

Joseph Chamberlain and Foreign Policy, 1895-1903.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates Joseph Chamberlain's conceptualisations of foreign policy while colonial secretary, 1895 to 1903. While Chamberlain's influential position has been noted in the historiography it has not been central to any study. Therefore Chamberlain's motivation and aims are not clearly understood. Most often his ideas are contrasted with Salisbury's, who currently enjoys a very high reputation as a *realpolitck* Foreign Secretary, with a clear sense of perspective and direction. This study will therefore reconsider how Chamberlain's opinions interacted with Salisbury's. The current debate also under-represents Balfour's own dissent from Salisbury and his own bid to control or influence British foreign policy. Therefore, this study sits firmly within the debate on British Isolation while acknowledging the Decline debate. Chamberlain was motivated to solve the problem of defending British interests, formal and informal, while Britain suffered from over-extension. His interest in a German alliance was heightened by events in China but was not limited to them; hence he was not content with the security afforded by the Anglo-Japanese alliance. An Anglo-German Alliance was to be the beginning of a new global Power bloc which would then order the world mainly for the benefit of its members. However, Chamberlain's enthusiasm for an Anglo-German alliance began to decline much earlier than historians normally allow. Likewise, although tense, Chamberlain's working relationship with Salisbury was stronger than has been previously allowed. Chamberlain's Cabinet colleagues also made use of his assertive nature in order to ensure opposition to Salisbury's policy was not dismissed without having to compromise their own relationships with the Prime Minister. Chamberlain was unsuccessful in negotiating an Anglo-German alliance and so turned to Imperial Preference in order to strengthen the Empire as a solution to Britain's stretched resources.

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Introduction: Chamberlain and the Historians.

Joseph Chamberlain remains a controversial figure; there appear to be almost as many opinions about him and his policies as there are authors writing on them. This is perhaps perfectly natural; he was, after all, a man who failed to find home within the party political system of the late nineteenth century. Contemporaries found it just as difficult to understand him as those who have tried to interpret him from the distance of years. Perhaps because of this, Chamberlain remains a perplexing figure of interest and one where the puzzle remains unsolved. The overall aim of this current study is to contribute to a better understanding of how Chamberlain approached power and international relations. For a man whose name is and was synonymous with the word 'Imperialism' it is curious that a search of the British Library's catalogue does not return a single work with his name in the title and foreign relations as a subject. This is surprising considering that he was Colonial Secretary during the high tide of Imperialism, with all the Great Power rivalry that came with it. This surely falls into the subject of foreign relations, yet no work currently exists which directly examines Chamberlain's role in the formation of, or opinions on, foreign policy. This is the deficiency that the current study primarily intends fill, at least with regards to his time served in the Unionist governments of 1895-1903.

Even in the realm of biography, foreign affairs is often ignored or reduced to a case study.¹ Biographers of Chamberlain have a particularly difficult task. There are many controversies, twists and turns to the story of Chamberlain's life which leaves the seemingly small role played by foreign relations as unimportant. Next to South Africa, Irish Home rule, Tariff Reform, Imperial Federation and the 'unauthorised Radical Programmes'; the alliance talks with Germany, relations with France and friendly overtures to the United States all seem small and uninteresting. This task was not

¹ Fraser P., *Joseph Chamberlain. Radicalism and Empire, 1868-1914*, (London, 1966)

helped by the authorised biography of Garvin and Amery.² The six volume work was authored by one of Chamberlain's contemporaries and admirers, Garvin, and completed by the son of a Tariff Reformer, Amery. Therefore, its claim to objectivity is subject to some scepticism. This work embarked upon the unenviable task of portraying Chamberlain to posterity as a giant of the Victorian era, a man of vision, ahead of his time and as an archetype of the unheeded 'voice in the wilderness'. To do this it had to attempt to dispel the most unsavoury accusations made against Chamberlain, namely the alleged betrayal of Dilke, the odium which stuck with him after the Jameson Raid, made worse by the final outbreak of war in South Africa and Lloyd George's accusations that the Chamberlain family were profiteering from that war. This would have been difficult enough even if it were a simple matter to interpret Chamberlain as a success and the very model of a statesman, which of course it is not: The fact that Chamberlain failed to turn more than a handful of his ideas into either social legislation, alliances, tariffs, railways or even closer imperial ties, made Garvin's task an unenviable one. Very few of Chamberlain's contemporaries can boast such a large biography, Salisbury certainly cannot compete but then neither can Gladstone. Only Disraeli comes close. This is perhaps a clue; the length of Chamberlain's biography, and perhaps Disraeli's, is proportional to the difficulty of understanding its subject. It is remarkable that a man, who never held the office of Prime Minister, or even one of the senior cabinet posts, has a six volume biography. Winston Churchill famously commented that "'Joe' was the one who made the weather" and this is another clue.³ Despite all of Chamberlain's apparent failures, he was still, somehow, a man of extraordinary influence and force of personality. Garvin's hagiography essentially set up the framework for the historical debate on Chamberlain but failed to reconcile his influence with his failures. The debate has ever since revolved around whether Chamberlain was a successful politician - a great statesman - or a tragic failure: whether he was motivated by deep

² Garvin, J.L. *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, I, (London, 1932); Garvin, J.L. *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, II, (London, 1933); Garvin, J.L. *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, III, (London, 1934); Amery, J. *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, IV, (London, 1951); Amery, J. *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, V, (London, 1969); Amery, J. *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, VI, (London, 1969)

³ Churchill W.S., *Great Contemporaries*, (London, 1937) p. 52

conviction or a politician possessed of great ambition, few scruples and little integrity. Garvin's attempts to appropriate his subject from the odium of the South African war, other various scandals and apparent u-turns, if not of policy at least of party, has placed fettered the debate to these topics. Garvin also claimed for Chamberlain foresight. As he was interpreting him in the light of the Great War, it was simple to portray Chamberlain's German alliance talks as an attempt to avoid that terrible conflict and, with all his conversations with the French, he became the father of the *entente cordiale*. The debate has thus revolved around these issues: Was he an ambitious opportunist, with an adaptability Machiavelli would have approved of, or, a politician driven by principle? Did he lie and cheat with regards to South Africa, Dilke's political suicide and over government contracts? And whether he left any lasting legacy, or successes?

Judd's biography has a very solid and plain aim: to dispel the popular myth that Chamberlain started life as Radical and ended it as a Conservative. He argued that Chamberlain's apparent changes were merely in response to changing circumstances. In this view Chamberlain did not change his opinions on property but merely adapted his rhetoric as Marxism and the agitation of the Independent Labour Party started to "amount to universal confiscation in order to create a Collectivist State."⁴ Judd explains that Chamberlain's

doctrine of 'Ransom' had been designed to provoke the 'Haves' into a more responsible attitude towards ... society's 'Have-nots'. 'Jake Cade' Chamberlain had been, in fact, ... striving to avoid class warfare and to render a laissez-faire economy more equitable.⁵

Judd concluded that Chamberlain never really changed his mind on the concepts that had him labelled as a Radical in his early career. His war for a more equitable society had switched battleground. The solution to these problems was increased prosperity, and that could not be gained by social reform alone. His interest in Empire was essentially to solve these

⁴ Memo. Chamberlain 13 Nov. 1894 quoted in Judd D., *Radical Joe. A Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (London, 1977) p.177

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.177

problems and his position of Colonial Secretary would “provide him with an unrivalled chance to promote the material well-being of Britain through a business-like re-ordering of imperial trade”, while “Tory sentiment for Queen and Empire would help to make smooth Chamberlain’s chosen path.”⁶ Therefore Judd can dismiss the apparent move from ‘socialist’ Radical to ‘imperialist’ as essentially attempting to find a different solution to the same problem. He also comments on the Jameson raid suggesting that “it is beyond belief that Chamberlain ... could have remained perfectly unaware of the plans for the raid.”⁷ In this way Judd is still trying to answer those questions Garvin appeared to have spun into a pro-Chamberlain conclusion. However, Judd does not attempt to explain Chamberlain’s opinions on foreign affairs. Although he included more detail than previous biographies on many neglected colonial issues, such as West Africa, it is to demonstrate Chamberlain’s aggressive stance rather than as part of a wider explanation of Chamberlain’s conception of how the world should be ordered; the how of his interventions not the why.⁸

In his bibliographical note Jay criticises every previous biography: Garvin is “unduly favourable”, Fraser is “unbalanced” and “misleading” and Judd “provides a full account” but is “insufficiently critical”.⁹ However, Jay’s work still operates inside the basic bounds of debate created by Garvin. Jay discusses Chamberlain’s lack of legislative achievement, inability to produce closer imperial ties and the failure of the Tariff Reform movement. He follows Fraser’s idea that Chamberlain did in fact change his political perspective. He suggests, however, that Chamberlain was not motivated by “the threat of social war” but that he was “driven into Unionism by the demands of political survival” and so “exploited the bogey of social war to create a national party moulded in the progressive image of Birmingham’s classless politics.”¹⁰ Essentially Jay argues that Chamberlain was motivated by ambition and the needs of his own survival rather than any underpinning

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.185

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.193-201 for discussion of the raid and Chamberlain’s involvement. quote on pp.198-99

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.203-4

⁹ Jay R., *Joseph Chamberlain. A Political Study*, (Oxford, 1981), pp.369-71

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.181

ideology; Chamberlain's choice of the Colonial Office is taken as proof that he had little real concern to see social legislation passed.¹¹ Jay's main charge against the previous biographers was that they were not critical enough, but in his attempts to avoid this same folly he seems to have forgotten the difficulties involved when trying to 'prove' a negative. A lack of documentary evidence should not be used to imply guilt. Jay's conclusion is that Chamberlain was an opportunistic politician who placed himself at the forefront of almost every serious debate of his time, but that he did offer serious alternatives to the policies adopted. He was also found to be a failure and guilty of most of the worst charges held against him. However, Jay does start to look in depth at the German Alliance talks and Chamberlain's role in foreign affairs, starting to challenge Garvin's implications that Chamberlain was father to the *entente* and that his diplomacy foundered on German duplicity and greed rather than his own inexperience. Jay simply concluded that Chamberlain was "an innocent in international affairs" who "had to learn the hard way ... the skills of diplomacy and the complexities of foreign relations."¹² This is in direct contrast to the god-like prescience attributed to him by Garvin. Chamberlain's decisions are described merely as having been reactions to specific problems, such as China, Samoa, Niger or the Transvaal; there was no unifying purpose behind any of them. This is consistent with Jay's assertion that Chamberlain was merely opportunistic, in essence an "intellectual magpie", but the biography does not even try to identify a set of ideas which may have underpinned Chamberlain's actions, he rather assumes the absence he attempts to prove.¹³ Chamberlain's supposed overarching ambition is used to explain these interventions; in China he had perceived "a chance to undermine Salisbury's overall control of foreign policy".¹⁴ Therefore Jay does not need to try to construct any overarching intellectual reasoning, or world view, behind Chamberlain's actions. Ambition alone is enough reason for his intervention in foreign policy.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.184-5

¹² *Ibid.*, p.323

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.324

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.217

Marsh's biography continued the development of his subject, being much more thorough in its evaluation. However, Marsh struggled to contain his work in a single volume. He focuses mostly on the same questions which have been features of the debate on Chamberlain since Garvin though he introduces some new ideas about Chamberlain. While the other biographers noted Chamberlain as one of the first industrialist to arrive in the very highest circles of power, they did so only as a note of interest and vague references to his business-like preference for straight talking and active policies. Marsh's is the first attempt to chart and map out how his business experience actually affected policy. As an example Chamberlain was always more concerned about the areas of Empire where he had sold his screws than less familiar ones; his ignorance and lack of opinion on India is partly explained this way. But it was also Chamberlain's business experience that led him to view markets as vital British interests and it was the waning of the informal commercial empire that "increased the importance of the formal empire", driving Chamberlain to extend its borders.¹⁵ Marsh explains Chamberlain's excursions into foreign policy in this way: it was not ambition or desire to de-throne Salisbury but that the two men conceptualised British interests in different ways. Chamberlain's reasoning for pursuing the first set of German alliance talks was explained thus; it was an attempt to prevent Russia from enclosing more of the Chinese market behind her tariff barriers. While this explanation goes further than previous biographies, Marsh neglects many other foreign policy issues. The second set of 'alliance talks' in 1900 are all but missing from his account, which also says little on the Japanese alliance. In fact after the 1898 Anglo-German convention, touching on Portugal's African possessions, he mostly leaves foreign affairs alone. Marsh still continues to argue about the same debates. He presents evidence to exonerate Chamberlain from the charge of having ill used his friend, Dilke, but not from intriguing over the scandal.¹⁶ He discusses Chamberlain's complicity in the Jameson raid in a neutral but exhaustive

¹⁵ Marsh P.T., *Joseph Chamberlain. Entrepreneur in Politics* (London, 1994) pp.433 - 4

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.225-7

manner.¹⁷ Deploying more evidence than the previous biographers he gives the impression that Chamberlain did no more than could be expected of any Cabinet member the upholding of British interests. Marsh exposes the fact that the previous Liberal government had also known about Rhode's plans, and had even replaced the Governor in order to aid them. Jay ignored this evidence. Marsh's opinion is that Chamberlain entered politics mainly to "ensure those benefits" of good wages and excellent profits to future generations of British entrepreneurs and workers; "His essential purpose as a statesman was to meet the needs of Britain's industrial economy".¹⁸ Policy drove Chamberlain not ambition. However, where Marsh touches on foreign policy he does so only briefly, merely upholding his business model as an explanation for Chamberlain's unorthodox behaviour rather than investigating any potential connections between foreign, imperial and economic policy that could reveal a how Chamberlain conceptualised Britain's place in the world.

Chamberlain's latest scholarly biography takes up essentially where Jay left off. Crosby seizes upon Jay's conception of Chamberlain as an 'intellectual Magpie' and driven by ambition. This Crosby paints into a picture which becomes almost a polemic; Chamberlain is regarded as a man driven by a need for power, who was unlovable and unhappy. Every twist and turn of his career can be read through this lens. The trauma of losing his first two wives is used as the starting point of this unhappy soul that ended up having to dominate all around him. His personal relationship with Potter and then Mary Endicott is cherry picked to display Chamberlain in this light. The happiness that both he and Mary shared is never demonstrated. Chamberlain is further characterised as creative but unimaginative; unable to see other people's point of view. As Crosby has already found his overarching explanation for Chamberlain, he describes each intervention in foreign policy as merely being motivated by either ambition or petty obstruction. This thesis ignores that Chamberlain could have challenged Balfour for the premiership in 1902 but chose not to. This study will

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.372-405

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.671

attempt to find a rationale behind his foreign policy rather than to dismiss it all as the action of a diseased mind.¹⁹

Much work has been done on Chamberlain outside of the confines of biography. However, most of this has been in works which do not hold Chamberlain as the main object of inquiry. The works touching on Salisbury and British foreign policy at the turn of the century are striking examples of this. Chamberlain's interventions in foreign policy cannot be ignored by a scholar of this topic and so it is without attempting a full reconstruction of Chamberlain's motivations, methods and outlook, that his actions with regards to foreign policy are assessed. This is, therefore, most often done in the traditional view of politics as being the art of the possible. This approach is perfectly reasonable, but while it may reveal whether Chamberlain was successful or conventionally wise, it will not help us understand why he was doing what he was, and why he failed to see what his colleagues thought was obvious. Again Garvin is partly responsible for laying out the battleground, his portrayal of the Chamberlain-Hatzfeldt talks as a great, but missed, opportunity drew attention to what Grenville described latter as "[t]he mirage of a German alliance".²⁰ Early opinion agreed with Garvin that Germany was to blame for missing the opportunity. However, this was soon challenged by those who felt that an alliance was also unacceptable to Britain at the time. This is the current predominant view: "[t]here was no commonality of interests; and therefore there could be no alliance".²¹ There is no significant problem with this view except that this should raise the question of whether it is reasonable to attribute

¹⁹ Crosby T.L., *Joseph Chamberlain: a most radical imperialist*, (London,2011)

²⁰ Grenville J.A.S, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy. The Close of the Nineteenth Century* Paperback Ed. with corrections. (London, 1970), p.148

²¹ Grenville J.A.S., *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy. The Close of the Nineteenth Century*, Paperback Ed. with corrections. (London, 1970); Otte T.G., *The China Question. Great Power Rivalry and British Isolation, 1894-1905*, (Oxford,2007), p.134; Langer W.L., *The Diplomacy of Imperialism 1890-1902*, 2nd Ed. (New York, 1968); Charmley, J. *Splendid Isolation? Britain and the Balance of Power 1874-1914* (London, 1999); Kennedy P.M., "Germany World Policy and Alliance Negotiations with England, 1897-1900" *Journal of Modern History*, 45, 4 (1973), pp.605-25; Kennedy P.M., *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism 1860-1914*, (London, 1980); Koch H. W., "The Anglo-German Alliance Negotiations: Missed Opportunity or Myth?", *History*, 54, 3 (1969), pp.378-92; Lowe C.J., *The Reluctant Imperialists*, I, (London, 1967)

Chamberlain's alternative opinion as being due to his being "too erratic, ... to impulsive; he was easily misled by others and rarely understood the outlook of colleagues and foreign diplomats. Above all he often revealed a lack of ... good judgement."²² This view of Grenville's has since stuck and fits well with general explanations that Chamberlain was nothing more than an ambitious opportunist with no guiding principles. Otte has revised this opinion by drawing attention to that fact that "Chamberlain's talks ... can not be written off as amateur dramatics of no real significance."²³ In his account Chamberlain's actions "were symptomatic of a growing discontent with Salisbury's Fabian policy".²⁴ While this revises the position a little it does not go far in trying to explain why Chamberlain believed an agreement was possible. Otte opts for an implied self-deception: "Whether Berlin would be so obliging and risk burning its fingers for the sake of Chamberlain's Chinese chestnuts, was the question which the Colonial Secretary had avoided posing."²⁵

Charmley describes Chamberlain as potentially attempting to walk in Disraeli's footsteps. In this view Chamberlain was essentially seeking to profit from popular jingoism: "the motives were the usual mixture of personal ambition and partisan advantage". Charmley did accept, however, that both Disraeli and Chamberlain considered the future of the British Empire as a vital interest and thus "there was also an important element of principle at stake."²⁶ This interpretation of Chamberlain is also unsatisfactory. In it he is described as having been motivated by a fear that "Britain could not afford to lose face or her position in the imperial struggle". Essentially prestige was apparently his central concern.²⁷ The Colonial Secretary was also criticised for not falling in with Salisbury's "attempts to improve Anglo-French relations", after all Chamberlain "had not gone to the Colonial Office to appease the French."²⁸ Later Charmley

²² Grenville, *Salisbury*, pp.127-8

²³ Otte, *China* p.175

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.175

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.207

²⁶ Charmley, *Splendid Isolation*, p.245

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.253

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.247

also criticised Chamberlain for having got worked “up into a lather about the Samoan Islands” when tension between Britain and France, over Fashoda, could have erupted into war with very short notice. The sense is that Chamberlain lacked judgement as to what was important, and lacked a skill, highly prized by Conservatives, for ‘masterly inactivity’. This interpretation leaves the reader with the sense that Chamberlain was an ambitious jingo, singularly lacking in both judgement and understanding of the world. Charmley’s only answer, as to why and how Chamberlain viewed the world so differently, is essentially a comment on “Chamberlain’s nature”.²⁹ Monger’s work, on the Japanese alliance and the end of British isolation, gives only partial attention to the role played by Chamberlain. The work noted that Chamberlain wanted to end isolation and that his preference was for “the natural alliance ... between ourselves and the great German Empire”.³⁰ However, Monger does not mention Chamberlain’s lack of enthusiasm for the Japanese alliance. This is difficult to explain if we are to believe that he was actuated by a desire to merely end isolation or find a regional solution to the China problem. Monger does go onto draw closer attention to Chamberlain’s role in the early stages of the eventual *entente* with France.³¹ However, there is no attempt to explain Chamberlain’s motives or methods. This is hardly surprising given that Monger’s work focuses mostly on Lansdowne.

These studies of foreign policy describe Chamberlain’s intrusions into this most aristocratic world as miss-guided and almost nonsensical. While some reference to the wider geopolitical picture is often made, for example drawing attention to Chamberlain’s aggressive stance on minor colonial matters, this is done only to demonstrate Chamberlain’s lack of judgement. An alternative would be to use this evidence in an attempt to understand why a man who had a firm grasp of what was possible in the world of marketing, both in terms of screws and that of a political creed, and in municipal politics, appeared to lack judgement in terms of international

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.252

³⁰ Chamberlain quoted in Monger G., *The End of Isolation. British Foreign Policy 1900-1907* (Connecticut, 1963), p.14

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.40

relations? A final question remains as to what Chamberlain actually hoped would be achieved by a German alliance. Most of these works assume that Chamberlain, like other Cabinet members, was concerned over Britain's international position and wished to see the Empire adhere to the Triple Alliance. This assumption has diverted thought away from considering Chamberlain's long-term goals. It also fails to account for how profoundly Chamberlain eventually abandoned the idea of a German alliance. He was not even its warmest advocate by the time Lansdowne was involved in own proposal for a secret agreement in 1901.³²

This study will naturally touch upon the 'isolation' debate in terms of Chamberlain's perception of, and attitudes toward, British isolation. Otte, argues that the, until recently, accepted opinion, that isolation ended with the Anglo-Japanese alliance, is inaccurate and that the effects and limited geographical nature of that alliance mark a continuation of Salisbury's 'nuanced' policy. Charmley had previously argued that Salisbury's was not a policy of isolation at all but that he followed an older 'Country Party' conservative tradition. It is not the aim of the current study to resolve these questions, but a study of foreign policy so close to them will necessarily touch upon them and perhaps attempt to fit Chamberlain among these competing interpretations.

Neilson's *Britain and the Last Tsar* describes the Cabinet of the time as composed of two generations: a 'Victorian' one, of which Salisbury is considered the archetype; and an 'Edwardian' generation, to which it is implied that Chamberlain belonged.³³ While there was certainly a grouping in that Cabinet that was increasingly concerned with Britain's relative decline, and who also increasingly lost faith in Salisbury's policy, it may not be satisfactory simply to drop Chamberlain into this group, or even to marry those two positions together. Certainly Chamberlain's opinion differed from many in this group once the Japanese alliance was on the table. This concept of an 'Edwardian' generation is taken further in Searle's *The Quest*

³² Grenville J.A.S., "Lansdowne's abortive project of 12 March 1901 for a secret agreement with Germany" *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, (1954)

³³ Neilson K., *Britain and the Last Tsar. British Policy and Russia 1894-1917*, (Oxford, 1995), pp.3-51

for *National Efficiency*. Chamberlain was mentioned often in the work, but he was not included in the list of famous names to which a concern for efficiency was noted. That list included the likes of Milner and Rosebery.³⁴ Sympathy for the concept of efficiency certainly cut across party lines, but those on the Liberal side of the house, being in opposition during Chamberlain's time, were the loudest. On the Unionist side, Otte identifies the likes of Curzon, Austen Chamberlain, Wyndham and Viscount Cranborne as desperate for a more active policy and by implication members of a new generation.³⁵

Friedberg's *The Weary Titan* also features Chamberlain, at least in the two sections devoted to the economic and financial power of the United Kingdom.³⁶ This work, focusing as it does, on the decline debate obviously discusses matters far from even the Colonial Secretary's roaming, self assigned remit. The work focuses on the problems facing Britain and the constraints she found herself labouring under, some very real, others merely virtual but perceived to be immutable.³⁷ Chamberlain's role in those debates is portrayed in varying terms. On the one hand he is credited with being "correct in at least half of his diagnosis of Britain's condition."³⁸ He is also praised by the work for having realised that it was essential "that the greatness of a nation is not to be measured by a comparison with its own past, but by its relative position in the councils of the world", a concept his Free Trade opponents did not care to admit.³⁹ Chamberlain is portrayed as having essentially recognised the problems facing Britain despite the "absence of decisive evidence of relative decline", which at the time simply did not, and possibly could not have existed, not because relative decline was a myth but due to the lack of relevant and sufficiently sophisticated measures.⁴⁰ However, Friedberg goes on to conclude that Chamberlain's

³⁴ Searle G.R. *The Quest for National Efficiency. A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914*, Paperback Edition (London, 1990), p. 2

³⁵ Otte, *China*, p.133

³⁶ Friedberg A.L., *The Weary Titan. Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905*, (Princeton, 1988) pp.21-134

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.107-120

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.83

³⁹ Chamberlain, quoted in *Ibid.*, p.72

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.82 and *Ibid.*, p.80

proposals for tariff reform “would only have served to strengthen” the “blunting of the incentives for Britain to remain adaptive and thus competitive.”⁴¹ Essentially Chamberlain may have accurately identified the problem, relative decline, but he had failed to offer a workable policy and that seen “in this light, Chamberlain appears as a truly tragic figure.”⁴² Again Chamberlain is judged by that old measure that politics is the art of the possible, and he was found lacking. However, he does appear prophetic in regards to Britain’s position, even if his remedies and judgement were not as divinely inspired.

While Freidburg gives an internally consistent description of Chamberlain he avoids most of his career, focusing only on the tariff reform campaign. Given the topic of enquiry this is to be expected and is indicative of a problem facing most of the works recently mentioned: they only call upon, or investigate, Chamberlain in piecemeal. Looking at his different roles in different contexts, such as the alliance talks in a foreign policy context, and tariff reform in an economic one, any attempt to understand the Colonial Secretary's approach to politics and the world, his political *mentalité*, is left to his biographers. These works are not even primarily concerned with Chamberlain, most being thematically based on decline, foreign policy or, as in Searle’s case, specific political movements or concepts. One notable exception is Porter’s *The origins of the South African War*. This work focuses more completely on Chamberlain and while remaining tightly within the South African context, it does demonstrate some of Chamberlain’s preferences and approaches to the conduct of policy. Porter describes Chamberlain’s liberal use of publication, bluebooks, as an attempt to educate the British electorate as to the importance of Empire. Porter places this engagement with the public as being in a tradition which included Canning and Palmerston.⁴³ While most of the work is naturally focused on the South African War the conclusions are also useful in any attempt to understand Chamberlain’s conceptual make up:

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.84

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.88

⁴³ Porter, A. *The Origins of the South African War Joseph Chamberlain and the diplomacy of imperialism, 1895-99*, (Manchester, 1980), pp.1-27

The education of public opinion which he[Chamberlain] had attempted was both a process of giving the public the 'right' views, and of helping people to formulate what he believed were their own often incoherent inclinations or beliefs. Thus the 'representative of the people' had also to fulfil the functions of a leader. Although in theory this might be a clear conception, its practical application, as has been seen, and as Chamberlain always acknowledged, was fraught with difficulties.⁴⁴

This concept of leading public opinion may well prove to be one of the keys to understanding Chamberlain. The concept that "giving the public the 'right' views" could win them over certainly helps explain why he thought the Tariff Reform campaign could have been successful. It may also explain why he believed an unauthorised programme could be successful in the 1880s and that the Conservatives could be persuaded to adopt social reform in the early 1890s. While writing about the South African context Porter has provided some evidence pointing toward parts of Chamberlain's conception of politics and democracy.

What is lacking then is a study to link together the suggestions and partial work already completed upon Chamberlain while attempting to avoid some of the pitfalls or perhaps distractions with which the traditional historiography is almost obsessed. For these reasons, this study will not revisit the origins of the South African War in any meaningful way. The problems caused by the extended British engagement in South Africa will have to be considered but there is no need to revisit the controversies of the War or the Jameson Raid. Hopefully then some of the apparent contradictions, lack of judgement and seeming unlimited ambition can be reconciled to reveal what Chamberlain was truly about.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.259

1: Making a Stand: Chamberlain and West Africa.

When Joseph Chamberlain arrived at the Colonial Office in 1895 he took over a department of state with a long but somewhat lowly history. Chamberlain inherited the department together with several existing issues. One of these was the long-standing dispute with both France and Germany for control over West Africa. Hargreaves' *West Africa Partitioned* devotes two volumes to the telling of that story and is still unrivalled.⁴⁵ The British territories were under several departments jurisdiction. The Colonial Office had responsibility for the crown colonies, Gambia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast and Lagos; The Royal Niger Company, a chartered company headed by Sir George Goldie, had responsibility to secure its territories from foreign penetration; and finally the Foreign Office had direct responsibility for the Niger River Protectorate.⁴⁶ Colonies, and Company, all had their own leaders and their own agendas, which were not always in accordance with their ultimate masters back in London.

The situation in the French colonies was similar, in that the new colonial ministry and even the *Quai d'Orsay* could not always control colonial elements, while the exploits of overzealous colonels caused as much difficulty for the French as the reluctance of some British agents did for Britain.⁴⁷ Although the French had attempted to centralise their West African colonies into a single unit, the difficulty of doing so - especially as large areas of as yet neutral, or even nominally British, territory were

⁴⁵ Hargreaves J.D., *West Africa Partitioned* Vol.I (London, 1974) Vol.II (Basingstoke,1985)

⁴⁶ George Dashwood Taubman Goldie Governor Royal Niger Company (Feb 1895-Jan 1900).

⁴⁷ As examples, Mizon joined a slave raiding party during his second expedition into Bornu, 1893. Decoeur pushed further North in 1894 fearing a recall from Paris, and in 1894 Toutee established a treaty with Tchaki, which was clearly already within the British sphere as established by the Treaties of 1889 and 1893. For the British side Goldie's constant reluctance to defend the Royal Niger Company's claims in Borgu, Gurma and Mossi or extend the field of its operations, further from the river banks, was thought to contribute to losses.

interspersed between them - left them as much dependent on the 'Man on the Spot' as the British were.⁴⁸

Chamberlain originally left the complicated mess that was West Africa in the seemingly capable hands of Salisbury at the Foreign Office.⁴⁹ He only involved himself once word reached him of what was taking place at the Niger Commission which had been created to resolve Anglo-French differences in West Africa. So it was not until the negotiations were already underway that Chamberlain turned his attention to the problem of 'effective occupation' of African hinterlands. Chamberlain's solution was to instigate a policy which effectively mirrored the French. As the situation developed it became apparent to him that the French would not admit Britain's rights without supporting evidence beyond the pre-existing treaties. To do this he raised the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) to reinforce Britain's position by confronting French military installations and seizing territory to use as bargaining counters in a negotiated settlement. This was a policy designed to meet what Chamberlain considered to be French bluffs and resulted in rival military forces being camped in very close proximity to one another. The Colonial Secretary did not intend to actually start fighting but he certainly believed Britain would be justified in defending her claims with force if necessary. Part of the reasoning behind this aggressive or 'forward' policy (as Chamberlain described it) was that Britain needed to demonstrate to a world increasingly full of imperial rivals, that she was prepared to defend her claims and would not be deflected by the use of threats.

Many of the leading works on foreign policy make reference to West Africa, even if only briefly. Roberts barely mentions it, playing Salisbury's control of it up by suggesting that "Salisbury never allowed the situation to develop into one that threatened war." Roberts also stresses the importance of the Nile Valley and the relative unimportance of West Africa, whose only

⁴⁸ In 1895 all the French colonies, excluding Dahomey, were joined together in the *Afrique Occidentale française* an administrative federation. Hargreaves, *West Africa* II, p.219

⁴⁹ Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne-Cecil, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury Prime Minister (1886-1892;1895-1902); Foreign Secretary (1887-1892; 1895-1900)

usefulness was as potential currency in a wider exchange.⁵⁰ Grenville draws attention to the relative unimportance of the "malarious African desert", again stressing the essential nature of British interests in the Nile Valley. The Niger negotiations significance are only derived as being the moment when Chamberlain started to lose faith in Salisbury; the apparent success of the Colonial Secretary's policy vindicated, in his own mind at least, his "apparently reckless diplomacy".⁵¹ Charmley argues that Chamberlain "was 'too warlike' by half". And by describing the Colonial Secretary as "Jingo Joe" he pulls no punches, arguing that Chamberlain operated under a dangerous and "ludicrous inversion of priorities", appealing to public opinion for his own advantage.⁵² Langer again only touches on West Africa very briefly. He aligned Chamberlain with "British public opinion" which "was astonishingly rabid." In his opinion the final settlement was less the result of British resolve than of a French desire "to avoid trouble and come to some agreement."⁵³

Works on the subject of imperialism have more to say about West Africa. Hargreaves' analysis is astonishingly detailed and thorough. Salisbury is again described as being sensible and having "never lost sight, as Chamberlain sometimes did, of the necessity of ultimately finding a diplomatic solution." Salisbury is credited with having a sounder "economic view than the Birmingham businessman." Chamberlain is described as wanting to accommodate popular jingoism and the interests of "the colonial lobbies". Ultimately, Hargreaves argues that Salisbury got the settlement he wanted and that Chamberlain only made his task more difficult.⁵⁴ Obichere concluded that "the triumph of British policy was due more to Chamberlain's realism than to Salisbury's statesmanship." The competition for territory in the hinterland resulted from the need to keep the coastal colonies viable as they "depended on the uninterrupted flow of trade." The most important finding was that reports on the economic potential of these regions "were not ignored and that decisions were made on their evidence."

⁵⁰ Roberts A., *Salisbury Victorian Titan*, (London, 1999) pp.685-6

⁵¹ Grenville, *Salisbury*, pp.121-4

⁵² Charmley, pp.247-8

⁵³ Langer, p.550

⁵⁴ Hargreaves, *West Africa*, II, pp.229-234

Chamberlain's role was essential to Britain's success in keeping foreign powers out of the navigable lower Niger, ensuring that most commerce would travel via British possessions.⁵⁵

As for Chamberlain's biographers, only Garvin talks of West Africa at length. Writing in the 1930s, when the British Empire was at its territorial height, he described the Colonial Secretary as standing firm: "Against the Foreign Office and the Paris Embassy he had been right in his judgement of what discriminating firmness could maintain and obtain without war." The resultant Anglo-French Convention "was worthy of two great nations ... honour and interest were satisfied on both sides." Garvin describes the areas reserved to Britain as containing "the largest manufacturing and commercial centre in all that part of the Sudan." Chamberlain is depicted as having successfully defended both the Empire's economic interests and British honour.⁵⁶

The currently accepted image of Chamberlain, created by historians, is one of an almost demagogic character, espousing doctrines of national honour to improve his own electoral prospects. His opinions and actions in West Africa are therefore seen as a dangerous ramping-up of tensions over an area of little or no intrinsic value. In one case Chamberlain is even described as not wanting "a diplomatic settlement", while others remark that he was "too warlike".⁵⁷ Salisbury, on the other hand, is consistently described as holding a clear conception of what was truly important, acquiescing in Chamberlain's policies only from fear that a split would otherwise ensue. Only Garvin and Obichere suggest that Chamberlain's policy was justifiable or a success. Re-examining the competition over the Niger permits a reassessment of the Colonial Secretary's motivations and policy; it acts as a case study in how Chamberlain believed foreign policy should be handled and his fears about Salisbury's approach to the same question.

⁵⁵ Obichere B.I., *West African States and European Expansion*, (New Haven, 1971) pp.245-253

⁵⁶ Garvin, *Life*, III, pp.202-23

⁵⁷ Robinson R., Gallagher J., and Denny A., *Africa and the Victorians The official Mind of the Imperialism*, 2nd Ed. (London, 1981) p.407; Charmley, p.248; Langer, p.550; Grenville, p.123; Roberts, p.685

Before examining this it is worth discussing how the situation stood in West Africa, firstly in terms of treaty agreements with the French and, secondly, in terms of action taken on the ground. The French envisioned an enormous African empire spreading from the west coast to the Red Sea, and from Tunis to French Equatorial Africa.⁵⁸ As she attempted to extend these territories various collisions occurred between her and native powers who had signed treaties with the British. A number of Anglo-French treaties were negotiated to resolve these early conflicts.⁵⁹ The Niger Commission was originally created to survey and tie up the loose ends left by some agreements. As French explorers entered an area already agreed as belonging to the Royal Niger Company they realised that the area was untouched by Europeans. Concerned that too much had been given away in negotiation France sent further military expeditions into nominally British territory.⁶⁰ In 1892 the Niger Commission briefly re-opened but Salisbury faced a difficult election and so rejected a proposal for settlement; he considered that the "French Commissioner seems disposed to consider that the Commission may reopen questions of principle instead of the comparatively mechanical work of a survey."⁶¹ The incoming Liberal administration continued on but all that was achieved was to settle the borders of the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone.⁶²

⁵⁸ Obichere, pp.124-8

⁵⁹ PP Arrangements Between Great Britain and France respecting West Africa, 1892, c 6701, LVI.775 this paper has annexed to it the text of Anglo-French treaties and agreements on West Africa, dated 1882, 1889, 1890 and 1891. PP Treaty Series. No. 13. 1893. Arrangement between Great Britain and France fixing the boundary between the British and French possessions on the Gold Coast. Signed at Paris, 12/07/1893. 1893-94, C.7108, CIX.93 and PP Treaty series. No. 5. 1895. Agreement between Great Britain and France fixing the boundary between the British and French possessions to the north and east of Sierra Leone. Signed at Paris, 21 January 1895, 1895, c.7600, CIX.11 complete the list of signed agreements between Britain and France Prior to Chamberlain's time at the Colonial office.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, Annex c [page 15 of document,]

⁶¹ PP Arrangements Between Great Britain and France respecting West Africa, 1892, c 6701, LVI.775

⁶² Dufferin to Kimberly, 16/08/1894, FO27/3186; Memo., Goldie, 10/07/1894, with minute by Anderson, FO27/3208; Hargreaves, *West Africa*, II, pp.199-201; PP Treaty Series. No. 13. 1893. C.7108, CIX.93; PP Treaty series. No. 5. 1895. c.7600, CIX.11

When negotiation failed, action took place on the ground in Africa. On the British side George Ferguson and Lugard were sent into the African hinterland to establish treaties with the natives⁶³ The treaties these men made with the natives powers in the region were considered as completing "the protection of the Middle Niger from the possibility of French interference".⁶⁴ France also sent out expeditions, they concentrated their efforts on the Niger Bend.⁶⁵ However, finding sparse evidence of the British French commanders adapted their arguments and decided that "[a] treaty has value ... Only so far as it results from and is justified by a *de facto* situation".⁶⁶ Competition on the Niger thereafter entered its most dangerous phase, when military occupation was regarded as essential to defend treaty rights. It was during this raising of the stakes that Chamberlain took control of the Colonial Office. His approach to West Africa would prove more determined than any of his predecessors. The Colonial Secretary was not alone in his desire to see a forward policy in West Africa as well as elsewhere. His subordinate, Lord Selborne, was perhaps even more aggressive.⁶⁷ In December 1895 he was exclaiming that he did "not understand how it is that the hinterland doctrine always works against us. If the French or Germans have a strip of coast they claim, and claim successfully, everything behind it to the North Pole. But with us it is quite different."⁶⁸ Salisbury had hoped that his son-in-law would be able to keep an eye on his Colonial Secretary. At the formation of the government Salisbury warned that Chamberlain's "interest in the Colonies is entirely theoretical" and hoped "that ... he will leave the practical work entirely to

⁶³ George Eken Ferguson British Explorer and Colonial Officer; Fergusons main report is printed in Arhin K., (Ed.) *The Papers of George Ekem Ferguson* (Cambridge,1974); Frederick John Dealtry Lugard, 1st Baron Lugard British explorer/Soldier High commissioner Northern Nigeria Protectorate (1900-1906)

⁶⁴ Goldie to Anderson, 17 & 18/06/1889 FO84/1997; RNC to FO, 22/07/1890 FO84/2087; Flint, J. E. *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria* (Oxford, 1960) pp.160-1. Lugard's trip is summarised in *Ibid.*, pp.222-225

⁶⁵ Flint, pp.172-9 and Hargreaves, *West Africa*, II, pp.131-3

⁶⁶ ANSOM, Soudan III/2 Toutee, *Notes Politiques*,, f. 35 quoted in Hargreaves, *West Africa*, II, p.205

⁶⁷ William Waldegrave Palmer, 2nd Earl of Selborne Colonial Under Secretary (1895-1900) First Lord of the Admiralty (1900-1905)

⁶⁸ Min., Selborne, 6/12/1895 on FO to CO 4 Dec CO96/265

you[Selborne]".⁶⁹ In reality the Prime Minister had brought two staunch imperialists together.

In October 1895 Hanotaux decided to re-open the Niger Commission.⁷⁰ To begin with, Chamberlain was hoping to settle the situation with a general exchange. By December 1895 he was discussing exchanging "Dominica for Dahomey and hinterland" and "the French shore [in Newfoundland]".⁷¹ Although Salisbury had to point out that the French were not yet ready for such an exchange, Chamberlain was certainly open to a negotiated settlement, and prepared to look broadly to find material upon which to base such an agreement.⁷² The general settlement would become a hallmark of Chamberlain's preferences. The Commission reconvened in February 1896 and the French refused to continue as they had before. Ferguson's treaties were to be discounted and the French insisted that they were free to penetrate south of the Say-Barruwa line except in areas belonging to Sokoto.⁷³ This made any progress in negotiations unlikely and the Commission closed again when the British announced their intention to re-conquer the Egyptian Sudan.⁷⁴ Lebon hoped that more 'effective occupation' would help with British intransigence.⁷⁵

The British were not quiet either; they had their own internal problems to solve. The Emir of Ilorin, notionally under the protection of the Niger Company, started to threaten messengers from Lagos and once news reached the Colonial Office, Chamberlain immediately asked that the Company to compel the cooperation of the Emirate.⁷⁶ Goldie asked for more time but when fighting broke out Chamberlain lost his patience and insisted that the Company either took immediate action or allow Lagos to do

⁶⁹ Salisbury to Selborne 30/06/1895, Selborne MSS 5/31-32

⁷⁰ Albert Auguste Gabriel Hanotaux French Foreign Minister (1894-1898)

⁷¹ Salisbury to Chamberlain 10/12/1895 JC11/30/25

⁷² Salisbury to Chamberlain 23/12/1895 JC11/30/27

⁷³ Hirschfield C., *The Diplomacy of Partition: Britain, France and the Creation of Nigeria, 1890-1898* (The Hague, 1979) pp.83-9; Uzoigwe G.N., *Britain and the Conquest of Africa* (Ann Arbor, 1974) pp.103-10.

⁷⁴ Hargreaves J.D., "Entente Manquee: Anglo-French Relations, 1895-1896" *Cambridge Historical Journal* XI, 1953 pp.65-92

⁷⁵ Andre Lebon, French Colonial Secretary (1896-1898); Hargreaves, *West Africa*, II, p.226

⁷⁶ CO to FO, 3/11/1895, FO83/1385

so.⁷⁷ The Colonial Secretary demanded that Lagos be allowed to move at once and the bill sent to the Company.⁷⁸ This was refused by the Foreign Office but the overlapping of responsibilities for the area had certainly caused tension. As news that the Company had eventually taken action reached the French they asked for assurances that the British forces would not enter disputed territory in Borgu. These assurances were given and even the planned movements of the expedition were released to the French press. The French response was to send three expeditions into the area: Salisbury's well intentioned diplomacy had only revealed to the French an opportunity, because he had neglected to extract a reciprocal promise to refrain from entering the contested area.⁷⁹

Goldie had subdued Illorin by Spring 1897, but Chamberlain was now aware that the French had occupied other areas and most importantly Bussa where the Niger became navigable to the sea. In June Chamberlain sent orders initiating his policy of counter occupations. Maxwell, the governor of the Gold Coast, was required to present the French with superior forces in order to encourage them to withdraw.⁸⁰ If they did not then the Governor was "to consider whether there are any places which it would be practicable for us to seize and hold as a material guarantee for dealing with French seizures of Mossi and Bousa when negotiations are resumed with the French Government." Maxwell was also warned "not to take the offensive against French troops", to avoid places south of the 9th parallel (agreed French territory), but to "occupy any places north of the 9th parallel to the west as well as to the east ... claimed by the French as theirs". To carry out this policy extra forces would be raised: "The question of expense must not be allowed to stand in the way of dealing effectively with the present emergency." This was the beginning of Chamberlain's WAFF.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Chamberlain suspected Goldie intended only delay because he had lied about the existence of a letter from the Emir to the Queen. RNC to FO, 17/04/1896, FO83/1443

⁷⁸ CO to FO, 27/05/1896, FO83/1444.

⁷⁹ Salisbury to Gosselin, 1/12/1896, FO27/3273; Flint, pp.241-2

⁸⁰ William Edward Maxwell Governor of the Gold Coast (1895-1897)

⁸¹ Chamberlain to Maxwell 4/06/1897, CO879/48, printed in Newbury C.W. (Ed.) *British Policy Towards West Africa* (London,1971) pp.221-4

Chamberlain's concerns over Salisbury's response to French demands extended beyond West Africa. When the Colonial Office was asked its opinion on Salisbury's proposed Tunis agreement, Chamberlain replied privately that he disliked "making these large concessions to France without securing any adequate *quid pro quo*. My own view is that every change to the advantage of France in Tunis should be accompanied with a change to our benefit in Egypt." He complained that Britain "had given a great deal to the French, in Siam, Madagascar and now Tunis." This, he believed, encouraged them, in "Newfoundland, Egypt and West Africa" to be "more offensive than ever and ... that if we do not show that we will not be trifled with, we shall finally be driven into war with the disadvantage of having already surrendered much that is valuable."⁸² The Colonial Secretary viewed the world very differently from Salisbury, who attempted to smooth Chamberlain's ruffled feathers in his reply. It revealed some of the differences between the two men. He did not "admit that 'we have given a great deal', or 'anything' to France in Siam" there "we found France in full process of absorbing the country" and that "we had no treaty right whatever to interfere on behalf of Siam."⁸³ He continued to explain that Britain had since gained that treaty right but only by agreeing to partition the territory. Salisbury explained the reasons why he felt an aggressive policy had not been possible, not only with regard to Siam, but also to Newfoundland and Madagascar. It was a very capable defence of Conservative foreign policy.⁸⁴ In Chamberlain's view, however, Britain had lost out by her long term policy of allowing commercial penetration to extend her informal empire, while neglecting to extend her formal empire in the hallowed name of retrenchment.⁸⁵ By not extending official control Britain had missed opportunities to develop the infrastructure of these territories, leaving them in the condition of "Undeveloped Estates", while formal rule would also have acted as a guarantee against annexation by a tariff-raising rivals. Chamberlain still considered the concessions given to

⁸² Chamberlain to Salisbury, 6/06/1897 JC11/30/81

⁸³ Salisbury to Chamberlain 7/06/1897 JC11/30/82

⁸⁴ *ibid.*,

⁸⁵ Robinson R., and Gallagher J., "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *The Economic History Review*, 2nd series, Vol.6, No.1 (1953) pp.1-15

France as being too great even where they were not at the expense of Britain's formal possessions. Wherever France had made a gain, whether from a third party or directly from the British a market closed to British trade; Britain's lead in terms of territory and trade was reduced each time her rivals made a gain and she did not. Salisbury did join with Chamberlain in lamenting the effects of "the Gladstonian garrisons of the Treasury" but the two men had entirely different views on Britain's geo-political position.⁸⁶ Salisbury's foreign policy was a classic defence of the status quo: attempting to maintain Britain's position and power without giving offence unless absolutely necessary. Chamberlain saw a passive Britain almost as a declining power, and that if she did not act to head off the encroachments of her enemies she would eventually lose her position of dominance, as her rivals caught up.

Chamberlain did not rest while the WAFF was in preparation. He immediately started to address the public as to the situation and the apparently dishonest nature of French methods. He hoped to engender an understanding of the need not only to defend vigorously and occasionally extend the Empire, but also to appreciate its value.⁸⁷ In August 1897 he asked for a despatch to be drawn up, protesting against French behaviour in West Africa. He did not think this would bring the French round "but it will be a useful preface to our new policy and will serve for reference". Salisbury agreed, although he thought the only effect would be "to prevent them[The French] from forgetting them[British grievances]".⁸⁸ As the month progressed, and the Foreign Office made "purely verbal" changes to Chamberlain's despatch, Salisbury started to become alarmed. Edmund Monson, an old and trusted diplomat, also started to become "rather anxious about our proceedings in Western Africa." Salisbury found "it rather difficult to follow quite accurately what is taking place", because of

⁸⁶ Salisbury to Chamberlain 13/12/1896 JC11/30/60

⁸⁷ Porter A., chapter 2 gives a good overview of Chamberlain's approach and rationale in regard to vigorously publicising of not only the confrontation with France over West Africa, but as part of a general imperial policy.

⁸⁸ Chamberlain to Salisbury 11/08/1897 JC11/30/89; Salisbury to Chamberlain 13/08/1897 JC11/30/90

the overlapping departmental responsibilities for the area.⁸⁹ He attempted to enlist Selborne's aid with a direct appeal to him for a copy of the "actual orders" Maxwell had received from the Colonial office. Salisbury was motivated by the "many letters" making it "evident" that Monson was disquieted.⁹⁰ Meanwhile, Goldie had been recalled to London, during late 1897, to discuss what action should be taken to secure the Company's territories. Maxwell's orders had been to secure the Gold Coast hinterland and so a forward policy, suitable for provinces further east, needed to be formulated.

Chamberlain was on holiday at this point and so Selborne wrote to him concerning discussions. The first letter discussed how Britain could establish effective occupation in areas where the French were already present.⁹¹ Goldie successfully argued against the suggestion that British forces should attempt to starve the French out of Bussa, even pointing out that it would be the natives who went without long before the French did. Needing an alternative, Selborne "asked Goldie if he would occupy all the remaining points in Borgu with detachments in the French style." Goldie was reluctant, preferring the British posts to "be large enough to hold them against any probable attack". Selborne admitted that this should be the case for any group sent into the French hinterland, but believed it did "not matter how small the detachments are" in the British sphere: "If the French attacked one of them & defeated it, it would be just the case we want." He went on, pointing out that a "disaster to one of our posts in the French hinterland would not be the same thing as a disaster in our own hinterland, for public purposes at home." It is striking that Selborne would regard a "disaster" as an opportunity almost suggesting that such an occurrence would be desirable.⁹² How far Chamberlain agreed with this is hard to discover. A note in Selborne's letter suggests that they had discussed this before, but there are no details of the conversation. Selborne's letter certainly implied that there was an opportunity to create conditions for such

⁸⁹ Edmund John Monson, British Ambassador to France (1896-1904); Salisbury to Selborne, 26/08/1897, Selborne MSS 5/49-50

⁹⁰ Salisbury to Selborne, 1/09/1897, Selborne MSS 5/53-54

⁹¹ Selborne to Chamberlain, 8/09/1897, JC9/4/2d/3

⁹² *ibid.*,

a "disaster" to take place. The suggestion was incendiary and Chamberlain sent it back by post, because he did "not like travelling with such compromising documents."⁹³

Thankfully, cooler heads prevailed and Selborne acted upon a suggestion made by Goldie to occupy two sites in strength, securing Salisbury's consent Goldie was encouraged to act as soon as possible.⁹⁴ Salisbury also further approved a telegram issuing instructions "to occupy, at once, all the villages on their route[French communications] & especially all frontier posts" near any roads and "to refuse passage to the French." Goldie had brought news that the French were moving supplies through territory south of the 9th parallel which belonged to Britain; Salisbury was hardly demurring in the face of these aggressive actions. The Prime Minister felt that these orders could be safely sent as activity on the ground was about to give way to talk around the conference table. Selborne's letter closed with the news that "Hanotaux had written ... asking to renew the Niger Negotiations" and Salisbury's opinion was "that we ought to go into the conference again".⁹⁵ What is striking is that clearly Selborne was at least as 'gung-ho' about the French as Chamberlain was, and is reputed to have been, but also Salisbury appeared to have been quite prepared to acquiesce in the brinkmanship, even if he believed it would naturally diminish once the Niger Commission was sitting again.

Chamberlain's reply started by reminding Selborne that the whole issue was highly sensitive and "if badly treated" could "involve a European War". His subordinate was reminded that "the Foreign Office, which knows better than we do the nature of our relations with France", and "the Prime Minister who is responsible in a peculiar sense for all questions of peace and war" had the ultimate responsibility to decide what to do and thus Chamberlain would "in any case yield to Lord Salisbury's wishes". This news could not have reached Salisbury or else he would have realised that his Colonial Secretary could have been relied upon to toe the line. However, Chamberlain was not

⁹³ Chamberlain to Selborne, 12/09/1897, Selborne MSS 8/176

⁹⁴ Selborne to Chamberlain, 8/09/1897, JC9/4/2d/3

⁹⁵ *ibid.*,

prepared for Salisbury to have it all his own way without recording his reasons for differing from him:

You[Selborne] do not give me any definite reason for the suggested change of policy[Reopening of the Niger Commission], unless it be Monson's fears that the French will be nasty and may even be prepared for extremities. But if this is the case are we, once more, to give way to them and to sacrifice the future of our West African possessions? For myself I could not do this and, at all risks, I would insist on our rights and not allow this country to be bullied and defrauded. ... My own idea was that the only hope of a peaceful arrangement was to convince the French, from the first, that they had tried our patience too far & that they must give way or take the consequences.⁹⁶

This was the crux of Chamberlain's position. He was not prepared to see French brinkmanship prosper and he feared that if British policy was going to be influenced by opinions such as Monson's then the ultimate outcome would be what Salisbury called compromise and Chamberlain surrender. Chamberlain believed that Britain should not offer any further concessions and therefore the conference would be deadlocked again from the moment it reopened. He considered "the aggressions of the French" to be "flagrant & almost dishonourable" but that his position would be "completely changed if I thought that our case would break down under further examinations". The strength of Britain's legal claims was important to the Colonial Secretary. Relying on Monson to defend British claims in West Africa seemed dangerous, Chamberlain made further suggestions: firstly, that if the British position was strong enough they should offer to go to arbitration and, secondly, if that was refused maybe a "Congress ... of Plenipotentiaries" would "be in a position to arrange a compromise, if one was possible." Chamberlain then offered himself as a potential appointee to this "Congress". His intention was obvious: he wanted to avoid relying on the 'old hands'. He believed it would require a properly empowered and energetic delegate to successfully combine the twin tasks of offering a compromise solution while convincing the French that Britain was serious about defending her claims. However, the Colonial Secretary was not prepared to attempt to force his opinion on the Prime Minister or the

⁹⁶ Chamberlain to Selborne, 12/09/1897, JC9/4/2d/4

Cabinet and closed his letter confirming that he was "perfectly content to accept & support any decisions at which he[Salisbury] may arrive."⁹⁷

Salisbury laid out his case to Chamberlain and attempted to explain why the Colonial Secretary's proposals were not practicable. With regard to Chamberlain negotiating directly with Hanotaux, the Foreign Secretary pointed out that as a Secretary of State Chamberlain would need to be invested "with the office of Special Ambassador" and as this "would seem so much in excess of the visible requirements of the case, that it would create a veritable panic."⁹⁸ Chamberlain had his previous mission to "Washington about the Fisheries" in mind when he made the suggestion.⁹⁹ He accepted Salisbury's statement as "conclusive against my personal representation in the Commission" but while he, again, agreed to be led by Salisbury it was unlikely he was convinced that precedent and protocol were more important than obtaining a satisfactory outcome. Salisbury explained that Britain had "claimed a good deal more than we can establish a sound claim for, in order to furnish material for an exchange which will enable the French to recede from untenable positions without discredit."¹⁰⁰ Rather than accepting the lesson in appeasement Chamberlain promised Salisbury only a reprieve until he had "time to master all the details of the question and the evidence on which our claim is supported."¹⁰¹

Chamberlain was certainly as relieved as he must have been disappointed as the Prime Minister closed his letter encouraging his hasty subordinate to "lose no time in collecting Hausas and gunboats: there is still much that has not been contested yet and which there is time to save." Salisbury probably thought that this exhortation would result in little controversy given that "Hanotaux [did] not contemplate commencing negotiations for another ten days."¹⁰² If the Prime Minister hoped that this would count as a warning not to continue to press forward after negotiations had opened he was sorely mistaken. What this interchange of letters does reveal is that

⁹⁷ *ibid.*,

⁹⁸ Salisbury to Chamberlain, 17/09/1897, JC11/30/93

⁹⁹ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 19/09/1897, JC11/30/94

¹⁰⁰ Salisbury to Chamberlain, 17/09/1897, JC11/30/93

¹⁰¹ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 19/09/1897, JC11/30/94

¹⁰² Salisbury to Chamberlain, 17/09/1897, JC11/30/93

Chamberlain was not alone in his desire to see a 'forward' policy. Certainly Selborne agreed. In fact the comment that he looked on a potential 'disaster' with some anticipation was more aggressive than anything Chamberlain had yet written. Salisbury was also much more encouraging than his reputation would suggest. Nevertheless, Chamberlain was easily capable of acting upon the Prime Minister's urgings while ignoring his subtler suggestions of caution. Having worked with Chamberlain, officially or otherwise, for the best part of nine years Salisbury should have been a better judge of the man.

Chamberlain certainly understood Salisbury's implied suggestions. He regretted that the colonial office would not now "be allowed to give instructions to McCullam to repel any further aggressions of the kind recently reported by France".¹⁰³ He also believed he detected a double standard by which France and Britain were playing this West African game of chess. The Foreign Office had ordered Maxwell to withdraw his forces from a village within the agreed borders of France's Ivory Coast colony. Chamberlain accepted this as being "right as far as it goes" but he was confused as to why the Foreign Office had not answered the French complaint about the occupation by reminding them of the British complaint made against their occupation elsewhere. Both France and Britain had justified these occupations, of territory recognised as belonging to the other, by claiming they were necessary for self-defence against native forces. The Colonial Secretary insisted that "it is not too late to do this now" and he wanted to "press the F.O. to make remonstrations in this sense."¹⁰⁴ If such misbehaviour were "good for the French", asked Chamberlain, "why sh[oul]d. it be bad for us?"¹⁰⁵ However, Chamberlain had little freedom of action. Until the Colonial Secretary returned from his holiday and examined British claims himself, he could not challenge the Foreign Office's handling of the matter.¹⁰⁶ Even Monson- while urging

¹⁰³ Henry Edward McCallum, Governor of Lagos, (1897-1899)

¹⁰⁴ Chamberlain to Selborne, 19/09/1897, JC9/4/2d/7

¹⁰⁵ Chamberlain to Selborne, 12/09/1897, Selborne MSS 8/176

¹⁰⁶ Chamberlain to Selborne, 19/09/1897, JC9/4/2d/7 has a list of what actually amounts to French objections to Britain's claims. Chamberlain wrote them out to

appeasement from Paris- had written to suggest that the British should "not relax in the slightest degree the preparations for vindicating our rights, I think if the French see that we mean business, they will be content to come to terms".¹⁰⁷ Chamberlain would later lament that Monson's backbone vanished as quickly as it had appeared.

A few days later, Selborne sent Chamberlain news which filled the Under Secretary "with anxiety if not dismay". He was in the process of gaining Foreign Office approval for a telegram ordering McCallum to use force if necessary to oust French posts from territory south of the 9th Parallel in Lagos.¹⁰⁸ He had also gained Salisbury's assent to complain about the French occupation of British territory in the same despatch, assuring Hanotaux that British forces would be vacating theirs. The same letter contained details of the progress being made in raising the WAFF, but while assured that "South of the 9th Parallel we are ... in a position to repel all trespasses" the situation to the north had worsened: "M. Ballot, the Governor of Dahomey, has himself started ... with 500 men & many officers- The Niger Conference will be meeting very shortly & we shall be confronted with this position. The French claim to have occupied the whole of our hinterland". Also included was the Colonial Office response to Salisbury's concerns over the validity of British claims.¹⁰⁹ Chamberlain appeared to have been rather buoyed up by the letter. He felt able to extend his holiday knowing that Selborne was "doing everything that is necessary & I rest quite easy on this case." The answers to Salisbury's concerns seemed "to be good answers ... quite good enough" to justify Britain "in taking a very strong line with the French." He went on to explain how the French "must not be allowed to take advantage of their own misdoings. We may -for the sake of peace - agree to a division but we

explain to his sub-ordinate why he had to consent to Salisbury's desire to negotiate and also to try to find answers to them.

¹⁰⁷ Monson to Sanderson, 19/09/1897, JC9/4/2c/1

¹⁰⁸ McCallum was sent "authority to prevent violation of British territory by resort to force if it should be absolutely necessary. You must, however, use great caution, and you should be clear that the case is a perfectly clear one and that the force which you have is distinctly superior." Chamberlain to McCallum, 28/09/1897, CO879/50 printed in Newbury, (ed.) *British Policy* No.52 p.227

¹⁰⁹ Selborne to Chamberlain, 27/09/1897, JC9/4/2d/9

ought - even at the cost of war- to keep our adequate hinterland for the Gold Coast, Lagos & the Niger Territories." The rest of the letter was full of advice for the upcoming Commission. Chamberlain expected to have to compromise and was even willing to "sacrifice the Gambia" to get what he wanted further east. Obviously more hopeful for the outcome than he was in his previous letter, Chamberlain pondered whom Salisbury would appoint to the Commission, suggesting that "we want very nice mannered but very determined men - the iron hand in the velvet glove".¹¹⁰

Chamberlain continued to be troubled by the double standard he believed was being applied by unilateral withdrawal from areas previously agreed as belonging to France. Salisbury once again attempted to educate the Colonial Secretary: "The fact the French are breaking international law elsewhere, will not excuse us here if we are breaking it also. The whole question must be looked at from a Bluebook point of view." Both men were thinking about the effect publication would have: Chamberlain, who was himself outraged by the French, expected that publication would vindicate the British occupation, because he anticipated public anger would equal his own. Salisbury anticipated the moral objections of Conservatives and Gladstonian Liberals. The Prime Minister added more legal arguments and also pointed out the area in question was only ten miles from the border and therefore "any security our encampment [...] would confer upon the colony of the Gold Coast, would be equally conferred by an encampment ten miles to the east".¹¹¹ This effectively ended Chamberlain's bluff. He had justified the occupation on the grounds that it was necessary for security against native forces and so it was vulnerable to Salisbury's suggestion that the safety of the Gold Coast could be equally assured by an encampment on the border. Chamberlain actually wanted to retain the position as a bargaining counter in the forthcoming negotiations. He would continue to argue that posts were needed in the areas already considered French, if some sort of fair agreement was to be arrived at. He ordered Maxwell to withdraw, claiming he felt "the force of your[Salisbury's]

¹¹⁰ Chamberlain to Selborne, 29/09/1897, JC9/4/2d/10

¹¹¹ Salisbury to Chamberlain, 23/10/1897, JC11/30/95

arguments, but I should have thought that we might be justified by the actions of the French which in four separate cases is a breach of agreement with us." It was not the case, as Chamberlain felt it to be, that Salisbury was not allowing the British "to recriminate in any way" but only that they stay within the bounds of international law while doing so. Chamberlain was still content to follow Salisbury's advice just so long as he had subjected the Foreign Secretary to his frustrations and protests.¹¹²

Chamberlain finally ordered Maxwell to retire to the border on 26th October 1897 noting only that this was "found necessary for political reasons."¹¹³

As the Niger Commission reopened Chamberlain complained that "the commissioners are easily discouraged and are inclined at every check to fall back on their original inclination for what they call compromise - which means in every case giving up something which we believe to be ours and getting nothing in return". Colonel Everett had compiled a memorandum detailing many problems with the treaties, Chamberlain had hoped that they would still confer some kind of right, however doubtful, regardless.¹¹⁴

It was the French insistence that the treaties, signed with the natives, were to be ignored and the British commissioners' willingness to accept that which irritated him. He was quite prepared for a creative geographical settlement but he was not prepared simply to let these treaties be cast aside without getting something in return. He also pointed out that the "essential points are not touched" by the controversy over treaties. He was referring to the need for control over Sokoto and both banks of the Niger as far up the river as possible. With this in mind Britain could "allow all beyond these points to be matter of bargains- i.e. to be given away if we get something positive in return for them."¹¹⁵ Chamberlain did not believe that the French should receive anything in respect of Sokoto or the banks of the Niger at least to the Bussa Rapids. Other claims could be bartered

¹¹² Chamberlain to Salisbury, 25/10/1897, JC11/30/96

¹¹³ Chamberlain to Maxwell, 26/10/1897, JC9/4/2d/12

¹¹⁴ William Everett British Army officer. Worked on commissions on West African frontiers (1895-1900); Memo., Everett W., 30/10/1897, CO879/50 printed in Newbury, (ed.) *British Policy* no. 53 p.227

¹¹⁵ Memo., Chamberlain, 16/11/1897, JC9/4/3/1

against other areas but he would not give the French anything for areas he considered to be solidly British already.

Concerned that a capitulation might take place in Paris, Chamberlain asked Salisbury "to delay the negotiations for a few days until we can exhaust the subject of Col. Everett's memorandum. It is no use negotiating with Commissioners who are only too ready to give up our case on the slightest pretext." Again he reiterated that apart from the "essential parts", which he believed Everett's memorandum had not damaged, he was "quite willing to barter away" the rest, "if we can get anything for them. Our claims to them are at least as good as the French and ought to be worth something." He also suggested changing the nature of the negotiations and asked after "the possibility of a general settlement". He noted that in return for that he was prepared "for some extensive sacrifices". He was prepared to look on the questions already under discussion from a different point of view if it were part of a proposal wider than just West Africa.¹¹⁶ Whatever historians or contemporaries thought of West Africa, or Chamberlain's estimation of its worth, he was quite prepared to make concessions there, but only as part of what he considered a fair exchange.

Salisbury's reply could only have reassured Chamberlain: "I deplore the turn Monson's views have taken. There is something fatal in the air of Paris. Everett goes in the same direction; and Phipps in the former Commission was just as bad." The Prime Minister had several suggestions as to how to avoid Monson's anticipated breakdown of negotiations and subsequent French request for arbitration. He would offer "arbitration on special questions of title... because I feel no doubt that we should win on those points." While he did not expect the French to agree, "discussion would take time, and would leave us a good record in the Blue Book if negotiations broke off." This delay was necessary because once negotiations broke off the French would "occupy Borgu: and you [Chamberlain] are not yet in a position to occupy anything in return." Salisbury appears to be in full support of Chamberlain's policy of counter-occupations, but within practical limits. On Chamberlain's suggestion about

¹¹⁶ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 17/11/1897, JC11/30/98

a general settlement Salisbury had a warning: "we must wait till such an offer comes from them. Our proposals are taken as admission from which our adversaries start afresh."¹¹⁷ The next day Salisbury continued to distract Chamberlain by considering "the bargain that we would be prepared to accept", should the French offer a general settlement. As regards the Niger he again advised delay in the negotiations.¹¹⁸ Chamberlain gave his assent "to the offer of a restricted arbitration" and also approved of delaying any formal reply until he had more detail on both Everett's and Lugard's memoranda as well as the Niger Company's comments upon them.¹¹⁹

Monson decided to write again to Chamberlain in an attempt to move him towards a more conciliatory policy. His position was clear: to settle before the French 'effectively occupy' other areas "where we cannot possibly permit them to show themselves".¹²⁰ Chamberlain was hardly moved, but then he fully intended to take 'effective occupation' to the French just as soon as the WAFF was ready to move. He believed that the French and Germans had only been able to settle their differences because the Germans "had taken places in the French hinterland which they were able to barter."¹²¹ Britain should therefore be prepared to do the same the moment negotiations failed. Action was the way to escape the impasse; Britain should not have to give up her rights, as Chamberlain interpreted them, because she respected international law and the French did not.

At this point Salisbury's approach diverged from Chamberlain's. He could not see how the French could be convinced to evacuate their posts without negotiations or probably compromise. He expected that if France had withdrawn it would have been "a grave humiliation, and would probably cost the Ministers their offices."¹²² He forwarded these arguments to convince Chamberlain of the necessity of re-opening negotiations, but if the French could only be moved by talk then that talk must contain something they

¹¹⁷ Salisbury to Chamberlain, 17/11/1897, JC11/30/99

¹¹⁸ Salisbury to Chamberlain, 17/11/1897, JC11/30/100

¹¹⁹ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 18/11/1897, JC11/30/102

¹²⁰ Monson to Chamberlain, 23/11/1897, JC9/4/2c/3

¹²¹ Memo., Chamberlain, 30/11/1897, JC9/4/3/2

¹²² Salisbury to Chamberlain, 17/09/1897, JC11/30/93

wanted. It was apparent that Salisbury had anticipated giving the French more than Chamberlain had. In early December 1897 he was considered offering the French a strip of land bordering on the Niger.¹²³ Chamberlain was disappointed: "Lord Salisbury's memo ... is most discouraging. I thought he was entirely with us". The Colonial Secretary went on: "I am more than sorry to differ from him, but I cannot stand it. I would rather give up office than allow French methods to triumph in this way. We shall pay for it sooner or later and I cannot be party to such a surrender."¹²⁴ It seems unlikely that Chamberlain's threat to resign was sincere. The area in question was not important enough, even to Chamberlain, and defending a resignation over it would have been difficult. But he believed that such a precedent would have serious consequences elsewhere in the world and in the future. His view was not unique; certainly Selborne agreed with him, against his father in law, and later even Francis Bertie in the Foreign Office would agree that Britain could not afford "to lose face with the natives generally; to give to France and other Powers the impression that we can always be squeezed."¹²⁵

Chamberlain wrote another lengthy memorandum. He explained what he considered to be the stumbling block of the negotiations:

that the French appear to contemplate as a compromise the exchange of incommensurable claims. In any transaction the sacrifices made by both sides should be similar in character. Doubtful claims may be exchanged for doubtful claims, and rights for rights; but the French only propose to abandon doubtful claims in exchange for the surrender by us of undoubted rights. In fact- as I have said before- they assume the position of a man who after stealing my purse should then ask for my watch in consideration of a promise that he will not strip me of my clothes.

He described what he considered 'doubtful' and 'undoubted' claims, eventually offering to give all the 'doubtful' ones over to the French in return for recognition of Britain's 'undoubted' positions. Given his feelings on the behaviour of the French this was indeed a concession on

¹²³ Obichere, p.229

¹²⁴ Chamberlain to Selborne, 1/12/1897, Selborne MSS 8/182

¹²⁵ Francis Leveson Bertie, Assistant Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office; Min., Bertie, 22/05/1898, quoted in Uzoigwe, pp.133-4

Chamberlain's part. This offer was only to be made once. If the French refused then Britain should insist on arbitration of the selected points about which Chamberlain and Salisbury were both confident. After that Chamberlain would no longer be prepared to offer anything without a corresponding concession of French territory.¹²⁶ Selborne wrote to lend his support to his chief.¹²⁷ By December 1897 Chamberlain rephrased his proposals in a memorandum detailing what the Colonial Office considered to be fair recompense for each of the contested areas.¹²⁸ However, Salisbury was not yet ready for anything in the way of an ultimatum. He thought it:

so much to the good, so far as West Africa, at least, is concerned. But I am sceptical- and inclined to think that the offer will not succeed: ... it would be a nuisance to have committed ourselves by language from which we cannot recede, to refuse altogether the only thing about which the French really care[an enclave on the navigable Niger]. I will send the despatch for your concurrence.¹²⁹

The Prime Minister was certainly not prepared to abandon the idea of some form of enclave, one of the concessions Chamberlain was most reluctant to make.

Meanwhile, the work of the Commission went on. By mid January, however, Monson felt that the commissioners had "carried out as well as could be expected the wishes of the Colonial Office in regard to spinning out the negotiations" and that they "must either let the negotiations break down altogether or be empowered to offer conditionally some such scheme of general arrangement as may make the French Government agree to the limited access [to the Niger] which is I understand, all that the Cabinet is likely to accord." Again Monson warned that more delay would put Britain at a disadvantage: the French would start penetrating south of the Say-Barruwa line as they had "no hesitation in working in laterally as they insist that they have the right to do." Writing to Salisbury, Monson attempted to circumvent what he had accurately identified as the source of Chamberlain's intransigence, commenting "that our contention with the French is based far

¹²⁶ Memo., Chamberlain, 1/12/1897, JC9/4/3/3

¹²⁷ Selborne to Chamberlain, 2/12/1897, JC9/4/2d/13

¹²⁸ Memo., Chamberlain, 25/12/1897, JC9/4/3/4

¹²⁹ Salisbury to Chamberlain, 30/12/1897, JC11/30/111

more on the indication of principle and on the enforcement of right ... than on interested motives." He was appealing to Salisbury's sense of perspective: British interests in West Africa were not sufficient to justify the danger even if the British were in the right. In the same letter Monson promised a memorandum detailing a "scheme which in our humble opinion might be accepted by them[HMG] as the basis of an agreement which the French might also on their side find acceptable." Interestingly, marginalia on the copy of this letter in Chamberlain's papers reads "No our interests as well as our honour compel us to resist the French encroachments".¹³⁰

Many historians have suggested that Chamberlain wished to use the Empire to find a broad base of electoral support; he is accused of having attempted to attach British sentiment to certain places, invoking national honour and public opinion as reasons for his intransigence. Few consider the simpler explanation that Chamberlain actually believed in concepts such as national honour. Most of his records reveal a deep conviction that the British public should have been educated as to the importance of Empire. A better informed electorate would act as a remedy for the malaise in British imperial policy caused by the 'Little Englanders'. This would also ensure that the Empire remained as important as Chamberlain believed it to be. In other words, Chamberlain was attempting to develop a broad base of electoral support but this effort was for the Empire itself rather than simply his own electoral fortunes. If enthusiasm for Empire was more widespread then he could rest assured that even his political opponents could not ignore it. Regarding charges that Chamberlain over-estimated the importance of British interests in West Africa, he felt that any settlement needed to demonstrate that Britain was prepared to defend her claims as a warning to any who hoped to squeeze the Empire in some other part of the world. Putting off new encroachments, in his view, was certainly in Britain's wider interest.

When Monson's memorandum did arrive, Chamberlain described it as "an admirable document if it were written by French Officials as a brief for a French Minister who wished to justify the extraordinary demand that has

¹³⁰ Monson to Salisbury, 14/01/1898, JC9/4/2c

lately been put forward- I can hardly believe seriously- by the French Commissioner." Chamberlain went on to complain about the "implied menace of war" that he felt was present throughout the memorandum. He pointed out that if the risk of war was a good reason for giving ground in West Africa then it would also apply to other disputes such as Egypt: "If we have rights and interests in any quarter of the world and are unprepared to defend them, it is certain that foreign nations will know how to take advantage of our weakness." Chamberlain never abandoned what he considered to be of the utmost importance, that the settlement could not be allowed to demonstrate that Britain was prepared to give up certain places to avoid war.¹³¹ It is not that Chamberlain lacked understanding of the relative importance of different places or that he wilfully chose to ignore them. His concern was not that Salisbury might consider giving ground in West Africa and not Egypt, but that by giving too much ground in West Africa, or at least not mounting a serious defence of British claims, the French, and others, would be encouraged in their attempts in other parts of the world, including Egypt.

By February 1898 Goldie had ordered his forces "to compel the French' to 'recross the Niger'."¹³² Chamberlain informed Salisbury reminding him that "Goldie's action is in accordance with the decision of the Cabinet and should I think be approved." The Prime Minister's reply was a single sentence which agreed with Goldie's actions.¹³³ This short interchange demonstrates that Chamberlain had become distrustful of Salisbury and so reminded him that his 'forward' policy had Cabinet approval; their relations had started to become seriously strained. The Colonial Office then prepared "to get rid of the French where they are established in close proximity ... by starving them out. ... If we cannot manage the matter this way we should expel them ... with an overwhelming force", should negotiations fail. This was not to be quite as aggressive as it sounded: "orders not to provoke or to

¹³¹ Memo., Chamberlain, 23/01/1898 JC9/4/3/5

¹³² Goldie to Selborne, 21/02/1898, JC9/4/2a/10

¹³³ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 21/02/1898, JC11/30/115; Salisbury to Chamberlain, 21/02/1898, JC11/30/114

commence an attack" were to be maintained. Selborne was clear: "We must make the French the aggressors & let them be the first to fire."¹³⁴

Monson decided that his arguments would be better received if his masters back home knew exactly why the 'air in Paris was fatal'. In late February he sent back a memorandum describing the end of Zola's case and the final closing of the Dreyfus affair. The result was that "Europe" had "judged France and she stands condemned by the unanimous public opinion of every civilized people." Therefore "it might be a relief to France to pick a quarrel with the one Great European Power who cannot invade her." He finished by suggesting that this situation could not be "overlooked by those ... engaged in conducting negotiations with France upon a subject ... which requires no little patience, tact and foresight."¹³⁵ This warning had little effect on Chamberlain. He continued his department's preparations and in a memorandum written just two days after Monson's fears had been shared with the Cabinet, he continued to insist that concession must come with a *quid pro quo*.¹³⁶

While his department was preparing to plans to starve out the French Chamberlain presented the Cabinet with a memorandum detailing his response to the latest French counter proposals. He again emphasised that his last suggestion represented an "irreducible *minimum*" to be retained in "regard to British interests and British Rights." These included an enclave "so as to offer every possible trading facility to the French in the portion of the Niger." There were restrictions on the use of the enclave which would still be subject to British jurisdiction. At this point there was growing disquiet in the Cabinet over Salisbury's handling of foreign policy, the Prime Minister was about to depart the country as he was ill, and Chamberlain and Balfour would embark on clandestine alliance talks with Germany.¹³⁷

The French response was to ask for a second enclave on the Niger delta and for a territorial concession without agreeing to Chamberlain's stipulated *quid*

¹³⁴ Selborne to Chamberlain, 28/02/1898, JC9/4/2d/15

¹³⁵ Monson to Salisbury, 26/02/1898, printed for Cabinet 2/03/1898 JC9/4/3/8

¹³⁶ Memo., Chamberlain, 4/03/1898, JC9/4/2d/19

¹³⁷ See Chapter four.

pro quo which focused on local tariff arrangements. Chamberlain was frustrated that every proposal made to the French was immediately used as a basis upon which further demands were made: "we are really in a worse position than we were when we began since we have been induced to show our whole hand, and to put in evidence all the concessions we were able and willing to make." He was only prepared to "sweeten the pill" by offering a province "which belong[ed] to Sokoto, but [was] north of the Say- Barruwa line".¹³⁸ Chamberlain did not advise breaking-off of negotiations even though his WAFF was nearing readiness. However, he had stuck to what he considered the most important parts of the settlement. It seems unlikely that Chamberlain hoped for hostilities, even if his sub-ordinate appeared to. By this stage Salisbury was struggling to understand Chamberlain's motives, writing to Balfour, that "the one object of the German Emperor since he has been on the throne has been to get us into a war with France. I never can make up my mind whether this is part of Chamberlain's objects or not. The indications differ from month to month".¹³⁹ The reasons the indications differed was because Chamberlain was occasionally prone to allowing his temper to get the better of him. In some moments he appeared willing to risk war. Hargreaves uses an entry in Lugard's diary to suggest that Chamberlain sometimes lost sight of the need for a negotiated settlement.

JC scouted the idea vehemently and angrily, said he would *never* be party to giving up our country in order to get what is already ours ... we could always have more money behind us than the French and hence spend double and have a larger force till they gave in- the Birmingham 'Screw Policy'!

Chamberlain was certainly bellicose, but he was trying to send a message to Britain's rivals that she was prepared to defend her claims. In this angry tirade, Chamberlain also discussed having a larger force and effectively coercing the French through intimidation. There is no indication that he

¹³⁸ Memo., Chamberlain, 19/03/1898, JC9/4/3/9

¹³⁹ Arthur James Balfour, Leader of the House of Commons (1891-1892; 1895-1902); Prime Minister (1902-1905); Salisbury to Balfour, 9/04/1898, Balfour MSS, Add.MS49691

looked toward a shooting war with them.¹⁴⁰ He was aware that "nothing in these territories is worth a war".¹⁴¹

A firmer policy on the ground began to pay dividends. One French post had been abandoned because the natives, protected by Lugard's men, refused to co-operate any longer. Finally faced with British action, the negotiations in Paris started to move forward.¹⁴² Pretty soon, a settlement, mostly along the lines suggested by Chamberlain back in December 1897, seemed imminent.¹⁴³ However, at the last moment Monson reported that the "fate of the negotiations hangs on Ilo." While the Commission was concluding their final discussions, concerning the regulations for navigation on the Niger, Hanotaux had added a demand that Ilo, a small town, remain in French hands, as a French officer had died there.¹⁴⁴ Hanotaux "had become decided about its retention- if he did not support this feeling the convention would be rejected by the Chambers."¹⁴⁵ Salisbury attempted to head off any anticipated objection from Chamberlain. He pointed out that in return for Ilo the French would give Britain "Bona, and the Niger arrangements in essentials according to our latest demands." This was a rather clever manoeuvre. By connecting Ilo with Bona Salisbury gave Chamberlain to consider the deal an exchange. The Prime Minister went on to suggest that the British claim to Ilo was slim and that it was only ten miles from where the line would have passed. Worried about Chamberlain's concern over trade routes, Salisbury pointed out that the trade route could be moved, especially as "a railway between Gando and Jebba cannot lie in the very far future after the country is settled." Salisbury was trying to appeal to Chamberlain's sensibilities and encouraging hope of colonial development. He closed with a warning that Lugard did not expect to be able to meet the French at Ilo and that if he attempted to it could provoke a war with local

¹⁴⁰ Lugard's Diary 13 March 1898 recalling an interview with Chamberlain held on 12/11/1897. quoted in Hargreaves, *West Africa*, II, pp.229-30

¹⁴¹ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 2/06/1898, JC11/30/123

¹⁴² Monson to Salisbury, 1/05/1898, *BD*, I, No.177, pp.152-3

¹⁴³ Memo., Chamberlain, 1/12/1897, JC9/4/3/3

¹⁴⁴ Monson to FO, 1/06/1898, JC9/4/2c/6; Monson to Salisbury, 3/06/1898, *BD*, I, No.180 p.155; Min., Sanderson (Copy), 3/03/1898 JC9/4/2a/11

¹⁴⁵ Monson to FO, 1/06/1898, JC9/4/2c/7

natives. Salisbury felt that the cost of such a war would "certainly buy out the value of Ilo a hundred times over."¹⁴⁶

Chamberlain's response was extensive and along expected lines. Firstly, either the French felt they had a good deal or they did not; Ilo could not add much value to it, "especially as we are ready to be conciliatory about Bona." He listed out all the concessions he felt had been made to the French and wondered why "not one word was said about Ilo which is now represented as the critical point in the negotiations." The Colonial Secretary also put forward an argument that if the French did insist upon Ilo it could only be "due to some information received as to the value of the position- either for trade, or as a good starting point for intrigues with the Chiefs or Sultans of Gando and Sokoto. Lugard's telegram points to something of this kind". Chamberlain had become so cynical about French policy that he viewed this last twist as an attempt to secure an area from which further mischief could be carried out. One advantage of the agreement was that it would leave the British a free hand in Sokoto but the proposed cession of Ilo represented a potential threat to that freedom of action. Chamberlain went on to suggest that the "so-called Empire of Sokoto is in a state of dissolution like that of the Great Mogul in the time of Clive. I imagine that in accordance with that precedent a small European force ... will be able to establish our authority". Chamberlain's concern was always with the distant future: whatever the result of the negotiations,

the French by acting in an unfriendly way- by risking a war which they rightly believe we are anxious to avoid- and by pursuing to the end a policy of bluff - will have secured at our expense an immense tract of African country which geographically belongs to our hinterland & which we first discovered by our explorers and which we alone can ever make valuable.

Aware that the territories' value lay in their future development, Chamberlain felt that "fifty years hence our descendants will talk of our pusillanimous surrender." He concluded by commenting that he did not think it a great loss if the negotiations fell through. This did not mean he

¹⁴⁶ Salisbury to Chamberlain, 2/06/1898, JC11/30/122

anticipated, or looked toward, hostilities but only an opportunity to "follow the example of the French, and occupy places in their Hinterland which would give us something to exchange when they are tired of the expense and danger of the situation."¹⁴⁷ Chamberlain simply did not share Monson's and probably even Salisbury's fears that France was capable of sudden assault precipitated by domestic political problems and he certainly did not feel that British imperial policy should be concerned by another power's domestic difficulties.¹⁴⁸

Much has been made of Chamberlain's comparison between nineteenth century Sokoto and eighteenth century Bengal. Hargreaves considers that "Salisbury delicately corrected Chamberlain's perspective."¹⁴⁹

It will be a pity if we break off negotiations, for it will add to our difficulties in the Nile Valley. ... If we are to send British or Indian troops in the hope of fighting another Plassey with Lugard as our Clive and Sokoto as our Bengal, the prospect becomes very much more serious. Our Clive will be in no danger of being astonished at his own moderation. There is no loot to get except in Goldie's dreams.¹⁵⁰

Charmley describes Chamberlain's position as "a ludicrous inversion of priorities" and Grenville drew attention to Salisbury's lamentation "that a 'malarious African desert' was not worth a war." The existing historiography agrees with Salisbury's view of what was at stake.¹⁵¹ However, the comparison between West Africa and eighteenth century India was not Chamberlain's invention. In September 1897, Monson had commented that "it looks like the struggles of the last century in India transferred to Africa, with all the chances in favour of the French."¹⁵² Even earlier articles in *The Times* had been drawing comparisons between Goldie's wars against the Natives and Clive's with Bengal.¹⁵³ Chamberlain was merely using the

¹⁴⁷ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 2/06/1898, JC11/30/123

¹⁴⁸ When news of the assassination of a French officer at Ilo came in, Chamberlain commented negatively on the suggestion that the death "of a Fch officer should be important to an English Co. and apparently semi-official people." Minute on Assassination at Ilo, 3/03/1898, JC9/4/2a/11

¹⁴⁹ Hargreaves, *West Africa*, II, p.231

¹⁵⁰ Salisbury to Chamberlain, 3/06/1898, JC5/67/97

¹⁵¹ Charmley, pp.247-48; Grenville, pp.123-4.

¹⁵² Monson to Sanderson, 19/09/1897, JC9/4/2c/1

¹⁵³ See 4/03/1897, 30/03/1897 & 19/04/1897, *The Times*

language of an existing discourse. No analogy is perfect and while the military aspects of this one were analogous (the Europeans were massively outnumbered), the economic one was not. However this discourse, even in *The Times*, was merely romanticising the military engagements in Africa. Only Garvin offered any defence of this comparison, in which he implied that Chamberlain was referring only to the military aspect.¹⁵⁴ As we have seen, the Colonial Secretary was aware that these provinces were "undeveloped estates" and that they needed to be made valuable.¹⁵⁵ Allowing for this, it seems unlikely that Chamberlain expected any more 'loot' to be found than Salisbury did. Furthermore, only Garvin, Chamberlain's great apologist, goes on to quote Chamberlain's reply in which he sticks to his desire to retain Ilo, again repeats his reluctance to give up either Bona or Ilo but acquiesces in giving up Bona, with which the French "ought to be content. It is more than I am - except that I am glad to meet your wishes."¹⁵⁶ When this is recalled along with Chamberlain's earlier comments to Selborne, detailing how matters of war needed to reside with the Foreign Office and the Prime Minister, it appears that an actual breach in the Cabinet was unlikely. Chamberlain often appeared to have been "perfectly content to accept & support any decisions" Salisbury arrived at, once the Prime Minister had seen the "full position of my views".¹⁵⁷ Also given that he gradually acquiesced in meeting certain French demands, it appears that he was prepared to let certain positions go once an attempt had been made to secure them via negotiation.

Presented here is evidence to suggest that Chamberlain's reputation as a warmonger is exaggerated. At several points Selborne appeared to be much more excited about the possibility of hostilities than his ministerial chief. Chamberlain was not alone in his opinions regarding national honour and irritation with French methods. Neither was he alone in having concerns for how any settlement might be regarded as a precedent for the future. In fact, concern for how decisions made then might have affected

¹⁵⁴ Garvin, III, pp.220-21

¹⁵⁵ Hansard, 22/08/1895, *PD HC*, 4th series, Vol.36, cc.640-5 quote on C.641; Chamberlain to Salisbury, 2/06/1898, JC11/30/123

¹⁵⁶ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 3/06/1898, JC5/67/98

¹⁵⁷ Chamberlain to Selborne, 12/09/1897, Selborne MSS 8/176

the future of the British Empire underpinned his entire position. Often he reflected on how Britain would stand "fifty years hence" rather than simply after the signing of the convention.¹⁵⁸ West Africa would be more valuable in the future, and so must be reserved to the British, and if "the tendency of the time" was "to throw all power into the hands of great Empires" then a "non-progressive" policy could leave any power in a "secondary and subordinate place."¹⁵⁹ Hargreaves suggested that Salisbury "knew that the disputed areas in Borgu would never be of intrinsic economic value" and, indeed, Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone never did become the kind of market Chamberlain hoped.¹⁶⁰ Chamberlain's hopes for the future were dependent on how well Britain could retain and then develop her 'estates'. Chamberlain was more successful at the former than the latter, but at the time he was promoting his aggressive policy in West Africa he could not have known that the necessary development would never materialise. Similarly it is not possible to predict what might have happened had Salisbury and Monson been permitted to get on with appeasing the French in West Africa. The Fashoda crisis erupted into Anglo-French relations just a few months later and, the similarities are striking: small French posts placed in territory which the British claimed. The French were not prepared to go to war at that time either, despite this being their last real opportunity to lever the British out of Egypt. It is impossible to say whether they would have been more or less intransigent had they got their way in West Africa. However, if they were not prepared to fight for the Nile valley, then it is difficult to imagine that they would have fought for the less important Niger.

¹⁵⁸ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 2/06/1898, JC11/30/123

¹⁵⁹ Chamberlain' Speech to the Royal Colonial Institute, 31/03/1897, reported in *The Times*, 1/04/1897

¹⁶⁰ Hargreaves, *West Africa*, II, p.230

2: The Storm Clouds. Chamberlain and the Climate of Foreign Affairs.

Chamberlain's policies in Africa were anything but diplomatic. There he met perceived French aggression in kind. The object was not a war over trifles but the defence of an area Chamberlain believed could become valuable and which he believed belonged Britain. However, even before the closing of the West African fiasco, Chamberlain had again launched himself into the midst of great power diplomacy. His failures to form an alliance with Germany are well known and almost every historian of the period has had their say on them; however these histories all have their distinct focuses. Kennedy on the relationship with Germany, Nish with the Japanese perspective, Otte on the Chinese context, Garvin on Chamberlain as the foresighted prophet, Crosby as the manoeuvre of a power addicted mind and various others including Charmley, Roberts and Grenville who interpret Chamberlain's actions as those of an ambitious and dangerous amateur.¹⁶¹ Most of these historians also treat Salisbury as a genius, rarely moved from his tight, pragmatic *Realpolitik* approach to foreign policy. Most of these histories isolate events into specific contexts. While much is debated about what these contexts are and which are more important the sheer scale of Britain's diplomatic and geopolitical situation gets lost. While reading Otte's incredibly detailed and rich history one could almost forget that Chamberlain was simultaneously involved in a confrontation with France; that Salisbury was preparing for another; that the Venezuela boundary dispute, with the US, was rumbling on and that South Africa was never quiet for long. The Near Eastern question/crisis had also exploded again with the Armenian atrocities. These were some of the most important global issues that British policy makers had to face almost simultaneously. It is no easy task to try to summarise them and how they intersected but while a thematic organisation is tidier, it belies the reality faced by

¹⁶¹ Kennedy, *Antagonism*, pp.223-50; Nish, pp.63-6; Otte, *China*, pp.135-160; Garvin, III, pp.254-77; Crosby, pp.124-7; Charmley, pp.254-60; Roberts, pp.689-93; Grenville, pp.153-76

politicians. Crises and concerns were not all separated out into neat self contained narratives; they overlapped and left their marks in the minds of those who had tried to solve them. Separate chapters on the Near Eastern and Far Eastern questions would make for an easier read and perhaps would be easier to write but it would create, or imply, a compartmentalisation of issues which did not exist at the time. The Venezuelan Crisis, the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese war, the Jameson Raid and Kruger telegram, the Armenian massacres, the confrontation with France in Africa, the potential fiscal collapse of Portugal, the re-conquest of the Sudan, were all concurrent in the minds of British policy makers. To understand the parts played by these historical actors it must be understood what their setting and stage was. It is therefore worth reviewing some of these issues in an attempt to understand how they affected decision making at other junctures. It also exposes how and why Salisbury's supposedly pragmatic approach to policy was vulnerable to attack and distrust; his almost stubborn refusal to see the reality of Anglo-Russian exchanges and his refusal to accept the advice of professionals calls his reputation for judgement into question. His often too easily seen irritation with having to satisfy the Public, and sometimes his own Cabinet, demonstrated that he had not adjusted to the new reality of making foreign policy in an emerging democracy.

China, or the Far Eastern question, is the context into which the more recent studies of British Foreign policy have been set. China most certainly deserves to be centre stage, but it is only one of many issues that were upon the minds of the individual Cabinet Ministers who would go on to support a radical diplomatic solution to what they perceived to be Britain's problems. However, the Far East is a good place to start to build up a sense of the patch work of problems the Unionist Cabinet would face and to start to follow the twisted path of Anglo-Russian relations. By 1895 the Liberal government, had avoided joining Germany, France and Russia in forcing Japan to give up what she had won in the Sino-Japanese war.¹⁶² They were also happy to trust private interests to make the arrangements

¹⁶² Neilson, pp.147-61; Nish, pp.23-45; Otte, *China*, pp29-74

for the loans China would need to pay the huge Japanese indemnity. The nature of those loans was of little concern until it became apparent the Russians were attempting to become China's sole creditor. In May 1895 the British became aware of this attempt and tried to convince the Chinese, through the Ambassador, Nicholas O'Connor, that it "would be unwise to entertain Russian offer of direct assistance which would place [them] in [an] embarrassing position of subserviency and expose them possibly to territorial demands later on". O'Connor was convinced that the Chinese were well aware of the "danger but they may not be able to resist pressure of Powers unless they can borrow in open market."¹⁶³ Shortly afterwards the Russian's were warned that Britain wanted "to be consulted" over the terms of any such loan.¹⁶⁴ When rumours of such a loan were confirmed by Rothschild, Frank Lascelles was sent to speak again to Lobanov, the Russian foreign minister, he asked whether Russia would work jointly with Britain, the Russian minister evaded. Lobanov feigned a lack of interest to both the British and the Germans but the Russian loan did become a reality on 6th July 1895.¹⁶⁵ Otte describes the nature of the loan as being "little more than another French loan to Russia [...] French misgivings about the details of the loan counted for nothing; alliance considerations overrode financial concerns." The Dual Alliance seemed to working in concert in China, not only with the French supporting Russia's fiscal hold on the Chinese but also by gaining concessions in the Chinese provinces which were contiguous with French Indo-China.¹⁶⁶ By this time Salisbury had taken the helm of both the Foreign Office and the British Government. While the Liberal government had opposed the Russian loan, albeit without finding a way to apply much pressure, Salisbury was even less concerned about it, especially while he was trying to reach an agreement with Russia over the Armenian crisis.

¹⁶³ Nicholas Roderick O'Connor, British Ambassador to China, (1892-1895), Ambassador to Russia, (1895-1898); Kimberley to O'Connor, 15/05/1895, and reply, 16/05/1895, both Rosebery Papers, 10134 quoted in Nielson, p.179

¹⁶⁴ Kimberley to Lascelles, 18/05/1895, FO65/1493 (quoted in Nielson, p.179

¹⁶⁵ Frank Cavendish Lascelles British Ambassador to Russia (1894-1895) and then to Germany (1895-1908); Lascelles to Kimberley, 21/05/1895, FO65/1491; Kimberley to Lascelles, 21/05/1895, FO65/1493; Lascelles to Kimberley, 22/05/1895, FO65/1491 quoted in Neilson, pp.180-1; Otte, *China*, pp.75-83

¹⁶⁶ Otte, *China*, p.81 for the quote *Ibid.*, p.85

In October 1895 the British press reported that China was preparing to grant Russia railway concessions. These would shorten the planned Trans-Siberian rail route to Vladivostok and allow a spur line to Port Arthur, a warm water port on the Chinese Coast. Salisbury remained unmoved; he accepted Russian assurances that "there was not a word of truth" in the report.¹⁶⁷ This was not because he necessarily believed these assurances but because, given the seriousness of the Armenian massacres, he wanted to call "a truce to all discussions with Russia" "in other matters – Pamir boundaries & Chinese loans [...] & we may assume, I suppose, that even her more fiery spirits will not wish to 'set the heather alight'."¹⁶⁸ W. E. Goschen, British *chargé d'affaires* at the St. Petersburg embassy, was concerned concluding that it was not "so certain that the Russian Government does not contemplate" building the proposed railways.¹⁶⁹ Salisbury responded in his Guildhall speech of 9th November 1895.¹⁷⁰ The speech made reference to the rumours of Russian rail concessions and Salisbury's lack of concern; "Depend upon it, whatever may happen in that region we are equal to any competition [...] We may look on with absolute equanimity at the action of any [...] who think that they can exclude us from any part of the world [...] in Asia there is room for us all." This attitude was born out in diplomacy; Salisbury barely responded to the creation of the Russo-Chinese Bank, which had blatant political aims. Perhaps the formation of an Anglo-German banking consortium, back in July, had reassured the Foreign Secretary that private means could check Russia's aggression. By the close of 1896 that consortium had secured the second £16 million indemnity loan. Otte suggests that this indicated that "Germany had ranged herself alongside Britain in Chinese affairs, and that there now was a firm basis of common interests which made for closer cooperation between the two countries."¹⁷¹ However, ultimately Salisbury believed that better Anglo-Russian relations were more important than

¹⁶⁷ *The Times*, 25/10/1895; Salisbury to Goschen W.E., (*chargé d'affaires* at St. Petersburg), 30/10/1895, FO65/1489; Goschen W.E., was the brother of Goschen G.J., the First Lord of the Admiralty.

¹⁶⁸ Salisbury to Lascelles, 27/07/1895, Lascelles MSS, FO800/16

¹⁶⁹ Goschen W.E. to Salisbury, 4/11/1895, FO65/1492

¹⁷⁰ *The Times*, 11/11/1895, p.6.

¹⁷¹ Otte, *China*, p.84

ruining the rumoured intentions of Russia's Chinese railway policy even if it appeared that Germany could be induced to help. It is not hard to see why Salisbury was prepared to treat the Russians in Asia with "equanimity". In the same Guildhall speech the Foreign Secretary discussed the situation in Armenia. He gave the Near Eastern Question about eight times the space he made for China. It is clear that, to the Prime Minister, China was the marginal issue, prepared to be sacrificed if necessary, but certainly content to be shared, if the Sultan could be dealt with.¹⁷² Salisbury also approached Africa with the same attitude; being prepared to sacrifice the economically important or potentially useful west, for the supposedly strategically important east. This attitude was revealed when he spoke with Hatzfeldt, commenting that "if Russia is committed in China [she] would be distracted from [the] Orient," spreading her military capabilities thinly around the world.¹⁷³

Salisbury also moved to reduce friction with France in South East Asia. France tried to move both northwards and westwards from her Indo-China colonies, to the west lay Siam and Burma, bordering on India. This posed a serious threat, if Russia could threaten India from the north, while France did so from the east, then the jewel in the Imperial crown was in serious danger. Salisbury explained to Chamberlain that "the ruling spirits in France mean to have it[Siam] if they can. England [...] will not fight for Siam [...] if we play the base role, we may be able to partition Siam before the last stage is reached."¹⁷⁴ By January 1896 a convention was signed that neutralized the Mekong valley. This maintained a buffer between British and French interests in South East Asia. This may have loosened the Franco-Russian alliance by giving France a stake in maintaining the Far Eastern status quo.¹⁷⁵ France was happy to sign a deal on Siam, while this was in her immediate interests, it meant sacrificing the hope of bringing further pressure to bear on British India's eastern most borders, an interest of utmost importance if the Franco-Russian alliance was aligned against

¹⁷² Abdul Hamid II, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, (1876 – 1909)

¹⁷³ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 25 Oct, 1895, *GP*, X, Nr.2393, pp.35-6

¹⁷⁴ Salisbury to Chamberlain, 8/09/1895, JC5/67/30

¹⁷⁵ Otte *China*, p.85; Neilson, p.181

Britain. France did not come to Russia's aid when there were threats in the Far East. Likewise, Russia did nothing to ease French troubles at Fashoda. As the years rolled by it became apparent that the Dual Alliance was a defensive counterweight to the Triple Alliance in Europe and barely operated elsewhere. Therefore attempts to dismantle it would have been unlikely to succeed so long as both Russia and France could imagine a European threat emanating from the allied Central Powers.

The New Year ushered in evidence of Russian mendacity in the Far East. By February 1896 W.E. Goschen was reporting that Russian engineers had completed surveying rail lines in China and Manchuria. These proposed lines were the basis of the rumours published in *The Times* back in October: rumours which Russia had already emphatically decried as being false.¹⁷⁶ Russia's actions and plans for China were not the only area of concern. In February 1896, from "the safety of their[Russian] legation" the Korean king "passed sentences on a large number of Japanese for their misdeeds." This suggested that Russia was also attempting to bring Korea under her protection.¹⁷⁷ Coupled with a report from W.E. Goschen that Russia favoured taking a warm water port in Korea this became worrisome for the British but a very serious problem for the Japanese who wished for Korea to remain neutral, at least until Japan was ready to absorb the country herself.¹⁷⁸ The status of Korea had been the cause of the recent Sino-Japanese war, of which Japan had been divested of the spoils. Japan faced a choice, whether to attempt to improve relations with Russia or find some European counter weight, such a Britain. However, Salisbury was unlikely to help the Japanese contain Russia, In Satow's instructions he claimed:

Our strategic or military interest in Japan can easily be overestimated. She may no doubt be of use in hindering Russia [...] [b]ut how long would her obstruction be effective? ... Britain cannot rely on Japan's interest to oppose Russia. [...] What you tell me about the apparent disinclination of the Japanese Government to generally cultivate our exclusive friendship, rather confirms the suspicion that in the end they

¹⁷⁶ Goschen to Salisbury, 27/02/1896, FO65/1514; for the earlier rumours and Russia's denial see note 8 above.

¹⁷⁷ Nish, p 42

¹⁷⁸ Goschen W.E. to Sanderson, 12/03/1896, FO65/1514

will be convinced that it is rather their interest to join with Russia, and perhaps with France in cutting up China.¹⁷⁹

Balfour in 1896 also poured cold water on any Anglo-Japanese rapprochement in a speech at Bristol he claimed that he could “frankly state that, so far, for example, from regarding with fear and jealousy a commercial outlet for Russia in the Pacific Ocean which should not be ice-bound half the year, I should welcome such a result as a distinct advance in this far distant region.”¹⁸⁰ Balfour would maintain this sentiment even into 1898 claiming that he “had always looked with favour upon the idea of Russia obtaining an ice-free port on the Pacific”.¹⁸¹ However, when news reached Salisbury that Japan and Russia were coming to an agreement on Korea, he attempted to interfere. Japan’s reply was blunt; she had already enquired about this and had received a British refusal. Japan had therefore been forced to find a *modus vivendi* with Russia. Salisbury was unprepared to sponsor any scheme, as Britain was not directly involved in Korea, and so Japan signed an agreement acknowledging equal preponderance in Korea between Russia and Japan.¹⁸²

While this was taking place the British were receiving more news about Russian designs in China. O’Conor sent back the text of a Sino-Russian treaty granting Russia the right to terminate the Trans-Siberian railway on Chinese soil.¹⁸³ Neilson notes that the Foreign Office did not think the treaty was serious or even genuine. O’Conor thought it was “in the main apocryphal” but he felt he could not take it up with the Russian Foreign Minister as its existence had already been denied.¹⁸⁴ However, the Ambassador, in St. Petersburg, believed “that the Russian Government will

¹⁷⁹ Ernest Mason Satow, British Ambassador to Japan (1895-1900) then British Ambassador to China (1900-1906). Salisbury to Satow, 3/10/1895, Satow MSS PRO 30/33/5/2 quoted in Nish, p.40

¹⁸⁰ *The Times*, 4/02/1896, p.7

¹⁸¹ Salisbury to O’Conor, 24/03/1898, *BD*, I, No. 38

¹⁸² Nish, pp.43-44, Satow to Salisbury, 4/05/1896, FO46/468; Salisbury to Satow, 13/05/1896, FO46/471

¹⁸³ O’Conor to Salisbury, 6/05/1896, FO65/1514

¹⁸⁴ Neilson, p.183; O’Conor to Sanderson, 7/05/1896, O’Conor Papers quoted in Neilson, p.183

in one way or another wring this concession from the Chinese".¹⁸⁵ The Chinese duly signed a treaty on 3rd June 1896, which granted the railway concession but not an ice free port. Anglo-Russian relations then entered a lull but only in the Far Eastern context. Armenia and the Greco-Turkish war certainly kept Russia on Salisbury's mind.

The situation in Turkey, surrounding the Armenian massacres, still appeared to be insoluble. The Russians were unhappy to push any programme of reforms, not least because they could "scarcely be expected to wish that the Armenians in Turkish territory should enjoy greater liberty than the Armenians in Russian territory".¹⁸⁶ While the beleaguered Liberal government had been happy to temporise, Salisbury desperately wanted to find a solution to this issue so inextricably linked to his career. Believing the Sultan would not yield before diplomatic pressure and in the absence of the possibility of joint action, Salisbury tried to take unilateral military action to intimidate him. The fleet was moved nearer to Constantinople, but suggestions of putting gunboats on the Tigris and a naval demonstration in the Red Sea failed to materialise. The Tigris suggestion was rebuffed by Sir Philip Currie in Constantinople who suggested that Turkish resistance would be too strong to overcome and the Red Sea demonstration fell apart on the practicalities.¹⁸⁷ Certainly Turkey was high up in his mind when he discussed the creation of the Committee for Defence. In an October 1895 minute he discussed the questions such a committee would be involved with. Suggesting the committee should answer whether "the functions of the Mediterranean Fleet" were "merely to watch & mask Toulon, or" whether it could or should have been fit to also be used "to reinforce diplomatic operations in the Turkish Empire, in Greece, in Morocco, or in Egypt?" Salisbury revealed that his frustration with the Near Eastern Question heavily informed his decision to create the committee. With regard to the "distribution of the fleet on the shores of the Indian Ocean, of Africa, & South America" he charged that the committee

¹⁸⁵ O'Connor to Salisbury, 9/05/1896, FO65/1514 O'Connor was in St. Petersburg for Tsar Nicholas II's coronation.

¹⁸⁶ Lascelles to Sanderson, 22/05/1895, FO800/17

¹⁸⁷ Sir Philip Currie, British Ambassador to the Sublime Porte at Constantinople (1893-1898). Grenville, pp28-9

should consider "the question of the size of the vessels & their capacity for acting in shallow water" as "a matter of the first consideration". While these references are not exclusively concerned with forcing the Straights, the Tigris or a Red Sea demonstration they are all objections which were raised against them.¹⁸⁸ Back in 1892 Salisbury had ruminated that if the fleet could not hold Constantinople against Russia, and if she must anyway destroy the French fleet in Toulon first then it may as well be withdrawn to Portsmouth. It "would surely be wise, in the interest of our own reputation, to let it be known as quickly as possible that we do not intend to defend Constantinople, and that protection of it from Russian attack is not ... worthy of the sacrifices or the risks which such an effort would involve" or "our policy is a policy of false pretences."¹⁸⁹ Salisbury was not prepared to try to use diplomacy to try to cover Britain's weakness; British policy should be conducted in accordance with her strength, actual as opposed to estimated by the Admiralty, or Britain's strength must be amended to better protect her interests. Salisbury was grappling against the realisation that Britain's interests were already too large to be adequately defended by the Victorian Navy in an increasingly competitive and unfriendly world. The Prime Minister's refusal to accept the Admiralty's advice, that they could no longer force the Straights, demonstrated that his Mid-Victorian mind could not easily reconcile itself to this predicament. The Committee of Defence was Salisbury's solution to this problem, which he assumed was one of bad management rather than an issue with the sheer diversity and scale of Britain's commitments. The people put on the Committee were not likely to make decisions very differently in the future though.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Min. Salisbury, the Committee of Defence, Oct. 1895, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Lansdowne/1882-1896 starts on folio 135

¹⁸⁹ Memo., Salisbury, 8/06/1892, quoted in Grenville p 27.

¹⁹⁰ Min. Salisbury, Committee of Defence, Oct. 1895 Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Lansdowne/1882-1896. Salisbury wanted to keep the committee small, so it could function more easily, leaving it comprised of the President of Council (Devonshire), The Secretary of War (Lansdowne), the Commander in Chief (at the time this was Prince George, Duke of Cambridge, a long time opponent of army reform), The First Lord of the Admiralty (Goschen G.J.) and the then First Sea Lord (Sir Frederick William Richards). It is hard to see how Devonshire was supposed to assist the political heads of the armed forces against the judgement of the professional chiefs.

Salisbury first tried to find some way to work with Russia with regards to Turkey. In July 1895 he explained to Lascelles, in St. Petersburg, that Britain need two things of Russia, firstly "that she will believe us, that we have no intention whatever of setting up any form of Armenian autonomy", secondly "Is she prepared for any form of coercion?" and "If Russia is adverse to any form of coercion in any case – will she object to the exercise of it by her allies – or even ally?"¹⁹¹

While waiting on Russia, Salisbury naturally sounded out the other Powers, including Germany.¹⁹² In an interview with the German ambassador, Count Hatzfeldt, Salisbury explained that he aimed for joint action with Russia, which would probably end the Sultan's rule.¹⁹³ Hatzfeldt pointed out that Russia would not want to see an autonomous Armenia on her borders, to which Salisbury replied "certainly not, but that the changes that were to come" would be entirely different and desirable to Russia. Hatzfeldt suggested this meant a partition of the Ottoman Empire, with substantial gains for Russia, but he suggested this would probably include the "Turkish provinces" on the Russian border. This was Hatzfeldt's own conjecture, Salisbury almost certainly meant to offer the Russians Constantinople, and hoped that this might make the Russians more friendly towards what might happen with the rest of the Turkish Empire. This worried the German diplomat; if Britain could get a settlement with Russia then she would not need to maintain a strong connection with Germany.¹⁹⁴ Salisbury was not unaware of Hatzfeldt's feelings: "I find Hatzfeldt in a very nervous condition as to the possibility of an Anglo-Russian *entente*."¹⁹⁵ Over the next few days Salisbury's hints at the possibility of Ottoman partition caused quite a

¹⁹¹ Salisbury to Lascelles, 27/07/1895, 3M/A/129.

¹⁹² Grenville, pp.31-43; Langer, pp.197-201; Kennedy barely touches on Armenia in his *Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism* which is odd given how badly the 'Coves Incident' soured the personal relationship between Salisbury and the Kaiser

¹⁹³ Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, 10 Jul/ 1895, *GP*, X, nr.2396, pp.40-1; downloaded pdf from <https://archive.org/details/grossepolitikeur10germ> translated via Google's translation services. No document translated in this way has been used to challenge any existing interpretation of that document and other translations have been used were they can be found in secondary literature.

¹⁹⁴ Grenville, p 33

¹⁹⁵ Salisbury to Lascelles, 27/07/1895, Salisbury MSS 3M/A/129

stir in Germany.¹⁹⁶ Salisbury demurred when approached by Hatzfeldt about potentially saving the Italians by handing over a seaport in British Somalia, instead he suggested compensation could be found in Ottoman territory, convinced that the "division must come in the foreseeable future".¹⁹⁷ The Germans feared this would cause a stir between Austria and Italy. Salisbury decried any such intention and asked the Germans if they had any suggestions on how to divide up the Sultan's lands.¹⁹⁸ Holstein back in Germany was suspicious; he feared any suggestions could be leaked to the Russians and in that case Germany would lose whatever freedom of action she believed she had. This freedom was essential if Germany was to demand her due when the "psychological moment" arrived.¹⁹⁹ Hatzfeldt replied as quickly as he could drawing attention to the fact that Salisbury had offered Russia "the most abundant satisfaction ... Constantinople with all that follows."²⁰⁰ Hatzfeldt also pointed out that with Russia satisfied in the East she would no longer need to cultivate her friendship with France. This presupposes that having gained Constantinople Russia would be happy to leave Austria with whatever she desired in the Balkans. If Russian ministers could imagine continued problems with Austria, even after a partition of Turkey, then her French connection would remain useful for so long as the Triple Alliance remained intact. However, if Russia was satisfied with Constantinople, and allowed Austria to satisfy herself in the Balkans, then the *raison d'être* for both alliance systems would have been weakened.

While Hatzfeldt was furiously telegraphing information to his near sighted superiors, Salisbury met with the Kaiser in the now infamous Cowes interview. Neither party really gave much away.²⁰¹ Holstein, upon receiving Hatzfeldt's telegram wired for the Emperor to meet with the Prime Minister again, but this interview never took place. Langer accepts this as a simple mistake but it seems odd that Salisbury would be prepared to risk

¹⁹⁶ Langer, p 198

¹⁹⁷ Hatzfeldt to Holstein, . 30/07/1895, *GP*, X, nr.2371

¹⁹⁸ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 3/08/1895, *GP*, X, Nr.2375, pp.16-8

¹⁹⁹ Langer, p.199,

²⁰⁰ Hatzfeldt to Holstein 5 Aug 1895, *GP*, X, nr.2381, pp.22-23

²⁰¹ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 7/08/1895, *GP*, X, nr.2385; Langer, p 199, Grenville, pp.36-9

offending royalty simply because he was running late. Salisbury's distrust of Wilhelm is well known, even before the German Emperor's coronation he was warning the Queen that "it appears that his head is turned by his position", later that same year he noted that he thought "that the Emperor William must be a little off his head."²⁰² Back in 1888, while Wilhelm was still merely a crown Prince, Salisbury had warned the Queen of the need to avoid offence when she met him.²⁰³ If the Foreign Secretary was concerned in 1888 about how easily Wilhelm could have been permanently offended it is hard to imagine that he was more sanguine about such risks in 1895. Regardless of whether Salisbury wished to snub the Emperor or not, the whole situation need not have arisen if Holstein could have brought himself to read Hatzfeldt's dispatches in the cold light of day rather than bathed in the malevolent rays emanating from his paranoid imagination. Hatzfeldt had already made it clear that Salisbury intended "to assist Russia, so the latter[autonomous Armenian provinces] be desirable."²⁰⁴ This could only have meant Constantinople which Hatzfeldt was well aware of, hence his clearer telegram on the 5th August while the Emperor was at Cowes.

Eventually the Russians replied to Salisbury's questions over the use of force. The Tsar found the idea of armed coercion as "personally repugnant", and action by a single Power was considered "equally distasteful" to that of a group.²⁰⁵ By the end of August the Sultan had hinted that he was prepared to enact the reforms pressed upon him and Russia was moving toward the idea of setting up some form of international surveillance albeit without a mechanism for coercion.²⁰⁶ The Kaiser then decided to try to make good some the missed opportunity at Cowes. Without consulting his ministers Wilhelm put a plan to Salisbury via Leopold Swaine, British Military *Attaché* in Berlin. This personal, informal, diplomacy of the Kaiser's embarrassed Salisbury. While the Foreign Secretary had been prepared to discuss possible suggestions on certain outcomes earlier,

²⁰² Salisbury to Victoria, 21/04/1888, *QVL*, 3rd Series, I, p.398; Cecil G, *Salisbury*, IV (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 2010) p.58; Langer, p.200-1

²⁰³ Salisbury to Victoria, 21/04/1888, *QVL*, 3rd Series, I, p 398

²⁰⁴ Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, 10/07/1895, *GP*, X, Nr.2396, pp.40-1

²⁰⁵ Lascelles to Salisbury, 9/08/1895, FO65/1491

²⁰⁶ Lascelles to Salisbury, 28/08/1895, FO65/1491; Neilson, pp.165-6

they were always supposing Russia would be willing to consider them. In the time that lapsed this had become unlikely. The Kaiser however urged Britain to use force against the Sultan, he would “warmly support this action” but “under one condition, namely that you do not spring this upon us like a thunder-clap out of a blue sky. [...] If you intend to [...] give Asia Minor and Constantinople to Russia, you must indemnify Austria [...] and satisfy Italy [...] As regards Syria, offer it to Russia [...] and disturb the *entente*.” He went on to explain that in the Far East “the next great war [...] will be between the Russians and the Japanese [...] my interests are to drive the Russians into Asia, and I am quite prepared to encourage them to entangle themselves with China and Japan.”²⁰⁷ This memorandum was set before the Cabinet and therefore Chamberlain would have been well aware of both the contents and nature of Wilhelm’s, personal, private and unofficial diplomacy. When Hatzfeldt convinced Swaine to send further information, Salisbury was forced to reply. It is important to note the differences between Salisbury’s vague suggestions and the more specific ideas formed by the Kaiser. Salisbury’s suggestions always relied upon working with Russia, the German suggestions encouraged Britain to take unilateral action which the Royal Navy was unprepared to risk. Any action was to be used as a demonstration to show the Sultan that they were in earnest about the required reforms, and *only* if that should fail would actual force be used. The German note rather assumes that the British wished to end the Ottoman Empire immediately. Salisbury’s reply was evasive; he barely touched on Turkey except to suggest that his policy had not changed.²⁰⁸ In reality it could not be changed, not without a stronger fleet or powerful military ally; in other words, not without Russian assistance. Salisbury was thus left with no policy but to wait. This reply was somewhat unfair to the Germans, if Hatzfeldt’s report back home on the 3rd August was accurate then Salisbury had asked for suggestions on the distribution of the Ottoman Territories. Therefore “it would be very useful that they [Germany] formed a plan [...] and that we would discuss” it in strict

²⁰⁷ Malet to Salisbury, 30/08/1895, enclosing Swaine’s memorandum, printed for Cabinet, FO64/1351 quoted in Grenville, pp 41-2.

²⁰⁸ Swaine to Hatzfeldt, 4/10/1895, cited in Grenville, p 43

confidence; Salisbury had suggested the Germans do this himself.²⁰⁹ The British reply angered the Kaiser who complained that "England's policy was completely incomprehensible" and that all of Europe was now moved by "a tangible distrust of England".²¹⁰ Salisbury was well aware that the Kaiser would not take the rebuff lightly but feared the real breach would come with Russia: "[w]e may, & I hope shall, retain the friendship of Germany: but I see very little hope of regaining the friendship of Russia."²¹¹

Salisbury had started to suspect the Russians were negotiating in bad faith, however, when news of fresh massacres reached Britain he again attempted to make a naval demonstration. This time specifically in the Red Sea to avoid threatening Russian interests at Constantinople. It is worth noting that the Germans had also taken offense at what the Kaiser had described as "the Mediterranean Fleet" taking "a week long stroll [...] before the Dardanelles".²¹² G.J. Goschen, First Lord of the Admiralty, implored Salisbury not to think of the navy as a geisha who was always reluctant but pointed out practical problems with a demonstration: "There is no Turkish military establishment which these vessels could approach, & no Turkish town that they could anchor near except [a] small village". Goschen thought it "questionable whether [...] the demonstration would have the desired effect."²¹³ The First Lord did offer to send the largest ship on hand into the Persian Gulf but this was unlikely to terrify the Sultan; again nothing adequate to the task was possible. Salisbury fell back on the use of words; in his Guildhall speech, the same mentioned above in respect of China, he threatened the Sultan and urged the Concert of Europe to take action. Believing "that they[the Powers] were never more disposed than they are now to stand together, by the European system[. ...] I believe the Powers are thoroughly resolved to act together upon everything that concerns the Ottoman Empire."²¹⁴ Austria responded with a suggestion that

²⁰⁹ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 3/08/1895, *GP*, X. Nr.2375 pp.16-8, quote on p.17.

²¹⁰ Wilhelm to Marschall, 25/10/1895, *GP*, XI, Nr.2579, pp.8-11

²¹¹ Salisbury to Lascelles, 17/09/1895, FO800/17;

²¹² Neilson, p.167; Wilhelm to Marschall, 25/10/1895, *GP*, XI, Nr.2579, p.9

²¹³ Goschen to Salisbury, 19/12/1895, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Goschen/1895-96

²¹⁴ *The Times* 11/11/1895, p.6

she, Russia and Britain should combine to force the Straights.²¹⁵ Salisbury seized upon this suggestion.²¹⁶ However, the Russians predictably responded negatively and were inclined to believe the Armenians would knuckle down and suffer their lot if only they were no longer being “stirred up to continued activity by some Power for her own political interests”.²¹⁷ The veiled accusation exposed the deep Russian distrust of British policy. It was probably just as well that this proposal came to nothing, as Salisbury had earlier sidestepped the suggestions of the Kaiser.²¹⁸ However, the proposal did make it to the Cabinet, which refused to contemplate forcing the Straights alone.

The Goschen and a few others refused to take the risks of trying to force the Straights singlehandedly, which rather saved Salisbury and the Navy from a nineteenth century version of the Dardanelles Campaign.²¹⁹ Chamberlain was among those unwilling to ignore the Admiralty’s warnings and go it alone however, he was much more sanguine about how much help Britain needed. Having been present when Swaine’s memoranda had been presented to the Cabinet he knew Germany was uninterested in sending a squadron herself, but Austria’s offer had not yet been withdrawn. The Colonial Secretary put his thoughts to Salisbury:

I think public opinion is moving steadily in favour of strong measures with Turkey & if it was possible to come to some arrangement with Russia the course would be easy.

If not – and if we could get Austria & Italy to join us – I think we might safely ask Russia & France to send battle ships to

²¹⁵ Neilson, p.168

²¹⁶ Memo., Salisbury, 4/06/1892, in comment on Joint Report of the D.M.I and D.N.I., of 18/03/1892, CAB 37/31/10, also printed in Lowe, II, pp.85-91; Memo., John Ardagh (future director of military intelligence D.M.I) Oct. 1894, with a covering note, Chapman E.F., (the incumbent DMI), 20/11/1894, Rosebery MSS, 10135 referenced in Neilson, p.167

²¹⁷ Goschen W.E. to Salisbury, 20/11/1895, FO65/1492

²¹⁸ Grenville, pp31-43

²¹⁹ Neilson, p 168, references K Wilson, “Constantinople or Cairo: Lord Salisbury and the Partition of the Ottoman Empire 1886-97”, in Neilson K., (Ed.) *Empire and Continent: Studies in British Foreign Policy from the 1880s to the First World War* (London, 1987), p.16-17.

Constantinople, with an instruction that, if they refuse, we shall go with our two allies at all risks.²²⁰

While Salisbury was unprepared to risk a potential European War, this combination could have applied the force required to motivate the Sultan to reform. It could also have pushed the Russians, who felt themselves unready for a European war, to join the demonstration rather than stand aside or fight.²²¹ However, Salisbury was unlikely to take such chances or play a game of chicken with the Franco-Russian Alliance, at least not unless what he considered a vital British interest was at stake. Chamberlain simply did not believe that those Powers were really prepared to disturb the peace any more readily than Britain was. He was prepared to run the risk of war, not because he thought war an idle issue, but because he believed that other nations stood to lose as much by war as Britain. Meanwhile, Salisbury described Goschen's acceptance of the Admiralty's fears as almost "theological" he then explained where this left the Eastern question: "It is impossible to mend the lot of the Armenians without coercing or deposing the Sultan. It is impossible to get at the Sultan without quarrelling with Russia, Turkey, France and (now) Austria[Austria had withdrawn her suggestion under Russian pressure]. So there is no practical course open at present."²²² Salisbury's persistence in the face of all this was somewhat reminiscent of Alice and her belief in 'as many as six impossible things before breakfast'. Salisbury did not list the lack of British power as one of the impossible obstacles to solving the crisis. The Armenian crisis was a trying time for the Prime Minister and his conduct is not easily understood. Normally Salisbury's response to situations which did not present a possible solution was to wait.²²³ In the Eastern question he could do no such thing. This was not because of the importance to British interests. The main

²²⁰ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 8/12/1895, Salisbury MSS 3m/E/Chamberlain/1887-95

²²¹ Waters to Goschen W.E., 13/10/1896, in Goschen W.E. to Salisbury, 17/10/1896, FO65/1516. If Russia was still unready for a European war in Oct. 1896 then she certainly felt that way in Dec. 1895.

²²² Salisbury to Goschen, 18/12/1895, quoted in Spinner T. J. Jr., *George Jachim Goschen: The Transformation of a Victorian Liberal* (London, 1973) p.199 also quoted in Neilson, p.169

²²³ Otte T. G., "Floating Downstream?": Lord Salisbury and British Foreign policy, 1878-1902" in Otte T.G., (Ed.) *The Makers of British Foreign Policy From Pitt to Thatcher* (Basingstoke, 2002) P.98-127

threat there would be if the Ottoman Empire collapsed quickly and Britain was not ready to act when it did so. However, Russian attitudes suggested that the most likely cause of that collapse, a Russian descent on Constantinople, was extremely unlikely. Austria was not prepared to move either, not even in tandem with Britain unless Russia approved. Only Germany seemed eager to see the 'Sick Man of Europe' euthanized. This German attitude reappeared later when dealing with Portugal.

Salisbury clearly saw more danger here than most, he was positively fuming about the Navy, which implies that he was more than ready to risk the fleet in an action that could not have been advised against any more strongly. Salisbury has a reputation as a pragmatic man with practical *Realpolitik* principles underpinning his policies.²²⁴ His attitude to forcing the Straights was at odds with that reputation. Salisbury's early political career had been served in opposition to the governments of John Russell, and Palmerston. Russell's policies he summed up as following a "sequence of snarling remonstrance, officious advice, treacherous encouragement, and shameless abandonment".²²⁵ Roberts believes that Salisbury was angered that Russell was not prepared to stand up to stronger Powers. He also abhorred public opinion describing his opponents as being "a set of weathercocks, delicately poised, warranted to indicate with unnerving accuracy every variation in public feeling." This was combined with a principal of respecting foreign sovereignty: "The assemblies that meet in Westminster have no jurisdiction over the affairs of other nations. Neither they nor the Executive, except in defence of international law, can interfere with [...] Italy, or [...] Spain, or [...] Schleswig. What is said in either House about them is simply impertinence." Salisbury also believed that a "willingness to fight is the *point d'appui* of diplomacy, just as much as a readiness to go to court is the starting-point of a lawyer's letter."²²⁶ Taking these principles together, makes evaluating the Eastern question particularly interesting. Firstly, the Armenian Crisis was not a case of a

²²⁴ Roberts, pp.40-2

²²⁵ Salisbury to Gladstone, Gladstone MSS Add.MS44416/84 quoted in Roberts, p.40

²²⁶ Salisbury, *SR*, XVII 707, XVII 129, XV 228, XVIII 407 quoted in Roberts, p.41-2

breach of international law, even if the massacres were clearly a breach of moral behaviour. By his own definitions, Salisbury was interfering where he had no right. Secondly, he also did not back away from the threat of force, even though he was told, emphatically, that the Fleet could not apply such force. One could argue that he was sensitive to the enormous pressure being applied on the Government by the public, but Salisbury did not trust public opinion on any matter. Perhaps, in the Eastern question, he found himself trapped by his belief that the British Government should not remonstrate unless it was prepared to back its case with force; Salisbury was unprepared to bluff. While the 14th Earl of Derby was famous for describing Russell's foreign policy as one of "meddle and muddle" Salisbury's criticism had included the lack of preparedness to back such meddling with force.²²⁷ Salisbury was trapped, he could either do nothing or he would have to back up any of his own 'meddling' with a real threat of force. It was perhaps his own feeling, that the Admiralty were mistaken about the capabilities of their own fleet, which should have been described as "theological". Why then, if the Russians were unlikely to capsize the Sultan's boat in a *coup de main*, could Salisbury, having done all that he could, not leave the Eastern question very much alone? It is often forgotten, in the hustle and bustle of an ordinarily pragmatic approach to politics and foreign policy, how deeply religious Salisbury was and perhaps this helps to explain his unceasing efforts.²²⁸ Salisbury still continued to search for a solution even as the grave risk, of the collapse of Ottoman rule, receded. It appeared that he genuinely wanted to see an end to the atrocities for reasons other than their affect on British popular opinion, or the equilibrium and peace of Europe. Salisbury was prepared to risk the collapse of Ottoman rule, in a controlled fashion, if it would end the Armenian suffering. However, as it seemed to him that Austria "would [not] acquiesce in any portion of the Straits being surrendered to Russia" this collapse could not be allowed to be precipitated by a Russian capture of

²²⁷ Edward George Geoffery Smith-Stanley 14th Earl of Derby, Speech to the House of Lords, 4/02/1864, Hansard, PD, HL 3rd Series, Vo.173, C.27-9

²²⁸ Roberts, p 12, p.23

Constantinople.²²⁹ Back in 1892, as we have seen, Salisbury concluded that if the Straights could not be held against Russia then the Fleet should be withdrawn to the Channel. While Salisbury positively fulminated against the reality that neither the Cabinet nor the department Chiefs were prepared to use force in the Ottoman Empire, he was still unprepared to remove the fleet or "to let it be known [...] that we do not pretend to defend Constantinople".²³⁰ Ultimately his pragmatism won out he was prepared to allow the fleet to remain as it at least implied the possible use of force and therefore may have acted as a deterrent on Russia. Salisbury was prepared to allow some measure of bluff to enter his policy. Neilson summed up the situation succinctly:

While an Anglo-Russia initiative was thus unlikely [...] this does not rule out the possibility that Salisbury would have preferred a *general*, pan-European solution involving partition. However, opposed by his Cabinet, faced with rejection from the Russians, abandoned by the Austrians, and faced with other difficult foreign policy issues [...] Salisbury saw that the Armenian question had no quick solution.²³¹

Chamberlain was well aware of the issues facing the Prime Minister. He had been in support of using force, albeit with Austria and Italy, when the matter had come before Cabinet, he still had ideas to offer. On Christmas Eve he wrote to the Prime Minister, his letter focused mostly on how much Britain had in common with the US. At that time the Venezuelan crisis was in full force and it perplexed Chamberlain as to why the Americans were seemingly so hostile. He suggested to Salisbury that perhaps the two nations could make a joint naval demonstration to force the Sultan to end the massacres.²³² Dismayed, Salisbury forwarded the letter to Balfour, commenting that "Randolph at his wildest could not have made a madder

²²⁹ Salisbury to Currie, 15/12/1896, Salisbury MSS 3M/A/138

²³⁰ Memo. Salisbury, 4/06/1892, in comment on Joint Report of the D.M.I and D.N.I., of 18/03/1892, CAB 37/31/10, also printed in Lowe, II, pp.85-91

²³¹ Neilson, p.170

²³² Chamberlain to Salisbury, 24/12/1895, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Chamberlain/1887-95/39

suggestion. I am afraid that J. is trying his hand at programme making."²³³

Balfour was somewhat kinder with Chamberlain's ideas:

His[Chamberlain's] Scheme does not seem very practicable!
But the failure of our policy and the victory of the Sultan over Europe are so complete that I am not surprised at him looking rather far afield to find an escape from the existing impass[e]. He purports however, that in addition to other difficulties, if U.S.A even is willing to work with us, have no treaty rights over Turkey; and" if they did "work with us, their doing so might, and possibly would bring down the Turkish Empire with a bump."²³⁴

Balfour also suggested that it was a shame that sentiment over Armenia could not be used to draw the US into the Mediterranean as they were not subject to "the insane suspicion which stupefies Europe where England is concerned." Balfour was attempting to demonstrate that while the scheme was almost certainly impractical it could have given Salisbury exactly what he wanted. It is curious to note that Balfour defended the theoretical merits of the scheme. He therefore gave a check to Salisbury, the subtext is simple, there was no practical solution and so Chamberlain's fanciful one was no less useful than Salisbury's hopes that something could be expected from the Russians. After sharing Chamberlain's suggestion with Balfour, Salisbury replied. He pointed out the practical problems with the suggestion, firstly that until the Venezuelan confrontation had "somewhat cooled" nothing could be done jointly and secondly that the US could only provide more ships as material aid.²³⁵ The Foreign Secretary also reminded Chamberlain "that the Straights cannot be forced by ships alone" and that while anything that a purely naval force could achieve would be "painful to him[the Sultan] [...] it would not induce him to lay aside his [...] personal power: & without either deposing him or very much curtailing his authority, you can do nothing for the terrible suffering of his subjects." This is a little more interesting than it first appears, while all of Salisbury's issues with Chamberlain's proposed Anglo-America alliance are practical, pragmatic and perfectly sensible, we also know that Salisbury struggled to accept the

²³³ Salisbury to Balfour, 27/12/1895, Balfour MSS, Add.MS49690

²³⁴ Balfour to Salisbury, 29/12/1895, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Balfour/1893-96/510

²³⁵ Salisbury to Chamberlain, 30/12/1895, JC5/67/36

Admiralty's position that naval action alone could not force the Straights. Both men still conceptualised naval power along lines they were familiar with. In the past the Navy had been able to deliver force anywhere around the world, and while it had always been difficult to hold territory without a military presence, the Royal Navy had a history of engagements where the crews of ships had taken and held coastal fortresses and cities. While the nature of coastal defences and naval operations had changed, it appears that both men still operated under the assumption that some of the crew of each ship could get off. Salisbury had already considered what this actually meant, if the navy could no longer project real power, on short notice and anywhere in the world: then it should retire to the Home Islands. British strategy still depended on a strong navy which historically could project force when and wherever it was needed, but if this was no longer possible then either the armed forces or general British strategy needed to be adapted. Salisbury's Committee of Defence was created to grapple with these issues. For a nation that depended on projecting power from the sea it is surprising that nothing like a large standing Marine Corps existed. This worrying constraint on British power exercised both men's minds. While Salisbury's criticism of Chamberlain's ideas was perfectly reasonable, it also rested on an assumption that the Sultan would not capitulate in the face of a threat of real force. Chamberlain, probably never imagined that an Anglo-American alliance would actually need to fight Turkey but that the Sultan would reform or abdicate rather than face potentially absolute and overwhelming force. Chamberlain replied: "I did not expect an answer & I beg you not to reply to any similar suggestions unless you wish for further information. Otherwise I should be [...] adding to your burdens."²³⁶ It seems the Colonial Secretary was merely throwing ideas out to Salisbury which he thought were perhaps too "far afield", as Balfour put it, to have crossed Salisbury's conservative mind.

Regardless Salisbury was not prepared to sit idle and so he continued to push both the Russians and the Turks. He proposed that the ambassadors

²³⁶ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 31/12/1895, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Chamberlain/1887-97/42

in Constantinople should “cooperate in devising some remedy” to try to make even this limited suggestion palatable to the Russians it was underlined that the suggestion would only authorise the ambassadors to discuss the situation.²³⁷ The Russians remained polite but continued to refuse. Salisbury finally capitulated noting that he “was fully convinced that the evils which would result from any interruption in the harmonious relations of the Powers, would far outweigh any advantage that could possibly be expected from isolated action”.²³⁸ The Armenian crisis thus trundled along quietly until a renewal of atrocities in August 1896. Diplomacy was stalled as the Tsar was away from court and the Russian foreign minister had died. Until someone was able to speak definitively for Russia, Salisbury could do nothing. Curiously it was the Russian Ambassador in Constantinople who managed to end this round of massacres, by threatening to have the city bombarded.²³⁹ Firstly this rather demonstrated that the Sultan could be bullied and secondly it exposed that there were Russians happy to provide that coercion. Eventually a central Russian response was forthcoming, the acting Foreign Minister, Shishkin, announced that the “existing *Regime*” must be maintained as any other solution may lead “even to a European war”.²⁴⁰ Little seemed to have changed, despite a fairly upfront conversation with the Tsar, on his visit to Balmoral, there still appeared to be little hope that Salisbury could find a policy.²⁴¹

Salisbury was still unable to do anything and so he put together a circular to all the Powers.²⁴² In this he offered his opinion that without action the Ottoman Empire would eventually collapse from within, and thus spark a crisis of enormous magnitude as it was assumed that interested Powers would attempt to further their aims in the chaos. The Ambassadors at Constantinople should come up with a programme of reform and should be

²³⁷ Goschen W.E. to Salisbury, 16/01/1896, FO65/1514

²³⁸ Salisbury to Goschen W.E., 29/01/1896, fo65/1513

²³⁹ Grenville, p.75

²⁴⁰ O’Conor to Salisbury, 17/09/1896, FO65/1516

²⁴¹ Neilson, pp.171-2; Jefferson M.M., ‘Lord Salisbury’s Conversations with the Tsar at Balmoral, 27 and 29 September 1896’, *SEER* 39 (1960) pp.216-22.

²⁴² Salisbury, 20/10/1896, FO65/1513

given “up to the measure of such force as the Powers have at their command”. Shishkin’s initial response was that he did “not anticipate any objections”.²⁴³ Just a week later Russia had changed her mind, preferring to deal with the problem by putting controls on the Sultan’s finances.²⁴⁴ W.E. Goschen noted that this conversation “was not friendly” because Russia still harboured suspicions about Salisbury’s intentions given the movements of the Mediterranean fleet. The British annexation of Egypt was even put up as evidence of Albion’s perfidious nature. While Neilson notes that Salisbury probably had been prepared to use unilateral force, had the Navy and Cabinet felt capable, he waves away the uncannily accurate fears that had occupied the Russian government: “Salisbury’s policy was purely defensive, and, unless Russia had designs upon Constantinople, her fears were groundless.”²⁴⁵ Russian foreign policy was more complex than a simple desire for aggrandisement. To her mind, permitting a rival to occupy Constantinople or control the Straights would be akin to the British allowing a rival to occupy the Low Countries, and thus open the Home Isles to potential invasion. Had Britain gained control of or access through the Straights then they would have been able to hurt Russia in a war.²⁴⁶ The same naval advisors that claimed Britain could not force the Straights, nor prevent Russia doing so, did comment that they would welcome the Black Sea being opened as a theatre of potential operations.²⁴⁷ In the analysis undertaken in 1896, the Director of Military Intelligence considered Salisbury’s plan of a joint venture to open the Straights as the best option. This would also make a Russian descent riskier, as Russia would immediately face the combined forces of any interested parties having gone unmolested by Turkish held fortifications. Russia was not to be allowed to

²⁴³ Goschen W.E. to Salisbury, 26/10/1896, FO65/1517

²⁴⁴ Goschen W.E. to Salisbury, 4/11/1896, FO65/1517

²⁴⁵ Neilson, p.173

²⁴⁶ Neilson, pp.110-143 Although the chapter focuses on defence planning all the way up to and beyond the Anglo-Russian entente it is clear that the perceived invulnerability of Russia was considered a fact of military planning life. The last study on this in 1896-8 was conducted in 1893. It was attached as the second appendix to “Military needs of the Empire in a War with France and Russia” Intelligence Department, War Office, 12/08/1901, CAB38/1/6

²⁴⁷ Ardagh, “The Eastern Question in 1896”, Oct. 1896, Ardagh MSS PRO 30/40/14 cited in Neilson, p.114 & p.173

navigate the Straights alone, this would have effectively place the Sultan under total Russian domination.

The British military *attaché*, in St. Petersburg, believed that Russia would “not permit, if at any cost she can prevent it, the Sea of Marmara falling under the domination of any European Power except herself”.²⁴⁸ In a crisis he expected that Russia would favour annexing Constantinople and her immediate surroundings into their empire. There were two reasons he was unperturbed, firstly he believe the Black Sea fleet was too weak, and secondly that the Russians thought a descent was only possible in the context of a European war, an event Russia felt she as yet too weak to face. Salisbury pressed on and in the Guildhall speech he again reiterated that there was no “necessary antagonism” between Britain and Russia and that the two Powers should be able to find common ground to solve the crisis.²⁴⁹ Shishkin received the speech warmly but still continued to reject the suggestions made in the British circular. This left Salisbury believing that without a commitment to coercion, there was probably no use “in combined further representations on the part of the Ambassadors”.²⁵⁰ However, O’Conor attempted to explain why this may not have been Russia’s last word, the Tsar who was “influenced by the arguments of his last adviser” also had “not much confidence in his own judgement”.²⁵¹ O’Conor was convinced that Nicolas currently favoured de Witte’s policy of opposing reforms dictated by joint pressure but also noted that Shishkin and Nelidov, who had returned to St. Petersburg from Constantinople, were for accepting Salisbury’s policy but that they probably counted for little in the Tsars estimation.²⁵² This left Salisbury in his customary pessimistic view, he started to think that the Russians could not be kept from the Straights and that the best Austria and Britain could hope for would be compensation.²⁵³

²⁴⁸ Waters to Goschen W.E., 13/10/1896, in Goschen to Salisbury, 17/10/1896, FO65/1516

²⁴⁹ *The Times*, 11/11/1896, pg 6.

²⁵⁰ O’Conor to Salisbury, 11/11/1896, FO65/1517; Salisbury To O’conor, 12/11/1896, FO65/1517

²⁵¹ O’Conor to Salisbury, 18/11/1896, Salisbury MSS 3M/A/129

²⁵² O’Conor to Salisbury, 18/11/1896, FO65/1516

²⁵³ Salisbury to Currie, 23/11/1896, Salisbury MSS 3M/A/138

Later in November 1896 all this was turned on its head as the Russians had accepted the British circular.²⁵⁴ The reply was vague and Salisbury had to try to stiffen it. By mid December the Russian reply indicated that they were willing to take coercive measures.²⁵⁵ By February 1897 the Ambassadors had worked out a plan of reform, but this was forestalled by the outbreak of the Greco-Turkish war. The reason for the Russian change of heart was due to Nelidov's success in St. Petersburg: he had convinced the Russians that the Ottoman Empire would fall and that Britain would try to take the Straights first.²⁵⁶ As we have seen Shishkin, at least, was unwilling to accept British assurances that the Mediterranean fleet was not poised ready to take Constantinople. Therefore, Russia had to force the Straights by force of arms. That she could do so was in no doubt.²⁵⁷ As Russia believed she could take Constantinople, then she had to assume that the British, the strongest navy in the world, could do similar. What remained then, was for Russian diplomacy to allay British suspicions and hence the need to agree to joint action. In December 1896 the Tsar approved to a Russian descent on Constantinople. This would only become apparent to British statesmen later in 1898.²⁵⁸ Salisbury's unceasing efforts appeared to have paid off, but had in fact had backfired. While Russia was previously prepared to maintain the status quo in Turkey, she was now actively working towards a unilateral *coup de force* to settle the Straights question in her favour: the exact circumstances Salisbury had wished to avoid; the exact circumstances the Fleet had advised they could do nothing about. While the Foreign Secretary had finally got Russian support for his circular and a policy of reform imposed by the Ambassadors he had also prompted this drastic change of direction, due to the incessant nature of his diplomacy coupled with Russia's fear of British intentions which he could never allay. Throughout this exchange the Cabinet had been consulted and informed, in fact this body had constrained Salisbury's freedom of action as much as Russia or the professional advisors at the Admiralty. However, it

²⁵⁴ O'Connor to Salisbury, 25/11/1896, FO65/1517

²⁵⁵ Salisbury to O'Connor, 25/11/1896 (sent a week later), FO65/1513 and minutes; O'Connor to Salisbury, 16/12/1896, FO65/1516

²⁵⁶ Neilson, p.176

²⁵⁷ Langer, pp.339-40

²⁵⁸ O'Connor to Salisbury, 16/06/1898, Salisbury MSS 3M/A/129

was clear to all including Chamberlain, that Britain was no longer capable of using unilateral force to defend some of her interests; a repeat of anything like the occupation of Egypt was now impossible or at the very least far more dangerous. This realisation and the tortured nature of Anglo-Russian relations left a mark on the Cabinet and Chamberlain, only Salisbury remained optimistic that Russia could be worked with. While Balfour would never openly say that he thought differently, when he became acting Foreign Secretary his focus was in an entirely different direction.

3: Seeking a Safe Harbour: Chamberlain and the Port Arthur Crisis.

Matters in China remained relatively calm for most of 1897. The Russians contented themselves with surveying their rail routes and the building of winter births for the Russian Far Eastern Squadron at Port Arthur. In the Near East the Greco-Turkish war remained a thorn in Salisbury's plans to bring the Sultan to heel. In Africa, Chamberlain's Hausas were still playing draughts with the French, while Kitchener and the Anglo-Egyptian army slowly made their way south into the Sudan and towards Fashoda. At the opposite end of that continent, the fallout from the Jameson Raid continued in the form of further defiance from the Transvaal; South Africa would not simmer down. This also embroiled Chamberlain back home as he fought to contain the potential fallout from the inquiry into Jameson's failed filibuster. While historians have pointed out "Anglo-Russian relations in the Far East were quiet" during this time, the British had plenty to be concerned with elsewhere.²⁵⁹ However, on 14th November the Far East would be catapulted to centre stage as the Kaiser's orders for the German seizure of Kiaochow Bay in the Shantung province of China came to a head. Throughout the crisis, Salisbury would remain obstinately wedded to the idea of Russian co-operation despite his experience in the Near East. He also opposed all other attempts to negotiate other international arrangements and ultimately only caved into a territorial acquisition when it became apparent that while his Cabinet was unsure what should be done something had to happen in order to face the public.

The Kaiser believed that another round of his personal diplomacy had cleared his Kiaochow action with the Russians. However, Muravev claimed that Russia had the right of first anchorage and a Russian squadron was ordered to safeguard it.²⁶⁰ This was quite a serious problem: Anglo-German relations had still not recovered from the damage inflicted by the "Kruger

²⁵⁹ Neilson, p.184

²⁶⁰ Otte, *China*, p.88;

Telegram" and the constant agitation against Britain in the German press, maintained in order to support the Kaiser's fleet building.²⁶¹ This left Bülow's 'Free Hand' looking, at least momentarily, like simply flailing about. In fact St. Petersburg had only given the Germans permission to merely winter in the bay and required them to seek permission of the local Russian Admiral; it is hardly surprising that the seizure of the bay caused a serious problem.²⁶² Russia also revealed that she was considering taking a port in Korea or in the Gulf of "Petchili[sic]". Otte was certainly right that Germany was not ready for the crisis she had created.²⁶³ Fearing a permanent souring of Russo-German relations, Holstein naturally swung toward a closer Anglo-German connection. This was to be achieved by Britain granting a concession to Germany, therefore, even when the Germans felt their 'chestnuts' were getting rather warm, they still wanted a concession before allowing Britain to rescue them.²⁶⁴ Holstein was convinced that Britain would act anyway, to prevent Germany and Russia having to come to an agreement.²⁶⁵ Hatzfeldt, with his superior understanding of British methodology, wired back for further instructions; to leave Kiaochow as Russia asked would have re-orientated German foreign policy. He suggested taking Amoy instead, but also suggested that some British support could be had if Germany offered something to Britain with regard to the Transvaal, and even mentioned the possibility of a secret agreement about Mozambique.²⁶⁶ It seemed he expected little from Salisbury without being able to offer an inducement.

The British were taken by surprise and Salisbury's initial response was hampered by uncertainty. The German occupation of Kiaochow could easily have been both temporary and genuinely in order to ensure compensation for the murder of German missionaries, or it could have been the beginning

²⁶¹ Lascelles to Salisbury, 20/08/1897, FO64/1411; Holstein to Hatzfeldt, 13/11/1897, *Holstein Papers*, IV, No.630, p.50; Kennedy, *Antagonism*, p.233.

²⁶² Bülow to *Auswärtige Amt*, 11/08/1897, *GP*, XIV pt.1, Nr. 3679, pp.58-9

²⁶³ Otte, *China*, p.88

²⁶⁴ Holstein to Hatzfeldt, 13/11/1897, *Holstein Papers*, IV, No.630, pp.48-53

²⁶⁵ Hohenlohe to Hatzfeldt 16/11/1897, *GP*, XIV pt.1, Nr.3702 pp.86-7

²⁶⁶ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 16/11/1897, *GP*, XIV pt.1, Nr.3703, pp.87-8

of a new 'scramble' for China.²⁶⁷ However, Lascelles, then ambassador to Germany, had reported a week earlier that he suspected that attempts to gain a Far Eastern coaling station were underway.²⁶⁸ Germany's intentions were shrouded in both uncertainty and suspicion but the possibility that the occupation had been approved of by other Powers also gave rise to fears of renewed joint European action against China; a Russian counterpoise was expected.²⁶⁹ When Hatzfeldt met with Salisbury he warned that domestic opinion may require Germany to remain at Kiaochow. Hatzfeldt also discussed the option of acquiring some other point in China. Salisbury made it clear that "the more to the north" this point was, "the less dubious or undesirable this would be for England."²⁷⁰ To begin with Salisbury was certainly unconcerned with what happened in North China. Hatzfeldt certainly had it in mind to link the Far Eastern situation to that in South Africa, hoping to buy British approval or at least apply leverage.²⁷¹ Salisbury was prepared to discuss other Chinese ports as Hatzfeldt tried to find somewhere for Germany to go, and thus escape from the tense situation with Russia, but Germany remaining at Kiaochow created the fewest problems for Britain.²⁷² Salisbury was shrewd enough to realise that the Germans must have been under pressure to exchange the port. On 22nd November, Germany informed St Petersburg that they could not leave the bay, shortly thereafter, unprepared to risk war, the Russians climbed down.²⁷³

Salisbury received reports that the Russians seemed indifferent to the German occupation.²⁷⁴ However, this was not the case. Russia, like Britain, feared that a general race for territory was starting to take place in China. One of the conditions that the Germans demanded, in their lease of

²⁶⁷ Salisbury to Lascelles, 12/01/1898, *BD*, I, No.3, p.4.

²⁶⁸ Lascelles to Salisbury, 7/11/1897, FO64/1412

²⁶⁹ Both Bertie and Sanderson in the Foreign office expected this to be the opening move in the partitioning of Chinese territory, Min., Sanderson, 13/12/1897, on Gough to Salisbury, 10/12/1897, FO64/1412 and Memo., Bertie, 18/11/1897, FO17/1330 both quoted in Otte, *China*, pp.90-1

²⁷⁰ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 17/11/1897, *GP*, XIV pt.1, Nr.3708, pp.92-4

²⁷¹ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 18/11/1897, *GP*, XIV pt.1, Nr.3709, pp.94-5

²⁷² Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 20/11/1897, *GP*, XIV pt.1, Nr.3710, p.96

²⁷³ Otte, *China*, p.92

²⁷⁴ Goschen W.E. to Salisbury, 1/12/1897, FO65/1534

Kiaochow, included some exclusive mining rights. The British protested that this was an abrogation of their 'most favoured nation' status. MacDonald was ordered to warn China that this would lead to a British claim for compensation.²⁷⁵ Salisbury was thinking of commercial concessions, such as ensuring a British successor as the head of Chinese customs. The rumours concerning the nature of this compensation added to the utter distrust of Britain, which was actually starting to drive Russian foreign policy. Driven by their fears of Britain in the Near East, Russia had started to plan for a *coup de Main* at Constantinople and in the Far East, Russia was again forced to act before she was ready and sent her fleet, to winter, at Port Arthur in mid December 1897, fearing delay could mean finding Britain already installed somewhere on the North Chinese coast.²⁷⁶

Salisbury had been inundated with advice even before the Russian squadron moved into the port she had forced Japan from three years earlier. Britain's primary concerns were along the Yangtze-Kiang River, a good distance away from the German and Russian occupations. However, as the Chinese government was based in the north it was subject to feel the pressure of those occupations more strenuously than the remote British presence. Even as early as November, MacDonald was suggesting Britain should acquire a fortified coaling station in northern China, but Salisbury was unconvinced, "[t]hat means a charge of some £40,000 again".²⁷⁷ While O'Connor, now in St Petersburg, believed that Britain could not stop Russia and Germany and so she should "define a sphere of influence".²⁷⁸ Advice external to the government was varied but strong; it ranged from securing the Yangtze Kiang River area, to aligning Britain with Japan.²⁷⁹ Bertie took a different view, believing that spheres of influence should not be defined until it was apparent that the British were "at a disadvantage in other parts of China".

²⁷⁵ Salisbury to MacDonald, 8/12/1897, FO233/44

²⁷⁶ For Constantinople see Chapter two; for Russia's un-readiness see Goschen W.E. to Salisbury, 26/12/1897, FO65/1534; and for Russian fears of a British land grab in the north see Vauvineux to Hanotaux, No 324. 5 Dec 1897, DDF (1) XII, No.374 referenced in Otte, *China*, p.95, n.84. For Russian Ministers deliberations after receiving confirmation that Germany would not withdraw see Langer, pp.457-59

²⁷⁷ Min., Salisbury, n.d., on MacDonald to Salisbury, 23/11/1897, FO17/1330

²⁷⁸ Memo., Sanderson, (on conversation with O'Connor), 23/12/1897 FO17/1330

²⁷⁹ Otte, *China*, p.95

He also suggested that the British should not send their squadron north for fear of encouraging the French to increase their presence in the south. To avoid weakening the British presence in the south, Bertie advised that a Chinese guarantee not to grant concessions or leases in the area around Hong Kong was sufficient, and that no further territorial demands should be made, such as a fortified coaling station. He concluded that the Far Eastern Squadron should have been brought up to a level capable "to deal with a Russian-German-French combination" as Britain's "best security".²⁸⁰ Otte points out that this implies a need for a Britain to acquire a naval base in north China, as maintaining a flying squadron almost a thousand miles north of Hong Kong was "fraught with logistical difficulties"²⁸¹. However, if, as Bertie suggested, Britain should not send ships to winter in a north China port, due to fears that France would be able to strengthen her squadron in the south, then this implied that Bertie did not think the ships should be 'flying' anywhere: they were needed to project power around Hong Kong where Britain's hard interests lay. The Navy itself had no difficulty in concentrating force in the Gulf of Petchilli without a naval station of its own. In December 1897 a force of nine cruisers were gathered to apply pressure over Korea. When the British would eventually demand the lease of Weihaiwei, the Navy would concentrate a force at the treaty port of Chifu that was larger than the Russian and German fleets combined, and did so in very short order. Operating out of Hong Kong, while also being able to make use of the Chinese Treaty ports, the navy believed they would have no serious problems blockading the Russians at Port Arthur. A north China Naval Base would be a different matter, but a mere Naval Station, while useful, would not make much material difference to the Navy's ability to project sea power in the Gulf of Petchilli.²⁸² Bertie also advised that the British Squadron should be strong enough to deal with all three European Powers combined. While Otte is correct that this implied the need to acquire a local coaling station, this ignores the implication of Bertie's explicit

²⁸⁰ Memo., Bertie, 23/12/1897, FO17/1330

²⁸¹ Otte, *China*, pp.96-7 quote on p.97

²⁸² Nish I.H., 'The Royal Navy and the Taking of Wei-hai-Wei, 1898-1905', *MM*, 54, 1 (1967), pp.39-52.

suggestion that territorial compensation should be avoided. That implication was that Britain needed to continue to project power from foreign held ports, such as the Chinese treaty ports, or by moving closer to Japan. However, Bertie also discussed that the Far East Squadron would need to be able to deal with the three other European Powers combined. Whatever reason brought those three Powers into a combination which required that the British squadron 'deal' with them would likely have left China as a rather low priority. It is hard to imagine that any such confrontation, let alone shots being fired, in East Asia or anywhere, would not have escalated quickly into a global conflict. It is not hard to see why Salisbury did not wish to rush to any conclusions. Professional advice did not illuminate the Foreign Secretary's way either. North Chinese ports were to be considered 'White Elephants'. They would become a source of weakness to their owners at a time of war, at least with a European Power, and would not affect British commercial interests mostly concentrated in the south.²⁸³

In late December Salisbury considered three crucial questions:

1. As to whether this would modify the strategical[sic] situation so as to make it necessary for us to occupy some new portion and if so where?
2. Whether such a step on our part would be required to maintain what is vaguely called our prestige - that is to say our position as a first-rate Power interested above others in the commerce of those seas?
3. Whether the position held by Russia and Germany would give them such means of exercising political pressure at Peking as to render some counter-move on our part necessary for preservation of our influence in matters which are important for the protection of our commerce, such as the selection of the Inspector General of Customs etc?

Thinking upon these questions, Salisbury thought the establishment of a port for a British squadron to winter at near "or the constant presence of our vessels there", could be necessary.²⁸⁴ He considered the East Asia

²⁸³ Otte, *China*, p.97-8

²⁸⁴ Memo. Sanderson, 23/12/1897 Sanderson MSS, FO800/2 also quoted in Otte, *China*, pp.98-9

situation as being one of the many terrible inheritances which Roseberry and Kimberley had bequeathed him. Salisbury's criticism was sensible: what had Britain gained by turning her back on her long-term ally, China, during the Sino-Japanese war? The Foreign Secretary believed that Britain had lost the trust of the Chinese who could not overcome their "indignation [...] at our support of Japan" and thus believed the British to be "a people that cannot be trusted". The result being that every new British action had "to make way against all the prejudice & all the distrust caused by the gratuitous abandonment of our previous political attitude".²⁸⁵ Salisbury's view was too simplistic, it is doubtful that the Tsungli Yamen really ever trusted the British; it was after all the British which had forced open the treaty ports and shot Opium into the veins of Chinese culture via the gratuitous use of cannon fire. The Chinese were not uncanny foreigners: while in negotiations with the Germans over the Kiaochow concession they attempted to play the Europeans against each other. If the Chinese harboured any ill will towards the British it would evaporate once Russian intentions to take those territories herself became evident. The Tsungli Yamen may have momentarily felt that working with Russia would protect their interests better; overall subordination to the Tsar was perhaps preferable to the Celestial Empire being torn to shreds between many European masters, but at heart, China wished to use any means possible to set the Europeans against each other and hopefully avoid having to concede them anything at all. Salisbury and his policy was contending with the Chinese feeling that they could make some wriggle room, some freedom of action, by playing Russia against Britain. In the end, China continued to placate all the European Powers not least of all, Britain. Salisbury was not struggling with the loss of as much soft power as he imagined.

During the earlier stages of this crisis, Chamberlain had kept mostly out of Salisbury's way. The confrontation with France in West Africa was in its most intense phase but on the 29th December he wrote to Salisbury:

²⁸⁵ Memo. Salisbury, n.d., encl. in Salisbury to Cross, 30/12/1897 Cross Mss, Add.MS51264 ; Cross to Salisbury, 31/12/1897, Salisbury MSS, 3M/3/Cross/1892-1902 quoted in Otte, *China*, p.100

I see that there is very little in the telegrams about recent events in China, although public opinion has been expecting some sensational action on our part. Public opinion is a very bad guide but I suppose we should be sharply questioned when parliament meets & if we do absolutely nothing before then I fear the effect of our self-effacement bills both on our own friends & on foreign governments.

I have no doubt however that you have all this already under consideration.²⁸⁶

Chamberlain did not think that Public Opinion was a good guide, but he was much more sensitive to the fact that in an increasingly democratic electoral system it needed to be heeded or dealt with. The letter is a barely veiled warning as to the affects of inaction; it was not that Chamberlain demanded that policy follow press opinion, but that something needed to be done, firstly in order to placate the public and secondly to meet the actual threat which the Colonial Secretary agreed existed. Foreign policy could no longer be made in an aristocratic *realpolitick* bubble insulated from electoral pressure, if indeed it ever had been. Therefore, inaction was Chamberlain's main concern; he had a few ideas as what may be possible but the perception of doing nothing was in his view worse than making a bad move. As ever, for Chamberlain, time was of the essence.

It is worthwhile to recall what had been going on in West Africa during November and December. Salisbury had recently had to instruct Chamberlain to withdraw troops from Bonduku as they were in breach of international law.²⁸⁷ The Colonial Secretary had complied, under protest; he thought the French breaches of the rules should have entitled the British to push back in a similar fashion. At the same time, the two men were playing a little push and pull game over how to conduct the Niger negotiations, Chamberlain had even threatened resignation: "I am more than sorry to differ from him, but I cannot stand it. I would rather give up office than allow French methods to triumph in this way."²⁸⁸ By December 1897 the relationship between these two men had become strained and Chamberlain

²⁸⁶ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 29/12/1897, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Chamberlain/1896-97/116

²⁸⁷ Salisbury to Chamberlain, 23/10/1897, JC11/30/95 See Chapter 1 pp.35-6

²⁸⁸ Chamberlain to Selborne, 1/12/1897 Selborne MSS 8/182; See Chapter 1 generally quote on Chp.1 p.39

had become particularly suspicious that Salisbury was not prepared to defend British interests with sufficient force. Salisbury replied to Chamberlain's concerns about inaction in China: "I agree with you that 'The public' will require some territorial or cartographic consolation in China. It will not be useful, & will be expensive but as a matter of pure sentiment we shall have to do it. I think it will be Chusan." He went on to point out that it was "more important" to "give enough assistance to the new indemnity loan to secure our obtaining a British successor to Hart[Head of China's Customs]." ²⁸⁹ Salisbury was focusing on pragmatically maintaining Britain's position in China. If Britain could still get what was truly important, her lion share of the trade, then all was well; he was impervious to arguments that the perceived loss of influence could cause real problems either in China or at home.

Chamberlain was not entirely satisfied with this reply; while he was "very glad" to hear of Salisbury's plans and agree that the "explosiveness of the Celestial Empire" was "premature", he also felt Britain could not "afford to be left behind". Therefore, he feared something more than a slow start in a new 'scramble': "I feel that if we make no move it will be a great encouragement to further tail-twisting on the part of our dear friends & allies of the Concert of Europe."²⁹⁰ Chamberlain never lost his deep concern about this; in Africa, Venezuela and now China he was perpetually in fear of what may happen should Britain's competitors come to believe that she would not defend her interests. However, Chamberlain was also not as wedded to territorial aggrandisement as his reputation suggests. He never wanted Britain to be left behind, but in the Far East he thought other actions would have met the public's desire for action: "[t]alking of allies have you considered whether we might not draw closer to Japan?" To Chamberlain's mind, Japan had already demonstrated her ability to fight and he noted "that they[Japan] are rapidly increasing their means of offence & defence [...]. If we decided to take anything [...] I imagine that we should be sure of their support. [...] In any case they are worth looking

²⁸⁹ Salisbury to Chamberlain, 30/12/1897, JC5/67/88

²⁹⁰ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 31/12/1897, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Chamberlain/1896-97/117

after for it is clear that they do not mean to be a *quantité négligeable* in the East."²⁹¹ Chamberlain's view was more positive about the value of Salisbury's inheritances and the usefulness of the Japanese.

Salisbury consistently denigrated the usefulness of the Japanese, expecting any connection with them to make discussions with the Chinese more difficult and potentially place Britain under obligations that would, at best, make any rapprochement with Russia harder and, at worse, possibly draw Britain into a war with the Dual-Alliance. However, almost at the same moment, Satow in Tokyo reported "that Japan would do anything England asked of her [...] to gain her friendship" though she was not yet ready to take any kind of assertive action in East Asia.²⁹² Throughout the Kiaochow/Port Arthur Crisis she made several enquires which suggested that she perhaps would have followed Britain in making a strong protest. However, the new Ministry in Tokyo was tempted to pursue their negotiations with Russia over Korea, while Britain attempted to find their own *modus Vivendi* with the Tsardom. As neither was prepared to give up these initiatives there was little chance that much could be made of Chamberlain's suggestion; at least until Japan felt her military and naval preparations were complete.²⁹³ Chamberlain was not naive about Japanese capabilities; his was a suggestion which had a characteristic long term view. Otte uses this exchange between Chamberlain and Salisbury to support his argument that the decision to take some part of China was taken in early January 1898. Otte also provides evidence from a wide array of sources including MacDonald's instruction to inform the Chinese that if they ceded territory to Germany, then Britain would require "some corresponding concession" and subsequently seeking advice as to which port to take.²⁹⁴ While Otte may be right that Salisbury had made "the decision to acquire some part of China as a response to the German action at Kiaochow" by January 1898, the final decision would ultimately rest with the Cabinet and

²⁹¹ Ibid.,

²⁹² Satow to Salisbury, 30/12/1897, Salisbury MSS 3M/A/126/

²⁹³ Nish., pp.47-53

²⁹⁴ Salisbury to MacDonald, 28 and 31 Dec/ 1897 FO17/1314; Otte, *China*, pp.100-1

that decision was not so easily made.²⁹⁵ His interpretation also gently sidesteps Salisbury's pragmatism; if Russia followed the German example it would then become necessary for Britain to follow suit, then it was only sensible to consider the comparative benefits of each site as soon as possible. It also ignores his seeming preference, even as late as the 22nd March, to avoid any territorial acquisition if possible.²⁹⁶

Just before the Cabinet meeting in January, Salisbury outlined what he believed was at stake to Balfour. He hoped to avoid being overruled by his Cabinet, as he had been over Armenia, by building a consensus ahead of time. Russia was at the heart of Britain's problems; she was the Power who appeared to be in a position, especially with her ally France, to apply pressure to several of the British Empire's sensitive points simultaneously. In the Near East she could snatch up Constantinople and thus upset the naval balance of power in the Mediterranean and threaten Egypt while dominating land communications between Europe and Asia. She could also challenge the British in India via Afghanistan. Whilst Britain believed she had no means of hurting the Tsar's colossus, whose vital organs all lay a fair way in land, away from the seas which Britain would be able to dominate and strike from. This was not the only reason why Russia was central to solving Britain's security problems. Not many in British Government circles were yet aware of the full implications of the Kaiser's naval policy, but influential *Times* writers were not so docile. George Saunders, *The Times* Berlin correspondent, commented that he believed "that we shall have to reckon with this people[Germans] long before anything like a decisive reckoning with Russia comes; and further that a *modus Vivendi* with Russia is more easily attainable than with Germany both now and in the future."²⁹⁷ This is not to say that Germany had already become the ultimate enemy or that there was anything inevitable about such an enmity, but it merely demonstrated that Britain's options were few. Salisbury's distrust of Germany was not new, nor based upon a sound evaluation of the German

²⁹⁵ Quote from Otte, *China*, p.101

²⁹⁶ Memo. Salisbury, 22/03/1898, *BD*, I, No.34, p.22

²⁹⁷ Saunders G. to Wallace M., 8/03/1897, *The Times Archive*. Quoted in Kennedy, *Antagonism*, pp.232-3

Naval Law, but if Russia was the Power currently able to make the most trouble for Britain, then there were only two possible solutions; come to terms with her, or find someone to stand with you to contain her. This was the central problem; Salisbury would have agreed with Saunders about Russia, he too believed an Anglo-Russian agreement was easier to achieve. He thus hoped to use the negotiations of the third Chinese indemnity loan to draw Russia and Britain much closer together, enough to realign the Powers in Europe.²⁹⁸ Salisbury had decided he preferred to lean towards Russia and the Dual-Alliance, now that in his mind Britain was freed from having to defend Constantinople.

The Cabinet meeting did not go as Salisbury had hoped. Salisbury's desire to attempt to negotiations over the loan to improve Anglo-Russian relations met with problems. Chamberlain rejected all suggestions at conciliating Russia or admitting her to the loan negotiations. He was not unaware of the same issues; he too was trying to find some diplomatic arrangement that would ease Britain's place in the world, but he believed Russia could not be trusted. He again suggested working with the US and Japan, as a new Far Eastern Triplice, and thus insist "that all concessions taken by or made to any other Power shall be shared with all other Powers, i.e. no exclusive rights to be allowed", and if that failed then "we shall ask for something for ourselves to balance Kiao-Chow".²⁹⁹ Chamberlain was again thinking further afield to find alternatives and thus avoid having to come to terms with Russia. To understand his aversion it is important to recall what Chamberlain knows of previous dealings with the Tsardom. He was fully aware of how negotiations over Armenia and over previous Chinese loans had gone. The Russians had lied, temporised, and had been insincere in both cases and over many months. Chamberlain did not believe they could be trusted to hold to any agreement. Furthermore, the demand he made was against any Power gaining exclusive rights in China. It was the exclusion of the British that made such concessions objectionable. Otte believes Chamberlain "doubted the much vaunted potential of the China

²⁹⁸ Salisbury to Balfour, 6/01/1898, quoted in Otte, *China*, pp103-4.

²⁹⁹ Chamberlain to James, 11/01/1898, quoted in Otte, *China*, p.104

market"; yet here the Colonial Secretary was doing all he could to keep as much of that market open as possible.³⁰⁰ Chamberlain wrote to Salisbury, touching on some of these concerns: could successful joint action over the loan become "the basis of a [Russian] claim for alternate – or –joint – management of the Chinese customs?" Having hinted that working too closely with Russia could have created a more serious problem by inviting them to ask after the one thing the British were most determined to maintain in China, he went on to suggest that Russia had:

behaved very badly to us in Corea[sic] & is taking Port Arthur; & she has shown special unfriendliness in preparing to exclude & dismiss English engineers, & in claiming consideration in the appointment of Director to Customs. Perhaps it may be right to keep coals of fire on her head, but I should have preferred to issue the loan singly, leaving power to share it afterwards if we thought fit. This would leave a weapon in our hands which we might use to make terms with Russia later on.³⁰¹

The Colonial Secretary signed off, asking Salisbury not to bother to. If Salisbury was hoping to create a new relationship with Russia, one that would meaningfully affect the situation in Europe, then he was probably quite prepared to offer major concessions. There is, however, no indication that the administration of Chinese customs would have been one of them. In addition Otte discovered that Chamberlain had told Staal that he favoured "an agreement with Russia and by ricochet with France".³⁰² Although this seems disingenuous, as outlined over West Africa, Chamberlain only really wished to consider agreements where there was a clear *quid pro quo*, or the trading of congruent claims. He did not believe that Russia would stick to any deal, or that Britain could well afford to offer them the kind of compensation they were likely to find inviting. In Chamberlain's mind, an agreement with Russia would be unreliable and too expensive.

³⁰⁰ Otte, *China*. p.100

³⁰¹ Chamberlain to Salisbury.,4/01/1898 Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Chamberlain/1898-99/119

³⁰² Egor Egorovich Stall, Russian Ambassador to Britain, 1884-1902; "une entente avec la Russie et par ricochet avec la France" translated by google the French is from Staal to Muravyov 10 & 22/12/1897, quoted in Otte, *China*, p.104

The Cabinet did not accept Salisbury's policy and agreed to consider other options, such as diplomatic approaches to the US, thus avoiding having to commit to a policy of their own. However, the Foreign Minister continued to push ahead with his Russian project, thinking that the time was not adverse; Russia was, after all, aggrieved with Germany over Kiaochow. Otte again suggests that at least Staal was in favour of some form of Anglo-Russian *détente*, noting that two powers only had one thing in common in Asia: "their mutual distrust".³⁰³ However, this was the biggest stumbling block to previous attempts to work together. Distrust of Britain had already caused serious reactions in St. Petersburg. Having failed to interest Russia in working jointly on the earlier Chinese loan, Salisbury would try to use similar currency in an attempt to buy the same horse. He could not have been naive enough to think that the negotiations for a *détente* could continue simultaneously as the loan negotiations without Russia connecting the two.

When Salisbury finally instructed O'Connor to begin talks on an Anglo-Russian *détente*, he suggested he should do so with Witte, Russia's finance minister. Witte was the one Russian minister who seemed to have been consistently opposed to territorial acquisitions in China, hoping to gain concessions, and a preponderance of power over Peking, through peaceful means. Muravev, the Russian Foreign Minister, was reportedly annoyed with this policy.³⁰⁴ Even as O'Connor started talks in St. Petersburg problems were already brewing. In Peking, the Chinese were under Russian pressure to refuse an Anglo-German loan to cover the third indemnity payment; China had herself asked for the loan and it was being offered on favourable terms. O'Connor was happy to report that Muravev (he was unable to talk to Witte first) was "more favourable even than I expected." Muravev appeared happy to look toward a general *entente*, which would include recognition of a Russian sphere of influence in Northern China. However, O'Connor noted something in his reply which historians have laid little influence on:

³⁰³ Staal to Muravyov, 7/19/01/1898, also quoted in Otte, *China*, pp.104-5

³⁰⁴ O'Connor to Salisbury, 12/01/1898, FO65/1552; Neilson, p.187

The information I have received since my return leads to the opinion that (? Russian Government) and particularly the Emperor are greatly afraid of complications arising before the Siberian railway is completed, and that in so far [as?] the moment is opportune for an amicable arrangement in regard to our respective interest in China and elsewhere. At the same time it becomes the more important to take care that any understanding we may come to gives no such headway that it cannot be set aside when it may seem to Russia to have served its temporary purpose.³⁰⁵

O'Connor, one of the strongest advocates of an Anglo-Russian agreement, clearly believed it possible that Russia would simply drop it once she felt secure enough to do so. While Salisbury was prepared to hope for better conduct from the Russians, detractors like Chamberlain could not. O'Connor eventually had his meeting with Witte, during which the Russian finance minister again expounded his vision of peaceful penetration: "Russia's geographical position must sooner or later secure her political predominance in the north of China and her true policy is to keep China intact." However, he still asked what "would England say if Russia's occupation of Port Arthur became permanent?" O'Connor was also pushed into giving some idea of what Britain's aims were: "to keep China open to foreign trade, to oppose prohibitive tariffs and not allow our commercial interests and our consequent political position to be set aside by the action of other Powers."³⁰⁶ Things were already not looking very good, when the Russians talked about a sphere of influence in the North they were actually requesting a *carte blanche* to do as they pleased there, including the occupation of Port Arthur. Salisbury replied that he was not contemplating a partition of territory, or anything that would "admit the violation of any existing treaties, or impair the integrity of the present empires of either China or Turkey." The Prime Minister hoped instead for what he termed, "only a partition of preponderance".³⁰⁷ This was incompatible with ultimate Russian aims, regardless of whether Witte or Muravev would manage to direct Russian Far Eastern policy. In his discussion with Witte, O'Connor described how the Russian Finance Minister had drawn his hand over four

³⁰⁵ O'Connor to Salisbury, 20 Jan 1898, *BD*, I, No.6, p.6

³⁰⁶ O'Connor to Salisbury, 23/01/1898, *BD*, I, No.8, pp.7-8

³⁰⁷ Salisbury to O'Connor, 25/01/1898, *Ibid.*, No.9, p.8

North China provinces, stating that "sooner or later Russia would probably **absorb** all this territory".³⁰⁸ At the very outset, it seemed Russia would require a high price for her friendship. Salisbury was not prepared to allow Russia the right to take unilateral action resulting in territorial acquisitions in Northern China. In his description of what he could offer: a "partition of preponderance" based upon the watersheds of the Yangtze and Hoango in China and the Black Sea and Euphrates in Turkey, he had also made clear that the violation of existing treaties, the partition of territory and the infraction of rights was unacceptable. In other words, he would not, or perhaps could not, agree to a deal that could allow Russia to close a treaty port such as Tientsin, take territory for herself or close parts of China to the trade of others.³⁰⁹ It should have been clearly apparent that this hope of a wide-ranging agreement with Russia would cost far more than Britain was prepared to pay.

Salisbury continued undaunted, he warned Staal in London that spheres of influence would accelerate China's disintegration and the Russian ambassador simply replied this was "a geographical fact."³¹⁰ These were serious problems it seemed Britain was unable to offer Russia what she really wanted; and despite Russian desires being confined to areas in which Britain lacked vital interests. Maintaining the integrity of international law was even more important to Salisbury than that of the Chinese and Ottoman Empires. Even in the midst of these discussions Witte had causally referred to Russia's antagonistic position with regards to the Chinese indemnity, he had "not yet lost all hope of the Chinese refusing the conditions of the loan and turning again to Russia"; the situation had become serious.³¹¹ Salisbury was quite right when he explained himself to Beach. With Germany in Kiaochow and Russia in Port Arthur, if the Chinese

³⁰⁸ O'Connor to Salisbury, 30/01/1898, note on *Ibid.*, No.8, p.8 emphasis mine.

³⁰⁹ Salisbury to O'Connor, 25/01/1898, *Ibid.*, No.9, p.8

³¹⁰ Courcel to Hanotaux, 23/01/1898, *DDF*, (1), XIV, No.25

³¹¹ O'Connor to Salisbury, 30/01/1898, *BD*, I, No.8, p.7

refused the British loan then the British "position in regard to Russia in China will be one of absolute effacement."³¹²

Chamberlain also believed the situation had become dire, but was losing patience with Salisbury who was, yet again, chasing the Russians regardless of a long list of Russian slights, some serious and some imaginary:

grave trouble is impending upon the government if we do not adopt a more decided attitude in regard to China.

What are the facts? We have a paramount interest in the Trade, and have gained much credit both at home and in America, by insisting that while we do not intend to oppose the occupation of Germany and Russia, we are determined that their Ports shall be Treaty Ports [...] and that our influence shall be maintained.

The Germans appear to have accepted our terms [...] But the Russians have done us at every point.

They have induced us to let our ships leave Port Arthur, while they have reciprocated our friendly attitude by opposing our loan proposals.

They have forced us to withdraw our own proposal to make Talienwan a Free Port

They are placing Russian officers in control of Railways & to the exclusion of English

They are ousting us from influence in Corea.

They pretend that their occupation is temporary and not in restraint of our Trade. We all believe that this is false and that they will transform the occupation into a permanent one and will exclude us altogether from the Liaotang peninsula. [...]

All this is known to our friends and to our enemies. If matters remain as they are our prestige will be gone and our trade will follow. I would not give a years' life to the Government under such conditions.

Suffice to say Chamberlain was extremely concerned. His solution was to make a clear proposal to the US and the Germans to join Britain in enforcing a policy that all ports held by foreigners, now or in the future, should be Treaty Ports and "That if Russia refuses these terms we should

³¹² Salisbury to Hicks Beech, 29/01/1898, quoted in Neilson, p.189 and Otte, *China*, p.108; Salisbury to MacDonald, 28/01/1898, FO17/1339

summon her fleet to leave Port Arthur and make her go if necessary."³¹³ He also thought this would be an effective combination with which to force China to open more treaty ports and allow internal navigation. He opposed territorial concessions all the way through the crisis. Chamberlain was certainly prepared, as long as Britain was not acting alone, for some pretty serious measures and the possibility of a military confrontation. He had also warned the Cabinet that chasing after Russia played into the Tsar's hands. His concern over prestige was consistent and here he saw more dangerous 'tail-twisting'. Chamberlain felt that in the Niger negotiations there was a feeling that Britain would always give way in the face of the threat of force. It was this self-debasement which he feared had become a standard motif of Salisbury's policy. In Chamberlain's mind, Britain could not afford for her rivals to become convinced that she would never defend her interests with force.

The next round of 'talks' in St. Petersburg revealed how far the Russians were really prepared to try to come to a worldwide arrangement. Talks with Muravev demonstrated how very little he was prepared to move on: he pretended to care a little and to be ignorant of the situation with the loan and while O'Connor tried to remind him that Salisbury was looking for a general settlement, the Russian wanted to "proceed in the first instance to treat Chinese affairs". At the end of the interview Muravev "added that later on we would take up the question of our respective spheres of influence in Turkey".³¹⁴ And again later while reporting on his meeting with Lamsdorff, O'Connor noted that he had "observed that Count Muraviev[sic] has rather avoided referring to Asia Minor, Africa, Persian Gulf, &c. Now is the time, I think, to make it clearly understood that the arrangement between the two countries shall extend not only to China but to all the other regions where we have conflicting interests."³¹⁵ This had been made clear from the start; it should all ready be noted that the Russians were not prepared to discuss the general situation. If negotiations were to proceed

³¹³ Chamberlain to Balfour, 3/02/1898, JC5/5/70

³¹⁴ O'Connor to Salisbury, 3 Feb 1898, *BD*, I, No.11, p.9

³¹⁵ Vladimir Nikolayevich Lamsdorf, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister (1897-1900), Russian Foreign Minister (1900-1906); O'Connor to Salisbury, 7/02/1898, *BD*, I, No.13, p.10

with each theatre taken separately, then it was certain that Salisbury would not get a deal the British would believe was fair. After all Salisbury could not even offer complete freedom of action in Manchuria and with the vagueness of Russian suggestions, it was apparent that no deal would be forthcoming.³¹⁶ It is hard to imagine how Salisbury hoped that agreeing to what Neilson calls a “balance of influence” in China, could ever have been attractive enough to the Russians.³¹⁷ If he was not truly prepared to accept delimitation of China into spheres of influence, what inducement did he actually have to offer the Russians? The Russians were full of distrust of Britain and so any informal arrangement, such as Salisbury’s watershed proposals, were unacceptable.

As Muravev was feigning disinterest in the loan, the Russians were doing all that they could in Peking to prevent the Anglo-German loan from being accepted. Salisbury noted that this was “very hostile and insulting”, despite the Tsar’s hopes that the current talks should succeed. However, “this affront is not due to any order of the Emperor[Tsar]”. Believing the Russian suggestion of sharing the loan was unworkable, Salisbury instructed O’Conor to discover what Russians objection actually were.³¹⁸ The chances of finding the currency for any agreement, let alone a general one, appeared to have already shrunk to the level of wishful thinking. MacDonald in China continued to pressure the Chinese for the concessions which were most important to the British. These included that China undertake not to alienate any part of the Yangtze valley and secondly, to reserve the superintendence of China’s customs for a British subject.³¹⁹ O’Conor in Russia continued to pursue the Anglo-Russian *entente*. He offered the Russians a memorandum of Salisbury’s ideas based upon “a partition of preponderating political influence and not a partition of territory” in an attempt to clarify where negotiations had arrived and to ensure that there had been no strong words of opposition to Salisbury’s suggestions. O’Conor had hoped that such a note would help facilitate the next stage of

³¹⁶ Otte, *China*, p.109

³¹⁷ Neilson, p.191

³¹⁸ Salisbury to O’Conor, 8/02/1898, *BD*, I, No.14, p.11

³¹⁹ Note on *Ibid.*, claims that the Chinese agreed to these demands on the 11/02/1898, Otte, *China*, p.109

discussions, which would mean resolving “to the mutual advantage of each country,” some “of the more definite issues at stake”.³²⁰ Before hearing any official reply, O’Conor continued to press the Russians on their counter-demands should the Anglo-German loan be accepted. This was the point reached when the British learnt that the occupation of Port Arthur was permanent in nature. The demand was for “merely a lease for, say, twenty years of Talienswan and Port Arthur”. As noted this was in direct conflict with Salisbury’s hopes to avoid a partition of territory. O’Conor noted that the Russians “intended to hold to these ports at any cost” whilst claiming that such a lease “would not destroy Chinese sovereignty”. Informing Lamsdorff that the British did not see things in the same way, and that this would almost certainly necessitate Britain making similar demands in their own sphere, he broke off discussing “these demands without referring” to Salisbury for instructions. Lamsdorff continued to assert that Russia had given up “her prior claim to the loan with all its political importance” implying that the British should perhaps accept the Russian leases as a *quid quo pro*.³²¹ Chamberlain would have noted this as yet another example of a European Power offering incomparable objects as part of a transaction.

The Cabinet meeting of 23rd February attempted to formulate a response. Most of those present accepted that they were powerless to prevent Russia obtaining the two ports; this should have been good news as it could have enabled Salisbury to concur in Russia’s actions and thus use it as part of the currency for a wider agreement. However, Salisbury, so often described as a *realpolitick* politician, felt unable to do so. Balfour felt even more strongly he “looked with no disfavour upon such course, for it opens ports which are now closed, and it makes it practically impossible for the French, if they have any aggressive designs on Hainan, to do more than adopt a similar policy of leasing, combined with Free Trade”.³²² Balfour’s trust, that the Russians would indeed keep the ports open to the trade of others was poorly placed unless he saw it as one of the conditions that could be

³²⁰ O’Conor to Salisbury, 12/02/1898, *BD*, I, No.16, inc. its enclosure, O’Conor to Mouravieff, 12/02/1898, pp.11-13

³²¹ O’Conor to Salisbury, 19/02/1898 *BD*, I, No 18, p.14

³²² Balfour to Goschen G.J., 26/02/1898, Balfour MSS, Add.MS49706

negotiated in further discussions. The Cabinet also decided to pursue Chamberlain's idea of approaching the US in an attempt to support the 'open door' policy in China. Chamberlain's original suggestion had wished to include Germany but this was not to be acted upon. In discussing this Cabinet meeting Otte corrects Neilson's comment that Salisbury was already in France recovering from illness. The Prime Minister did not leave for France until 26th March but how far he was able to direct Cabinet discussion, or even how often he was present, is difficult to discern. As Balfour increasingly deputised both as Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister it becomes harder for the historian to distinguish Balfour's and Salisbury's preferred policies; it should not be assumed that they were one and the same. Most evidence for the content of this meeting is in Balfour's letter to Goschen in which Balfour extensively defends the decisions the Cabinet made. This implied that Balfour approved of them and was instrumental in the debate around them, and that Goschen was unconvinced. However, it is also very difficult to imagine that Salisbury would have been unable to at least postpone the US initiative, as he had in January, if he had been present or in full form.

There is little evidence for exactly when and for how long Salisbury's illness affected British decision making. Otte quotes two notes from Sanderson, the Permanent Under Secretary of the Foreign Office, to O'Connor. They suggested that British diplomacy would "have for the moment to get on as we can under Balfour's superintendence" and that Salisbury "was nursed up and kept quiet". While, as Otte suggests, this may have allowed the Prime Minister to "preside over the now very brief Cabinet meetings in March", it also plainly states that he was to be "kept quiet". It is still very difficult to state with any precision when it was that Salisbury started to lose his control of foreign policy due to illness, however, the resultant decisions of the Cabinet of 23rd February suggests that he was not in control even then.³²³

While the Cabinet battled with how to proceed, O'Connor was still hopeful of progress with Russia. On the 22nd February he had finally received an

³²³ Sanderson to O'Connor, 2 & 17/03/1898, quoted in Otte, *China*, p.111

official response to his memorandum on how the talks had progressed so far. He was told that the Tsar had been "pleased" to read of British desires to improve relations via an *entente*, and that he welcomed "these overtures and thinks that the affairs of China and more especially the loan offer a good opportunity of putting them into immediate application which would ultimately lead to an exchange of views on the larger question." The note went on to acknowledge Britain's conditions for the loan and Russian counter-demands, and that the "Russian Government now awaits further communications."³²⁴ O'Connor also wrote to Lascelles, in Berlin, telling him that Salisbury had wanted "an alliance with Russia (& this he told me himself) thereby ending our isolation in Europe", and that negotiations should not have started "unless we are resolved to go till we at all events came to an irremovable obstacle".³²⁵ It is clear that the ambassador did not see the loan as just such an obstacle. Otte asks that some "allowance ought to be made for O'Connor's loose usage of the term 'alliance'." That is quite correct; it is difficult to imagine that Salisbury had meant to form any kind of formal Anglo-Russian alliance, while the evidence does support that "Salisbury's plans were more far-reaching than previous historians have allowed," it is still important to remember what it was he was actually prepared to discuss and with whom.³²⁶ As has been previously emphasised, Russia had proved to be unreliable and insincere in almost all her diplomatic arrangements and talks with Britain over the last three years. It is doubtful that an informal agreement could have been relied upon, and even if it could, it is even more doubtful that the Cabinet would have been prepared to take such a risk even if Salisbury had been. There was also an element of blackmail in even this last, seemingly optimistic, message from Russia. The inference was clear, let us have what we want with regards to the Chinese Loan and this "would ultimately lead to an exchange of views on the larger question."³²⁷ O'Connor may have thought this was not too high a price to pay, but considering all that was being promised was 'an exchange of views', it would have been too high for a Cabinet that had no

³²⁴ O'Connor to Salisbury, 22/02/1898, *BD*, I, No.20, p.15

³²⁵ O'Connor to Lascelles, 23/02/1898, Lascelles MSS, FO800/6

³²⁶ Otte, *China*, p.110

³²⁷ O'Connor to Salisbury, 22/02/1898, *BD*, I, No.20, p.15

clear idea of where to take British policy. While Russia would probably have been happy to agree to Britain taking a port in her area of interest, such as Chusan, this would not have mollified everyone in the Cabinet and would require serious effort to sell to the British public. It would certainly have seemed to encourage the piecemeal territorial disintegration of China, which the British wanted to prevent, and Chusan, while useful for safeguarding and strengthening British position in the Yangtze region could hardly have been considered a counter stroke designed to maintain a balance of both influence at Peking and naval power in the Gulf of Pechili, far in the north. Even though objective strategic opinion preferred Chusan to Weihaiwei, it would have been a much harder sell to an angry and almost bellicose public. Salisbury was concerned that China accepting the Russian loan would leave Britain in a humiliated position but this did not mean the loan could not form part of a general agreement. However, it would have been politically suicidal to offer the loan before talks had even got serious.³²⁸ On the 1st March the Chinese signed the British Loan agreement and just two days later O'Connor was reporting Russia's response. The signing of the loan and the other "commercial advantages", which Britain had obtained, "had made an unfavourable impression upon the Emperor[Tsar] ... under the feeling created by these events, His Majesty[the Tsar] did not seem inclined to pursue [...] the discussion of the broader question." The note went on to say that with regards to keeping Talienwan open under existing treaty rights, the Russians would be guided "by what the Germans do at Kiaochau."³²⁹ In reply, Sanderson noted that "the prospects of the *entente* making progress are checked for the moment". O'Connor was also not convinced that the *entente* was dead, commenting that he did not think "that our negotiations have actually broken down, but they have certainly had a severe check". In reality it seems that the *entente* had little prospect at any point. Russian desires, once Witte's policy had lost out in St. Petersburg - the event of which the Russian Finance Minister had tried to

³²⁸ Salisbury to Hicks Beech, 29/01/1898, quoted in Neilson, p.189

³²⁹ MacDonald to Salisbury, 1/03/1898, *BD*, I, No.21, p.15; O'Connor to Salisbury, 3/03/1898, *BD*, I, No.22, p.16

hint at to O'Connor - were simply not compatible with Britain's.³³⁰ It is hard to imagine how Britain could have acquiesced in the leasing of Port Arthur, without taking action of her own in recompense, and Britain could not have given up the loan either, as Sanderson put it "[t]here will be a regular row here ... [for] the public have set their minds on it."³³¹ Salisbury's balance of preponderating political power was not something Russia could agree to.

With the Russian *entente* now seemingly dead or at least in a deep coma, Balfour acted upon the Cabinet's decision to approach the US. Otte notes the delay between that decision and instructions being sent to Pauncefote on 7th March.³³² He claims that Salisbury's preference for a Russian agreement ensured that "nearly two months were allowed to lapse before the approach to the United States was made".³³³ It is hardly to be doubted that Salisbury preferred his own policy to Chamberlain's. Chamberlain first suggested that Britain approach the US over China in Cabinet on 11th January; however it was not until the Cabinet of 23rd February that the suggestion was accepted.³³⁴ Only twelve days were actually "allowed to lapse" between deciding to approach the US and actually doing so. While it seems certain that Balfour waited on the Russians before approaching the US, it also seems unnecessary to exaggerate the length of the delay. While the proposed agreement with the US would have made working with Russia difficult, it should not have made it impossible as Salisbury hoped to prevent a partition of territory. It seems unlikely that Salisbury was prepared to see Port Arthur and Talienwan become closed Russian territory even in return for a wider agreement. Certainly Balfour, as late as 23rd February, was talking as though it was assured that these ports would remain open. The agreement with the US would have made it much harder for Britain to have acquired new territory, but the agreement would have made such actions less necessary, as it was designed to prevent other

³³⁰ Sanderson to O'Connor, 9/03/1898, quoted in Otte, *China*, p.112; O'Connor to Salisbury, 31/01/1898 Salisbury papers, 3M/A/129

³³¹ Sanderson to O'Connor, 28/01/1898, quoted in Neilson, p.190

³³² Salisbury to Pauncefote, 7/03/1898, FO5/2364

³³³ Otte, *China*, p.112

³³⁴ Chamberlain to James, 11/01/1898, noted in Otte, *China*, p.104 & p.110; Balfour to Goschen G.J., 26/02/1898, Balfour MSS, Add.MSS.49706

Powers gaining exclusive advantages. The plan had further problems however, back when Chamberlain had first suggested it he had hoped to include Germany. While it was true that Germany had, at that time, already seized Kiaochow, it had not yet become apparent that they intended to close the area to foreign trade and dominate the province of Shantung. By March Germany had revealed these aims. If the US did agree to attempt to enforce the 'open door' then this new alliance would have had to deal with both Germany and Russia, or at least run the very serious risk of pushing the two Powers together. Given that France would almost certainly have been dragged along by her alliance partner, this was likely to have revived the Far Eastern Triple which had divested Japan of her spoils just three short years earlier. Bertie in the Foreign Office lamented the situation while commenting to Lascelles that the Germans had "lied with their customary awkwardness" but that more importantly:

I am convinced that if we show that we mean business we shall have very little trouble with our big European friends. Unfortunately France, Russia & Germany have got it into their heads that we shall never stand up to one First Class Power much less to two or three even if we had with us little Japan. It is difficult to remove this idea especially when we do our best to encourage it.³³⁵

This opinion was shared fully by Chamberlain, who was so often complaining that the British conducted themselves with far too much restraint and that the other Powers had learnt to rely upon it.³³⁶

With all other options exhausted Cabinet discussion fell back upon thoughts of territorial compensation. In late February, the Chinese had offered Britain the lease of Weihaiwei.³³⁷ The Chinese were trying to 'tempt' the British north; this would have prevented a demand for an alternative, more lucrative site further south or along the Yangtze and would help balance the influence of European Powers near to the Chinese capital. At the time, the

³³⁵ Bertie to Lascelles, 16/03/1898, FO64/1437 quoted in Otte *China* p.113

³³⁶ For some examples across the period in question see: Chamberlain to Salisbury, 4/01/1896, JC5/67/39; Chamberlain to Salisbury, 6/06/1897, Salisbury papers 3M/E/Chamberlain/1896-97/93; Chamberlain to Salisbury, 31/12/1897 *Ibid.*, 117; Chamberlain to Balfour, 3/02/1898, JC5/5/70

³³⁷ Macdonald to Salisbury, 25/02/1898, *BD*, I, No.25, p.18

port was occupied by Japan but she was due to retire with China's final payment of the war indemnity; the payment had been facilitated by the final Anglo-German Loan. If Japan withdrew it was widely considered that Germany would take the port or at the very least the final check on German domination of Shantung would have ended.³³⁸ Salisbury was concerned thinking that a "German takeover [...] would be very bad" but still argued that Chusan would be preferable. As if her intentions were not already apparent, Salisbury claimed all would depend upon Russia.³³⁹ The situation was discussed in Cabinet on 14th March, in Salisbury's absence.³⁴⁰ Immediately after this meeting, Bertie and Curzon worked together to write separate memoranda.³⁴¹ Bertie began by suggesting that none of the concessions Britain had gained were detrimental to Russia or unreasonable. Any objection to the opening of China's waterways could only be "on the ground that she [Russia] desires to keep the north of China more or less difficult of access by sea and rivers in order to pour over the land frontier Russian goods at preferential rates." Germany was also accused of playing a sly game with Chinese trade as they were "bent on monopolising everything in Shantung, and by preventing a trunk line of railway from Tien-tsin to Chin-kiang, on the Yang-tsze River, hoped to draw the trade of Pechili, Shansi, and Shensi to the triangle of railways in Shantung and to Kiao-chau." These concerns could be checked or at least watched if Britain established herself at Weihaiwei. "Chusan and Silver Island" could be taken "whenever some other Power moves that way, [...] but the occupation of Wei-hai Wei requires a preliminary arrangement". Bertie continued, convinced that if Japan left, Germany would move in, resulting in Britain having to do what she could in the Yangtze region while her "trade" was "gradually squeezed out of North and South China." He finished with the suggestion that if Britain did not take the port, then she should offer Japan such assurances that she would remain in occupation, in defiance of probable Russian, Germany and French anger.³⁴² His memo should have

³³⁸ Macdonald to Salisbury, 10/03/1898, FO17/1340

³³⁹ Salisbury to Macdonald, 12/03/1898, FO17/1338

³⁴⁰ Otte, *China*, p.114

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.124

³⁴² Memo., Bertie, 14/03/1898, *BD*, I, No.24, pp.17-8

also rendered a decision on Weihaiwei an imperative but no decision was yet made. In Salisbury's absence the two most influential Cabinet Ministers were Balfour and Chamberlain. Chamberlain would remain opposed to any territorial acquisition, even after the decision was finally taken. He firmly believed that British interests would be best protected by ensuring her access to the areas Germany and Russia were likely to dominate. Balfour was not likely to make any definite decision lightly. Despite believing that any "policy should be initiated *before* the conclusion of the Russo-Chinese arrangement", thus making "an immediate decision absolutely necessary", he allowed the Cabinet to postpone making it.³⁴³ This was hardly surprising as Bertie had just described how Britain taking Weihaiwei would ruin Germany's plans, MacDonald had earlier described that it would "strike a death blow" upon them and would thus "incur her hostility."³⁴⁴ Balfour was plagued with unanswerable questions:

What will be the effect of the new policy on Germany? Will it provoke a Triple Alliance against us in the Far East? Could we resist the power of such a combination (a) without Japan, (b) with Japan? Could the contest be confined to the Far East? Or would it mean a general war?... What will be the cost and what the military value of Wei-hai-Wei to us?

Balfour was in a position where he needed to provide leadership but saw nothing but danger. The wrong step could permanently alienate Powers he would prefer to work with, or even provoke a general war. Some of these questions could be answered with time but time was pressed. Firstly, Japan was asked if she would stay on. This she could not do; the Ito ministry in Tokyo was opposed to taking the risks this would represent, even being accused of a 'peace at any price' policy.³⁴⁵ Secondly, Balfour asked how Japan would respond to Britain taking possession of the base. Japan preferred that China to take back control, but that "Japan has no objection to its possession by a Power disposed to assist in maintaining the independence of China".³⁴⁶ The next effort was to try to prod along the slow pace of US diplomacy. Pauncefote was requested to ask after his

³⁴³ Min. Balfour, 14/03/1898 Balfour MSS, Add.MS49746

³⁴⁴ MacDonald to Salisbury, 10/03/1898, FO17/1340

³⁴⁵ Nish, p.56, see pp.53-7 for more information

³⁴⁶ Satow to Salisbury, 17/03/1898, FO46/502 also published in *BD*, I, No.30 p.21

earlier inquiries. However, the American scheme fell apart; McKinley was not prepared to enter into any agreement in advance of any Power actually closing ports and did not wish to steer the US away from her isolationist position.³⁴⁷ The Cabinet was rapidly running out of options.

The Cabinet met and discussed the situation over the next few days. News that the Russians had now officially made her demands on China had also filtered in meaning that a decision really had to be made.³⁴⁸ However, a serious division had opened. In the meeting on 18th March the Cabinet was therefore stuck with two options. Firstly, "one allowing Russia to lease Port Arthur subject to engagements to preserve existing treaty rights and possibly [...] to refrain from fortifying Port Arthur – we taking as a makeweight a lease of Wei-hai Wei" and secondly, "[t]he other requiring the Russians to abstain from leasing Port Arthur – we engaging to take no port in Gulf of Pechili and not to intervene in Manchuria." In summing up the possible pros and cons of these two options, Balfour noted that the first would make no difference to the ultimate future of Northern China on account of the long Russian border, which Russia would still manage to dominate, and that Britain could maintain her naval superiority "with or without Port Arthur". The first also had the notable benefit of being unlikely to result in a general war.³⁴⁹ O'Connor had also suggested that there was little chance of a Russian or German occupation of Weihaiwei; hence Balfour's newly found lack of concern that acquiring the port would dangerously ruin Anglo-German relations.³⁵⁰ The second of the two options ran the risk of a general war with Russia and thus perhaps France. However, it was also considered the only way to prevent the Russian advance and the "imminent partition of the Chinese Empire; that Wai-hai Wei if obtained would require too large military force for its defence, and **except for appearances** would be worth little to us if fortified and still less if unfortified". It would therefore be no makeweight for Port Arthur, which

³⁴⁷ Salisbury to Pauncefote, 15/03/1898, FO5/2364; Pauncefote to Salisbury, 16/03/1898, FO5/2365

³⁴⁸ O'Connor to Salisbury, 16/03/1898, FO65/1553

³⁴⁹ Balfour to O'Connor, 18/03/1898 repeated in Balfour to MacDonald, 19/03/1898, *BD*, I, No.32, pp21-2

³⁵⁰ Otte, *China*, p.116

was considered so strong that further fortification could make the place “impregnable [...]”; that the influence at Peking of the Power which had such a base at Port Arthur must be overwhelming.”³⁵¹ This reflected the differing opinions between the two groupings within the Cabinet.

As has already been noted, Chamberlain opposed taking Weihaiwei and was never convinced otherwise. At this stage, he was joined by the two service chiefs, Goschen and Lansdowne, and also by Hicks Beach, Balfour, Devonshire and Chaplin. This group was not cohesive; they were not unified by an agreed foreign policy outlook, Otte describes them as “a motley crew” that “was by no means a natural formation”.³⁵² Chamberlain appeared to advocate conflict; it was hardly imagined that Britain could attempt to “summon her[Russian] fleet to leave Port Arthur”, let alone “make her go if necessary”, without causing a conflict.³⁵³ However, if Russia was “[a]t heart” “in a mortal funk of our Fleet” then conflict was not certain.³⁵⁴ Russia had changed her policy in both Armenia and China due to fear of British power.³⁵⁵ It would also be unnecessary to fight for Port Arthur if Russia’s descent into Northern China was inevitable, on account of her railway building and land frontier, then all she needed was patience just as Witte had argued. O’Conor also feared what would happen if he “succeed too well” and convinced Russia not to hold on to Port Arthur; Russia would “pose again as the friend & protector of China” and use that position to block British initiatives at Peking.³⁵⁶ However, it is hard to see how allowing Russia to retain Port Arthur would have diminished these risks. While convincing her to withdraw would have soured Anglo-Russian relations, the reality was that Russia had continued to obstruct British initiatives even while negotiating for an *entente*. Salisbury had hoped that

³⁵¹ Balfour to O’Conor, 18/03/1898 repeated in Balfour to MacDonald, 19/03/1898, *BD*, I, No.32, pp21-2 emphasis mine.

³⁵² Otte, *China*, pp.117–24 for a full description of the members of each group along with Otte’s often excellent analysis of each cabinet members position; quote is from p.117

³⁵³ Chamberlain to Balfour, 3/02/1898, Balfour MSS, Add.MS49773

³⁵⁴ O’Conor to Bertie, 10/03/1898, quoted in Otte *China* p.113

³⁵⁵ For Constantinople see Chapter Two; for Russian fears of a British land grab in the north see Vauvineux to Hanotaux, 5/12/1897, referenced in Otte, *China*, p.95, n.84

³⁵⁶ O’Conor to Sanderson, 24/03/1898, Salisbury Papers, 3M/A/129/39

agreement would have represented a seismic shift in geopolitical alignments. Chamberlain's policy was not pro-war; it just did not shrink from the risk of it. His opinion was based on the assumption that Russia could not be trusted and there is little evidence to suggest that he was wrong. It should also be remembered that Chamberlain had never intended to unilaterally confront Russia, he hoped for Britain to find a different alignment, one that checked Russian plans, rather than having to acquiesce in them, namely a German alliance which preferable also included the US.

Otte notes that both Balfour and Lansdowne were unprepared to risk a confrontation with either Russia or Salisbury.³⁵⁷ Balfour was, of course, Salisbury's nephew and although he believed that Britain needed to find a first rate ally, he would go about such a policy with a more nuanced approach than 'Brummagen Joe'. He was unprepared to confront the Prime Minister, let alone actively undermine him.³⁵⁸ Lansdowne had been consistently opposed to any policy in which his department may end up required to do its job. He had been reluctant over West Africa, or even the Sudan, and thus a potential confrontation with Russia, at best confined to the Far East, at worst all over the globe, was hardly attractive to him. Lansdowne was also indebted to the Prime Minister, who had convinced him not to resign after his failure to reform the war office.³⁵⁹

Goschen was altogether a different kettle of fish. He had first-hand experience of both French and Russian intrigues having had assignments to Egypt. As First Lord of the Admiralty, he was mainly concerned with trying to check any possible Franco-Russian naval combination in the Mediterranean but also believed there were no serious conflicts of interest between Germany and Britain.³⁶⁰ Unlike Lansdowne and Balfour, he had no problem with potentially opposing Salisbury; it was Goschen who had led dissent against the Prime Ministers plans to force the Straits back in 1895. He believed that Weihaiwei would prove nothing but a drain on the Admiralty, while providing no real counterpoise to Port Arthur. He also

³⁵⁷ Otte, *China*, p.119

³⁵⁸ Balfour to Devonshire, 31/03/1898, Balfour MSS, Add.MS.49769.

³⁵⁹ Lansdowne to Salisbury, 2 & 3/02/1898, 3M/E/Lansdowne/1897-9/342 and 343

³⁶⁰ Otte, *China*, pp.119-20

believed this would represent a defeat for British diplomacy having been forced to abandon the 'traditional policy' of maintaining Chinese territorial integrity.³⁶¹ However, failure to convince both Russia and Germany to withdraw from their respective bases would have represented a defeat for that policy anyway. Goschen disagreed with Chamberlain's position in two important respects; firstly he was much more cautious about potential conflict and secondly did not think that events in the Far East were as important.

Hicks Beach initially opposed the acquisition of Weihaiwei on the grounds of fiscal restraint. All professional opinion had rated the base as being second rate, and the cost of fortification and maintenance alarmed the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Given the choice between paying for Weihaiwei or a potential Anglo-Russian war, Beach soon let his opposition drop. His concern for Britain's finances were not the usual penny pinching which was, and is, part and parcel of his job, but because the Victorian fiscal system was already starting to show signs of cracking even before the enormous strain of the South African War.³⁶²

Devonshire was technically the second most senior minister after Salisbury. Trying to summarise Devonshire's position is not a simple task. Often Balfour and Chamberlain were both able to wield more influence than 'the Duke' but Devonshire's opinions were important and carried great weight. If he had been prepared to take more of a lead he would certainly have undermined Chamberlain's position as the principal Liberal Unionist. He had also refused the Foreign Office in 1895. Otte notes that having refused; he "scrupulously avoided trespassing on that department's territory and refrained from challenging Salisbury's lead in foreign policy." He was concerned that events in China portended badly for Britain, he was perhaps the most influential Cabinet minister with regards to military matters, especially as Lansdowne's credit in that department was at low ebb. Devonshire also presided over the nascent and ineffective Committee of Defence. Again, if he had be more inclined to exert himself, he could have

³⁶¹ Min. Goschen on O'Connor to Sanderson, 24/03/1898, 3M/A/129/39;

³⁶² Otte, *China*, p.121

done much in that position, but instead the committee trundled along with the majority of strategic decisions still being made by the service heads, the full Cabinet or not being made at all. He had some personal ties to Germany, and thus wished to maintain Anglo-German relations.³⁶³

Chaplin was the final member of the anti Weihaiwei group and the least influential member of Cabinet. Otte again notes that "Salisbury later deeply regretted" Chaplin's elevation to the Cabinet. That is partly due to his strong support for Chamberlain, not only over Weihaiwei but in other areas too. His popularity amongst the Conservative parliamentary party may have partly explained his initial appointment, especially in a Ministry in which the Liberal Unionists were over represented. However, his ministerial career would not survive the Cabinet reshuffle of 1900 and he had little influence.

Despite this grouping containing the most senior members of Cabinet, it was clear that it could not offer effective opposition to Salisbury. Seeing that the options were perceived as being Weihaiwei or probable war over Port Arthur, the cautious and those with personal or political ties to Salisbury were not likely to force British policy to take note of their concerns. The one member who could have effectively led such a revolt, Goschen, simply did not believe the events in China were serious enough to warrant such risks. While their opposition to taking Weihaiwei faltered, this group would later find common cause as, to one extent or another, they all felt that Britain's position would be stronger with a reliable ally. It is this group that would use, or encourage Chamberlain to attempt to force such a change on Salisbury. Otte presents the Cabinet at this time as being simply split into the 'anti-Weihaiwei' constellation and a Weihaiwei group led by Salisbury and assisted by Curzon.³⁶⁴ This group regarded Russia's acquisition of Port Arthur as inevitable. While Britain could not prevent it, Weihaiwei would act as a check on it. They also believed that the experience of leasing Port Arthur would drive home to Russia the usefulness of an Anglo-Russian agreement and revive the failed *entente*. There are

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp.121-2

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.122-3

some problems with the reasoning here, firstly, Britain's own advisors had warned that Weihaiwei would be a 'white elephant', expensive to fortify and a point of only weakness in a war. How this second-rate harbour would compete with Port Arthur, feared as being possible to render impregnable, is not clear. It would be foolish to assume that either Germany or Russia lacked a deep enough understanding to not come to the same conclusions. If the British believed that merely having the power to blockage Port Arthur was all that could ever be required, then Weihaiwei would be of some limited use but not essential. Overwhelmingly the Cabinet opted for the option which limited the risk of war. If there was a risk involved in taking Weihaiwei it was in regards to Germany and not Russia.

On 22nd March a committee of the Cabinet met at the Admiralty and prevailed over the 'anti- Weihaiwei' group. Chamberlain continued to dissent. The meeting consisted of Balfour, Chamberlain, Goschen, Devonshire, Hicks Beach and Lansdowne. A meeting consisting entirely of members of the supposed 'anti- Weihaiwei' group somehow prevailed against themselves. Salisbury was not present but had penned a short note on the subject; the committee also had the memorandums by Bertie and Curzon before them. It is important to stress what this committee decided. Balfour informed the Queen that "[c]onfidential instructions to her Majesty's Minister at Peking were also determined on. The Yamen are to be requested not to alienate Wei-hai-wei and, if it is to be alienated, to give Great Britain the refusal of the place."³⁶⁵ This was completely in agreement with Salisbury's suggestion in his short note: "the best course [...] to pursue as to Wei-hai-wei is to make a Chusan agreement, either binding China singly not to alienate or binding her to give us the first refusal."³⁶⁶ Given that Germany had simply steamed into Kiaochow and then made demands on China, it is hard to see how this guarantee and promise of first refusal could be enforced. Certainly China could not enforce it, and, of course, if Britain had a right of first refusal and Russia or Germany occupied the port, this could give rise to a *casus belli*. However, if Britain had determined not to

³⁶⁵ Balfour to Victoria, 22/03/1898, *QVL*, 3rd series, III, pp237-8 quote on p.238

³⁶⁶ Min. Salisbury, 22/03/1898, *BD*, I, pp22-3 quote on p.22

fight to keep the powerful Port Arthur from Russian hands, it seems unlikely that she would have wished to fight to keep the much weaker Weihaiwei from either Russia or Germany.

Both Bertie and Curzon had advised urgent and immediate action. Their writings differ from Salisbury's note in tone and content; both are filled with a sense of urgency, Salisbury's still had the air of masterly inactivity. His advice was to do as little as possible, move as slowly as possible and having secured first refusal on Weihaiwei, merely "to object to the military occupation of Port Arthur in language sufficiently measured to allow Russia to find a way out." The real difficulty here is to understand how it can be that, having refused to allow Russia a free hand in Port Arthur while negotiating for an *entente*, her possession of the place became to be considered "insignificant compared to the effect of the long land frontier behind which no doubt in due time a Russian *Corps d'armee* will be quartered."³⁶⁷ Salisbury appeared to be highly nonchalant about the effects of a Russian occupation and fortification of Port Arthur on the Chinese government. This was one of the main thrusts of Curzon and Bertie's argument. Curzon argued that British prestige and influence at Peking would have evaporated unless Britain demonstrated "that we have not abandoned the field in North China".³⁶⁸ Bertie concurred "[i]f we desire to have some counterpoise to the preponderance of Russian and German influences at Peking we must have some point of advantage in the north."³⁶⁹ However, Salisbury's idea of a 'partition of preponderance' was based upon the assurance that both parties could count on the support of the other with regard to concessions within their own area of influence. Salisbury expected Russia to back Britain up with any demands she made on Peking, which were based in the south, and he would do the same for Russia in regards to the north. The need for a base was not considered until Russia had occupied Port Arthur and it had become apparent that the occupation would be permanent. As the Weihaiwei group considered that the

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.22-3

³⁶⁸ Memo. Curzon, 'Memorandum on the Advantages of a British lease of Wei—hai—Wei', 14/03/1898, quoted in Otte, *China*, pp.123-6

³⁶⁹ Memo, Bertie, 14/03/1898, *BD*, I, No.24, pp.17-8

occupation was an insignificant factor, in terms of influence over Peking, next to that of the long Russian land frontier, then Britain should have needed to find some way to secure her influence even before the Russian squadron ever 'wintered' at Port Arthur. British policy was reactive and floundering.

The Chinese themselves had offered Weihaiwei to the British and they had not done so to ensure that Britain would still wield sufficient influence at Peking to demand whatever they wanted in the future. The Yamen had anticipated a British demand for 'compensation' and hoped to avoid having to hand over strategic positions along the Yangtze. They also hoped that tempting Britain north would act as a check on the other Europeans. In the eventual lease the Chinese would retain the right to harbour their ships in the Port whenever they needed to, and hoped that the British could be convinced to help drill their crews. They were trying to maintain good relations with Britain and even to develop friendlier ones.³⁷⁰ While China wished to improve relations with Britain and Japan in response to the hostile actions of Russia and Germany, it is clear Britain would retain great influence at Peking.

Curzon went on to stress that the overall effect of the combined Russian concessions, those of her Manchuria railways and the possession of Port Arthur, would "involve the ultimate domination of Manchuria and Shinking by Russia, and place her in ... possession of the most powerful naval port in those waters". He also believed that if Russia was permitted to become the "mistress of the approach to Peking by sea, and of the territorial frontier of China by land", then eventually she could have extended her influence with the result of dominating north China, at least as far as the area Salisbury and O'Connor envisioned as falling to Russia when they had discussed the failed *entente*.³⁷¹ In Curzon's mind, Britain was compelled "to acquire a corresponding position" or to accept Russian influence over "the maximum

³⁷⁰ MacDonald to Salisbury, 28 Mar 1898, *BD*, I, No.42, p.29; MacDonald to Salisbury, 3/04/1898, *BD*, I, No.44, pp.29-30; Sun E.Z., 'The Lease of Wei-hai-Wei', *Pacific Historical Review* Vol. 19, Issue. 3 (1950), pp.277-83

³⁷¹ Memo. Curzon, 14/03/1898, quoted in Otte, *China*, pp.123-6; Salisbury to O'Connor 25/01/1898, *BD*, I, No.9, p.8; O'Connor to Salisbury, 7/02/1898, *Ibid.*, No.13, p.10

sphere of influence ever hitherto claimed in North China". He also stressed that the German position in Shantung made for blocking Britain out of the north completely.³⁷²

Bertie stressed the effect of German railway building in Shantung, and her efforts to block a railway concession, which hoped to connect "Tein-tsin to Chin-kiang, on the Yang-tsze River". In this way, Germany hoped "to draw the trade of Pechili, Shansi, and Shensi to [...] Shantung and to Kiao-chau." Bertie therefore argued that "[a]t Wei-hai-Wei we should face Russia, and have some control over the proceedings of the Germans, who are evidently bent on monopolising everything in Shantung".³⁷³ While these arguments appear cogent, everything would depend upon what Britain would choose to do when she did take the port. As it stood when being discussed, Weihaiwei was no counterweight to Port Arthur in naval or military terms and it was also no counterweight to Germany, who had already extracted exclusive concessions in Shantung. In most confrontations around the world, Salisbury's policy had been to avoid proximity; he focused on creating buffer zones or states between British territories and her imperial rivals. It is a measure of how much the Prime Minister was not in control that a decision appears to have revolved around acquiring a territory in as close proximity to two imperial rivals as possible. Curzon also argued that a policy designed to check Russia at Port Arthur specifically and in the north more generally would not offend her. He noted how far Weihaiwei was from Port Arthur, and that it did "not touch or threaten Manchuria; nor does it in any way interfere with **legitimate** Russian expansion".³⁷⁴ It should be considered that Muravev and Curzon probably had very different ideas about what they considered 'legitimate' Russian expansion, after all the rationale for acquiring the base was to prevent Russian domination of Northern China. Also here it was again argued that the balance of naval power could be somehow maintained by the acquisition of a base considered to be so far removed from the port, whose power it was hoped it would check that the owners of said port would not find it objectionable.

³⁷² Memo. Curzon, 14/03/1898, quoted in Otte, *China*, pp.123-6;

³⁷³ Memo. Bertie, 14/03/1898 *BD*, I, No.24, pp17

³⁷⁴ Memo. Curzon, 14/03/1898, quoted in Otte, *China*, pp.123-6, emphasis mine

With regard to Germany there could be no "legitimate offence". Germany had risked a permanent souring of Russo-German relations in order to acquire Kiaochow and it seemed rather naive to hope they would react calmly to suddenly finding they had unexpected British neighbours. Curzon did highlight the likelihood that Weihaiwei could be "a source of irritation" in Anglo-German relations, but he hoped that this would "provide us with the very means we desire of coming to terms with her, [...] and of compelling her to respect Treaty rights in Shantung"³⁷⁵. How exactly, or which part of, Britain's occupation of the place Curzon thought could be bartered away is hard to discern. The eventual acquisition of Weihaiwei actually reduced British freedom of action. In Anglo-Russian terms, if the conclusion of the third indemnity loan allowed Russia to break off talks for a rapprochement, the taking of Weihaiwei nailed the concept in its coffin.³⁷⁶ In the German direction possession of the port acquired no leverage at all. Hatzfeldt was instructed to demand a British declaration accepting Germany's domination of Shantung, promising that no railways would be constructed by the British. Balfour quibbled but only managed to exempt the proposed line from Tientsin[Tianjin] to Hankow[Wuhan]. This cannot be considered to have picked up any real influence on how the Germans would use their rights in Shantung, if Curzon was hoping that maybe Weihaiwei would provide leverage to allow the British some rights to the provinces resources and/or any delineation of spheres of influence, then Balfour dashed them quickly by giving the Germans what they wanted.³⁷⁷ The taking of Weihaiwei would also spell the end of the informal talks Balfour and Chamberlain were conducting with Hatzfeldt on the possibility of closer Anglo-German relations.³⁷⁸ What the British could do with their new naval station and surrounding environs was extremely proscribed, whilst Germany could continue to develop the province as they saw fit. However,

³⁷⁵ Ibid.,

³⁷⁶ O'Connor to Salisbury, 3/03/1898, *BD*, I, No.22; Otte, *China*, pp.128-9; Neilson, pp.194-5

³⁷⁷ Lascelles to Salisbury, 7/04/1898, FO64/1437; Lascelles to Bülow, 20/04/1898, *BD*, I, No.52, pp33-4; for the German side see Bülow to Hatzfeldt, 4/04/1898 and Bülow to Wilhelm II, 21/04/1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1, Nrs.3761 & 3770 respectively; Otte, *China*, pp.128-9 and pp.152-3; Langer, pp.474-5

³⁷⁸ See Chapter 4

ultimately, the Cabinet committee did not decide on 22nd March to acquire the port. Despite Bertie and Curzon both pressing that the issue was urgent, the Cabinet relied upon Salisbury's formula to essentially delay a final decision, which, at his suggestion, needed to be put to the whole Cabinet.

While waiting for the Cabinet to assemble Salisbury attempted to convince Russia not to lease Port Arthur. The British Government "would not regard with any dissatisfaction the lease by Russia of an ice free commercial harbour and its connection by rail with the Siberian Railway now under construction", however, "Port Arthur [...] whose whole importance is derived solely from its military strength and strategic position, would inevitably be considered in the East as a standing menace to Peking and a commencement of the Partition of China." The Foreign Secretary reassured Russia that the British had no desire to have the place themselves, and that if Russia would agree not to take it or any other military port in Pechili, then Britain would do the same. If Russian policy had not been partly driven by extreme distrust of Britain this may have been acceptable. "Maintenance of existing Treaty Rights" was Britain's only interest.³⁷⁹ O'Connor had to reply that Muravev did not admit that leasing Port Arthur constituted the dismemberment of China or even affected Chinese sovereignty. He did give assurances that "Port Arthur and Talienwan will be opened to commerce and ships of war."³⁸⁰ In the few days between the hesitant Cabinet Committee agreeing to Curzon and Bertie's suggestions, and a meeting of the full Cabinet to ratify that decision, Salisbury tried to push once more and convince Russia not to hold Port Arthur. Balfour, acting in his Uncle's place, met with the Russian Ambassador on the 24th March and again tried to convince the Russians not to take the military port.³⁸¹ This brief exchange demonstrates that Salisbury and Balfour were both still willing to try to find some other way out. This suggests that the splinters in the Cabinet were more complex than simply an anti- Weihaiwei and pro- Weihaiwei grouping. Salisbury was still trying to maintain the territorial

³⁷⁹ Salisbury to O'Connor, 22/03/1898 *BD*, I, No.36, p.23

³⁸⁰ O'Connor to Salisbury, 23/03/1898 *ibid.*, No.37, p.24

³⁸¹ Salisbury to O'Connor, 24/03/1898 *Ibid.*, No.38, p.24-5

status quo. Curzon believed that the Ministers in the Cabinet Committee on 22nd “hesitated on strategical[sic] grounds, but were clear on the advisability of occupation on political grounds”. There can be no mistake that they thought Weihaiwei would act as any practical check on Russia or perhaps even on Germany. Chamberlain still dissented.³⁸² To his mind, Weihaiwei was no safe harbour and it would do nothing to protect British trade and influence from being eroded by Russia and Germany combined. Russia was still the biggest problem; having demonstrated so many times that she could not be trusted. All of Muravev’s promises about the ports remaining open were meaningless because regardless of whether the ports did remain open “they[the Russians] will know how to make the position intolerable for our[British] merchants.” Chamberlain was convinced that “[t]he Germans appear to have accepted our terms” and was more inclined, at this point, to treat the Germans as trustworthy.³⁸³ Chamberlain was convinced that given fair access Britain could maintain her position as controlling China’s trade. Both Chamberlain and Salisbury were essentially on the same page with regards to desired outcomes, they both wished to prevent Britain and Russia from taking Weihaiwei and Port Arthur respectively. However, Salisbury was not prepared to run the risk of an armed confrontation in order to achieve it. As Weihaiwei could not provide the safety Chamberlain felt was needed, he remained convinced of the need to try to find some other mechanism to help safeguard British interests.

At the Cabinet meeting on 25th March 1898 “the government took their courage in both hands and (Joe dissenting) agreed on the Wei-hai-wei policy.”³⁸⁴ Balfour’s description is revealing; the Cabinet was clearly still reluctant to demand the lease and remained concerned over the outcome. MacDonald was ordered to demand the lease and the next day a naval demonstration, larger than the Russian Squadron at Port Arthur, was ordered up to Pechili in order to strengthen Chinese resolve in the face of

³⁸² Min. Curzon, n.d., Curzon MSS, MSS.Eur.F112/368 quoted in Otte, *China*, p.127

³⁸³ Chamberlain to Balfour, 3/02/1898, Balfour MSS Add.MS49773 ; Chamberlain to Balfour, 3/02/1898, JC5/5/70

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*,

presumed Russian pressure not to grant the lease.³⁸⁵ The Chinese agreed to the lease on 2nd April, attaching their hopes that Britain would permit China to use the port for her new ships, and also agreed to help train their crews and promised that further concessions would not be demanded. MacDonald offered to present these requests but made it clear that if other Powers took more territory, Britain could not promise it would not follow suit. The Chinese were certainly concerned that Port Arthur and the subsequent demand for Weihaiwei were indeed the beginning of “an endless chain of demands each founded on its predecessor” or in other words, the ‘scramble’ for China.³⁸⁶

Informing the other Powers proved an interesting exercise. Russia was to be informed that Britain had grave objections to the occupation of the military Port Arthur only. In this objection Britain also hinted at what was to come:

Her Majesty’s Government regard it as most unfortunate that it has been thought necessary in addition to obtain control of a port, which, if the rest of the Gulf of Pechili remains in hands so helpless as those of the Sovereign Power [China], will command the maritime approaches to its capital, and give to Russia the same strategic advantage by sea which she already possesses in so ample measure by land.

This missive was coupled with regret that Russia had not heeded Salisbury’s last suggestion and that the British Government would thus retain their “entire liberty of action to take what steps they think best to protect their own interests and to diminish the evil consequences which they anticipate.”³⁸⁷ Unsurprisingly Anglo-Russian relations became tense, regardless that the Russians had been adequately warned of Britain’s attitude. Muravev went ahead and announced the Russian leases the next day and a few days later he gave the British another shock. His earlier reassurances that Talienwan would remain an open port were only hypothetical in nature. This further act of Russian mendacity would not have surprised Chamberlain, who, as we have already seen, expected them

³⁸⁵ Salisbury to MacDonald, 25/03/1898, *BD*, I, No.39, p.23; Admiralty to Seymour, 26/03/1898, ADM 125.88

³⁸⁶ MacDonald to Salisbury, 3/04/1898, *BD*, I, No.44, pp.29-30, quote on p.30

³⁸⁷ Salisbury to O’Conor, 28/03/1898, *BD*, I, No.41, pp27-9

to find some way to nullify Britain's treaty rights. O'Connor was furious that he had been "obliged to send home such a history of Chincanery [sic] as is disclosed in Mouraveieff's Notes", even describing the Russian foreign Minister as that "slippery Minister with whom I have to deal daily."³⁸⁸

Sanderson at the Foreign Office was more optimistic and hoped "that after the first irritation has subsided we shall settle down to fairly friendly terms again." The experienced Permanent Under-Secretary believed that Russia would not allow their anger to push Britain too far, as they feared that such action could make an Anglo-Japanese arrangement more likely.³⁸⁹

Germany was to be informed just before Balfour would announce the lease as part of the Commons foreign policy debate on 5 April. In Lascelles' instructions, Balfour asked him to point out that the lease of Weihaiwei was in response to the Russian occupation of Port Arthur in an attempt to maintain the balance of power in the Gulf of Perchili. He also wished to reassure Germany that Britain had no desire to interfere with Shantung: "Wei-hai-wei cannot be made a commercial port, and it could never be worth while to connect it by Railway with the peninsula." He even volunteered that "[a] formal undertaking on this subject would be given if desired"³⁹⁰, given that Curzon's rationale for demanding the lease was partly based on the idea that the port would grant Britain "some control over the proceeding of the Germans".³⁹¹ Balfour was happy to proactively give the Germans an assurance of a free hand in Shantung. This formal pledge was given on 20th April. It has already been stated that this was not really compatible with many of the arguments made for acquiring the base, however it fell to Balfour, who wanted to cultivate Anglo-German relations, to handle the situation and so he was only too happy to appease German opinion.³⁹² Otte insists that "British policy during the Far Eastern crisis was motivated by the perceived need to counterbalance the arrival of Germany in China as well as the gains made by Russia."³⁹³ However, while it was

³⁸⁸ O'Connor to Sanderson 7/04/1898, quoted in Neilson pp.194-5

³⁸⁹ Sanderson to O'Connor, 13/04/1898 quoted in Otte, *China*, p.128

³⁹⁰ Balfour to Lascelles, 2/04/1898, *BD*, I, No.47, p.31

³⁹¹ Curzon to Brodrick, 4/10/1898, quoted in Otte, *China*, p.124

³⁹² Lascelles to Bülow, 20/04/1898, *BD*, I, No.52 pp.33-4

³⁹³ Otte, *China*, p.129

certainly true that the actions of Germany precipitated the crisis and that the discussion of acquiring some form of territorial concession predated the Russian occupation of Port Arthur, it seems hard to ignore that the vital memoranda written by Bertie and Curzon focused on Russia. Their language was one of domination and preponderance of influence caused due to controlling both a long land frontier and the approaches to Peking by sea. Balfour's easily given assurances that the British would not interfere in Shantung nullifies much of the places usefulness in constraining Germany. Curzon hoped that these assurances could be bartered in return for the respecting of treaty rights in Shantung. Balfour's eagerness not to offend the Germans cost the British whatever leverage they may have gained from taking Weihaiwei.

The strategic reality of Weihaiwei was not lost on anyone. The Navy had considered it just as viable to blockade Port Arthur from Hong Kong as from Weihaiwei, especially as they had the right to use Chinese held ports for resupply.³⁹⁴ Eventually the plans to fortify the port were dropped. It was considered of no use in a confrontation with a naval Power and that its possession could not stop Russia from pressing down further towards Peking. Curzon admitted that the Cabinet Committee of 22nd March had not been convinced for strategic reasons but on "political grounds".³⁹⁵ Whether these political grounds were related to the Far East or the domestic situation is harder to discern. It certainly may have helped prop up British influence in Peking, but the Chinese government appeared to have already desired to court Britain's friendship regardless of the lease and would certainly have looked to other Europeans to come to their aid when or if further Russian and German demands were made. As for political effects on Germany and Russia, it is hard to see any. Certainly the lease remained a superficial reason for a cooling of Anglo-Russian relations, but that was certain to happen the moment Russia could not be convinced to give up on Port Arthur. Germany had been worried about the effect of the lease on

³⁹⁴ Ibid., p.130

³⁹⁵ Min Curzon, n.d., Curzon MSS, MSS.Eur.F.112.368 quoted in Otte *China* p.126

their plans for Shantung, but Balfour moved quickly and decisively to ensure they were reassured in that regard.

These 'political grounds' were more domestic in nature than to do with China. Curzon noted that "I think everyone on our bench (including the anti-Wei-hai-Wei party such as Chamberlain & Goschen etc.) realized that but for Wei-hai-Wei we would have fared badly".³⁹⁶ Chamberlain had been warning that "grave trouble [was] impending upon the Government" unless a "more decided attitude" was adopted since December 1897.³⁹⁷ Press and Public Opinion absolutely slammed the Government. Foreign policy had even played a large part in the Government's by election performances, even losing Curzon's seat when he left for India.³⁹⁸ After having announced the lease of Weihaiwei the Government still had rough debates on both 5th and 29th April.³⁹⁹ Various anonymous writers had also offered prolonged and substantial criticisms of the Government in several periodicals, and H. Wilson was happy to be on record in the *National Review*, calling the Government "Frontbench Invertebrates".⁴⁰⁰ As a By-election for a safe Tory seat got underway the Liberal candidate would substantially reduce the Unionist majority by focusing on foreign affairs: "could they find a spot in the habitable globe where we had not some foreign difficulty which had grown since Lord Salisbury taken command of the Foreign Office?" The same issue of *The Times* also carried news of the formal Russian demand for the lease of Port Arthur and extensive coverage of concerns about French manoeuvres in Southern China.⁴⁰¹ . While all this concern was

³⁹⁶ Curzon to Salisbury, 11/04/1898, Salisbury MSS, 3M/E/1/118

³⁹⁷ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 29/12/1897, Salisbury MSS, 3M/E/Chamberlain/1896-7; Chamberlain to Balfour, 3/02/1898, JC5/5/70

³⁹⁸ For a breakdown of seat by seat by-elections see Otte., 'Avenge England's Dishonour': By-Elections, Parliament and the Politics of Foreign Policy in 1898, *EHR* Vol. 121, No.491 (2006), pp.385-428

³⁹⁹ Hansard, *PD*, HC, (series 4), Vol.56, cc.224-88; *Ibid.* cc 1560-1680; Devonshire also ran into trouble on the 5 defending the government's position in the lords. HL, Series 4 Vol.56, cc.165-81

⁴⁰⁰ 'Diplomaticus', 'A Monroe Doctrine for Asia', *FR* lxiii, 374 (Feb. 1898), 333; H. W. Wilson, 'Frontbench Invertebrates', *NR* xxxi, 4 (Apr. 1898), 300-1; anon., 'The Failure of Our Foreign Policy', *CR* lxxiii, 4 (1898), 457-80; 'Diplomaticus', 'The Break-Down of Our Chinese Policy', *FR* lxiii, 5 (1898), 844-54.

⁴⁰¹ "Election Intelligence." *The Times*, 21/03/1898, p.12, "The Far East." And "Our Peking Correspondent." p.7 & 11 respectively; See also "Election Intelligence.", *The Times*, 21/01/1898, p.8

boiling in the public's mind, and aiding the opposition by handing them a patriotic stick with which to beat the government, Salisbury continued to pursue a policy which only safeguarded the first refusal of Weihaiwei, or more succinctly to do very little indeed. Otte suggests that even the lethargic Devonshire started to worry that "Salisbury's cautious foreign policy was bound to attract adverse criticism; and that in consequence the administration was in danger of appearing to be out of step with public opinion."⁴⁰² Salisbury's preference was that public opinion should leave foreign policy entirely in his own aristocratic hands, agreeing with Chamberlain back in December that "[p]ublic opinion is a very bad guide" and thought "that 'the public' will require some territorial or cartographic consolation in China."⁴⁰³ Salisbury was not entirely blind to the importance of acknowledging the desires of the electorate but he was certainly disdainful of them, his instinct was to respond to issues in a manner that he thought did the least damage to his own policy preferences. In the case of Weihaiwei even the Conservative press started to think that the Government's "idea now was hurriedly to do something which may enable it to face the House of Commons".⁴⁰⁴ To the Cabinet's mind the acquisition of the North China naval station was almost entirely upon 'political grounds'. While some influence at Peking may have been preserved by this action, in reality domestic public, electoral and parliamentary pressures had won out. Salisbury had relinquished in giving the British people the "cartographic consolation" he always believed they would require but had done all he could to have avoided doing so. The acquisition of Weihaiwei represented doing the least possible. While it did not materially alter the strategic reality of what was taking place in the Far East, it did give the government a defence before the country. Therefore, Salisbury preferred it as both the least unfavourable and least substantive option; a mask for doing nothing at all.

⁴⁰² Otte, "Avenge", p.401

⁴⁰³ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 29/12/1897, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Chamberlain/1896-97/116; Salisbury to Chamberlain, 30/12/1897, JC5/67/88

⁴⁰⁴ *Morning Post*, 30/03/1898 quoted in Otte, "Avenge" p.402

In fact what took place cannot be considered Salisbury's policy; his illness had prevented him from being able to control his department, the Cabinet or forcibly put his own ideas forward. The Cabinet choose to go ahead despite being unconvinced of the strategic merits of the acquisition, what they did know was that they needed something to present to the public and parliament. As even the somewhat irritated German Emperor noted to Lascelles "Wei-hai-Wei would, he thought, be a useless expense, and indicated a departure from that practical common sense with which Englishmen were usually credited."⁴⁰⁵

Chamberlain is often accused of being too sensitive to public opinion but in this sense there was a difference. He clearly did not believe that the Public held the answers, but he did believe that they should be heeded, and that continuing to pursue policies that were unpopular would eventually become untenable in an increasingly democratic polity. To Salisbury this heralded the end of sound foreign policy whereas to Chamberlain this presented an opportunity to educate and lead public opinion in order to secure control over foreign policy. If the public was worried, Chamberlain believed this could and should have been addressed proactively, not merely responded to. While he did not think the public held the answers, he did think their fears were justified and needed responding to rather than being waved away as the unfounded concerns of the poorly educated and poorly washed. This he had already started to do with regards to his own field. *The Times* on 21st Jan also covered a speech by Campbell-Bannerman to his constituents. In it "[h]e agreed" with Chamberlain "that there were sacrifices which could not be made even for so good a purpose as maintaining a good understating with Europe. [...] [His constituents] were all glad to hear" Chamberlain admit "that we must contemplate [...] a time arising when it would no longer be possible for us to avoid isolated action with regard to the East."⁴⁰⁶ And in the opinion of one independently minded Liberal, Chamberlain's strong line in West Africa had already captured a

⁴⁰⁵ Lascelles to Salisbury, 26/05/1898, *BD*, I, No.53, pp.34-4

⁴⁰⁶ Henry Campbell-Bannerman, Prime Minister (1905–1908), Leader of the Liberal Party from 6/02/1899.; "Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman in Scotland" *The Times*, 21/01/1898, p.4

"good section of the press".⁴⁰⁷ Chamberlain had shown that France would back down in response to an aggressive defensive of British interests.⁴⁰⁸ He was in affect giving lead to some sections of public opinion rather than being led by it or trying to ignore it. To his mind, the logical way forward was an alliance with Germany. It was Britain's isolation that ensured she could not risk standing up to one of the other Powers, as this would almost certainly run the risk of activating their alliances. To his, and to Goschen's mind, Germany had little or no current conflicts of interest with Britain. Whereas the Anglo-French relationship would always have Egypt and traditional colonial rivalries to irritate it, and the Anglo-Russian relationship was mired in mutual distrust, while Russia also appeared to threaten Britain's vital interests, meant that the German relationship gave the impression that it could be easily improved. On 26th March, as the Far East Squadron prepared to assemble in the Gulf of Pechili demonstrating that they could indeed concentrate naval power exactly where it would be needed in the event of a conflict with Russia, at short notice and without a north Chinese naval station, Salisbury would also leave the country for his 'second' home in France to recuperate from his illness. This would give all those in Cabinet, who had lost faith in his foreign policy, an opportunity to explore their own ideas.

⁴⁰⁷ Leonard Courtney, quoted in Otte, "Avenge", p.402

⁴⁰⁸ See chapter 1.

4: He who dares: Chamberlain and Alliance talks.

Regardless of whether “everyone on our bench (including the anti-Wei-hai-Wei party such as Chamberlain & Goschen etc.) realized that but for Wei-hai-Wei we would have fared badly” in Parliament, Chamberlain was far from content with the outcome of the Far Eastern Crisis.⁴⁰⁹ Britain had been forced to abandon her policy of maintaining the integrity of China, had failed to keep the whole of the Chinese market open and had gained an expensive and unnecessary naval station. He was not alone in his disappointment. Popular opinion, voiced in various journals, often noticed the exact same points. Britain’s policy of upholding China’s integrity and maintaining the ‘open door’ had failed. She had gained a naval station for the purposes of “C’est pour amuser les badauds[for the amusement of the onlookers]” and that she should have foreseen the problem arising and acted more strenuously to prevent it. This criticism was not confined merely to the handling of the Far East indeed many of Chamberlain’s private criticisms and frustrations with Salisbury’s policy were shared by many of these writers. From Siam, to West Africa, to China, to Madagascar the arguments were made that ‘graceful concessions’ had followed ‘graceful concessions’ and that the results, taken cumulatively added up: “Great Britain, the very essence of whose existence is foreign commerce, is being gradually ousted out of the neutral markets of the world”.⁴¹⁰ The criticism also implied further problems, Britain should not expect Russia and France to leave their new territories open to free trade, free trade, it was argued, was not a matter of moral right and wrong it was a policy which Britain only adhered to because it suited her interests. What the British really needed was a

⁴⁰⁹ Curzon to Salisbury, 11/04/1898 Salisbury MSS, 3M/E/1/118

⁴¹⁰ Diplomaticus, “The Breakdown of our Chinese Policy”, *FR*, Vol.63, No.377 (May 1898) pp.844-54 Quote on p.844; H. W. Wilson, “Front Bench Invertebrates”, *NR*, Vol.31, No.182, pp.292-301; Wm. Des Voeux, “Our Policy in the Far East”, *CR*, Vol.73, (Jun 1898), pp795-602; A. Michie “Our Future Policy in China”, *NR*, Vol.31, No.185, pp.654-70; Diplomaticus, “Where Lord Salisbury has failed.”, *FR*, Vol.63, No.374, (April 1898), pp.513-523; Anon., “The Failure of our Foreign Policy”, *CR*, Vol.73, (Apr 1898) pp.457-80 quote on p.457

government as prepared to deploy the resources of the state in a manner to defend and support the activities of her merchants, industrialists and capitalists, as it was perceived her rivals.⁴¹¹

Britain was struggling with a geo-political world which was not ready to stand still. Much of her trade was conducted in parts of the world which had never fallen under the British flag. Such was the case in China, South America and even in Africa, despite several treaties implying formal rule. The benefits of this informal empire were at risk as other Powers became able to compete. Germany and the US were quite capable of competing for that trade but Britain still retained a huge advantage due to her network of naval stations and the protection the Royal Navy could afford to her merchants. France and Russia could not compete so well in the open market. Therefore they needed to bring such areas under their control and use imposed mechanisms to keep out foreign competition. In other words, France and Russia were inescapably expansionist and protectionist powers. It is not hard to see why. Their alliance was based on the shocking realisation of how powerful the German threat had come. If Prussia had managed to win a difficult victory over France in 1871, it was clear that she could win a crushing one later as Imperial Germany. Russian resources and manpower should enable her to compete with Germany, but she required time to industrialise, build a fully working rail network and reform internally to better exploit those resources. She also needed a supply of ready capital to fund these reforms, as she also recognised that the Triple Alliance posed a serious threat, should the Eastern question finally explode, an Alliance with France and thus access to French capital could have answered both situations.⁴¹² Their alliance was born out of fear of the German menace and the hope that with each other's support they could remedy their short comings through expansion. Germany was well embarked upon her *weltpolitik* and so, unlike the British, she would not be content to share informal control and domination despite her industry being quite capable of competing and so delivering such a result. The US had also decided that

⁴¹¹ Anon., "The Failure of our Foreign Policy", *CR*, Vol.73, (Apr 1898) pp.469-473

⁴¹² Nish, p.16; Langer, pp.56-60

she would expand, though not in areas which would directly threaten the British. All the Great Powers, bar Britain, wanted to grow, which meant coming into conflict with Britain's empire, formal or otherwise.

Chamberlain's and the presses urgings that Britain should expand were in essence a demand to bring under formal rule, areas which were informally under British domination, thus safe guarding them.

There were really very few options which Britain could pursue. One would be to simply acquiesce in these gains while trying to mitigate them, working hand to mouth reactively, but essentially to admit that Britain would not remain the sole global Power or the workshop of the world. This did not mean that there could be no aggrandisement of territory but it did mean a reactive approach to foreign and imperial policy. It also meant being prepared to grant 'graceful concessions' where conflicts arose over British Interests which were not deemed vital. This was Salisbury's policy of choice. The second option would be to improve Britain's ability to compete and thus also expand to protect her trade interests. No concession could afford to be granted without an appropriate *quid pro quo* because even if they were not of vital importance the whittling away of such interests would amount to being vital eventually and would encourage ever more demands from the hungry Powers. This would require a preparedness to raise extra funds to increase the military services as well as to develop stronger links with the Empire. It would also require a preparedness to confront Imperial Rivals not in order to enlarge the Empire for its own sake but so as to bring markets under the British umbrella, defensively, to prevent them falling behind a tariff barrier. This was Chamberlain's policy of choice.⁴¹³ The Colonial Secretary was aware that his plans for colonial development and support for a more aggressive foreign policy were likely to be continuously blocked by either the Treasury or the Cabinet. Regardless of possessing the most powerful navy in the world, the British Cabinet had been repeatedly warned of the dangers of trying to use it. The Straights, held by a supposedly crumbling power, could not be forced without a combined arms

⁴¹³ Kennedy, *Antagonism*, pp.228-31; Howard C.H.D., *Splendid Isolation: A study of Ideas Concerning Britain's International Position and Foreign Policy During the Later Years of the Third Marquis of Salisbury*, (London, 1967);

operation beyond Britain's capability. This led to a second major deficiency, the British Army was proving impervious to reform, and yet remained unable to defend the Empire against either alliance block. No professional advice was ever presented to Cabinet which suggested Britain was prepared for an actual confrontation with a first rate Power, especially if there were allies involved. Under these conditions Chamberlain became aware that the only hope of bolstering Britain's position would be some form of alliance in order to buy time while the Empire was reorganised into a tighter more efficient competitive entity.

Chamberlain attempted to mix both these approaches. The difference between his conception of 'graceful concessions' and Salisbury's was that where the later was prepared to grant one, in order to avoid a war 'over trifles', the former would only permit an exchange of like claims. The only time Chamberlain appeared willing to offer serious concessions, which were not to his mind perfectly balanced, was when he was attempting to find that elusive 'general' settlement with either France or Germany. As demonstrated in Chapter One Chamberlain was quite prepared to offer concessions in West Africa if the deal could be widened to take in other trouble spots with the French. Hanotaux was disinclined to be drawn into a final settlement.⁴¹⁴ Likewise, as we shall see later, he offered a generous deal in settlement of the Samoa question with Germany, trying to tie most of their current colonial difficulties up.⁴¹⁵ Deals of this kind were not likely to get very far until both contracting Powers felt they had more to gain by compromise than by confrontation. While France, Germany and indeed Russia believed they would be in a position in the future to demand more, it was unlikely that they would settle until a common threat could be identified.

Chamberlain had decided that Britain could no longer afford her position of isolation. This should already be apparent from following the evidence to this point. Chamberlain had always believed in the benefits of working

⁴¹⁴ See Chapter One pp.37-8; Chamberlain to Salisbury, 17/11/1897, JC11/30/98 and reply Salisbury to Chamberlain, 17/11/1897, JC11/30/99

⁴¹⁵ See chapter Five pp.193-5

more closely with the US. He had hoped a joint Naval Demonstration would impress the Sultan. This was despite the Venezuelan dispute straining relations.⁴¹⁶ In China he had suggested working with both Germany and the US to oppose exclusive rights, and to keep the 'open door', at least somewhat open.⁴¹⁷ He had also held out an opinion that maybe Salisbury should consider whether Britain should not "draw closer to Japan".⁴¹⁸ In fact, Chamberlain had even told the Russian ambassador that he believed the best solution would be an *entente* with Russia and "*par ricochet*" with France too.⁴¹⁹ While this appears to be disingenuous it should be noted that the Colonial Secretary would have welcomed a general settlement. Back during the Armenian crisis, he had been clear that "if it was possible to come to some arrangement with Russia the course would be easy."⁴²⁰ Chamberlain was not always opposed to working with Russia however, it should be remembered that his comments to Staal were made before the arrival in Britain of the news that the Russians had sent their fleet to Port Arthur.⁴²¹ Chamberlain's distrust of Russia grew rapidly after that occupation and during the subsequent negotiations. Even as the Cabinet edged closer to the decision to take Weihaiwei, the Colonial Secretary remained convinced that doing so would not add an iota of strength to the British position or prevent Russia from pushing on further. While he may have admitted the occupations usefulness, from a propaganda point of view, he still felt that British interests in China were under threat and that Britain's ability to protect them was still insufficient.

Both Langer and Nish reference the memoirs of *Kato Takaaki*, the Japanese ambassador to Britain. They claim Kato had a meal with Chamberlain on 17th March 1898.⁴²² This date is vital. This was between the Cabinet

⁴¹⁶ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 24/12/1895, Salisbury MSS, 3M/E/Chamberlain/1887-95/39

⁴¹⁷ Chamberlain to Balfour, 3/02/1898, JC5/5/70

⁴¹⁸ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 31/12/1897, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Chamberlain/1896-97/117

⁴¹⁹ Staal to Muravev, 10/22/12/1897, quoted in Langer, pp.460-1

⁴²⁰ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 8/12/1895, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Chamberlain/1887-95

⁴²¹ Goschen to Salisbury, 23/12/1897, FO 65/1535, Neilson, p.184

⁴²² Ito Masanori, *Kato Takaaki* (Tokyo, 1929), pp.292-7; Langer pp.472-3, Langer also believes these talks were alluded to in *GP*, XIV, Nos. 3759 & 3782; Nish,

meeting of 14th and the Cabinet Committee meeting on 22nd. The exact moment when Curzon and Bertie were preparing their memorandums on the Far Eastern Crisis and an unwell Salisbury had prepared his note. Chamberlain started the conversation by pointing out the danger of continued southward penetration by Russia and then discussed Weihaiwei; Britain would support the Japanese if they wished to stay on but if not would they mind Britain taking the port? He then went on to ask, bluntly, what Japan proposed to do about the Russian occupation of Port Arthur. Kato replied that he did not know, but pointed out the danger presented to British trade that would result from the loss of political influence at Peking. The Japanese ambassador asked Chamberlain how far Britain would go to defend China's integrity. Chamberlain knew that he stood little chance of convincing the Cabinet to stand up to Russia at least not without a strong ally. He replied truthfully that the British lacked the military force to oppose Russia in Manchuria; this broadened the discussion to further afield than the immediate Port Arthur crisis. While Chamberlain had been candid about the need to oppose Russia's penetration of China in general, and the difficulties involved given Britain's position as a naval Power, Kato pushed him back on to more short term aims; Port Arthur was a Naval Base, Britain could apply force there. Chamberlain stuck to the Cabinet position, with or without Port Arthur, they believed Russia was going to be able to apply enormous pressure on account of their congruous boundary; a purely naval action would not prevent their ultimate aim.⁴²³ The Colonial Secretary was looking to solve the main issue, not find some temporary solution. He asked whether the two countries could not act together as Japan must desire Chinese integrity as well. Kato replied in kind, suggesting that maybe the Japanese were waiting on the British. Chamberlain again suggested that the Japanese should approach the British and assured Kato that such proposals would be welcome.⁴²⁴ The importance of the timing of this

pp.63-6 Nish notes that Kato's despatch home, detailing this conversation can be found in the published Japanese documents, *Nihon gaiko bunsho* ('Japanese diplomatic documents'), Vol.31/I, No.358; A. M. Pooley, *The secret memoirs of Count Tadasu Hayashi G.C.V.O.* (London, 1915) p.89 also alludes to these talks

⁴²³ Balfour to MacDonald, 19/03/1898, *BD*, I, No.32, pp21-2

⁴²⁴ Langer, pp.472-3; Nish, pp.64-5; for an example of the Cabinet's position, see Chapter 3 or Min. Salisbury, 22/03/1898, *BD*, I, No.34, pp.22-3 as an example.

conversation has already been noted. The Cabinet were slowly moving toward their unhappy consolation policy of taking Weihaiwei. There were plenty of members unconvinced of the wisdom of such a move. In reality it was only acted upon as there was a lack of any other options save a confrontation with the Dual Alliance. Had any proposals arrived from Japan they could have had serious implications for what remained an uneasy decision for the Cabinet. There are no English documents supporting this account of their talks, except the brief mention of it in Hayashi's memoirs, however, Kato not only sent news of this conversation back to Japan, he also followed it up with a lengthy memoranda of his own. In that he urged his government not to miss this opportunity and pressed his case for an Anglo-Japanese alliance. When this was refused, he resigned his position in protest, although he was convinced to stay in post for awhile longer.⁴²⁵ The story of this affair is entirely in step with Chamberlain's character, the brash blunt approach to diplomacy and even the growing habit of meeting diplomats for dinner. It also seems unlikely that Kato would have threatened resignation if his suggestions had been based on a fabricated meeting. His report of the conversation too closely matches what we know Chamberlain thought of this situation from other sources. Chamberlain was also aware he was losing the argument in the Cabinet and while he could not induce Salisbury to approach the Japanese, or anyone else, an approach from Japan could have changed the trajectory the Cabinet deliberations were headed in.

This was not the only iron Chamberlain would be involved with placing in the fire. Chamberlain's famous alliance talks were also about to take place. Having now laid out the lengths to which he and the Cabinet had already gone, in order to find some other solution to the China problem, it should be no surprise that having failed to convince the Cabinet to face up to Russia alone, or to convince the Americans to join in, or even the Japanese to make proposals, that he would turn to the last Power left with an interest in China; Germany. The dates and details of these talks have been examined

⁴²⁵ Masanori, *Kato, I*, pp.302-6 & 333-5 noted in Nish. Nish also provides reference to the published Japanese documents; *NGB 31/I*, No.363 for Kato's lengthy memorandum.

frequently but it is necessary to attempt to pick over them again. The exact origins of who suggested what to whom look likely to never be thoroughly resolved. The only source to offer an opinion on this is Eckardstein's own, untrustworthy memoirs. Hermann Baron von Eckardstein was First Secretary at the German embassy to Britain. His 'role' or ability to take part in these affairs does not stand solely on his official position amongst Germany's diplomatic Corps. He derived some additional access and thus influence, through his position in London society.⁴²⁶ His is the only source which discusses the origins of, what is often inaccurately referred to as, the Chamberlain-Hatzfeldt talks. Eckardstein claims responsibility for the talks. His account suggests it was at a society dinner, attended by himself, Devonshire, Chaplin and Chamberlain. Eckardstein gives some time in February for the meeting, but the context of discussions would suggest that a later date is more likely.⁴²⁷ It is unfortunate that the exact date cannot be established. It is entirely possible that these three Cabinet Ministers, two very senior, one very minor, may have met Eckardstein sometime in February, where he first suggested that Germany and Britain should work more closely in China. Otte claims that "[t]he initiative clearly came from Chamberlain and his clique."⁴²⁸ Considering that clique contained senior Cabinet ministers, and German officials it is stretching the evidence to place responsibility solely with Chamberlain. Later Eckardstein would outright lie to both the British and the Germans in order to try to bring about an alliance; it is more than possible that he was the prime or initial instigator and that his efforts started earlier. Anglo-German relations also had the appearances of being warmer already. Langer sums the position up this way; "England's acceptance of the German occupation of Kiaochow was a striking contrast to the desperate opposition of Muraviev. It helped to instil some cordiality in the relations of the two countries and at the same time served to make the German Emperor realize the futility of the continental

⁴²⁶ Otte, *China*, pp.137-8; Garvin, *Life*, III, p.255-6; Charmley, pp257-9; Grenville, pp.159-60;

⁴²⁷ H. Freiherr von Eckardstein, *Lebenserinnerungen und politische Denkwurdigkeiten* (3 vols., Leipzig, 1920), I, 292-3

⁴²⁸ Otte, *China*, p.139

league."⁴²⁹ They had also already co-operated unofficially in China, as it was an Anglo-German consortium (HSBC-DAB) which had managed to attract the lion's share of China's indemnity loans. Otte believes this gave the appearance that "Germany had ranged herself alongside Britain in Chinese affairs".⁴³⁰ While the taking of Kiaochow was only barely acceptable to the British, it did not auger the total domination of the Chinese Government, as did Port Arthur, and the Germans appeared happy to keep the port open to foreign trade. The dinner in question was not uncommon in society; it is entirely possible that the Duchess or Rothschild, both of whom were inclined to see Anglo-German relations draw closer, brought this group of people together often. Eckardstein could have first mentioned his suggestion in February while the British did not take it up until the situation was more acute in March. It is therefore impossible to know exactly when Rothschild was asked to invite Hatzfeldt to breakfast for the 26th March.

Hatzfeldt expected both Balfour and Chamberlain were to be present.⁴³¹ As also only telegraphed for instructions on 24th this suggested that the breakfast had been arranged quickly upon the news that the Russians did not intend to leave Port Arthur.⁴³² His instructions did not, in fact, arrive before his meeting with Balfour. However, this first meeting actually took place on 25th March. Balfour explained to Hatzfeldt that he was unable to meet him the next day and asked if he could meet him that morning again at Rothschild's.⁴³³ In his own account of these proceedings, in which Balfour puts his spin on them for Salisbury's benefit, he suggested that there had been no other arrangement and that he had always planned on meeting Hatzfeldt alone.⁴³⁴ Having already accepted, in principal, the taking of Weihaiwei on 22nd, Balfour could have been merely concerned with how Germany would respond but there was no hint in his account or in

⁴²⁹ Langer, p.492

⁴³⁰ Otte, *China*, p.83

⁴³¹ Hatzfeldt to Holstein, 24/03/1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1, Nr.3779, pp.193-4

⁴³² O'Connor to Salisbury, 23/03/1898 (arrived 24/03/8 A.M.), *BD*, I, No.37, p.24

⁴³³ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, *GP*, XIV pt.1, Nr.3781, pp.195-6

⁴³⁴ Balfour to Salisbury, 14 Apr 1898, Balfour MSS, Add.MS49691 or Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Balfour/1897-8/223

Hatzfeldt's to suggest something of that sort took place. Their conversation appeared to have been very general and there was no urgent reason to have a general conversation on 25th unless it would pertain to immediately subsequent events. The Cabinet meeting later that evening was one possibility, but so was Salisbury's departure for France, scheduled for 26th, but postponed due to the weather. Balfour did visit Salisbury after meeting with Hatzfeldt and before the Cabinet meeting.⁴³⁵ The 25th March was clearly a busy day for the acting Foreign Secretary. Given that Balfour was unlikely to attempt anything dramatic in terms of diplomacy it is perhaps only due to Salisbury's impending departure that the first meeting was moved forward; this would provide cover against the implication that the talks had waited on Salisbury's absence. Despite this Balfour's letter of 14th April, informing Salisbury of what had taken place is disingenuous in the very least. Balfour claimed that the origin of the 'talks' lay with "a very motely 'cast'" made up of Chaplin, Rothschild, Eckardstein, Chamberlain and Hatzfeldt. He neglected to include Devonshire in the list. Unable to extract his own involvement entirely he started weaving a tale that he expected "Uncle Robert" could happily choose to believe.

The Drama opened by a suggestion much good might be done if there was a friendly, private, and quite unofficial conversation between Hatzfeldt and myself on strictly neutral territory. It was at a moment when things were approaching their hottest in connection with Prt. Arthur: & as I thought some good and no harm could come of it I accepted.

This misrepresents events quite considerably. There is no mention of Balfour's rescheduling of the meeting or that it had been understood that others would also initially be present. Balfour's hurried rescheduling implied that he believed the meeting was urgent, but he reported his involvement in only the most ambivalent terms possible. The mention that it took place, "[t]he day on which, at the afternoon cabinet the govt. [...] agreed on the Wei-Hai-Wei policy" also reinforces the already created impression that it was in the Chinese theatre that Balfour hoped "some good and no harm could come". Balfour's aims and hopes are hard to discern but were almost certainly, like his Uncle's hopes with Russia, much further ranging than

⁴³⁵ "Court News" *The Times*, 26/03/1898, p.7

China. It is possible that the Port Arthur/Weihaiwei Crisis was being used as cover for something with larger implications. In 1902 at the signing of the Japanese alliance Balfour protested that the geographical range of operation was too small, he wanted a wider agreement, not one which simply enabled Britain to remain aloof from the European alliance blocs.⁴³⁶ Whatever else was going on Balfour did not want Salisbury to suspect that he was among the provocateurs.⁴³⁷

Balfour discussed very little of substance with Hatzfeldt. In his own account "there was an infinity of talk, out of the nebulous friendliness of which I really gathered very little." Apparently the Germans disliked Chamberlain's attitudes over Africa, presumably the way in which he would refuse to hand over concessions to Germany without a *quid pro quo*, and that Britain had protested the granting of exclusive railway rights in Shantung. According to Balfour he offered no thoughts on these issues. Hatzfeldt's account differs only slightly but importantly. Balfour commented that there were no conflicting interests between Germany and Britain and so hoped that a clearer understanding and rapprochement would be possible. Hatzfeldt then underlined what had previously caused the problems; Chamberlain's attitude in colonial matters, Britain's protest at Germany's concessions in Shantung and remarkably even Britain's attitudes over Armenia which ignored that the Kaiser had pushed for unilateral British action. Balfour countered each; public opinion drove the Armenian policy, yes no British interest was at stake in Shantung but then why did Germany protest about a proposed Railway to the Yangtze River as her interests were not involved and finally that he would talk to Chamberlain about being more accommodating. Hatzfeldt summed up the meeting as limited; a general discussion of a desire for better relations with no formulas on how to proceed in China or elsewhere. The German ambassador agreed better relations were desirable but thought that no serious proposals were in prospect. He was left with the impression that Balfour wished to have

⁴³⁶ Balfour to Lansdowne, 12/12/1901, Balfour MSS Add.MS49727.

⁴³⁷ Balfour to Salisbury, 14 Apr, 1898, Balfour MSS, Add.MS49691 or Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Balfour/1897-8/223

another meeting soon.⁴³⁸ Balfour's involvement was essential; Hatzfeldt would never have discussed these matters with Chamberlain alone "because Salisbury and I[Hatzfeldt] had agreed—this being a precondition of our confidential relations—that I would establish contact on business matters with other ministers in special cases only and with his express approval".⁴³⁹ Balfour, with his position as acting Foreign Secretary but more importantly with his close familial ties to the Prime Minister, ended up representing Salisbury and implied his approval. This, the timing of that first meeting on 25th, as well as Garvin's spin helped convinced Langer that Salisbury and the whole Cabinet were aware of the talks.⁴⁴⁰ Given what would follow in Cabinet simultaneously with the talks it seems highly likely that they were kept informed of the talks and their progress. However, Salisbury was almost certainly kept out of the loop until Balfour's misdirection of April 14th.

Hatzfeldt met Chamberlain on 29th again resulting in two differing accounts of the conversation.⁴⁴¹ In Chamberlain's account Hatzfeldt requested the meeting and opened with a discussion on colonial matters. This was hardly surprising; Hatzfeldt had attempted to leave Balfour with the impression that colonial obstinacy was a hindrance to better relations and this was in keeping with his instructions from home. Bülow had essentially instructed Hatzfeldt to encourage the British to take regard for Germany's junior partners in the Triple Alliance. As Otte points out this amounted to inviting the British to make proposals beyond a simple colonial arrangement.⁴⁴² Chamberlain described the discussion of the colonial issues as "in the nature of a skirmish, and Count Hatzfeldt did not press the subject." Hatzfeldt had been instructed to try to bring the British to aid Italy in East Africa; this would naturally have widened the discussion into realms "where in the course of questions and answers [...] suggestions were evolved." These questions and answers revolved around Chamberlain's analysis of not only Anglo-German relations but Britain's strained geopolitical position. In

⁴³⁸ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 25/03/1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1, No.3781 pp.194-5

⁴³⁹ Hatzfeldt to Holstein, 26/03/1898, *Holstein Papers*, IV, No.644, p.65

⁴⁴⁰ Langer, pp.492-3

⁴⁴¹ Memo. Chamberlain, 29/03/1898, JC7/2/2a/3 for Chamberlain's account and ; Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 29 Mar, 1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1, No.3782, pp.196-9

⁴⁴² Bülow to Hatzfeldt, 27/03/1898, *Holstein Papers*, IV, No.645, pp.65-6

Chamberlain's account it is Hatzfeldt who replied "Certainly not. Before long it must be changed" when asked about British isolation. Bülow's long term plan, of holding the naval balance of power so as to extract maximum concessions from the British when the inevitable Anglo-Russian war arrived, was certainly based upon making Britain pay to exit isolation. German policy was based on the assumption that Britain could not maintain forever her independence from the European blocs. Hatzfeldt followed his instructions to draw the British into making proposals beyond a colonial agreement. He did not have to try hard as this was both Chamberlain's intention and his usual methodology; that is to close with the heart of the matter in a direct businesslike manner. Chamberlain's account claimed that in this to and fro the sketch of a mutual defense pact was outlined. A defensive treaty or arrangement, ratified by parliament, to run for a number of years, "based upon a mutual understanding as to policy in China and **elsewhere**."⁴⁴³ Hatzfeldt's account differs only slightly; his was longer and suggested that much more was discussed touching on France and West Africa, and Japan in the Far East, all of which had little to do with Germany's Triple Alliance partners. He was clearly following his instructions to tease out proposals while also reminding Chamberlain of "England's habit of exploiting her friends".⁴⁴⁴ He also claimed that Chamberlain had suggested joining the Triple Alliance and that if the larger question could be settled it would be easy to settle colonial differences more generously. It is clear that Chamberlain had a direct agreement with Germany alone in mind. As Hatzfeldt's opening paragraph explained these proposals were not only motivated by the critical situation in China but also by the possibility of serious complications with France. The *raison d'être* of the agreement, as conceptualised by Chamberlain, was based firmly outside Europe, although not exclusively on China. It was therefore highly unlikely that he believed adherence to the Triple Alliance was the most advantageous option, he was hoping for a different constellations of Powers. Bismarck may have thrived at the centre of a spider's web of treaties and agreements, but Bülow would not; Hatzfeldt 'converted' Chamberlain's suggestions into adherence to the

⁴⁴³ Memo., Chamberlain, 29/03/1898, JC7/2/2a/3 emphasis mine.

⁴⁴⁴ Bülow to Hatzfeldt, 27/03/1898, *Holstein Papers*, IV, no.645, pp.65-6

Triple Alliance. How joining a bloc, the existence of which was based upon mutual European interests could be considered based upon a "mutual understanding" of interests outside of Europe is a mystery. The Ambassador finished up by claiming that Chamberlain felt that there was no time to lose and that the whole thing needed to be decided in the next few days.⁴⁴⁵ Chamberlain had laid out his hopes with a directness which one would expect from a successful marketing director. This was not the slow, deliberate, careful but also timid approach that diplomacy normally took. Chamberlain knew what he wanted and asked what it would cost, making it clear that he would be as accommodating in the colonial sphere as he could be. Hatzfeldt, who had been tasked to see how serious the British were and to tease out details of a more limited agreement, must have been perplexed with the candour. Even if the Germans had been prepared to negotiate for a mutual defence pact in good faith this would not have been the manner in which Hatzfeldt would have felt comfortable in doing so.

Hatzfeldt met Balfour again later that afternoon and mentioned nothing of the morning's discussions with Chamberlain. While this "rather amused" Balfour it should not be surprising. By his own admission the nature of the two meetings were entirely different; "Hatzfeldt who had thus spent the morning **unofficially** with Joe[Chamberlain] came to see me[Balfour] **officially** in the afternoon."⁴⁴⁶ Therefore if Hatzfeldt was attempting to run his own ideas, as Grenville believed, then he was still not prepared to exceed his instructions in a formal setting. He could not have discussed Chamberlain's alliance proposals, which he had agreed to keep in strict confidence, at the Foreign Office, in an official meeting with the acting Foreign Secretary, without any instructions to do so; if the Ambassador had he would be in very serious danger of ending his career. If he wished to pursue his own agenda then he would need to bring the *Auswärtige Amt* along with him at least some way before he could discuss it in anything like an official setting. While Balfour's approval for the meeting with Chamberlain was essential, Hatzfeldt did not assume that Chamberlain's

⁴⁴⁵ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 29/03/1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1, No.3782, pp.196-9

⁴⁴⁶ Balfour to Salisbury, 14/04/1898, Balfour MSS, Add.MS49691 emphasis in bold is mine.

ideas were widely shared by the Cabinet or Balfour. Therefore, he kept quiet in the meeting with Balfour and hoped that by converting Chamberlain's nebulous ideas into a request to join the Triple Alliance, he could tug the *Auswärtige Amt* and Bülow along the path to closer Anglo-British relations. In his second meeting with Chamberlain, Hatzfeldt had asked whether the Colonial Secretary thought his Cabinet colleagues shared his opinions "as he had seen rumours that we sometimes differed." By leaving the initiative on Balfour to mention anything of Chamberlain's 'alliance' proposals Hatzfeldt was testing whether support for the idea extended to the acting Foreign Secretary. He was able to do so, without causing Chamberlain to doubt his interest in the idea by reporting "that he had not mentioned the fact of our previous interview to Mr. Balfour, as he did not know whether I[Chamberlain] considered it as entirely between ourselves." Chamberlain made it clear that what he said was not binding on the government, but that he had "reported the substance" to Balfour and the Committee of Defence.⁴⁴⁷

The second Chamberlain-Hatzfeldt talk took place on 1st April. This was around the same time that Goschen, Devonshire and Chaplin, upon receiving disturbing news about Weihaiwei's suitability as a naval base, had moved to either redirect the demands ordered of China, or recall the fleet completely. Balfour explained that the distance made it impossible to reverse the orders. He did offer Devonshire the option of an emergency meeting which also offered him responsibility for any change of policy; the Duke declined being unready to openly break with Salisbury, even in his absence. Eckardstein, via Chaplin, had also given Balfour and almost certainly the Cabinet the impression that an alliance had been agreed in principal.⁴⁴⁸ While the chance of rescinding the Weihaiwei solution and replacing it with an Anglo-German alliance/China agreement had receded, in part thanks to Balfour's timidity as much as the state of late Victorian telecommunications, Chamberlain must have been buoyed up by

⁴⁴⁷ Memo. Chamberlain, 1/04/1898, JC7/2/2A/4

⁴⁴⁸ Otter, *China*, pp.146-7

Eckardstein's 'misrepresentation' and subsequently had high hopes when he went into the second meeting.

In accordance with his instructions, Hatzfeldt brought up the parliamentary problem. While in reality the Germans were happy enough to trust diplomatic agreement with Britain, as testified by the various treaties signed over the course of the 1890s, the continued adherence to this excuse is telling. Bülow was emphatic in his instructions; any alliance would be vulnerable to a parliamentary vote effectively opening a door for Britain to back out in any "psychological moment". He went on, there "is hardly a German statesman, how great may be his sympathy for England, and how much he may be convinced that the continued existence of England's power is necessary" who would want "to take responsibility for the consequences" that may arise from an Anglo-German Alliance.⁴⁴⁹ If Bülow believed this then an Anglo-German alliance was impossible on any terms. If German planners could have escaped from their preconceptions about the reliability of the British then very many eventualities could have been different. The Kaiser's shock at the news that Britain declared war in 1914 could only have been because he fully expected that Britain would 'use the back door' to exit her responsibilities to Belgium. While Bülow's comments on the wisdom of relying on an agreement based on a parliamentary system appear cogent enough, initiating a military strategy in part based upon the assumption of Albion's perfidy must be considered equally irresponsible.⁴⁵⁰

Bülow's thinking continued on, and so in the meeting did Hatzfeldt, Germany could not have allowed Britain to be overcome, as then the

⁴⁴⁹ Bülow to Hatzfeldt, 30/03/1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1, No.3783, pp.199-202

⁴⁵⁰ Both Steinberg, J. "A German Plan for the Invasion of Holland and Belgium, 1897" and Turner, L.C.F., "The significance of the Schlieffen Plan" in Kennedy, P.M., (ed.) *The War Plans of the Great Powers, 1880-1914* (London, 1979) pp.155-170 and pp.199-222 respectively, discuss the very early origins of what essentially became Germany's plan for dealing with the expected war of French vengeance. Planning began as early as 1897 and thus the expectation that Britain could, and indeed would, renege on her commitment to Belgium and on any uncomfortable international agreement, was prevalent at the time these decisions were taken. It seems that the Germans never grasped the patriotic nature of British public opinion, which would have destroyed any government attempting to abandon any international treaty, activated defensively and ratified by Parliament, even into the peace loving days of the 1930s.

Franco-Russian alliance would then “focus on the revision of the Treaty of Frankfurt.” “Therefore, in no case would they[Germany] join a combination against us[Britain]. Treaty or no Treaty, the worst we had to anticipate from them was that they would remain neutral.”⁴⁵¹ Hatzfeldt continued suggesting that perhaps Britain should come to some agreement with Russia in China and then settle her African differences with France in armed conflict. Bülow was certain that Britain would win such a conflict. German neutrality alone would guarantee that the French army would need to remain in France at the German/Italian border. Chamberlain believed that the British would be able to deal with the French but he saw through Bülow’s attempts to push the world’s two strongest navies to war. To his mind it was the Russians who were pushing dangerously upon what were vital interests, and the Russians who had demonstrated they were untrustworthy. Chamberlain asked if such a war would destroy the Dual Alliance, Hatzfeldt believed not, France would “accept the crumbs from the Russian table”. Chamberlain therefore pressed on, only a “clear understanding with Germany and a joint policy” would permit “a much stronger attitude [...] and [...] lay down the bases of a settlement in China which neither France nor Russia would be likely to resist.”⁴⁵²

Chamberlain had just been offered the very war Salisbury could not decide was “part of Chamberlain’s objects or not.” From France the Prime Minister went on: “The indications differ from month to month, as to France’s future conduct their elections will tell us a little more. But France certainly acts as if she meant to drive us into a German alliance”.⁴⁵³ This reference to being driven towards Germany indicates that Britain was not prepared to attempt to settle her differences in unilateral military action. The British Cabinet would never have felt secure enough with only German neutrality holding the ring for Britain and France to go at it alone. That course would have been riddled with danger. Chamberlain’s offer then to come to some agreement with Germany over the defence of primarily Chinese interests

⁴⁵¹ Bülow to Hatzfeldt, 30/03/1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1, No.3783, p.200; Memo., Chamberlain, 1/04/1898, JC7/2/2A/4

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*,

⁴⁵³ Salisbury to Balfour, 9/04/1898, Balfour MSS, Add.MS49691

was an attempt to protect these interests without endangering global peace. What the Colonial Secretary offered was substantial; Germany would have Shantung and its hinterland, along with her rights there, she should have tax powers to fund a Chinese army under German officers, the British would do the same in the Yangtze region. This was to offer the Russians recognition of their current gains, but to prevent their further penetration. Germany was concerned about the future in China, Chamberlain noted that Hatzfeldt commented that the Chinese capital should move further south. In his earlier meeting with Balfour it had been suggested that Germany and Britain could come to a formal understanding based on areas of railway interest in China.⁴⁵⁴ Any formal agreement concerned with where the respective parties could build what, would have been an informal or implied recognition of spheres of influence, or could certainly have become the basis of such an understanding. These suggestions made by Chamberlain built upon the outlines of Balfour's much more limited offer. The two men were clearly sharing information and probably working together.⁴⁵⁵ Balfour offered the start of what he hoped would be a process of drawing the two nations together; Chamberlain offered a short cut as well as a glimpse at the final destination. The similarities and timing of changes in direction up until this point strongly suggest that the two men were working together.

Chamberlain clarified that what he hoped to achieve was defensive in nature, to prevent further Russian gains. Judging by the space this was given in Hatzfeldt's report this change was of great significance.⁴⁵⁶ This also suggests that Chamberlain was reacting with speed to any changes in the situation; as the Cabinet failed to recall the fleet from demanding Weihaiwei, so the aims of an arrangement changed from forcing Russia out of the north, to defending the rest of China. As Balfour discussed railways so Chamberlain expanded upon those ideas into wider spheres of influence and administration.⁴⁵⁷ Despite Bülow's message which suggested that he believed no deal done with Britain would be safe, Hatzfeldt gave ample

⁴⁵⁴ Memo., Chamberlain, 1/04/1898, JC7/2/2A/4; Sanderson to Lascelles, 29/03/1898. FO 64/1437

⁴⁵⁵ Otte, *China*, p.149

⁴⁵⁶ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 1/04/1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1, No.3784, pp.202-4

⁴⁵⁷ Memo. Chamberlain, 1/04/1898, JC7/2/2A/4

space to Chamberlain's reassuring comments on the veracity of any agreement which had been ratified by parliament. That rather suggested the Ambassador did not share Bülow's beliefs that a treaty would always be threatened with repudiation.⁴⁵⁸ Essentially here was an opportunity for Germany to gain for herself, without war, quite a large 'place in the sun', but not only that, but also the control over an Asiatic Army. This agreement would have given both Germany and Britain, especially working together, the ability to open a military front on Russia in East Asia during any future conflict. In this situation Russia would find herself confronted by Germany and Austria in Europe, Britain in Central Asia and everywhere at sea, and Germany and Britain in the Far East. In a war between the Dual Alliance and Germany, Britain would be able to provide naval protection, which would keep communications with Germany's overseas territories open as well as protect their trade, and prevent Russia from concentrating her forces in Europe, while divesting France of not only support from her own Empire, but probably possession of it too. However, aware of Bülow's plans to extract as much as possible, as a colonial entrance fee to any alliance, Hatzfeldt did not communicate Chamberlain's grander ideas to Berlin. This prevented her from seeing the benefits of such an arrangement. This would have rendered Tirpitz's plans redundant and Germany could have switched her naval ambitions to building better support for her burgeoning international trade. Given Chamberlain's earlier promises of being generous in the small colonial matters if the larger one could be agreed first, here was Britain demonstrating she was prepared to treat with Germany both fairly and generously, thus admitting her into the small circle of truly global powers. Here was Germany's best chance of achieving many of her *Weltpolitik* aims without a major war. Chamberlain kept Balfour and the Committee of Defence in the loop with his version of events. Hatzfeldt had left him with the impression that Germany was still in favour of closer relations. Chamberlain was being overly hopeful but it was also partly because Hatzfeldt was trying to avoid missing any genuine opportunity and also needed to break off negotiations without causing offence or alarm.

⁴⁵⁸ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 1/04/1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1, No.3784, pp.202-4

Bülow's reply continued to focus on Britain's parliamentary system, reminding Hatzfeldt of how Salisbury himself had used these same arguments to avoid alliance proposals in the early 1890s. He no longer focused on the dangers of repudiation but on the consequences of a failure to ratify the Treaty. He noted that public opinion in the two countries was not conducive to any large scale changes. In the future things would be different, the British Public would come to understand the need, as Britain failed to disrupt the Franco-Russian alliance and thus realised they stood all alone. Germany would also be warmer in the future, if obstinate British statesmen would stop being so rugged in defence of British colonial interests.⁴⁵⁹ Chamberlain needed to be convinced that he should be grateful for Germany neutrality and amenable in colonial disputes so that at some point in the future the conditions may be better. This was disingenuous; in his last despatch Bülow had pointed out that while Russia's strength was increasing Britain's constitutional arrangements would still make any alliance impossible. How then could there have ever been a more advantageous moment later? Bülow's plans could not afford to see Britain disappear as a Power, at least not yet, but his plans and attitudes were full of enmity; he wished to wait until the British were desperate and thus Germany could demand to be made the inheritor of Britain's global mantle.

Before Balfour met Hatzfeldt again on 5th April, he sent word of the talks via Salisbury's son, Cranborne. How much exactly Cranborne had been asked to reveal is impossible to know, but he left England on 4th before the acting Foreign Secretary had his last meeting with the German Ambassador and the talks arrived at a dead end.⁴⁶⁰ Balfour had chosen to stop proceedings at least those which may have had radical implications. The Ambassador rehashed Bülow's reasoning's why attempts to negotiate an Anglo-German alliance were premature. Balfour appeared to say little to persuade him otherwise and why should he as he was now trying to restrain the situation. He agreed that public opinion was not yet ready. He also left Hatzfeldt with the impression that he was unsure that Parliament could be brought to

⁴⁵⁹ Bülow to Hatzfeldt, 3/04/1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1, No.3785, pp.204-207

⁴⁶⁰ Balfour to Salisbury, 14/04/1898, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Balfour/1897-8/223

ratify such a treaty. Despite the existence of calls for an Anglo-German Alliance made in the Commons' debate on China earlier that day.⁴⁶¹ Balfour also acted against Chamberlain; it was a peculiarity of the Colonial Secretary to want to go too fast, he also left Hatzfeldt with the impression neither he nor Salisbury would be sorry to see Chamberlain fail. Balfour had decided to abandon Chamberlain, whether he hoped to actually cause him damage politically or not remains unclear, but by making it clear to Hatzfeldt that Chamberlain's attempts no longer had his approval Balfour was bringing immediate control of the situation back to himself. However, he did not inform Chamberlain that the talks had been broken off, nor that he had informed Salisbury of their existence.⁴⁶²

The announcement of Britain's lease of Weihaiwei was bound to strain German feeling. Having just had discussions about how the two countries could work together in China and elsewhere, Britain picked up a naval station in Germany's backyard. Any hope that this possession would give Balfour any leverage railway concessions was largely dashed by Germany's barely restrained anger. Bülow demanded a pledge that Britain would not build any railways connecting their new territory with any treaty port or the Shantung interior.⁴⁶³ Balfour agreed quickly but used this to try to revive his idea of an agreement based on an understanding as to Railways. In the end he gave the Germans a unilateral declaration along the line they had asked for, with only one change, that the line from Tientsin to Hankow could still be built. Balfour thought it "rather absurd" to be giving pledges

⁴⁶¹ Hansard, 5/04/1898, *PD*, HC (4), LVI, (1898), cc.224-88

⁴⁶² Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 1/04/1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1, No.3784, pp.207-208; Balfour to Salisbury, 14/04/1898, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Balfour/1897-8/223 Balfour certainly informed Salisbury before his dishonest letter of the 14 in which he went into greater detail. In that letter he referred to "further developments" since he had asked "Jim" [Cranborne, Salisbury's son] to speak to Salisbury about it Salisbury himself mentioned the Chamberlain/Hatzfeldt talks in Salisbury to Balfour 9/04/1898, Balfour MSS, Add.MS49691. This makes it extremely difficult to ascertain what exactly Salisbury was told and when, however, as Balfour described the start of the proceedings in his letter of the 14th, as further developments since speaking to Cranborne, once Salisbury had Chamberlain's dated memos he must have become aware that Balfour chose carefully when to reveal what to him. Chamberlain mentioned that Salisbury had not yet been informed in his meeting with Eckardstein on 22, Memo., Chamberlain, 22/04/1898, JC7/2/2a/5

⁴⁶³ Laschelles to Salisbury, 7/04/1898, FO64/1437

against very remote actions without receiving anything in return.⁴⁶⁴

However, he had learnt from his meetings with Hatzfeldt that Britain needed to be generous in these small disputes if there was ever to be any hope of a more formal arrangement.

While Balfour was dealing with Germany's railway paranoia the other anti-isolationists were not idle either. At another dinner, so Eckardstein claimed, Chamberlain reported the bad news that nothing could be done to further the alliance scheme. Among those present were: Chamberlain, Devonshire, Chaplin, Rothschild and Eckardstein. Here it was decided that Eckardstein would approach the Kaiser himself and see if the proposals could be pushed along from the German side.⁴⁶⁵ The earlier private diplomacy conducted by the Kaiser via Swaine, suggested that he could be approached in such a manner. However, Wilhelm was not easily persuaded but despite that Eckardstein reported back that the Kaiser was thoroughly convinced. Balfour was kept informed of these proceedings by Chaplin and Rothschild.⁴⁶⁶ The dates Balfour wrote to Salisbury were important as they give some indication of what Balfour hoped to achieve. He had put Hatzfeldt off as best he could; certainly Balfour was no longer hoping for any radical or quickly formed alliance. However, by not informing Chamberlain he knew that the Colonial Secretary would continue on like a runaway train. While he sent word of the talks to Salisbury it was not until he had both come to the end of his diplomacy with regards to Shantung railways on 13th and received word via Chaplin of Eckardstein's reported success with the Kaiser at Homburg on 12th, that he put pen to paper on 14th April and laid out his version of what took place for Salisbury's consumption.

Balfour now had a serious problem; if Chaplin's reports of Eckardstein's success proved true then Salisbury would be facing some serious difficulties when he got back and it was very likely that the 'talks' could still have been

⁴⁶⁴ Balfour to Sanderson, 10/04/1898, Balfour MSS, Add.MS49732

⁴⁶⁵ Eckardstein, *Lebenserinnerungen*, I, 294-6; Garvin, III pp.269-70; Otte, *China*, pp.153-5

⁴⁶⁶ Chaplin to Balfour, 12/04/1898, Balfour MSS Add.MS49772; Rothschild to Balfour, 18/04/1898, quoted in Otte, *China*, p.154

ongoing by his return. Balfour's letter on 14th April was mainly an attempt to disguise his own involvement. He described the opening moves, the dinner at Rothschild, as "a further development in the matter" he had previously asked Cranborne to inform his Uncle of. As he went on, he laid the responsibility for what took place squarely on Chamberlain: "Joe is very impulsive and the Cabinet discussion of the preceding days had forced on his attention our isolated and occasionally therefore difficult diplomatic position." This implied that Balfour did discuss the possibilities which could rise from the discussions he had with Hatzfeldt on 25th March with the Cabinet of the same day. He went on to succinctly and amusingly describe what had been discussed but he described Chamberlain's ideas as being much more vague than they were and he implied that Chamberlain was much more desperate for the deal, noting that Hatzfeldt "had nothing to say" to the Colonial Secretary by 5th April. The instructions sent from Berlin appeared to imply that a further discussion was expected; Hatzfeldt took the decision himself to limit his contact to Balfour only, detecting danger in continuing to discuss these matters with Chamberlain now that it was clear the talks no longer had Cecilian support. Balfour continued his epistle obscuring not only his past involvement but, even more importantly, his intentions for the future, he "was much entertained by [Hatzfeldt's] conclusion" that "those small concessions [...] which Joe (he said) was so reluctant to make" could "pave the way for a straight and more forward union!!" However, he chose to "express no dissent from" that view and went on to explain that despite being "inclined to favour an Anglo-Germany agreement" he would prefer to be the party "that lent the cheek not that imparted the kiss." This was an attempt to throw his Uncle off his own scent. Balfour would go on to pursue his own, independent, pro-German policy but knowing that Salisbury would need to reassert control upon his return it was vitally important that Balfour remained in a position to continue to be of influence. He could not afford to be detected as one of the anti-isolationists in the Cabinet. Earlier in the letter Balfour threw out to Salisbury a suggestion of 'sharing' the Foreign Office: "As regards F.O. work do you not think that in the future it might be found possible for me or some other colleague to take it over for (say) a month each year when nothing very particular was going on?" Crouched in concern for his Uncle's

well being was the suggestion that Balfour should regularly be permitted to steer the country's foreign policy. The story which he then went on to unfold would hardly have convinced Salisbury he could trust the work to anyone else in the Cabinet. By this method Balfour hoped to find enough room to continue to push his nascent pro-German policy. Balfour closed the letter by reporting on Eckardstein's antics. Playing on the German's lack of 'real' social standing, the proud cuirassier Baron von Eckardstein was reduced to "(You know the fat fellow who married Maple's daughter?)" and was accused of attempting "(by his own account successfully)" to persuade Wilhelm of "the transcendent value of the English alliance" apparently "behind Hatzfeldt's back". Any value that this personal diplomacy, a tactic that the Kaiser had tried to use himself previously, may have had was reduced by underlining that this operator was an interloper, a phoney and fake, his aristocratic and thus diplomatic credentials deemed threadbare.⁴⁶⁷

Eckardstein saw Chamberlain upon his return to London on 22nd April. The Kaiser was in favour of the alliance and of acting quickly, lest news of negotiations would leak. The ideas with which Eckardstein tempted Chamberlain were different from those Hatzfeldt had discussed. A defensive agreement to guarantee each Power's possessions, arranged to be activated if attacked by either a single Power, or two Powers combined which ever was preferred. Austria and Italy should be admitted at an early date. The Kaiser would also recognise that Britain would require a freehand in Egypt and the Transvaal; Chamberlain wanted a deal which would settle more than just China. Chamberlain noted that Eckardstein invited him to lunch with Hatzfeldt, the Colonial Secretary replied reminding him that "what we were doing was absolutely personal and unofficial" and noted that he still did not believe that Salisbury had been informed of the talks.⁴⁶⁸ Chamberlain evidently discussed the content of this meeting with Balfour that day, as Balfour again put pen to paper in order to keep Salisbury up to date. His letter is again misleading or at least trying to tug Salisbury in a certain direction. The nephew reports that Eckardstein appeared to have

⁴⁶⁷ Balfour to Salisbury, 14/04/1898, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Balfour/1897-8/223

⁴⁶⁸ Memo. Chamberlain, 22/04/1898, JC7/2/2a/5

managed to convert the German Emperor who was "now 'breast high' for a defensive alliance on any terms". Balfour pretended to be inclined, as he predicted his uncle would be, to "be disposed to put it on one side as a political comedy without the least significance" due to Eckardstein's lack of importance. However, he believed this would have been a mistake, not least because "these impossible diplomats have raised the expectation in the Emperor's mind which, if left unfulfilled, will, acting on so impulsive a being, throw him violently into the opposite camp." Balfour was playing on Salisbury's deeply held concerns about the Kaiser and was effectively ensnaring the returning Foreign Secretary into pursuing the alliance, the merits of which Balfour believed "would take too many pages" to discuss in correspondence. If the pros and cons of such an arrangement would require too much space to write about then it is evident that Balfour was taking the opportunity seriously rather than trying to treat it as the comedy of errors he had painted it as. His closing comments on the subject revealed that Balfour secretly hoped an agreement could be had: "The real fact is that the E. Of Germany, in spite of his aim of European domination, is in a mortal fright of Russia; and especially of a maritime (as well as military) combination of France and Russia. From the effects of the maritime combination we would save him- and he is prepared to buy us. If we are not for sale, he will go elsewhere:- to our detriment."⁴⁶⁹ Balfour was certainly attempting to make a strong political case in favour of the alliance and trying to head off his Uncle's reluctance. Taking this later letter and comparing it with the letter of 14th reveals some curious twist and turns in Balfour's attempts to orchestrate Salisbury's response. The first letter was to distance himself from what he believed was going to be a train wreck, to get enough distance to be likely to retain his Uncle's trust and so remain in a position to effect some of the '*do-ut-des*' he believed the German's required for a more direct arrangement later. By the second letter, it looks like he found himself stuck, the radical sudden change then looked like it might, against all odds, come off and having distanced himself from the proceedings he was likely to be left behind. But this was more than just political manoeuvrings against Chamberlain directly and more circumspectly

⁴⁶⁹ Balfour to Salisbury, 22/04/1898, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Balfour/1897-8/234

with regards to Salisbury. The second letter clearly revealed that Balfour was actually in favour of the radical change he had just so amusingly decried. He attempted to hide that opinion in ridicule but the tenor of the whole letter is that the situation had moved beyond his, and he also implied Salisbury's, control. The Kaiser was too dangerous to be let down in his expectations. The only reason this did not explode into either a radical realignment or a serious blow to Anglo-German relations was because Eckardstein had either been thoroughly misled or had thoroughly lied about the Kaiser's disposition towards an English Alliance; it is difficult to tell which. A few months later Wilhelm would again get excited about a proposal Lascelles threw out, concerning how easily the two nations could compose their differences in a crises. He even exclaimed to the Ambassador to be ignorant of any prior proposals for a defensive alliance, activated if either party was attacked by two other Powers, this would suggest Eckardstein really achieved nothing during his visit. It also suggests that Wilhelm at least may have been more interested in Chamberlain's proposals for a direct treaty rather than the request to join the Triple Alliance they had become by the time they reached Berlin.⁴⁷⁰ Essentially Balfour was stuck between desperately wanting to control the situation while remaining in his Uncle's good books but also to allow the radical change in British policy to occur if possible. Balfour should have held off writing this second letter; if he had waited until Chamberlain met again with Hatzfeldt he would have realised that his fears and excitement were unfounded. Instead by writing too soon, he unintentionally and needlessly revealed his position to Salisbury.

Hatzfeldt wired back to Berlin that Chamberlain had requested another talk.⁴⁷¹ Whether Chamberlain actually requested the meeting, or whether Eckardstein merely told Hatzfeldt this was the case hardly matters as the German Ambassador would never have approached Chamberlain without again clearing the action first with Balfour. It was therefore necessary for Hatzfeldt to believe that the initiative came from Chamberlain. It was also

⁴⁷⁰ Lascelles to Balfour, 23/08/1898, *BD*, I, No.122, pp.100-1; Lascelles to Salisbury, 21/12/1898, *Ibid.*, No.124, pp.102-4; Kennedy, *Antagonism*, p235-6

⁴⁷¹ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 23/04/1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1, No.3791, p.218

quite in keeping with Chamberlain's direct, or often called business like, approach to diplomacy to care little for such subtleties; to him what was important was the substance of the talks. There was little new in Bülow's reply: Britain was safe from France because German neutrality would keep the French "mesmerized before the Vosges", in fact he even suggested France would renege on their obligations under the Dual Alliance out of fear of a neutral Germany, an odd proposition after having previously stressed how essential that alliance was to the French; Britain would gain little from an Anglo-German Alliance, as Russia could not yet bring her forces to bear on any British frontier but once her preparations were finished, along the Afghan border and in China, she would be much more dangerous, in the meantime therefore Germany would simply be a diversion for the Tsar's army which could not yet act against Britain anyway; Austria and Italy may be drawn closer to Britain and help her. Therefore Britain does not need to do a deal with France, it is much cheaper for her to purchase continued Germany neutrality with acts of 'do-ut-des' in the colonial sphere. None of this suggested that the Kaiser had been convinced of anything, perhaps he had encouraged Eckardstein in an attempt to ensure the British did not entirely give up on the concept. If so Bülow still had much to do to teach his master to act as the "tongue on the scales" between Britain and Russia rather than the "restlessly moving pendulum".⁴⁷²

Chamberlain met with Eckardstein and Hatzfeldt at Rothschild's house on 25th April. As Hatzfeldt's instructions suggested very little was likely to be achieved. Chamberlain's report of the meeting was to the point and brusque despite having had his expectations raised by Eckardstein's misinformation. From Chamberlain's point of view the cardinal points were that the Germans remained entrenched in their fears about the difficulties of parliamentary ratification or of a secret agreement being reneged upon by a later government, that despite this an agreement may be possible in the future, but that it should be approached via the Triple Alliance's secondary partners; an Anglo-German alliance was premature but not

⁴⁷² Bülow to Hatzfeldt, 24/04/1898, *GP*, XIV, pt. 1, No.3792, pp.218-221; Bülow's note on Wilhelm II to *Auswärtige Amt*, 10/04/1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1, No.3790, pp.217-8

impossible, and that Britain may find it possible to come to agreement with Austria now as her opinion with regards to Turkish integrity had changed. Chamberlain closed by warning the German Ambassador “*le bon heur qui passé*”.⁴⁷³ Hatzfeldt’s report was broadly similar but also much longer and more detailed.⁴⁷⁴ It reveals that the two men discussed the issues in more depth than Chamberlain implied. The Colonial Secretary was probably aware that this would be his last chance to discuss the matter for some time; he dwelt on trying to convince the Germans of the usefulness of an Alliance and trying to focus on the Russian threat in China. However, Hatzfeldt revealed Germany’s lack of concern; the Russians would not be prepared to make further moves in China for some time, “Decades” the Kaiser noted in the margins. It was typical of Chamberlain to take a long term view of problems and solutions, after all his suggestion of raising Chinese armies would have taken years to prepare as well; the Colonial Secretary wanted to take action today to prevent a war later.⁴⁷⁵ Wilhelm’s notes on the report expose this even more deeply; he described Chamberlain’s suggestions as repaying the Tsar’s assistance in acquiring Kiaochow by demanding that Russia penetrates no further “because it does not suit England! A stroke of genius!” Because Berlin and the Kaiser had not been fully informed of Chamberlain’s proposals, the Emperor may not have been aware of the huge strip of Chinese territory Chamberlain had offered them as the first basis of an agreement.⁴⁷⁶ Further Russian penetration did not suit Britain but then neither did it suit Germany if she hoped to extend her influence into the hinterland of her new territories. The Kaiser was also conveniently forgetting how tense Russo-German relations were during the seizure of Kiaochow. Chamberlain had also pointed out that the German area of interest was already much closer to the Russian, that it was they who would encounter difficulties first, however, the Kaiser noted that Weihaiwei now placed Britain closer to the Russians.

⁴⁷³ Memo., Chamberlain, 25/04/1898, JC7/2/2a/6

⁴⁷⁴ Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, 26/04/1898, GP, XIV, Pt.1, No.3793, pp.221-7

⁴⁷⁵ Memo., Chamberlain, 1/04/1898, JC7/2/2A/4

⁴⁷⁶ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 1/04/1898, GP, XIV pt.1, No.3784, pp.202-4 made no mention of Chamberlain’s offer of a hinterland that extended beyond Shantung rather than just Kiaochow or the suggestion of raising armies under European Officers, a Sino-German/Anglo version of the Indian Army, paid for by the Chinese.

This was geographically true, but Britain had already given such guarantees to the Germans that it should have been perfectly apparent that she had no interest in developing the area around the naval station. Russian influence could utterly replace the German influence surrounding Weihaiwei without touching a single vital British interest, except for exposing Weihaiwei as merely a cosmetic solution. Hatzfeldt also made note that Chamberlain had again reiterated that he could only be generous in the treatment of colonial differences if offered as part of a wider agreement or general alliance. The main point of contention was based upon the different assumptions held concerning the inevitability of an Anglo-Russian war. A series of pragmatic agreements combined with a stalwart defence of vital interests could have, and did, see them avoid such a conflagration. Bülow and others in Germany, but not necessarily Hatzfeldt, believed that it was impossible for Britain to avoid this fight. Thus, an Anglo-German Alliance guaranteed their own participation in a war with Russia. They simply could not believe that Russia would back down in the face of such overwhelming force. In the British Cabinet's mind, if the Dual Alliance hesitated now to attack either the Triple Alliance or Britain then how on earth could it have been expected that they would definitely attack both at once? The other factor solidly missed by the Germans is that this would also represent a British acceptance that Alsace-Lorraine had been lost to France in perpetuity. Holstein's comments on a duplicate copy of Hatzfeldt's reports also demonstrated incredulity that Britain could escape her fight with Russia. Hatzfeldt did not bother passing on Chamberlain's warning that time was passing, he probably believed this was a reference to Salisbury's return, in part it was, but it was also a reference to the alternative that Chamberlain had always threatened, that he would find a way to settle with France if not Russia as well. He, along with all the rest of the British Cabinet, was also misreading German intentions; the British had no idea how much the Germans believed they deserved, in fact the rejection of the Colonial Secretaries offer to agree to protect their territory, while also offering them a huge swathe of China and the settlement of outstanding Colonial matters in their favour, should have

started to ring alarm bells as to the size and nature of their eventual demands.⁴⁷⁷

Balfour must have been relieved when Chamberlain informed him of the sorry contents of his last meeting. Thus the first Alliance talks drew to a close. Eckardstein visited Chamberlain in apparent confusion the next day, but the Colonial Secretary put him off, "it was for the Emperor to make the next move", if there was ever a ball and thus a real game in play it was now firmly in the German court.⁴⁷⁸ Balfour had almost been tripped up, but his instincts had seen him through. Not only had he learnt how the Germans preferred to move forward, with smaller concessions paving the way toward a wider scheme, he had also firmly placed himself as the best person for them to do business with. By leaving Chamberlain out of the loop, on what he had said to Hatzfeldt, and by leaving the German with the impression that both he and Salisbury would like to see Chamberlain fail, Balfour had secured himself as the safe sensible person to do business with. Both Bülow and the Kaiser preferred his practical gradual approach to Chamberlain's fantastic ones.⁴⁷⁹ As for the alliance proposals themselves it is harder to judge. Hatzfeldt always converted the suggestions Chamberlain made into concepts he believed were more likely to be acceptable to his superiors. Therefore they were never in possession of some of the ideas that Chamberlain was contemplating. What he suggested amounted to paying the Germans on account of their future interests. While historians often interpreted this as an invitation for Germany to throw themselves across Russia's path it was also an offer to control a much larger area in China than Germany could expect to secure for years to come. Along with it were the promises of settling colonial matters favourably too. This scheme was never considered properly on its merits; Chamberlain was offering them a deal based upon a presumed German desire to acquire the interests offered. The continued German insistence that Britain work through Austria and Italy, was certainly designed to end the talks, such

⁴⁷⁷ Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, 26/04/1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1, No.3793, pp.221-7

⁴⁷⁸ Memo., Chamberlain, 26/04/1898, JC7/3/2a/7

⁴⁷⁹ Wilhelm to *Auswärtige Amt*, 8/04/1898 and Bülow to Wilhelm, *GP*, XIV pt.1, Nos.3768 & 3769

agreements with the secondary central Powers could not have guaranteed Britain what she needed outside of Europe. In essence despite *weltpolitik* the Germans were still unable to see beyond Europe with regards to their alliance obligations and interests. Chamberlain was almost as blinkered with regard to only seeing the global position, but the Germans missed that his offers represented an acceptance of Germany onto the world stage. The Germans desired 'place in the sun' had been offered, along with a guarantee of the territorial status quo in Europe, and almost summarily turned down. Perhaps if Chamberlain had approached this in a subtler, more traditionally diplomatic, fashion then perhaps the Germans would have looked at it more favourably. His 'cut to the chase' style had provoked fear and suspicion, where he hoped they would have provided the opposite. There did exist an opportunity here, but it was slight and would have required the Germans to have dramatically realigned their future policy.

Salisbury returned to Britain at the start of May. Chamberlain sent him copies of all of his memoranda; he pretended that the discussions were started by the Germans, rather than by agreement between the anti-isolationists and Eckardstein over a society dinner. Actually his writings and the letter he enclosed them with all failed to mention the role Balfour, Devonshire and Chaplain played. The Colonial Secretary placed himself squarely in the centre of the narrative; "On every occasion I made it clear that I only expressed my personal opinions and could not speak for you or any of my colleagues."⁴⁸⁰ This naturally played into Balfour's hands who had already taken to steps to sideline his own involvement.⁴⁸¹ The timing of the discussions, the aborted attempt to reverse the Weihaiwei decision and Balfour's turn of phrase in his letters all suggest that Cabinet in fact discussed the talks themselves. Chamberlain asked Salisbury to consider "a Treaty with Germany providing for reciprocal defence" as "recent experience" demonstrated that Britain was "powerless to resist the ultimate control of China by Russia and that we are at a great disadvantage in negotiating with France, as long as we maintain our present isolation".

⁴⁸⁰ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 29/04/1898, JC11/30/117

⁴⁸¹ Balfour to Salisbury, 14 & 22/04/1898, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Balfour/1897-8/223 & 234 respectively.

Believing that "such a Treaty would make for peace and might be negotiated at the present time" Chamberlain reserved the decision to Salisbury "to say whether the matter should be pressed or allowed to drop."⁴⁸²

Salisbury was facing difficult problems he had to balance the need to placate Chamberlain, thus keeping him in the government, while avoiding offending the Kaiser without making an alliance with him. Hatzfeldt made this balancing act easier. He met Salisbury on 2nd May 1898; Salisbury reported to Chamberlain that "[h]is business was evidently to throw cold water", nothing could be hurried and Britain should ripen the situation by being amiable in other matters. The Foreign Secretary also finished with a postscript agreeing that "a close relation with Germany would be very desirable, but can we get it?"⁴⁸³ This was almost certainly how Chamberlain felt about Salisbury's own attempts to create a closer relationship with Russia. Chamberlain replied commenting on how he was "very glad to see your[Salisbury's] handwriting again". He agreed that it was clear that the German Government were not eager, if "anything [was] to be done it must be by a movement on the part of the Emperor himself." He also agreed that it would not "be wise for us to show ourselves too eager". Before moving on to the selection of the Governor-General of Canada, he did note that he thought it perfectly possible "to ascertain through Eckhardstein whether the Emperor is determined to press the matter," naturally Salisbury was prepared to wait and hope that Wilhelm did not prevail to force the issue upon Bülow.⁴⁸⁴ The two men met on 3rd and discussed the matter; any further move had to come from the Germans, this essentially killed any chance of further talks unless Wilhelm was prepared to order Bülow to do so against the latter's own advice. Chamberlain was permitted to tell Eckardstein that the Government looked favourably upon the suggestion of an alliance, but no more than that.⁴⁸⁵ Otte points out that by posing as a friend of an Anglo-German alliance, Salisbury denies Chamberlain of a

⁴⁸² Chamberlain to Salisbury, 29/04/1898, JC11/30/117

⁴⁸³ Salisbury to Chamberlain, 2/05/1898, JC11/30/119

⁴⁸⁴ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 2/05/1898, JC11/30/118

⁴⁸⁵ Memo Chamberlain, 3/05/1898, JC7/2/2A/8

pretext for disrupting the government.⁴⁸⁶ The evidence does not suggest that Chamberlain was seeking such a pretext. It was also unlikely that the Colonial Secretary, or any other dissenting Cabinet minister, would be swayed by such an exchange. Recalling Chamberlain's final conversation with Eckardstein on 26th April he was certainly convinced that nothing more could be done from London, the Colonial Secretary had already accepted that all would now rest with the Germans. If they had come forth with more definite proposals which Salisbury then rejected then perhaps a collision would have been unavoidable. In such circumstances it would be difficult to imagine that Chamberlain would have had to act alone; how those in Cabinet, whose views were sympathetic to an Anglo-German agreement, would have responded is impossible to know, but it seems unlikely that they would have simply let Salisbury avoid a real opportunity. Thankfully for the unity of the Government nothing came forth from the Germans.

There was no real threat posed by Chamberlain of disrupting the Government, whether over these talks or even over general Chinese policy. The Colonial Secretary was a canny political operator; the fact that he still had a political career was testimony to his ability to read politics and adapt himself to changing political situations. Salisbury could not have been unseated without a serious break between the Prime Minister and a majority of his Cabinet. If the Germans had responded favourably then perhaps the other malcontents would finally be prepared to move more openly against Salisbury. Only in the context of general Cabinet revolt could Chamberlain have caused the Government an upset and hoped to come out with even his own office. Chamberlain's original choice of office was driven by a sensible reading of his political position.⁴⁸⁷ He could not have thought the conditions much more favourable in 1898 over 1895 for him to attempt to lead a Conservative dominated majority. Neither could he have taken the Home Office or the Treasury without needing to deliver upon his old platform of social reform which again his Conservative colleagues would have blocked.

⁴⁸⁶ Otte, *China*, p.158

⁴⁸⁷ Bray, D.M. "To the Colonial Office", *Joseph Chamberlain and Foreign Policy, 1895-1902*, pp.3-18, unpublished Master's thesis, UEA digital repository.

If Chamberlain had wished to disrupt Salisbury in 1898 he would have needed to have brought most of the Cabinet with him, Balfour especially, and that any replacement of Salisbury as Prime Minister or Foreign Secretary would have needed to be acceptable to the mass of Conservatives in the House, which Chamberlain was not. While Chamberlain was popular with the public, and controlled a sizeable 'Electoral Duchy', as Marsh described it, he did not even command the loyalty of all the Liberal Unionists; he could not have led the Conservatives and he was sensible enough to know it. Hatzfeldt may have attempted to explain away his motivation as being driven by personal ambition but this was certainly not among his prime motivations.⁴⁸⁸

Instead Chamberlain had been filled with a growing fear over Britain's seeming powerlessness to defend her interests, within which he included informal positions of power and trade dominance. In West Africa he was successful at 'enlarging' Britain's formal empire, but his motivation was defensive and the areas which eventually came under the flag, were to his mind already British. His concerns were serious but something has to be given for his turn of phrase. In December 1897 he wrote to Selbourne, which was a kin to writing almost directly to Salisbury himself, about the West African situation:

"I thought he[Salisbury] was entirely with us and now he is prepared to give away everything and get nothing.

I am more than sorry to differ from him, but I cannot stand it. I would rather give up office than allow French methods to triumph in this way.

We shall pay for it sooner or later and I cannot be a party to such a surrender."⁴⁸⁹

The threat to resign was hardly implicit. Salisbury would have to allow Chamberlain more direction of the Niger Negotiations and events on the ground or allow him to resign and attempt to ride out the waves this would cause. What is more intriguing about this letter is how different

⁴⁸⁸ Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, 7 and 26/04/1898, *GP*, XIV pt. 1, No.3789 & 3793 respectively.

⁴⁸⁹ Chamberlain to Selborne, 1/12/1897, Selborne MSS 8/182

Chamberlain's approach was when in regard to matters pertaining more exclusively to his own office. In the next paragraph he accepted that Hicks-Beach would not apply countervailing duties on sugar in order to support the Caribbean colonies in their trade dispute with the US: "I cannot force a policy which is open to so many political and party objections." Even as he was threatening to resign over West Africa he was reasonable and accepting in another sphere, paying more than differential respect to "political and party objections". This was not a man who was deluded as to what he could achieve as part of a Conservative dominated coalition. Salisbury was no more prepared to lose his Colonial Secretary, with all that entailed, over West Africa than he was prepared to fight a war over it.

As the China crisis progressed Chamberlain became no happier. By February the crisis had developed into a serious problem. The Colonial Secretary warned Balfour that he believed "grave trouble" was "impending on the Gov. if we do not adopt a more decided attitude in regards to China." This was the letter in which Chamberlain had reiterated his ideas to try to approach the US and Germany in order to preserve the 'Open Door'. It is also the evidence presented by Otte as suggesting that Chamberlain was threatening to resign.⁴⁹⁰ While the letter does criticise Salisbury it also clearly acknowledged the Foreign Secretary's acumen; "If only Lord Salisbury sees the peril and is prepared to meet it I would rather leave to him the methods than rush in with what may be impossible suggestions." Otte believed this rhetoric could only suggest Chamberlain was threatening his own resignation unless the Cabinet's indecision was overcome, however the critical phrase, "I would not give a year's life to the Government", did not follow up on the demand for action but upon Chamberlain's feared results of inaction: "If matters remain as they are our prestige will be gone and our trade will follow. I would not give a year's life to the Government under such conditions." It is only once Britain's prestige and trade were damaged that Chamberlain expected the Government to be disrupted, again he was taking the longer view. Whether Chamberlain intended to threaten

⁴⁹⁰ Chamberlain to Balfour, 3/02/1898, JC5-5-70; Otte, *China*, pp.142-3, Otte admits to quote "under such circumstances" and portrays the letter as a much more straight forward threat to resign than appears to be entirely reasonable.

his resignation was not as straight forward as Otte suggests, given his work on the importance of foreign policy in by-elections, it seems somewhat disingenuous to suggest that only a parliamentary disruption created by the Colonial Secretary himself, could be the threat Chamberlain had referred to.⁴⁹¹ If, in 1898, the Unionists were losing by-elections, and their foreign policy was playing a large part, electorate and public indignation could only have been worse once the China trade collapsed. This letter underlined how serious Chamberlain believed the situation was and how much more serious he believed it would become unless Salisbury could be pushed to take action. It does not suggest that the Colonial Secretary intended to precipitate action himself.

Chamberlain had requested that the Committee of Defence meet to discuss how to deal with the threat of war with France, Russia or both on 12th March just as the discussions over Weihaiwei really started to get heated.⁴⁹² This was indicative of how seriously he was concerned. After a meeting of the full Cabinet, just two days later, Bertie and Curzon were working together on their own memoranda supporting the desirability of taking Weihaiwei. Chamberlain's actions and concern were shared widely enough to cause a burst of action throughout the government. His burning motivation, which had pushed him to attempt to find a general settlement with France, convinced the Cabinet to approach the US, made a small approach to Japan and encouraged Salisbury to do so more meaningfully and finally to engage in the German alliance talks, was to solve a problem he felt was real and not simply to enhance his own political standing; though he would hardly have found that a disappointing side effect. In all of these actions he was supported by doubt filled and uncertain Cabinet ministers, who preferred to let the Colonial Secretary push his own agenda than meet Salisbury's apparently negative and pessimistic foreign policy head on. The disaffected members of the Cabinet were prepared to allow Chamberlain his head, in order to both see if a better solution might

⁴⁹¹ Otte, "'Avenge England's Dishonour': By-election, Parliament and the Politics of Foreign Policy in 1898" *EHR*, Vol 121, No.491, (Apr., 2006) pp.385-428

⁴⁹² Memo., Chamberlain, 'Niger Negotiations, 17/03/1898, Cab 37/46/27; Otte, *China*, p.136

materialise and in the very least allow warning shots to be fired across Salisbury's bow while still flying friendly colours themselves.

Chamberlain's interventions and "rush[ing] in with what may be impossible suggestions" all had another factor in common. In 1895 he was in favour of forcible action against the Sultan: "public opinion is moving steadily in favour of strong measures with Turkey". In West Africa public opinion was also agitated and compared the growing hostilities there to eighteenth century India.⁴⁹³ A while later Chamberlain would be commenting that "fifty years hence our descendants will talk of our pusillanimous surrender", with regards to the Niger question.⁴⁹⁴ He was aware of how strong public opinion was and how dangerous it could be. His concern over the public's response to events in China was just as strong and clearly demonstrated. The Colonial Secretary thought that "public opinion is a very bad guide" but still it could not be simply ignored.⁴⁹⁵ He was also not as canny at reading the mood of the nation as he thought he was but, like Palmerstone and Disraeli before him, he was able to communicate well with the general public.⁴⁹⁶ Salisbury's negativity and disdain at having to respond to the masses helped fuel Chamberlain's concerns. If he was worried about the future of the Government and was not prepared to be the force that disturbed it, then he was most probably concerned that Salisbury, whose participation in politics was not subject to the whim of the electorate, would not react with sufficient force to democratic pressures.

Salisbury did not choose to leave the situation as it was. He was shrewd enough to realise that there was more support for Chamberlain's position both in Cabinet and in the Country. He chose to meet these multiple threats with the famous 'Dying Nations' speech, delivered 4th May 1898 at the Primrose League.⁴⁹⁷ Historians have noted that Salisbury used this speech to reassert his control over foreign policy. Many of these historians have also noted that Chamberlain's response, 'The Long Spoon' speech

⁴⁹³ 4 & 30/03/97, 19/04/97 *The Times*,

⁴⁹⁴ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 2/06/1898, JC11/30/123

⁴⁹⁵ Chamberlain to Salisbury, 29 Dec 1897, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Chamberlain/1896-97/116

⁴⁹⁶ Porter, pp.1 -48

⁴⁹⁷ "The Primrose League." *The Times*, 5/05/1898, p.7

given on the 13th May at Birmingham, was misjudged.⁴⁹⁸ It was hardly surprising though that Chamberlain could not resist speaking out in response. The foreign policy content of Salisbury's speech has been written about extensively and while it remains necessary to revisit some of it, the rest of the speech is often ignored completely. The Prime Minister was speaking at "The Primrose League" an organisation founded in part by his onetime leadership rival Randolph Churchill. Its purpose was to obtain the support of the people for conservative policies and thus was to be a foundational plank in Churchill's dreams of a Tory democracy. It was founded in 1884, which was a year that is rather important in Chamberlain's life. It was the time of the Third Reform Act which extended the franchise to almost all adult males; it was also around the time when Chamberlain made his "Jack Cade" speeches: accusing Salisbury of being merely a "spokesman of a class – a class to which he himself belongs, who toil not neither do they spin." A time when Salisbury threatened that if "he[Chamberlain] would head" a reform march on London the result would be "that his head would get broken."⁴⁹⁹ Early in 1885 Chamberlain launched his Radical Program and asked "What ransom will property pay for the security which it enjoys?"⁵⁰⁰ This was the context in which the Primrose League was born.

Salisbury opened his speech by congratulating the League on a long list of achievements. These included having helped to prove that the "fatalist doctrine that Radical proposals once made must eventually succeed has been contradicted by the test of actual experience." Chamberlain's had been a Radical Programme. "Fifteen years ago it was believed that any resistance on the part of the House of Lords was quite illusory, [...] [t]he battle has been fought the attempt has been tested. [...] The effects of that result have not terminated; its influence has not terminated [...] the resistance of the House of Lords can be calculated upon as a secure political force, and that no political force exists in the country which can overwhelm

⁴⁹⁸ "Mr. Chamberlain In Birmingham." *The Times*, 14/05/1898, p.12.

⁴⁹⁹ "Lord Salisbury At Dumfries." *The Times*, 22/10/1884, p.6.

⁵⁰⁰ "Mr. Chamberlain And Lord Rosebery At Birmingham." *The Times*, 31/03/1883, p.10; "Mr. Chamberlain At Birmingham." *The Times*, 6/01/1885, p.7.

it." Chamberlain had contributed to a charge against the Lords as it appeared to oppose the 1884 Reform Act. Salisbury went on to congratulate the League for its efforts to prevent the disestablishment of the Church, a cause very dear to Chamberlain's non-conformist heart. The opening also congratulated the League on its work to maintain the Empire: "We have tried issues with those who would break the Empire in pieces, and not only have they failed, but they have failed so completely that they have shattered the political party which in a moment of madness allied itself to them." Chamberlain could at least be glad to hear this part, though his own actions in defence of the Union did more to shatter the Liberal Party in 1885/6 than the work of the fledgling League. "I think the Primrose League has every right to congratulate itself. So large a body [...] must have had, and has had, an enormous influence in shaping opinion to the salutary ends which I have named." The whole introduction of the speech was calculated to be insulting to Chamberlain and his previous, currently on ice, radicalism. While this sort of rhetoric had to be endured, as part of the price of working with the Conservatives, when it was also coupled with a direct attack on the criticisms laid at the feet of Salisbury's foreign policy it acted as a red rag to a bull; as it was almost certainly designed to do.

When Salisbury moved on to foreign policy he first congratulated the league on having "done so much to popularize and to strengthen" the spirit upon which it was founded. The spirit which also animated the likes of Rhodes, Portal, Kitchener, Lockhart, Cromer and MacDonald. It motivated these men to build the Empire and by stretching forth "the sword of England" had put a stop to "terrible evils". The glories for these acts, which were "in the highest sense a supreme blessing to the dearest interests of mankind", were to be attributed not only to the individuals on the ground but also to "the work of the league". Given the specific reference to Ashanti and Benin, in West Africa, this was claiming victory for matters which were very much within Chamberlain's remit as Colonial Secretary and for which he was responsible. It would be difficult to imagine a more provocative start, and the Foreign Secretary had not yet even got to China.

Salisbury asked his listeners to judge the Far Eastern crisis by its results. He then went on to discuss public opinion on the matter, and did so in

terms which revealed how far removed from even parliamentary practice he wished diplomacy to be. He refused to be drawn into responding to "anonymous critics", a reference to the many articles appearing in the national journals, but instead "looked with some anxiety to see what would be the kind of complaint made by responsible" commentators, namely in Parliament. Parliamentary debate was reduced to simply being an attempt to "score off the persons sitting on the other bench to the utmost extent [...] and they naturally expect, I suppose, that what they do with Ministers in the House of Commons we should do with Ministers of another kind when we meet them in diplomatic debate." The whole critique of government vacillation, with all its concerns over the suitability of Weihaiwei, the effect of Russia being able to penetrate further into China, the removal of engineers and what this may presage, all of these concerns were ignored in the speech. The only cogent criticism worthy of response from the great aristocrat was about whether he had "not given a piece of his mind to foreign Governments when they said certain things to which entire confidence was not to be given or which were falsified by the event." Considerable space was given over to a defence of discrete polite diplomacy, based more around the etiquette of private discourse, than the 'argy-bargy' of parliamentary debate. While this was clearly advantageous for the smooth running of diplomacy it did nothing to answer the real concerns members of the public had. In fact it did not even answer the criticisms then being offered at the annual meeting of the City of London Liberal Association. The two speeches were printed adjacent to each other on the same page of *The Times*.⁵⁰¹ Public opinion was still not content with how the Government had proceeded in China. Salisbury's speech also demonstrated that he was not particularly worried about satisfying these concerns either. This speech, as well as being provocative to Chamberlain, was a piece of nineteenth century Conservative spin; it obscured the real concerns offered by some writers by deliberately and explicitly ignoring them as irresponsible observers, while also offering a defence against one of the more baseless concerns under the pretence that this was the only "responsible" opinion Salisbury could find to answer. This demonstrated

⁵⁰¹ "Mr. Bryce On The Government's Chinese Policy." *The Times*, 5/05/1898, p.7.

that Salisbury had little or no time for public/press opinion and wished to remove diplomacy and foreign affairs as far away from public scrutiny as he could.

Salisbury's final word on China was to ask how it was that Britain could have lost her prestige, in the eyes of the Chinese, and still gain the concessions that she had: "Three years ago, one year ago, such a result would have been held to be impossible, and that we should have been able to obtain this appears to me to be a sufficient, conclusive, final answer to those who tell us that [...] we have lost influence or prestige with the Chinese." Remarkable given that Salisbury had considered a loss of soft power in China to have been one of his disastrous inheritances from Kimberly. In reality it is difficult to pinpoint why the Chinese gave way on these issues, the opening of more ports, the opening of the internal waterways and securing a British successor to the Head of Chinese customs, but if it had merely been a case of British prestige and these objects were unobtainable even just one year ago, then this implied a substantial increase in prestige over that time. What seems more likely is that the Chinese were desperate to avoid the 'scramble for China' and acquiesced in fear that Britain would follow with territorial demands if she did not capitulate. Sadly for China, Britain followed on with territorial demands anyway. Without this fear, generated by the violent actions of Germany and Russia, the Chinese would still have refused to accept these concessions. They were accepted as a bribe to keep Britain in check and the lease of Weihaiwei was reluctantly accepted, in the face of the Royal Navy Far Eastern squadron, because it was hoped to set the Europeans against each other. These actions were taken not in awe of Britain, or from a desire to meet her needs, but in response to the very real threat posed by Russia. Also Salisbury had also forgotten the 'most favoured nation' clauses China had with almost all Europeans by this time. Britain had demanded that more ports and that the rivers were to be opened to trade, but all the other European states would be able to attempt to use these advantages also. However, Russia and Germany had obtained exclusive rights, which were technically, therefore, breaches of Britain's own most favoured nation's clause. Britain actually lacked the means to maintain her treaty

rights. Salisbury rounded off this section with an interesting point. He warned his listeners not to imagine the situation in China to be exceptional, similar problems would probably recur therefore he continued on to make a point which Chamberlain could not have left unanswered. Salisbury negatively connected a patriotic exhortation that "in spite of the jargon about isolation" Britain was "amply competent" to "maintain against all comers that which we possess", but he added the clause that this would "not secure the peace of the world." Salisbury had implied, almost explicitly said, that to maintain the peace Britain could not expect to maintain what she possessed.

Having just made this startling admission, Salisbury went on to discuss the "Living and Dying Nations". The living nations he described as "growing in power", "wealth", "dominion" and "organisation". He feared that nothing could diminish these nations' forces and that future rival claims may only be settled "by a bloody arbitrament". Given his immediately prior warning, that Britain could not expect to hold her own and live in peace, it becomes difficult to see where Salisbury ultimately thought Britain belonged, among the living or the dying nations. Certainly she had been growing in all the attributes he had mentioned but, as many thought, Britain could not afford to fight over trifling issues either. Perhaps Salisbury believed that Britain's power was possibly near its zenith. His description of the dying nations was simply a binary of the living: "Decade after decade they are weaker, poorer, and less provided with leading men or institutions in which they can trust, apparently drawing nearer and nearer to their fate and yet clinging with strange tenacity to the life which they have got." This process would continue on and eventually the living nations would devour the dying and "the seeds and causes of conflict amongst civilized nations will speedily appear." Britain would not allow herself to "be at a disadvantage in any re-arrangement" but she should "not be jealous if desolation and sterility are removed by the aggrandisement of a rival in regions to which our arms cannot extend." To someone inclined to trust Salisbury's judgement this is solid rhetoric. Britain was capable of 'holding her own' and she would do so where she had an interest and could project power. However, to those who were disinclined to trust Salisbury this all sounded like an argument to

appease Britain's rivals, to withdraw from parts of the world where "our arms cannot extend." The loss of informal dominion, such as feared in China, was side stepped by this argument about where British arms could reach. After all even the Liberal Imperialist Rosebery had admitted that:

because our commerce is so universal and so penetrating that scarcely any question can arise in any part of the world without involving British interests. This consideration instead of widening rather circumscribes the field of our actions. For did we not strictly limit the principle of intervention we should always be simultaneously engaged in some forty wars.⁵⁰²

Sanderson described the situation less flatteringly the Empire was a "huge giant sprawling over the globe, with gouty fingers and toes stretched in every direction, which cannot be approached without eliciting a scream." And earlier Chamberlain had admitted she was like "the weary Titan, staggering under the too vast orb of his fate".⁵⁰³ Informal British interests were already global and due to the lack of any real competition had become used to being able to settle questions mostly in their favour regardless of the reach of British arms. The picture Salisbury painted necessitated the giving up of informal control and even suggested that the British should not feel jealous doing so. Salisbury's speech, while full of patriotic rhetoric, still left plenty of room for those concerned about Britain's relative decline, and the emergence of real trade competition from the US and Germany, to feel insecure as the man at the helm of British policy may consider selling their interests as a cheap price for peace.

Chamberlain's was a deep concern for the future of British prosperity. Any area that fell behind the tariff barriers of other Great Powers were markets lost to the British. The Colonial Secretary had always been quick to link the Empire with prosperity at home: "Is there any man in his senses who believes that the crowded population of these islands could exist for a single

⁵⁰² Rosebery to Kimberly, 28/04/1895, quoted in Kennedy, *Antagonism*, p.229

⁵⁰³ Memo., Sanderson, 21/02/1907, *BD*, III, Appendix B pp.421-31 quote on p.430; Often attributed to Chamberlain at the Colonial Conference 1902, Amery, *Life*, IV, p.421; but Chamberlain first used it on 14/05/1888 while speaking to the London Chamber of Commerce, "Mr. Chamberlain On British Interests In Africa." *The Times*, 15/05/1888, p.10, quote taken from *The Times*; Marsh attributes the origins of the phrase to Matthew Arnold; Marsh, p.306; Arnold, M. "Heine's Grave", *New Poems*, (1867) lines 87-96 accessed at <http://www.bartleby.com/254/126.html> on 14/7/2015

day if we were to cut adrift from the great dependencies which now look to us for protection and assistance?"⁵⁰⁴ It was this link that resulted in his sensitivity toward foreign encroachments. Lord Salisbury, and the class Chamberlain had not forgotten he represented, had never had to worry about their existence. No foreign policy decision was likely to leave many, if any, member of the British aristocracy hungry and in search of shelter. Those whose livelihoods depended upon manufactories finding sufficient demand were far more likely to feel drastic ill effects if large existing markets were closed to their employers. Chamberlain responded in his 'Long Spoon' speech at Birmingham 13th May 1898. He opened by wishing the ailing Gladstone and his family well, and then moved on to celebrate the achievements of the Liberal Unionists and to emphasize the necessity of remaining a separate political entity, safeguarding his own independent political power base. Turning to foreign policy Chamberlain immediately made reference to Salisbury's "powerful and [...] eloquent speech". Noting Salisbury's desire that foreign policy should be tested by results Chamberlain moved on to his principal concern:

I am inclined to think that it is [...] rather on foreign than on domestic policy that the attention [...] fixed [...]. I am glad that the people of the country are turning their attention to this question of foreign policy, which in the past they have sometimes thought had nothing to do with them. It would be a great mistake to suppose so, because you must all recognise that there is, and there has been for some time past, a combined assault by the nations of the world upon the commercial supremacy of this country, and if that assault were successful our existence would be menaced in a way in which it never has been threatened since the time [...] when the great Napoleon attempted to lay an interdict upon British trade⁵⁰⁵

It is apparent from this section that Chamberlain's concerns were still rooted in the potential economic fallout of any serious foreign policy disaster, or even the cumulative effect of many small gracious concessions. For this reason the Colonial Secretary believed ordinary people should take great interest in foreign policy; an explicit encouragement in counterpoise to Salisbury's subtle suggestions that responding to public concerns was

⁵⁰⁴ "Mr. Chamberlain On British Interests In Africa.", *The Times*, 15/05/1888, p.10.

⁵⁰⁵ "Mr. Chamberlain In Birmingham." *The Times* 14/05/1898, p.12

beneath him and unnecessary if only people would await upon the results of such crises. Chamberlain went on to suggest that the issues at stake were too important to be subject to partisan politics, to describe Salisbury and the Government as “discredited and defeated” or as “weak and vacillating” was in error and if that error was “believed in foreign countries, if they were acted upon by foreign Governments, they would make a great mistake.” Chamberlain went on to point out that:

courteous diplomacy, and moderate language, and even graceful concession are not incompatible with a firm maintenance of the honour and the essential interest of the country. (Cheers) And if they were to presume upon this false interpretation [...] the difficulty of preserving peace would be very much increased.

Having said that he moved straight on to support his ‘New Diplomacy’ in which he believed that:

[o]urs is a democratic Government [...] there is no longer any room for the mysteries and reticencies of the diplomacy of 50 years ago. [...] [T]he plain issue and the main principles and the particulars of the problems with which we have to deal – those might be stated in language to be understood[sic] of the people.

Here he explicitly staked out his claim against the implications in Salisbury’s speech, where the Foreign Secretary asked to be left alone to run his office and only be judged by the results, Chamberlain explicitly claimed that there was “no longer any room for” such behaviour. He went on to tell his listeners in plain language exactly what the problem, to his mind, was. Isolation had been good, but now that the European Powers were aligned in blocs it was a weakness as Britain was “liable to be confronted at any moment with a combination of Great Powers so powerful that not even the most extreme, the most hot-headed politician would be able to contemplate it without a certain sense of uneasiness.” Therefore Britain must as “the first duty [...] under these circumstances [...] draw all parts of the Empire closer together”, the next duty was to continue to improve relations with the US because “terrible as war may be, even war itself would be cheaply purchased if in a great and noble cause the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack should wave together over an Anglo-Saxon alliance.” Chamberlain then moved from the general geo-political situation, to the specifics in East

Asia. China had proved too weak and so Russia had made the foreseen descent to Port Arthur. While doing so she made promises and gave representations which were speedily broken, of this he felt he "had better perhaps say nothing except I have always thought that is was a very wise proverb, "Who sups with the Devil must have a long spoon." This was far from being within the bounds of diplomatically acceptable language. What followed was worse, Britain had tried to make a deal and had failed. Despite offering an understanding based around Russia's "Commercial objects", "the development of her trade", and "the expansion of her legitimate authority." Having failed Britain took Weihaiwei, which was the only alternative to an understanding with Russia: "Some of our critics say, 'Oh you might have come to an understanding with Russia.' It is easy to say that, but an understanding takes two parties to the bargain, and Russia wanted what we did not want, and we had nothing to offer her to induce her to desist from her plan." Anyone criticising the Government, for taking Weihaiwei and their failure to secure a deal with Russia, was advocating "the policy of war". This Chamberlain described as impossible, while he believed there were worse things to befall a nation than war, he would not give voice to one "unless I can see at the commencement [...] a fair probability that at the end [...] the objects of the war will have been obtained. (Cheers.) Now, what does history show us? It shows us that unless we are allied to some great military power, as we were in the Crimean war, [...] we cannot seriously injure Russia". This made the situation very serious indeed, because unless Russia could be stopped she would threaten British interests in China, which were already "so enormous, and the potentialities of the trade are so gigantic that I feel that no more vital question has even been presented". Again Chamberlain was looking to the future, not just at how important the China market was in 1898, but also how important developing that trade would be in the future. Given the strong economic links Chamberlain believed existed between the Empire and prosperity at home, he was certainly being consistent. Also in reference back to Salisbury's speech, any loss of this enormous trade, or even the capturing of new emerging Chinese markets behind rival tariff barriers, would constitute a loss of informal dominion; the areas the tentacles of British trade could reach into would have been curtailed.

Chamberlain finished on a stern warning and with a veiled reference to the desirability of an Anglo-German alliance:

“If the policy of isolation [...] is to be maintained [...], then the fate of the Chinese Empire may be, probably will be, hereafter decided without reference to our wishes and in defiance of our interests. [...] we must not reject the idea of an alliance with those Powers whose interests most nearly approximate to our own.”

The Germans were considered to have “nearly approximate” interests to Britain’s because of her position as the ‘late starter’ in the imperial race. Germany lacked the naval capacity to project power at any great distance, and while she was embarked on acquiring the balance of naval power in the North Sea, she still lacked the world wide network of coaling stations and bases required to fight at a distance and to protect her trade during any war. Therefore it appeared to Chamberlain that she would prefer areas to remain open to trade than for them to be cut off thus allowing her to benefit from the trade, without needing the power to enforce her own formal control. He also assumed that as Germany was becoming a serious competitor in terms of trade, she would want to preserve her own access to as many markets as possible. He assumed his beliefs about the links between Empire and trade with British prosperity were also understood by the Germans. If the British population and polity was dependent on trade with the Empire, formal and informal, then so too Germany must be dependent on their own trade. The point he missed was how powerful a fear Germany held of that long European frontier with Russia. However important her international trade became it was always likely to be easier to give up a part of it than fight a war across that border. The Kaiser also noted that “the further the Russians engaged in Asia, the quieter they are sitting in Europe.”⁵⁰⁶ While it was certainly in Germany’s interests to encourage the diversion of her European rivals into concentrating on their colonial rather than European interests, there was again a short sightedness in German thinking. Diverting other European powers onto colonial ventures may seem to secure the European peace but it also encouraged

⁵⁰⁶ Wilhelm’s marginalia note on Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, 26/04/1898, *GP*, XIV, pt.1. No.3793, p.226

the planting of the very "seeds and causes of conflict amongst civilized nations" that Salisbury had warned about.⁵⁰⁷ Britain and Russia and Britain and France, came close to open breaches in 1898; all due to colonial quarrels. While Germany had few colonies there was little danger of a colonial issue producing a European war involving her. However, she was desperate to acquire more of these liabilities, and her attempts to do so were alarming to the other European Powers. She could not expect to have encouraged Russia and France in the colonial arena for ever without eventually arriving at a collision with one or the other.

In all Chamberlain had laid out a straight forward assessment of Britain's position in 1898. There was nothing in it that was glaringly erroneous. Britain was isolated and she was incapable of defending all her interests, even Salisbury had admitted so much. The main differences between the two speeches can be summed up thus: Chamberlain was prepared to admit Britain's over extension and that the quickest remedy to that was an alliance; Salisbury was not prepared to admit that weakness but believed that the best remedy was Imperial retreat through the granting of graceful concessions and the swallowing of jealousies as areas fell into the influence of other Powers. Both were reactive but one offered the appearance of a way out, the other the slow acceptance of relative decline. Chamberlain had every reason to expect that the public would respond well to his candour. There was nothing in his speech which had not already been commented on in the press over the previous couple of months. However, Chamberlain was not seer like in reading public opinion. What was acceptable criticism from observers outside of government was always likely to be treated differently when coming from the mouth of a senior Cabinet Minister.

Public responses were widely different some welcomed Chamberlain's plain speaking while others eschewed his rudeness.⁵⁰⁸ Parliamentary opinion was

⁵⁰⁷ Langer, p.516; "The Primrose League." *The Times*, 5/05/1898, p.7

⁵⁰⁸ "Mr Chamberlain As Foreign Minister.", *FR*, Aug 1898, Vol 64, pp.317-25 for a positive response and Stead. W.T., "Russian and Mr. Chamberlain's Long Spoon", *CR*, Jun 1898, Vol 73, pp.761-777 for a decidedly negative one, though coupled with wider criticism for the Government's response to the China Crisis.

more damning but also revealed how blinkered many opinions were to the nature of British Power. Asquith asked in Parliament "what have we done or suffered that we are now to go touting for allies in the highways and byways of Europe?"⁵⁰⁹ Asquith, either deliberately or worse ignorantly, ignored that there are other agencies in the world. It was not what the British had or had not done; it was the growth of Germany, it was the forming of the Franco-Russian Alliance which appeared to threaten Britain's interests, in other words it was the actions of others that had produced the need. Asquith's quip suggested that the actions of other Powers were irrelevant thus demonstrating a blindness to both relative decline and the dangers of a nonchalant attitude to the formation of foreign power blocs. Many of these responses were as much to the nature of Chamberlain's action as to his assessment of Britain's geopolitical position. "A more abject confession of weakness never was made by a British statesman than this confession made by the Colonial Secretary", who was "a strange and wonderful statesman, with his new diplomacy, his new departures, and his unauthorised programmes."⁵¹⁰ Harcourt added his own attack "Of all the humiliations which [...] we have been subjected to, I think this seeking in *forma pauperis* for allies on the ground of our feebleness is the greatest".⁵¹¹ Even the Kaiser "doubted whether it was judicious to proclaim so openly the necessity of an alliance".⁵¹² But while the Parliamentarians made much of how the 'Long Spoon' speech had little of substance on how to remedy these problems, and while they embarrassed the Unionists by demanding whether this was settled policy, they ignored the wider point. Chamberlain was not advertising his wears to the global audience, though he certainly conducted himself under their watchful eyes, but to the people of Britain. It was British attitudes towards isolation that he hoped to address and not the great Powers. This did not change the fact that he compared Russia to the devil or that he had admitted Britain, alone, was powerless to prevent

⁵⁰⁹ Hansard, 10/06/1898, *PD*, HC (4), LVIII, cc.1347,

⁵¹⁰ Hansard, 10 Jun 1898, *Ibid.*, cc.1375, Labouchere was a Liberal MP for Northampton.

⁵¹¹ Hansard, 10 Jun 1898, *Ibid.*, cc.1418

⁵¹² Lascelles to Salisbury, 26/05/1898, *BD*, I, No.53, p.34

Russian designs in China. What he hoped for was to start preparing opinion for an alliance, and to rally calls for one.

The reaction to the speech certainly curtailed Chamberlain's freedom of action. Liberal opinion in Parliament must have only underlined Bülow's fears concerning ratification of any treaty.⁵¹³ Lascelles reported the German Emperor as viewing "with the greatest pleasure a thoroughly good understanding with England" even though "Germany did not intend to go to war with Russia for the purpose of driving her out of China."⁵¹⁴

Chamberlain's proposals had ultimately been aimed at containing the spread of Russian influence not to drive her out of China completely. He also hoped that the threat of a more serious war would constrain the Russian Bear rather than actually having to fight her. Otte suggests that Salisbury had this dispatch printed up for the Cabinet in an attempt to embarrass Chamberlain.⁵¹⁵ Otte has a tendency, despite his over arching theme of a wide breakdown of the foreign policy consensus, if one had existed in the first place, to focus too exclusively on Salisbury and Chamberlain. The sharing of this despatch would also chasten those who had allowed the Colonial Secretary his head. It was not simply to embarrass one strong willed Cabinet Minister, but to act as a warning to those who dealt with and supported him, which included Balfour. It would have been remarkable that a man of Salisbury's perceptive nature had not seen through Balfour's smoke and mirrors. Whether the dispatch embarrassed Chamberlain is difficult to say, the man was so full of energy and a desire to keep moving forwards that it is doubtful it acted as a direct check to him at all. His political position was relatively secure he could hurt Salisbury and the Government but just as Balfour was to discover, he would be much more dangerous once freed from office. He needed to be kept close. The German despatch also contained a hint that a "good understanding" was desirable. If he was embarrassed it certainly did not stop Chamberlain from trying to act on it in any way he could. While the 'Dying Nations/Long Spoon' spat had constrained his actions, he continued

⁵¹³ Hansard, 10 June 1898, *PD*, HC (4), LVIII, cc:1337,1347,1377-8,1420

⁵¹⁴ Lascelles to Salisbury, 26/05/1898, *BD*, I, No.53, p.35

⁵¹⁵ Otte, *China*, p.159

unabated to chaff against his cage in order to find space to continue to push his ideas. Therefore Chamberlain arranged to meet Lascelles when he was next home, and induced Goschen, Hamilton and Chaplin to join him. Lascelles was asked to continue to probe the Kaiser in order to discover how far the Emperor was committed to forming an eventual alliance.⁵¹⁶ That this group lacked both Devonshire and Balfour, whom had both been party to the Chamberlain/Hatzfeldt talks, demonstrated how, temporarily at least, Chamberlain had lost the essential support required for furthering any of his plans. It is in this embarrassment of other Cabinet colleagues that deprived Chamberlain of much of the room to manoeuvre. However, it also demonstrated that he was unwilling to sit still or to be contained. Having let Chamberlain have his head the other dissenting and concerned members of Cabinet found it hard to restrain him again.

⁵¹⁶ Marsh, p.439

5: The Triumvirate Dance: Salisbury, Chamberlain, Balfour and Anglo-German negotiations.

The dust eventually settled on Chamberlain's and Salisbury's public spat. The Colonial Secretary had lost the initiative over the German alliance and as the most senior of his Cabinet colleagues had withdrawn their support, there was little he could do about it. During this time the Niger negotiations were entering their final stage and while Chamberlain had managed to prevent Salisbury from offering the French another 'graceful concession', relations between the two men remained strained. The situation in China had begun to normalise and Salisbury settled into a long negotiation with Russia over a proposed extension of the Teintsin-Shanhaikuan rail line right up to Newchwang at Russia's doorstep in Manchuria. Salisbury and later, while he was once again away in France, Balfour would both try to use British interest in this somewhat provocative line, as a bartering tool to push the Russians into accepting a delineation of spheres of concessionary interest. Britain would respect and support Russia's right to seek concessions in Manchuria in return for a like commitment with regards to the Yangtze on the British side. The resultant Scott-Muravev agreement, finalised on 20th April 1899, was somewhat broader, extending the Russian sphere to anywhere north of the Great Wall but vitally omitted the British stipulation that trade would be permitted unhindered in each sphere.⁵¹⁷ Chamberlain's influence can be detected in the earliest phase of the negotiations while Balfour still had the Foreign Office. In mid August 1898 Balfour and the Cabinet considered violent means and strong language to intimidate the Russians into agreeing with their terms; this was certainly indicative of Chamberlain's opinions.⁵¹⁸ Confidence was running high after the demonstration of British resolve at Fashoda had appeared to hold the

517 Salisbury to Bax-Ironside, *Chargé d'affaires* at Peking in MacDonald's absence, 30/04/1899, *BD*, I, No 61., pp.40-1 has a rough outline of the agreement; Sir Charles Steward Scott, Ambassador to Russia (1898-1904).

518 Memo. Balfour, 13/08/1898, CAB37/47/62

day. The agreement also recognised Britain's interests in the Yangtze which compliment the informal understanding already reached with the Germans.⁵¹⁹ Witte had also offered an agreement to bind both parties "on any occasion of a question arising in any part of the world ... involving a possible conflict between their respective interests." This agreement bore many similarities to Salisbury's own ideas made prior to the leasing of Port Arthur. Now Salisbury commented on how such a deal "would be a good deal laughed at" and Balfour agreed that it was "derisory".⁵²⁰ The threat of military force and Salisbury's refusal to compromise at Fashoda, had not just cowed the French and demonstrated that Britain was prepared to defend her interests, but it had also strengthened Salisbury's resolve. Nothing had actually changed in the geo-strategic position between Russia and Britain but Salisbury was no longer prepared to agree to such compromises. This position rather lends weight to Chamberlain's much earlier suggestion that Britain "ought to defy someone."⁵²¹

In the immediate aftermath of the 'Dying Nations'/'Long Spoon' fiasco Chamberlain's attention had focused on the settlement of the Niger question. However, he soon found himself negotiating with the Portuguese over a loan secured on some of her Africa possessions, including Delagoa Bay which had come to be described as the key to peaceably solving Britain's problems with the Transvaal. The origins of the negotiations rested with a group of British financiers in 1897, this led to the Portuguese government opening negotiations in the hope of securing a loan based on the customs of Lourenco Marques and the railway as security. Chamberlain was the negotiator and was prepared to offer a guarantee of Portugal's African possessions. However, the Portuguese Government were afraid that France or Germany would object and take action. Sensitive to the perception of weakness that any agreement which appeared to diminish their sovereignty entailed, they allowed the proposals to drop. Chamberlain summed up two options as the negotiations broke off in June 1897: "The

519 For a full account see Otte, *China*, pp.162-76; Neilson, pp.195-204; *BD*, I Nos.55-61, pp.36-41; Langer, pp.679-683

520 Scott to Salisbury, 2/11/1898, *BD*, I, No.59 pp38-40

521 Chamberlain to Salisbury, 4/01/1896, JC5/67/39

alternatives were a guarantee of territory in exchange for the control of the railway and port or assistance to a loan in return for a full and complete assurance of the maintenance of the status quo with no concessions of any kind.”⁵²² It was not until the German seizure of Kiaochow that Portugal would again approach the British. Fearing they may be made the object of German aggression, on the grounds of diminishing interest on Portugal’s German bonds, Soveral again called upon Bertie. The Assistant Under-secretary was left with the impression that Soveral was agitated by a fear that Wilhelm “appeared to prefer some slight advantage to Germany, rather than the preservation of a monarchy in Portugal”. The Portuguese minister hoped this fear would move the *Cortés* in Lisbon to agree to a British loan in order to help preserve the monarchy. Bertie was not prepared to calm Soveral’s fears. The Kaiser, after the Kruger Telegram fiasco, was unlikely to try anything at Delagoa Bay but Germany “might try to obtain Tiger Bay” in Angola. Britain would have no reason to object as the Portuguese Government had not accepted the “very liberal offers” made previously.⁵²³ Before Soveral returned to Lisbon to discuss the situation with his Government, Bertie wrote a memorandum on the subject.

Bertie discussed five different ways to provide support to Portugal, but the salient point was fear of foreign intervention. Any “ordinary commercial loan” could not be floated without Portugal negotiating for debt consolidation. Germany could then use this to place Portugal’s African possessions under her own control.⁵²⁴ While Bertie had not imagined that Germany would “burst in upon the Anglo-Portuguese discussions” as Kennedy put it, intervention had been anticipated and so it should have come as no surprise when Hatzfeldt, on 14th June 1898, visited Salisbury to do just that.⁵²⁵ Chamberlain and Soveral had been making smooth progress over the terms of a loan. This was based upon the British reaffirming the ancient Treaties of Alliance with Portugal, and the maintenance of the status quo in Africa, in return for a loan secured against the duties of Mozambique.

522 Luis Pinto de Soveral, 1st Marquis of Soveral, Portuguese Ambassador to Britain (1897-1910).

523 Memo., Bertie, 10/01/1898, FO63/1359

524 Memo., Bertie, 1/05/1898, *BD*, I, No.65, pp.44-8

525 Kennedy, *Antagonism*, pp.235-6

Salisbury told Hatzfeldt that he “would not fail to inform him in due time of any steps that we might take which might concern the rights or legitimate interests of Germany in the Portuguese Colonies.”⁵²⁶ It appears that British statesmen heartily felt qualified to decide for others what their “legitimate interests” were.⁵²⁷ Despite Salisbury repeatedly explaining to Hatzfeldt that he was unable to discuss financial matters concerning Portugal and Britain, the Germans remained determined to “not have it though!”⁵²⁸ Salisbury went so far as to send a clear warning of the depth of Britain’s commitment to Portugal; “the Cabinet were fully alive to the importance of the ancient Treaties between Portugal and Great Britain, [...] the Treaties contained stipulations which, in substance, were still binding upon Great Britain.” Naturally this warning was ignored, as the Germans could not entertain the thought that Britain would ever make an honourable ally. Hatzfeldt insisted that Germany be consulted immediately despite Salisbury having plainly agreed that such consultation would be necessary if control of territory was concerned.⁵²⁹ Bülow also had the German Ambassador in Lisbon threaten the Portuguese king. Salisbury’s reassurances that the discussion did not anticipate any territorial concessions were undermined by the Monarch’s response that Britain’s conditions were unacceptable. This was far from the case; the Portuguese king was merely attempting to find language which allowed him to back away from the British proposal in the face of the German Ambassador who was in full military uniform.⁵³⁰ As it was feared that had driven the Portuguese into re-approaching Britain, this further intimidation was highly effective. Soveral met with Salisbury and the crux of the matter was discussed. Salisbury would not accept that a loan secured against the customs of any territory constituted an alienation of sovereignty or territory and pointed out several ludicrous examples.

526 Salisbury to Gough, 14/06/1898, *BD*, I, No.66 p.48

527 Curzon had also said similarly of Russia; Memo., Curzon, 14/03/1898, Curzon MSS, MSS.Eur.F112/363

528 Kaiser’s marginalia No.10 on Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtigen Amtes*, 14/06/1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1, Nr.3807, pp.261-3

529 Salisbury to Gough, 21 June 1898, *BD*, I, No.67, p.49; Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtigen Amtes*, 21/06/1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1, Nr.3817, pp.270-1; Bülow to Hatzfeldt, 22/06/1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1, Nr.3818, pp.272-6

530 Bülow to Tattenbach (Lisbon), 18/06/1898, *Ibid.*, Nr.3811 pp.265-6; Bülow to Hatzfeldt, 22/06/1898, *Ibid.*, Nr.3818, pp.272-6

Several enquired about the ancient treaties again, which again Salisbury confirmed were still enforce, except where the passage of time had invalidated interests.⁵³¹ Had Portugal remained steadfast this could have caused a very serious problem. It would be wrong to criticise the Germans too strongly, though their actions were certainly well beyond what was usually acceptable behaviour. Their demands were driven by two concerns, firstly a desperate need, verging on greed, for territorial expansion, as much due to domestic pressure as their own imperialist goals and secondly, a near pathological suspicion of British diplomatic methods.⁵³² Salisbury was quite right that there was no legal reason why Germany should be interested in financial arrangements between two parties but he was being stubborn about dealing sensitively with German interests. At the Cabinet on 22nd June Salisbury had wished to bring an end to discussions with Germany; he was overruled. Chamberlain and Balfour both thought that the Foreign Secretary was not responsive enough to German overtures.⁵³³ Sometime in June Chamberlain sketched out several points of a plan for a seven year defensive Anglo-German Alliance, to be activated by an attack from any two Powers upon either of the contracting parties. The Colonial Secretary believed the plan would also have needed to; provide a solution for China based upon his suggestions made to Hatzfeldt but never communicated to Berlin; a free hand for Britain in Egypt and the Transvaal; Delagoa Bay to Britain from Portugal and Tiger bay to Germany; for Germany a free hand in the Philippines and the settlement of outstanding colonial issues, including Samoa, the Neutral Zone and arrangements for a Cape to Cairo railway.⁵³⁴ Chamberlain was hopeful but cautious. Only after

531 Salisbury to MacDonell, 22/06/1898, *BD*, I, No.68, p.50

532 Kennedy, *Antagonism*, pp.225-228, pp.235-6 for the role of German domestic considerations.

533 Salisbury to Victoria, 22/06/1898, Royal Archives, referenced in Grenville, pp.190-1

534 Notes, Chamberlain, June(?) 1898, JC7/2/2a/25, the exact date is not known it was written at some point in either May or June 1898, here it is agreed with Kennedy that the month was June. Kennedy P.M., *The Samoan Tangle, A Study in Anglo-German-American Relations, 1878-1900*, (Dublin,1974), p.201 nd.41. The references in the document to the Philippines and the prominence of the Portuguese African territories suggest it was during June when Germany had started to show an interest in the discussions between Britain and Portugal and had sent ships to Manila. Chamberlain's comments to Salisbury, made on the 27th, also imply that

"carefully considering the conversation you[Salisbury] had with Hatzfeldt" did he find "in it the foundation for an arrangement." He considered it sensible to come to some agreement about "division of spheres on both the east & western side." Typical of the Colonial Secretary he hoped to meet some of Germany's more extravagant demands by widening the scope of any agreement into a general settlement: "But I wish we could do something bigger still & bring Togoland into the bargain."⁵³⁵ Langer comments that the Germans "would not for a moment entertain" giving up Togoland or her right to extraterritoriality in Zanzibar.⁵³⁶ Langer fails, however, to consider the German demand for Walfish Bay, which was part of the self governing Cape Colony. Similarly, the demand for Blantyre in Nyassaland was also out of the question, as they were British territories and they could not have been given up to Germany in exchange for Britain being 'permitted' to lend money to Portugal.⁵³⁷ Chamberlain had only attempted to include the German territories in an effort to meet Germany's wishes; a trade of territories and rights could be contemplated but he could not exchange territory and receive nothing in return. He was applying to the Germans the same rules he had developed with which to deal with French demands in West Africa, namely that concessions should only be of like value. Salisbury and Chamberlain worked closely together throughout July

he had recently been thinking upon such lines. It is important that these notes are kept within their chronological bounds; Chamberlain was very capable of amending his opinions very quickly when he believed the need arose. These notes made in June or May should not be relied upon to suggest that Chamberlain was principally trying, in all his colonial discussions with the Germans, to appease them in order to obtain an alliance. The fact that the document is filled immediately after a note of Austen Chamberlain's concerned with his father's remembrances of his conversation with Bülow, during the Kaiser's visit to Britain, in November 1899, should not be taken as reliably linking it to those talks or to the Samoan settlement which immediately preceded that visit. The usually exceptionally helpful members of staff of the University of Birmingham's Special Collections were unable to provide any detail on how Chamberlain's papers had been catalogued or by whom. It seems likely that the catalogue was completed in line with Garvin and Amery's ordering of Chamberlain's papers for their biography.

535 Chamberlain to Salisbury, 27/06/1898, Salisbury MSS
3M/E/Chamberlain/1898-99/132

536 Langer, p.526

537 Salisbury to Gough, 9/07/1898, *BD*, I, No.74, p.55

1898.⁵³⁸ On 23rd Chamberlain sent Salisbury a memorandum on the progress of the negotiations. In it Chamberlain noted that:

“The present position of Portugal [...] affords an opportunity for testing the possibility of untied action by the two Powers[Britain and Germany], and, if an arrangement could be arrived at [...], it might lead to an agreement on other still more important questions.

But hither to every attempt to arrive at a common base of action has been frustrated by extravagant and irrelevant demands put forward on behalf of the German Government and of such a character as to give rise to the suspicion that there is no real desire on their part to come to any understanding.”

These were not idle words. Chamberlain had been disposed to offer a favourable solution to all colonial issues with the Germans, as part of a general alliance; he had always warned that without the alliance each colonial issue would have to be looked at on its individual merits. Chamberlain was not pro-German and did not wish to appease Germany with one sided agreements. He would do so only in return for an agreement which would also substantially aid Britain; the Colonial Secretary was always pro-British in every attitude. It was Balfour who had taken on the message of *do et des* from the failed Hatzfeldt/Chamberlain talks. The memorandum continued to state in damning terms that Germany had demanded to be admitted to any Anglo-Portuguese arrangement on equal if not better terms than the British, “but also that Great Britain, without any compensation whatever, should surrender two important positions in her undoubted possession.” The Anglo-Portuguese agreement was:

[I]ntended to maintain the status quo and to guarantee the territorial rights of Portugal [...]. To suppose that Gt. Britain would give up important & valuable positions, [...] in order to secure the assent of Germany to such an arrangement as this, is so preposterous that it leads inevitably to the conclusion that the proposal was only made in order to bring the negotiations to a close.

H.M. Government are sincerely desirous of an understanding

538 Salisbury to Chamberlain, 1 and 10/07/1898, JC5/67/100 and 101 respectively.

with Germany, but such an understanding can only be arrived at on equal terms.⁵³⁹

These were hardly the words of a man prepared to offer much by the way of blackmail for German neutrality. Salisbury responded, enclosing a despatch from Lascelles: "It looks to me as if the Germans were quite sincere in desiring a rapprochement between the two powers: but that their view of their just claims differs so very widely from ours that the desired end is yet a long way off." Chamberlain agreed: "Unless they are able to modify the opinion they have formed of the value of their neutrality, we must certainly look elsewhere for allies."⁵⁴⁰ By this stage Portugal had already withdrawn her request for a loan.⁵⁴¹ Salisbury struggled on and before leaving for France had successfully convinced the Germans to drop the requests for British territory.⁵⁴² Early in August Balfour was again left to deputise for his uncle.⁵⁴³

Balfour moved quickly to complete the negotiations. Immediately upon taking them up Hatzfeldt reinserted a demand that Britain assign the Portuguese part of Timor to Germany as security for any future loan.⁵⁴⁴ Balfour pressed on with drafting the declarations of an agreement. Chamberlain was highly critical of the arrangement. He started off by warning Balfour that the Germans may reveal the content of the discussions to a third party and that he agreed with Salisbury that Timor should be left out. The Colonial Secretary immediately moved on to items of more serious concern. "I do not think we should admit the contention that we should never realise our security in Delagoa Bay unless at the same time the Germans entered into possession of their spheres". He also steadfastly stuck to maintaining the British right of pre-emption to Delagoa Bay.⁵⁴⁵ The next day Chamberlain was trying to underline what the two men had in

539 Memo, Chamberlain, Salisbury MSS, 3M/E/Chamberlain/1898-99/134 enclosed in Chamberlain to Salisbury, 23/07/1898, *Ibid.*, 133

540 Salisbury to Chamberlain, 25/07/1898, JC5/67/102; Chamberlain to Salisbury, 25/07/1898, Salisbury MSS, 3M/E/Chamberlain/98-99/135

541 Salisbury to MacDonall, 13 Jul., 1898, *BD*, I, No.76, p.57

542 Salisbury to Lascelles, 27/07/1898, *Ibid.*, Bo.79 p.59

543 Salisbury to Victoria, 25/07/1898, *LQV*, III, p.261

544 Balfour to Lascelles, 11/08/1898. *BD*, I, No.82, p.62

545 Chamberlain to Balfour, 16/08/1898, JC5/5/74

common, while the negotiations were heading on to "rather dangerous grounds" he did not think there was a difference in principle between himself and the deputised Foreign Secretary: "We both want (1) control of Delagoa[sic] Bay & Railway (2) good relations, and if possible an alliance and understanding, with Germany." With regards to Delagoa Bay the Colonial Secretary felt that the proposed agreement would not give Britain anything she did not already have under her pre-emptive rights. In fact, he had started to fear that the agreement would result in making the "exercise of this right [...] conditional on the assent of Germany, or on her getting some other advantage which she has not got at present." Only if Balfour was "clear" that this agreement did not "in any way weaken our existing position" would he be prepared to let negotiations continue and even then, only if they could secure the second objective of a "better understanding with Germany." On this note Chamberlain was also unhappy, Hatzfeldt spoke like "an injured man who is being fleeced by usurers. [...] Unless he recognises that the advantage is very much on his side I should say it is not worth while going on". Unless Germany would widen the deal to include, the Neutral Zone, Zanzibar and China, Chamberlain would insist that Balfour "would not yield another inch". On receiving this letter Balfour asked Chamberlain to come to see him and "talk the matter over".⁵⁴⁶ It is clear that at this stage Chamberlain was very much opposed to continuing the talks and would certainly have preferred them to end rather than granting any other further concessions. His priority was to prevent any foreign interference at Delagoa Bay and to put his country's pre-emptive rights on an even stronger footing, if not to take immediate control of the railway. These rights were rapidly becoming derogated into requiring a third Power's assent before they could be exercised.

Hatzfeldt and Balfour next met on 18th August and Balfour gave the Ambassador copies of the proposed declarations which were to form the final agreement.⁵⁴⁷ He also wrote immediately to the Colonial Secretary to outline Hatzfeldt's renewed demand for Timor which Balfour took an

546 Chamberlain to Balfour, 17/08/1898, JC5/5/77; Balfour to Chamberlain, 17/08/1898, JC5/5/31

547 Balfour to Lascelles, 18/08/1898, *BD*, I, No.83, pp.63-5

ambivalent attitude towards: "Personally I should not regard the question of the slightest importance one way or the other excepting in so far as it may hurt the feelings of Portugal." The nephew had none of Salisbury's disdain for German greed or methods. While Balfour had "altered the Draft Agreements so that the question of our pre-emptive rights over Delagoa Bay were not raised" he was "not quite sure that on this particular point I am wholly at one with you." Where Chamberlain wished to break off negotiations, Balfour believed that the right of pre-emption would be useless because Portugal would mortgage Lourenço Marques long before selling it. If the agreement was in force at the time of a subsequent default, then the area would fall to Britain anyway, if it did not, an argument could ensue between Portugal's various creditors. As the whole tenor of the agreement was to maintain the status quo in South Africa until such a default then the pre-emptive right was inconsistent with it. When asked what Hatzfeldt believed Britain was getting in return for all this, he replied "that this arrangement would be a public advertisement to the Transvaal Government that they had nothing more to hope for from Germany".⁵⁴⁸ Chamberlain was not impressed:

The only advantage to us is the assurance of Germany's abstention from further interference in Delagoa Bay and the Transvaal – in other words, we pay blackmail to Germany to induce her not to interfere where she has no right of interference. Well! It is worthwhile to pay Blackmail sometimes.⁵⁴⁹

His comments about blackmail were made less in agreement with lines of Balfour's policy and more in the nature of trying to be optimistic. The initial hope of solving Britain's problems with the Transvaal peacefully, by gaining control of her communications with the sea, had become much less likely. There was to be no way to do so unless Portugal defaulted on her debts and effectively became subject to a retreat from her empire. His consolation was that if it became necessary to subdue the South African Republic, Germany would not interfere.

548 Balfour to Chamberlain, 18/08/1898, JC5/5/32

549 Chamberlain to Balfour, 19/08/1898, JC5/5/78

Hatzfeldt again saw Balfour and the declarations were amended. Timor was to be included and return for Germany would surrender her right of extraterritoriality in Zanzibar when the agreement came into effect. A provision was added to ensure the rate of interest to be offered would be as low as possible "to conciliate Portuguese opinion". It is difficult to imagine that Portugal would be so conciliated if she discovered how her colonial empire had been tidied up as security for a loan she did not even want. Balfour felt it important to draw attention to Hatzfeldt's parting comments, the impression that Germany was not behaving cordially, with her threats of going to other powers and even of causing trouble in Egypt, was "in the strongest language [...] mistaken, and that his Government [...] was prepared to regard this agreement about South Africa as a new departure of the happiest augury for future relations of the two Empires." This informed Balfour, who was still very much in favour of an eventual Anglo-German alliance, that his conciliatory response to Bülow's concept of *do et des* was bearing fruit.⁵⁵⁰ However, word reached Balfour that the Kaiser was "evidently annoyed at the prospect of the negotiations breaking down," and felt "that he had been treated with scant consideration".⁵⁵¹ The pressure was on to conclude an agreement after having come so far.

After a conversation with Hatzfeldt that same day, Balfour wrote in haste to Chamberlain, he was struggling to reconcile the British right of pre-emption with the German demand that only simultaneous gains were acceptable. Balfour also pointed out that if Britain exercised her right of pre-emption and then Germany demanded something similar from Portugal, the ancient treaties between Britain and Portugal would require Britain to "come to Portugal's assistance." All of this was an attempt to force Chamberlain to accept giving up pre-emption.⁵⁵² Balfour had included some draft verbiage as a suggestion to meet Chamberlain's desire to retain some right of pre-emption; the solution was that if one power gained a privilege not specified

550 Balfour to Lascelles, 20/08/1898, *BD*, I, No.86, p.68; for examples of threats see *Ibid.*, Nos. 78, 83, 85 & 87 on p.58, 63-4, p.67 & 68-9 respectively; for a consideration of how the Foreign Office weighed them see Memo., Bertie, 10/08/1898, *Ibid.*, No.81, pp.60-1

551 Lascelles to Balfour, 22/08/1898, *BD*, I, No.87, pp.8-9

552 Balfour to Chamberlain, 22/08/1898, JC5/5/33

by the agreement but in the geographical area it covers, the party concerned would not object to the other Power doing similarly.⁵⁵³ In a longer letter of the next day it appeared that Balfour was prepared to indulge in some creative thinking in order to persuade himself that the deal was a good one. The acting Foreign Secretary had come around to "the view that" his verbiage of the previous day "might be accepted." As an example Balfour suggested that if Britain, acting due to some complication with the Transvaal, concluded a temporary concession from Portugal over Delagoa Bay, then Germany would gain the right to demand a similar temporary arrangement in their sphere. Balfour believed Germany would not bother to exercise this right and even if she did, it would do no permanent damage to Portugal as both arrangements would be temporary. This rather ignored how sensitive the Portuguese Government was to the pressure of domestic opinion. To believe that no permanent damage would be done to Portugal belittles what it was that Balfour was expecting Portugal to do without any consultation. If Britain were to need a temporary arrangement with her oldest ally it would have been very odd to have that arrangement refused. However, the Portuguese public would be surprised and angered if they were subsequently presented with a similar temporary demand on behalf of Germany, whose government would be acting under the pressure of their own public opinion. Portuguese anger would have likely deepened to fury when her oldest ally, Britain, whom she had just assisted, announced that she would do nothing to support them against this German demand. How this loss of face for the Portuguese monarchy and the nation, which considered her imperial dominions as her last saving grace, "would not do any permanent injury" Balfour does not answer. Balfour had also agreed to drop the requirement for Germany to give up her extraterritoriality in Zanzibar in return for Timor as this would suggest the British hoped or at least expected that Portugal would eventually fail and the agreement would come into force.⁵⁵⁴

553 Balfour to Chamberlain, 22/08/1898, JC5/5/34

554 Balfour to Chamberlain, 22/08/1898, JC5/5/35; for German opinion on the agreement as another sell out to the British see Kennedy, *Antagonism*, p.236; for

Chamberlain's earlier note that "it is worthwhile to pay Blackmail sometimes", is often quoted to exemplify his concurrence with Balfour's actions.⁵⁵⁵ This implies that the Colonial Secretary was happy with the deal and willing to meet German demands. Sufficient attention is rarely paid to his later comments in reply to Balfour. Chamberlain had become "much less eager than I was for any arrangement, and I should not break my heart if the negotiations came to an end." He had "never anticipate[d] that the Germans would be so greedy". The arrangement as it stood would not be acceptable to public opinion; all it did was give Britain permission to do what she a legal right to do anyway, just without German interference. In fact, Portugal may have extended Britain's pre-emptive rights to all her African possessions if they had not been scared off, and while Germany would have been angry, she would certainly not have gone to war and would have had no "legal grounds of objection." He went on to reconsider the hope that the agreement may lead to a warming of Anglo-German relations:

Of course if this agreement could be assumed to be the beginning of a cordial understanding with Germany I should think the price paid was not too high, but I fear that the whole tone of the negotiation shows that Germany feels no particular gratitude to us for our sacrifices, and accordingly on all questions which still remain unsettled we are likely to find them as unreasonable in the future as they have been in the past. On these grounds I cannot be enthusiastic about the agreement, although, I recognise that having gone so far we must loyally do our best to carry it through.

Chamberlain then laid out his thoughts on the issues still in question. Balfour's solution to the pre-emption problem was acceptable to Chamberlain only if it was limited to offering no objection to Germany gaining a like privilege by diplomatic means: "the Germans would not be able to compel her to do this by force without coming into conflict with us [...]. In other words, by your draft we do not insist that the surrender of

the internal state of Portugal see Grenville, pp.182-4; Langer, pp.519-21 and Memo., Bertie, 1/05/1898, *BD*, I, No.65, pp.44-8

555 Chamberlain to Balfour, 19/08/1898, JC5/5/78; As examples of referencing only the 'blackmail' comment; Grenville, p.194; Langer, pp.528-9; Charmley, pp.264-6; Porter, pp.158-9 as examples

right by Portugal should be equal & simultaneous, but merely promise not to take objection if they are." This was a dangerous interpretation; Germany had inserted this demand to ensure that this exact occurrence never happened. While still keeping to the exact letter of the agreements acting in this way would have breached the spirit of them in a manner that Germans most feared. Chamberlain wanted to underline this interpretation by adding "by agreement" into Balfour's proposed wording. The Colonial Secretary also closed with a plea to try to keep Zanzibar in the agreement, because if that extraterritoriality was dropped, Britain could refuse it to the French.⁵⁵⁶ Chamberlain was aware of the potential problems that would be caused if the agreement should fail to materialise, but his objections here are strong. He did not want this agreement and accurately predicted that it would not help Britain in South Africa, or improve Anglo-German relations.

Chamberlain's strong objections were overruled. The convention ultimately gave up Britain's right of pre-emption and omitted any reference to Zanzibar.⁵⁵⁷ Balfour confessed to the absent Salisbury that the deal had been done. Worried that "you[Salisbury] & my colleagues will have to take the responsibility for my handiwork" he went on to explain that the right of pre-emption was originally used to try to keep Germany out of South Africa, but under the convention she "keeps herself out, and is pledged to help us to keep out third powers." He went on to suggest that the right had not been given up, only prevented from being acted upon unless Germany gained a like concession: "E.G. of course, Tiger Bay".⁵⁵⁸ The acting Foreign Secretary failed to realise that this pre-emptive right had also been used to prevent Portugal from allowing the bay to be developed by foreign private concerns, he thus failed to recognise the threat that commercial development presented to the British.⁵⁵⁹ Balfour was only permitted to include a stipulation for allowing "occasional privileges" so Britain could theoretically use the railway, with Portugal's permission, if at war with the

556 Chamberlain to Balfour, 23/08/1898, JC5/5/80

557 For the text of the Convention, Secret Convention and Secret Note see Balfour to Lascelles, 31/08/1898, *BD*, I, Nos. 90-2 and their enclosures, pp.71-5

558 Balfour to Salisbury, 26/08/1898, Salisbury MSS, 3M/E/Balfour/97-98/278

559 559 Henshaw P., "The 'Key to South Africa' in the 1890s: Delagoa Bay and the Origins of the South African War", *JSAS*, Vol. 24, No.3 (1998), pp.529-531

Transvaal. The acting Foreign Secretary was not permitted to use the word temporary as the Germans feared "a temporary privilege might last 30 years!!" While this may seem a bit churlish it should be remembered that Britain was still in 'temporary' occupation of Egypt and had been for sixteen years. Balfour explained to Salisbury that Chamberlain had desired to remain "absolutely unfettered over pre-emption rights. But this I feel quite sure was impracticable we had to choose between some such agreement as I have made and breaking off the whole thing. This last alternative, when the matter had gone so far, would in my judgement have been very unfortunate."⁵⁶⁰ Balfour was not prepared to sacrifice the deal for the sake of Chamberlain's desire to gain control of Delagoa Bay. The right of pre-emption had not been specifically aimed at Germany either; Britain would have been able to exercise that right if any other Power had tried to alienate the territory from Portugal. With this agreement the hope of settling the South African difficulties by controlling the Transvaal's communications and trade with the outside world, which had worked tolerable well when the Transvaal had been dependent on the Cape Colony's rail network, was lost. Balfour signed, "for good or ill" the final agreement on 30th August 1898.⁵⁶¹ In fact Britain had previously managed to prevent the port from competing with British ports in South Africa by using her pre-emptive rights to convince Portugal to grant no foreign concessions to develop it. However Article 4 in the Secret Convention withdrew Britain's objections to exactly this kind of concession.⁵⁶² Until the port had been developed, the threat posed by the shortest railway link between the Transvaal and the sea was hypothetical. The Anglo German Convention opened the door to just such development exposing the British self governing colonies to potential bankruptcy.⁵⁶³ This made finding some final settlement with the Transvaal more urgent. Balfour's dismissal of Chamberlain's concerns and the speed with which he signed the Convention frustrated the Colonial Secretary. In a matter which heavily concerned his own ministerial office Chamberlain had been constrained.

560 Balfour to Salisbury, 26/08/1898, Salisbury MSS, 3M/E/Balfour/97-98/278

561 Balfour to Salisbury, 30/08/1898, *Ibid.*, 3M/E/Balfour/97-98/280

562 Balfour to Lascelles,, 31/08/1898, *BD*, I, No.91. Pp.72-3

563 Henshaw, "Key" pp.541-43

From a close reading of the evidence available, it is apparent that Balfour and Chamberlain had been in close communication throughout the negotiations. Before the reins were handed over to Balfour, Salisbury had also been in constant contact with Chamberlain. The Colonial Office had thus been consulted at its highest level and Chamberlain was well versed in the concerns his office entertained.⁵⁶⁴ The Anglo-German negotiations had moved through several phases. The story began with Salisbury's reluctance to negotiate with Hatzfeldt. Balfour and Chamberlain then worked together to ensure that the Cabinet forced Salisbury to do so. Salisbury and Chamberlain then worked together during the early negotiations. It was during this phase that Chamberlain began to believe that the deal would be of no use. Salisbury then handed over negotiations to Balfour, who rushed to complete it. He did so for a number of reasons, firstly in an attempt to improve Anglo-German relations and secondly, to ensure that the agreement happened at all. He knew his uncle's objections and as he became aware that Chamberlain had grown adverse, he realised that if he had handed the negotiations back to Salisbury on his return, they may never have been completed.

Balfour also appeared to enjoy his brief moments at the Foreign Office and even asked if he could take over regularly. When he announced the signing of the Convention he promised not "to trouble you, until after you resume the reins of office, with anything but accomplished facts".⁵⁶⁵ Salisbury's reply was telling, he was "very much obliged for your[Balfour's] kind offer to stay on at the F.O. for ten days. But I[Salisbury] cannot accept it because it would be imposing on you a perfectly supererogatory burden." While the Prime Minister admitted there was "nothing really urgent", he used the excuse of a small disagreement with Spain, which only in the most extreme circumstances could have led to military action, as the reason for why he needed to regain control of his own office. He could not "devolve upon any other member of the Cabinet the responsibilities" of such

564 Henshaw maintains that the Colonial Office was not properly consulted on the convention.

565 Balfour to Salisbury, 14/04/1898, Salisbury MSS, 3M/E/Balfour/97-98/223; Balfour to Salisbury, 26/08/1898, *Ibid.*, 3M/E/Balfour/97-98/278.

events.⁵⁶⁶ Salisbury would never have rescinded what his nephew had done while in his office, and so he would have to live with the Convention, as would Chamberlain, but he acted to ensure that he could regain control of foreign policy from Balfour as quickly as possible. Historians have been quick to examine the threat that Chamberlain represented to Salisbury's running of foreign policy, but it is apparent here that Balfour posed a subtler and, due to his actual deputising for his uncle, more dangerous derangement of the Prime Minister's control. If Chamberlain's interference lead to the British Government being described as double-headed, it is only because he chose to make his position known publicly and later, during the Samoan negotiations, to deliberately make play upon the supposed differences between himself and Salisbury. Meanwhile the third head, Balfour, attempted to enhance his own influence on policy by manipulating the differences between the Colonial Secretary and the Prime Minister, while relying on the familial link with Salisbury to smooth over or obscure the differences between them.

Immediately upon his return Salisbury did all that he could to ensure that the Anglo-German Convention never came into force. No sooner than it was signed, then the Germans went to work trying to convince the Portuguese to approach only themselves for a loan. Salisbury minuted that he had "expected this. They are not content to wait for events to give them their share of Portuguese territory, but wish to force the pace of destiny."⁵⁶⁷ Much later MacDonell, British Ambassador to Portugal, would be informing Salisbury that his German counterpart "understood his instructions [...] [were] to induce the Portuguese Government to contract a loan in order that, when its proceeds had been extravagantly wasted, we should remain with a claim on the control of the Portuguese Colonial Customs."⁵⁶⁸ Salisbury would not assist in that adventure, the Prime Minister was determined to render Balfour's handiwork irrelevant. The German attempts to speed up destiny merely deepened the Foreign Secretary's detestation of them and made Balfour's hope of better Anglo-German relations, developed

566 Salisbury to Balfour, 1 Sep.1898, Balfour MSS, Add.MS49691

567 Minute on Balfour to Lascelles, 1/09/1898, *BD*, I, No.94, pp.75-6

568 MacDonell to Salisbury, 22/07/1899. *BD*, I, No.112, pp.86-7

by the granting of advantageous concessions, illusionary. Salisbury also appeared to become somewhat buoyed up by his success at Fashoda. As seen above, this affected his attitude towards the Russians in China and his foreign policy more generally. Brodrick reported early in 1899 that Salisbury was "in splendid spirits just now & thinks he has done first rate business with Cambon & Fr[ench] agreement."⁵⁶⁹ In the immediate aftermath of that confrontation with France, the Germans hopefully awaited the outbreak of an Anglo-French war. Even when the crisis was over, the Kaiser could not imagine that Britain would not force a war upon France.⁵⁷⁰ This underlined the serious differences of outlook between the Germans and the British. Salisbury was happy to defend what he thought essential from the French but, unlike Germany, he was not prepared to use war in order to settle other outstanding issues. Lascelles had explicitly explained to the Kaiser that Britain had no desire to force war upon France yet the German Emperor refused to accept this.⁵⁷¹

Even before Salisbury had returned, Hatzfeldt had been instructed to enquire from Balfour the likely British response to a proposed partition of the Samoan Islands. Before even meeting him, Hatzfeldt had warned the *Auswärtige Amt* that public opinion in Australia would restrain the British.⁵⁷² In his second interview with Balfour, Hatzfeldt offered to swap the Samoans for the Tongans (Britain to retain Tonga) and offered to drop German extraterritoriality in Zanzibar. Hatzfeldt tried to tempt Balfour by reminding him that it was only the conclusion of the Samoan issues that stood in the way of creating "a lasting favourable impression in both countries". Balfour promised to write to Salisbury upon the subject as he vacated the Foreign Office.⁵⁷³ Salisbury's reply to Hatzfeldt was simple: nothing could be arranged because of Australian opinion. The German ambassador warned

569 Brodrick to Curzon, 20/03/1899 quoted in Kennedy, *Samoan*, p.179, the French agreement mentioned was the Anglo-French Convention of 1899 which settled the boundaries of British and French territory based upon the watersheds of the Congo and Nile.

570 Lascelles to Salisbury, 21/12/1898, *BD*, I, No.124, pp.102-4

571 Rumbold to Salisbury, 5/12/1898; Lascelles to Salisbury, 21/12/1898, *BD*, I, Nos.123-5, pp.101-5

572 *GP*, XIV, pt. 2, Nrs.4028-31, pp.567-70

573 Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 2/09/1898, *Ibid.*, XIV pt.2, No.4032, pp.570-1

his superiors that he believed it was "hopeless" to continue at that time.⁵⁷⁴ At this point the Fashoda confrontation was about to enter the most acute phase, while Kitchener would not meet Marchand until 18th September the meeting had been anticipated by both the French and the British. Monson in Paris had telegraphed back home with news that Delcasse was concerned that the victorious British would soon encounter the French.⁵⁷⁵ This left Salisbury in a serious position and his reluctance to discuss German demands over the islands was well founded. The Germans would not allow the matter to rest and continued to push Salisbury. The situation was further clouded by various arguments between the Kaiser and the British Royal family, these rested upon his feelings of being treated without due consideration in the Saxe-Coburg-Gotha succession and with regard to invitations to Victoria's eightieth birthday celebrations. As Kennedy put it, "[u]sing his own peculiar logic, Wilhelm blamed everything upon Salisbury". This almost made the mere continuation of the Prime Minister in office a stumbling block to better Anglo-German relations.⁵⁷⁶ Kennedy offers a highly detailed and well reasoned account of the negotiations for the partition of the island group, how the issue became of such great importance to the Germans and how Salisbury was either unable or unwilling to understand these pressures. The Prime Minister was well aware of the internal problems Wilhelm faced and the difficulties that Hatzfeldt and Bülow had in operating under him: "You[Hatzfeldt] want to please your Kaiser and I[Salisbury] am to help you." Salisbury's logic was implacable: how could the British Prime Minister be expected to ease the wounded pride of the German Emperor? However, he wilfully ignored the signs that this could have resulted in very serious trouble, even when Hatzfeldt made it clear that he may even be withdrawn if a satisfactory settlement was not forthcoming.⁵⁷⁷ As the Germans feared that Salisbury was a stumbling

574 Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 8/09/1898, *Ibid.*, XIV pt.2, No.4034, pp.571-2

575 The anticipation of the impending crisis can be easily followed in *BD*, I, Nos.185-191, pp.159-166

576 Kennedy, *Samoan*, pp.178-88 gives a detailed account of Wilhelm's feelings towards Salisbury and being treated as a *quantité négligeable* by the British. Quote on p.181;

577 *Ibid.*, pp.178-239, quote on p.190; Hatzfeldt to Salisbury 14/09/1899, Salisbury MSS 3M/A/122/70

block to any solution, they decided to try to circumvent the Foreign Secretary and to contact Chamberlain whom they believed would be more amenable.

In April 1899 the Colonial Secretary dined at Eckardstein's house and Hatzfeldt reported home that Eckardstein "found him in his whole attitude and language greatly changed towards Germany, Chamberlain used expressions like the following: 'Last year we offered you everything and you would not have it, now it is too late.' You see that we have not much to expect from this so-called friend."⁵⁷⁸ Hatzfeldt attempted to continue on with Salisbury and suggested that perhaps arbitration could settle the dispute.⁵⁷⁹ Chamberlain came out strongly against the idea agreeing with his department that "[w]e should discourage any idea of partition as it is obvious that the German plan would take the oyster, leaving us the shell."⁵⁸⁰ An appeal to the Colonial Secretary was not likely to yield the kind of results the Germans were looking for. In fact there is nothing in Chamberlain's writings that indicated any desire to meet German demands. However, neither Bülow nor the Kaiser believed that Chamberlain had changed his mind. Bülow even commented that he did not understand the objection as Chamberlain had described the Samoan group as "trumpery affairs not worth twopence to either of us".⁵⁸¹ The message Chamberlain was trying to communicate was that the Germans should expect no preferential treatment. He would, and later did, entertain ideas of a transaction, but only on what he considered to be fair or advantageous terms. The Colonial Secretary had been considering what he would want to include in a full settlement for some time. Back in May, perhaps prompted by the discussion with Eckardstein over dinner in late April, he had written up some notes concerning how to divide up the various Pacific territories in question and pondered whether settling African disputes at the same time

578 Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtigen Amt*, 22/04/1899, *GP*, XIV pt.2, No.4071, pp.611-3, the translation used is from, Garvin, *Life*, III, p.331

579 Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtigen Amt*, 8/09/1899, *GP*, XIV pt.2, No.4082, pp-628-30
580 Min., Chamberlain, 11/09/1899, JC7/2/2a/29

581 The Kaiser noted that he could not believe that Chamberlain was in earnest when he said it was too late on Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtigen Amt*, 22/04/1899, *GP*, XIV pt.2, No.4071; Bülow to Hatzfeldt, 6/05/1899, *Ibid.*, No.4072, p.613, Bülow apparently quotes Chamberlain, the translation used is from, Garvin, III, p.331

could resolve the problem.⁵⁸² Before he had even been contacted by the Germans, Chamberlain had also enquired about the thoughts of his department on the value of various Africa possessions, including the Volta Triangle, the Neutral Zone, Walfisch Bay and Togoland. Selborne even considered throwing Gambia into the mix.⁵⁸³ Before his first meeting with Eckardstein in September, he had noted that Australia and New Zealand “would be bitterly offended if an arrangement was made which they consider unsatisfactory.”⁵⁸⁴

Chamberlain put his ideas to Salisbury on 18th September before even meeting with Eckardstein. Salisbury had enquired after his thoughts having finally started to take German threats seriously. As tension rose in the Transvaal the Foreign Secretary could “not see my way ‘out’ quite clearly” he was unsure what to recommend, as it was difficult to steer between the opinions of the Kaiser who had decided, in desperation, to connect Samoa with his already promised neutrality in South Africa, and of the Dominions.⁵⁸⁵ Chamberlain’s response was emphatic and hardly suggests he was happy to try to help the Germans: “The policy of the German Empire since Bismarck has always been one of undisguised blackmail.” He informed Salisbury that Eckardstein wanted a meeting and that it was scheduled for Wednesday (21st September) in his usual grandiose style the Colonial Secretary reminded Salisbury of his duty to the colonies and thus also the Dominions, he also attached a warning. It was his “conviction [...] that before the first half of the 20th Century is past Germany and France will find themselves ousted from any possessions that they may have in the Pacific by the forces of Australasia- whether they will then be Colonial forces I do not know.” Chamberlain had an overly inflated sense of the future power of Australia, but his real warning was that offending the sub-imperialism of the Antipodean Dominions could cause the kind of splitting away that the Colonial Secretary devoted most of his energies into preventing. Such concerns were foremost in his mind as the British were

582 Nd., Chamberlain, 16/05/1899, JC7/4/2/19

583 Chamberlain, 12/08/1899, JC7/2/2a/27, Selborne’s was the last note on the reply dated 20/08/1899.

584 Nd., Chamberlain and Colonial Office officials, 15/09/1899, JC7/2/2a/15

585 Salisbury to Chamberlain, 18/09/1899, JC5/67/123

about to be plunged into war to prevent South Africa from drifting out of the British orbit. Having given this warning he went on to accept whatever Salisbury decided to do; if Britain needed to purchase Germany's neutrality then the Cabinet would have to "face the Colonial indignation as best we can." He then put forward one of his 'impossible suggestions', offering to Germany the Volta Triangle, in return for the largest island in Samoa and the division of the Neutral Zone along the lines he had requested. Chamberlain would prefer to face "the indignant protests of Manchester and Liverpool", than Australia and New Zealand.⁵⁸⁶ Kennedy erroneously thought that this idea originated with Salisbury, however the Prime Minister did not agree with Chamberlain's reasoning. He asked his Colonial Secretary what he thought of a German offer claiming that if Britain were "to make a bargain, I should prefer it[the German offer] to Volta against Upola[the largest Samoan Island] and Neutral zone. This would be rather sacrificing Manchester and Liverpool to the Australians. Now as Manchester and Liverpool will certainly never seek their independence – I prefer them."⁵⁸⁷ Chamberlain's preference for offending the interests of British commerce was based upon exactly the same logic. Chamberlain was content to cause domestic offence in order to keep the colonies happy with their British connection. However, it is impossible to know whether the two men were in full agreement or not, as they may have met that afternoon to discuss the issue.⁵⁸⁸ During his first meeting with Eckardstein, Chamberlain made it clear that he was very unhappy that Germany would try to make use of Britain's current embarrassment in South Africa, but that he would do what he could. He offered his Volta scheme to Eckardstein adding that the Tongan group and the Savage Island would be shared. The German replied that he felt it unlikely that Germany could withdraw from the largest of the Samoan Islands and that he did not think sharing the islands was practicable. Chamberlain replied that he could possibly yield on the island groups but not on the Samoan Islands. He also explained that these ideas

586 Chamberlain to Salisbury, 18/09/1899, JC11/30/181

587 Kennedy, *Samoa*, p.205 Kennedy has appeared to miss date these two communications failing to notice Chamberlain's was the day before Salisbury's he also appears to have misread the contents of Salisbury's letter; Salisbury to Chamberlain, 19/09/1899, JC11/30/182 or JC5/67/124

588 *Ibid.*,

were his own and that he had not taken any ministers' advice.⁵⁸⁹ This claim was not true; he had consulted his own department extensively about the territories involved and had discussed his scheme with Salisbury the day before. Chamberlain had chosen to play up to the belief that he and Salisbury were not in agreement. By widening the prospective range of territories involved in the discussions, the Colonial Secretary had put together everything he needed to eventually lay a trap before the Germans.

The Germans preferred to leave the Volta out of any deal, believing their demand for Tonga, the Savage Island and the Neutral Zone were reasonable compensation for giving up on Upola, the largest Samoan Island.⁵⁹⁰ Hatzfeldt then met with Salisbury. Salisbury suggested a scheme of different compensations, which depended on who should receive the smaller of the two Samoan Islands in question. He also put forward the idea that Germany should leave the whole of Samoa, withdraw from the Neutral zone and receive the Volta Triangle instead.⁵⁹¹ Hatzfeldt mentioned in his telegram that this Volta-Samoa swap deal was a proposal of Chamberlain's. He also noted that the Tongan group and the Savage Island were not in the agreement.⁵⁹² This suggested that Chamberlain and Salisbury had agreed to disturb Manchester and Liverpool in order to appease Australia and New Zealand. It also demonstrated that the two British statesmen were working together or at least were in very close contact. Throughout the discussions they could almost be described as playing a 'good cop, bad cop' routine. While contemplating those proposals, the Germans felt that their hand was getting stronger as Britain moved closer to war in the Transvaal. This was to become a serious obstacle; Bülow had already commented that a conciliatory solution of the Samoan problem was a "precondition for a truly friendly relationship" and that this had been pointed out "months before the escalation of the situation in South Africa".⁵⁹³ The British probably considered that since the Anglo-German convention on Portugal's colonies had promised a free hand to

589 Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 20/09/1899, *GP*, XIV pt.2, No.4089, pp.637-8

590 Richthofen to Bülow, 21/09/1899, *Ibid.*, No 4090, pp.638-9

591 Salisbury to Lascelles 22/09/1899, *BD*, I, No.148, p.124

592 Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 22/09/1899, *GP*, XIV pt.2, No.4092, pp.641-2

593 Bülow to *Auswärtige Amt*, 22/09/1899, *GP*, XIV pt.2, No.4091, p.640

Britain in the Transvaal, these demands were not friendly at all. Every time Britain settled a dispute, which the Germans invariably described as the last issue before real friendship could begin, another issue arose. Bülow's price for a visit from the Kaiser and German neutrality in South Africa, which had already been promised several times, had grown higher. Whomever received Savaii, the smaller island in Samoa, would also get the Tongan group, Savage Island, and if this were Germany the Gilberts too. Also an African settlement would additionally need to be agreed with this, Germany would receive the Volta, and Yendi in the Neutral zone, Britain would receive the remnant of that zone, and then Germany would waive her extraterritoriality in Zanzibar. In other words, Britain would be required to offend all her concerned interests; Manchester and Liverpool were to suffer along with Australia and New Zealand. Germany's price for neutrality was very high indeed; these demands would not prove acceptable to either of the two British Statesmen.⁵⁹⁴ Eckardstein met Chamberlain again to put Germany's increased demands to Britain. While he gave Hatzfeldt to believe that Chamberlain was "quite inclined" to their proposals, there was evidence that the Colonial Secretary anticipated the objections which Salisbury would later offer. On the long list of Pacific archipelagos' demanded by the Germans, Chamberlain merely confirmed that he wished to do his utmost to meet German desires but that he could give "no definitive answer". He left it to Salisbury to later definitively decline these ideas. Chamberlain was also careful to retain the banks of the Volta triangle to Britain. In closing, Eckardstein said that Chamberlain wanted to talk with Salisbury about the proposals but that the Germans should be "prepared for an uphill battle".⁵⁹⁵

While it appeared that Salisbury had agreed to some of what was discussed between the Colonial Secretary and Eckardstein, he was adamant about the areas Chamberlain had deliberately demurred over. The Germans believed the two men were acting against each other and so they ordered Eckardstein to inform Chamberlain that Salisbury's obstructions over Tonga

594 Bülow to *Auswärtige Amt*, 25/09/1899, *Ibid.*, No.4094, pp.643-4

595 Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 28/09/1899, *Ibid.*, No.4095, pp.644-6

would ruin the whole agreement.⁵⁹⁶ However Chamberlain's "heads of agreement", penned to Salisbury on the same day of his meeting with Eckardstein, had Tonga to go to Britain as did his preliminary ideas sent to Selborne even earlier. Salisbury commented that this newly added demand for Tonga was the only difference between Hatzfeldt's and Eckardstein's schemes and his Colonial Secretary agreed it was "only a try on of Ct. H[atzefeldt]." He "would not give them Tonga under any circumstances" and that it had been Eckardstein's suggestion that it go to Britain anyway.⁵⁹⁷ Chamberlain then discouraged Eckardstein from seeing him again which the latter thought may have been down to concerns that Salisbury would become offended.⁵⁹⁸ It appears Chamberlain and Salisbury were effectively in agreement on most of Germany's demands, the only difference being that Chamberlain continued to dress his objections in honey or rather to leave them for Salisbury to put to the Germans. While he desired a better working relationship with Germany he was not prepared to actually sell British interests cheaply even if "it would certainly be an advantage if we could clear the slate of all matters of controversy at the same time."⁵⁹⁹ However, his relationship with Eckardstein was complex and one which Chamberlain managed to exploit in the Samoan dispute to Britain's advantage. Given the delicate situation with the Transvaal, Hatzfeldt should have been able to play his hand strongly, but due to the self imposed time constraints, of settling before both the Kaiser's visit to Windsor and even the Tsar's visit to Germany, the Germans were in a serious fix. As Eckardstein begged Chamberlain for a meeting, Salisbury met with Hatzfeldt, where the ambassador insisted that If Germany gave up Upola and the Neutral zone she would require Tonga, another five pacific island groups and the Volta triangle; the future friendship of Germany required it. Salisbury insisted that he needed time to examine the relative values of these groups. He then commented that he was "not myself able to judge" how Germany had demonstrated her past friendship or what their intentions

596 Kennedy, *Samoa*, p.207

597 Heads of Agreement, Chamberlain, 28/09/1899, JC7/2/2a/16; Chamberlain to Selborne, 25/09/1899, JC7/2/2A/30; Salisbury to Chamberlain, 29/09/1899, JC11/30/186 or JC5/67/126; Chamberlain to Salisbury, 29/09/1899, JC11/30/185

598 Eckardstein to Chamberlain, 30/09/1899, JC7/2/2B/5,

599 Chamberlain to Selborne, 25/09/1899, JC7/2/2A/30

for the future were, should negotiations fail. In the end he insisted that because Britain was not requesting any change and that as there was no danger in Samoa itself, the matter was not pressing and he would reserve the necessary time to look into it in detail.⁶⁰⁰ It must be kept in mind that these two correspondences, Eckardstein with Chamberlain and Hatzfeldt with Salisbury, were taking place simultaneously and that Chamberlain and Salisbury were corresponding closely, certainly immediately before Salisbury's 6th October meeting with Hatzfeldt. Salisbury was originally disinclined to agree to consider including the Volta triangle in the scheme, however, in his "provisional judgement" he believed "the balance would only be approximately restored if [...] Tonga were left out of the negotiation."⁶⁰¹ This indicated that Chamberlain had either convinced him to accept the sacrificing of Manchester and Liverpool on the altar of Dominion opinion or to assist in potentially laying a more elaborate trap. Kennedy ponders whether "the German government ever forgave the prime minister for this icy rejection of all their arguments and his absolute indifference to their haste" and while Salisbury was perfectly 'correct' in his judgements upon German haste; his utter indifference can perhaps not be taken at face value.⁶⁰² As already seen back in late September he was concerned that the Samoan dispute could result in an unpleasant intervention by Germany in South Africa, there is nothing to suggest that this risk had vanished in the following short weeks.⁶⁰³ While German methods had surely been a great irritation it is hard to imagine that Salisbury would have felt safe given the threats that had been made. His response on 6th October heightened and extenuated German sensitivity and desperation.

As Salisbury was applying extreme levels of pressure based upon an indifference that bordered on diplomatic impropriety, Chamberlain finally agreed to meet with Eckardstein again and thus offered, to the beleaguered members of the German Embassy, some rays of hope. Hatzfeldt had not offered any new departures in his last discussion with Salisbury this should

600 Salisbury to Lascelles, 6 Oct 1899, *BD*, I, No.149, pp.125-6

601 *Ibid.*, p.125

602 Kennedy, *Samoa*, p.209

603 Salisbury to Chamberlain, 18/09/1899, JC5/67/123

have revealed to the British statesmen that regardless of the actual material value of Upola the Germans were absolutely desperate to have it. When he met with Eckardstein, Chamberlain proposed a new basis for the settlement as no formula appeared to be possible in which the two Samoan Islands in question could be partitioned. He offered that Germany should retire from Samoa in entirety and would receive the Solomon group and Savage Island, as Pacific compensation. In return Britain would give up the whole Volta triangle, in return for the Neutral Zone, and Germany's right of extraterritoriality in Zanzibar. This was a very astute suggestion and importantly Tonga was reserved to Britain. Chamberlain warned Eckardstein that so far Germany had quite underestimated the value of the Volta Triangle and that he required a little time before he could be held to the new offer. He also played upon the supposed differences between himself and Salisbury, explaining that he had discussed their previous ideas but had "encountered insurmountable difficulties". In reality the Colonial Secretary had been entirely in agreement with Salisbury's objections to include Tonga and the seemingly ever increasing list of small island groups.⁶⁰⁴ Chamberlain had just removed the very thing Germany most wanted from the deal. Given the direction of their previous conversations, Eckardstein had almost walked out of this meeting, this was a bold move. The deal itself would have been highly favourable to Germany, but Chamberlain was almost certainly aware that a total German withdrawal from Samoa was unlikely to be accepted.

That day two other important events took place, firstly the Transvaal issued its ultimatum to the British which ensured the outbreak of the South African War, increasing Britain's desire to clear the diplomatic decks. Secondly, the Admiralty passed its judgement, only requested on 6th October, on the value of the various groups in question. It is remarkable that this advice had not been sought earlier. Goschen had already given the Admiralty's informal response as early as 7th October; The Samoan group was useless from a naval perspective, except for the island everyone agreed was to be American. Tonga was of vital importance and had a good harbour; the

604 Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 9/10/1899, *GP*, XIV pt.2, No.4105, pp.656-8

other small islands were only useful for landing the Pacific cable.⁶⁰⁵ Certainly Chamberlain acted as though he were also aware of this information but on 9th October the official and more detailed response arrived and allowed him to complete his understanding of what was at stake. Effectively, as Kennedy describes, the value of the Samoan Group versus the Tongan Group underwent an immediate reversal.⁶⁰⁶ The next day Chamberlain met with Eckardstein and finally felt confident enough to trap the Germans. He made two different suggestions; the first was based upon the proposal made just the day before, but with a couple of options upon how best to divide up the Solomons and Gilbert islands; the second option was that Germany would retain the whole of Samoa but would leave the Soloman Islands, Tonga, the Neutral Zone (apart from Yendi) and her extraterritoriality in Zanzibar. The first was more favourable to Germany but required her to totally give up Samoa, the second was more favourable to Britain and, given the new information on Tonga, could possibly be squared with the Dominions. Chamberlain even drew attention to this in his meeting, stating that the first proposal was “more businesslike” and appropriate to Germany’s real interests; the second was in sympathy with Germany’s “sentimental interest” in Samoa. While he went on to say that he preferred the first option, it is clear that Chamberlain was well aware of how important that sentimental interest was. In either option, Tonga would remain British while the Colonial Secretary had certainly made a strong offer as part of his trap; the most important concession to Britain in either case.⁶⁰⁷

Salisbury and Chamberlain had also discussed the matter on 10th whether Chamberlain had told Salisbury of his second plan or not is difficult to discern. However Salisbury had noted upon the first option that he thought it “impossible” that Germany would give up both Samoa and Tonga.⁶⁰⁸ It was unlikely that Chamberlain had failed to see that his first and reportedly

605 Goschen to Salisbury, 7/10/1899, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Goschen/99-01/; see MacGregor to Villiers, 7/10/1899, Confidential with 2 enclosures FO83/1781 for the official admiralty estimation of the Pacific islands in question.

606 Kennedy, *Samoa*, pp.211-5

607 Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 10/10/1899, *GP*, XIV pt.2, No.4106, pp.658-660

608 Min., Salisbury, 11/10/1899 quoted in Kennedy, *Samoa*, p.217

preferred option was impossible. Salisbury wanted to attempt to negotiate on the first proposal but Hatzfeldt put off seeing him. Kennedy also felt that Salisbury would have disapproved of the second proposal.⁶⁰⁹ This only becomes likely in light of the misreading of the Prime Minister's desire not to offend Manchester and Liverpool. At the start of discussions in October Salisbury had preferred not to give up the Volta however, the threat that the 'bad cop' was about to take over discussions again increased the pressure on the Germans to arrange a deal with Chamberlain. Eckardstein certainly preferred Chamberlain's mode of procedure "to lay everything open on the table and discuss matters openly in a business-like way" over "the old principles of diplomacy that is to say the game of hide and seek".⁶¹⁰ The Germans asked for some more time, which Chamberlain, being in no real hurry, was happy to accept, but he played upon German fears they should accept his first option. Hinting that if they wanted the second it may fall to Hatzfeldt to force it upon Salisbury warning that they would not be able to rely upon support from the Cabinet as they only supported a decision in which Germany left Samoa.⁶¹¹ The Germans were left with the distinct impression that the second option was, in Chamberlain's view, less favourable to them and harder to achieve in London. Chamberlain's trap was set; he was certain that he got what he wanted whichever option the Germans chose. With Option A, New Zealand and Australia would be indebted to London, Tonga would remain British and all other points of contention would be wrapped up to the detriment of Manchester and Liverpool, although he had insisted that British Merchants would be subject only to the same tariff conditions as German ones. With Option B, he obtained the withdrawal of Germany from Tonga and the Solomon Islands which could appease Antipodean opinion, while securing the best parts of West Africa. Materially the second option was much in Britain's favour.

The Germans opted for the second proposal. Tirpitz made a case to support retention of Samoa, he did so clearly on political grounds rather than economic or even strategic ones. Bülow believed that the group meant too

609 *Ibid.*, p.216

610 Eckardstein to Chamberlain, 12/10/1899, JC7/2/2B/9

611 Kennedy, *Samoa*, p.222 based upon the London Embassy records.

much to the German people, that he was too committed by his record in the *Reichstag* to give the group up and finally because of what it meant to the Emperor. Tirpitz's opinions had only strengthened Bülow in his views. Even though the *Kolonialrat*, hastily convened to discuss the matter, admitted the first proposal was superior it still opted for Samoa on prestige and idealistic grounds. The London Embassy was instructed to approach Chamberlain with a view to accepting an amended version of his second option. They wanted to retain a small part of the Solomon group, so as to recruit labour for plantations in Samoa, and offered the Savage Island and Extraterritoriality in Zanzibar as compensation.⁶¹² Chamberlain accepted this agreement but warned against any more concessions and finally Hatzfeldt met with Salisbury and discussed it.⁶¹³ The Cabinet met three days later and approved the scheme, so long as some small changes to the verbiage could be arranged. All the prior concerns that this solution would be unacceptable to Salisbury proved quite unfounded.⁶¹⁴ Salisbury did drag out the negotiations, ensuring that all the details were in order and to Britain's satisfaction. He knew that even in these little details Britain had a strong bargaining position as he was almost certainly aware that the Tsar and his foreign minister were arriving in Germany on 8th November. The Germans were horrified at what they assumed were Salisbury's delaying tactics; the Kaiser bombarded the British Military Attaché with his displeasure:

Your Government in England appears to have two heads, Lord Salisbury and Mr. Chamberlain, and the one will not do what the other wants. With Mr. Chamberlain the negotiations proceed smoothly and quickly and an agreement could be come to with him very rapidly, but what he agrees to Lord Salisbury refuses to sanction, and so the affair is dragged out for months and months. [...] Does England not want my friendship, about the only one left her on the Continent? Some day when she is in trouble she will find that German patience had been tried too long.⁶¹⁵

612 *Ibid.*, pp.217-24; Bülow to Hatzfeldt 18/10/1899, *GP*, XIV pt.2, No.4109, pp.663-4

613 Eckardstein to Chamberlain, 27/10/1899, JC7/2/2B/13-15 all of the same date; Salisbury to Gough, 27/10/1899, *BD*, I, No.151 & 2, pp.127-8

614 Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 1/11/1899, *GP*, XIV pt.2, No.4117, pp.673-75

615 Grierson to Gough, 6/11/1899, *BD*, I, No.154, pp.129-30

However it had been Chamberlain in Cabinet and from the Colonial Office who had insisted on waiting for US and Australian approval. Many of Salisbury's 'quibbles over trifles', based upon details in West Africa and in Samoa, had also originated from Chamberlain's department.⁶¹⁶ If the Germans had noticed that the British Government had two heads, they failed to see that they had been working for the same goal, essentially a settlement that was in Britain's interests. The Admiralty memoranda which rated Tonga so highly and Samoa so poorly, was decisive only in that it confirmed Chamberlain and Salisbury in the desirability of the group and provided them both with the means to appease Dominion opinion and confidence that Britain was not left without a strategic point.⁶¹⁷ It is a pity that this had not be requested earlier as Hatzfeldt's original suggestion was based upon Germany leaving Tonga in exchange for Britain leaving Samoa. This was offered to Balfour back in 1898 before Salisbury had even returned to the Foreign Office.⁶¹⁸ It is also clear that between them Chamberlain and Salisbury, with their 'bad cop/good cop' routine, extracted far more from the Germans than they could have achieved alone. While the surviving documentary evidence is not conclusive, it appears quite reasonable to assume that the two British statesmen worked together and were in near constant communication. Chamberlain does not appear particularly pro-German, he was prepared to pay highly to defend the sub-Imperial pretensions of the Dominions, but he offered his second proposal unprompted and seems to have understood that Samoa held much more importance to the Germans than the value of the islands truly warranted. He thus trapped the Germans in two important respects. Firstly, either option held important concession to Britain, and secondly, he had managed to clear up almost all outstanding colonial issues between the two governments. This meant that it was very unlikely that he or any other British statesmen would be prepared to offer any more concessions, on account, for better relations later. By choosing the Samoa option Germany had used up her leverage, and at a time when it was at a premium, just as

616 CO to FO, 2/11/1899, FO58/334 see also; Kennedy, *Samoa*, pp.246-7

617 MacGregor to Villiers, 7/10/1899, Confidential with 2 enclosures FO83/1781

618 Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 2/09/1898, *GP*, XIV pt.2, No.4032, pp.570-1

the South African War was starting. Eckardstein acknowledged this when he wrote to Chamberlain. Bülow and Hatzfeldt wished to thank the Colonial Secretary for the arrangement "which does not only settle the Samoa question, but abolishes every colonial antagonism between the two countries. They are both fully alive to the fact that without your intervention this settlement would have been utterly impossible".⁶¹⁹ It should be carefully noted that if this settlement did abolish every reasonable colonial antagonism and if Chamberlain did not expect to be able to 'help' the Germans again later, then the currency for purchasing an alliance had run out. Even Balfour's careful approach had very little he could give way on now, except perhaps more agreements of the type of the Anglo-German convention on Portugal's Colonies, where he had effectively given away someone else's territory. Given that the British did not anticipate major concessions being granted at the 'psychological moment' as the supposedly inevitable Anglo-Russian war began, any Anglo-German alliance needed to be bought immediately or at least very soon; they had used up all the available currency. Also Chamberlain's 'new diplomacy' had actually found a solution and quickly. Whatever criticisms had been levelled at him as a diplomatist in the previous year his negotiation tactics, including making himself unavailable at certain times, had been fully vindicated in the Samoan dispute. Kennedy claims that Chamberlain's real aim became clear due to the number of times he broached the idea of an Anglo-German alliance with Eckardstein. However just the page before it had been admitted that Eckardstein "was often guilty himself of the grossest exaggeration and of reporting what he wished to believe", and his references to support such a claim rely on a single telegram and Eckardstein's memoirs. A wish "to maintain the friendliest relations possible with Germany for the future" should not be construed into an all encompassing desire to enter an alliance.⁶²⁰ Garvin also references the same section of Eckardstein's memoirs but he noted that while Chamberlain

619 Eckardstein to Chamberlain, 9/11/1899, JC7/2/2B/16

620 Kennedy, *Samoa*, pp.247-8 quote on 247; see note 30 on page 248, the reference to a GP telegram is in error, No.5153 is in Vol 17 but it only discusses Chamberlain's hints that an agreement on Morocco could be made; Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, 30/10/1899 quoted in Kennedy, *Samoa*, p.248

still wanted German friendship, the Colonial Secretary had warned that a "settlement with France and Russia" was possible.⁶²¹ Chamberlain was still certainly in favour of an alliance, which the Prime Minister never was, but his enthusiasm had started to wane. Eckardstein was also an advocate and had already filled Chamberlain's head with the notion that the Kaiser was more sympathetic to an Anglo-German agreement than his ministers. The two men were more than prepared to stretch the truth to gain what they wanted; it is uncertain whether Chamberlain genuinely believed the Samoan settlement would pave the way for an Alliance. However, it is certain that he would have taken one if it were offered. Therefore, the Kaiser's visit to England and Chamberlain's meetings with both him and Bülow, would give the Colonial Secretary an opportunity to test both men personally, and their supposed feelings towards Britain.

The solution of the Samoan dispute came in time for the Kaisers visit to Windsor. This greatly pleased the German Emperor who very much enjoyed his visit. The visit was welcomed by the British too, with the *Daily Mail* going so far as to exclaim that "A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed".⁶²² Bülow travelled with his august master in the hopes of preventing him from getting carried away by any talk of an Anglo-German alliance. The Kaiser was to meet all three heads of British policy, Balfour, Chamberlain and Salisbury but the death of Lady Salisbury prevented the Prime Minister from attending. Whatever Chamberlain had hoped may be achieved by sounding out the visitors and architects of German policy, Bülow, having got what he wanted in Samoa, had already reverted to his free hand policy. Despite Hatzfeldt's desire that they do what they could for Chamberlain, Bülow replied coolly that the Colonial Secretary could ask for no more, the Kaiser's visit was enough to ensure no continental coalition would form.⁶²³ Essentially there would be no change from Germany's policy of strict neutrality. Chamberlain either made no note of his own about his meetings

621 Garvin, *Life*, III, p.496-7

622 Quoted in Kennedy, *Antagonism*, p.242

623 Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 15/11/1899 and Bülow to Hatzfeldt of the same date, *GP*, XV, Nrs.4396-7, pp.409-13

with the Kaiser and Bülow, or they have been destroyed or lost and so we must rely upon the German records.⁶²⁴

Chamberlain and Bülow discussed the future of Anglo-German relations only vaguely. This was in line with Holstein's instructions to avoid any hint of an alliance. Chamberlain discussed his desires to see an Anglo-German-American arrangement come into being; a scheme which he believed would secure the peace of the world by bringing together the forces of the world's biggest economies. Bülow warned that this could not, to begin with, be directed against Russia, but if Chamberlain wanted such common action then he should try to remove any causes of friction between Germany and the US. Chamberlain was happy to support German aspirations to build the Baghdad Railway. As the Kaiser expounded to Balfour that he would rather see the Russians damned than let them into Asia-Minor augured well. Chamberlain admitted again his concerns about Russian penetration in China, but was told seemingly emphatically that Germany could do nothing against Russia, that she wished to live in peace with her, that Germany did not need the British and so an alliance was unnecessary. Chamberlain and Balfour were told that continuing on a case-by-case basis, such as on Samoa and the Portuguese colonies, was the best way to proceed. Chamberlain was left with the clear indication that Germany knew that an Alliance was "impossible; but an *understanding* yes. Then when a question arises which only interests England, Germany would not interfere and vice versa- but so soon as the question involved common interest we should stand and act together."⁶²⁵ Chamberlain suggested an agreement on Morocco may be possible, this idea had originally been Hatzfeldt's, but the German astutely suggested negotiations should wait until Chamberlain was ready, but that Chamberlain could not do anything that would rouse

624 Bülow to *Auswärtigen Amtes*, 24/11/1899, *GP*, XV, Nr.4398, pp.413-20; Garvin, *Life*, III, pp.503-5 contains a translation of part of the original document. However, Garvin rearranged the document into the form of a conversation but this still remains an easily accessible English language version of the document; for the 'Windsor talks' in general see Grenville, pp.277-281; Langer, pp.656-8; Charmley, P.274; Bülow B., Voigt F. A. (trans.) *Memoirs of Prince Von Bülow*, I, (4 vols, London,1931) pp.357-85,

625 Bülow to *Auswärtigen Amtes*, 24/11/1899, *GP*, XV, Nr.4398, pp.413-20; ; Bülow, *Memoirs*, I, pp.360-67; Memo., Bigge, 20/11/1899 quoted in Grenville, p.281

Salisbury's ire. Earlier in the month the Colonial Secretary reinforced the good cop/bad cop image that the Germans, with his encouragement, had developed with regard to himself and Salisbury. It would be better to negotiate these issues, such as Morocco, with him first rather than make any premature approaches to Salisbury.⁶²⁶ In Windsor the Germans seemed prepared to discuss the matter with Chamberlain via the Embassy as they had over Samoa, but Hatzfeldt noted later in the New Year that the situation had remained still because he had not received any instructions to discuss it. Bülow put a question mark next to this in the marginalia.⁶²⁷

The most important point was that Chamberlain came away believing that the time was not right for a full alliance; that until Russian interests collided with German interests, Germany would do nothing to offend her. However, this must have frustrated the Colonial Secretary who clearly saw that Russian penetration in China would adversely affect German interests as well as the British. However, the Germans believed this problem was "decades!" away.⁶²⁸ Chamberlain also looked forward to an anti-German response in Russia as the former began to penetrate Asia-Minor with her railway projects, which he had encouraged during the 'Windsor Talks'. Chamberlain was left with the impression that so long as he could maintain good Anglo-German relations all he needed to do was wait for German interests, in the Orient or the Far East, to collide with the Russians and then an alliance would have become possible on reasonable terms. It is entirely reasonable to consider that Balfour came away from the 'Windsor Talks' with a similar conclusion.

That Chamberlain and Salisbury were on closer terms is evident by their public speeches. After the Hatzfeldt/Chamberlain talks the two had indulged in a very public display of their differences. After the Samoan agreement and even the commencement of the South-African war, Salisbury felt no need for a repeat. His speech at the Lord's Mayor's Banquet, focused on the advantages of the Samoan agreement, the

626 Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtigen Amtes*, 3/11/1899, *GP*, XVII, Nr.5153, p.297

627 Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtigen Amtes*, 21/05/1900, *Ibid.*, Nr.5159, pp.303-307

628 Wilhelm's note on Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, 26 Apr., 1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1, Nr.3793, quote on p.226 which referenced the content on p.222

unlikelihood of foreign interference in South Africa and the exceptionally warm relations between Britain and the US. The most significant points made, were based upon his incomprehension of why the Germans were so attached to Samoa and another disparaging reference to the power of public opinion, as expressed in newspapers, and his "great confidence that I do not believe that that trend of opinion affects the peoples of foreign countries, and I am quite certain that it does not affect their Governments."

⁶²⁹ Perhaps if the Prime Minister had less confidence in foreign Governments being invulnerable to the pressure of their own publics he could have understood the German Government's attachment to Samoa somewhat more fully. More importantly however, there was nothing in this speech which implied or directly criticised Chamberlain, a marked difference from the 'Dying Nations' speech the year or so before.

Chamberlain also gave a speech in November 1899 and this ranks among his greatest mistakes. Garvin stresses that Chamberlain had been unwell prior to giving the speech but nothing can really forgive his inability to anticipate the response.⁶³⁰ As in his great 'Ransom' speech, during his 'Jack Cade' period, where the use of the word ransom was unfortunate, so too in this speech did he mis-use the term 'alliance' when he claimed that between the US and Britain there was already a "union- the alliance, if you please- the understanding between these two great nations is indeed a guarantee for the peace of the world." He then espoused the birth of a "new Triple Alliance between the Teutonic race and the two great branches of the Anglo-Saxon race." An alliance with Germany was the "natural" one, because there were few real conflicts of interests between the two nations. He also went on to describe common cultural similarities; a similarity in the system of justice, literature and even the basis of language. However, in his private diplomacy and while he searched to find a solution of the Port Arthur crisis, Germany had been Chamberlain's last port of call. Had Japan been perhaps more forthcoming, his Leicester speech may have been full of references to the communal interests of two island nations, which thus

629 "The Lord Mayor's Banquet." 10/11/1899, *The Times*, p.7.

630 Garvin, *Life*, III pp.506-10

formed a 'natural' identification with one another. Whether Chamberlain believed in the racial ideas of his time is hard to discern, he only mentioned such concepts directly when speaking to the public, which often harboured racist concepts and ideas. Whether he too believed these concepts or just attempted to exploit a popular notion cannot be answered here.⁶³¹ He finished his section on foreign policy with an attempt to contain the fallout that the use of the word alliance would cause. This demonstrates that regardless of whether he was ill or not he had anticipated the public's reaction to his choice of words.

I have used the word 'alliance' sometimes in the course of what I have said but again I desire to make it clear that to me it seems to matter little whether you have an alliance which is committed to paper or whether you have an understanding which exists in the minds of the statesmen of the respective countries. An understanding, perhaps, is better than an alliance, which may stereotype arrangements which cannot be accepted as permanent in view of the changing circumstances from day to day. An understanding, a determination to look favourably upon the motives of those with we desire to be on terms of friendship—a feeling of that kind, cultivated, existing and confirmed by all these three countries will, I am certain, be to their enormous advantage, and I believe, whether they think it themselves or not, will also be to the advantage of the other nations.⁶³²

Naturally no official in the US could acknowledge that deep cultural similarities existed between America and Britain, whether described as such or as a racial affinity. It is relatively clear that Chamberlain was expecting his comments to be taken in the full context of his speech, which strongly curtailed his meaning when he had mentioned an alliance. However, American and German complaints, made in response to excerpts wired ahead of the full text of the speech, were easily foreseeable.⁶³³ In the speech itself, the Colonial Secretary had commented that he wanted a deal with the people, and the Governments, of the two nations and not with press opinion; he expected his intended audience to forgive the use of the

631 Grenville, p.281-2; Mock W., "The Function of 'Race' in Imperialist Ideologies: the Example of Joseph Chamberlain" in Kennedy P.& Nicholls A (eds.), *Nationalist and Racialist Movements In Britain and Germany Before 1914*, (Oxford,1981), pp.190-201; Otte, China, p.137

632 "Mr. Chamberlain At Leicester." 1/12/1899: *The Times*, p.7.

633 Metternich to Bülow, 19/03/1900, *GP*, XV, Nr.4456, pp.484-500

term once they had dwelt upon how he had defined it. The only plausible reason why he would have run such a risk was hinted at in Hatzfeldt's initial thoughts on it.⁶³⁴ Chamberlain was attempting to build upon his 'Long-Spoon' speech by continuing a public discourse on alliances, and thus he believed he was helping to prepare the British public for such commitments. The German situation and therefore response was more complex; Bülow would now be accused by sections of the German public of having said and done more at Windsor than he had. He also still needed to exploit Anglophobia to ensure the passage of the Second Navy Bill while trying not to offend Chamberlain.⁶³⁵ Chamberlain also believed that Bülow had asked him to speak upon Anglo-American-German relations. This he expressed to Eckardstein and Lascelles and so he waited for Bülow to respond; he hoped this would recover something of the mess his own ill judged utterances had caused.⁶³⁶ Chamberlain had plenty of reasons to expect aid from this quarter, not only because of his expectations arising out of the talks at Windsor, but also because Eckardstein wrote to him ensuring him that both the Kaiser and Bülow welcomed his Leicester speech.⁶³⁷ The German Foreign Minister did not do this however, on 11th December Bülow spoke in the *Reichstag* and dwelt upon how Germany was on friendly terms with everyone, but when he spoke of England he also interjected a call for building a stronger fleet. If Chamberlain had made an embarrassing blunder, Bülow's reaction was inexcusable. Not only did he abandon the one Cabinet member who the Germans believed was warmest toward Germany, but he also revealed to anyone paying close enough attention that the Second Naval Bill was primarily aimed at curbing the influence of British naval power.⁶³⁸ Chamberlain responded coolly, he told Eckardstein

634 Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, 2/12/1899, *Ibid.*, Nr.4401, pp.422-6

635 Kennedy, *Antagonism*, p.239-40

636 Chamberlain to Eckardstein, 1/12/1899, Eckardstein H., *Lebenserinnerungen u. politische Denkwürdigkeiten*, II, (Leipzig, 1919) p.111-113 reproduction in Chamberlain's hand. Chamberlain to Lascelles 12/12/1899, quoted in Garvin, *Life*, III, p.512.

637 Eckardstein to Chamberlain, 5/12/1899, JC7/2/2B/17

638 Bülow, Reichstag Speech, 11/12/1899, quoted in Langer, p.660

and latter Metternich that as things stood, and regardless of his personal feelings, the chances of better Anglo-German relations were dwindling.⁶³⁹

Chamberlain's own words had stalled the progress, if any could have been made anyway, of his plans. No conversations on Morocco commenced, Anglo-German relations slowly became more embittered over the preceding months and years of the South African War. Whether the Colonial Secretary had been operating against Salisbury, or alongside him, during the Samoan dispute, his ability to manoeuvre at all subsequently dried up. Both the embarrassment caused by the reception to the Leicester speech and the response in both Germany and Britain to the taking, by the Royal Navy, of German mail packets headed for Delagoa Bay, constricted the opportunities for any kind of improvement in relations between the two countries. Bülow could not ignore German public opinion and indeed needed to exploit it to pass the Kaiser's Second Navy Bill. Eckardstein tried to mollify Chamberlain that Bülow still held to a much warmer personal opinion on the future of Anglo-German relations but effectively the Colonial Secretary had damaged his own stock by overestimating how well he could qualify his statements.⁶⁴⁰ With the general and acute Anglophobia generated by the South Africa War dominating public opinion in both the US and Germany, there was nothing that could be done even if all the statesmen involved had wanted to sign a treaty at that time. Chamberlain would have to wait and hope that future events would assist in bringing about better circumstances.

639 Chamberlain to Eckardstein, 28/12/1899, Garvin, III, p.513, retranslated from the German printed in, Eckardstein, II, p.125, the provenance of the letter is questionable, no copy exists in an English archive and Eckardstein did not choose to print this letter in facsimile; Metternich to Bülow, 19/03/1900, *GP*, XV, Nr.4456, pp.484-500

640 Eckardstein to Chamberlain, 17/12/1899, JC7/2/2B/19

6: When dreaming ends: Chamberlain and the turn to Empire.

Chamberlain's public folly at Leicester had left the Colonial Secretary at low ebb. His ability to manoeuvre in foreign policy was suddenly curtailed. While public humiliation would not have worried him particularly, the polite but serious concern his Cabinet colleagues had shown, under pressure from the Germans, during the Samoan Crisis dried up.⁶⁴¹ Germany had been appeased and her neutrality was supposedly now ensured. While these simple truths would have reduced Chamberlain's freedom of action, there were two other factors making further 'dining room' *pourparlers*, over Morocco or any subject, practically impossible. The South African War, which would become known as 'Joe's War', not only filled his time with departmental work, but also tied up his reputation and his standing. December 1899 was therefore a vital month, while it is well documented that Milner and Chamberlain had foreseen the military problems encountered in South Africa, and thus had come to understand that a long war was a certainty, 'Black Week' brought this home to a shocked nation.⁶⁴² Right at the very end of the month discussions of any kind which dealt with the Germans would have been absurd given the storm blown up over the taking of German mail packets headed for Delagoa Bay. during the Windsor talks Chamberlain had also been plainly told that Germany was not prepared for an alliance and would not risk her Russian relations in order to achieve one. The Colonial Secretary held out hope that either in China or in Turkey, the Germans and the Russians would eventually cross each other. This perhaps would change German resistance to offending the colossus. This was a misreading of German interests; Chamberlain approached these concepts as a British politician and had accepted German officials' personal

⁶⁴¹ Kennedy, *Samoan*, pp.245-6

⁶⁴² Milner to Chamberlain, 9/11/1899, referenced in Garvin, III, p.520 suggests significantly more troops would be required to win, and Chamberlain to Milner, 6/12/1899, demonstrated that Chamberlain had already recognised the deficiencies of British strategic doctrine in South Africa, and recognised that South African tactics of hit and run could draw the conflict out indefinitely.

exclamations of friendship with Britain at face value. The result was a misunderstanding; he expected Germany to respond to threats against her Chinese or Ottoman interests in a similar manner to how Britain would respond to pressures on her own interests. Maintaining Britain's interests in China was vital. If Britain was thrown out or her trade driven off this would have caused considerable economic damage and dislocation all over the Empire. Germany's interests were more speculative, her power and economy would not have been vastly reduced if she had been contained in Shantung, or thrown out of China completely however, there was still much she hoped to gain there. If she sided with the British, in order to defend their interests in the Yangtze, and received support in the areas Chamberlain had offered back in 1898, she would indeed have achieved a great expansion of the Emperor's domain, but only at the cost of her relations with the Tsar. Given that ultimately siding with Tsar could have allowed her to expand His Imperial Majesty's possessions at Britain's expense, without running the risk of a two front war in Europe, it is not difficult to see why Chamberlain's expectations were almost bound to be disappointed. Likewise in Turkey, if Germany had to give way before Russia she would only have lost potential interests and certainly nothing vital, unlike the British who had always valued the land connection to the Indian sub continent. Chamberlain was not entirely blinkered to this he just hoped that as these interests developed, then, as with Samoa, Germany may have been forced for domestic and prestige reasons to resist the Russian Bear. All this made for keeping a low profile and waiting upon events, with the war in South Africa taking up so much of his time, for once, he was able to sit upon his hands.

It was not until September 1900 that Chamberlain once again engaged meaningfully with foreign policy. His experience during that period and after it started to colour his determination to avoid isolation. There were issues despite the obvious South African War, which kept Chamberlain busy during this time. The Australian Colonies were preparing for federation and in West Africa colonial forces were stuck fighting the War of the Golden Stool. However, it was the Colonial Secretary's experience of the Boer *imbroglio* that accelerated the development of his ideas on how to solve the

problems of Britain's overextension. Even before 'Black Week', Canada and the Australian colonies had arranged to send troops to support the British in South Africa. They had many reasons for doing so, some out of loyalty to the Empire, others were of a more nationalistic bent; a demonstration of nations coming of age and a *quid pro quo* for the ongoing protection that the British tax payer supplied to the mostly independent states.⁶⁴³ After the reverses in December 1899 even more help was forthcoming. Canada could not wrangle effectively with the US over their borders if Britain's power was perceptively diminished. Australia could not secure her trade links if a permanent threat to the Cape persisted. Therefore even more effort was expended after 'Black Week' demonstrated that the struggle to secure the Empire was real rather than merely symbolic.⁶⁴⁴ Significantly Canada and Australia, with their own 'frontiersmen' provided mounted infantry by instinct and thus helped ease, while also aping, one of the British army's biggest deficiencies. . By February 1900 Chamberlain's opinions on the future of British security were shifting, while an escape from isolation was still preferred, he started to return to his ideas of Imperial Federation but upon an accelerated timeline. In the House of Commons he started to give utterance to these forming conceptions:

Sir, we shall have in this war before it is over an army of colonials called to the aid of Her Majesty who will outnumber the British army at Waterloo, and who will be nearly equal to the total British force in the Crimea [...] and these people shortly [...] about to become great and populous nations, now for the first time claim their share in the duties and responsibilities as well as the privileges of Empire. Accordingly you have the opportunity, now that you are the trustees, not merely of a Kingdom, but of a federation [...] which exists already in spirit at any rate. [...] Meanwhile, we are finding out the weak spots in our armour and trying to remedy them; we are finding out the infinite potential resources of the Empire; and we are advancing steadily, if slowly, to the

⁶⁴³ Penny, B. R. "Australia's Reactions to the Boer war – A Study in Colonial Imperialism", *JBS*, Vol. 7, No.1 (Nov. 1967) pp.97-130; Miller, C. "Loyalty, Patriotism and Resistance: Canada's Response to the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902", *SAHJ*, Vol.41, No.1 (2009) pp312-23

⁶⁴⁴*Ibid.*, pp.318-20; Penny, "Australia's", pp.106-20.

realisation of that great federation of our race which will inevitably make for peace and liberty and justice.⁶⁴⁵

While Chamberlain was 'distracted' with his duties, foreign affairs were not quiet. While Salisbury endured the rumours of continental coalitions with magnanimity, other members of the Cabinet were not so impervious to these perils.⁶⁴⁶ More serious were rumours of Russian manoeuvres in central Asia, which Britain had no means of opposing even if she were not bogged down in South Africa.⁶⁴⁷ At the same time the British press also managed to stir up a French invasion scare.⁶⁴⁸ It was in this atmosphere that news of the Boxer rebellion in China arrived in London.⁶⁴⁹ Salisbury tended to treat this news only in so far as it might affect the relations of the Powers, including a disturbed attitude to the landing of troops in response to the legations requesting support. His response was somewhat hampered by MacDonald's own lack of concern with the seriousness of the developing situation. By early July 1900 communications with Peking were cut off and British policy making was "living on rumours and conjecture".⁶⁵⁰ Salisbury failed to perceive that there was any real threat from China herself, just ten days before the legations came under siege, he telegraphed the Queen to confirm that "Russia, not China, seems to me the greatest danger of the moment."⁶⁵¹ While Salisbury had anticipated the dangers that were to follow the re-establishment of order, he had failed to realise the seriousness of the Chinese threat itself. He continually tried to ignore the problem, prevent military co-ordination with the other Powers and even preferred to avoid sending more troops. Salisbury was very much the main obstacle to Britain forming a response. Chamberlain, who had shown such a keen interest in China during the previous crisis, remained quiet. Why this should be is easily apparent, not only was he busy with South Africa and his own besieged legation in West Africa, but the Cabinet were highly active in

⁶⁴⁵ Chamberlain, 5/02/1900, Hansard, *PD*, (4), LXXVII, cc.609-624

⁶⁴⁶ Kennedy, *Antagonism*, pp.241-2; Grenville, pp.269-90

⁶⁴⁷ Neilson, pp.207-10

⁶⁴⁸ Langer, pp.662-4

⁶⁴⁹ *The Times* start to carry news of the rebellion from late March onwards.

⁶⁵⁰ Sanderson to O'Connor, 26/06/1900, quoted in Otte, *China*, p182. Otte gives a clear picture of the problems British Policy was facing.

⁶⁵¹ Salisbury to Victoria, 10/06/1900, *LQV*, III, p.561

trying to form a response. Troops from India were arranged and dispatched but this was mostly the work of Hamilton at the India office rather than Salisbury.⁶⁵² By July senior ministers' opinions of Salisbury's response and position were telling. Curzon described him as "A strange powerful, inscrutable, brilliant, obstructive dead-weight at the top". Hamilton also informed the Indian Viceroy that: "We are all most unhappy about China. We cannot get the Prime Minister either to state a policy, or to adopt a definite line. He seems disposed to let things settle themselves, [...] heaven knows where we shall finally drift."⁶⁵³

Salisbury's undersecretary at the Foreign Office, Brodrick, continued throughout June to try and push Salisbury into working with the Russians and Japanese. Eventually he managed to convince the Foreign Secretary to send more troops, but fearing the results of any military co-operation with Russia, Salisbury refused to any agreement on organisation or overall command. Brodrick had even enlisted Balfour and Goschen to assist and reported his failures to his more senior colleagues: "Arthur[Balfour] & Goschen threw up their hands ... practically saying, either Ld S must be upset wh[ich] none of us will do, or nothing will be done." The Japanese also refused to take independent action without knowing that Britain and/or Germany would have her back as this would be "resented by Russia and probably lead to a collision".⁶⁵⁴ Salisbury retired to Hatfield and only emerged once it became known that the legations were still alive but remained besieged.

The details of each movement, whether diplomatic or military, are interesting but not necessary to understanding Chamberlain's reactions to them. Essentially busy with his own wars, and aware that other members of the Government were hounding Salisbury, he was content to stay quiet and let exasperation with Salisbury grow. With several thousand soldiers, of various nationalities, on route to China there still remained the problem

⁶⁵² Otte, *China*, p.184

⁶⁵³ Curzon to Brodrick. 19/07/1900 quoted in Charmley, p.277; Hamilton to Curzon, 20/07/1900 quoted in Otte, *China*, p.193

⁶⁵⁴ Brodrick to Curzon, 22/06/1900 quoted in Otte, *China*, p.187; Whitehead to Salisbury, 25/06/1900, Salisbury MSS 3M/A/126 quoted in Nish, pp.84-6 quote on p.85

of who was to be in command. First the Russians proposed that command of the allied forces in Chili should be brought together under one person while reserving Russian freedom of action to secure her railway and interests in Manchuria. They did also admit that others would do likewise in their own areas of interest in China. Here was an invitation to extend the Scott-Muravev Railway agreement into unofficial spheres of influence, with the essential capital province of Chili under international control. At the same time, the Germans decided to make their own bid for control, Eckardstein let the Foreign Office know that Germany would be gratified if Britain proposed a German general for overall command. According to the erstwhile German official both proposals were discussed in the same Cabinet, though if so, Salisbury made no mention of it to the Queen, probably to forestall further pro-German pressure being thrust his way. The Russian initiative fell apart as Salisbury and the Cabinet demanded that the objectives, military and political, together with the rules of engagement would have to be worked out in advance., This caused Lamsdorff, then in temporary charge of Russian Foreign Affairs after Muravev's death, to back down. Russia was not ready for any large and expensive engagements in China.⁶⁵⁵

The German manoeuvres were more interesting. Hatzfeldt's telegram home, after the Cabinet meeting, demonstrated that only Balfour and Chaplin had been in favour of meeting the German proposal.⁶⁵⁶ Lascelles also reported that Britain was unlikely to propose a German commander. The Germans were disappointed and specifically mentioned Chamberlain's lack of intervention.⁶⁵⁷ This should have warned Berlin that the Colonial Secretary's affection was waning. Salisbury and Lascelles both explained to the Germans that after the Kaiser's bombastic speech in which he had dubbed his troops the new 'huns', it would now be unlikely that they could put British troops under German command.⁶⁵⁸ Sanderson also thought

⁶⁵⁵ Otte, *China*, pp.189-93; Neilson, p.210; Nish, pp.88-9

⁶⁵⁶ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 20/07/1900, *GP*, XVI, Nr.4579, p.62

⁶⁵⁷ Derenthall to Hatzfeldt, 31/07/1900, *Ibid.*, Nr.4595 p.75

⁶⁵⁸ "The Powers And The Situation.", *The Times*, 30/07/1900, p.5; Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 31/07/1900, *GP*, XVI, Nr.4596, pp.75-77; Lascelles to Salibury, 1 and 9/08/1900, FO64/1494

public opinion "would not have understood our initiating the proposal", due to recently strained Anglo-German relations, if "any Power was to make the proposal the Russians were much the best."⁶⁵⁹ The Kaiser sent a telegram to the Tsar asking for his agreement, which was duly received the next day and so the Germans did get their Field Marshall in command.⁶⁶⁰ Salisbury's lack of policy was causing ever more serious dissention and Balfour, Goschen and Chamberlain's seeming inaction was exacerbating the problem. Hamilton believed the administration "wants badly new blood, and the Prime Minister is tired and absolutely ... out of touch with public opinion".⁶⁶¹ It was hardly surprising these concerns were becoming more frantic and were starting to be directed at a wider target than simply the Foreign Secretary. At the Cabinet meeting of the 9th August, called to discuss whether to place British troops under German command given that Russia, France and Japan had appeared prepared to do so, Salisbury was opposed by all the senior ministers present. Brodrick reported that Devonshire, Chamberlain, Lansdowne, Balfour, Goschen and Hamilton were in favour of accepting German command. Yet still they agreed to a compromise solution where British troops were placed under German 'supreme direction' rather than command.⁶⁶² Even when the whole senior Cabinet was arrayed against Salisbury he still managed to avoid having to give a straight answer.

The international force, managing quite well without a German supreme commander, entered Peking on 14th August and relieved the legations. As already noted Russia was not fiscally prepared for a prolonged engagement and so they withdrew within two weeks. The Kaiser was furious, despite having been warned in advance, having helped the Tsar to put Manchuria in his pocket, the German Emperor felt he had been left in the lurch; this "outrageous impertinence" was Germany's "reward for loyal behaviour".⁶⁶³ Therefore the Germans turned to Britain to rescue them from the potential embarrassment of having a Field Marshall arrive to lead a force that no

⁶⁵⁹ Sanderson to Scott, 20/08/1900 quoted in Otte, *China*, pp.194-5

⁶⁶⁰ Bülow to Wilhelm, 5/08/1900, *GP*, XVI, Nr.4601; Wilhelm to Bülow, 6/08/1900, *Ibid.*, Nr.4602, pp.81-84

⁶⁶¹ Hamilton to Curzon, 8/08/1900 quoted in Otte, *China*, p.194

⁶⁶² Brodrick to Hicks Beach, 9/08/1900 quoted in *Ibid.*, P.196

⁶⁶³ Wilhelm to Bülow, 21/08/1900, *GP*, XVI, Nr.4615, pp.95-6

longer existed, and to prevent the Powers from settling with China too quickly and individually. Whilst the embarrassment of the former requires no explanation, the later is worth discussing briefly. As Kennedy notes the Germans wanted to prevent the *early* disintegration of China. If the Celestial Empire was carved up even into spheres of influence in 1900, then Germany would end up shut into Shantung.⁶⁶⁴ In response the Kaiser attempted to open negotiations on what would eventually become the Yangtze Valley agreement. He dropped some hints to Lascelles and the Prince of Wales in a meeting on 22nd August. The Emperor revealed his concerns that Britain may drop the 'Open Door' policy, not only in the Yangtze but also in general, in favour of Imperial Preference as demonstrated by Canada's small preference. As "German commercial interests were second and not far inferior to those of England in the valley of the Yang-tsze" he hoped the British Government would make a "formal undertaking" to "maintain the policy of the open door, they would find the German Government on their side."⁶⁶⁵ However, the British did not respond quickly, firstly Salisbury was out of the country, and secondly the vagueness of what was requested allowed those with concerns over Germany's ultimate aims to ignore the suggestion. This second reason was disingenuous, Lascelles report, as quoted above, clearly states that the Germans were asking for a formal undertaking to maintain the open door in the Yangtze River valley, where German interests were apparently not far behind Britain's. This should also have alarmed the British, as it revealed that the Germans were more concerned with securing their rights and access to what Britain considered its most important informal sphere of interest in the world.

In Salisbury's absence decision making had been delegated to a Cabinet Committee, made up of Hamilton, Lansdowne and Goschen. Goschen and Hamilton were both in favour of working more closely with the Germans generally, Hamilton had previously admitted that he would "prefer to be allied; if allies are necessary, which I think they are", with the Germans

⁶⁶⁴ Kennedy, *Antagonism*, P.242-3; Grenville, p.312; Bülow to Wilhelm, 30/06/1900, *GP*, XVI, Nr.4699, pp.199-00

⁶⁶⁵ Lascelles to Salisbury, 24 Aug 1900, *BD*, II, No.8, pp.7-9

whereas Goschen was more cautious but still preferred to work with them.⁶⁶⁶ Salisbury remained obdurate, explaining that he did “not see what he[The Kaiser] has to do with it, and his observations look very much like an attempt to make a quarrel between France and us.”⁶⁶⁷ Goschen attempted to dispel what had always been of one Salisbury’s firmest held beliefs “as we certainly mean to keep an open door, we might as well say so, & I did not see how this particular step would embroil us with the French, as you believe is the object of the German Emperor.”⁶⁶⁸ If the formal undertaking was merely a promise to maintain the open door in the whole Yangtze region then Goschen’s analysis that France would not object seems logical. However, if in any agreement on the Yangtze or any part of China, formally recognised exclusive rights for either party then as Bertie argued, France would very possibly start to make trouble for Britain in the southern most regions.⁶⁶⁹ Salisbury’s memorandums remained powerfully insightful all the way up to his eventual retirement from politics, however, the discontents in Cabinet would probably have interpreted such intransigence as more evidence of how “Grandpa Smallweed” was becoming set in his ways.⁶⁷⁰

Salisbury was unconvinced and replied to Goschen that a much more detailed proposition was required, what did the ‘open door’ mean to the Germans, and what exactly did having ‘Germany on our side’ mean?⁶⁷¹ Bertie too, was convinced that “mere ‘open door’ or ‘open port’ and tariff declarations are not likely to satisfy her.”⁶⁷² Goschen appealed to both Balfour and Chamberlain for help to move Salisbury into at least discussing the matter further with the Germans. This had been encouraged by Bülow who had asked Lascelles when Germany could expect a response.⁶⁷³

⁶⁶⁶ Otte, *China*, p.199; Grenville, p.313 Hamilton to Curzon, 27/04/1900 quoted in Otte, *China*, p.200; Goschen to Salisbury, 27/08/1900, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Goschen/1899-00

⁶⁶⁷ Salisbury to Bertie, 24/08/1900 quoted in Grenville, pp.313-4

⁶⁶⁸ Goschen to Salisbury, 27/08/1900, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Goschen/1899-00

⁶⁶⁹ Memo., Bertie, 13/09/1900, *BD*, II, No.12, p.11

⁶⁷⁰ Hamilton to Curzon, 17/08/1899, quoted in Otte, *China*, p.192

⁶⁷¹ Salisbury to Goschen, 29/08/1900, Copy in Balfour MSS, Add.MS49706

⁶⁷² Bertie, Memo, 13/09/1900, *BD*, II, No.12, p.11

⁶⁷³ Lascelles to Salisbury, 30/08/1900, *BD*, II, No.9, p.10; Goschen to Balfour, 1/09/1900, Balfour MSS Add.MS49706;

Chamberlain was presented with some very serious criticism of Salisbury, Goschen's was pretty damning:

I enclose his[Salisbury's] reply to the letter. It makes one despair. A *non-possumus* in every direction. It is quite possible the Emperor has some designs that are not clear: but we shall not thwart them by standing aloof. I do not know that more can be done. If some policy is forced on Salisbury, which he disapproves of, it breaks down in the execution. [...] If I see any opening that may be utilized I would ask you and Balfour to come to London to meet Lansdowne and G. Hamilton, who like myself, are in despair of our present attitude.⁶⁷⁴

The Cabinet were in despair; the next day Goschen wrote that Salisbury's response to Bülow, which asked for more information, was "worse than silence [...] whatever might come from pourparles at Berlin our present attitude does more harm [...] I cannot help expressing myself strongly [...] Absolute isolation is playing the devil." Brodrick also concurred that "Salisbury's reply is characteristic and I think unlucky. We do what is needed and get nothing for it." He also noted that "Arthur[Balfour] generally concurs with you[Chamberlain] re Peking and Germany."⁶⁷⁵ Once again the Cabinet ministers who were unhappy with Salisbury's handling of foreign affairs, were still unprepared to take action to 'upset him'. They turned to Chamberlain and thus he regained the support required to exert himself against Salisbury, had he wanted to. Apart from simply wishing to enlist Chamberlain's support the two service chiefs, Lansdowne and Goschen had little traction on the Prime Minister. Salisbury had recently declined Lansdowne's offer of resignation over delayed army reform, while Goschen had announced that he would retire at the next election which was merely weeks away; neither could therefore apply much pressure no matter how much they wished to.⁶⁷⁶ Once again the 'strong man' of the Cabinet was being given his head as the others despaired of the situation. Chamberlain's response was not, perhaps, quite what one would have expected.

⁶⁷⁴ Goschen to Chamberlain, 1/09/1900, quoted in Amery, *Life*, IV, p.138

⁶⁷⁵ Goschen to Chamberlain, 2/09/1900, quoted in *Ibid.*, p.138; Brodrick to Chamberlain, 7/09/1900, JC11/8/2

⁶⁷⁶ Lansdowne to Salisbury, 27/08/1900, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Lansdowne/1900-02; Goschen to Salisbury, 7/08/1900, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Goschen/1899-00

Chamberlain did not arrange to meet Eckardstein to discuss a solution as had been done over Samoa; in fact he did not meet him at all, and so there was no repetition of the Hatzfeldt/Chamberlain talks, at least not then. When Salisbury appeared to have been at his weakest, Chamberlain chose to do no more than merely write a memorandum. He had little choice as Salisbury had just asked the Queen to dissolve Parliament and the 'Khaki' election was about to begin. While this did not prevent some discussions or foreign policy business, it was hardly the time for the leading Liberal Unionist to be seen or even suspected of acting against the wishes of the Prime Minister. Also Chamberlain would take a highly active role in defending the Government's record during the election.⁶⁷⁷ Anything of the sort would have stirred up issues between the two coalition partners. This must have somewhat frustrated Chamberlain; here was everything he needed, the most important Cabinet ministers had asked him to intervene and the Germans had made the approach apparently because their relations with Russia had become tense. Chamberlain summed up the position in China and what may come of it. Britain's most important interest was the maintenance of "absolute equity of opportunity for trade" which "would, necessarily, preclude any kind of indirect preference, such as more favourable rates on railways". Salisbury's policy which continued "to allow matters to settle themselves" was counterpoised with Russia's underhanded attempt to pose as China's friend, while strengthening her hold on Manchuria and remaining in a menacing position with regards to Peking, through her choice of troop movements. The US should have been prepared to support Britain in her aims at maintaining the "Open Door" but would not lend material aid for what Chamberlain, who was well connected in American politics, believed were electoral reasons. Japan wished to maintain the *status quo* but would demand compensation if Russia aggrandized herself. France would follow Russia's lead and had some ambitions in the south. Britain could not simply acquiesce in the Russian suggestion that they allies should withdraw to the coast; public opinion would not understand it, it would not accelerate negotiations with the Chinese Government and further outrages, perhaps extended to the

⁶⁷⁷ Garvin, *Life*, III, pp.593-607; Marsh, pp.496-504

viceroys who had been “friendly to foreigners”, could occur. The majority of the memorandum was dedicated to the position Germany had assumed. Germany was out on a limb, the “idiosyncrasy of the Emperor” had left her with a mission to avenge the death of their Minister (shot dead as the siege of the legations began), a German Field Marshal *en route* to lead an international force in a war which some members of that international community believed was over, coupled with an ambition to carve out “a second India” for the *Reich*. Russia’s actions were “a poor reward for the diplomacy which snubbed us[Britain] [...] to please Russia. But, if he[the Kaiser] is to escape from his humiliation, he must largely rely on us to save him.” If Britain agreed to reject the Russian proposal to withdraw, it was likely Japan and the US would follow suit. He concluded that as an alliance between Germany and Russia was “the one thing we have to dread” therefore “the clash of German and Russian interests, whether in China or Asia Minor, would be a guarantee for our safety.” Ultimately it was in Britain’s “interest that Germany throw herself across the path of Russia.” This rather ignored that either directly, or via her allies, Germany already lay across Russia’s path in Eastern Europe. The Colonial Secretary’s closing paragraph called for encouraging better Anglo-German relations and to capitalise upon the current tension between Russia and Germany on one hand, and Russia and Japan on the other. In return for letting these two Powers know that Britain would not oppose German expansion in Shantung and Japanese in Korea, he hoped they would be prepared to formally recognise Britain’s claim to predominance in the Yangtze Valley. “We[Britain] are not likely ever to want to take possession of any territory in the interior ourselves; but we ought to try to for some understanding which will keep off all others, and make it easy to maintain the ‘Open Door’ in at least this, the most important, portion of the Chinese Empire.”⁶⁷⁸

Otte believes there is an implicit contradiction between the desire to maintain the “absolute equity of opportunity for trade” and the desire, in

⁶⁷⁸ Memo., Chamberlain, “The Chinese Problem.” 10/09/1900, CAB37/53/65 or JC14/4/1/1

the case of the Yangtze at least, to "keep off all others".⁶⁷⁹ Chamberlain assumed that Britain's industrial and commercial power was such that she would be able to maintain her impressive lead in the share of the commerce of the Yangtze valley without the need for artificial measures. His proposal clearly related to preventing the spread of rival European power, or their possession of Chinese territory, than "shutting the door to the Yangtze to all but British commerce." Otte also thought that this implication, of shutting out rival trade, "adumbrated Chamberlain's later imperial preference arguments."⁶⁸⁰ This seems to miss that the Colonial Secretary's later ideas for imperial preference did not start as an attempt to close Britain's export markets to rival competition. This would stand against the evidence of every agreement he negotiated with the French and the Germans where ensuring reciprocal tariff treatment for contracting parties' nationals was an essential concern in the negotiations. Such concerns were included in the West Africa agreement with France, the Anglo-German Agreement on Portugal's colonies and the Samoan agreement. Chamberlain's imperial preference scheme would entail the closing of the British home market, the only free trade market in the British Empire, in order to encourage trade with her dependencies by offering them a preference and thus drawing them into closer political as well as economic union. This also envisaged the reciprocal relaxing of the tariffs on British goods imported into colonial markets. He would no more have considered the Yangtze an area suitable to be drawn into a closer political union with Britain as he would have considered it suitable for annexation. Similarly he had no plans to include other areas where Britain's interests were merely commercial, such as South America. Chamberlain's Yangtze plans cannot be seen as a harbinger of his scheme for imperial preference as the aims of that scheme were political in essence, where his concern in China was commercially driven and only ever political in the negative sense of preventing other Europeans from gain and then exerting political control as a means of damaging Britain's commercial interests.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁸⁰ Otte, *China*, p.207

The memorandum appeared to break the impasse, or rather Salisbury finally had to face direct criticism from an important member of the Cabinet, who *could* do irreparable damage to the Government, owed the Prime Minister no favours, was quite capable of airing his differences in public and was certainly not ready to retire. Balfour could prod the Foreign Secretary but he would not force an issue upon his Uncle. It is doubtful that Chamberlain's memorandum convinced anyone, except perhaps himself, but it did enable other Cabinet ministers to strengthen their opposition to 'allowing things to settle themselves' while hiding, again, behind the Colonial Secretary.

Despite Bertie's best efforts, Salisbury was forced to open negotiations for the ill fated Yangtze agreement.⁶⁸¹ Given how Germany needed an agreement quickly and urgently, Britain should have been able to get a better deal than they did.⁶⁸² This advantage may have been lost when Salisbury committed a serious, though understandable blunder. This accident occurred when the Germans objected to the Foreign Secretary's counter proposal to defend the 'open door' in the whole of China. Salisbury offered to remedy this suggesting that the offending article should be limited to south of the 38th Parallel. This actually drew a line around 120 miles south of even Peking. Lascelles gently chided him that he hoped the "line you draw will include Shantung".⁶⁸³ However, the Liaodong Peninsula, upon which Port Arthur sat, comes down reasonably close to the 38th Parallel, though it is still some 45 miles north of it. It is clear that Salisbury intended to exclude the area covered by the Scott-Muravev agreement, as otherwise he could have simply referred to Manchuria specifically in answer to the German objection. In the end the ruinously vague language of "uphold the same[the Open Door] for all Chinese territory as far as they can exercise influence" was agreed. Both Governments refrained from using the present crisis to "obtain for themselves any territorial advantages" and

⁶⁸¹ Memo., Bertie, 13/09/1900, *BD*, II, No.12, p.11

⁶⁸² Lascelles to Bertie, 15/09/1900, Lascelles MSS FO800/17 quoted in Otte, *China*, p.208 and see pp.208-15 for a detailed description of the negotiations.

⁶⁸³ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt* 2 & 9/10/1900, *GP*, XVI, Nr.4728, pp.230-1 and Nr.4737 pp.240-2 respectively, Bülow to Hatzfeldt, 3/10/1900, *Ibid.*, Nr.4729, pp.231-2 Lascelles to Salisbury, 5/10/1900 Salisbury MSS 3M/A/121/61

“reserve to themselves to come to a preliminary understanding as to the eventual steps to be taken *for the protection of their own interests in China*” if any other Power did. The other Powers were to be asked to agree with these principles.⁶⁸⁴ The agreement was clearly of little use; the evolution of the phrase “as far as they can exercise influence” clearly demonstrated that the Germans wanted nothing to do with opening doors in Manchuria. Furthermore, all that was promised to be done in the event that another Power, say Russia, took territorial advantages, for example by demanding the right to militarily occupy the whole of Manchuria while also occupying a railway line mortgaged to British bond holders, was to merely have a good ‘preliminary’ chinwag about how to protect their own interests, which in the situation just briefly described, were on the German side negligible.⁶⁸⁵ John Hay, Secretary of State in the United States, an anglophile, upon reading the agreement and then making discreet enquiries derogatorily describes it as “a horrible practical joke on England.”⁶⁸⁶ Chamberlain appeared to be pleased and welcomed the agreement: “I think that events are slowly tending to draw us closer together & to separate Germany from Russia”.⁶⁸⁷ However, Chamberlain was by nature an optimist and had not been privy to the exact details of the negotiations and thus was unaware of how the territorial limits had been agreed. The Colonial Secretary had greeted all the Anglo-German agreements with hope, even the Convention upon Portugal’s colonies which he would have preferred to have never been concluded.

Just as the agreement was being signed, Russia continued to occupy more parts of the Newchwang railway in the Chinese capital province of Chili, and claimed it by right of conquest.⁶⁸⁸ On 3rd November the British formally protested and Anglo-Russian relations entered a dangerous phase. Over the next few weeks the Russians strengthened their hold on Manchuria while the British maintained their protests. Also, Salisbury had been forced

⁶⁸⁴ English Draft Agreement, as finally Settled. Enc. In Salisbury to Lascelles, 15/10/1900, *BD*, II, No.17, pp15-6 emphasis mine.

⁶⁸⁵ Neilson, pp.210-8; Kennedy, *Antagonism*, pp.243-4, Monger, pp.21-30

⁶⁸⁶ Quoted in Langer, pp.702-3

⁶⁸⁷ Chamberlain to Balfour, 21/10/1900 quoted in Otte, *China*, p.214

⁶⁸⁸ Otte, *Ibid.* p.223; Neilson, p.212

to relinquish the seals of the Foreign Office and Lansdowne now took the helm of British foreign policy; given his timid anti-isolationist stance over the previous few years this augured well for Chamberlain's desire to see Anglo-German rapprochement. Lansdowne protested Russian actions over the railway, however, shortly after desiring to "return to the charge" he found the situation further complicated.⁶⁸⁹ On 3rd January 1901 *The Times* reported that Russia and local Chinese officials had signed an agreement which allowed "the resumption of Chinese civil administration under Russian protection" in the southern most province of Manchuria. Once similar agreements, governing the other two Manchurian provinces, were signed the whole area would "be a *de facto* Russian protectorate".⁶⁹⁰ What followed was a 'war in sight' crisis, at the exact moment when the vast majority of Britain's forces were engaged in South Africa, and her finances were becoming extremely strained, both Neilson and Otte are right to emphasise that British diplomacy was caught between two crises, Boxer and Boer.⁶⁹¹

At this point Chamberlain started to become more active, since writing his memo, he had kept abreast of what was happening but had remained relatively still, trusting to the new head of the Foreign Office. However, several events in January concerned him and he chose to intervene again. On 12 January, alarmed by Russian actions in Manchuria, Hayashi asked Lansdowne whether he would join Japan in making a joint request for information as a first step towards formally protesting; Lansdowne declined. The main reason for not acting against the Manchurian agreement immediately was due to the situation on the spot. Waldersee was, at the time, negotiating for the return of the occupied rail line to British control and as the Russians were still occupying parts of Tientsin and raiding the rolling stock, Lansdowne feared that protesting too much would provoke them to break off negotiations with the German Field Marshal and encourage further acts of 'brigandage' upon the stocks of a company

⁶⁸⁹ Min, Lansdowne on Hardinge to Lansdowne, 14/11/1900, FO65/1602

⁶⁹⁰ "Russia And China." *The Times*, 3/01/1901, P.3; Monger, pp21-4; Nish, pp.112-4; Grenville, pp329-32 & 336-9; Neilson, p.214; Otte, *China*, pp.233-5

⁶⁹¹ Neilson, p.216; Otte, *China*, p.215

mortgaged to British bondholders.⁶⁹² While Lansdowne had good reason to respond carefully to Russia, who apart from Japan was able to project the greatest power into China, having to wait upon Waldersee had the appearance of allowing the matter to drift. After all, delayed action could result in simply allowing Russia to denude the Chinese Northern Railways (CNR) at her leisure. Lansdowne had been determined, back in November, that he could not "allow matters to drift indefinitely".⁶⁹³ To other observers, such as Chamberlain, that determination had become difficult to spot as the situation got materially worse, not only in Manchuria but also over the railway issue. Two months of Lansdowne's 'determination' had merely resulted in more rolling stock being sent to Manchuria, new strategically important areas of Tientsin being occupied and then an agreement harbinging an informal Russian protectorate of the whole of Manchuria. This inaction appeared no more masterly than Salisbury's had. Chamberlain, in consultation with Devonshire again took action and on the 16th January informally met with Eckardstein at Devonshire's seat; Chatsworth House. According to the German report back to Berlin, again the only surviving account of the meeting, Chamberlain had acknowledged that 'splendid isolation' was over and that Britain would have to choose between the Dual and Triple Alliances. Chamberlain and other Cabinet ministers were in favour of the German connection but if that proved impossible then an agreement with Russia would have to be reached, regardless of the potential cost in China and Persia. Chamberlain offered to move towards this slowly, starting with a secret agreement dealing with Morocco once Salisbury left for the south.⁶⁹⁴ The Colonial Secretary's ultimate aim was "that Germany should throw herself across the path of Russia" but this time rather than lay out all that he wanted openly, as he had during the Hatzfeldt/Chamberlain talks, he did not mention his ultimate aim at all and neither did he appear hurried.⁶⁹⁵ The Colonial Secretary also

⁶⁹² Count Hayashi Tadasu, Japanese Ambassador to Britain (1900-1906); Min. Lansdowne on Bertie to Lansdowne, 12/01/1901, FO17/1499; Nish, p.112; Neilson, p.214; Otte, *China*, p.235

⁶⁹³ Min. Lansdowne on Hardinge to Lansdowne, 14/11/1900, FO 65/1602; Otte, *China*, p.225

⁶⁹⁴ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 18/01/1901, *GP*, XVII, Nr.4979, pp.14-16

⁶⁹⁵ Memo., Chamberlain, "The Chinese Problem.", 10/09/1900, JC14/4/1/1

made play on the alleged friction between Salisbury and himself. While still Prime Minister, Salisbury would continue to exercise great influence on foreign policy, however it was by no means guaranteed that he would prevail against Lansdowne if the new Foreign Secretary was prepared to pursue an agreement with Germany. Chamberlain was continuing to defend his position as the person Germany should go to for a fair hearing. Hatzfeldt read his message right, Chamberlain was willing to work slowly towards an alliance but he also thought that the Colonial Secretary was offering to take the initiative once Salisbury had left.⁶⁹⁶ The note that he was willing to join the Triple Alliance remains dubious, Eckardstein and Hatzfeldt worked on these reports before sending them back to Berlin, and, as on previous occasions, they adapted what the Colonial Secretary had offered, in order to be more tolerable to Bülow and the German Foreign Ministry. A few months later Rothschild would remind Eckardstein that Chamberlain had been after "quite a new grouping of the world".⁶⁹⁷ This was in line with the Colonial Secretary's view, espoused in the 'Long Spoon' and Leicester speeches, that ultimately he wanted an Anglo-American-German Alliance. Finally the timing was all important, this meeting took place, just as Lansdowne had rejected the Japanese initiative over Manchuria but before the German interpretation of the 'Open Door' agreement had been tested. Chamberlain was hoping that the prospect of Britain's benevolence in other matters, such as Morocco, could help warm the Germans to taking a stronger line based upon that agreement.

There was little enough prospect of this initiative achieving anything. Bülow decided to leave the ball in Chamberlain's court. Citing slights over Samoa, the South African war, and even Britain's decision to support Portugal, he explained that distrust of Britain had grown. Germany must wait until all British hopes of both American assistance and improved relations with the Dual Alliance had died, only then would Britain be prepared to pay Germany's price. Germany must listen without granting anything and

⁶⁹⁶ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 18/01/1901, *GP*, XVII, Nr.4980, pp.16-17

⁶⁹⁷ Rothschild to Eckardstein, 14/06/1901, quoted in Amery, *Life*, IV, pp.157-8

without revealing her friendly words disguised an ill intent.⁶⁹⁸ However, Bülow failed to account for growing distrust on the part of the British. He was also unaware that Salisbury's sentiment that the "you[Germany] demand too much for your friendship" was shared by Chamberlain who agreed that "unless they[Germany] are able to modify the opinion they have formed of the value of their neutrality, we must certainly look elsewhere for allies."⁶⁹⁹ Whatever Chamberlain hoped to achieve it was interrupted by the death of the Queen. The Kaiser made his moving pilgrimage to her bedside but did not see Chamberlain at all despite being in Britain for a full two weeks.⁷⁰⁰ While he was in Britain the German Emperor did meet Lansdowne and gave him an odd lecture in which he described a future where Russia and the US combined to force the Europeans out of Asia, and in which the Europeans banded together to thwart this grouping. Thus England would have to choose which grouping to side with and help detach France from her unsatisfactory alliance and win her back for Europe.⁷⁰¹ This grandiose scheme revealed to Lansdowne and probably by proxy to Chamberlain, made it clear that Germany was not interested in any Moroccan deal, and that she looked forward to an Anglo-America split, which no member of the Cabinet would countenance.

This was Chamberlain's last attempt to personally affect Anglo-German relations, at least in a positive way. He was not done with foreign policy

⁶⁹⁸ Bülow to Hatzfeldt, 20/01/1901, *GP*, XVII, Nr.4981, pp.17-8; Britain had reaffirmed her ancient treaties with Portugal back in October 1899 (see *BD*, I, No.118), and Britain had sent a squadron to Lisbon, in December 1900 to take part in celebrating the fact. There was nothing explicitly preventing Britain from doing so in the Anglo-German Convention on Portugal's African Colonies, in fact that convention had been made in order "to preserve her[Portugal's] integrity and independence" which was certainly compatible with affirmation of the ancient Anglo-Portuguese treaties. (See *BD*, I, No.90) However, the territorial guarantee, interpreted as extending to Portugal's colonies, did seem at odds with the spirit of the Anglo-German Convention. This revealed the grasping nature of Germany diplomacy and her annoyance that Britain would not do all in her power to hasten events to that end.

⁶⁹⁹ Salisbury to Lascelles, 11/05/1898, FO64/1436; see also, Bülow to Hatzfeldt, 14/05/1898 *GP*, XIV.pt.1, Nr.3796, pp.230-3, n.* on pp.230-1 mentions Hatzfeldt to Bülow (No.384), 12/05/1898, which contains Salisbury's quote; Chamberlain to Salisbury, 25/07/1898, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Chamberlain/98-99/135

⁷⁰⁰ Amery, *Life*, IV, pp.147-51; Grenville, pp.335-5; Monger, pp.22-3; Otte, *China*, pp.238-40

⁷⁰¹ Wilhelm to Bülow, 29/01/1901, *GP*, XVII. Nr.4987, pp.24-9

and his concerns over Britain's geo-strategic position had not been resolved. Britain still had an extensive Empire, and even wider sprawling interests, which needed to be defended if she were to hold her own in the world. Germany was proving difficult; her constant hot and cold attitude was bound to eventually put the Colonial Secretary off working with her. After each agreement professions of friendship abounded, claims that all points of difference had been cleared up were common, and assertions that brighter Anglo-German relations were about to begin were made, but each time they did not materialise.

Three forces thus pulled British Far Eastern policy into a vortex. Firstly that the "South African entanglements make it impossible for us to commit ourselves to any obligation which might involve us in war, unless we can assure ourselves that any obligation which we might incur would be shared by another Power".⁷⁰² This ensured that Britain could make no firm commitments or take independent action to resolve her Far Eastern quarrels. She would not even approach the Manchurian issue until an end to the occupation of the CNR was resolved. This was the main stream which brought the remaining two forces to act upon British Policy. Out of all the Powers involved in China, only two were capable of sharing any of those obligations; Germany and Japan. Lansdowne would attempt to work with both. Germany acted as a brake on proceedings, wishing to avoid any sign of a quarrel with Russia her replies to the other two Powers, Britain and Japan, were occasionally contradictory and often tried to avoid a plain statement of their lack of intent to take any action over Manchuria. This was because German policy would have been happy to see a Russo-Japanese War, especially if it was supported by Britain but could not afford to endanger her relations with her eastern European neighbour. The Anglo-German Convention acted as an anchor too, for while it remained untested it was left to each Power to imagine how far Germany would adhere to it. Therefore, it implied German opposition to Russian actions in Manchuria. The British were well aware that they "may be able to work with Germany to our advantage in China so long as we do not expect her to

⁷⁰² Lansdowne to Lascelles, 18/03/1901 quoted in Otte, *China*, p.261

run her head against the Manchurian wall", but this was in essence what Lansdowne would actually do.⁷⁰³ Whereas Germany was the brake, Japan acted as an accelerator. The British were sensitive to Japanese feelings and did not wish to "drive her to a policy of despair, in which she may come to some sort of terms with Russia [...] and our interests would greatly suffer if she did."⁷⁰⁴

Japan repeatedly asked Britain to join her in joint diplomatic action, firstly to make enquires at St. Petersburg about Russian intentions, then in demanding that China make no unilateral agreements, then again towards China in order to encourage her to resist Russian demands.⁷⁰⁵ Lansdowne wished to encourage Germany to join with the two other naval Powers. He side stepped the initial Japanese request though he asked Berlin for their opinion, with the second request Berlin concurred, and with the third request Britain advised Japan to wait until China requested mediation.⁷⁰⁶

The third Japanese enquiry suggested that Britain and Japan should promise China material aid in order to defend her territory from Russian encroachment.⁷⁰⁷ Otte describes the details of what followed.⁷⁰⁸ During the discussions on how to respond to this Japanese *démarche* Salisbury penned a memorandum which encouraged the idea of Japan and Britain offering a guarantee of China's coastline.⁷⁰⁹ Some historians have seen in this memorandum the seeds of the 1902 Anglo-Japanese alliance.⁷¹⁰ However, Otte, draws a comparison with the Second Mediterranean Agreement of 1887, which he believes "provided for cooperation in defence of a geographically delimited status quo, without incurring any binding

⁷⁰³ Min., Bertie, 29/12/1900, FO 17/1451

⁷⁰⁴ Memo., Bertie, 11/03/1901, *BD*, II, No.54, p.43

⁷⁰⁵ Neilson, p.214; Otte, *China*, pp.239-41; Nish, pp.113-4

⁷⁰⁶ Lansdowne to Lascelles, 17/01/1901, FO800/128; Lansdowne to Lascelles, 12/02/1901, *BD*, II, No.30 p.24;

⁷⁰⁷ Macdonald to Lansdowne, 15 Feb 1901, FO46/542

⁷⁰⁸ Otte, *China*, pp.242-246

⁷⁰⁹ Salisbury to Lansdowne, 16 Feb 1901, FO 17/1500

⁷¹⁰ Young L. K., *British Policy in China, 1895-1902*, (Oxford, 1970) p.295; Nish, p.113

commitments for Britain in anticipation of a stipulated situation.”⁷¹¹ While the Mediterranean agreements lacked any precisely stipulated situations they certainly described general ones. Article five made it clear that the agreement forced Turkey to refrain from and resist certain incursions and article 8 added the stipulation that she could not become complicit or connive to allow such encroachments. Article 7 and 8 required the signatory Powers to “immediately come to an agreement as to the measures to be taken” if Turkey was resisting and would be justified in a “provisional occupation by their forces, military or naval, of such points of Ottoman territory as they may agree to consider it necessary” in the case that she was not.⁷¹² In the preamble to the second agreement it was agreed that this “intended to confirm the principles established by the aforementioned exchange of Notes[The First Mediterranean Agreement] and to define the common attitude of the three Powers in prospect of the eventualities which might occur in the Orient”.⁷¹³ The Second Agreement did not ignore the Articles of the first, which were vaguer than the second but still called upon the contracting Powers to “promise one another mutual support in the Mediterranean in every difference which may arise between one of them and a third Power” and “to prevent any change, which, under form of annexation, occupation, protectorate, or in any other manner whatsoever”.⁷¹⁴ While the Mediterranean agreements may not have bound Britain to any specific action, it certainly placed upon the British Government, grave commitments to act in specific circumstances. As the British, at the time, believed their interests would require them to intervene in Turkey anyway, the extra obligations were less onerous. However, at the time, they did believe they were capable of acting decisively, even if they had to act alone. In the Far East and while still at war in South Africa at the very least, this was certainly not true. The Mediterranean Agreements ensured Britain would have allies if she had to intervene in the Ottoman Empire; the proposed Anglo-Japanese Agreement was designed to threaten

⁷¹¹ Cary A., & Pribram A.F., *The Secret treaties of Austria-Hungary, 1879-1914*, (2 Vols., Cambridge, 1920) I, pp.94-103 and 125-133 for the text of the First and Second Mediterranean Agreements respectively; Otte, *China*, p.244

⁷¹² Pribram, *Treaties*, I, pp.125-7

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*, p.125

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.95-7

Russia without Britain having to take military action, which she certainly could not do. It was a proposal for a highly geographically limited agreement which anticipated the joint defence of the area it covered.⁷¹⁵ The Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 actually had more in common with the Mediterranean Agreements than with a general alliance. It was limited to a large, but specific geographical area: China and Korea. It permitted them to take action if their interests were threatened by the aggressive action of another Power or from disturbances arising from within China or Korea themselves. It promised support if either Power was involved with more than one other Power, the Mediterranean Agreements had stipulated "mutual support" if there were differences with even just one other Power, but did not explicitly mention war.⁷¹⁶ The Anglo-Japanese Alliance required frank consultation upon any action to be taken, as the earlier agreements required and both announced that the contracting parties had no aggressive tendencies in the areas the contracts covered. The principal difference was that war was explicitly mentioned in the Anglo-Japanese Alliance while the Mediterranean Agreements only implied it, with descriptions of certain military actions given as examples of what it permitted.⁷¹⁷ That Alliance was still some distance away when Salisbury suggested his North China coast agreement. Salisbury more than any other member of the Cabinet was aware of how the negotiations for the Anglo-German Yangtze agreement had gone, he knew full well that Germany considered Manchuria to be outside of its remit. The proposed Anglo-Japanese Agreement would have covered some of the area missing from the earlier one. Certainly Salisbury was taking the situation very seriously and envisaged agreements with potentially heavy commitments.⁷¹⁸ Lansdowne still hoped to convince the Germans to interpret the Yangtze agreement in a boarder sense and so rejected both Salisbury's ideas and Japan's request for a vague pledge to give China material support.⁷¹⁹ Lansdowne advised the Japanese to wait for

⁷¹⁵ Salisbury to Lansdowne, 16/02/1901, FO 17/1500

⁷¹⁶ Pribram, *Treaties*, I, p.97

⁷¹⁷ For the text of the First Anglo-Japanese Alliance see Nish, pp.216-7

⁷¹⁸ Otte, *China*, p.244

⁷¹⁹ Lansdowne to Bertie, 17/02/1901, FO 17/1500

the Chinese to ask for assistance. This the Chinese did on 1st March 1901.

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Lansdowne immediately started to prepare an initiative which began by applying diplomatic pressure on the Russians. He asked Germany and Japan to agree to jointly request the terms of the Manchurian Agreement as the first step towards mediating the Sino-Russian disagreement.⁷²¹ Before waiting to hear from Tokyo and Berlin Lansdowne made his request of Russia, the Russians refused with:

considerable warmth [...] even if terms had been definitely fixed and he[Lamsdorff] had them in his portfolio before him, he would consider it incompatible with the character of an independent State in negotiation with another to communicate the details to a third party [...] and he feared that the Emperor[the Tsar] might finally lose patience.⁷²²

Berlin also made the situation even more awkward; Germany left the initiative to Britain and Japan, whose interests were more directly involved, which Lansdowne recognised "obliges us to proceed with extreme caution".⁷²³ British diplomacy was then directed to try and illicit from the Germans whether they would be prepared to, in the event of a Russo-Japanese war, declare neutrality so long as France remained neutral. The Germans were annoyed, "[t]he English should finally say what they themselves intend to do, instead of repeatedly asking others." Naturally, Bülow and Hatzfeldt expected the mere promise of German neutrality to paralyse the French even in the event of a Japanese-Anglo-Russian conflict, French neutrality would be preserved due to "Germany holding a rifle" to her in Europe.⁷²⁴ German irritation with British reticence to commit themselves rather ignored that they were already deeply committed elsewhere in the world. Britain would end up irritating the Germans even more. On 9th March 1901 the Japanese handed the British copies of two

⁷²⁰ Neilson, p.215; Langer, pp.714-16; Monger, pp.24-32; Grenville, pp.336-43; Otte, *China*, pp.246-7

⁷²¹ Lansdowne to Lascelles, 1/03/1901 FO244/596

⁷²² Scott to Lansdowne, 7/03/1901, *BD*, II, No.48, pp.39-40

⁷²³ Lascelles to Lansdowne, 7/03/1901, FO64/1524; Lansdowne to Lascelles, 9/03/1901, FO64/1523 quoted in Monger, .p25

⁷²⁴ Hatzfeldt to *Auswärtige Amt*, 8/03/1901, *GP*, XVI, Nr.4829 and nd. pp.341-43

telegrams, the first suggested that Germany had offered Japan "benevolent neutrality" and promised that "this attitude of Germany will keep French fleet in check, while England will probably support Japan." The second telegram contained Hayashi's instructions to discover if Britain had consulted with Germany, whether the British thought the Germans were in earnest and how far could they rely on British support in the case that "Japan finds it necessary to approach Russia?"⁷²⁵

Lansdowne needed to discover whether the Japanese impression of Germany's position was accurate in a climate where the Germans were getting rather testy about being asked their intentions without Britain offering the same openness.⁷²⁶ The Foreign Secretary decided to attempt to give a lead to the stalled situation and proposed to the Cabinet that Britain ask Germany to join her in a statement of intentions should Japan and Russia come to blows. This declaration contained the promise of naval assistance to the Japanese should any Power join Russia, and neutrality if they did not, while reserving freedom of action to rescue Japan should she be overwhelmed by Russia. Lansdowne hoped that in the very least it should "elicit from Germany a distinct statement of her intentions".⁷²⁷ This draft declaration has been heralded as the first serious step away from the supposed British policy of no alliances during peace time.⁷²⁸ However, while this most certainly was an agreement to make joint war-like action in a stipulated situation, by this stage, it should be apparent that the subtleties of such a test were great. The Mediterranean agreements were not considered as a departure from the policy of avoiding entangling alliances and neither were Salisbury's suggestions of an Anglo-Japanese regional agreement to be considered an alliance. However, this draft declaration is to be considered as "a decisive breach with Britain's traditional diplomacy".⁷²⁹ Otte's corrective that this "was not a draft alliance with Germany", does not fully explain why not.⁷³⁰ While it certainly was of

⁷²⁵ Hayashi to Lansdowne, 9/03/1901, *BD*, II, No.51, p.41

⁷²⁶ Lascelles to Lansdowne, 10/03/1901, FO800/128

⁷²⁷ Memo. Lansdowne, 12/03/1901, CAD 37/56/30

⁷²⁸ Grenville, p.340, Monger, p.27-9, Charmley, pp.283-4

⁷²⁹ Grenville, p.341

⁷³⁰ Otte, *China*, p.257

limited geographical scope it was also disingenuous; Otte is right to point out that Germany joining the declaration “was of largely political value.”⁷³¹ After all the nascent German navy could not be expected to provide much naval assistance to Japan in the event of a third Power joining Russia. However, Germany’s inclusion in the scheme was therefore at odds with the proposed aim of ensuring the conflict remained localised as the only material aid she would bring to the table was in Europe, perhaps that threat was designed to raise the stakes so far as to expect Russia to capitulate; Russia did also share that European border with Germany. Britain was quite capable of lending the required naval force to counter balance France in the Far East but it cannot be admitted that this intervention would remain localised; if Britain joined Japan against the Dual Alliance the conflict could not have been contained. Russia would have had to attempt to force the straits and the French would have been engaging the British in the Channel and the Mediterranean. If the declaration was intended to be taken up, the inclusion of Germany ensured the stakes were so high that France could not come to Russia’s aid. The attempt to include Germany was, as Lansdowne said at the time, to discover the limits to which she would go, to bind her own hands with regards to joining Russia should Japan be getting the worse of it, and to guarantee, as far as possible that France remain neutral by threatening the possibility of a global conflagration if she did intervene. To say nothing of how the situation would escalate if Japan needed to be rescued by the British, the inclusion of Germany in that situation makes more sense. Whether this did or did not represent an alliance, is not the most pertinent point, it certainly contained obligations which could have acted remarkably like an alliance. Otte, sketches the ways this idea had evolved from “Salisburyian precepts” but there comes a point where evolutionary processes result in something new.⁷³² Either, this departure must be seen as some form of alliance, or it should be considered a bluff; a promise made with the expectation of never having to fulfil it. The declaration was also to be secret, how a secret agreement could then have deterred France from coming to Japan’s aid is even harder to imagine.

⁷³¹ *Ibid.*, p.258

⁷³² *Ibid.*,

Lansdowne must have expected the Germans to refuse. It is not hard to imagine why the Cabinet rejected it. Monger believes the pro-German component of the Cabinet could only have rejected this declaration as they were only asked to consider "the tactical question of how best to negotiate with the Germans."⁷³³ However, Chamberlain would never have taken his eye off the wider goal, of closer relations with the Germans. The problem from his point of view would have been that this document ran the risks of an Alliance with none of the benefits. It would constitute a tool against Russia in China, but it did not defend any of Britain's other interests and left it to Japan to wield such a tool. Also Salisbury was reported as being "very much ag[ain]st getting tied to Germany".⁷³⁴ The Prime Minister certainly saw this declaration as going much further than his own suggestion of an Anglo-Japanese agreement, not as a simple evolution of it, he also saw danger in German adhesion. Cranborne, Salisbury's heir, believed Japan was not strong enough to win.⁷³⁵ In that situation Britain would have to rescue them, which in turn would probably have activated the Dual Alliance. In that situation Germany could renege on the secret agreement or gleefully demand whatever price she wished as the psychological moment she had been waiting for had arrived. This was too much for the Cabinet and according to Salisbury they deferred making a decision until they could hear from Germany about her likelihood to adhere to such an agreement.⁷³⁶ Given that Germany had already told the British that they were unlikely to reveal any intentions unless the British did this, too, was bound to return a negative.

The Germans were not slow to reply, Lascelles wired home that the Germans would show the "strictest and most correct neutrality towards all parties".⁷³⁷ Of course in the German mind this automatically ensured the strictest and most correct neutrality of the French too, regardless of the fact

⁷³³ Monger, p.28

⁷³⁴ Brodrick to Selborne, 13/03/1901, Selborne MSS 26

⁷³⁵ Memo., Cranborne, 13/03/1901, Lansdowne MSS, Add.MS88906/17/5; James Gascoyne-Cecil, 4th Marquess of Salisbury, at the time Viscount Cranborne and Parliamentary Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs.

⁷³⁶ Salisbury to Edward, 13/03/1901, CAB41/26/5 quoted in Monger, p.29; Lansdowne to Lascelles, 13/03/1901 FO64/1523

⁷³⁷ Lascelles to Lansdowne, 14/03/1901, FO64/1524

that France could deploy her navy without denuding her borders with Germany. If this was not enough Bülow gave a speech in the Reichstag in which he announced that the Anglo-German Agreement of October 1900 did not concern Manchuria, and that “the fate of that province was a matter of *absolute indifference* to Germany.”⁷³⁸

This public knock back, delivered in an almost nonchalant manner, had wide ranging effects. It immediately destroyed the appearance that there was an Anglo-German-Japanese triplice in the Far East, opposed to Russian pretensions in Manchuria. Lansdowne had to inform Japan, that if they did end up in a war with Russia, the British, like “Germany, would probably remain neutral”.⁷³⁹ Lansdowne believed British actions had been justified as “our South African entanglements make it impossible for us to commit ourselves [...] unless we can assure ourselves that any obligation which we might incur would be shared by another Power”.⁷⁴⁰ It had been essential to test the Anglo-German agreement in order to honestly inform Japan of what was likely to happen if she had proceeded to challenge Russia. More indirectly, as Monger suggests, “it was from this moment that the pro-German sentiment of the Cabinet [...] began to decline.”⁷⁴¹ Lansdowne had to find a new Far Eastern policy and Lamsdorff was not slow to try to take advantage of the breakdown of the triplice. He assured Scott that that Russian demands in Manchuria did not violate existing British treaty rights, and he argued that the Chinese Government should not grant any new concessions to any Power in Manchuria.⁷⁴² These modifications gave the appearance of a way out and Lansdowne decided to try to resolve the matter directly with the Russians. Suddenly, having previously escalated the crisis, and increased the tensions in the region, the Foreign Secretary did not wish to be needlessly provocative about Manchuria, having “already recognized its “gravitation” [towards Russia] for Railway purposes” the British would not be adverse to “any reasonable arrangement of the

⁷³⁸ Lascelles to Lansdowne, 16/03/1901, FO64/1520

⁷³⁹ Lansdowne to MacDonald, 16/03/1901, FO46/538

⁷⁴⁰ Lansdowne to Lascelles, 18/03/1901, FO800/10

⁷⁴¹ Monger, p.29

⁷⁴² Scott to Lansdowne, 18/03/1901 FO65/1620

conditions under which the Russian troops might be withdrawn."⁷⁴³ The issue ultimately came to nothing; Lansdowne gave a speech in the Lords, which Otte describes as constructing "a golden bridge for Lamsdorff over which to retreat" and over the next few weeks, tensions dissipated as the Russians gave up on their Manchurian agreement. As Neilson puts it: "Unable to bribe the Chinese into signing, faced with Japan's unrelenting opposition and Germany's meddling, uncertain of Britain's position and in need of a foreign loan, the Russians had decided to adopt a new course."⁷⁴⁴

Anglo-German relations were a different matter. Just after Bülow had destroyed the basis of Lansdowne's Far Eastern Policy, Eckardstein met with Chamberlain and the British Foreign Minister in separate meetings on 18th March 1901. The case with the Colonial Secretary is suspect; again there are no records on the British side, and only a copy of a telegram in Eckardstein's memoirs on the German. Chamberlain told Eckardstein that his views had not changed since the Windsor Talks, but that as everything that the British said to the Germans was repeated to St. Petersburg, Britain had to hang back and that "he ha[d] no desire to burn his fingers again" with regards to taking part in any alliance talks.⁷⁴⁵ Eckardstein was about to embark on his own clandestine attempt to bring about an Anglo-German alliance by use of, as Kennedy puts it "the simple device of confidentially assuring both sides that the other was eager for one."⁷⁴⁶ As Eckardstein's record of these meetings is the only one surviving, it is possible that he played up Chamberlain's last bid for an alliance, made at Chatsworth back in January 1901, and hence the Colonial Secretary's change of heart appears more abrupt than it truly was. Even according to Eckardstein's retelling of those Chatsworth talks, Chamberlain's proposals seemed much more limited than they had before. It seems likely that between Bülow's rebuff in response to Chamberlain's Leicestershire speech, in December 1900, and his nonchalant dropping of joint action in China, in March 1901,

⁷⁴³ Lansdowne to Scott, 13/03/1901, FO800/140

⁷⁴⁴ Otte, *China*, pp.262-266 quote on p.265; Neilson, pp.217-9 quote on p.218; Monger, pp.31-2

⁷⁴⁵ Eckardstein to Holsten, 18/03/1901, Eckardstein, *Lebenserinnerungen*, II, p.277-8, quoted from the translation in Amery, *Life*, IV, p.153.

⁷⁴⁶ Kennedy, *Antagonism*, p.244

the Colonial Secretary had decided that nothing useful would come from continued hope in Germany. As a man who often paid close attention to public opinion at home, and had been mired in personal attack all through the Khaki election and the reopening of parliament, it is certain that he was aware, and increasingly so, of the intense anti-British feeling demonstrated in Germany.⁷⁴⁷ He was also a busy man, both supporting the inexperienced Brodrick at the War Office and in directing the political side of the South African War.⁷⁴⁸ To give a simple example, on the 19th March, the day after he had met Eckardstein, he presented the Cabinet with a memorandum on the negotiations with Botha which had attempted to find acceptable peace terms to end the guerrilla phase of the South African war.⁷⁴⁹ The circumstances in which Chamberlain had initiated his own talks back in January appeared far more favourable than they did in March when Eckardstein made his attempt. Chamberlain acted when it appeared that perhaps Germany wanted better terms before committing to resisting Russia in Northern China and was probably supported by Balfour and Lansdowne.⁷⁵⁰ Eckardstein made his attempt at the worse possible moment, just as the British had received a shock over the Anglo-German agreement and Monger describes how there "grew up the feeling that Germany had encourage Britain and then [...] left her in the lurch."⁷⁵¹ Eckardstein's attempt therefore met with little enthusiasm from Chamberlain but not yet hostility. In his meeting with Lansdowne the German stand in ambassador, talking only for himself in an unofficial voice, suggested that Germany would be more responsive to a broader and more general agreement, even suggesting a "defensive alliance, directed solely against France and Russia." Lansdowne worried that Germany's long border with Russia would make her an unreliable ally, and that to join in such a way would have entailed "the adoption of an identic foreign policy by both Powers in all their external relations".⁷⁵² The example of the Franco-

⁷⁴⁷ Marsh, pp.496-504; Kennedy, *Antagonism*, pp.246-8

⁷⁴⁸ Marsh, pp.504-6

⁷⁴⁹ Memo. "South Africa: Peace Negotiations" Chamberlain, CAB 37/57/34

⁷⁵⁰ Memo. Lansdowne, 22/11/1900, CAB37/53/76; and 17/01/19001, CAB37/55/9; Tyrrell to Asquith, 16/09/1922, quoted in Otte, *China*, p.239

⁷⁵¹ Monger, p.29

⁷⁵² Memo. Lansdonwe, 18/03/1901 FO 64/1655

Russian alliance was certainly illustrative, at Fashoda, France had been unable to rely on Russian aid, and at Port Arthur Russia received scant support from France; a similar situation could have been the result unless the alliance was very carefully worded, and that did not even consider the difficulties arising out of Germany going to war due to her Triple Alliance obligations. Lansdowne only took the proposal seriously because he believed it may have originated from the Kaiser.⁷⁵³ Eckardstein's *demarche* was unlikely to succeed for several important reasons. Firstly, having suggested to both parties that the other was very eager both were waiting on the other for proposals. Secondly, Bülow's immediate response was to suggest that Britain should join the Triple Alliance and to demand exceptions including the defence of India from the Russians and Alsace-Lorraine from the French, although it appeared he envisioned help if those conflicts widened to include the opponents' alliance partners.⁷⁵⁴ Thirdly, the immediate need for an alliance dropped away in early April 1901 as matters cooled with Russia in the Far East. Fourthly, Chamberlain had refused to engage in another round of his new diplomacy. Eckardstein's plot depended on being able to have frank unofficial discussions, in order to construct a proposal that one side could offer the other as a starting point to official discussions, as had happened in the Samoan settlement. He had also waited until Salisbury, who the Germans assumed was a major obstacle, had left the country before he made his attempt. However, Chamberlain was not prepared to do so again, whether he was motivated solely by his stated concerns that anything that was sent back to Berlin was immediately wired to St Petersburg seems unlikely. During the Hatzfeldt/Chamberlain talks it had been suggested that if Russia thought an Anglo-German alliance was being negotiated then she would launch a pre-emptive war before its conclusion.⁷⁵⁵ Chamberlain could not simply assume this was bluff to put off the discussion and so had to consider that it would not be in German interests to leak such suggestions. More important was the suggestion that he had burnt his fingers enough. It implied that he expected he would be

⁷⁵³ Lansdowne to Lascelles, 1/04/1901, FO800/10

⁷⁵⁴ Bülow to Hatzfeldt, 24/03/1901, *GP*, XVII, Nr.4998, pp.48-9

⁷⁵⁵ Bülow to Hatzfeldt, 3/04/1898, *GP*, XIV pt.1 Nr.3785, pp.204-207

burned again if he tired. The Colonial Secretary no longer thought the arrangement he had preferred was possible. Without someone prepared to go out on a limb Eckardstein's plan was bound to eventually stall. However, because Eckardstein was the acting Ambassador when he made his approach and as Lansdowne wanted to work with Germany where he could, and so wanted to avoid giving Germany any snub, the spectre of negotiations lingered on.⁷⁵⁶ In May 1901 they became more serious, Hatzfeldt had returned to his post and emphatically gave Lansdowne to understand that Britain would be expected to join the Triple Alliance and started to suspect that Eckardstein had been exceeding his instructions.⁷⁵⁷ Lansdowne was awaiting a document from Eckardstein and in his meeting with Hatzfeldt requested the terms of the Triple Alliance.⁷⁵⁸ This was exactly what Holstein had wanted to avoid, it was also what Chamberlain's refusal to assist Eckardstein had all but guaranteed.⁷⁵⁹ Sanderson and Lansdowne drew up a draft convention, in order that the Cabinet could have something "to cut about", but Sanderson had already noticed serious issues with any alliance:

There must be a certain amount of qualifying words to prevent either Party from being dragged into a quarrel of which it disapproves, and in which it would not have the necessary amount of popular support.

These qualifications are likely to be the cause of serious dispute – and the Germans will be much less scrupulous in making use of them to throw us over than we can be in leaving them in the lurch. Our public opinion would not allow it- theirs would.⁷⁶⁰

Worse, the Permanent Under Secretary noted that while Britain would have to guarantee Alsace-Lorraine, it was unclear what Germany would guarantee in return, this was especially true as not even Chamberlain could

⁷⁵⁶ Lansdowne to Lascelles, 11/11/1900, FO800/17; Lansdowne to Lascelles, 29/03/1901, *BD*, II, No.79, p.62

⁷⁵⁷ Lansdowne to Salisbury, 24/05/1901, *BD*, II, No.82, pp.64-5

⁷⁵⁸ Lansdowne to Lascelles and Lansdowne to Eckardstein, 24/05/1901, *BD*, II, No.83 and 84 respectively, pp.65-6

⁷⁵⁹ Holstein to Hatzfeldt, 29/05/1901, *GP*, XVII, Nr.5015, pp.70-1

⁷⁶⁰ Memo., Sanderson, 27/05/1901, *BD*, II, No.85, pp.66-8

any longer harbour hopes that Germany would help contain Russia in the Far East.

Salisbury also wrote a memorandum for Cabinet, which stands as one of the most important documents with regards to understanding his *realpolitik* view of foreign policy. He chose to take aim at the proposition that Britain would join the Triple Alliance. While Sanderson, Lansdowne and certainly Chamberlain had preferred a direct agreement with Germany this appeared a little disingenuous except that it was probably the only alliance Britain stood any chance of concluding with the Germans. The Prime Minister's key criticism was that "[t]he liability of having to defend the German and Austrian frontiers against Russia is heavier than that of *having to defend the British Isles against France*." He went on to talk about how British isolation was presented "as constituting a serious danger for us. *Have we ever felt that danger practically?*" Ignoring every French invasion scare of the nineteenth century, the most recent during the South African War, he focused on how Britain was not isolated during the Napoleonic wars and so had she failed then it would not have been due to her isolation. Ultimately he warned against undertaking "most onerous obligations, in order to guard against a *danger in whose existence we have no historical reason for believing*."⁷⁶¹ All of this seemed cogent enough, and certainly such arguments helped persuade the Cabinet, but it contained glaring omissions which ignored grave concerns outside of Europe. While it was true that Britain had not faced the prospect of invasion throughout most of the last century, a reliance on the Navy as a 'Wooden Wall' or even what had by then become an 'Iron Clad Wall', ignored other effects of advances in naval technology. The advent of ships able to move at speed in almost all weathers made the short line that is the English Channel a very small barrier. And the advent of the submarine and torpedo boats would eventually revolutionise naval defence in coastal waters. Though without defeating the Royal Navy, any invasion would be hard to supply and reinforce. Even leaving aside the wisdom of ignoring the threat of invasion on the grounds that it historically had not existed or happened, Salisbury

⁷⁶¹ Memo., Salisbury, 29/05/1901, *Ibid.*, No.86, pp.68-9

also ignored two other major problems. The British Cabinet were also struggling to answer two vitally important strategic questions. The first of these was how to defend India from a Russian advance through Afghanistan and Persia.⁷⁶² The second was how to maintain naval supremacy while many of the Powers developed their own sea power.⁷⁶³ Six months later, Selborne at the Admiralty would be arguing for interpreting the "Two Power Standard" as requiring making "such provision as will offer us the reasonable certainty of success in a war with France and Russia".⁷⁶⁴ By May 1901 Hicks Beach had already started to show concern for the spiralling costs of the service departments, pursuing every saving he could while still being prepared to meet requests for the South African War.⁷⁶⁵ By September it was the Chancellor of the Exchequer that was causing serious concerns as he started to demand immediate retrenchment when the South African War ended, not just of war time expenditure but of the normal service estimates.⁷⁶⁶ Certainly isolation was steadily becoming much more expensive and it is worth considering that the draft agreement Sanderson drew up for an Anglo-German alliance also considered it important to create a supplementary naval and military arms control agreement to prevent Germany demanding Britain increase her military forces.⁷⁶⁷

Chamberlain's various thoughts on alliances, which he freely shared in his public speeches and private conversations, often included the phrase, "would be a guarantee of peace."⁷⁶⁸ He placed great store on the value of such a connection as a deterring factor. To his mind a defensive arrangement could have ensured peace by deterring war from ever breaking

⁷⁶² Neilson, pp.110-143; Friedberg, pp.209-278; Grenville, pp.291-318;

⁷⁶³ Friedberg, pp.135-208; Langer, pp.420-428

⁷⁶⁴ Selborne, "The navy Estimates and the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Memorandum on the Growth of Expenditure", 16/11/1901, CAB37/59/118

⁷⁶⁵ Hicks Beach to Lansdowne, 9/05/1901, Balfour MSS Add.MS49727; Hicks Beach to Chamberlain, 27/06/1901, JC11/18/8; Hicks Beach to Salisbury, 10 & 14/05/and 9/09/1901, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Hicks Beach/1899-02

⁷⁶⁶ Hicks Beach to Chamberlain, 10 & 16/09/1901 & 2 Oct 1901 JC11/18/9,11 & 14 and Chamberlain To Hicks Beach, 12 & 30 Sept, & 4 Oct 1901, JC11/18/10,13 & 15 see also Hicks Beach, "Growth of expenditure", 12/09/1901, CAB 37/58/85

⁷⁶⁷ Otte, *China*, pp.279-80

⁷⁶⁸ Memo., Chamberlain, 29/03/1898, JC7/2/2a/3; see also "Mr. Chamberlain At Leicester." 1/12/1899, *The Times*, p.7; and for further examples his memoranda on discussions with Hatzfeldt, Eckardstein, the Kaiser and Bülow at Windsor and various correspondence with Salisbury.

out. By contrast it seems Salisbury never admitted or discussed the value of alliances in deterring the actions of others, though he must have understood this while offering to renew Britain's commitments to Portugal. Salisbury focused exclusively on what may or may not happen if the *casus foederis* arose. He also lingered at length on the difficulty the British parliamentary system brought to the table. The matter of war or peace would be decided ultimately by "the humour of our people in circumstances which cannot be foreseen" and while this issue affected the German side slightly less than Britain it still existed; "*neither we nor the Germans are competent to make the suggested promises.*"⁷⁶⁹ As Langer notes while Salisbury always disdained the role public opinion played on foreign policy he never considered that it could be moulded or led.⁷⁷⁰ Whether this memorandum was decisive in convincing the Cabinet to reject the Anglo-German alliance proposal is impossible to discern. It was certainly influential but Lansdowne was not prepared to do much of anything until he received some written form of German ideas and the terms of the Triple Alliance. Given that the Germans had no intention of furnishing those unless Britain made the first move there was in reality no decision to be made. Without those documents and as Hatzfeldt was being recalled due to his prolonged illness, Lansdowne was in no hurry, he expected that the matter would be "dropped for the moment" and that he was "quite content to mark time for a while".⁷⁷¹ Ultimately Lansdowne attempted to divert the stalled Anglo-German alliance negotiations onto discussing more limited regional agreements; this was unacceptable to the Germans who insisted that any agreement needed to be "the whole or none".⁷⁷² Bülow rather cynically wrote "R.I.P" on the *Auswärtige Amt's* final memorandum on the subject.⁷⁷³

Chamberlain had already abandoned Germany and had moved on to attempt to find a settlement with France. When the French had approached

⁷⁶⁹ Memo., Salisbury, 29/05/1901, *BD*, II, No.86, pp.68-9

⁷⁷⁰ Langer, pp.734-5

⁷⁷¹ Lansdowne to Lascelles, 30/05/1901, FO64/1655; Lansdowne to Lascelles, 9/06/1901, *BD*, II, No.89, pp.71-2 quote on p.72

⁷⁷² Lansdowne to Lascelles, 19/12/1901, *BD*, II, No.94, pp80-3 quote on p.82

⁷⁷³ Quoted in Kennedy, *Antagonism*, p.246

with an initiate for a discussion on Morocco Chamberlain had been cautious but interested but Lansdowne had shut it down as premature, as he did Chamberlain's attempts to broaden discussions on an exchange of colonial territories. Chamberlain had never hesitated to broaden the range of discussions in order to find that most reclusive of things, a general settlement. Lansdowne "deprecated any attempt at a transaction on so vast a scale, and would rather avoid discussing it."⁷⁷⁴ These Anglo-French *pourparlers* were taking place in March 1901 just as the Manchurian crisis reached its summit and merely days after Bülow had announced Germany's indifference there. Chamberlain had wasted no time in making good his repeated intentions to Hatzfeldt and Eckardstein that he would turn towards the Dual Alliance if Germany proved unfriendly. Langer and Kennedy both note that from around the turn of 1901 onwards the British press and thus public opinion started to pay more attention to both the Anglophobia prevalent in Germany and the increasing tensions caused by economic competition. By 1902 this situation had deteriorated to the point where the British press could be described as openly Germanophobic.⁷⁷⁵ Chamberlain always paid close attention to the mood of the British public. Therefore this change of opinion in the British press confirmed him in his belief that *le bon heure qu'elle passe*, with which he had warned the Germans as long ago as 1898.

The Russian climb down over Manchuria, back in April 1901, had not resolved many problems. While it dissipated the sense of urgency and ended the 'war in sight' crisis the actual issues had remained unresolved. Various provinces of China were under European occupation, Chili, Manchuria and even in the Yangtze delta around Shanghai. Lansdowne initially took a two pronged approach; he tried to find some kind of agreement with Russia while also pursuing the Anglo-German alliance offers he believed Eckardstein had initiated. Therefore he had responded somewhat coolly to Hayashi's early suggestion that Britain and Japan come

⁷⁷⁴ Monger, pp.38-40 Lansdowne to Monson, 20/03/1901 quote on p.40; Cohen, A. "Joseph Chamberlain, Lord Lansdowne and British Foreign Policy, 1901-1903: From Collaboration to Confrontation", *AJPH*, Vol. 43, 2 (1997) pp.122-34;

⁷⁷⁵ Langer, p.726; Kennedy, pp.246-8, 255-6, 260-3.

to “some permanent understanding for the protection of their interests in that part of the world”.⁷⁷⁶ As Lansdowne and Sanderson continued to believe that “in the long run the policy of trying to work comfortably with Russia [was] the only sound one” the Japanese overture was not yet taken up.⁷⁷⁷ Negotiations over how to settle China’s affairs lumbered on in Peking. In a series of meetings between the Foreign Secretary and Hayashi, at the end of July 1901, Lansdowne told the Ambassador that “If the Japanese Government desired it, he (Baron Hayashi) would find me[Lansdowne] ready to discuss [...] the possible establishment of an understanding between our two countries.” This was to be based around a commonality of interests in regards to the eventual fate of Korea and the “balance of power in the waters of the Far East”.⁷⁷⁸ Otte argues that this demonstrated an evolution of ideas based upon Salisbury’s suggestion in February for an Anglo-Japanese *entente* to defend the northern coastlines of China, through a set of memoranda written by Bertie over the summer, to arrive at encouraging Japan to provide a “statement of their requirements” by mid August.⁷⁷⁹ Monger places the conversation of 14th August as the point at which alliance talks were decided upon.⁷⁸⁰ This was certainly not the case as the Anglo-Japanese agreement was referred to the Cabinet several times to empower Lansdowne to continue. The Cabinet decision in late August to allow Lansdowne to continue was revisited on 5th November, 13th December and on 19th December.⁷⁸¹ However, during the Lansdowne-Hayashi interview on the 14th August, the Japanese ambassador dropped hints about an alliance while “he did not for a moment suppose that there could be any question of an offensive or defensive alliance between us [...] his country would go to war rather than see Corea[sic] fall into the hands of Russia”.⁷⁸² Whether the eventual agreement Lansdowne and Hayashi envisaged was to be called, alliance or *entente*, in the Ambassador’s mind,

⁷⁷⁶ Lansdowne to MacDonalad, 17/04/1901, *BD*, II, No.99, p.89

⁷⁷⁷ Sanderson to Scott, 24/04/1901, quoted in Neilson, pp.218-9

⁷⁷⁸ Lansdonwe to Whitehead, 31 Jap 1901,*BD*, II, No.102, pp.90-1

⁷⁷⁹ Otte, *China*, pp.287-9; Lansdowne to Whitehead, 14/08/1901, *BD*, II, No.103, pp.91-2

⁷⁸⁰ Monger, pp.48-9

⁷⁸¹ Otte, *China*, pp.297-8, 303-304

⁷⁸² Lansdowne to Whitehead, 14/08/1901, *BD*, II, No.103, pp.91-2

and made quite clear to Lansdowne, it was based upon needs arising from a stipulated situation with which his country was already prepared to commit to warlike actions. Lansdowne did inform his colleagues on 16th August and Salisbury informed the king that while “[t]he negotiation has hardly yet proceeded further than the stage of asking for information as to our mutual assistance – but it will be pursued.”⁷⁸³ On 25th Lansdowne informed Satow, in Peking, of the “interesting conversations with Hayashi [...] I think it not at all improbable that we may succeed in arriving at this”.⁷⁸⁴ While cautious Lansdowne certainly expected some agreement to come into being that would be based upon the “balance of power in the waters of the Far East” with a view to enabling Japan to defend her interests, and by proxy Britain’s, by using war if necessary.

Hicks Beach’s concerns about the growth of military expenditure not associated with the South African War exploded across policymakers’ desks. Chamberlain, Selborne and Brodrick robustly attempted to defend departmental spending.⁷⁸⁵ Regardless of how successful they were, this led to financial concerns being taken into consideration with regard to foreign policy. The Chancellor had been unofficially complaining about this and officially pressing for the immediate withdrawal of at least some troops from China for some time.⁷⁸⁶ Bertie had already started to allow financial concerns to be considered in his memorandum over the summer.⁷⁸⁷ This resulted in Selborne being able to argue in favour of the Anglo-Japanese connection on the grounds of fiscal expediency.⁷⁸⁸ While Parliament was in

⁷⁸³ Salisbury to Edward, 16/08/1901 quoted in Nish, p.160

⁷⁸⁴ Lansdowne to Satow, 25 Aug 1901, quoted in Otte, *China*, p.290

⁷⁸⁵ Hicks Beach to Chamberlain, 10 & 16/09/1901 & 2/10/1901 JC11/18/9,11 & 14 and Chamberlain To Hicks Beach, 12/09 & 30/09 & 4/10/1901, JC11/18/10,13 & 15 see also Hicks Beach, “Growth of expenditure”, 12/09/1901, CAB 37/58/85; memo. Hicks Beach, “Financial Difficulties: Appeal for Economy in the Estimates”, Oct. 1901, CAB37/58/109

⁷⁸⁶ Hicks Beach to Salisbury, 10/05/1901, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Hick Beach/1899-1902

⁷⁸⁷ Memo., Bertie, 22/07/1901, FO17/1507; memo., Bertie, “Anglo-Japanese Agreement”, 22/07/1901, FO46/547; Nish, pp.154-6; Otte, *China*, pp.288-9

⁷⁸⁸ Memo., Selborne, “Balance of Naval Power in the Far East”, 4/09/1901, CAB37/58/81; memo., Selborne, “The Navy Estimates and the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s Memorandum on the Growth of Expenditure”, 16/11/1901, CAB37/59/118; Steiner, Z. S., “Great Britain and the Creation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance”, *JMH*, Vol. 31, 1 (1959), pp.29-31

recess the matter rested but Lansdowne had Bertie rewrite his 22nd July memo and sketched his own ideas of an agreement in the marginalia before he met with Hayashi again on 16th October.⁷⁸⁹ Lansdowne had completed a draft for the Cabinet to consider, which Salisbury approved of being laid before them, for the meeting on 28th.⁷⁹⁰ Both Nish and Otte suggest that Salisbury's approval of presenting the draft to Cabinet was significant. Nish suggests that his remark that he agreed "generally with the despatch and draft treaty", invalidates any the idea that the Prime Minister opposed the alliance right from the start.⁷⁹¹ Otte suggests that this demonstrates that Salisbury recognised that the draft "did not differ substantively from his[Salisbury's] own suggestion of an Anglo-Japanese *entente*".⁷⁹² However, to suggest that Salisbury approved of the proposed agreement at this time but not the final agreement stretches the evidence. Articles II, III, IV and V in this draft remained almost untouched. Only article I, which contained the description of the interests which could give rise to the *casus foederis* required much debate and Salisbury was involved in drafting it. Lansdowne had asked Salisbury to "suggest a formula which would secure for us the requisite measure of discretion & for the Japanese the certainty of our cooperation where their quarrel was a justifiable one".⁷⁹³ Lansdowne believed that if Salisbury retained an objection it was that the disclaimer of aggressive intentions in article I would "[g]ive us no security" while the Foreign Secretary felt that "it is worth something" as it would "enable either Power to disavow the other in a case where the quarrel was a wanton and gratuitous one".⁷⁹⁴ If the Prime Minister did harbour strong doubts about the agreement he did not exert himself sufficiently in order to disrupt its conclusion.

The first draft was not actually discussed by the Cabinet until the 5th November. Otte and Neilson both argue that this date is significant as it

⁷⁸⁹ Memo., Bertie, 22/09/1901, FO17/15707; Nish, p.177; Otte, *China*, p.296

⁷⁹⁰ Lansdowne to Salisbury, and memo., Lansdowne, 23 Oct.1901 and min., Salisbury, 25/10/1901 FO46/547

⁷⁹¹ Quote from Nish, p.178

⁷⁹² Otte, *China*, p.297

⁷⁹³ Anglo-Japanese Agreement, 30/01/1902, *BD*, II, No.125, pp.114-20; Lansdowne to Salisbury, 8/01/1902, Bowood MSS Add.MS88906/17/5

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*,

comes after Lamsdorff, meeting with Hardinge in St. Petersburg, rejected a British overture to offer a joint loan to Persia.⁷⁹⁵ However, Nish notes that Lansdowne had wanted to discuss the proposed agreement in Cabinet on the 28th Oct, which is highly suggestive that the two diplomatic incidents were not linked.⁷⁹⁶ On 1st November Lansdowne wrote to MacDonald, in Japan, that he had told Hayashi that he “regarded it[proposed alliance] as extremely hopeful”.⁷⁹⁷ This does not suggest that Lansdowne believed the Anglo-Japanese arrangements were dependent on the failure of coming to terms with the Russians, although he anticipated that the Anglo-Russia joint loan to Persia would collapse.⁷⁹⁸ The draft was approved and then passed over to Hayashi along with a remark that the British wanted the Japanese to consider whether they could include India.⁷⁹⁹ The Japanese did not reply with their counter draft until the 12th December. The delay was partly caused by illness, a desire to exhaust their options with Russia and their constitutional arrangements which revered the opinions of the *Genrō*.⁸⁰⁰

It was Balfour who put up the strongest resistance to the alliance. The Prime Minister in waiting put his objections down in a lengthy note to Lansdowne. He started by claiming that the Cabinet had come to the “rather hasty decision” to “have offered to enter into an offensive and defensive alliance with Japan”, on 5th November. Balfour complained that no papers had been circulated before the meeting and that as he arrived late he found the debate in full swing, that the Cabinet was “not very anxious to hear any views on the general aspects” and that they were treating the proposed agreement “as one confined to the far east”.⁸⁰¹ Balfour would very soon have to take charge of such meetings and if he could not insist that he be heard then this did not bode well for the future. He did not expand upon his complaint that the agreement appeared to be

⁷⁹⁵ Neilson, p.221; Otte, *China*, p.291

⁷⁹⁶ Nish, p.179

⁷⁹⁷ Lansdowne to MacDonald, 1/11/1901, *BD*, II, No.109, p.99

⁷⁹⁸ Lansdowne to Salisbury, 15/10/1901. Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Lansdowne/1900-02

⁷⁹⁹ Nish, p.183

⁸⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.185-203 and pp.4-5 for the curious position the *Genrō* or Elder Statesmen, held within Japan.

⁸⁰¹ Balfour to Lansdowne, 12/12/1901, Balfour MSS Add.MS49727

offensive and defensive in nature but Salisbury did in a memorandum on 7th January.

The famous memorandum of 7th January 1902 demonstrated that Salisbury was very much aware that the agreement in question was an alliance and not a regional *entente*. He had fixed upon two problems, the problem of Japan taking aggressive action in defence of her Korean interests which the British could not support, and the tried and tested parliamentary objection. Salisbury was commenting on the draft of 5th January and found that in terms of Britain's liability "There is no limit and no escape. We are pledge to war, though the conduct of our ally may have been followed in spite of our strongest remonstrances, and may be avowedly regarded by us with clear disapprobation."⁸⁰² This was a very strong objection but it was not directed at the Japanese. Salisbury could not "think that Japan will definitively refuse us some discretion on the question whether the *casus belli* [...] is one on which we can properly draw the sword." The Prime Ministers ire fell upon Lansdowne's interpretation of Japanese intentions, and even quoted the Foreign Secretary in his memorandum.

"Japan will, in my belief, never accept a stipulation that she is not to be allowed to take without our permission measures which we might regard as provocative but which she would defend upon the ground that they were forced upon her by the conduct of Russia. If we were to tell her that should she become involved in a quarrel with Russia in such circumstances without our concurrence, the *casus foederis* would not be held by us to have arisen, she will, I am convinced tell us that it is impossible for her to accept our terms."⁸⁰³

Salisbury's actions were to prevent his Foreign Secretary from handing over complete discretion to the Japanese without having actually attempted to retain some measure of discretion. Whatever the stipulations and sentiments of various parts of the agreement were, Salisbury did not want the British to enter the agreement having already come to the conclusion that they were required to act as Japan's second regardless of the circumstance. His intervention did secure a change to the draft wording

⁸⁰² Memo. [Anglo-Japanese Agreement], Salisbury, 7/01/1902, CAB37/60/3

⁸⁰³ Min., Lansdowne, 1/01/1901, quoted in *Ibid.*,

handed to the British on the 31st December, which read that "Great Britain recognises the right of Japan to take such measures as she may find necessary to safeguard and promote those interests[in Korea]." ⁸⁰⁴ This would indeed have handed Japan absolute discretion over when the treaty was to become activated in both an offensive and defensive fashion. The British counter draft removed the independent reference to Japan together with the reference to promoting those interests, the final text read "the High Contracting Parties recognise that it will be admissible for either of them to safeguard those interests if threatened either by the aggressive action of any other Power, or by disturbance arising in China or Corea[sic]". ⁸⁰⁵ Salisbury's objection was designed to ensure that Lansdowne more robustly defend Britain's freedom of action by removing any implication that the treaty provided for more than just defensive situations but it also acknowledged that the agreement promised war-like action in stipulated situations.

Balfour's main concern was with how this would affect relations with Germany and it should be remembered that while the Anglo-German alliance negotiations were all but closed, they had not yet been officially dropped. However, Balfour exposed how wedded he was to the German connection. The majority of his complaint compared and contrasted what Britain would get from an Anglo-Japanese alliance, against joining the Triple Alliance. His criticisms seemed cogent enough, the Anglo-Japanese alliance risks Britain finding "ourselves fighting for our existence in every part of the globe against Russia and France [...] over some obscure Russian-Japanese quarrel in Corea[sic]." But again, he failed to consider the alliance as a deterrent; would France really choose to find herself fighting for her existence in every part of the globe over an obscure Russian-Japanese quarrel? Certainly, the Russians had declined to fight over obscure Anglo-French Sudanese quarrels. The Triple Alliance would make superior allies as they were better able to assist the British who would have to fight the same combination of Powers. The Central Powers having to come to Britain's aid

⁸⁰⁴ Anglo-Japanese Agreement, 20/01/1902, *BD*, II, No.125, p.116

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*,

would prevent France from “throwing in her lot with Russia.” However, he ignored the political problems of joining the Triple Alliance. Lansdowne’s main concern was that in doing so Britain and Germany would have to agree on a joint foreign policy. This consideration barely existed in the case of the geographically limited agreement with Japan. Balfour had also ignored the difficulties in concluding an Anglo-German agreement; so far it had not been possible to even start official negotiations. Balfour went on to use Salisbury’s arguments about how the British could not agree to go to war without knowing the state of public and parliamentary opinion at the time: “We have offered in favour of Japan, to abandon our traditional policy, and we have proved in your own persons that a ministry can promise to go to war in remote contingencies and over quarrels at present unforeseen.” Balfour also believed that defending the central Powers was in Britain’s interests. His argument was also based on a false equivalence, he argued as though the question being asked was not whether the Japanese connection held sufficient advantages for Britain but whether it was a better deal than membership of the Triple Alliance. The question posed as an either/or choice, which it was not, in fact there was no reason, on the British side, why she could not pursue both a Japanese Alliance and adhesion to the Triple Alliance, although the later may have been even harder to achieve after the conclusion of the former.⁸⁰⁶

Lansdowne’s reply was calmer, firstly, he reaffirmed that “the chances of the ‘casus foederis’ arising are much fewer in the case of the Anglo-Japanese agreement than they would be in that of an Anglo-German agreement.” The area was much more limited and so this “diminishes the difficulty of explaining to the Germans why we are prepared to face the one but not the other liability.” The Foreign Secretary closed by reminding Balfour that Britain could not afford to allow Japan to be crushed between Russia and France either and thus why not get something for it by admitting as much.⁸⁰⁷ Ultimately Lansdowne had already decided that British membership in the Triple Alliance was simply not possible, and Metternich,

⁸⁰⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁰⁷ Lansdowne to Balfour, 12/12/1901, Balfour MSS Add.MS49727

whom he saw that week and had considered sharing news of the Anglo-Japanese talks with, ruled out any chance of working towards such a project piecemeal.⁸⁰⁸ Balfour clung to a *rapprochement* with Germany for far longer than any other member of the Cabinet. Chamberlain remained unhappy with the deal, though he did not try to prevent it taking place. His objection was obvious, the text of the treaty gives the appearance that it is unequal; Korea was mentioned specifically, while Britain's interests in the Yangtze were only implicitly mentioned.⁸⁰⁹ Salisbury's memorandum of 7th January also had strong criticism of the Japanese draft, which included language that gave the agreement a limited offensive remit. However, this had already crossed with Lansdowne's proposed counter draft and the Foreign Secretary asked for Salisbury to strengthen the British position if he could.⁸¹⁰

The Anglo-Japanese alliance was concluded on 30th January 1902. It is often viewed as marking the end of Britain's 'Splendid Isolation' which strictly speaking it did.⁸¹¹ However, it is now well accepted that the arrangement prolonged British isolation from the Europe alliance blocs.⁸¹² The financial pressures of attempting to compete with the world had already been proved too much and the British Empire had retreated from the western hemisphere.⁸¹³ The Anglo-Japanese alliance therefore, had two important effects. The first of these was to enable the British to 'co-opt' the Japanese fleet into her thinking with regards to naval estimates. This had been stressed by both Selborne and Bertie in the discussions leading up to the alliance.⁸¹⁴ This allowed the Cabinet to convince itself that the

⁸⁰⁸ Lansdowne to Salisbury, 13 & 22/12/1901, Salisbury MSS 3M/E/Lansdowne/1900-02; Lansdowne to Monson, 20/03/1901 quoted in Monger, p.40

⁸⁰⁹ Chamberlain to Lansdowne, 5 Jan 1902, Bowood MSS, Add.MS88906/17/5

⁸¹⁰ Memo. [Anglo-Japanese Agreement], Salisbury, 7/01/1902, CAB37/60/3; Lansdowne to Salisbury, 8 Jan 1902, Bowood MSS Add.MS88906/17/5

⁸¹¹ Nish, pp.241-4; Monger, p.70; Langer, p.783, 787-797, Charmley, pp.303-4; Grenville, pp.411-7

⁸¹² Otte, *China*, p.307, Kennedy, *Antagonism*, p.249,

⁸¹³ Otte, *China*, p.279

⁸¹⁴ Memo., Bertie, 22/09/1901, FO17/15707; memo., Selborne, "Balance of Naval Power in the Far East", 4/09/1901, CAB37/58/81; memo., Selborne, "Naval Estimates, 1903-4" 10/10/1902, CAB37/63/143; memo. Ritchie, "Public Finances", 23/12/1902, CAB37/63/170; Otte, *China*, p.310

agreement improved British security however, this was a somewhat dangerous idea; the *casus foederis* of the alliance could only arise due to events in the Far East and an Anglo-French-Russian conflict, growing out of a collision somewhere else in the world, would not automatically bring Japan into the fight. Under those circumstances the British Far-Eastern squadron would still have had to face the combined Franco-Russian squadrons alone. That is not to say that Japan would have remained aloof as her ally's usefulness was destroyed. This was the principal reason Balfour and Chamberlain were never enthusiastic about the agreement although it did safeguard Britain's Far Eastern interests, while constructing a clear field for Japan to potentially give Russia a second 'Sebastopol', it did nothing to relieve pressures outside of China. The second effect was upon international relations. France and Russia quickly issued their own counter declaration but Germany remained neutral, "convinced that the great *Krach* (which would enhance her own position) had come a little closer."⁸¹⁵ However, as both France and Britain were now the respective seconds for Russia and Japan in the Far East they had even more reason to improve relations to safeguard against fighting in the Channel or the Mediterranean over their respective allies' obscure Korean interests.⁸¹⁶ This merely accelerated the French trend towards trying to find colonial agreements with Britain. It also lessened the immediate need for good relations with Germany, Lansdowne had convinced the Japanese to throw themselves across the path of Russia in Germany's stead, a suggestion Chamberlain had often made himself.⁸¹⁷ The alliance itself had evolved from Salisbury's earlier suggestion of an Anglo-Japanese *entente* similar in scope to the Mediterranean Agreements of 1887. However, during that evolution, it had most certainly become an alliance for the mutual defence of regional interests. Salisbury was well aware of the agreements nature and had he chosen to he could have encouraged further resistance to it but he did not, it appeared that the chief exponent of isolation was content to sign an

⁸¹⁵ Kennedy, *Antagonism*, p.249; Langer, p.781; Monger p.71; Neilson, p.224

⁸¹⁶ Monger, pp.72-3, 77-81; Charmley, pp.305-9; Kennedy, *Antagonism*, pp.249-50

⁸¹⁷ Otte, *China*, p.307-8; Cohen, "Confrontation", p.128

agreement which bound Britain to war-like actions in stipulated situations.⁸¹⁸

Chamberlain's desires to form an alliance with Germany had always been based upon a grand strategic vision. The Anglo-Japanese alliance was much too localised to be considered a substitute and he gave proof that he did not consider it one. Just before the alliance was concluded, amid a stormy press war with Germany of his own making, he gave a speech in which he remarked upon Britain's isolated position "[w]e have the feeling, unfortunately, that we have to count upon ourselves alone, [...] I say alone, yes, in a splendid isolation, surrounded and supported by our kinsfolk."⁸¹⁹ This revealed something of Chamberlain's adapting attitudes to Britain's security problem and potentially how he viewed the forthcoming Anglo-Japanese alliance; namely that it did not meaningfully affect the nature of British isolation and that he was starting to view the Empire as Britain's best form of security. His spat with Bülow, over the honour of British arms, also revealed that he was no longer concerned about offending the Germans.⁸²⁰ Throughout 1902 and into 1903 Chamberlain became convinced that Germany had no part to play in Britain's future. This was accelerated in April 1902 when the Admiralty finally admitted "that Germany is building *against* us."⁸²¹ Laying to one side the tension which would eventually develop into a full blown naval arms race; Anglo-German relations were still damaged at other points too. The situation in China had still not been normalised and on 30th July 1902 the Chinese asked the Europeans to withdraw the troops they had stationed at Shanghai.⁸²² The British were inclined to agree and set about arranging for all the Europeans to do so at the same time. French and German agreement had been delayed but in

⁸¹⁸ Nish, p.210,

⁸¹⁹ "Mr. Chamberlain In Birmingham." *The Times*, 7/01/1902, p.4.

⁸²⁰ This disagreement was over comments made in a speech defending the British Army's use of oppression as counter insurgency measures in South Africa, see "Mr Chamberlain in Edinburgh", 26/10/1901, "Count Von Bülow on the European Situation", 9/01/1902, "Count von Bülow and Mr. Chamberlain", 11/01/1902, "Mr Chamberlain in Birmingham." 13/01/1902 all in *The Times*

⁸²¹ Kerr to Selborne, 28/04/1902, Boyce D.G., (ed.) *The Crisis of British Power. The Imperial and Naval Papers of the Second Earl of Selborne, 1895-1910*, (London, 1990) p.144

⁸²² Foreign Office to India Office, 20/08/1902, *BD*, II, No.151, p.140

October Eckardstein announced that Germany would leave only after China agreed not to grant special concessions in the area of the Yangtze. This had been Britain's area of interest and revealed that the Germans wished to ensure that the British would be powerless to take action to prevent her own penetration of that rich commercial market.⁸²³ This demand was in keeping with the nature of the 'Open-Door' policy but it ignored that Britain had not reserved an area of China solely to herself, as Russia had in the north, Germany in Shantung, and France in the provinces immediately contiguous with French Indo-China, had; it was therefore a positively anti-British move. Chamberlain had been consistently concerned about reserving the Yangtze as a *de facto* British sphere of influence and his objections to the Anglo-Japanese alliance were based upon its weakness with this regard. Ultimately Satow in Peking managed to turn the tables by convincing the Chinese to extend the guarantees, which the Germans had sought for the Yangtze, to cover the whole of China thus making it harder for Germany to acquire further concessions in Shantung.⁸²⁴ To compound the problem Metternich also attempted to lie to Lansdowne about German intentions, which the Foreign Secretary responded to in very strong terms.⁸²⁵ In mid November the Kaiser and Lansdowne met during the former's visit to Britain, their discussion touched on Shanghai and was not reassuring; the Kaiser had only desired "that the conditions of withdrawal should be such as to render it unnecessary for them to return." The conversation finished with the Kaiser reminding Lansdowne that with regards to Kiaochow "He had, therefore, been obliged to help himself. It was absolutely necessary for the development of Germany that she should have coaling stations."⁸²⁶ By then Germany had already started to pose a rising naval threat to the British, the Kaiser's words could not have soothed Lansdowne's fears. Chamberlain was well aware of what had taken place in China, although already busy with his developing ideas for imperial

⁸²³ Monger, p.83

⁸²⁴ Otte, *China*, p.309, for details see Otte, T.G. "Not Proficient in Table-Thumping': Sir Ernest Satow at Peking, 1900-1906" *D&S*, Vol. 13, No.2 (2002) pp.161-200

⁸²⁵ Monger, p.84

⁸²⁶ Lansdowne to Buchanan, 14/11/1902, *BD*, II, No.164, p.148;

preference, as the matter had been before the Cabinet.⁸²⁷ Germany's unfriendly actions in China only hardened Chamberlain's attitude towards them; while previously he may not have treated them as an unfriendly Power, even though he had come realise that as an alliance partner they would not bring the British Empire the security he hoped, he now became almost a foe to them. Chamberlain had no opportunity to demonstrate this hardening towards Germany before he headed to South Africa for his tour in late November 1902. However, on his return it would not be long before he did have an opportunity to do so.

Back on 16th May 1902, Chamberlain had given a speech to the Liberal Unionist Association in Birmingham. In it he described the position of the country as a cause of anxiety due to "[t]he political jealousy [...], the commercial rivalry [...], the pressure of hostile tariffs, the pressure of bounties, the pressure of subsidies, it is all becoming more weighty and more apparent." Mentioning Germany specifically but not exclusively, the Colonial Secretary went on to elaborate that this system of economic intervention was set up with "the intention [...] to shut out this country as far as possible from all profitable trade with those foreign States and at the same time to enable those foreign States to undersell us in British markets." Reliance on the "old and antiquated methods", a reference to free trade, could not meet this new threat. Chamberlain laid out his prescription for the disease of unfair competition:

At the present moment the Empire is being attacked on all sides and in our isolation we must look to ourselves. (Cheers.) We must draw closer our internal relations, the ties of sentiment, the ties of sympathy, yes, and the ties of interest. (Cheers.) If by adherence to economic pedantry, to old shibboleths, we are to lose opportunities of closer union which are offered us by our colonies, if we are to put aside occasions now within our grasp, if we do not take every chance in our power to keep British trade in British hands, I am certain that

⁸²⁷ Lansdowne "German views on the evacuation of Shanghai" 9/10/1902 CAB37/63/140; "German attitude to the evacuation of Shanghai" 4/11/1902 CAB37/63/150; "German attitude to the evacuation of Shanghai, etc." 4 Nov 1902 CAB37/63/151

we shall deserve the disasters which will infallibly come upon us.⁸²⁸

Chamberlain was drawing links as well as parallels between economic and diplomatic isolation. Three months after the formation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance Chamberlain was still referring to Britain as suffering in her isolation and, where as once he demanded a strong, natural alliance, to cover this weakness, he now talked of strengthening the bonds of Empire.⁸²⁹ At the Colonial Conference in July the Colonial Premiers had decided to offer Britain a unilateral preference in their tariffs, they did not demand a reciprocal preference, but they reserved their rights to act differently if one was not forthcoming.⁸³⁰ Over the summer Chamberlain had been distracted by numerous issues, the Boer General's attempts to negotiate better terms in South Africa, the fallout from the Education Bill and his own plans for a colonial tour starting in South Africa itself. During this the Canadians applied pressure on Chamberlain to press the Cabinet to offer reciprocity in the duty on corn, a duty which Hicks Beach had only reluctantly applied in desperation to raise revenue.⁸³¹ In October, as the news concerning the German attempt to prise the Yangtze open to their trade became apparent, Chamberlain brought his proposal for imperial preference generally and Canadian reciprocity specifically, to the Cabinet.⁸³² Ritchie, who replaced Hicks Beach as Chancellor of the Exchequer in August, fought against the proposal, he laid memoranda before the Cabinet in October and November.⁸³³ However, he failed to prevent the Cabinet from agreeing to Chamberlain's proposal in principle though Chamberlain also failed in convincing the Cabinet to make binding communications on the subject to Canada. Balfour informed the king that "as at present advised" the Cabinet would retain the corn duty but would

⁸²⁸ "Mr. Chamberlain In Birmingham." *The Times*, 17/05/1902, p.12; Marsh, p.520-1; Amery, *Life*, IV, pp.404-7 ; Friedberg, p.52

⁸²⁹ Marsh, pp.525-6.

⁸³⁰ Amery, *Life*, V, 54; Marsh, pp.533-5

⁸³¹ *Ibid.*, pp.536-41

⁸³² Balfour to Edward, 21 Oct 1902, quoted in Marsh, p.540

⁸³³ Charles Thomson Ritchie, 1st Baron Ritchie of Dundee, Chancellor of the Exchequer (11/08/1902- 9/10/1903); Treasury, "Preferential Treatment", 31/10/1902, CAB37/63/148; Ritchie C.T., [Colonial Preference], 15/11/1902, CAB37/63/155

offer "a preferential remission of it [...] in favour of the British Empire."⁸³⁴ Chamberlain left for South Africa believing that the Canadian preference was as good as sown up. While he was abroad his own ideas on how far reaching preference could become and the potential of the Empire started to firm up.⁸³⁵

Ritchie, back in Britain, was not idle either and did all that he could with the budget to demonstrate that the country's finances no longer required the revenue raising duty on corn at all. This he lay before the Cabinet and convinced them that no preference was necessary as the duty was not necessary. It had not been an easy fight; Ritchie had to threaten resignation, which would have left the Budget in a shambles, in order to get his way.⁸³⁶ Word reached Chamberlain while he was on his return journey from South Africa.⁸³⁷ Chamberlain had insisted that the duty be repealed if it could not be amended but he was furious. He had hoped to use the corn duty to start a slow gentle process towards imperial preference but Ritchie had destroyed this hope. Worse, in the debates over the budget, Ritchie discussed the Corn Duty in such a manner as to make its re-imposition as politically difficult as possible.⁸³⁸

Chamberlain was far from finished though. Later in the year Balfour would defend what he described as Chamberlain's somewhat understandable and even justifiable ill temper:

On his arrival[from South Africa] he found the bye-elections going against us; he found a Land Bill[Wyndham's Irish Land Bill] about to be introduced [... h]e found Brodrick and Brodrick's army schemes the topic of universal criticism, [... h]e found our Education Bill in its most unpopular phase and daily alienating valuable supporters belonging to the left wing of the Unionist Party in Birmingham and elsewhere[, ... a]bove all, he found that his scheme for employing the shilling duty on Corn as a means of obtaining preferential treatment for Canada was rendered impossible by the Chancellor of the

⁸³⁴ Balfour to Edward (copy), 19/11/1902, JC17/1/13

⁸³⁵ Amery, *Life*, IV, pp.528-33; Marsh, p.550

⁸³⁶ Ritchie, "Public Finance.", 23/12/1902, CAB37/63/170 see also 21/02/1903 CAB37/64/15; Friedberg, p.54

⁸³⁷ Austen Chamberlain to Joseph Chamberlain, 5/02/1903, JC18/15/7

⁸³⁸ Amery, *Life*, V, p.183; Hansard, Ritchie, 23/04/1903, PD (4), Vol.121, cc.255-7

Exchequer's unexpected refusal to embody it in his budget, and this after he had just reason to suppose that in November the Cabinet, as a whole, were in its favour.

It must be acknowledged that all the causes, taken together, made him by no means an agreeable colleague during the first months after his return to England. Sensitive, indeed over-sensitive, as he is to temporary movements of public opinion, he hated the political situation and wanted a new cry; and, quite unconsciously to himself, he was perhaps influenced by the notion that his counsels had not all the weight, which his public position justified, in determining the legislative policy of his colleagues.⁸³⁹

Balfour wrote this a mere month before Chamberlain's departure from his government, the relatively inexperienced Prime Minister quite clearly understood why his Colonial Secretary was so embittered. The Germans were also made to feel his wrath. Back in April, Chamberlain's implacable opposition to British participation in the Baghdad Railway caused Lansdowne to have to back away from the negotiations just as Chamberlain's opposition to the suggestion of a joint Anglo-German naval demonstration in Venezuela had succeeded in forcing the matter to be dropped.⁸⁴⁰ These were not simply the actions of an ill tempered and overly ambitious man, he had serious concerns about both situations; one would offend American sensibilities, just when Anglo-American relations were good, and were about to be tested by the Alaskan boundary dispute. The other would open an international port on the British dominated Persian Gulf; which would have resulted in British diplomacy being entangled in a never-ending round of concession and counter concession hunting while vital interests in the area became dependent upon on the dubious trustworthiness of the Germans. At around the same time the Germans also increased their pressure on the British self governing dominions in their ongoing trade war with Canada, the Germans had threatened to retaliate against any other colony that offered Britain a preference, this was seen in the British press as an attempt by Germany to prevent the drawing together of the Empire.⁸⁴¹

⁸³⁹ Balfour to Devonshire, 27/08/1903 quoted in Amery, *Life*, IV, p.175

⁸⁴⁰ Monger, pp.118-23 for the railway and Kennedy, *Antagonism*, pp.256-62

⁸⁴¹ Kennedy, *Antagonism*, pp.261-2

Chamberlain had made up his mind as to what to do. His feeling of isolation and of being disregarded by the newer members of Cabinet reinforced his decision to stake his future and the future of the British Empire, on Tariff Reform. Back in South Africa he seemed "as though a period or stage in his career had been reached. ... Position, safety, administration, do not attract, he seemed to say; there was something great to be done for the Empire, and he was willing to risk a fall."⁸⁴² This dissatisfaction had been with him for some time. Back in September 1902 he lambasted Devonshire with his ire, as the second leading Liberal Unionist, Chamberlain should have expected to have more in common with 'the Duke' but his relationship with the Whig grandee was one of frustration:

I never can get any real support from you or anyone else in the Cabinet, in support of my own convinced opinion that we ought not to give way to the bluffing of any Foreign Power & that if the worse come to the worse we could hold out, as our ancestors did, against the lot of them.⁸⁴³

That frustration had grown through subsequent Cabinet reshuffles, as Salisbury left the Foreign Office and then resigned as Prime Minister, people with whom Chamberlain had had long standing relationships, such as Goschen, Chaplin and even Hicks Beach were replaced by younger members less impressed with what they owed the Liberal Unionist. Balfour also failed to realise what Salisbury had always understood, the sheer power Chamberlain could wield and thus the danger he posed once freed from the Cabinet. In his usual style Chamberlain responded to Ritchie's Budget with a public speech of his own, back in Birmingham. In it he would survey the great problem of strength and security that faced the British Empire and the German commercial threat. Calling for the opening of a debate upon the issues of imperial preference and tariff retaliation he made the purpose of such a policy crystal clear and echoed Lord Salisbury's 'Dying Nations' speech to drive his point home:

"Our[British] Imperial Policy is vital to them[the Colonies] and vital to us. Upon that Imperial Policy and what you do in the

⁸⁴² Quoted in Marsh, p.550 see also Amery, *Life*, IV, p530. And "The Turning Point" *The Times*, 28/11/1923

⁸⁴³ Chamberlain to Devonshire, 22/09/1902, quoted in Marsh, p.538

next few years depends that enormous issues whether this great Empire of ours it to stand together, one free nation, if necessary, against all the world (hear, hear), or whether it is to fall apart into separate States, each selfishly seeking its own interest alone, losing sight of the commonweal, and losing also the advantages which union alone can give. [...]

In my opinion the germs of a federal union that will make the British Empire powerful and influential for good beyond the dreams of any one now living- the germs of that union are in the soil; but it is a tender and delicate plant and requires careful handling. [...]

We also have our chance, and it depends upon what we do now whether this great idea is to find fruition or whether we will for ever and ever dismiss it from our consideration and *accept our fate as one of the dying Empires of the world*".⁸⁴⁴

⁸⁴⁴ "Mr.Chamberlain In Birmingham." *The Times*, 16/05/1903, p.8, emphasis mine

Conclusion

Chamberlain's concerns over foreign policy were shared by many members of the Cabinet. Both Britain's geo-strategic position and perceptions of Salisbury's conservative foreign policy fuelled discontent. However, it would be a mistake to assume that Salisbury was solidly opposed strong measures. During the Armenian Massacres he lamented that the navy was unprepared to seize the Straights and, having been forced away from a policy of unilateral militarism by the Cabinet, became frustrated while trying to find a diplomatic solution with Russia. The Committee of Defence was organised in order to provide some kind of overview to Britain's sprawling and somewhat haphazard defence arrangements. Salisbury absolutely believed that Britain's military needed to be able to project power or at least threaten force otherwise British foreign policy must become one huge bluff, or need to be reoriented. This was sometime before the South African War would stretch Britain's resources and temporarily hamstring her freedom of action. Salisbury also appeared to be much more supportive of Chamberlain's chequer board posturing in West Africa than his reputation suggests. Certainly, the Prime Minister was caught between managing the potentially explosive crisis with the French and keeping his Cabinet whole as Chamberlain forced an aggressive policy. But, Salisbury managed the task admirably and both men eventually got the essentials of what they wanted.

It was during the Port Arthur crisis that differences started to become a serious problem. The public outcry to the emerging crisis drove Chamberlain to action. Chamberlain was not merely acting upon Public opinion; he also tried to give lead to it. However, Salisbury was somewhat blind to the risk of ignoring the papers. He would much have preferred to reserve foreign policy to a closed, aristocratic, grouping and what he considered rational methodology. By contrast Chamberlain believed that the public needed to be heard and feel their concerns were represented; ignoring their complaints would be electorally dangerous.

The Cabinet as a whole was faced immediately with the reality of British overextension, again long before the British were tied up in South Africa. Salisbury, for all his private disdain of talk of prestige, lamented the loss of soft power he imagined he laboured under due to his predecessors decisions over the Sino-Japanese war. Thus Britain was powerless to prevent the concession hunting that took place in China and had to content themselves with their own acquisition of Weihaiwei, which the Cabinet was aware, presented no safety at all. In fact Salisbury had encouraged the taking of Weihaiwei which was certainly only a manoeuvre for prestige. Salisbury's policy had become concerned with maintaining a bluff. While historians have identified that British freedom of action would be circumscribed by the joint crises of Boxer and Boer, this earlier situation presented the similar problems to the Cabinet albeit in a more nebulous and less defined form. In 1898 the British were presented with dangerous situations in Africa and China, and lacked the materials, military or diplomatic to deal with both.

Chamberlain's response was to attempt to find a diplomatic agreement which would strengthen Britain's position in the world. He was convinced that hand to mouth agreements with Russia could secure Britain's interests and it was not until Russia's lack of power was demonstrated in the Russia-Japanese war that she was prepared to. He looked in several directions before latching onto Germany as potentially the way out for the British. Several of his senior Cabinet colleagues felt similarly. The Chamberlain/Balfour/Hatzfeldt talks were the result of not only the Colonial Secretary's concerns but because they were shared by Balfour, Devonshire, Goschen, Lansdowne and Chaplin. Salisbury and Chamberlain were both convinced that Britain needed some form of international agreement. Chamberlain sought one that would enable the British to continue to defend her interests in the face of Franco-Russian encroachments; Salisbury sought a series of them that would convince the Dual Alliance partners to restrain themselves from such encroachments. Chamberlain was unable to accept that Russia would content herself with a deal that was also acceptable to the British, Salisbury felt similarly about the Germans. This goes to the heart of the issues surrounding isolation. On one hand it brought a freedom of action that no binding agreement could, but on the other hand it left

Britain in a 'hand to mouth' situation, finding small diplomatic solutions to skip over the current crisis while providing nothing to avoid the next. The Cabinet faced a constant stream of crises, which made Salisbury's preference for subsistence diplomacy seem even more dangerous. Salisbury hoped to defuse each crisis as they arose; Chamberlain wanted an alliance powerful enough to deter such challenges from being made at all. Both were essentially struggling to solve the same problem, British overextension, but from entirely different points of view.

Chamberlain's approach to the Hatzfeldt talks, his 'new diplomacy', was symptomatic of his businesslike approach to problems, and his desire to get results quickly. Salisbury's preference for a more circumspect diplomatic dialogue was built not only on tradition but pragmatism; he was not prepared to trust Powers with an entirely open dialogue. This caused him problems, just as Chamberlain's approach caused him embarrassment. Both German and Russian policy was driven by a deep distrust of 'stand aloof' Britain. Salisbury's and Lansdowne's pragmatically tight lipped diplomacy did nothing to reduce that distrust. Had the Salisbury been able to discuss his proposals during the Armenian Crisis as forthrightly as Chamberlain discussed his alliance proposals he may have been able to dispel some of the distrust of Britain, which dominated Russian and German policymakers. Certainly Hatzfeldt would not have had to try to spell out that his suggesting included a most ample provision for Russia.⁸⁴⁵

Dissent in the Cabinet enabled Chamberlain to make his overtures to Hatzfeldt and Eckardstein. These were not independent actions and any suggestion that they were ignores recent scholarly work presented here and by Otte.⁸⁴⁶ Most certainly the whole Cabinet knew about, and were consulted upon the talks as they were happening. Chamberlain's character equipped the Cabinet with a powerful but double edged tool. One contemporary observation rings partially true:

Chamberlain doesn't deserve all the bad things that are said of him, but he is essentially a dangerous man, because being

⁸⁴⁵ Hatzfeldt to Holstein 5/08/1895 GP, X no. 2381 pp.22-23

⁸⁴⁶ Otte, *China*, pp.134-58

very masterful, impulsive and sanguine he always believes he can get through a tight place by pushing. He is like an engine driver, who running at speed finds that parts of his engine get hot, & who instead of slowing down to let them cool & oiling them, crams on more speed in the hope of reaching the end of the journey before anything gives way.⁸⁴⁷

This was not entirely accurate; Chamberlain was capable of 'slowing down' if his goal appeared to him a long way off. His desire for imperial federation or union had been ardent since the 1880s, but he was prepared to wait until an opportunity would arise. That was partially why he was so embittered over Ritchie's handling of the Corn Duty; he destroyed the first real opportunity to start a piecemeal journey to Imperial Federation. Also while Chamberlain would 'push' to get through a tight place, he would also do all he could to limit the likely fallout. To complete Grey's analogy, if Chamberlain believed the end was in sight, he would indeed 'cram on more speed' but he would also do all he could to cool and oil the heating parts as well. This aspect of his character was useful to the Cabinet, it allowed them to pursue or investigate policies at variance with Salisbury's views. Chamberlain was therefore used by his colleagues; he would be encouraged by them when they were unhappy with Salisbury but unprepared to challenge him themselves. They most certainly did not give the Colonial Secretary any blank cheque or blanket support and so he found himself constrained by their timidity more often than he was empowered by their shared concerns. In early 1898 they gave him his head over the talks with Hatzfeldt, assisted in forcing Salisbury to open talks on the future of Portugal's territories, then again on Samoa and supported Chamberlain's interventions in those negotiations, later during the Boxer crisis senior Cabinet ministers encouraged him to meet Eckardstein and as they could get nowhere with Salisbury themselves and convinced him to intervene to force the negotiation of the Anglo-German Convention on China. The Cabinet therefore 'deployed' Chamberlain against Salisbury. Contrastingly by the time Chamberlain was preparing to leave the government Balfour was perfectly aware of how often the Cabinet had also frustrated him. However, essentially Salisbury had the better appreciation of the Colonial

⁸⁴⁷ Grey to Northbrook, 28/07/1900 quoted in Marsh, p.558

Secretary; this was why he would often give way before him if he could do so safely. Salisbury believed that whatever threat Chamberlain posed to his foreign policy, he would pose a much greater threat, on a much broader range of subjects, outside of the government. Balfour failed to understand this to his ultimate detriment.

Balfour's role in the undermining of Salisbury's position is not emphasised sufficiently enough in the current historiography. Balfour had his own ideas on how British foreign policy should develop and as prime minister in waiting, certainly felt justified in his more subtle interventions. He was the last member of the Cabinet to still consider working with the Germans to be worthwhile. His inability to have his opinions on the Anglo-Japanese alliance heard was a bad omen for his future leadership. Balfour had been involved in each demarche that forced Salisbury to negotiate with the Germans when the Foreign Secretary did not wish to. He had wilfully rushed through the completion of the convention on Portugal's colonies to avoid his Uncle's intervention upon his return. The Dying Nations speech was not only aimed at Chamberlain. Salisbury never lost his suspicion of Balfour, over the debate about when to call the Khaki Election, Salisbury commented to his nephew, "[y]ou are like Joe[Chamberlain], who again is like Randolph[Churchill]. You don't care the least for character."⁸⁴⁸ This rather reminded Balfour of where his earlier political loyalties lay and that Salisbury probably remembered. Historians often attribute a closer political relationship between Balfour and Salisbury than probably existed.

Chamberlain's view of foreign policy was entirely pro-British, he was not pro-German, and he wanted an alliance with them only in order to better defend British interests though he was prepared to admit that the alliance could not be one sided. This was to bring about the end of the hand to mouth diplomacy that typified Salisbury and later Lansdowne's approach. His interest in the various Anglo-German diplomatic agreements negotiated at this time was based upon the continually diminishing hope that they would lead to eventually to an alliance. Once Germany had exhausted even Chamberlain's patience he turned to other means to secure Britain's future.

⁸⁴⁸ Quoted in Roberts, p.774

Chamberlain's comments that he wanted Germany to throw herself across Russia path in China appeared on the surface to ignore Germany's strategic position in Europe.⁸⁴⁹ German officials always had Europe in mind when considering the various alliance proposals. However, Chamberlain's conception of global interests was insightful; he essentially invited the Germans to join the very small number of potentially global Powers; a short cut to their desired world power. By inviting the Germans to take a large swathe of Chinese territory under their control and even raise a Chinese army under German officers, Chamberlain had invited them to *share* at a very exclusive table.⁸⁵⁰ These proposals never made it back to Berlin. Germany, despite all her talk of *weltpolitik* was not ready for such a suggestion and would have dismissed it angrily; even more convinced that the British wished only to see the rest of the world at war. Chamberlain was asking the Germans to weigh extra-European interests against European ones. If Germany ever hoped to become a global Power and retain that position she would need to learn how to do that, but by this stage she had not. She could assess how important extra-European matters were to the British, but she could not conceptualise that they may be so to her. Although Germany was restless for growth, and unlikely to be happy with merely becoming an economic colossus, her concepts of how to obtain her place as arbiter of the world were entirely European in focus. The Kaiser's discussion with Lansdowne demonstrated the understandable centrality of Europe to the Germans.⁸⁵¹ Chamberlain may as well have offered them the moon. The Colonial Secretary did misread German interests, but only because, as he did with many issues, he looked to the far future than the immediate situation. He expected her to defend her developing interests in China or Asia-Minor as Britain would defend her already existing interests. This ignored that in the German case those interests were not yet vital while in the British case they were. Salisbury is considered to have better read German interests:

⁸⁴⁹ Memo. Chamberlain, "The Chinese Problem." 10/09/1900, CAB37/53/65 or Chamberlain Papers JC14/4/1/1

⁸⁵⁰ Memo. Chamberlain, 1/04/1898, Chamberlain Papers, JC7/2/2A/4

⁸⁵¹ Wilhelm to Bulow, 29 Jan 1901, *GP*, XVII. No.4987, pp.24-9

She[Germany] is in mortal terror on account of that long frontier of hers on the Russian side. She will therefore never stand by us against Russia; but is always rather inclined to curry favour with Russia by throwing us over. I have no wish to quarrel with her; but my faith is infinitesimal.⁸⁵²

As ever this is cogent enough, but it missed a singular point which it appeared the Germans also missed. Germany was most likely to find herself in a conflict with Russia because of an issue arising out of Russian and Austrian ambitions in Eastern Europe. This was the rationale for why the Germans wished to keep the Russians as deeply involved in the Far East as they could.⁸⁵³ Germany never considered whether the British connection would lessen their dependency upon Austria and thus increase their own influence over Austrian policy. The Austrian ambassador in Berlin had noted in 1900 that if Germany persisted in her aim to supplant Britain as the world's dominant Power then she would eventually encounter serious problems outside of Europe and thus become even more dependent on Austria inside within it. The Ambassador also realised that Russia was unlikely to watch her neighbour become such a power with equanimity.⁸⁵⁴ A British alliance could have helped create the opportunity to escape from a two front war arising out of Eastern Europe, if only because it could strengthen Germany's hand in controlling Austrian ambition. However, this would have added another level to the house of cards which rested on the perceived balance of power in Europe. Chamberlain's alliance proposals need to be read in this light, he did not wish to join the Triple alliance, he hoped to pull Germany out of her European mindset and add her strength to Britain's in the geo-strategic competition. There was also a serious misreading of British imperialism which was essentially, even in Chamberlain, defensive in nature. The Kaiser and Bulow failed to realise that for most of this period the British flag was somewhat following the trade, or more often, safeguarding vital strategic routes and interests. The Germans considered the actions of others from their own perspective; they did not consider how a mature state would act to defend her established

⁸⁵² Salisbury to Curzon, 17 Oct. 1900, Curzon MSS, MSS.Eur.F.111/159 quoted in Monger, p.17

⁸⁵³ Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, 26/04/1898, *GP*, XIV, Pt.1, No. 3793, pp.221-7

⁸⁵⁴ Kennedy, *Antagonism*, p.241

interests which were often geographically outside of her direct control. The Germans did not understand informal empire, though they often used their increasing trade concerns as a right to interfere in areas still dominated by the British.

Ultimately Germany alienated Chamberlain; the constant Anglophobia in the German press as well as the ever grasping, never content, nature of her diplomacy drove him to other ends. The German behaviour over Shanghai was the last straw and he started to try to settle differences with France. While Chamberlain probably never entertained anything like an alliance with either of the Dual Alliance partners, he did start to work upon solving the outstanding issues. Removing them could, despite decades of hostility, normalise Anglo-French relations. The signing of the Anglo-Japanese alliance made this even more important; neither France nor Britain would be eager to join a Russo-Japanese war, if there was nothing they wanted from each other. Chamberlain was just not excited by the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, it appeared to him to be one sided and as it was limited to specific area only partly acted to cover the British overextension. As the list of potential alliance partners dwindled, Chamberlain became increasingly convinced that the future safety of the Empire could rest only on its own shoulders. While the Tariff Reform campaign would rather quickly embrace protection, its beginnings are to be found routed firmly in the problem of defending sprawling interests. As colonial forces proved so useful and so forthcoming in the South African War, Chamberlain set about creating ties of interest to keep the British Empire from flying apart. While the majority of the arguments were rightly based on economics, what Chamberlain was most actuated by were concerns of the relative diminishing of British Power. The foreign policy crises which fell upon the Unionists were all complicated in part by the realisation of the disparity between the vastnesses of British interests, "thrust like gouty fingers into every corner of the globe", and her power to protect them.⁸⁵⁵ If Germany could not be bought to assist in

⁸⁵⁵ Memorandum, Sanderson 21/02/1907, *BD*, III , Appendix B pp. 421-31 quote on p. 430

protecting them, by offering to share some of them, then the gout must be fought and the “weary titan” reinvigorated and strengthened.⁸⁵⁶

Otte suggests that Salisbury’s approach was more nuanced than simply that of an isolationist and even an adherent to the Conservative Country Party line, as suggested by Charmley. This study suggests that Salisbury was indeed more nuanced than his historiography offers. Otte concludes that “there was no ‘end of isolation’, the latter defined as selective engagement in international politics on the basis of limited agreements that provided for geographically clearly defined cooperation, whilst maintaining the maximum amount of freedom of manoeuvre possible.”⁸⁵⁷ However, the definition offered for ‘isolation’ is not isolation at all; merely the continuation of caution with regards to formal far reaching commitments, but this did not prevent the conclusion of diplomatic agreements which called for action in stipulated situations the traditional test of isolation.⁸⁵⁸ This rather suggests that there was actually no *policy* of isolation at all, even if Britain, from time to time, lacked even regional agreements and was *de facto* isolated *diplomatically* or rather unaligned. This is implied in Howard’s work on *Splendid Isolation*.⁸⁵⁹ While Portugal was on the periphery of Europe, Salisbury’s willingness to renew binding treaties with her, when he knew other Powers were circling like vultures, cannot hold hands with a policy of isolation. Salisbury’s approach was nuanced, it was not dictated by a predisposed policy and thus, even before Lansdowne took over it was evolving in response to the geopolitical realities Britain face. It just was not changing fast enough for many members of the Cabinet. Lansdowne’s stewardship continued in Salisbury’s footsteps.

If Charmley’s summation of the Country Party line as a “school of Economy, Peace [and] Sound and strict Finance” then Salisbury’s lamentations of the

⁸⁵⁶ Often attributed to Chamberlain at the Colonial Conference 1902, Amery, *Life*, Vol. 4, p.421;

⁸⁵⁷ Otte, *China*, p.338

⁸⁵⁸ Grenville, *Salisbury*, p.340; Monger, p.27; Charmley, P.283-4

⁸⁵⁹ Howard, C. *Splendid Isolation, A study of ideas concerning Britain’s international position and foreign policy during the later years of the third Marquis of Salisbury*, (London, 1967) see particularly chapter 6, “Legend or Reality” pp. 41-52

effects of the Gladstonian garrison at the Treasury were at odds with this.⁸⁶⁰ Salisbury certainly eschewed a European war, but neither was he for peace at any price and appeared comfortable with the application of force outside of Europe and right at the edge of it with regards to the Ottoman Empire. He was definitely no simple isolationist, nor 'Little Englander': he was prepared to offer treaties where Britain's interests were at stake and the treaty was limited to a specific area and set of circumstances. However, he was not prepared to underwrite another country's aggressive plans and his experience of German diplomacy suggested they would make domineering and selfish allies; Chamberlain eventually agreed. Salisbury's was a policy which attempted to adapt the sound peaceful tenants of the traditional conservative line to suit a world full of dangerous competition in an age where British arms no longer commanded the same confidence they once did.

However, Otte is even more circumspect with where to place Chamberlain. Charmley, firmly connects Chamberlain's precepts with Disraeli's vision of a cosmopolitan military Empire independent of Europe. Ultimately this is very close to where ultimately Chamberlain found himself but only because Germany and the U.S. refused to fall in with his plans. Chamberlain's was a vision of Britain which sat uncomfortably somewhere between the Gladstonian Concert of Europe, and Disraeli's independent prestige driven artifice. Chamberlain wanted to create a new concert, one which included Germany and the U.S. which could then dictate the tune to which the world would dance. He wanted to reform the Empire, within that system, bringing together its constituent parts. Chamberlain cared about prestige but only as a tool to build sentiment and thus a tie between the public and the Empire. His then was an evolution derived in part from Gladstone and Disraeli into something of his own, a precursor to Roosevelt's 'Big 4', when that proved unattainable he accelerated his plan for binding the Empire together so that Britain could face the world even alone. The emphasis was in covering or removing weakness, Britain needed to be stronger; Disraeli did not have to deal with the effects of overextension in the same way.

⁸⁶⁰ Charmley, p.398

Disraeli attempted to use Britain's strength in order to attach public sentiment to a vision of Empire associated with a particular party, essentially to co-opt Palmerstonian principles for Conservative electoral benefit. Chamberlain attempted to attach, lead and create public sentiment towards the Empire in an attempt to ensure that the security, well being and development of the Empire transcended party politics.

Abbreviations

- AJPH *Australian Journal of Politics and History.*
- BD *British Documents on the Origins of the War.*
- CR *Contemporary Review.*
- D&S *Diplomacy and Statecraft.*
- ECHR *Economic History Review.*
- EHR *English Historical Review.*
- FR *Fornightly Review.*
- GP *Grosse Politik der europäischen Kabinette.*
- HJ *Historical Journal.*
- JBS *Journal of British Studies.*
- JMH *Journal of Modern History.*
- JSAS *Journal of South African Studies.*
- MM *Mariner's Mirror.*
- NR *National Review.*
- QVL *The Letters of Queen Victoria.*
- SAHK *South African Historical Journal*
- SEER *Slavonic and East European Review.*
- SR *Saturday Review*

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AC 1; 5; 7

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NC 1/6, 19

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MSS Add.MS 49690-1; 49706; 49727; 49732; 49746; 49769; 49772-4;

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MSS Add.MS 88906/17/1, 5; 88906/16/1-3, 18

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3M/E/Balfour; 3M/E/Chamberlain; 3M/E/Goschen; 3M/E/Lansdowne;

3M/E/Selbourne; 3M/A/121; 3M/A/126; 3M/A/129; 3M/A/138

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