sir Ernest Cassel in view of improving the relations between the two countries."<sup>48</sup> This was an encouraging response to the British note which stated: ". . . naval superiority recognized as essential to Great Britain. Present German Naval programme not to be increased, but if possible retarded and reduced."<sup>49</sup> The British also stated that they did not wish to ". . . interfere with German colonial expansion."<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, after Haldane's visit to Berlin, it became clear that the Germans wanted to eliminate the British Navy from its position in European affairs by the desired declaration of neutrality. If she (England) would not comply, then Germany must continue to build for her own protection. It was, therefore, on the basis of political agreement that the

<sup>48</sup>Dugdale, IV, 72. Cf. Churchill, I, 96-97.

<sup>49</sup>Dugdale, IV, 71. Cf. Tirpitz, I, 283.

<sup>50</sup>Dugdale, IV, 71.

negotiations fell through. Naturally, both sides assured themselves that the other side was at fault.

To help the already strained relations along, the Kaiser, incensed by the possible transfer of British warships from the Mediterranean to the North Sea, minuted:

With the consent of the entire Cabinet they made proposals through Haldane (to retard the tempo of construction) which we accepted with a heavy heart. We proposed a neutrality Agreement, which they so far have not accepted. Now they turn away sans facon from the Haldane basis which we accepted and demand more or less that we drop the Supplementary Bill, and do not make us the slightest offer with regard to anything binding about neutrality! Such one-sided action is utterly unacceptable.<sup>51</sup>

Asquith retorted:

That the mission of Lord Haldane did not for the moment produce tangible results was the result of two causes:

(1) The formula of neutrality which we were asked to accept was of such a character that if there had been no entente at all Great Britain would have been bound, even in her own interest alone, to refuse it. It would, for instance, as Lord Haldane pointed out to the Chancellor, have precluded us from coming to the help of France should Germany on any pretext attack her and aim at getting possession of her Channel ports.

(2) The refusal of the German Government to modify or even to discuss the main provisions of the Navy Bill was an equally grave stumbling block.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, the negotiations had to deal with the refusal of Great Britain to modify, in any concrete fashion, the

<sup>51</sup>Dugdale, IV, 77.

<sup>52</sup>Asquith, pp. 99-100. Cf. F. Maurice, Haldane, 1856-1915 (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., n.d.), pp. 304-305.

relations between herself and the French. Any neutrality agreement would necessarily affect the relations of the Entente Powers.<sup>53</sup> Germany, on the other hand, felt ". . . if the political agreement was concluded the Emperor should at once announce to the German public that this entirely new fact modified his desire for the Fleet Law as originally conceived. . . ."<sup>54</sup>

It was apparent that the Haldane mission was doomed to failure because of the overwhelming distrust that had grown up in both England and Germany since the turn of the century. Certainly Haldane believed that some chance existed for him to usher in an era of good feeling between the two nations but the situation was much against him.<sup>55</sup> In his

<sup>53</sup>Spender, Fifty Years in Europe, p. 380.

<sup>54</sup>Maurice, p. 312.

<sup>55</sup>Actually, the Cabinet decided that Grey and Churchill were too intimately concerned with the problem of naval armaments. If either of them were to go, a failure to come to terms would have a far-reaching effect. Grey states: "If nothing came of it, it would not have the appearance of an unusual effort and great failure; if the time was opportune for rapprochement, Haldane better than anyone else would be able to discover and improve it." Grey, I, 243. Haldane, in addition to his obvious qualifications, was further protected by the status of an unofficial visitor, unable to commit England to anything. This type of provisions was the common thing when England was dealing with either Germany or France; the major difference was that with France, England conceded points and stipulated that it did not bind either nation. With Germany, the concessions were minor (if there were any) and England refused even the non-commitment provisioned negotiation as with the French. Cf. Swart, I, 171; G & T, VI, 670-675; Grey, I, 241-245.

anxiousness, some of his statements in the conversations with Bethman-Hollweg went further than the Cabinet was willing to go.

Haldane was ranged against a formidable array of people hostile to his purpose; among them were the French, the professionals in the Foreign Office, and, of course, von Tirpitz.

The French always had to be considered for they became nervous any time the English and the Germans conferred. The French were driven by their own self interest which rested firmly on maintaining and extending the Entente with England. It was obvious to them that any substantial agreement with Germany could only weaken the hold that France had on England. Poincare, therefore, watched Haldane's efforts carefully through the eyes of his Ambassador in Berlin, Jules Cambon.

Poincare, unquestionably wary of the negotiations, had some powerful allies in the English ranks. Chief among these were Nicolson, Crowe, and the British Ambassador in Paris, Bertie. Moreover, Grey was aware of the apprehension of France and assured that the French were well informed of every move. Nicolson's position as a firm Francophile is indicated by his mutilation of the suggested formula that Haldane brought back from Berlin.<sup>56</sup> Bertie's sentiment is encapsulated thus: "I think that the Haldane Mission, which

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<sup>56</sup>G & T, VI, 686.

is absurd and of no use to surround with mystery, is a foolish move, intended I suppose to satisfy the Grey-must-go radicals."<sup>57</sup> Haldane, who was doing the best he could to arrive at a suitable solution, was faced with an insolvable problem accentuated by enemies in his own camp. It is surprising to find that Tirpitz was more amenable to an agreement than the Englishmen mentioned but he required a suitable substitute for naval protection, if he were to agree to cutting back his navy bill. In an era when the principal men all subsequently wrote memoirs, Tirpitz's writings are for the most part correct and attested so by his contemporaries.<sup>58</sup> There seems no doubt that if England had been willing to agree to the neutrality provision, as desired by Bethman-Hollweg, agreement could have been reached. In retrospect, the requirement of the Germans does not seem to be out of line with the British pronouncements but it would not fit the secret provisions and undocumented diplomacy of Grey. If England intended no attack on Germany and would not support France in an aggressive war, the Haldane formula was

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 687.

<sup>58</sup>Churchill, for one, does not agree with Tirpitz's ideas and calls him "purblind" but he does not question the historical accuracy. Others, Poincare, von Bulow, etc. have not endowed their work in this manner. Churchill, I, 117.

workable. From Appendix I of Haldane's Diary, February 10, 1912:

2. They will not, either of them, make any unprovoked attack upon the other or join in any combination or design against the other for purposes of aggression, or become party to any plan or naval or military combination alone or in conjunction with any other power directed to such an end.

. . . . .  
4. The duty of neutrality which arises from the preceding article has no application in so far as it may not be reconcilable with existing agreements which the high contracting parties have already made. The making of new agreements which render it impossible for either of the high contracting parties to observe neutrality toward the others [other] beyond what is provided by the preceding limitation is excluded in conformity with the provision in article 2.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, previous formal agreements are recognized but the type of "military and naval conversations" and the like unbound by formal agreements would not be cause for calling Article 4 into effect. Grey, of course, was unable in good conscience to agree because of the existence of the "conversations" which were binding England and France closer and closer as time went on. In addition, he was realist enough to know that France would consider any such agreement as a death blow to the Entente. In view of this, Grey fell back

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<sup>59</sup>G & T, VI, 682-683. The Germans were aware of conversations or that some type of military interplay had been going on between the English and French for some time. Bethman-Hollweg, however, seemed willing to accept Haldane's word that no agreements existed with France and Russia except those published. Maurice, p. 303.

on his concept of British interest and that concept had as its keystone the friendship of France.

The French, meanwhile, were concerned with the possible outcome of the Anglo-German negotiations. They had been kept well informed<sup>60</sup> by Grey all through the talks and were noticeably nervous. It was this nervousness that Grey was particularly anxious to dispel and it affected his actions with Germany.

Saldane had met Jules Cambon, the French Ambassador in Berlin, during his visit to that city and noted the French apprehensiveness at first hand. To soothe Cambon, he ". . . stated emphatically that we were not going to be disloyal to France or Russia. . . ." <sup>61</sup> Poincare was immediately informed of this talk and subsequently stated his feelings on the subject. <sup>62</sup> Izvolsky, the Russian Ambassador in Paris, reported that:

. . . there had been made by Germany to England a proposal altogether concrete amounting to this that the Cabinet of London make written engagement to maintain neutrality in case Germany should find herself engaged in a war not provoked by Germany. The London Cabinet informed Poincare of this, and apparently hesitated whether to

<sup>60</sup>G & T, VI, 691-692, 729, 731.

<sup>61</sup>Maurice, p. 313.

<sup>62</sup>Ewart, I, 173, quoted from R. Marchand, Un Livre Noir: Diplomatie d'avant-Guerre d'après les Documents des Archives Russes, I, 365-366.



accept or reject the proposal. M. Poincare declared himself in most categorical fashion against such an engagement; he informed the English Government that while between <sup>63</sup> and England there existed no written accord <sup>Ibid.</sup> of general political character, the signature of such an accord with Germany by England would deal a finishing blow to the present Franco-English relations.<sup>63</sup>

The position of France was quite clear. The original formula that Germany had agreed to was then discarded and Nicolson's work appeared in its place. In this document, England reiterated that she was not committed to any nation and was willing to:

. . . make no provoked attack upon Germany and will pursue no aggressive policy toward her. Aggression upon Germany is not the subject and forms no part of any treaty, understanding, or combination to which England is now a party, nor will she become a party to anything that has such an object.<sup>64</sup>

The effect of this pronouncement was that the French agreed to it<sup>65</sup> and the Germans rejected it.<sup>66</sup> Tirpitz said that ". . . my naval concession was absolutely uncompensated."

Since the English would not agree to the political formula that the Germans required, the Germans, in turn, would not reduce their Novelle. The two governments were at cross purposes since each considered its objective as primary and that of the other as secondary.<sup>67</sup> It is unfortunate, but

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.    <sup>64</sup> Dugdale, IV, 93; G & T, VI, 713-714.

<sup>65</sup> G & T, VI, 729.    <sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 719.

<sup>67</sup> Harder, From Dreadnought to Scapa Flow, p. 286.

naval matters had developed to such a point that the obstacles were insurmountable.

From the failure of the Haldane mission and the resultant imminent passage of the Flottennovelle came the requirement to strengthen the fleet to meet the anticipated German increase. The only reservoir of British warships remaining was in the Mediterranean. The German Government knew of the transfer of the Mediterranean squadron to the North Sea during the time of the naval negotiations, a fact that did not create a favorable impression in Berlin. The Kaiser angrily threatened that "if England withdraws her ships from the Mediterranean home to the North Sea, it will be taken here as a threat to war and be answered by a strengthened Supplementary Law--Triple tempo--and eventual mobilization."<sup>68</sup> Thus, the British did not wait for the passage of the Novelle but began to plan a transfer that the Germans regarded as hostile. The knowledge of this impending move, therefore, enhanced the chance that the German naval increase would be passed by the Reichstag.

As demonstrated, the "unprovoked attack" terms suggested by Grey as the political formula found no favor in Germany. Bethman-Hollweg had challenged Tirpitz and had lost when the

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<sup>68</sup>B. T. S. Dugdale, IV, 83.

Kaiser sided with Tirpitz,<sup>69</sup> Bethman-Hollweg, although still hopeful of an Anglo-German agreement, capitulated by mid-March. In a final attempt to swerve the Kaiser to a conciliatory line and so save the Haldane negotiations, he pleaded:

Mr. Winston Churchill told him [Metternich] that if England was not forced to increase her armaments on the principles which he declared publically, she would be prepared for a political Agreement; but German armaments considerably in excess of the Naval Law would oblige England to increase hers, and this competition was bound to lead to war within the next two years.

If the present naval proposals were published now, the bridge for an understanding with England would be definitely broken down.

.....  
 Thus we are faced by the question whether we ought to cut ourselves off from the possibility of an understanding with England by premature publication, contrary to custom, which is neither advisable nor demanded by public opinion --or whether by publishing the Supplementary Bill, we desire to give the signal for competition in armaments and so produce the probability of an Anglo-German war combined with a land war, which is bound to accompany it, within this or the coming year.<sup>70</sup>

The Kaiser quickly minuted that ". . . by letting Haldane down the British Government have deserted and altered their own basis and disavowed him; so the Agreement is finished."<sup>71</sup> For all this pessimism, the Kaiser continued, "Fresh negotiations are now to begin on a different basis. I propose to offer England--since out of consideration for

<sup>69</sup>Asquith, pp. 101-102.      <sup>70</sup>Dugdale, IV, 83-84.

<sup>71</sup>ibid., p. 84.

France she will not grant us neutrality--an offensive and defensive alliance with the inclusion of France in place of the neutrality clause.<sup>72</sup> This amounted to a variation of the German desire for preeminence in continental Europe by eliminating England as a threat and gaining France as an ally and, through France, Russia. England, for her part, would be reduced to a zero in continental affairs. France would then be essentially isolated and pliable to the German will. England would have none of it. While proclaiming a desire for a naval understanding, she stood by her "unprovoked attack" formula and refused to agree to exclusive friendship with Germany.

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<sup>72</sup>ibid. Cf. Halevy, VI, 573. This outburst amounted to nothing.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CONVERSATIONS

#### The Mediterranean and the North Sea

It was Germany's avowed objective to break up the "encirclement"<sup>1</sup> with which she complained the Entente powers were bent on strangling her. It was also her policy to move out into the world and to take what she felt was her rightful and predestined place among the imperial nations of the earth. Lord Escher fully appreciated the position of Germany, stating:

We are an Island Race, but we have ceased to be an Island State. The King's Empire has frontiers coterminous with the land frontiers of some of the greatest military Powers on earth. Russia, Turkey, And the United States. In addition, the Commercial and naval superiority of Great Britain is threatened by (not the Kaiser nor any man) natural forces, which require the expansion of Germany to sea frontiers. No greater Empire has ever remained cooped up, without outlets to the sea. Kiel and the Elbe are utterly inadequate.

Germany must stretch her limbs seawards. This means perpetual threats to Belgium and Holland. It is only a question of time. Are we to depend upon "alliances" or upon ourselves? That is the question.<sup>2</sup> (Italics Escher's.)

Lord Escher was, it will be remembered, one of the few persons who knew of the military and naval conversations that

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<sup>1</sup>Ewart, I, 530.    <sup>2</sup>Escher, II, 186.

had been going on since 1906. He knew that England had elected a risky course in allowing the conversations to take place. His view was:

If ever a nation was bound, we are encircled by our acts and tacit promises. How I have argued this point with Asquith and Harcourt and Haldane--all these Ministers wishing to enjoy the best of both worlds--to be bound or unbound at their option, and perhaps to leave unfortunate France to be overwhelmed.<sup>3</sup>

Balfour and Churchill were among those who felt that the Entente should be converted to an alliance. "We were," in their view, ". . . bearing the risks and burdens of an Alliance without the advantages."<sup>4</sup> This statement was not based on the military conversations, per se. Indeed, after the failure of the Haldane mission and the subsequent passage of the "Flottennovelle of 1912," a new and dangerous condition was thrust on England. The construction of additional ships under a more efficient naval personnel policy placed Germany in a position to imperil Great Britain to a greatly magnified degree.

Due to the turnover of personnel that was inherent in her conscript naval personnel policy, Germany, in actuality, only presented a threat to England for approximately one half

<sup>3</sup>Esher, III, 174.

<sup>4</sup>B. E. C. Dugdale, Arthur James Balfour (2 vols.; New York: G. P. Putnam Sons, 1937), I, 71-72. Cf. Churchill, I, 116. Esher was of another mind. "I am heartily glad that foreign alliances are now exploded. Very glad to be France's friend and backer, but no more!" Esher, III, 102.

the year. Germany, unable to put her entire force to sea during those six months, was in a situation that was bitter to Admiral von Tirpitz.<sup>5</sup> The Agadir crisis with its naval implications gave him the opportunity that he was waiting for. The "Flottennovelle," though in slight jeopardy during the Haldane negotiations, was never really in doubt. The Admiral knew that he had the Kaiser behind him and he knew that the English would cooperate by not giving the concessions desired by Germany.<sup>6</sup> Soon after the return of Haldane, Churchill made his move to counter the German threat. He determined that immediate reinforcements could come only from the Mediterranean. This was a decision of tremendous proportions. Desertion of the Mediterranean by England would leave a power vacuum with unknown, but potentially serious consequences.

If Germany wanted England to notice her, she had succeeded. Under the pressure of German sea power--no, under the threat of German sea power much as yet unbuilt--Germany had caused England to concentrate virtually all her naval power in the North Sea.<sup>7</sup> Leaving the Mediterranean was tantamount

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<sup>5</sup>Marder, From Dreadnought to Scapa Flow, p. 279. Cf. Tirpitz, I, 277-278.

<sup>6</sup>Marder, From Dreadnought to Scapa Flow, pp. 278-279.

<sup>7</sup>Churchill, I, 113-114; G & T, X, Part II, 596. "They consider that by the development of German naval strength we have been obliged (to use their own words) to hand over waters where once we were supreme to the guardianship and influence of another Power."

to the rejection of world power. Substantially, England had placed herself in the same position as Germany herself. Germany had an unsound position from a naval standpoint, due to her geography, and had concentrated her fleet at Kiel because she had no place to put it otherwise. England had no such restriction but was forced to assume a corresponding counterposture all the same.

In addition to the improved personnel aspects of the Novelle, there was an increase in the size of the fleet which assured twenty-five battleships would be standing watch at Kiel throughout the entire year<sup>8</sup>--an increase that would assure an enlarged British naval estimate. If an increase in the naval estimate would solve the problem, it would be little different from the previous ones that yearly came before the Commons. The Novelle, however, had produced a problem of many aspects, some of which could not be solved in this manner. Basically two situations had arisen that caused difficulty for England--the first, the rise of the Italian and Austrian fleets as dreadnought navies,<sup>9</sup> and the second, the importance of the Mediterranean had recently been emphasized by changes in territorial sovereignty.

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<sup>8</sup>Churchill, I, 97; G & T, VI, 698-699.

<sup>9</sup>Harder, From Dreadnought to Scapa Flow, p. 288.



English naval strategy was centered around the "narrow" seas" that Fisher called the five strategic keys. They were Singapore, The Cape, Alexandria, Gibraltar, and Dover. The reconcentration would leave only Dover with the door locked. While respect for Churchill as a First Lord of the Admiralty was great,<sup>10</sup> the leaders of the opposite view to Churchill's did not believe that he should be allowed to make the decision whether or not England was to maintain naval supremacy in the Mediterranean.<sup>11</sup> This judgment rested with the people. Esher, close to the situation, felt that this question placed England at the crossroads when he wrote:

This Mediterranean question is the vital essence of our being. No Minister, no group of Ministers however talented can be allowed to settle it. No one who puts aside political prejudice and knows the high patriotism of the Prime Minister and his colleagues can imagine that they desire to settle it. The question is one for the people of this country to determine, for the burden will be theirs in any case, and the disaster theirs, if they come to the wrong decision.<sup>12</sup>

Esher was not alone in his sentiments. Lord Roberts and Admiral Beresford were among those who wanted another solution. The Conservative press and the Navy League opposed Churchill feeling that ". . . the Mediterranean was the center

<sup>10</sup>Esher, III, 95. Esher wrote, "In my experience of public life . . . we have never had at the Admiralty so brilliant, so resourceful, so daring a First Lord. . . ."

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

of naval-strategic gravity in Europe. . . .<sup>13</sup> Churchill had proposed a reorientation of the English battle fleets to the Commons on March 18, 1912.<sup>14</sup> He visualized a new command--a Home Fleet made up of three smaller fleets. Additional ships in home waters, were to come from the Atlantic Fleet. The Atlantic Fleet, to this time, had its headquarters at Gibraltar. When this fleet vacated the western key to the Mediterranean to become the Third Battle Squadron of the Home Fleet, the base became the headquarters of the Mediterranean Fleet. Thus, the Mediterranean Fleet moved from Malta to straddle the Pillars of Hercules--straddle because Churchill envisioned a second aspect for the fleet. In this second role it was the Fourth Battle Squadron of the Home Fleet.<sup>15</sup> Churchill stated that with this disposition, the Gibraltar squadron would have the option of being sent into the Mediterranean or to home waters as the situation demanded.<sup>16</sup> Baher attacked this suggestion thus:

Mr. Churchill's notable speeches on the navy . . . contained one mischievous passage, destined to throw dust in the eyes of the public. . . . The passage is that in

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>14</sup>Churchill, I, 110; Marder, From Dreadnought to Scapa Flow, p. 283.

<sup>15</sup>Marder, From Dreadnought to Scapa Flow, p. 287.

<sup>16</sup>Hankey, I, 27.

which Mr. Churchill suggests that a squadron based on Gibraltar could act, as required, eastward or westward.

It is precisely at this moment [the outbreak of war] that the Fourth Squadron of the First Fleet would be required in the North Sea, and to suppose that it could be used to safeguard our manifold interests in the Mediterranean is a dream.<sup>17</sup>

Esher saw dire consequences arising from the Churchill proposal and provided his own preference:

The choice . . . lies between such an increase of naval power as will ensure sea command in the Mediterranean or the substitution of a conscript for a voluntary army, or the abandonment of Egypt and Malta and a complete reversal of the traditional policy of Great Britain in regard to her trade routes and military highways to the East.

There is no alternative.<sup>18</sup>

There were, however, those who believed that there was another alternative<sup>19</sup> and that alternative was "an understanding with France whereby she would undertake, in the early period of a war and until we could detach vessels from home waters, to safeguard our interests in the Mediterranean."<sup>20</sup>

Balfour, the leader of the Conservatives, looked upon this idea with satisfaction but went further:

An "Entente" is the natural prey of every diplomatic intriguer, . . . and it could hardly be doubted that the immediate effect of an Anglo-French Alliance would be to

<sup>17</sup>Esher, III, 96.    <sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>19</sup>Nicolson and Crowe at the Foreign Office.

<sup>20</sup>G & T, X, Part II, 585.

relieve international strain rather than to aggravate it.<sup>21</sup>

Esher countered that "any attempts to rely upon 'Alliances,' or the naval forces of friendly Powers, are bound to prove illusory. Britain either is or is not one of the Great Powers of the world."<sup>22</sup>

That Great Britain was one of the Great Powers was, of course, beyond any doubt but withdrawal from her historic position in the Middle Sea would certainly indicate that the power balance had changed. Since Germany was intent on establishing a balance of power on the sea, it would seem that she had accomplished that end with the English departure. This was the case contended by Esher and his friends. The Conservative press thundered that the solution was to build additional ships for the Mediterranean. Confidence was expressed that the public, once made aware of the situation, would not object to additional taxation to preserve the stature of the Empire.<sup>23</sup>

Within the confines of the Foreign Office, the professionals had come to the same conclusions. As they saw it, there were actually three alternatives. First was ". . .

<sup>21</sup>g. E. C. Dugdale, p. 72.      <sup>22</sup>Esher, III, 97.

<sup>23</sup>Churchill, I, 103; Maurice, p. 307; quote from Lord Haldane's Diary.

increase the Naval Budget so as to enable an additional squadron to be created for permanent service in the Mediterranean,"<sup>24</sup> second was to ". . . come to an alliance with Germany so as to free a large portion of the fleets at present locked up in home waters for the purpose of watching Germany."<sup>25</sup> This would naturally ". . . place us [Great Britain] in an inferior naval position . . ." and would enable Germany ". . . to put unendurable pressure upon us whenever she thought it necessary."<sup>26</sup> A German alliance would also throw ". . . the three Scandinavian countries, Belgium, and Holland into the arms of Germany. . . ."<sup>27</sup> Lastly, the reaction of Russia and France to such a move would be "cold and unfriendly,"<sup>28</sup> combined with a general loss of prestige throughout the world. Unless Great Britain was willing to become a vassal of Germany, this alternative had to go by the board. The third and last possibility was the understanding with France, but the Foreign Office warned, "She [France] would naturally ask for some reciprocal engagement from us which would be well worth our while to give."<sup>29</sup>

Sir Arthur Nicolson was, at that time, the Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Office. On the fourth of May,

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<sup>24</sup>G & T, X, Part II, 585.    <sup>25</sup>Ibid.    <sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.    <sup>28</sup>Ibid.    <sup>29</sup>Ibid.

1912, he was approached by Cambon who brought up references to the ". . . conversations [that] had originated in the days of Lord Fisher--had arisen from an enquiry as to whether the French Gov(ernmen)t would undertake the 'care of the Mediterranean' should British fleets be employed elsewhere."<sup>30</sup> The French were willing to take care of the western Mediterranean but could not look after the eastern. "Later conversations were to have taken place between the present Lord of the Admiralty [Churchill] and M. Delcasse. . . ." Though incomplete at this time, Cambon remarked, ". . . the French Gov(ernmen)t desires that the British Navy will look after the Channel and the northern coasts of France, if the latter, as with her renovated fleet is now possible, will undertake the 'care of the whole of the Mediterranean.'<sup>31</sup> Nicolson, it should be known, was a firm Francophile but even he was aghast at finding out about the conversations, saying:

I think that these inter Admiralty discussions or conversations should not have been undertaken without the knowledge and approval of the Sec(retary) of State for F(oreign) A(ffairs) at least. Indeed I should have thought Cabinet sanction should have been solicited.<sup>32</sup>

Sir Edward did not concede that Cabinet sanction was necessary (thus maintaining consistency with his position with Campbell-Bannerman in 1906) but minuted that:

<sup>30</sup> ibid., p. 582.

<sup>31</sup> ibid.

<sup>32</sup> ibid., p. 583.

The conversations began originally with my knowledge and that of the Prime Minister in 1906, they have been kept up to date ever since. . . . But it was always understood that they did not commit either Gov(ernmen)t to go to war to assist the other, but were to enable the respective naval and military authorities, between whom alone they took place to carry out co-operation at short notice, if that was in any emergency the decision of their Gov(ernmen)ts.<sup>33</sup>

Circumstances had gained the entrance of Nicolson to the select little group that knew of the conversations; these same circumstances were destined to open the door to a larger group. Churchill, by opening discussions with the French on such a touchy subject as the movement of fleets for the mutual benefit of both nations, demanded Cabinet concurrence. Plans for a contingency (as in the 1906 pattern) were one thing but disposition of forces was quite another. Before this action was taken, several items had to be cleared up. In accordance with the Prime Minister's instruction, Captain Maurice Hankey, then Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, asked for ". . . some guidance as to what is the strongest combination of Powers which might reasonably be assumed as hostile to us, in making calculations regarding the defence of British interest in the Mediterranean."<sup>34</sup>

This question was asked on the eve of the implementation of Churchill's new fleet disposition and was preparatory

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid. Cf. Grey, I, 86.

<sup>34</sup>G & T, X, Part II, p. 553.

to a decision as to what action was to be taken to plug up the hole. Inasmuch as the Prime Minister was planning a trip to the Mediterranean, he had decided to view the situation there at first hand. The guidance of the Foreign Office was contained in an important memorandum drafted by Sir Eyre Crowe<sup>35</sup> and forwarded by Grey to the Committee of Imperial Defence. This comprehensive report plainly states that the position of England would be seriously jeopardized from a political standpoint by the withdrawal of the fleet, the Navy's requirement understood but notwithstanding. In his conclusions, Crowe states:

The evacuation of the Mediterranean by British naval forces would tend:

(1) To throw Italy completely into the arms of the Triple Alliance and place her in a position of definite hostility to France and Great Britain;

Note:--All political forecasts of this nature are necessarily to a certain extent speculative. The Tripolitanian War is introducing many complications into a situation already exceedingly complex, and no attempt is here made to foretell what will be the immediate outcome of the war as regards Italy's relations with Turkey and with Russia, or the manner in which the nature of these relations will in turn react on the attitude of Turkey toward the Triple Alliance and on Italy's "hedging" policy toward France and England. It may however be safely said that the withdrawal of the British Fleet from the Mediterranean can only add further to the complexity of the political problems to be solved, and by increasing

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 585. Crowe was an important influence in the Foreign Office. Both he and Nicolson seem to have been Cambon's voice in British diplomatic circles.



the elements of uncertainty, make it more difficult to devise the appropriate measures for meeting the situation.

(2) To detach Spain from her present understanding with France and England, and make her ready to co-operate with the Triple Alliance in a war against France;

(3) Seriously to weaken British influence at Constantinople<sup>36</sup> and encourage Turkey to join forces with the Triple Alliance and attempt the reconquest of Egypt;

(4) To create in Egypt a state of dangerous unrest, which would gravely embarrass the administration of the country, besides inviting Turkish intervention;

(5) To stimulate all efforts directed to a disturbance of the status quo, affecting probably Crete and possibly Cyprus, and to endanger the general peace.

(6) These consequences could to a certain extent be averted if the place of the British Mediterranean squadron were effectively taken by a powerful French fleet.

(7) If Anglo-French co-operation were assured in the case of either country being at war with the Triple Alliance, and if the French fleet were in a position to beat those of Italy, Austria and Turkey combined, and to win the command of the Mediterranean, Italy would probably continue to refuse allowing her partnership in the Triple Alliance to involve her in a war with the two western Powers, and Spain would have no sufficient inducement to change her present policy. Malta and Gibraltar would be as secure as they are now.

(8) It is less certain that the British position in Turkey would remain unaffected; our hold over Egypt might have to be materially strengthened.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 589. British influence was already on the down slope with the rise of Germany in the favor of Turkey. Crowe was particularly concerned because it would take little to remove what influence remained. The end result can be seen with Turkey joining Germany in the Great War.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 589.

Crowe's explanation of the problems to be expected left no doubt in the Committee of Imperial Defence that England was confronted with a most serious problem. In addition to the obvious and general loss of prestige, the problem of Turkey and Egypt needed the most careful consideration, not to mention the question of Italy and Spain. Of all the points set forth by Crowe, the suggestion of the transfer of responsibility in the Mediterranean to the French Navy placed England on the horns of a dilemma. As Nicolson expected, the French expected some return on such an investment. Cambon had given the conditions of the bargain the French would be willing to consider. If England undertook to protect the northern coast of France, how could she maintain her axiom of non-commitment? Seemingly she could not. Nicolson, no mean authority, believed such ". . . an understanding with France . . . would . . . be very much of the character of a defensive alliance."<sup>38</sup>

At approximately the same time, early May, 1912, Grey, undoubtedly prompted by Crowe's memorandum, asked a question of Lord Kitchener, then British agent and consul-general in Egypt: ". . . how can we reinforce the British Army in Egypt unless we have a considerable Fleet in the Mediterranean to

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 584.

insure the safe passage of troops from Malta and elsewhere?"<sup>39</sup> Kitchener replied that in effect such a condition would ". . . result in making Egypt rely upon India in the future for supports and reinforcements, instead of, as at present, looking to Malta and England." Further, the ". . . military point of the greatest importance in the consideration of the effect of the proposed Naval changes in the Mediterranean is whether India would be in a position to send to Egypt from three to four divisions of troops whenever they might be required."<sup>40</sup>

The General Staff had another concern which resulted from the primary mission of the French Fleet for the first ten days or so; this mission was the transporting of an army corps from North Africa to France.<sup>41</sup> The French Fleet, thus occupied, would leave the Mediterranean in control of the Triple Alliance, possibly augmented by Turkey. The General Staff felt that this was enough time to spell doom for Malta, Cyprus, and Egypt. Certainly these things had to be taken into consideration, and when considered, the conclusion was that abandonment of the Mediterranean would be hazardous.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 590.    <sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 592.

<sup>41</sup>France, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Documents diplomatiques français, 1871-1914, 3e série (5 Dec, 1912-14 Mar, 1913) V (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1933), 487. (Hereafter cited as DDF)

Over Churchill's protest, the Cabinet reached a compromise which did not totally desert the Middle Sea. Churchill, however, did carry several of his points; the pre-dreadnought battleships had to leave the Middle Sea and the moves were justified since superior strength had to be available in the North Sea at all times. The Admiralty was, at the same time, charged with supplying two, and, if possible, three battle cruisers to the Malta Station.<sup>42</sup> These ships, with associated lighter vessels, when combined with the French Fleet, were deemed equal to the combined Austro-Italian fleet.<sup>43</sup> Circumstances, history, and geography had eliminated the combination of the Austrian and Italian fleets since the two nations' interests were diametrically opposed. Moreover, a fleet of battleships was to be built for the Mediterranean so that the "one power standard excluding France"<sup>44</sup> would expire in 1915. Esher breathed a sigh of relief. "We can now hold up our heads once more in the Mediterranean--and beyond."<sup>45</sup> Furthermore:

You must remember that we are contending for a principle which meant

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<sup>42</sup>Harder, From Dreadnought to Scapa Flow, p. 294.

<sup>43</sup>DDF, 3e série, III (1931), 271.

<sup>44</sup>Harder, From Dreadnought to Scapa Flow, p. 294. Quoted from Asquith.

<sup>45</sup>Esher, III, 100.

(a) reliance upon a British fleet to maintain the prestige of this country all over the world--that fleet being located in the Mediterranean Sea;

(b) that the British flag should fly in the Mediterranean in war alongside that of France, and that the French fleet should not stand unsupported in 1915-1920 in that sea.<sup>46</sup>

Several days later (10 July 1912) the First Sea Lord, Sir Francis Bridgeman, had a preliminary conversation with the French Naval Attache. The Attache reported that:

La mer du Nord et le Pas-de-Calais, à l'exception de la zone côtière française limitée aux Dycks et au Colbert sont réservées aux opérations de la flotte anglaise. La France n'intervient que dans la zone côtière ainsi définie et, dans l'Ouest du Colbert, au Sud d'une ligne tracée dans la Manche aux deux tiers de sa largeur à partir des côtes françaises.<sup>47</sup>

In the meantime the British Government had decided by the middle of July the course of action that suited it best. Consultations with the French in this sense were officially authorized by Churchill on the seventeenth of July, 1912. As usual the French Naval Attache was told that the discussions were not to restrict the freedom of either nation and ". . . that nothing arising out of such conversations or arrangements

<sup>46</sup>ibid., p. 103.

<sup>47</sup>DDF, 3e série, III, 236. The translation is as follows: "The North Sea and the Pas-de-Calais, with the exception of the French coast between Dycks and Colbert are reserved for operations of the English Fleet. France will exercise authority only in the shore zone thus defined and, in the west from Colbert, to the south from a line drawn in the English Channel to two-thirds of its width from the French coast." Cf. G & T, X, Part II, 602.

could influence political decisions."<sup>48</sup> Churchill expressed the opinion that the best disposition of French naval forces was that which could give an equality of strength with the combined Italian and Austrian Fleets.<sup>49</sup> The Attache agreed that this was also the opinion of his government and that the six remaining battleships of the French Atlantic Fleet were to be dispatched to the Mediterranean. This would leave their

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<sup>48</sup>G & T, X, Part II, 600. Cf. DDF, 3e série, III, 270-271. The French Naval Attache reported to the Minister of Marine, Delcasse, the following: "M. W. Churchill m'a fait alors l'exposé rapide de la politique navale méditerranéenne qu'il annoncera au Parlement le 22 juillet, mais en me demandant de considérer, jusqu'à cette date, ces renseignements comme rigoureusement confidentiels. 'Le Cabinet,' m'a-t-il dit, 'considère comme improbable une coalition des forces navales italiene et autrichienne contre l'Angleterre, et dans l'éventualité de cette coalition, il considère que nous pourrions compter sur l'appui d'une marine amie. Dans ces conditions, il est inutile que nous cherchions à être supérieurs, dans la Méditerranée, à toute coalition imaginable; il suffit que nous ayons une force très mobile, capable de frapper à l'occasion un coup énergique en un point déterminé, et, en cas de guerre générale, de faire pencher la balance de votre côté.'" Translation: Mr. W. Churchill then gave me a quick rundown on the Mediterranean naval policy that he would announce to Parliament on July 22 but asked me to consider this information as rigorously confidential until that date. The Cabinet, he told me, considers a coalition of Italian and Austrian naval forces against England as improbable and in the eventuality of a coalition, he considers that we would be able to count on the help of a friendly navy. In these conditions, it is useless for us to try to be superior to every imaginable coalition in the Mediterranean. It is only necessary that we have there a very mobile force capable of striking on any occasion an energetic blow at a predetermined point and in the case of general war to bring the balance to our side.

<sup>49</sup>p. Poincaré, Memoirs, trans. G. Arthur (New York: Doubleday, 1926), p. 111.

northern coast defended by torpedo flotillas (destroyers). Additionally, the French Fleet was building heavy ships again of which seven were being built at that time and four more were planned for 1913.<sup>50</sup> Conspicuous by its absence was any reference to what was expected of the British Fleet in view of the unprotected French northern coast. A draft was prepared a few days later that recognized the division of responsibility in critical areas. This document defined the British objectives in the Mediterranean as in the eastern basin or east of Malta and the French objectives as in the western basin or west of Malta. It also specified that each nation could make reciprocal use of the other's ports.<sup>51</sup> It then gave the lines of patrol that each nation would be responsible for in the Straits of Dover. The contents of this draft were put forth by the First Sea Lord, Sir Francis Bridgeman, for consideration of the French Naval War Staff.

On July 24, M. Cambon appeared at the office of Sir Arthur Nicolson, armed with the suggestion that Sir Arthur had predicted a short time previously. M. Cambon noted that

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<sup>50</sup>G & T, X, Part II, 601.

<sup>51</sup>E. T. S. Dugdale, IV, 325. Captain von Müller, the German Naval Attache in London, reported later; "The right of British war fleets to use French harbours with no preliminaries must be regarded as a natural consequence of the guarantees which England has undoubtedly given France so that she may be able to transfer her naval centre of gravity to the Mediterranean."

the draft agreement giving the dispositions and responsibilities of the two navies indicated ". . . that 9/10 of the naval force of France would be sent to the Mediterranean. Now this meant that the Channel and the Atlantic would be practically abandoned by France, and would expose her to an attack by Germany without any guarantee at all that the British fleet would come to her aid."<sup>52</sup> Cambon suggested that Poincaré might arrive at the same conclusions. It was too obvious to miss and Poincaré, of course, did respond.<sup>53</sup> Poincaré alluded to the preamble of the draft which set forth the standard formula of not committing either nation.<sup>54</sup> This, he said, ". . . threatened to destroy the practical value of the Entente."<sup>55</sup> Further, Poincaré did not feel that reservations belonged in a purely military document since none of

<sup>52</sup>G & T, X, Part II, 603.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 602. Cf. Poincaré, p. 112.

<sup>54</sup>G & T, X, Part II, 602. "These dispositions have been made independently because they are the best wh(ich) the separate interest of each country suggests, having regard to all the circumstances and probabilities; and they do not arise from any naval agreement or convention." Cf. BDP, 3e série, III, 507-508; Avant-Projet de Convention Navale, Annexe I; Paragraph 3, contains the same words (which are objected to by Poincaré without some assurance that the French north coast will be protected), thus: "Ces dispositions ont été prises par chacun des pays de son propre mouvement, parce que leurs intérêts, envisagés séparément, les font considérer comme les meilleures eu égard à toutes les circonstances et probabilités; elles ne résultent d'aucun accord ni entente navale."

<sup>55</sup>Poincaré, p. 111.



the participants were plenipotentiaries who could commit their governments. He thought a better method of defining the situation would be in the exchange of diplomatic notes, or, failing that, declarations.<sup>56</sup> Poincare held a trump card under particularly favorable circumstances. English public opinion had determined that the Mediterranean should not be abandoned, but to adequately protect British interests, yet enable the necessary concentration in the North Sea, the French had to cooperate. It was a card that Poincare played well; he did not insist on an alliance but rather created a circumstance that would place the English in an awkward position should the occasion for implementation arise.

To this point the English were committed to diplomatic support of France only when the question of Morocco arose. The Franco-German Agreement after Agadir had laid that problem at rest. The military conversations had created an atmosphere that made it possible for England to help France, should Germany threaten her, but it guaranteed the French nothing. Poincare could see that another thing was required to bind the English. The transfer of French warships to the Mediterranean was a tangible accommodation for the English which would be looked upon by the world at large like an

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<sup>56</sup>G & T, X, Part II, 609, 610.

alliance.<sup>57</sup> Bertie reported to Grey on August 13, 1912: "He [Poincare] holds, and technically he is right, that any such reservations should be placed on record by an exchange of notes or declarations or records of conversations between the Diplomatic Representatives of the two countries and to be communicated to each other."<sup>58</sup> (Italics Bertie's.) Bertie, who had close contacts in the French Government, suggested that:

. . . what might be acceptable to the French Government would be that the naval agreement should state that the British and French Naval Authorities will exchange full information as to the actual and prospective dispositions of their naval strength which they may make as best conducing to the preservation of their own national interests. The document would, as Mr. Churchill says, then "proceed to deal with the best way to which the forces thus disposed could be utilized in a war in which the two Powers are allies."<sup>59</sup> (Italics Bertie's.)

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., pp. 596, 618-619 and 606 which contains Bertie's comment on the transfer thus: "The transfer was a spontaneous decision of the French Government and not in consequence of the conversations between the British and French experts in the same way as the decision of His Majesty's Government to withdraw for the present from the Mediterranean. . . ."

"Monsieur Poincare said that the decision of the French Government was quite spontaneous but it would not have been taken if they could suppose that, in the event of Germany making a descent on the Channel or Atlantic ports of France, England would not come to the assistance of France. If such was to be the case, the conversations between the Naval experts would be useless and the French Government must have their best ships to face Germany in the Channel."

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 609.

<sup>59</sup>G & T, X, Part II, 610. In the same letter, Bertie states the situation in a rather concise fashion thus: "We have withdrawn or are about to withdraw some of our ships

French history does not leave one in doubt that the French will always act in their own interest. It is evident that it was to their interest to move the greater part of their heavy ships to the Mediterranean. Having some appreciation for the idiosyncrasies of English parliamentary government, they did not press for a formal commitment. Such a requirement would have demanded that the blessing of the House of Commons be gained. There was every reason to believe that the House would not permit it. For the French the "half a loaf" technique had worked well; they preferred to move by inches to get what they desired. The success of the web that they were weaving was amply evident on August 4, 1914.

When confronted by the French desires, Asquith was more cautious than Campbell-Bannerman had been with relation

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from the Mediterranean in order to have a larger disposable naval force in the Home waters to face Germany. We say that we do this for our own purposes and irrespective of French intention to move the greater and more powerful part of their fleet into the Mediterranean, and that the naval force which we shall maintain in that sea will be sufficient of itself to deal with the Austrian (and Italian) fleet. The French contention is that this may possibly be, but that we would not have withdrawn the ships from the Mediterranean unless we had felt confident that were we in difficulties there the French Fleet would come to our assistance and that it cannot reasonably be supposed that the French Government would transfer the greater and more powerful part of their ships to the Mediterranean and denude their Atlantic and Channel coasts and leave them exposed to a German attack unless they had reason to suppose that in such a contingency the British Fleet would intervene." Cf. Poincare, pp. 112-113.

to the military conversations in 1906. Asquith ". . . agreed to an exchange of letters on condition that these should not rank as diplomatic documents, but as personal correspondence, between a Secretary of State and an Ambassador; he also stipulated that the wording should be approved by the Cabinet which met on the 30th October."<sup>60</sup>

### The Diplomatic Negotiations

The result of the Grey-Cambon talks was the famous letters of November 22 and 23, 1912. The Grey letter marks the closest that England ever formally committed herself to support France in the event of aggression by Germany. It reads:

Foreign Office, November 22, 1912

My dear Ambassador,

From time to time in recent years the French and British naval and military experts have consulted together. It has always been understood that such consultation does not restrict the freedom of either Government to decide at any future time whether or not to assist the other by armed force. We have agreed that consultation between experts is not, and ought not to be regarded as, an engagement that commits either Government to action in a contingency that has not arisen and may never arise. The disposition, for instance, of the French and British fleets respectively at the present moment is not based upon an engagement to co-operate in war.

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<sup>60</sup>Foincare, p. 113.

You have, however, pointed out that, if either Government had grave reason to expect an unprovoked attack by a third power, it might become essential to know whether it could in that event depend upon armed assistance of the other.

I agree that, if either Government had grave reason to expect an unprovoked attack by a third Power, or something that threatened the general peace, it should immediately discuss with the other whether both Governments should act together to prevent aggression and to preserve peace, and if so, what measures they would be prepared to take in common. If these measures involved action, the plans of the General Staffs would at once be taken into consideration, and the Governments would then decide what effect should be given to them.<sup>61</sup>

Yours, &c.

E. GREY

The exchange of this letter with Cambon and the nearly exact reply by Cambon marked the closest that England ever approached a formal alliance with France. In the previous six years, the conversations had been at the military level. The exchange of letters was approved by the Cabinet which elevated the understanding in the diplomatic sense. In the military sense, it meant that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff spoke with Cabinet authority. Thus, the military had prepared the British Army for battle on the Continent for six years in coordination with the French and the Royal Navy was arrayed in overwhelming force in the North Sea without even the protection of the Mediterranean to be maintained.

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<sup>61</sup> G & T, X, Part II, 614-615.

While the British still kept the White Ensign flying in the Mediterranean, it was a far cry from the preeminence she had enjoyed in those waters for the past one hundred years. The five great British fleets of the nineteenth century were concentrated in the North Sea; Rome had called the legions home.<sup>62</sup>

In place of the British Navy in the Mediterranean, there appeared the mass of the French Navy with a battle line composed of fourteen pre-dreadnoughts and six ships of a type that can be described as semi-dreadnoughts.<sup>63</sup> Arrayed against them was the possible combination of the Italian Fleet of eight pre-dreadnoughts and four dreadnoughts, and an Austrian Fleet of nine pre-dreadnoughts and two dreadnoughts.<sup>64</sup> The ships that Churchill promised were duly supplied to the base at Malta. These ships, Indomitable, Inflexible, and Indefatigable, were battle cruisers and the fastest ships in the Mediterranean;<sup>65</sup> they were shortly to have their work set out for them. In November of 1912, the Imperial German Navy reentered the Mediterranean. Germany had reestablished her

<sup>62</sup>Harder, Dreadnought to Scapa Flow, p. 290; E. T. S. Dugdale, IV, 141.

<sup>63</sup>Harder, From Dreadnought to Scapa Flow, p. 288.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 295. Cf. H. M. Le Fleming, Warships of World War I (5 vols.; London: Ian Allan, Ltd., 1961), I, 45.

Mediterranean squadron.<sup>66</sup> A comparison of the two composite fleets shows that the Entente and the Triple Alliance were approximately equal--if the Italian Fleet is counted. England did not think that the Austrian and Italian interests would make a joining of navies likely. The Germans had little confidence in the Italians but nurtured them so that they would not outwardly join the Entente Powers. In both the English and German calculations the Italians amounted to little. In consequence, Churchill's rationale that the French Navy could care for the Mediterranean until the new British squadron was ready in 1915 was correct. His opposition was also right in demanding the stationing of the British battle cruisers at Malta. The German Mediterranean squadron was comprised of a battle cruiser and several light cruisers. The French had nothing that could match the speed of the German ships. Thus, the British watched the Germans in the Mediterranean as well as in the North Sea.

In the meanwhile, the departure of the French Navy from the Channel gave rise to a multitude of rumors and suggestions that the exchange of fleet positions was the outward sign of an alliance between England and France. "It did not entail a written alliance, but Europe recognized that it had

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<sup>66</sup>Harper, From Dreadnought to Scapa Flow, p. 301.

the value of one.<sup>67</sup>

A secret document, entitled Joint Action in the Mediterranean, was agreed to by the staffs of the French and British Admiralties. It set forth the responsibilities of each, thus: ". . . in event of a war in which Great Britain and France are allied against the Triple Alliance, the two Powers will endeavor to cooperate in the Mediterranean as elsewhere to the best of their respective abilities. . . ." The area of operations for the French was the western Mediterranean, while the eastern portion was allocated to the British cruisers.<sup>68</sup> Another portion of this document opened the harbors of each nation to the other's navy with no further coordination required. The effects of this provision were noticed by the Germans. Captain von Müller, the German Naval Attache in London, reported:

The right of British war fleets to use French harbours with no preliminaries must be regarded as a natural consequence of the guarantees which England had undoubtedly given France so that she may be able to transfer her naval centre of gravity to the Mediterranean. The permanent concentration of the whole French fleet in the Mediterranean and the strengthening of her bases there are the result of discussions between the British and French Admiralties, which took place after Italy's conquest of Tripolitania and after her increased naval

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<sup>67</sup>G & T, X, Part II, 619.

<sup>68</sup>DDF, 3e série, V, 486-487.



importance brought about a change in the strategic aspect of her position in the Mediterranean.<sup>69</sup>

There was, however, no proof that the agreement, or understanding suspected by French, German, English, and even American publications existed. The English stated that the movement of French ships had nothing to do with the transfer of British ships. Each occurrence was dictated by the recognition of the best strategic location for each navy. Churchill emphasized this and it was echoed in Britain and France.<sup>70</sup>

Germany knew the contents of the Grey-Cambon notes by 1913 but as before they were unsure as to Britain's position in case of war.<sup>71</sup> It was much the same with the French. The opinions of various people in each nation were divergent. Each nation had those who were convinced that England would support France and those who believed that England would maintain neutrality.<sup>72</sup> In any case, for all the fleet

<sup>69</sup>G. T. S. Dugdale, IV, 325.

<sup>70</sup>Churchill, I, 115. Cf. G & T, X, Part II, 619.

<sup>71</sup>Ward and Gooch, II, n. 468.

<sup>72</sup>Tyler, n. 168. "Huguet said in Britain and the War, that ' . . . after 1913 the probability of cooperation between the two [French and English] armies became so certain that during the year he received orders to leave his regiment in case of general mobilization in order to become Chief of the Military Mission which was attached to the British Expeditionary Force.' Officially the French position was 'Nous agissons donc prudemment en ne faisant pas état des

movements and the decision of Britain to increase her fleet as the result of the failure of Haldane's mission and the subsequent Flottennovelle, the relations of England and Germany were conciliatory, each endeavoring to cool the aggressive spirit of her respective partner, Russia and Austria.

In February of 1913, Tirpitz announced before the Reichstag that he was ready to accept the sixteen to ten ratio that Churchill had set as the minimum that Britain could accept. Grey did not respond to this offering. Churchill's ratio had been offered before the passage of the Flottennovelle by the Reichstag which changed matters. When he stated the ratio, he had not intended that the ships being built for the British colonies be included. Additionally, he did not want to include the ships that were being built for the Mediterranean. He used the sixteen to ten ratio for home waters only, that is, eight battle squadrons when Germany had five.<sup>73</sup>

At the same time that England sought a naval agreement with Germany, Churchill was conferring with Sir John Fisher

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forces anglaises dans nos projets d'opérations." Translation: "We will therefore act prudently by not taking into account the English forces in our operational planning." pp. 168-169.

<sup>73</sup>Kardner, Dreadnought to Scapa Flow, pp. 311-313.

about the construction of new dreadnoughts. In the past, Fisher had done much to forward the competition of naval armaments with Germany. He had started out with the development of the Dreadnought which, upon its launching, made a profound impact on the naval world of its day. Dreadnought's guns could destroy anything afloat in 1906, but Fisher was not satisfied. He began to build ships with larger guns. The ten 12-inch guns of the Dreadnought set the pattern for ten more ships.<sup>74</sup> By 1912, however, the H.M.S. Orion was launched mounting ten 13.5-inch guns.<sup>75</sup> This ship was followed by thirteen more ships of equal power. The naval estimates of 1913 and 1914 authorized the building of ten ships carrying eight 15-inch guns.<sup>76</sup> The increase in weight of metal per broadside was very great with each increase in calibre, as was the improvement in range and accuracy.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Fleming, pp. 21-25. H.M.S. Bellerophon, Temeraire, Superb, St. Vincent, Collingwood, Vanguard, Neptune, Colossus, Hercules, and Acincourt.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 28-34. H.M.S. Canada, Erin, Emperor of India, Benbow, Marlborough, Iron Duke, Audacious, Ajax, Centurion, King George V, Monarch, Thunderer, Conqueror, and Orion.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 38. H.M.S. Queen Elizabeth, Warspite, Barham, Valiant, Malaya, Revenge, Royal Sovereign, Royal Oak, Resolution, and Hamillies.

<sup>77</sup>Churchill, I, 125-148. Note also the decision of the British to use oil as fuel rather than coal. The 15-inch gun battleships gained an increase of some four knots in speed

England was forcing a technical race on the Germans. With each enhancement in capability of the English ships, the German ships then extant became less adequate and caused the German Navy to attempt to catch up with the English escalation. The naval race, therefore, was not one sided and Germany was not singularly responsible for its continuance. The Germans were, all the same, poor judges of the English, of their determination to maintain naval supremacy, and of their ability to stay ahead in the race. When Tirpitz did finally realize the inability of Germany to outbuild England, it was too late to mend their relations. The Great War was nearly upon them.

From 1900 to 1912, the naval question was the sustaining and ever-increasing cause of Anglo-German irritations; other more virulent matters appeared from time to time but the antagonisms hatched by naval rivalry were omnipresent. The race was to prove all the more unfortunate because the Germans did not know what to do with their magnificent fleet when the time came to use it. They had great tactical skill, but lacked the strategic sense required to exploit the

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due to the higher efficiency of oil fuel. The decision was a good one. The increased speed of the Queen Elizabeth class battleships made them a link between the Grand Fleet and the Battle Cruiser Fleet at Jutland. The increased speed allowed the Queen Elizabeth to move into position in time to aid the hard-pressed battle cruisers at Jutland.

instrument they had created.<sup>78</sup>

Pressed by the naval race and nurtured by the military and naval conversations, England drew closer to France. France, in turn, uplifted by British support, inched closer to England with each successive German onslaught. The military and naval conversations were born of a feeling of need for protection on the part of both nations. The keystone of understanding was dropped into place with the Grey-Cambon notes, the result of England's need for her ships in the North Sea. France capitalized on England's position and established what was an alliance in every way but name.

For Germany, the spectre of isolation was very real; Italy was nearly worthless as an ally and Austria was crumbling from internal strife. The prospects of peace were dimmed by the environment in which Germany saw herself slowly sinking. In comparison to the deterioration of the Triple Alliance, the Entente was growing in power and showed every indication of gaining even greater strength.

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<sup>78</sup>R. Bacon, The Dover Patrol (2 vols.; London: Hutchinson and Co., n.d.), I, 47-48.

## CHAPTER V

### REVELATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

#### The Commitment of the Second of August

The moment of reckoning drew near. Grey's efforts to prevent the outbreak of war came too late; now he knew that it was coming and he was helpless to stop it. He had tried but was blocked at every turn, even with the most unlikely of colleagues at his side. Germany had at last seen that her policy of containment of the Austro-Serbian conflict--or more accurately, her unconditional commitment to Austria combined with the faith that the war could be confined to Eastern Europe--had failed. Russia was determined that she would have no more humiliations of the Bosnia-Herzegovina variety, but she really wanted to triumph without a general war. The Austrian declaration of war on Serbia on July twenty-eighth was closely followed by the mobilization of Austria and Russia.

During this period, Paul Cambon appeared, reminding Grey of the Notes of November 22, 1912<sup>1</sup> and suggesting that

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<sup>1</sup>GB/CD, pp. 79-80.

the time had come to confer. Cambon was hardly prophetic; the mobilisations of Austria and Russia had cast the die. Mobilization meant war; every nation could start the process but none had the means of stopping it.

The Germans were watching events very carefully, aghast at the situation which was developing about which they could do nothing. Initially, they determined that they would be content if Russia only mobilized against Austria.<sup>2</sup> They were grasping at straws, for the Russians were not sophisticated enough to partially mobilize. At this juncture, Germany felt that she had no choice for she feared the size of the Russian Army and was horrified by the vision of the eastern hordes sweeping through Europe. On the first of August, Germany declared war on Russia, thereby gaining the advantage of her rapid and efficient mobilisation. From this time on, the timetable of the Great General Staff transcended all else in Germany. The house of cards so precariously balanced for the previous two decades fell with increasing rapidity. No one and no nation could stay the cycle, for the remainder of events were determined by events of years long gone by.

It was an open secret that the plan of Germany was to crush France before Russia could fully mobilize. Once again

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

this plan was made to use the very quick action inherent in her mobilization system as opposed to the extreme slowness of the Russian system. In this case, the Germans were faced with a dilemma; neither Germany nor France had an overwhelming interest in the Balkans. It was a quirk of fate. After all the questions that had caused friction between France and Germany, the most virulent one arose where neither had a direct interest. In both cases, the two nations were tied to allies long antagonists in the Balkan area.<sup>3</sup> Still, Germany felt that she had to support Austria, her one faithful ally. She did not want war, and if she had not been spurred by the Russian mobilization, would undoubtedly have resisted any temptation to mobilize. Thus Germany, frightened by Russia, placed affairs at a second plateau.

Now, what of France? The German plan to attack France could only be circumvented by a declaration of French neutrality properly secured by placing her frontier fortresses of Toul and Verdun in the hands of Germany.<sup>4</sup> Germany was alive to the new militant spirit in the France of Poincaré and was well aware that this demand would not be met. When Viviani replied that, "France will have regard to her

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>4</sup>Brandenburg, p. 505; Halevy, VI, 629; Asquith, pp. 207-208.



interests,<sup>5</sup> a third plateau was reached. Meanwhile, mobilization was nearing completion in Germany as well as in France, where the capability was nearly as fast as in Germany. France was as ready as she ever would be when the Germans declared war on August third. So twenty-four years, four months and fourteen days after the displacement of Bismarck, Germany had achieved the "Iron Chancellor's" greatest nightmare, a war on two fronts. It was a far cry from the position in which he left the Empire.

Grey was one of those statesmen who believed that the less said publicly about foreign affairs, the better. Although he had been marvelously successful in achieving this, the war's imminence prescribed that the time had come to inform the world, the English people, and the Commons. Hence, the contributing events from the shadowy past were revived by Grey's address of the third.

As he spoke beside the great table littered with dispatch boxes, books, and papers, half hiding the golden mace, Grey commanded every attention in the Commons as he continued.

Grey proceeded to inform the House of "British interests, British honour and British obligations."<sup>6</sup> He told them

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<sup>5</sup>GB/CD, p. 223. <sup>6</sup>Grey, II, 309.

that they were free to decide the course that Britain was to follow, for in line with previous statements, there were no commitments that restricted the national decision.

It must be admitted that Grey was able, in the most technical sense, to avoid a commitment. There was no document that stated that England would aid France if she were attacked by Germany. Grey, therefore, cannot be criticized for entering into formal agreements without knowledge of Parliament. No, in the strictest sense, Grey was truthful.

Eight years after their inception, Grey finally told the House of the "military and naval conversations." His casual explanation of the necessity to be able to aid France, if necessary, was excused by reason of expediency and that the conversations did not bind the contracting governments.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, he had informed Campbell-Bannerman, Haldane, and others, but in this rendition he blithely passed over not informing the Cabinet. In the latter instance, the reason was that the Algeiras crisis passed over and the matter became unimportant. Grey neglected to inform that the military and naval "conversations" did not also stop after Algeiras but continued on, unbroken, to that day that he stood there talking to the House. Grey's action in 1906 had

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 311.

solidified the previous action of Lansdowne relative to military talks. The plans that were the result of the talks developed at a rapid rate and progressively drew the military forces of the two nations closer together. This was the obvious development of the British and French Armies' natural desire to place their troops in the best strategic location to combat the expected German onslaught. The longer the two armies conferred, the more refined the plans became and the more they depended on each other.

Grey evidently allowed himself to forget the authorization that he had given to the military and naval forces until another crisis (Agadir) arose. He stated that he did not know what went on between the British and French experts after 1906.<sup>8</sup> If Grey didn't, Haldane did, for his plans for reforming the British Army were developed with the Expeditionary Force in mind. From an initial commitment of 100,000 men, Haldane eventually contrived to have 160,000 men available for service in France.<sup>9</sup> Generals Wilson, Ewart, and Grierson and their staffs had ranged all through Belgium and Northern France.

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<sup>8</sup>Grey, I, 91-92.

<sup>9</sup>Haldane, pp. 30-31; Repington, I, 6, 14.

The Belgian question seems to have been fixed upon first by the military. Grey, in the early days, made no point of it but immediately after the Foreign Secretary's authorization for staff coordination, General Grierson focused on Belgium as the theater of operations.<sup>10</sup> Highly agreeable to a liaison with France, the military plunged in with a will.

Grey, in the meantime, did not remember the conversations again until the Agadir crisis of 1911. Grey only remembered when the occasion demanded it and that situation was ominous. Agadir, however, gave birth to the Flottennovelle of 1912, which, in turn, caused the British withdrawal of their main naval force from the Mediterranean, and this resulted in the Grey-Cambon Notes of November, 1912. When Cambon "reminded" Grey of these papers on July 31, 1914,<sup>11</sup> Grey agreed that the time was ripe for the conference agreed on. It must be remembered that the wording specifically said that the removal of the French Fleet from the Channel was not because of the Anglo-French agreement. Grey stated on the third of August that the French northern coasts were absolutely undefended.<sup>12</sup> He suggested that the absence of the French

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<sup>10</sup>G & T, III, 172.    <sup>11</sup>GB/CD, pp. 79-80.

<sup>12</sup>Grey, II, 314.

from the Channel area was due to ". . . the feeling of confidence and friendship. . . ." <sup>13</sup> He further suggested that England could not stand by and watch the French coast attacked under her very eyes and do nothing. He intimated that this would be gross ingratitude because the French Fleet was looking after British interests in the Mediterranean.

Up to this point in his speech, Grey had related the historical background, and, in doing so, had informed the House of a series of secret engagements that had occurred since 1906. In this respect, he continued to stress the non-commitment of England.

But committed or no, Grey announced that even though there was no obligation to defend the French coast, it was in England's interest that she do so. Early in his speech, he had made the reservation that no commitment had been made up to August second; he confessed that, with Cabinet authorization, he had informed France that the Royal Navy would defend the French north and west coasts if the German Navy were to attack them. <sup>14</sup> The Germans had responded that if this were the cause of British concern, they would agree not to attack the French coasts in exchange for British neutrality. <sup>15</sup>

Grey disdained this offer stating, ". . . it is too narrow an engagement for us . . ." and swiftly turned to his

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>GS/CD, p. 103.

<sup>15</sup>Grey, II, 316-317.

argument that was to support his major contention that British interest demanded British intervention.<sup>16</sup> Grey had known for years that public opinion would decide the entry of England into a future war. He realized that an inflammatory issue would be necessary to make the war a popular cause. Grey had found his issue in Belgian neutrality.

#### The Belgian "Red Herrings"

Grey had determined that the Anglo-French rapprochement was a good thing and had to be protected at all costs. Once Germany had rejected the British alliance overtures and began, by the construction of a battle fleet, to threaten England, it became mandatory that Britain support fully the nation for whom she deserted "splendid isolation." It was intrinsic in the departure of England from isolation that she had to join Germany or support France. From the time that the decision was made, England's policy never wavered from standing with France against Germany and with good cause; her interests and those of France corresponded.

Moreover, although Grey stated non-commitment, England was obligated by her own self interest to support France and to assure her continuance as a Great Power. Britain was not being altruistic; the demise of France would

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 317.

leave England to confront Germany alone. Grey conceived of a rapacious Germany, on the verge of hegemony in Europe and seeking hegemony in the world, and the only obstacle was England. Once Grey had determined his position, he caused England to support France whether France was in the right or not.<sup>17</sup>

In the final analysis, Grey knew that public opinion would have to rise to a cause, which was to be Belgium. The cause was necessary because he had determined that he could not achieve an alliance with parliamentary sanction. To compensate for this deficiency, he made all the arrangements as would be expected of an alliance but at a level that would not commit either government. Since he did not want war but only wanted to be prepared if it did come, the "conversation" method allowed him to claim non-commitment. The Belgian issue was necessary to make use of the arrangements if it was in the British interest to do so if the time came. Belgium was particularly suitable because of her proximity, British history in relation to it, the position of Britain as a guarantor of Belgian neutrality, and because it was an obvious threat in the hands of a hostile Great Power.

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<sup>17</sup>At Algeciras, it is recognized that Germany had a legitimate objection to French inroads. The French received complete British support.

The bases of Grey's use of Belgium as an inflammatory issue were the treaty of 1831 and its successor in 1839. These treaties set up Belgium as an independent and neutral nation to be guaranteed in neutrality by Great Britain, France, Russia, Prussia, and Austria. The treaty of 1831 is of interest because of Article XXV, even though it was superseded by the treaty of 1839. The following does not appear in the 1839 document:

XXV. The Courts of Great Britain, Austria, France, Prussia, and Russia, guarantee to His Majesty the King of the Belgians the execution of all the preceding Articles.<sup>18</sup>

The guarantee, if it remains such, takes a different form in 1839. First, Article XXV does not exist; in lieu of that guarantee, Article I reads (in part) that the five Great Powers:

. . . declare, that the Articles [I through XXIV] heretofore annexed and forming the tenour of the Treaty concluded . . . are considered as having the same force and validity as if they were textually inserted in the present Act, and that they are thus placed under the guarantee of their said Majesties [of the five Great Powers].<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Great Britain. A Complete Collection of the Treaties and Conventions and Reciprocal Regulations, at present existing between Great Britain and Foreign Powers, Vol. IV, compiled by L. Hertslet (London: Darling and Son for Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1835, reprinted 1898), p. 37.

<sup>19</sup>Great Britain. A Complete Collection of the Treaties . . . Vol. V, compiled by L. Hertslet (London: Henry Butterworth, 1840), p. 28.



Of the various articles, the most important one, in view of neutrality, is Article VII which is identical in both treaties:

VII. Belgium, within the limits specified in Article I, II, and IV, shall form an independent and perpetually neutral State. It shall be bound to observe such neutrality toward all other States.<sup>20</sup>

The question of obligation is obscure, perhaps on purpose, for the treaties are products principally of British interest.<sup>21</sup>

Grey, during his speech, thought it necessary to establish precedent by quoting Lord Granville and Mr. Gladstone, but he was more knowledgeable than he admitted. In 1908, he asked Crowe and the Crown Law Officers for an opinion concerning Belgium. Crowe's opinion was:

Great Britain is liable for the maintenance of Belgian neutrality whenever either Belgium or any of the guaranteeing Powers are in need of, and demand, assistance in opposing its violation.<sup>22</sup>

The Law Officers, in their analysis, supplied the opinion that the ". . . guarantee is a joint one."<sup>23</sup> In other words, both Crowe and the lawyers believed that there was a guarantee obligating the maintenance of Belgian neutrality by the five Great Powers and that the obligation was joint. The language of the treaty leaves something to be desired. The word

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 359.      <sup>21</sup>Ewart, I, 413-415.

<sup>22</sup>G & T, VIII, 375-377.      <sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 378.

"guarantee" in the case of Belgium is construed to mean or imply military intervention.<sup>24</sup> The Belgian Treaty (1839) was negotiated to assure Great Britain of safety from a hostile power in possession of the Belgian coast. It is highly unlikely that she would tie herself down to a treaty where she must intervene upon the call of any of the other signature powers or Belgium or the Netherlands, individually or collectively. She would if Crowe's interpretation is accepted.<sup>25</sup>

Ewart points out that the word "guarantee" provides, in most treaties, for the right to intervene rather than the obligation.<sup>26</sup> Since Great Britain was the nation primarily interested in Belgian neutrality, it is difficult to believe that she would have obligated herself forever to military intervention in all circumstances. One eminent authority suggests that if France were to violate Belgium instead of

<sup>24</sup>Ewart, I, 421.

<sup>25</sup>Nielson, p. 380. Nielson got sidetracked here saying that the guarantee is to the Netherlands rather than to Belgium. He evidently forgot the identical Netherlands treaty which contains the same Article VII. On the other hand, Crowe neglects mentioning the guarantee is also made to the Netherlands that Belgium was to be perpetually neutral.

<sup>26</sup>Ewart, I, 421, quote from Gladstone in 1872, thus: " . . . while a guarantee gave a right to interference it did not constitute of itself an obligation to intervene." (Italics Ewart's.)

Germany, England would not intervene.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, if the character of the agreement was joint, as the lawyers said, then all the guarantors must act in unison. The language of the treaty is questionable since the only danger (as Crowe points out) can come from one of the guarantors.<sup>28</sup> Obviously the treaty was not constructed to enforce intervention since it is not clear whether it stands if one power defects.

It appears, therefore, that Great Britain had sufficient grounds to intervene on the basis of the 1839 treaty if she wanted to. In late July of 1914, it suited Grey to consider it so and his arguments were of enough force to convince the Cabinet to make the violation a casus belli. The Cabinet would only have taken this action if they felt that Britain's paramount interest was at stake.

Grey, anxious to determine the position of the two major powers threatening Belgium, asked each of them of their intent. France (long ago warned by Repington and subsequently

<sup>27</sup>G & T, VIII, 377-378. Charles Hardinge states: "Supposing that France violated the neutrality of Belgium in a war against Germany, it is, under present circumstances, doubtful whether England or Russia would move a finger to maintain Belgian neutrality, which (sic) if the neutrality of Belgium were violated by Germany it is probable that the converse would be the case."

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 376.

by a variety of others) sent assurances that Belgian neutrality would be respected.<sup>29</sup> Germany's reply was unsatisfactory.<sup>30</sup>

Grey, in the interim, was attempting to stem the tide of war; he did not want it. Concurrently, however, he was laying the groundwork in case his peace efforts failed. Grey's policy was support of France, a policy that he had set down years before and from which he never strayed far. If France were attacked, Grey believed that British interest required British participation. That participation must be popular in the nation and Belgium would supply that popularity.<sup>31</sup>

The Germans then suggested that they would not invade Belgium if Britain would remain neutral. Grey said that he could not ". . . say that; our hands were still free, . . . The Ambassador pressed me as to whether I could not formulate conditions on which we would remain neutral . . . I could only say that we must keep our hands free."<sup>32</sup>

Clearly the Germans had to invade Belgium to create a "popular" situation and this must be combined with Belgian resistance as required.<sup>33</sup> Grey urged this and promised

<sup>29</sup>GR/CD, p. 227.      <sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 92-93.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 93.      <sup>32</sup>Ibid., cf. pp. 541-542.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 301.

support if the neutrality was violated. The Belgian Government replied, ". . . the Belgian Government are firmly resolved to repel, by all the means in their power, every attack upon their rights."<sup>34</sup>

Thus Grey had succeeded in his policy; he had secured a resisting Belgium with a high assurance of German invasion. Grey was convinced that the British public and, even more important, the Cabinet and the Commons, would see the German menace as he saw it. This is not to say that he desired that the war come; quite the contrary, if it had been averted, Grey would have rejoiced.

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 312.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE BRITISH INTERESTS

"The British Empire . . . is essentially a maritime empire. Its pivot is the United Kingdom set in the narrow seas; it is always in peril of being dominated by a combination of continental powers."<sup>1</sup> Grey had seen the peril early and set the foundation of his foreign policy in the Anglo-French Agreement of 1904. He had indicated his complete support of the rapprochement between the two nations in a speech before the House of Commons on June 1, 1904. Grey exclaimed before the House, "No one viewing the relations between France and Russia since the Dual Alliance was known to the world can fail to discover that, when France is a friend, she is an exceedingly good friend. . . ."<sup>2</sup> England needed a friend at the time, a friend for which she would be willing to abandon her policy of isolation. Rejected by Germany as an ally, she moved increasingly closer to France.

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<sup>1</sup>A. Hurd, "The United States and Sea Power: A Challenge," Fortnightly Review, CXI, February, 1919, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup>Grey, II, 299.

The German decision to build a fleet was based on the same factors that England used to justify her fleet with one exception. The German factors were status, protection, and influence; the exception was that England needed her fleet for her survival as a nation, whereas Germany did not.

Further,

"Among the Great Powers," said Moltke in his Military Testament, "England necessarily requires a strong ally on the Continent. She would not find one which corresponds better to all her interests than a United Germany, that can never make claim to the command of the sea."<sup>3</sup>

Germany's great field marshal was correct as far as he went because he did not visualize Germany as a naval power. When Germany departed from Moltke's belief of Germany never claiming command of the sea, his statement concerning England's need of a strong continental ally remained true. Against his expectations, the continental ally became France, not Germany, and the cause centered around the rise of the German Navy.

### Conclusions

Grey had determined that the German Navy was a threat to Great Britain. Great Britain's need of a friend on the continent was the basis of Grey's policy that British interest would not allow France to be crushed by Germany. To assure British ability to aid France, Grey authorized the

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<sup>3</sup>Churchill, I, 12.

military and naval conversations in 1905. The naval controversy from 1906 caused a continuing animosity to build up between England and Germany.

Fisher's development of the all-big-gun battleship, coupled with technical improvements, increased the strain and had a sustaining influence on the naval race. The support of France by England in Morocco bolstered Tirpitz's contention that Germany required a navy. In Europe, Grey's policy had the effect of isolating Germany and frightened her into continuing the naval race at all costs. By this action, Germany caused England to support France all the more and further escalate naval construction.

Both nations wanted to improve relations but neither would grant the concession the other desired. Germany wanted protection in one form or another, either by her navy or by British neutrality. The British refused. After 1912, relations between the two nations improved considerably due to the elimination of the tension over Morocco. There were good signs, during the Balkan wars particularly, that England and Germany might come to some understanding. Had more time been available, the difference might well have been resolved. Tirpitz, in 1913, had indicated that he was amenable to some concessions on the naval issue. When the Serajevo incident occurred, relations between England and Germany were the best



that they had been in a decade. Germany, however, was committed to the support of Austria and the obligations that England had assumed with France placed England and Germany in opposition. Thus England was confronted by the agreements made during the eight years of Grey's secret diplomacy. Grey was determined to support France in the British interest, even to war.

This is not to suggest that Grey was either naive or Machiavellian; he was an honest man who pursued a policy that he felt was best for England. He was not a great statesman of the broad vision that was necessary under the conditions. Grey felt that if events were to take a turn for the worse, England must be in the best military position to protect herself. He authorized the military conversations to accomplish this end and sealed the obligation to France with the Naval Agreement of 1913. Thus, under the guise of a contingency, Grey prepared England for a war that might never happen and in doing so made war more likely. As it was, Grey's secrecy created an air of apprehension not only in Germany but in England and France. His policy left no occasion for true reconciliation and the naval rivalry widened the gulf.

In a summation to his speech of August third, Grey says:

[If we say] . . . "We will have nothing whatever to do with this matter" under no conditions--the Belgian Treaty

obligations, the possible position in the Mediterranean, with damage to British interests, and what may happen to France from our failure to support France--if we were to say that all those things mattered nothing, were as nothing, and to say we would stand aside, we should, I believe, sacrifice our respect and good name and reputation before the world, and should not escape the most serious and grave economic consequences.<sup>4</sup>

The House supported Grey amongst great cheering. The Belgian issue had determined the fate of England. Grey had designed it as a method to rally public opinion to decide in favor of his policy. The Belgian question, however, was a fraudulent way of achieving his ends. There was no obligation.<sup>5</sup>

Grey had done his work well; England was at war and the plans of the military conversations were smoothly put into operation. The British troops in France undoubtedly made the difference in stopping the German advance on Paris. The naval dispositions resultant from the Anglo-French Naval Agreement allowed England to retain control of the seas throughout the war.

If Grey was right and Germany was a menace determined to rule in Europe and dominate the world, he should be revered. If he was not and his actions forced Germany to fight for her existence, he blundered terribly. In any case,

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<sup>4</sup>Grey, II, 323-324.

<sup>5</sup>Stuart, I, 132-133. Cf. Nielson, p. 382.

the war saw the beginning of the erosion of English power; the great fleets of dreadnoughts, so important at the time, are no more. Giant symbols of England's power and prestige, their disappearance from the seas nearly coincided with England's relegation to a second class power.

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