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Sir Edward Grey, the Parliamentary Radicals
and the Struggle for Control of Foreign Policy 1911-12

G M Scrase

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts
University of Durham
1993

This thesis examines the issue of parliamentary involvement in foreign affairs, and the implications that this had for British foreign policy, in the period 1911-12. The struggle for control of policy between Sir Edward Grey and the parliamentary Radicals is considered from two perspectives: with reference to the Radicals' arguments for both review and reform of policy; and with reference to the strategic realities facing Grey which dictated policy in this period.

The background to the events of 1911-12 is discussed giving particular attention to three areas - reappraising Britain's strategic position and policy *vis à vis* the states system in the light of recent historiographical debate; examining the fundamental principles of the Radicals and their previous agitation concerning Parliament and foreign policy; and summarising the key events of summer 1911.

The parliamentary struggle is examined with reference both to parliamentary questions and debates, and to relevant private papers and diplomatic documents. The major issues of contention are considered: most notably the Agadir Crisis and Anglo-German schism, the Persian Question and Anglo-Russian collusion, the issue of excessive secrecy in diplomacy, the controversial 'balance of power' question and diplomatic bias, and the constitutional rights of Parliament respecting foreign policy. The struggle for control of both specific diplomatic initiatives and the principles which underwrote policy during this period focuses attention upon the confrontation between the moral imperative (the need to operate policy commensurate with principles of conscience) and the practical necessity (the need to subordinate conscience to considerations of grand strategy). Having assessed the respective parliamentary performance of the protagonists, and the success of their arguments, this study concludes that despite evidence of wilful abuse of Parliament, the diplomatic situation confronting Grey justified both his conduct and policies; that despite an unassailable moral position, the Radical failure to offer practical solutions to serious diplomatic crises and undermining of Grey's position despite this renders their position unsustainable; and that minimal parliamentary involvement was in the circumstances desirable.

**SIR EDWARD GREY, THE PARLIAMENTARY RADICALS,
AND THE STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL OF FOREIGN POLICY**

1911-12

G M SCRASE

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CONTENTS

Chapter I : Britain in the States System Before 1914:
Some Reappraisals, pp.1-27

Chapter II : 'Matter' and 'Manner' in British Foreign Policy:
the Foreign Affairs Debate of November 1911

1. The Agadir Crisis and the Radical Campaign for the
Control of Foreign Affairs, pp.28-43

2. The Debate of 27th November 1911: Grey's Statement
of Policy, pp.44-78

Chapter III: Parliament and the Persian Question 1911-12: the
Radical Position, pp.79-116

Chapter IV : Parliament and the Persian Question 1911-12: the Realities
of Policy, pp.117-154

Conclusion pp.155-159

References pp.160-198

Bibliography 199-206

CHAPTER I : BRITAIN IN THE STATES SYSTEM BEFORE 1914 : SOME REAPPRAISALS

To achieve an accurate assessment of the role of Parliament vis à vis foreign affairs, it is necessary to consider both the nature of the policies operating at that time and the diplomatic and strategic considerations that underwrote them. Recent work in this field has sought to examine the premier interests and responsibilities of Britain, and her ability to meet and sustain them, in the light of available military resources and prevalent strategic considerations.¹ The findings of these studies have brought into question the nature and aims of Grey's Entente diplomacy, and tend to encourage a revision or at least a review of the traditional interpretation of Britain's ante bellum position. This introductory chapter seeks to consider Britain's position within the states system in the light of the historiographical perspective, as a necessary forerunner to the analysis of the role of Parliament in foreign affairs. Recognising that any parliamentary intervention into the world of foreign affairs had clear implications for the wider field of international relations, close examination of parliamentary intervention, with particular reference to the questions posed, answers extracted, and arguments advanced in Westminster, may help provide further insight into Britain's position within the states system, and thus contribute towards a resolution of the ongoing historiographical debate. At the same time, if the wider diplomatic considerations at stake can be identified and evaluated, the impact which prolonged parliamentary interference had upon Britain's diplomatic position may be evaluated, thus providing a clear indication as to whether increased parliamentary



involvement was either practical or desirable: and thus help explain the nature and progress of the Radicals' parliamentary campaign to that effect. The extent to which awareness could exist in Westminster, both of premier policy considerations and of the practical limitations precluding action, or indeed of the impact made upon Britain's diplomatic position of open debating of issues, reflects upon the overall question of the role of Parliament. As such, it is necessary to outline as far as is possible exactly what such considerations were, and to provide a clear background upon which to base an analysis of the parliamentary struggle.

* * *

Before any survey of the diplomatic field is attempted, one element in particular about the nature of foreign affairs during this period, and indeed the subsequent historical assessments that have been attempted, requires clarification. The use of specialist terminology in scientific study necessitates accurate definition of terms used - historical study is no different. In the case of the foreign affairs and diplomatic history of this period, two terms in particular require careful consideration, both in terms of meaning and application. They are, respectively, 'balance of power' and 'great power'. Both the contemporary figures involved in the diplomatic and political field and subsequent students of the period argue that these elements were central factors in Grey's policy, and examine Britain's international position in terms of these descriptive and yet ambiguous phrases. It is therefore necessary to determine, in the context of this discussion, exactly what these terms were taken to represent; the extent to which they were operated upon as central elements in the great diplomatic game; and how Britain fitted into a diplomatic system in which they actually applied.

Defining 'great power' status is possible only if the context in which it is being applied is remembered. Britain was undoubtedly 'great' in some ways. Her position as a premier commercial nation involved in a vast carrying trade is not disputed here. Her status as the world's single largest naval power (especially if a Eurocentric perspective excluding the United States is adopted) provides another example of

British 'greatness'; although here, ironically, contemporary commentators judged her position as weak because she proved unable to sustain a naval level equal to the combined forces of the next two respective naval powers.² However, for the field of international power politics, a much broader base of definition is required. A meaningful definition can only be advanced if the nature of power is seen in the context of the period under consideration; and if a nation's power is taken in its entirety, as opposed to distinct component parts, as it related to the states system of that time. Martin Wight has provided a workable definition along these lines³:

Great powers are powers with general interests ie.
whose interests are as wide as the states system itself ...
[and possess] an ability to protect those interests by
force. And this means a readiness to go to war.⁴

It is along the lines of this working definition that this study seeks to examine the Foreign Secretary's diplomacy and the concomitant parliamentary disquiet of the period 1911-13. The current historical debate over the exact nature of British policy pre-1914 needs to be considered in light of this definition: as do both the diplomacy of Sir Edward Grey and the parliamentary struggle which dominated the 18 month period between the Agadir Crisis and the end of the parliamentary session of 1912, insofar as they relate to that debate.⁵ That the period of Grey's ministry witnessed a significant transition in the nature of British diplomatic considerations, and that diplomacy was therefore prone to consequent crises of realignment, is widely accepted. The parliamentary struggle for the control of foreign affairs began once a number of sleeping concerns over policy direction were awakened. Changes in

Britain's diplomacy and her dealings with other powers were perceived by those not fully aware of prevailing strategic considerations (and consequently of options open to policy makers) to contradict both political traditions and the nation's best interests. These changes seemed to be incompatible with continuing 'great power' status. However, if Wight's definition of 'great power' status is applied to the situation, and recent research into Britain's ability to guarantee primary interests in time of conflict (either in terms of imperial defence or continental commitments)⁶ is considered, a re-evaluation of status is encouraged with Britain threatened by strategic weakness and material shortcomings. The very shifts and 'failings' in policy that provoked criticisms of Grey and accusations that British honour, prestige and, consequently, status were being compromised may now be placed in a context where that status was already in jeopardy. As such, and given the activity of this period in both Houses, the parliamentary perception of role and Britain's actual 'great power' status is an element which this study seeks to pursue.

As with 'great power', the value of 'balance of power' as specialist terminology depends upon the context in which it is used and the extent to which it may accurately be applied. This term provides the historian with a greater problem of definition, because varied and inconsistent application over the years has led to ambiguity and confusion. Indeed, much work has been attempted to overcome this problem, with mixed results.⁷ For the purposes of this study it is necessary to understand the context in which the protagonists of 1911-12 saw the 'balance', and to assess the extent to

which it can be applied as an element in the overall issue of foreign affairs conduct and control.

Once more, Wight is able to offer a concise explanation, this time of the 'balance':⁸

The balance of power is the principle of what might be called the mechanics of power politics; and the mechanistic metaphor is useful for describing international relations provided that we do not suppose that it exhausts everything that can be said about them.⁹

Wight recognises that a variety of definitions can be advanced for the 'balance', and examines them closely. In doing this, he is able to provide a distinction between the existence of a distribution of power amongst states in a common system, and the operation of deliberate policies intent on manipulating elements within the distribution. He argues that the operation of a states system in which power distribution is an issue of contention tends to result in the operation of a series of policies by the involved states aimed at revising or preserving inequalities in the distribution of power so as to maximise advantage. It is in these terms that a 'balance', as a system of power distribution under constant revision and flux, appears most attractive and applicable to the ante bellum diplomacy of the European powers.

However, in terms of the parliamentary struggle for control of foreign policy of 1911-1912, the 'balance of power' became a political issue, seen as synonymous with

the operation of a definite and manipulative policy, rather than as a definition of the existing distribution of power. The deliberate manipulation of the states system through a conscious design, with the purpose of maximising national power and influence, was an issue of considerable political controversy in Britain. It was one thing to accept that the policy makers saw the British position in terms of a states system where power was unevenly distributed, and formulated their policies to respond to the exigencies of that situation.¹⁰ It was quite another to infer that Grey was engaged in a policy that manipulated that states system by means of subtle yet aggressive diplomacy, seeking maximum advantage for Britain at all costs and with scant regard for the position of others. Such a policy was reviled by Liberals for being contrary to existing principles of conduct. It provoked untoward antagonism between states detrimental to commercial and economic interests and necessitated wasteful expenditure on excessive defences. It also tended to entangle the nation in political commitments with other powers contrary to the spirit of free trade and international harmony, and created a series of unavoidable responsibilities which impaired the ability of Parliament to exercise its legitimate functions and therefore undermined the basis of democratic control of policy.¹¹ Nevertheless, it would be wrong to infer that even the most worried Liberals were unaware that a distribution of power was an inescapable reality; that Britain's role as a power lay within such a system; and consequently that her diplomacy needed to reflect such an awareness. As a leading Radical admitted:

I never thought that we could detach ourselves from our sympathies and duties to the rest of the world.¹²

It remains to be seen how the 'balance of power' can best be applied to the consideration of Britain's diplomatic position and foreign policy during Grey's ministry. The principles of a 'balance' policy were clearly elucidated by officials at Whitehall;¹³ but whether or not claims or denials as to the operation of any such policy can be upheld is less clear. It is necessary to understand how Britain's position in the states system was perceived by those interested in foreign affairs, and how in consequence it was felt policy should reflect that position. As the consideration of 'great power' status offered above has suggested, Britain's position *vis à vis* the states system in the ante bellum period has recently come into question. That a change in defensive and diplomatic orientation occurred in the first decade of the twentieth century is not disputed. However the reasons behind the nature of the change, and exactly against who or what, and why, the changes were directed, has been brought into question. If the policymakers of this time were dictated to by perceived material inadequacies and a concomitant inability to meet essential strategic defensive requirements as a result of political and socio-economic reasons which allowing for domestic and diplomatic considerations it was arguably impossible to admit, then policy should be viewed not as manipulative or a result of premeditated, Machiavellian design; but rather as an unavoidable and necessary response to matters of grave importance. As Wight recognises:

The operation of the balance of power is true to states in proportion to their strength, confidence and internal cohesion.¹⁴

As such, if it is possible to discover exactly what interests were deemed to be under threat, and exactly which power or powers dominated the minds of the policy makers (and why), a better idea of how the 'balance' can be applied to Grey's diplomacy may be attained.¹⁵

Furthermore, the mechanistic model of the 'balance' is important to this study because, having accepted that 'internal cohesion' is an important element in the position of any power operating within the state system, the 'balance' in operation can be used to examine how the parliamentary situation played an important role in the wider context of power politics. The impact and success of the parliamentary struggle for control of foreign affairs had potentially crucial implications for Britain's position in the states system. It undoubtedly had an impact upon Grey's ability to pursue diplomatic initiatives seen as vital to maintaining levels of power and status. It also reflected to interested parties abroad the extent of domestic faith and satisfaction in security and policy. In this way, the struggle helped influence perceptions of strength that determined beliefs in current and indeed future scopes for action by Britain, perceptions which arguably had a greater say in determining the relative influence and power devolved to Britain (her status) than did the existing but often unknown levels of material resources. The issue of the 'balance of power' therefore occupies a central position in this study; as an issue of contention in the parliamentary struggle (and in which ironically Parliament unwittingly exerted influence over both the 'balance' and foreign policy), and also as an explanation of certain seemingly

incongruous elements in policy, given that relative power distributions were an accepted part of the states system, but were often only partially understood because rarely given definite substance by detailed information. Indeed, considering the issue of availability of information, it was ironic for Sir Arthur Nicolson to lament:

So many people regard the maintenance of the equilibrium...as merely an abstract principle... they do not understand [the nature of current diplomacy and our position].¹⁶

Recent work has inferred that in fact misunderstanding and ignorance, playing upon erroneous perceptions rather than established fact, indeed that abstraction both domestically and abroad, was a crucial factor in Grey's defence of national interests and preservation of status.¹⁷ As such, the words of Richard Cobden appear to ring true:

The theory of the balance of power is a mere chimera - a creation of a politician's brain... without definite form or tangible existence... words which convey sound without meaning.¹⁸

* * *

What were the main considerations that underwrote Grey's foreign policy? With which 'model' of ante bellum policy do the more controversial diplomatic initiatives which attracted parliamentary scrutiny appear to sit most comfortably? Two main historiographical views have been advanced seeking to explain the nature of British policy. The standard or 'traditional' interpretation¹⁹ seeks to portray foreign policy as

having been a self-contained institution, to a large extent free from considerations of domestic political competition. It is seen as having been formulated and controlled by an élite, led by the incumbent Foreign Secretary, which adhered to a set of established principles and traditions, and argued for continuity above party politics. The Ententes of 1904 and 1907 respectively marked a shift by the policy makers from an Imperial to a Continental orientation, with an emphasis upon countering moves which it was feared pointed towards a German hegemony in Europe; a hegemony taken to be inimical to British interests and policy principles. The result of the diplomacy of this period was that Britain, through the military contacts made with the French to secure Franco-Belgian security, became irretrievably tied to a set of continental responsibilities.

An alternative approach has been suggested by Keith Wilson, who has attempted to challenge the traditional interpretation and proffer an explanation in some respects similar to that offered by the Fischer school in their exposition of German policy in the same period.²⁰ He has argued that due consideration should be paid to domestic issues and political constraints before any assessments are attempted, and that much of what has been previously deduced about policy is in fact based upon mistaken interpretations of the contemporary sentiments held by the élite - that a series of 'manufactured myths' were used to obscure worrying frailties in the position of Britain as an imperial 'great power', and that these 'myths' have continued to obscure the truth ever since. Wilson contends that policy was based upon a tacit acceptance that

the diplomatic and military resources of Britain were insufficient to provide for both imperial security and a continued defence of much-vaunted principle; that Russia and not Germany was and continued to be seen as the single largest threat to Britain's position²¹; and that the policy of involvement in the affairs of continental Europe was pursued as a means to secure good relations with Russia - the only way to secure a viable defence of the Empire. The securing of sound Anglo-French relations, as well as removing areas of tiresome colonial friction, is seen as having been an essential prerequisite to any improvement in Anglo-Russian relations; even though the paltry value of British support was clearly illustrated as the French sought to improve their position against their bugbear, Germany. Wilson sees British policy under Grey as having been one of necessary bluff, the maintenance of a facade of greatness and status by means of association with those who most threatened her. This pretence of greatness was in turn the basis for domestic interpretation of her place within the system of power politics; and that the 'myths' sustained to obscure the actual weakness of Britain's position to foreign powers (both friends and foes) also had the same effect upon the domestic audience. As a result, the reality of the position, dictated by limited material resources and a consequent restriction upon the ability to act, proved increasingly difficult to reconcile with the arguments voiced in support of action based on the 'myths' of greatness; and that in consequence the pursuit of policy was made all the more difficult.

In his study British Economic and Strategic Planning 1905-15²² David French

provides an extra contribution to the debate by examining the political economics upon which policies pertaining to national security and defence were based, and viewing the international position of Britain in this light. Political economy may best be defined as the operation of government upon the material resources available to it. French argues that changes in the nature and composition of Britain's economic position in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when viewed in the context of her interests and responsibilities as an imperial and commercial Great Power, created a situation where Britain faced potential disaster should she become embroiled in any large-scale war.²³ Put simply, the relative decline of Britain as an industrial power and her loss of self-sufficiency in key economic areas²⁴, and the concomitant dependence upon international commerce and finance as the major sources of relative national prosperity, meant that the material resources upon which Britain's position as a political and military power were based were significantly weaker than had previously been the case. The dependence upon commerce that had developed apace during the industrial expansion of the later nineteenth century, and Britain's position via the Bank of England at the centre of the world's financial system as 'the world's only free market in gold', underwrote the continuing prosperity of the nation; and consequently provided the basis of wealth and material resources upon which national security depended.²⁵ French argues that these two areas were thought to be more susceptible to collapse than had the previous bases of national wealth and security,²⁶ and that if the outbreak and course of any war should cause a significant disruption to either commercial or financial stability, in spite of safeguards to the contrary,²⁷ then the

premier sources of finance for the conducting of war and defence would be compromised. Moreover, it was feared that the surplus resources which had in the past been diverted to finance and sustain wartime defences had been eroded by increases in peacetime public expenditure (blamed by some upon the Liberal reforms of the period²⁸), and that it was not possible to make good the shortfall by further fiscal measures without risking potentially severe socio-economic consequences²⁹. Fears that, if a war situation should arise, Britain would not be able to sustain a financial commitment commensurate with her position were increased. In short, she would be unable to defend all her domestic and imperial interests. It was feared that Britain's means would prove unequal to the burden of sustaining a war effort and maintaining the level of supplies needed to protect basic levels of domestic economic consumption, and that failure to achieve the latter would be to provoke a socio-economic crisis from which revolution and national collapse could well arise³⁰. This had clear implications for Britain's international standing; should such weakness be perceived by rival powers, her diplomatic position could easily be undermined by hostile or ambitious powers applying pressure which she could not resist - and she would be forced into submission. In summary, the political economics of the British Empire at this time dictated that diplomacy should be aimed at reducing as far as possible the need for defence expenditure, that crises should be avoided at all costs; and that a policy of rapprochement and co-operation with erstwhile rival powers be pursued as the best method by which to make sure that the first two necessities were secured.

French tends to accept without adequate critical scrutiny the traditionalist interpretation of the foreign policy of this period. He argues that the Ententes were created to effect a reduction in potential areas of conflict; but that, presumably as a result of her position as a major economic power and apparent attempts at securing continental hegemony, it proved impossible to reach terms with a 'hostile' Germany, and that subsequent strategic planning against Germany showed a recognition that she was regarded as the premier threat to Britain's position.³¹ In the light of Wilson's work³², such an argument appears to require reconsideration. The traditional approach fails to assess or compare the bases for contact or the respective relations existent between Britain and Germany, and Britain and Russia, to a satisfactory degree. The respective, relative threats posed, and more importantly if French's work is allowed for, the different circumstances for and likely consequences of any conflict between Britain and those powers deemed to threaten her require further consideration. As has already been suggested in the discussion of the 'balance of power' question, it is necessary to consider how the relative distribution of power that the policy controllers thought existed affected the nature of that policy³³. The question arises: who or what were the primary considerations and influences, the dynamic elements in the diplomatic system that held the attention. Was the fear of German designs upon continental hegemony the over-riding concern facing Grey, and if so why? Was Germany the state most likely and able to carry out a conflict against Britain that would result in the disaster that French suggests had come to dominate British fears? Did the Anglo-Russian Entente reflect a fear of Germany, or a

recognition that the Russian threat was of potentially and indeed practically greater significance? And did the 1907 Entente mean that any Russian threat had been removed, or reduced in importance to a tertiary position in policy considerations? It is important to remember that the 'balance of power' was prone to constant change as different events and political considerations came to the fore.³⁴ Any event in the diplomatic field could provoke a change in the overall distribution of power in the states system. Every dispute between powers could upset the equilibrium, and offer an opportunity for a tertiary power to intervene seeking advantage. This was often as much a consideration as was the original issue of contention. As a result, it is necessary to allow for an interaction between all considerations rather than to use specific issues and events as evidence in any over-hasty categorization of relations; for example, into 'phobia' or 'philia' brackets as over-riding policy considerations. Only then can the relative importance of issues at stake and the nature of diplomatic relations be properly assessed.

The options open to the government in trying to improve the security position were limited. French argues convincingly that, as a result of fears that higher taxation in peacetime would reduce the financial reserves available for any war situation, an increase in taxation was deemed to be dangerous. The introduction of tariff reform for revenue purposes was opposed by the Liberal Party, Treasury and Foreign Office alike, all of whom maintained that free trade must remain as a policy cornerstone.³⁵ Put simply, it was all but impossible to use increased expenditure to resolve the

security dilemma. As a result, two alternatives were available. The government could admit that, as a result of increasingly finite resources, it could no longer undertake to meet all the responsibilities it had previously upheld, and that as a result certain areas of policy commitment would have to be abandoned. Policy would undergo an economisation until sustainable levels of commitment had been reached.

Unfortunately, such a course was itself fraught with both domestic and diplomatic dangers. To concede that the existing level of responsibilities was beyond the means of Britain would have diminished influence and prestige and, more seriously, led to a re-evaluation of the distribution of power and a reduced status for Britain. It would have reduced the amount of diplomatic influence Britain could exert, and risked encouraging other rival powers to exploit the areas of weakness which had been exposed, thus jeopardising the security it sought to achieve. In any case, the dependence upon commerce would still preclude any economisation upon the defence of trade routes or free access to foreign markets, because any loss of trade, even if only relative to other powers, would put the ability to secure necessary levels of income (sufficient to maintain a level of influence) or guarantee essential supplies in jeopardy.³⁶ As the naval issue shows, it proved impossible to publicly economise away existing traditions such as the Two Power Standard for fear of adverse political reactions.³⁷ Similarly, it is clear that Grey could not concede influence over areas such as Persia if the result appeared to be the abandoning of principles and, worse, an increased threat to Indian and thus imperial security. To do so would be to arouse domestic political passions³⁸ and to encourage foreign powers to believe that further

exploitations of weaknesses elsewhere could bear fruit. In both cases, and in the light of Wight's evaluation of important elements in international power politics already discussed, such domestic and international disruptions could only further harm Britain's position vis à vis the distribution of power.³⁹ As a result of this inability to economise openly, and the recognition that increased expenditure on security could not be sustained without compromising the very basis of national wealth, it became necessary to use diplomacy itself to cover for any shortfall, to obscure areas of weakness.

One problem that exists in dealing with antagonistic models seeking to outline emphases in policy is a tendency of those models to mutual exclusivity. My intention here is to illustrate the size and nature of the problem facing Sir Edward Grey and those in charge of foreign affairs, to attempt to ascertain what the primary considerations at stake at the time of the parliamentary struggle for control of policy were before examining the struggle itself. Germany was of course a cause of concern, although given Wilson's approach it is less certain that she dominated matters to the extent outlined by previous studies. The problem posed by Anglo-Russian relations and the Great Game in Central Asia appears to have been equally persistent. The threat of conflict in Central Asia, indeed of any developments that could compromise the security of India and reveal areas of weakness within Britain's position, was taken extremely seriously. Such a confrontation was undoubtedly seen as potentially disastrous as any Anglo-German dispute;⁴⁰ the geographical factors and relative naval

and military dispositions involved meant that it was more likely to undermine Britain's status than any confrontation with Berlin. Even if Beryl Williams is correct in ¹ doubting whether or not Russia had any designs upon India, and that the Central Asian issue was used to exploit British fears so as to secure concessions elsewhere,⁴¹ the fact remains that Russia was seen in Whitehall as being the power best equipped to exploit British weakness (with obvious repercussions in other areas of diplomacy). The 1907 Convention had reduced the immediate threat of any confrontation, but as McLean recognises, its failure to produce a lasting settlement in Persia, an area where the long term interests of the two powers were arguably irreconcilable,⁴² meant increasingly that it was seen as no more than a temporary working agreement which would require later revision.⁴³ French's arguments concerning material weakness apply at least as much to any scenario involving war in Asia, because of the strain that such a commitment far from home and with the cost of supplies thus increased would place upon the imperial socio-economic position. It was also realised that any such conflict would most likely encourage interventions or exploitations of her weakness by other ambitious powers which would make her position all the more untenable. Moreover, it was feared in Whitehall that even if Russia did not become embroiled in a war with Britain, a future with Russia not tied to an Anglocentric Entente could prove as disastrous. Grey was well aware that the fears of Curzon and the Indian lobby for Indian security could well be realised should no obstacle be placed in the way of a Russian annexation of Persia, Russian penetration to the Persian Gulf, and the creation of a contiguous Anglo-Russian frontier. In such circumstances a vast

increase in the size of the Indian Army would be required to secure adequate defence. However, the concomitant increases in expenditure which this would engender, added to those resulting from the ongoing naval arms race to which for strategic and political reasons Britain remained committed, would have made the financial burden intolerable⁴⁴ - unless sacrifices were made elsewhere, such as in domestic reform or in terms of higher taxation, both of which were potentially fraught with danger and liable to provoke electoral disquiet.⁴⁵

Keith Neilson has shed further light on the nature of Anglo-Russian relations during this period by no means inimical to Wilson's view by illustrating how the overriding need for cordial relations tended to engender 'wishful thinking'.⁴⁶

The need for accurate information in order to pursue a rational foreign policy is obvious...but those who gather, collate and interpret information shape, in many ways, the answers which it provides [because] their political 'taste' [has] a subtle yet profound influence upon...decisions which are made.⁴⁷

Whilst accepting that concern existed over Central Asia, Neilson is unconvinced that British policy towards Russia at this time was the product of the Russophobic belief that a Russia free from any Anglocentric diplomatic system would inevitably pursue an anti-British policy because their respective interests were seen to be inimical. Instead, and differently from Wilson (who sees apparently Russophilic diplomacy as being the result of exactly the fears outlined above, and a concomitant recognition that Britain would in the long term be hard pressed to resist), he argues along traditional lines that the threat perceived in Whitehall was caused in the light of

Germanophobia, that a rapprochement between Russia and Germany was to be avoided for fear of a shift in favour of continental German hegemony.⁴⁸ This aside, Neilson recognises that the principal consideration was that Britain needed close links with Russia, and that, because the Foreign Office was unable to offer binding guarantees in the form of military commitment or political alliance, for obvious reasons,⁴⁹ she was forced to convince Russia that the Entente was of value by professions of loyalty and examples of good faith alone. As such, Grey's diplomatic position and room for manoeuvre were severely restricted.⁵⁰ The ability to maintain lasting good relations depended upon two factors. It was necessary to provide evidence that diplomatic co-operation could profit both Russia and Britain, and that good faith and loyalty could convert into material advantage. It was also essential to show sceptical elements both in Britain⁵¹ and Russia⁵² who were eager to secure the collapse of the Entente that apparent socio-political differences or traditions of mistrust were not obstacles precluding contemporary co-operation.⁵³ As such, it was necessary to attempt to control and regulate the nature of information upon which perceptions as to respective political attitudes concerning the Entente were based; and to persuade respective critics that Russian reactionism and British Radicalism were neither representative of government attitudes nor influential over policy operation. As two Whitehall permanent under secretaries commented:

A reactionary government in Russia would meet with no sympathy at all in this country, and it would be impossible to grow closer to Russia in any way.⁵⁴

If our affairs at home develop in a direction which the Emperor may consider to be ultra-democratic and as indicating instability...he will most probably be disposed to seek comfort in more conservative quarters.⁵⁵

Neilson argues that these two goals, the achievement of a situation which 'liberalised' reports of Russia and 'conservatised' the nature of Britain, and provided definite examples of good faith, tended to cloud official perceptions of the truth. Because the Foreign Office needed Russia to be a loyal political ally and to move towards a more liberal socio-political system, and tended to rely almost exclusively upon evidence from such Russian liberal sources as could provide assurances to that effect, British officials were prone to misinterpretation and 'wishful thinking' as to the real nature of Russian politics. In this way, the extent of the Tsar's liberal inclinations came to be exaggerated;⁵⁶ and evidence that elements in the Russian bureaucracy undertook measures incompatible with the Entente ignored, their actions taken to be unrepresentative of official policy, and excused away as being unavoidable problems to be expected in any system as monolithic as that of Nicholas' Russia.⁵⁷ A discussion of the realities of Russian politics and the nature of the bureaucracy is not required here. Suffice to say that Neilson's arguments as to 'wishful thinking' can surely be compared with Wilson's ideas of a series of myths as being an example of an exercise intended to conceal problems at the heart of Britain's security. They tend to sustain the view that the British Foreign Office was forced by circumstance to take declarations of principle in favour of the 1907 Convention at face value, and therefore to trust Russian initiatives in good faith; because it was too unpleasant to consider

any implications to the contrary. Nicolson epitomises the position which the Foreign Office, officially at least, saw itself as obliged to adopt:-

I have not read this document [memo on apparent Russian violations of the 1907 Convention] but if, as I assume, it contains criticism of Russian procedure in Persia, it is largely based on prejudices and false assumptions.⁵⁸

The need to provide security in the light of material inadequacies and political constraints was, then, the over-riding factor that dictated the diplomacy of the ante bellum years and, with specific regard to this study, the period immediately post-Agadir. Wight has argued that powers in a position of weakness tend to gravitate towards the dominant power in the prevalent states system;⁵⁹ and although it would be improper to attribute too much to coincidence, it is certainly interesting in the light of Wilson's work that it was towards Russia that Grey aimed his diplomatic overtures. As the American Lewis Einstein recognised in a contemporary review of the situation:

The Anglo-French and Anglo-Russian negotiations ...smoothed out through diplomatic means the ... rivalry of a century. But between Germany and England similar adjustment is impossible. Their antagonism presents nothing concrete ... there is no real difficulty.⁶⁰

The major strategies of imperial defence had to be based upon tangibles, upon where and against whom conflict was both most likely and potentially most dangerous. Once a need to minimise defence expenditure had been recognised, and diplomacy became the only plausible medium by which to ensure that the scope for conflict was

reduced (and therefore the need for vast defence expenditure lessened), it was natural that the diplomatic moves to secure imperial security should be with those powers who provided the greatest threat. Grey sought to persuade erstwhile protagonists that mutual advantages would accrue to both sides should friction be removed and friendly co-operation provide the basis for future relations. However, and at the same time, he had to ensure that Britain's position within any Entente relationship should not appear to be of excessive weakness. She had to appear ready to promote equitable negotiated compromise where conflicting interests emerged; but also had to be able to command respect commensurate with a position of 'great power' status, a nation both willing and able to use her resources to support allies and defend specified interests. In the light of her precarious position, two main considerations determined the scope for diplomatic initiative.⁶¹ Policy had to be designed and operated to allow for the fact that Britain operated within constraints of finite resources which she dare not compromise. However, because she was bound by involvement within the states system of the time to diplomatic links with other powers, and that as a result of her finite resources she was forced to secure friendly links with powers who threatened her interests, it was vital that she maintain a pretence of strength so that her viability as a premier power (and thus value as an ally or ability to command respect as a rival) was not compromised. Should Britain's weakness and inability to meet certain levels of commitment become obvious, then the value of her support to her Entente partners and the continued mutuality of advantages initially accrued by those rapprochements would come into question and the British security dilemma reassert

itself all the more seriously. It must be remembered that under the auspices of the 'balance of power' it was natural for nations to maximise personal advantage. Grey had to allow for the fact that the failure to sustain an appearance of vitality and power within the states system would be to encourage or force other powers to effect a redistribution of power at her expense. His policy therefore acted to prove how influential Britain remained, and to obscure areas of weakness by minimising the nature of emerging conflicts. He was well aware that Britain's position was fixed not by empirical evidence available to the policymakers at home, but how other powers thought Britain could and would act:-

[In the great affairs there is much more] in the minds of events (if such an expression may be used) than in the minds of the chief actors.⁶²

It was the need to ensure that perceptions of Britain as a 'great power' were maintained, and that the minds of the chief actors would fail to appreciate that a security dilemma had effectively compromised her ability to meet Wight's yardstick of great power status, that best explains the foreign policy of the period. Both the 'manner' and the 'matter' of policy aimed at preserving a façade of greatness, and in this rests the 'myth' interpretation of Wilson. The Ententes were not directed outwardly against a hostile threat, but inwardly against a threat born of weakness. Grey was forced in his conducting of Entente diplomacy to meet a variety of requisites. He had to convince the other powers that Britain would supply diplomatic aid in support of her friends commensurate with prevalent circumstances, buttressed if

necessary by viable military and economic sanctions.⁶³ He had to appear as the champion of negotiated compromise, ready to accept assurances offered by friends in good faith, to act as the advocate for the advantages of peaceful co-operation.⁶⁴ He also had to convince all other powers that where various specified interests existed, Britain would defend them over and above other agreements so as to prevent their being compromised; and that any such defence would be sufficient to force the issue.⁶⁵ In summary, Grey had to achieve a working balance between these factors so as to convince the Entente powers that co-operation with Britain was worthwhile, and therefore to make certain that his diplomacy was able to secure the level of defence which finite material resources could not. It is a paradox that at the same time the Ententes enabled Grey to adopt an attitude in his diplomacy that inferred that British prestige remained undiminished, reflecting the fact that imperial security had been greatly enhanced, he was (at the same time) constrained by a need to ensure that the Ententes themselves survived so that the real weakness of the British position was not exposed. This, then, is what Wilson suggests to be the 'Fiction of the Free Hand',⁶⁶ the fact that for all the statements made to the contrary that sought to perpetuate the idea that British policy was commensurate with her position as an independent 'great power', Grey's diplomacy in reality reflected a recognition that Britain's status as a 'great power' rested with the maintenance of good relations with those who threatened her the most. The potential consequences for this policy of a protracted parliamentary intervention into affairs of policy could therefore only contribute towards the exposure of issues and problems that Grey sought to limit, and a

questioning of the bases of his diplomacy by all those involved in power politics. This could in turn lead to an undermining of Britain's position unless either Grey could fend off criticisms (obscuring once more the weaknesses of his position) or another practical line of policy could be provided as a viable alternative given her fundamental interests.

Chapter II: 'MATTER' AND 'MANNER' IN BRITISH FOREIGN
POLICY: THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS DEBATE OF
NOVEMBER 1911

1. The Agadir Crisis and the Radical Campaign for the Control of Foreign
Affairs

When we hear that there was a time when we were on the eve of war...then indeed democracy has the right to ask...that the people shall be clearly informed before such a crisis is reached, and...shall be allowed to express their opinions with the facts before them and decide for themselves whether action shall be taken or not...

It is intolerable that the country should be kept in the dark and misled. Now that the policy of secrecy and mystery presents itself as a serious national danger it is the plain duty of politicians...to deliberate as to how this method of conducting foreign affairs can be altered and corrected.

- Arthur Ponsonby, Democracy and the Control of Foreign Affairs, 1912

The events of the summer of 1911 surrounding the Agadir Crisis have attracted a great deal of attention from historians. Seen perhaps as the dress rehearsal for the Great War, the war scare of 1911 had far-reaching consequences for far more people than those directly involved in the dispute over Morocco and the respective imperial interests of Germany and France. Once it became clear exactly how serious the extent of Franco-German schism had become, and how close an escape the European powers had had from escalation and military confrontation, some form of reaction became inevitable. In Britain, no less than anywhere else, serious questions were raised about the nation's involvement in an affair in which it had little justifiable or visible

grounds for interference. Stephen Koss has gone so far as to argue that 'it was the Agadir Crisis and not the outbreak of war three years later that convinced [Radical politicians] of the need for a foreign policy more responsible...to public opinion'.¹ In the wake of Agadir, a concerted effort was made by Radical MPs in Westminster to force the issue of the conduct of foreign affairs onto the political agenda, and a campaign was undertaken to attempt to force a reform of the machinery by which policy was formulated and implemented. This campaign is of particular interest to those concerned with the nature of diplomacy at this time, and its interaction with domestic politics. However, before this campaign can be assessed, it is necessary to place both it and its initiators into context with the time in question.

The involvement of Radical MPs in the foreign policy issues of this period has been extensively researched. It is fair to trace their general position back to a House of Commons debate of 19th March 1886, in which Henry Richard had proposed the following motion:-

That in the opinion of this House it is not just or expedient to embark in war, contract engagements involving grave responsibilities for the nation, and add territories to the Empire without the knowledge and consent of Parliament.²

The failure of that motion, by a mere four votes, followed by a long period in which Radicalism was a substantial minority in the House, forced a change in approach by those concerned about the lack of parliamentary involvement in foreign affairs. The Radicals were forced to accept Gladstone's not unsympathetic argument that, although it was worrying that Parliament

could not act to check misguided policy (because it lacked both the information and the opportunity to pass judgement), it was impractical for the House to attempt to assume executive functions when it was already overburdened with legislative duties. The two roles could not be combined with any degree of practicality.³ Having accepted this, the Radicals sought to ensure that the legislature remained in close contact with the executive, so as to guarantee that the latter should remain ever aware of the attitude of those from whom it derived its authority. Agitation that emerged over specific issues therefore tended to be of a substantive as opposed to a procedural nature. Richards describes the change in approach as being towards public campaigns of criticism, which could be advanced by direct challenges within the existing pattern of debates, as opposed to separate initiatives launched from beyond the scope of current business.⁴ Morris concludes that the Radicals set up stall as the moral guardians of liberal principle, dissenters against any policy which threatened to compromise sacred ideals.⁵

The studies of Radical involvement in specific campaigns against certain policy issues reflect not so much direct opposition to official positions, but rather concern that those positions held scope for abuses contrary to Liberal principles. Weinroth argues that the Radicals championed the Entente of 1904 with France insofar as it promoted peaceful co-operation and rapprochement, hinting that a 'family of nations' in which the need for arms and scope for war would be concomitantly reduced could be realised. It was only once the Tangiers Crisis had caused fears of German ambition that Radical

commentators perceived an anti-German bias incorporated within the Entente, and complained that Britain had become entangled within a 'balance of power' mechanism contrary to the spirit of a 'family of nations'. Only at this stage did the Radicals adopt a more hostile view towards the nature of Anglo-French relations.⁶ The attempts by Courtney and Avebury's 'Anglo-German Friendship Committee', and Sir Thomas Barclay's 'Brotherhood Alliance', to promote closer Anglo-German relations were intended to foster the spirit of continental rapprochement which the Radicals had hoped the Entente would be the first step towards. The lack of political grounds for complementing the Anglo-French Entente with an Anglo-German Entente, which frustrated the diplomatic moves for Naval disarmament, did not deter Radical hopes. Such failures were taken to reflect the fact that the spirit of the original Entente was being abused for illiberal 'balance of power' considerations, and convinced Radicals that their duty was to restore and expand that spirit so as to defuse the dangerous situation that the isolation of Germany had caused.⁷

The 1907 Convention with Russia aroused Radical suspicion because of the nature of that country's regime. In spite of favouring general rapprochement, the fact remained that the Tsar's Empire was the antithesis of all that liberal idealism held dear, and this tended to encourage the Radicals' fears that close Anglo-Russian relations could only be maintained at the expense of Liberal traditions. The nature of Anglo-Russian co-operation in Persia was seen to reflect a bias towards pro-Russian and imperialistic tendencies, and not the championing of a small, constitutionally inclined state

against the oppression of larger illiberal neighbours that the Radicals hoped for. The Bosnian Crisis of 1908-09 merely encouraged fears that the Ententes had entangled Britain into an alliance, anti-German in character, and dominated by two allies: one, France, which harboured deep-seated resentment towards and distrust of a German Empire which had prospered at her expense (both in terms of territory and prestige); the other, Russia, which in appearing to follow a dangerous Pan-Slav policy, threatened to destabilise the international status quo. Although not bound by overt military obligations or diplomatic guarantees, the nature of Grey's diplomacy convinced his Radical colleagues that under his guidance Britain had ceased to be an impartial arbiter between the Powers, and had instead become a willing participant in the 'balance of power' game which had prompted the division of Europe and spawned the bloc alliances which seemed to have emerged.⁸ Arguments that his initiatives merely continued an accepted line of policy which had evolved irrespective of domestic party political considerations did little to placate his critics. It was this 'balance' scenario that the Radicals sought to avoid; and this that eventually sparked off the struggle for control of foreign policy in 1911. As they had feared, developments suggested that the executive had grown increasingly apart from the legislature, to the point where policy was being initiated without due attention being paid to the wishes of those from whom authority was derived. Suspicions of this kind existed before the summer of 1911. The impact caused by the events of that summer, the outburst of indignation that followed the Agadir Crisis and which prompted the subsequent agitation for change in policy control, need to be considered. Why did the

Agadir Crisis have such a profound effect upon the domestic political scene in Britain, and consequently upon foreign policy?

Ironically, it is possible to cite the slackening of concern over foreign affairs during 1910 and the early part of 1911, and the absence of any overt crisis at that time, as the main reason for the furore which arose after Agadir. After the Bosnian Crisis and its aftermath, a period of relative calm occurred in which diplomacy tended to encourage optimism even in Radical quarters. During this period Russia and Germany reached their agreement at Potsdam which, although dealing principally with the right to construct railways in the Near and Middle East, was seen by Liberals as evidence that the Entente powers could reach an amicable modus vivendi with Germany. Similarly, it was felt that the Anglo-American Arbitration Treaty of early 1911 provided a precedent for a style of diplomacy which would encourage universal rapprochement and compromise. There was little to suggest that confrontation was near, or that Britain's foreign policy was incompatible with long term international peace and co-operation.⁹ Furthermore, the domestic political scene in Britain conspired to distract attention away from the realm of foreign affairs.¹⁰ 1910 and 1911 had been dominated by the issue of the power of the House of Lords and parliamentary reform. The months prior to the Agadir Crisis saw the country hit by a wave of strikes, in which serious rioting provoked the government into deploying troops against strikers. Moreover, it is by no means certain that the general public was particularly concerned with foreign affairs developments which, to the uninformed observer, had apparently

little to do with domestic matters. What is certain is that after the general elections of 1910 the Radicals' scope for agitating against their own ministers was greatly reduced. With up to a 33% reduction in the number of Liberal MPs, and with the government dependent upon the Irish vote in the Commons, the Radicals were forced to support Asquith's cabinet or otherwise risk letting Balfour and the Unionists in. It would seem that, until the extent of the crisis in late summer 1911 was appreciated, domestic and parliamentary attitudes towards foreign affairs reflected a combination of complacent optimism, enforced quiescence and loyalty to political responsibilities, and general lack of interest. Even Radical MPs who had previously stirred up trouble in the House seem to have recognised that little could be gained from any outbursts of rhetoric. As Morris says, right up to the Crisis and even during its diplomatic height, 'like Hamlet, conscience seemed to have made cowards of them all'.¹¹

The events of the summer of 1911, once fully appreciated, changed everything.¹² Again ironically, a change in domestic circumstances occurred simultaneously with developments in the international arena. The domestic issues which had helped divert attention during 1910 and early 1911 were now at least partially dealt with: and the relative calm which had prevailed in the diplomatic field during the same period was shattered. The Agadir Crisis removed at a stroke the circumstances which had rendered Radical arguments *vis à vis* foreign policy impotent and unattractive. Just as the dominant issues at home (the passage of the Parliament Bill and the rail and dock strikes) were

resolved, the collapse of the relative detente between Britain and Germany, and the perceived threat of war, occurred - and grabbed the attention of both the public and the politicians. For those who had never conceded defeat to the Foreign Secretary over policy, who had held fast to their convictions as to how policy should be conducted, the opportunity to force a review of affairs for once with the full attention of the politically interested focussed upon the international scene must have seemed heaven sent. The days in the wilderness, when their arguments had been laid aside, were over.

As Morris has shown, the revival of Radical fortunes in the struggle for control of foreign policy did not occur immediately.¹³ In the period 1st to 27th July, during which the diplomatic activity surrounding the crisis reached its height, and indeed for much of the summer when 'war fever' and military activity reached unprecedented levels, the Radicals were prevented from launching any attacks upon Grey or the Foreign Office. It was not until the end of the summer of 1911 that the domestic political scene had quietened sufficiently to enable the Radicals to attack a minister without fear of upsetting other legislation or policy with which they were concerned. Furthermore, they were as much bound by more general political considerations as any other party or faction - and could not afford to be seen to be unpatriotic, ergo unsupportive, when the crisis was at its height.¹⁴ The lack of dissent from the back-benches during the foreign affairs debate of 27th July 1911 can best be explained by two factors: the political constraints outlined above: and ignorance. Indeed, the second of these two factors was to provide Grey's

critics with a powerful weapon in their later agitation. His failure to provide sufficient information at the height of the crisis to defuse a situation which he was later to claim had been blown out of all proportion merely seemed to uphold the traditional Radical arguments claiming that the executive had assumed excessive power over policy, to the extent where the supervisory powers of the democratically elected legislature had become meaningless. Their initial failure to offer anything other than patriotic support, when their subsequent activity seemed later to suggest that they should have intervened earlier to repair the serious abuses of power which, they argued, had caused much of the summer's crisis, merely gave weight to this position. Finally, it is important to remember that, with Parliament in recess during the summer months, the opportunity to place Grey under pressure afforded by direct questioning was removed, and even though the break enabled Radicals to embark upon initiatives whilst free from their duties in the House, the closure of the parliamentary stage until the Autumn doubtless helps explain the delay between the crisis period and the initiation of the Radical campaign.

As soon as they were afforded the opportunity to examine the events of the summer free from the constraining factors of July and early August, the Radicals began to perceive serious anomalies in the British position that Grey and other officials proved unable to explain away. The reasons given for British involvement in what on first examination appeared to be a Franco-German matter appeared at best to be unconvincing. The Radicals could find no material interests of sufficient importance to justify the extent of British

intervention. Moreover, the apparent bias displayed in favour of France during the summer seemed to contradict the principles of legality and justice to which Grey claimed he was bound. It was the French who had provoked the Crisis with their encroachments into Morocco: the German demands for compensation were therefore to be expected, even supported when the terms of the 1909 Franco-German Agreement were allowed for. Grey's staunch opposition to the German position, and refusal to condemn his Entente partner for what seemed to be a similarly aggressive policy (pursued at Moroccan expense), caused concern. What really provoked Radical fury, however, was the speech delivered by Lloyd George at the Mansion House on 21st July and its implicit refusal to tolerate German snubbing of defined British interests.¹⁵ Although at first applauded as a staunchly patriotic exposition Britain's position, the Chancellor of the Exchequer's speech attracted increasingly vituperative criticism once the circumstances of its release were considered. There had been no obvious threat to commercial interests at the time of its release, and the obviously provocative tone which Lloyd George seemed to have displayed towards Germany in his strong attack upon displays of coercive brinkmanship, seemed anything but consistent with the circumstances existing at the time of its release. The fact that up to that point he had been seen as a senior spokesman for pacifism merely increased Radical ire; he now seemed to have betrayed his convictions and his erstwhile supporters in one stroke. The Germans had quite naturally believed that as he was a senior cabinet minister, Lloyd George's speech had to represent the position of the British Government

✕ (which it did): and in the face of such hostility, their alienation was only to be

expected. What had the Chancellor hoped to achieve? The only explanation which seemed to make sense to the Radicals, if Lloyd George had not committed a blunder of incredible incompetence, was that the speech - and, indeed, the entirety of Grey's diplomacy in the summer months - had been a calculated attempt to bolster up France against Germany (which it was). This in turn only made sense if the 1904 Entente had committed Britain to such a policy, for the circumstances of July 1911 (and the lack of material interests involved) hardly seemed to have done so. If this was the case, then the criticism and fears which the Radicals had expressed in the wake of the Tangiers Crisis, and their long standing opposition to entangling alliances, assumed new importance.

Matters were not helped by the nature of British diplomacy concerning other developments occurring in the summer. In the case of both the Italian invasion of Tripoli and the renewed Russian interference in the domestic affairs of Persia, Grey showed little inclination to undertake the stringent diplomatic measures needed to champion the position of the weaker and (in Persia's case at least) constitutionally-minded states against the wanton aggression of powerful European countries harbouring imperial ambitions. This may have been consistent with the listlessness displayed by Whitehall towards the French incursions into Morocco, and in particular the expedition to Fez of December 1910 which had sparked off German protests. It hardly mirrored the reaction shown to the despatching of the 'Panther' to Agadir and the subsequent demands issued by the Germans. Considerations of Realpolitik

which shaped Grey's policy initiatives during the summer of 1911 are immaterial here. Even though his diplomacy may have been determined by very real policy considerations of which his critics had little inkling, and which historians have only recently come to appreciate, the fact remains that it is what the Radicals saw and believed at that time, rather than the reality of the situation, that motivated them into action. What is certain is that, of the four Powers with whom Britain could have become embroiled, given the events of the summer of 1911, only one - Germany - was treated in an openly hostile and aggressive manner. Perceived bias in the conduct displayed was bound to provoke a reaction from the Radicals. Reports of military preparations and the likelihood of war could only but attract concerned attention. However, the nature of the later attacks upon the Foreign Secretary stemmed principally from his failure to explain away these anomalies in terms of the circumstances in which they occurred. Without satisfactory explanations, his critics could only draw their own conclusions. The bias shown in favour of France and Russia, not justified by the activities of those Powers in the summer of 1911, could only be explained if Britain had by dint of the 1904 and 1907 Ententes committed herself to the supporting of these 'allies', irrespective of the cost to tradition or principle. The acquiescence displayed towards Italy vis à vis Tripoli was less easy to link to covert commitments, but was nevertheless in stark contrast to the Agadir line. It seemed that Grey did not want to antagonise the Italian government over an affair of such low material importance. All the evidence from the summer of 1911 pointed to a 'balance of power' infrastructure within which Britain's role had become fixed as the result of her Entente

commitments - public or secret. Her traditional role in the states system, that of the impartial liberal arbiter, had been sacrificed, without popular mandate, for what, in the circumstances of the Agadir Crisis, must have seemed little better than Esau's 'mess of pottage'.

From August 1911 onwards, the Radicals increased their agitation over foreign affairs, seeking to expose policy initiatives incompatible with what they argued was the 'correct' policy for Britain, and demanding explanations where such anomalies were uncovered. After two of the leading Radical MPs, Noel Buxton and J H Whitehouse, had returned from a fact-finding visit to Berlin, Buxton despatched a memorandum to Asquith, calling upon the Government to reassure Germany that British policy was neither Germanophobic in orientation, nor, by dint of the Anglo-French Entente, an obstacle to an Anglo-German rapprochement.¹⁶ Another leading Radical agitator, Lord Courtney, urged the Foreign Secretary to issue a statement recognising Germany's position.¹⁷ Arthur Ponsonby, who with Buxton was to spearhead the Radical campaign in Parliament, supplied the press with information about military preparations for war; claims echoed by Buxton in the November edition of Contemporary Review. At the same time, the National Peace Council, the Anglo-German Friendship Society, and the New League of Universal Brotherhood all began to campaign for improved relations with Germany, and against the increases in armaments and militarism which, they believed, increased the likelihood of war. Articles in the Economist and Concord examined the economic grounds for Anglo-German co-operation and the

probable cost to the British economy if Grey's apparently anti-German policy were to continue. Labour organisations, ever sympathetic to Radical campaigns of this nature, criticised the Foreign Secretary for the cold, illiberal, secretive manner in which he was handling affairs. It was time, they argued, to institute measures that would oblige the Foreign Secretary to release information on demand, thus reducing the chance that any more unrepresentative policy initiatives would be undertaken.¹⁸

Of greatest significance for the parliamentary agitation which was to follow, however, was the creation of an organised campaign vehicle - the so-called Liberal Foreign Affairs Committee. This body was created following a meeting of the leading Radical critics at the New Reform Club on 14th November 1911. Arguing that the upholding of pre-stated principles foreign policy was the only sure way in which real national interests could be secured, this Committee became the platform for Radical agitation up to the outbreak of the First World War. Its aims were simple: to focus attention upon the principles which underwrote policy initiatives; and to secure greater access to official information as an insurance that those principles were upheld by policy.¹⁹ A similar, but short-lived, committee was started by Courtney. Whilst echoing the calls for Anglo-German rapprochement, this group sought to reaffirm traditional Liberal ideals; the upholding of the twin principles of 'independence and integrity' for all states, support for all nations attempting to establish constitutional government, and opposition against moves to commit Britain to alliance blocs or a 'balance of power' system. As with the Liberal

Foreign Affairs Committee, an increase in the supply of information vis à vis policy was demanded.²⁰ Last, but by no means least, the appointment of Sir John Brunner to the presidency of the National Liberal Federation saw the revitalisation of that organisation as a check against the Government's practice of using the power of the Whips to coerce its supporters into a mere rubber-stamping of its policies. Brunner sought to champion calls for increased liberalism in foreign policy at regional levels, involving the N.L.F. in campaigns over issues in that field.²¹

The wave of indignation and concern reached even to the cabinet, for even at that level Radical idealism was able to count upon sympathy, if not unreserved support. Certain ministers noted for such sympathies reacted angrily when it became clear that they had been excluded from a meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence on 23rd August 1911, in favour of a smaller 'Inner Cabinet' group dominated by Liberal League ministers (although Lloyd George and Churchill, erstwhile Radicals, had been present). This meeting had included sensitive discussions about the Entente with France, and in particular about possible military co-ordination in the event of a war against Germany. A serious split in Asquith's cabinet was avoided, but only after the Prime Minister fashioned a compromise at the crucial cabinet meeting of 15th November 1911 in which it was agreed that future decisions on policy would be initiated only after full cabinet approval had been granted.²²

However, the concerns and demands of Radicals both in and out of

Westminster could not be so easily deflected. The revival of their interest and arguments, given new vitality by both the incidence and seriousness of developments noted in the summer of 1911, prompted those who had long harboured doubts about the nature of foreign policy to campaign for a review of the machinery of policy; and, if justified, to secure a reform of the same. And, for once, they could campaign whilst the attention of a concerned domestic audience was focused upon the issue.

2. The Debate of 27th November 1911: Grey's Statement of Policy

The debate of 27th November 1911 marked a recognition by those in the government responsible for the formulation and control of foreign policy that the increasingly persistent expressions of Radical dissatisfaction which followed the Agadir Crisis could not be ignored. Although stability within the Liberal Cabinet had been restored by Asquith's compromise of 15th November 1911,²³ the need to answer criticisms of policy emanating from the Radicals²⁴ and to justify both the nature and the conduct of policy that had provoked them, became irresistible. As suggested above, the concatenation of events during the summer had encouraged the revival of Radical concern, and prompted calls demanding a general statement and discussion of policy.²⁵ The debate of the 27th November 1911 was the product of this environment of tension and criticism, of the uncertainty and suspicion that the unexplained events of the summer had engendered. As Morris explains:-

The debate arose mainly as a result of their [the Radicals'] activities, and the public anxieties fostered by their insistent propaganda.²⁶

Before attempting a closer analysis of the debate of 27th November, it is necessary to clarify and reiterate several points at the heart of the argument. It is possible to identify and distinguish between two facets of foreign policy which attracted particular attention: specific issues and events which constitute the operation of policy (the 'manner' of policy); and the fundamental determinants of policy, both material and

theoretical (the 'matter' of policy) which dictate the nature of its practical application.²⁷ As has already been discussed, a great deal of the criticism levelled against Grey was prompted by the events of the summer, in which specific instances of inconsistency in the operation of policy were perceived by Radical spectators.²⁸ Considering the seriousness of the crisis of the summer, and the belief that there had been a real threat to peace and stability, it is hardly surprising that these anomalies and inconsistencies in policy 'manner' provoked some form of parliamentary backlash. However, these anomalies, taken in isolation, hardly explain the extent of outrage that poured forth - unless taken in conjunction with an altogether wider and more perturbing development. Radical interest in foreign policy, indeed in any policy, was motivated to a large degree by principle, and the conviction that these should be upheld by those in government at all times.²⁹ Their opposition to certain initiatives, such as a manipulative 'balance of power' policy, was based on a belief that they were incompatible with a Liberal or democratic policy infrastructure. Isolated examples of illiberal or flawed policy 'manner' might attract general but transitory Radical dissent, or even, as McLean notes, prolonged agitation by a few interested individuals.³⁰ The concatenation of events in the summer and autumn of 1911 which showed evidence of flawed policy 'manner' attracted a sustained and organised campaign of dissent far beyond the norm. With evidence from such a wide range of sources, and of such serious import, that policy 'manner' had been neither consistent in approach nor compatible with stated material interests and principles, the Radicals concluded that the flaws in policy 'manner' were symptomatic of a serious malaise which arose from

the 'matter' of policy. The nature of Britain's diplomatic involvement in the Agadir Crisis, when compared and contrasted with that displayed during the concurrent developments in Tripoli and Persia, pointed to a significant abuse of executive authority. It was easy to believe that the nation, kept in a state of ignorance by the policy controllers, had been committed without due mandate to a policy line compatible neither with material interest nor political tradition. This, then, was the basis of the Radical assault: policy 'matter' had been dictated without consideration of the wishes of the legislature (the democratically elected representative of the popular will), and consequently policy 'manner' had brought Britain to the brink of a war, and sacrificed her traditional role as upholder of justice and Liberalism, to no obvious end. To the Radicals, who had long argued that the material and theoretical interests upon which policy was based had to be representative of, accountable to, and therefore safeguarded by the will of the majority (through the medium of Parliament), all the evidence pointed towards the need for a review and reform of the policy mechanism. Foreign policy 'manner' and 'matter' had to represent the interests of the democratic consensus.³¹ This, then, was the cornerstone of the Radical campaign. This was the position that Sir Edward Grey had to contend with in his speech to the House on 27th November 1911.

For Grey, the debate provided a chance to strike at the roots of the Radical agitation, and to counter the domestic furore which was causing considerable difficulty for the Foreign Secretary as he sought to uphold his overall diplomatic position and

follow a consistent line in a variety of theatres.³² Criticism from his own backbenchers meant more to Grey than parliamentary weakness (with the Foreign Secretary increasingly having to rely upon Conservative support for his conduct); the domestic expressions of dissent and concern did little to help uphold his and Britain's credibility abroad. This threatened to have a damaging effect upon the attitudes of foreign powers, upon their assessments upon the value and stability of her Entente relationships, and consequently upon her position in the European distribution of power. Grey's Entente partners could be expected to re-evaluate their positions vis à vis the respective agreements made with Britain, seeking to accrue maximum advantage from any developments in the British position. Moreover, attempts to stabilise relations with non-aligned or estranged powers could hardly be expected to prosper whilst domestic agitation placed Grey's position as the undisputed voice of British diplomacy (and thus her 'internal cohesion') in question.³³ The Foreign Secretary was well aware of these considerations, and the consequent need to restore domestic calm and faith so as to minimise any disruption in his diplomatic position.³⁴ The statement delivered on 27th November 1911³⁵ was intended to meet these requirements, to offer sufficient explanation and information to show that the policies in operation and the events of the recent past were entirely compatible with the defence of national interests and traditional policy considerations. By systematically rebutting the charges levelled against both the context and conduct of his policies, Grey sought to go beyond the defence of his record; he attempted to show that his critics were unable to offer any alternative capable of sustaining viable levels of

defence for national and imperial interests. The debate came to focus upon the conflict between the moral imperative (the need to follow a policy compatible with principles of conscience), and the practical necessity (the extent to which constraints of practical diplomacy meant that some compromise on principle became necessary). In short, the issues came to be: were the policies of the Foreign Secretary justified by the circumstances facing Britain; and did the arguments of his Radical critics reflect a sufficient awareness of those circumstances - did they provide a practical alternative which could cater for both the dictates of conscience and of reality? By examining the issues raised in the debate itself, and assessing the relative merits of the statements made, a clearer understanding of the position in Westminster may be reached, an understanding that will enable an evaluation of exactly how far foreign policy was understood and influenced by Parliament, and as a result of how far such an influence was desirable given the nature of the interests at stake.

The Foreign Editor of The Times Valentine Chirol reported the statement delivered by Grey as having been one of 'transparent sincerity'.³⁶ It is certainly fair to say that the Foreign Secretary seized upon the opportunity afforded by the debate, offering what Asquith described as 'an exposition ... of policy ... on the subject of Morocco ... with fullness and precision'³⁷; and thus carried the attack to the critics of both policy and conduct who were to follow. Nor did he attempt to shirk his responsibilities to the House by restricting the parameters of debate and thereby dodging questions of an awkward nature. Although he admitted to intentionally

limiting his statement to issues pertaining to the Agadir Crisis and the Anglo-German schism (for reasons clearly given), he also expressed a wish not to limit possible areas of discussion that went beyond his own coverage.³⁸ In fact, documentary evidence suggests that Grey would have been only too happy to have avoided any difficult subjects of discussion, especially those which dwelt upon matters fundamental to Entente stability³⁹ - but he was well aware that, should he appear unwilling or unready to consider the other concerns voiced by the Radicals, he would risk further and enduring parliamentary interventions potentially damaging to his overall diplomatic position.⁴⁰ It must be remembered that this position left him little room for manoeuvre. His scope for revealing the considerations that dictated the nature of policy, and consequently his ability to explain his conduct, was extremely limited. He actually attempted to show how such constraints limited his options, and therefore how his conduct could be justified as being commensurate with existing and unavoidable diplomatic exigencies.⁴¹ However, Grey knew that a failure to answer questions in as full and open a manner would hardly suffice to reduce the fears and suspicions that underwrote the vocal expressions of dissent which were of such potential danger. In a letter, to one of his Radical critics, Arthur Ponsonby, of 20th December 1911, following the conclusion of the debate, Grey was to lament the problem that faced him in this:-

[As regards foreign affairs, a Minister] must even suppress the things most essential to his own defence when he is attacked.⁴²

Grey's statement had to be more than a resumé of events that clarified points of material interest. It had to be an apology for the very bases of his foreign policy, both 'manner' and 'matter', a counter-attack capable of showing that the charges of malpractice levelled against him were undeserved because in the light of practical constraints little in the way of alternative options existed for the operation of British diplomacy. Criticisms that failed to provide practical suggestions for change could thereby be shown as misguided because they failed to consider all the issues implicit in an overall foreign policy position. But in doing this Grey had to make sure that he did not compromise his position either at home or in a wider diplomatic context. He had to be careful not to offend Liberal sentiment by appearing excessively Machiavellian in the pursuit of practical policies; nor to arouse Conservative concern by bringing into question issues of national security and influence. At the same time, and in a similar vein, he had to take care not to provoke adverse reactions abroad, either by contravening diplomatic etiquette and presenting an overly aggressive front, or by revealing information central to policy issues without due consideration for other interests not under scrutiny but of no less importance.⁴³

In the light of such constraints, Grey's statement can indeed be interpreted as worthy of the praises it received. His account of the summer's diplomatic initiatives was clear and concise, to a large but by no means complete degree repairing omissions as to specific events and conduct which Grey claimed had been the cause of the misunderstandings and scaremongering outbursts of concern.⁴⁴ The later sections

of the Foreign Secretary's initial statement, which dealt with domestic and diplomatic considerations that in combination had engendered much of the strains and tensions of the summer and autumn, and with the discussion of British foreign policy which sought to examine both the 'matter' and 'manner' which constituted his diplomacy, are of particular interest to any study analysing the practicality of policy. Nevertheless, because the Agadir Crisis had been the dynamic factor behind the Radical campaign, and because it was the diplomatic handling of this specific issue that Grey had to explain in order to retain a semblance of credibility, it is with the Foreign Secretary's statement about Agadir that this study shall begin.

Concentrating on the issues central to the Agadir Crisis, the Foreign Secretary was nevertheless able to address the bulk of the more general criticisms levelled against his policies. Grey qualified his position over Morocco by arguing that British diplomacy had been concerned at all times with the defence of definite interests which were already recognised in international agreements - specifically, strategic and economic interests confirmed by the 1904 Anglo-French Agreement,⁴⁵ but which Germany had wrongly assumed had been waived in 1904. This German misinterpretation had underscored the Anglo-German rift from 4th July 1911 until 27th July 1911, a rift caused mainly by the failure of the two powers to clarify their respective positions, or to concede any recognition that they had done so. Britain, apparently faced with attempts to exclude her from negotiations which not only concerned her interests but also threatened to compromise them, and with an

apparent reluctance on the part of Germany to respond to requests for a recognition of those interests, had reacted sharply, attempting to persuade Berlin that she would not tolerate any ignoring or infringement of her declared interests. However, at no time were any demands made for a role in negotiations involving matters beyond those interests. Lloyd George's Mansion House Speech, with its declaration of the British position couched in the strongest terms, proved sufficient to provoke a response from Germany.⁴⁶ The consequent diplomatic exchanges were able to secure such clarifications and recognitions as were deemed necessary, and at the same time it was agreed that a normalisation of relations should be encouraged by public statements aimed at restoring calm and promoting goodwill.⁴⁷ With the statement of the Prime Minister to the House on 27th July 1911 to that effect, the schism had been repaired and rapprochement begun.⁴⁸

Using the crisis as a backdrop, Grey attempted to consider the lessons which could be derived from the course and nature of events. He argued that, given the high level of tension and excitement that had erupted as the public became aware of events, the success of achieving a negotiated settlement and thereby averting the threat of coercion and conflict itself merited applause. If any bitterness still lingered, and indeed if any rift in Anglo-German relations persisted, it was due primarily to the intervention of misinformed individuals who, motivated by their own perverse interpretations of events, sought to exploit the existence of tension and criticise the content and conduct of diplomacy, thereby forcing a review and possibly even the

reform of the machinery of policy formulation and control. This issue came in for particular attention from Grey:-

It is as if the world were indulging in a fit of political alcoholism, and the best that can be done by those of us in positions of responsibility is to keep cool and sober.⁴⁹

His statement was aimed not only towards alleviating sources of tension, but was also a direct attack upon such agitations, which conspired against the normalisation of affairs by misrepresenting the issues at the heart of the crisis and thus perpetuating instability. If Grey appeared to claim a special responsibility or proprietary rights in discussing the management of foreign affairs, he argued that it was because he felt duty bound to counter rash, uninformed and unofficial expositions that undermined diplomatic relations.⁵⁰ This statement was an official response outlining what the government believed had been the cause and nature of problems. By at last providing a clear exposition outlining the considerations behind policy, Grey was able to counter the scaremongering critics; and at the same time attempt to shift at least partial responsibility for the prolonged tension upon those who had indulged in the general bout of 'political alcoholism'.

Given that the Foreign Secretary was so scathing about the impact which misinformed opinions had upon diplomacy, it is hardly surprising that he also sought to clarify the reasons for the long delay in, and the incomplete nature of, the release of official information. As Noel Buxton was quick to point out, this was itself in part

responsible for the problems of scaremongering because it encouraged rather than discouraged further speculation.⁵¹ Grey had already excused his failure to keep the House informed at earlier dates for several reasons. The revelation of potentially sensitive material during the course of Franco-German negotiations, or indeed before the ratification of any agreement that resulted from them, would threaten the successful conclusion of the negotiations.⁵² The Germans had themselves requested that specific information be kept secret about events in Morocco during the July exchanges,⁵³ and Grey made no apology for adhering to conventions of diplomatic etiquette and keeping silent.⁵⁴ However, several other political factors not mentioned in the debate can also be given as reasons for earlier silence. The Cabinet rift of 1st November to the 15th November has already been mentioned, although as Wilson recognises the actual weight the rift had in delaying a statement cannot be proven.⁵⁵ Grey had also held hopes of entering the debate from a position of strength: after the publication of the Secret Articles of the Anglo-French Agreement of 1904 had weakened the Radical position; and, if possible, with a motion offered by the official Opposition who he knew would, in the main, refrain from turning a foreign affairs debate into a party political contest.⁵⁶ Although unable to secure the latter, the publication of the Secret Articles on 24th November had the desired effect, successfully countering claims that the government was guilty of pursuing clandestine agreements or compromising national independence by undermining her ability to pursue any course of policy she wished.⁵⁷ At the simplest level, this conveyed an impression that Grey was willing to concede information and that accusations of

excessive secrecy were without basis. In Parliament it gave the Foreign Secretary the opportunity to exploit several points. By associating the conduct of current affairs with the 1904 Unionist ministry, he was able to secure a recognition of both consistency in foreign affairs and the subjugation of party affairs to the national interest; a sentiment echoed by Lansdowne (through Bonar Law), who had been consulted prior to both publication and debate.⁸⁸ As a result, Grey was able to adopt the position of a statesman defending national interests rather than that of a politician exploiting them for political gain. The role of secrecy could therefore be defended from a position of relative strength. The articles that were published helped this, because it was possible to show that they merely complemented the basic outlines that the open treaty expressed, providing for an easier adoption of mundane principles already known. Britain was not committed by any documentary responsibility to France, and consequently the fear that Britain could be dragged into a war in which she had no interest or justification for involvement was rebuffed.⁸⁹ Radical critics of the Entente could still accuse the Foreign Secretary of pursuing a course of diplomacy not strictly upheld or defined in treaties. However, their ability to accuse Grey of conducting a secret diplomacy that removed the 'free hand' and threatened to commit Britain via treaty responsibilities had been damaged.

However, if the arguments of commentators upon the diplomacy of the ante bellum period are considered, this aspect of Grey's speech warrants criticism, and upheld as evidence that the Radicals' claims about deliberate misleading by officials

were justified. Wilson argues convincingly that Grey's diplomacy throughout the Agadir Crisis had been determined not by anti-Germanism, but by a need to ensure that French policy did not wreck the modus operandi upon which the 1904 Entente depended.⁶⁰ It is surely correct to point to the German response to French incursion as the dynamic factor that provoked the British intervention of 21st July 1911⁶¹: the opposition to German territorial claims in Morocco, and the resistance shown to the threat of an agreement dictated by Berlin between Germany and France, which excluded Britain from an area of expressed interest, cannot be explained in any other light. What dictated such a response, however, can be questioned.

Officials in Whitehall were certainly critical of the French policy which had enabled Germany to seize the initiative with the despatching of the 'Panther', and were angered by subsequent initiatives undertaken from the Quai d'Orsay which threatened to adopt a course incompatible with responsibilities due under the 1904 Agreement.⁶² However, at no time did the British show any inclination to question the Entente as the basis for continuing foreign policy. The threat of a conference, to settle the dispute, marked the extent to which Britain threatened an 'abandonment' of the French; and this concession, that France may have to concede ground under the auspices of an international forum, cannot hide the fact that at any conference she could count upon both Britain and Russia for support.⁶³ All the evidence available suggests that British policy was intent upon preserving the Entente against all threats: internationally, against French indiscretion and German opportunism, and

domestically, against criticism of foreign policy 'manner' and 'matter'. The security dilemma which had prompted the adoption of the Entente system in the first place meant that, in spite of the difficulties which arose under its auspices, the 1904 Agreement (and indeed the 1907 Agreement with Russia) remained as the best guarantee of Britain's position in the states system.⁶⁴ Britain needed cordial relations with France to offset an acute strategic crisis; she had therefore to convince the French that any advantages accrued from such cordiality would be reciprocal.

When it is remembered that this strategic crisis was basically imperial in orientation, Wilson's assessment of the French position at this time explains the attraction which the Entente held for both powers. He paints a clear picture:

Though France was militarily stronger than England, she was more vulnerable in European terms. The weakness of weaker states puts stronger states almost entirely at the disposal of their dependents. Once a stronger state had adopted the interests...of a weaker state as its own, then [its] foreign policy...could not change...[and] was no longer its own foreign policy, but that of the weaker state.⁶⁵

Wilson argues that, in European terms, France had become dependent upon the support of the British, who enjoyed a relative strategic advantage. However, in imperial terms, the positions were reversed. Britain needed an end to agitation in the colonial field to alleviate the crisis over imperial defence which had built up.⁶⁶

Rapprochement with France, a definite threat prior to 1904, achieved this; and, moreover, made the chance for agreement with Russia (according to Wilson, the real target of Entente diplomacy) all the greater. The Entente provided reciprocal

advantages. France gained British support vis à vis Europe: Britain secured French co-operation vis à vis Empire. It is with this arrangement that the events surrounding Agadir were concerned. Grey was forced, in spite of reservations about French initiatives, to steer a course for the Entente through the minefields of domestic and international politics, in order to preserve the diplomatic agreements upon which Britain's imperial security was based. Had Grey failed to support the French in the way he did, manoeuvring both France and Germany into an agreement commensurate with French strategic and political interests, he could not have expected the French to remain loyal to the Entente. The fact that the dispute was resolved with both the Entente and continental peace intact marked a considerable achievement.

But, crucially, the Foreign Secretary could not achieve this diplomatic success whilst placating domestic critics concerned with apparent diplomatic bias and manipulative 'balance of power' policy. Had Grey outlined the strategic considerations at stake, he would have simultaneously been forced to reveal politically sensitive material; most damagingly, about the reciprocal weaknesses and strengths of Britain and France upon which the Entente was based.⁶⁷ The political furore which this would have provoked was too much to contemplate. It was much easier to engage in a policy of half truth and deception, to protect the Radicals from themselves. By stressing the part played by German dynamism, and judging the nature of Anglo-French relations (using the publication of the secret articles of the 1904 Agreement, in conjunction with the already published texts, to show that no

written commitments had been made, thereby hiding the unspoken intent behind the words), Grey used the short-term 'manner' of policy to hide the 'matter' at stake: the reciprocal weaknesses of France and Britain and consequent interdependence that made the Entente both strategically indispensable and politically indefensible. Grey was not in the business of revealing any information which could expose the frailty of Britain's diplomatic position. The debate was called to enable the Foreign Secretary to put an end to domestic unrest that, by bringing into question areas of British involvement, undermined his diplomatic position. By removing the ability of critics to point out inconsistencies and failings within his diplomacy, Grey sought to maintain a position commensurate with the upholding of British interests. It is possible to argue with the benefit of hindsight that his explanations were not always complete or honest, but that is to miss the point here - a restoration of 'internal cohesion' was of paramount importance.⁶⁸ As a result, any area in which an effective counter to criticisms could be provided and the façade be upheld should be viewed as a success.

* * *

Now let me say a word upon the general aspects of what I consider is the proper foreign policy of this country.⁶⁹

The success of Grey's defence rested with the extent to which he could persuade the House that his Entente policy was indeed the best suited to serve and uphold British interests and traditions. Put simply, he had to dispel fears that the Ententes

represented a balance of power policy incompatible with either Liberal principle or national interest. The Agadir Crisis had increased fears that, as a result of associations with other powers (over which Parliament had little or no control), Britain had become embroiled in conflicts which had nothing to do with her material interests or political principles. Grey was bound to admit that the Ententes with France and Russia denoted some form of commitment; however, he was quick to argue that they were not of a binding military nature, nor could they be used to force Britain into moves contrary to her specified prevailing interests. The Entente system as outlined by the Foreign Secretary was a system which had ended previous antagonisms between the powers. Negotiations now provided mutually advantageous solutions to problems which had previously been resolved by force, or merely remained unsolved. The result of these settlements had been the creation of ties of goodwill, based on a recognition that cooperation accrued more advantage to both sides than did coercion.⁷⁰ This meant that areas and issues in foreign affairs where conflicting interests and contiguous pressures, be they territorial, strategic or economic in orientation, could be eased without destabilising international relations. Moreover, and because the agreements (and thus advantages they provided) were dependent on the maintenance of mutual gain and therefore cooperation, it became possible to exert moderating diplomatic influences on friendly powers so as to promote greater liberalism and international stability. It was possible to divert allies of mutual interest from any policy which threatened to compromise the Ententes by failing to consider the interests of their partners.⁷¹ Similarly, the ability of a bloc of cooperating states to

present a united diplomatic front against other powers as a deterrent, against those who threatened to impinge on established interests or destabilise the states system by their actions, permitted the use of coordinated diplomacy to encourage negotiated resolution of outstanding issues instead of conflict.⁷² In this way, Grey was able to argue persuasively that the positive elements of the 1904 and 1907 Agreements were sufficient to justify their existence, and indeed that they were wholly compatible with the preservation of British interests without having committed Britain by binding treaty agreement to the individual whims of other powers.

Grey's position was strengthened by the ease with which he was able to turn the tables upon his Radical critics. His attack upon what he portrayed as ill-considered expressions of concern that had done little to improve Anglo-German relations undoubtedly carried weight. More damning, however, was his castigation of the policy of isolation which those who opposed the Ententes, because of the apparent commitments they entailed, argued should be upheld for the sake of tradition.⁷³ The Foreign Secretary argued that any move towards effective isolation that an abandonment of the Ententes would effect would not be a constructive shift in policy, but rather a negation of policy.⁷⁴ Any abandoning of the friendly associations or the agreements that had been made in the Entente treaties would not only be to sacrifice the obvious advantages that cooperation and mutual compromise had secured, but also the value of prestige and trust, and the concomitant diplomatic influence abroad, which such a volte face would engender. Nor would it lead to any improved relations

with those powers like Germany previously outside the Entente system for, as Grey noted, 'one does not make new friendships worth having by deserting old ones'.⁷⁵ The resulting isolation would be neither splendid nor stable. To adopt such a line would be to refuse to accept pragmatism and its dictates as the basis of diplomacy, and to subjugate policy to the whims of nebulous principle which could in no way uphold the national interests to a satisfactory degree. Agadir had proven that British interests had been defended because of her role in the diplomatic system as an aligned power. To achieve a similar position of influence as an isolated nation facing uniform suspicion and mistrust would require the operation of policies (such as conscription) inimical to other much-vaunted Radical principles, and would only promote confrontational antagonism of exactly the sort his critics pinned upon the Ententes, but on an increased scale. More to the point, the necessary cost of providing such an influence would prove incompatible with existing domestic policies⁷⁶ (if indeed they could be sustained at all⁷⁷). Grey had no hesitation in seizing upon the inherent problems that the Radical alternative to active association displayed:-

I cannot imagine a more impossible statement of foreign policy ... no allies, friendly with all, and feared by all.⁷⁸

Even if it is accepted as Weinroth suggests that the Radicals were not anti-Entente, but merely opposed any binding commitment in excess of friendly cooperation⁷⁹, the fact remains that those agreements of 1904 and 1907 would have been placed in jeopardy had British policy not displayed an awareness of and

tolerance towards the hopes and interests of both the French and the Russians. And it is certain that Paris and St Petersburg were after more than the friendly relations and rhetoric that the Radicals offered in return for the securing of stable contiguous frontiers. Grey argued that his Entente policy reflected awareness of this, and he was able to refute the basis for a Radical alternative as a result. Consequently, he was able to promote the 'matter' of his policy as being the best means for securing national interests and international stability.

Grey was at pains to argue not only that the Ententes served the best interests of the nation without compromising any essential principles, but also that his policies and the events of the summer did not reflect any anti-German prejudice in Whitehall. As has already been shown, the Foreign Secretary explained that the Agadir Crisis had caused a rift with Berlin as the result of misunderstanding, which had been compounded because ignorant scaremongers had publicly poisoned relations.⁸⁰ Grey wished to complement his defence of the Ententes by persuading his critics that they were not directed against Germany, or that they provided any insurmountable obstacle to the establishment of good Anglo-German relations. Grey contended that the Entente ties precluded any policy of antagonism towards other powers because such moves invariably proved to be detrimental to the interests of partner states.⁸¹ It was natural for Germany to be concerned by an Entente bloc and to make defensive naval and military preparations in case of future conflict; it was natural that such preparations should arouse apprehension abroad. As to the future, it rested with

Germany to reassure the other powers that her moves were purely defensive, and to enter into dialogue to solve outstanding problems in the same way as had the Entente powers. The Foreign Secretary posed a rhetorical question for his audience:-

Is the policy I have sketched out necessarily a bar to good relations with Germany? I do not believe it is.⁸²

Several points about Grey's position towards Germany require clarification if his defence to the House of Commons is to be put in perspective. Keith Wilson has argued persuasively that the traditional view of Whitehall as being anti-German is unconvincing, and that the bias that Buxton claimed was so damaging to relations was in fact Anglomania rather than Germanophobia.⁸³ The Foreign Office was bound to defend British interests at all times, had adopted rapprochement diplomacy and concluded the Ententes, in order to secure a viable defence of interests threatened by contrary French and Russian positions. However, it had been found even before the 1904 Anglo-French Agreement that it was either impossible or impractical to reach such a rapprochement with Germany.⁸⁴ It is important to remember that the extent to which Grey had been able to tie France and Russia to friendly compromise agreements had been determined principally by two factors: the amount of ground conceded, and the relative position of those powers in the states system at the time.⁸⁵ Germany, both in 1904 and in 1911, had neither common nor conflicting interests upon which a compromise of mutual gain could be worked with Britain, nor a predilection borne out of relative weakness for sacrificing policies inimical to British interests. Indeed, as the works of the Fischer school have suggested, and Berghahn in

particular, the success of German government policy, of the Tirpitz stratagem and Weltpolitik, depended upon a series of results in political, economic and military areas diametrically opposite to the interests of Britain.⁸⁶ Whitehall was aware that Germany was a constant threat not in a direct military sense, but as the power most likely to drive a wedge between the Entente powers and therefore to reopen the British security dilemma.⁸⁷ Crowe was fond of explaining German diplomacy in terms of the bellicose pronouncements of a Prussian Minister at Hamburg:-

Germany's policy always had been and would be to try to frustrate any coalition between two states which might result in damaging Germany's interests and prestige, and Germany would, if she thought that such a coalition was being formed ... not hesitate to take such steps as she thought proper to break up the coalition.⁸⁸

Nicolson remarked later at the time of the Haldane Mission:-

Of course the idea at the back of the German mind, Emperor and Chancellor ... is to detach us from our friends.⁸⁹

Even more revealing is the comment of Jules Cambon, French Ambassador to Berlin, which Goschen reported to Nicolson prior to the outbreak of the Agadir Crisis on 29th April 1911:-

If [Germany] sees any likelihood of [British] support being withdrawn or given grudgingly she will at once proceed to make trouble and turn the situation to her advantage.⁹⁰

However, an awareness of the existence and nature of conflicting aims did not mean that the attitude adopted was bound to be one of hostility. As the relationship

with Russia over the Central Asian question shows, years of mistrust and competition were not insurmountable obstacles to the creation of friendly relations. The attitude with which powers came to be treated was determined mainly by the extent to which those powers threatened Britain's position, and whether grounds for compromise and cooperation and therefore mutual advantages sufficient to secure a defence of vital interests could be exploited. In the case of Russia, the fact that such grounds were found did not reduce the fact that Russophobia had been a major spur to agreement.⁹¹ In the case of Germany, it was felt that the cost of such an agreement would be too high and only at the price of the other Ententes, which it was feared would be devalued by the terms of any conceivable Anglo-German treaty.⁹² This did not mean that areas of conflicting interest were not appreciated, (or the German position not understood), for of course there were efforts made to effect a rapprochement.⁹³ However, dealing with peripheral issues whilst failing to settle major areas proved insufficient; and Britain could not be expected to compromise her international position by conceding crucial interests without sufficient recompense, such as Germany proved unwilling to offer. Churchill was to sum up the position nicely in January 1914:-

We have engrossed to ourselves an altogether disproportionate share of the wealth and traffic of the world ... our claim to be left in the unmolested enjoyment of our vast and splendid possessions, mainly acquired by violence, largely maintained by force, often seems less reasonable to others than to us.⁹⁴

If Germany was one of the more vociferous 'others' whom it proved impossible to satisfy with concessions, then the apparent reaction of Britain to her machinations

merely reflected a weighted response intent not on antagonism but on self-defence. The attitude held by those in control of British foreign policy was therefore as Grey had summed up in 1910:-

The answer to such statements [of bias] is that [we] are pro-British and not pro-German or pro-anything else.⁹⁵

When informing the House about the 'manner' and 'matter' of his policy, Grey could not be completely candid for fear of compromising his position either at home or abroad. He could not attempt to explain policy away in terms of phobia or philia, or of relative strengths and weaknesses, indeed in any way as an element in a wider diplomatic 'game', for fear of conceding information detrimental to Britain's position or fuelling domestic suspicions that he was pursuing the Liberal anathema of a manipulative 'balance' policy. However, by establishing that the Ententes were not binding militaristic alliances but the instruments of rapprochement and friendship, and that no good could come from sacrificing friendship for political gain, Grey was able to show that the British position vis à vis Germany was not fixed by Machiavellian design, but by loyalty to existing agreements not incompatible with German interests as expressed publicly by Berlin. Moreover, by declaring that Britain posed no real obstacle precluding Germany from joining such a system, as long as no existing agreements were compromised in the process, and remembering that the secret elements of the Entente had been revealed, Grey was able to transfer at least part of the onus for reaching a compromise to Germany, by making it clear that she must offer acceptable terms as the basis for rapprochement with the entire Entente bloc.

If, as was anticipated privately in Whitehall, no such terms were to be forthcoming, then the failure could not be pinned completely on any obvious anti-German pro-Entente bias on Britain's part, but upon a German inability to reach a compromise with a set of existing and publicly amicable relations.

* * *

What conclusions can be drawn about Grey's performance in the debate of 27th November 1911? His speech provided the House with a clear narrative of the diplomatic activity during the crisis month of July. Moreover, it had also delivered a riposte to his Radical critics, inferring that their failure to grasp the issues at stake or understand the wider nature of policy considerations, and their misleading and fanning of public opinion, had helped develop a short term misunderstanding into a full-blown schism. However, the very nature of the task that the Foreign Secretary had been forced to confront, given that his scope for revealing both diplomatic evidence and the disposition of British interests was severely restricted, conspired to deny him complete success. His private expressions of regret as to necessary, unavoidable secrecy were well founded.⁹⁶ Grey was unable to convince the Radicals as to the true nature of the premier considerations that had dictated the nature of his diplomacy over the specific issues that attracted concern. As a result, both the 'manner' and 'matter' of his policy remained in question, and the criticism was not reduced to a level commensurate with a satisfactory degree of Wight's 'internal cohesion'.⁹⁷

With specific regard to the parliamentary struggle for control over the formation and conduct of policy, it is sufficient to suggest that circumstances conspired against Grey's attempt to remove the basis of criticism - circumstances compounded by the nature of Britain's position within both the Ententes and the states-system. The actual influence that the Foreign Office proved able to exert over Entente partners was far less than Grey would have wished, and not to the degree intimated in the debate.⁹⁸ As evidence emerged that French and Russian initiatives in foreign affairs were incompatible with the spirit of their respective agreements with Britain, the Foreign Secretary was left open to censure. He was constrained from acting decisively to curb those initiatives for fear of jeopardising those essential ties. Furthermore, he was forced to offer a modicum of diplomatic support, which France and Russia felt they were entitled to, for fear of bringing into question the value of their existing Anglophile policies.⁹⁹ Unfortunately, as has already been intimated, it proved impossible to offer that support and convince domestic observers that fundamental British interests and political principles were being upheld: and, by appearing to support the Entente powers whilst attacking other powers not closely tied to Britain, Grey was taken to be conducting an at best inconsistent double standard diplomacy, and at worst a 'balance of power' policy incompatible with the Gladstonian attitudes inherited by the Radicals.¹⁰⁰ This was especially true in the case of the Foreign Office attitude towards Germany.¹⁰¹ In fact, the Foreign Office felt quite strongly that if anyone was the victim of a deliberate 'smear' campaign, motivated by 'balance of power' considerations, then it was Whitehall itself. Crowe

for one was quite convinced that the Germans were unscrupulously using the press to encourage the Radicals' misunderstanding and to hide their own initiatives:-

The German government is conveying through the Liberal press to the British public what the former wants it to believe ... I do not think these efforts to influence ... remain so fruitless.¹⁰²

Grey was to reflect that the use of the press as a means by which to influence opinions was a nuisance for the diplomat who had to undertake sensitive diplomacy, stating that 'a Press Bureau is used to make mischief'.¹⁰³ However, it was impossible to counter either the German press or the Radical accusations without recourse to the sort of information that itself could collapse the diplomatic position. Asquith's staunch support of Grey in the House against the Irish MP John Dillon's accusations of a marked increase in Foreign Office secrecy was almost certainly a recognition of this problem, a wish to explain the implicit problem of opening to democratic debate issues which by their nature necessitated confidentiality.¹⁰⁴ However, it was precisely because the Foreign Secretary was unable to provide the sort of answers sought by the Radicals that they argued the case that Ramsay MacDonald put so eloquently:-

In view of what has taken place ... it is about time for this House to insist upon knowing something more about foreign affairs than it has done hitherto.¹⁰⁵

Concomitantly, and although it is possible with the benefit of hindsight to agree with Grey that they were bereft of any practical alternatives or solutions as concerns both the 'matter' and 'manner' of policy, the fact is that the Radical position was basically unshaken by the unsubstantiated rhetoric of the government. The Radicals'

ignorance vis à vis the premier policy considerations that Grey's diplomacy sought to defend, which today, in practical terms, makes their position difficult to uphold, made their contemporary position irresistible. Orwell's axiom that 'Ignorance is Strength' can scarcely have been better illustrated.¹⁰⁶

As the arguments contained in the letter which Buxton and Ponsonby published in The Times of 22nd November 1911 and the statement of purpose issued by the newly formed Liberal Foreign Affairs Group on 6th December 1911 show, the issue of excessive ignorance and the consequent inability of MPs to address themselves properly to foreign affairs was of paramount concern to the Radicals.¹⁰⁷ The shortage of information which made them prone to misinterpretation, and provided the basis for many of the unsubstantiated criticisms which Grey found so easy to deflect, ironically meant that the Radicals could criticise perceived failings of policy without fear of later censure. Any evidence which emerged belatedly to disprove their contentions was seized upon as proof of the Foreign Office's monopoly on information and its refusal to publish details unless it suited the official position.¹⁰⁸ This, the Radicals argued, was an abuse of executive power, especially if the Foreign Secretary insisted upon blaming serious deteriorations in diplomatic affairs such as Agadir upon those to whom information was restricted. Buxton clearly expressed this position:-

I hardly think the Foreign Secretary was justified in attributing to mischief that clarification [to which] may be assigned that motive of bringing forward the facts.¹⁰⁹

Buxton argued that the major point brought forward by the events of the summer was the misunderstanding of the diplomatic situation caused by failures in the exchange of information between Britain and Germany. The fact that his attempts to portray the successive crises of the summer almost exclusively in the light of Anglo-German considerations, or that the basis outlined for a rapprochement between the two powers display the classical failings of the Radicals' position - (the inability born of ignorance to respond in pragmatic fashion to vital considerations of policy) does not diminish this argument. Indeed, it was this very ignorance, with its impact upon the ability to offer valuable objective criticism, that strengthened the subjective argument that the Radicals advanced against excessive secrecy. Even where problems over both the practicality and desirability of a more open diplomacy were raised, as was the case in the contribution to the debate of Mark Sykes,¹¹⁰ the obligation of the Foreign Office to provide sufficient information to allow the democratically elected representatives of the people to assess affairs could not be ignored. All the critics of both specific and general issues in policy expressed a similar regret and hope; that information relevant to the understanding and assessment of policy had not been supplied in sufficient quantity, and that as a result of the events of the summer of 1911 which had clearly illustrated the dangers of such widespread ignorance, that more information would be forthcoming.¹¹¹ Asquith's claim that existing parliamentary procedure already catered for the debating and constitutional control of policy by the House failed to satisfy Grey's critics, who not only feared that affairs were being mismanaged, but also that they were being denied their constitutional right to

scrutinise policy conduct, and that as a result the role of Parliament was being subverted.¹¹² As Sir Henry Dalziel, Liberal MP for Kirkcaldy Burghs, illustrated, the practical ability of a Parliament to alter events which had already been set in motion without prior knowledge of the issues that had provided the spur to action was far less than the constitutional function available might suggest.¹¹³ Furthermore, and as Ponsonby was to point out in his pamphlet 'Democracy and the Control of Foreign Affairs', the fact that Parliament, as the legislative body, was ultimately responsible to the people for any binding legal commitments meant that, unless diplomatic agreements were not laws as such, the failure of the executive to submit diplomatic agreements and treatise in their entirety to Parliament effectively entailed legislature by decree. His citation of the constitutional expert Bagehot did little to quell the fears:

Treaties are quite as important as most laws, and to require the assent [of Parliament] to every word and not to consult them on the essence is ludicrous.¹¹⁴

However, even in the one area where Radical criticism carried significant weight, the Radicals failed to achieve more than an airing of their grievances. In spite of suggestions by MacDonald for an enquiry into the formation of a Committee on Foreign Affairs intended to provide Parliament with direct access to Foreign Office sources,¹¹⁵ the Radicals were unable to overcome the arguments voiced in favour of the existing constitutional processes or the objections to any suggested concession to specific MPs of extra powers for 'vetting' the activities of the Foreign Office. Just as

their attacks on specific areas of policy foundered because of interpretative inaccuracies and impractical bases of criticism, so their arguments for a greater access to information, and consequently an increased ability to ensure that policy was in the public (or at least national) interest failed to progress towards implementation because the theoretical position they advanced proved impossible to translate into a practical form.¹¹⁶ That is not to say that the Radicals failed to achieve any success in the debate; far from it.¹¹⁷ The debate was the platform from which the campaign for the restoration Parliament's supervisory function vis à vis foreign policy was launched. Even if the immediate aftermath of the debate did not witness the establishment of a new machinery for ensuring the release of information to Parliament for scrutiny (even the most ambitious Radical had known that such a coup would be rejected unless and until proven necessary), by provoking thought and outlining an agenda for consideration, they nevertheless established a position from which they could at least pressure Grey into concessions on issues of principle central to their philosophical position.

The very nature of both Radical dissent and the official Whitehall position meant that the issues raised in the debate, subjective and objective, invariably became interwoven; and that as a result in many cases it becomes impossible to distinguish between them. The Radical attacks upon the 'matter' of Grey's policy were triggered by what was seen as evidence of material failings in policy, as events appeared to place not only material interests, but also national honour and prestige in jeopardy.¹¹⁸

At the same time, concerns that were voiced over specific issues of ‘manner’ carried an implicit questioning of ‘matter’ of which it was after all a material expression. In some cases, such as the issue of secrecy and information release, the two factors became inextricably confused, both as an example of how policy was being mishandled in application, and indeed as proof that it was in itself flawed.¹¹⁹ They believed that no matter what transpired, a reaffirmation of democratic control was needed to ensure that the interests of the majority were upheld and that schisms and confrontations not compatible with those interests be avoided.¹²⁰ They were at the same time interested in repairing apparent breaches and injustices that the misuses and unsuitability of the previous diplomacy had caused, but were primarily concerned with restoring to Parliament its position as the overseer of policy. Ponsonby, although not a speaker on 27th November 1911, was well aware that Parliament could not exercise an executive role in the field of diplomacy, both because of the limited time available to the House and because any *en clair* discussion of ongoing developments could only damage the political position of Britain in the states-system.¹²¹ However, and because as Ponsonby later noted, the legislative body Parliament was responsible for the consequences of any applied policy,¹²² the Radicals believed that it should be kept aware of both the direction and development of policy so as to be able to intervene to prevent any repetition of an Agadir scenario - where the secret and unexplained nature of policy had placed an ignorant nation in danger for reasons inconsistent with the interests at stake. If the Radical position is seen in this light, of pointing at examples of ‘manner’ apparently inconsistent with what was thought to be

Britain's position, and of arguing that Parliament should be able to intervene to protect that position and ensure that policy 'matter' (as effectively the legislation that legitimised the executive function of diplomacy) worked to that end, then their position both during and after the debate should be seen as one of moral strength undamaged by the weakness of the practical inadequacies which their ignorance caused.

The debate of 27th November ended without resolving the issues which the Foreign Secretary had sought to explain, at an effective impasse. The positions of the respective protagonists had been clearly established, but both had been unable to force a decisive capitulation from the other. Grey had been prevented from dismissing the criticisms levelled against his conduct of British policy because circumstances constrained him from revealing too much information. The Radicals, although able to exploit the problems facing Grey which weakened the effectiveness of his explanations of both diplomatic events and policy principles were unable to convince the House that the situation merited the changes they advocated, or that they could offer a practical set of alternatives for both the content and conduct of policy. The respective strengths and weaknesses of the two sides complemented each other to a point where neither could claim a sufficiently large advantage to allow a complete vindication of their position. It is possible with hindsight to argue that Grey's approach offered the best option available given the position facing Britain at the time, and that the Radical criticisms were unhelpful and counter-productive.

Grey's reflection upon the inability of a public which could not know all the issues at stake to conduct effective statesmanship certainly appears to have some justification.¹²³ However, the Radicals should not be castigated for attacking what remained unexplained abuses because hindsight suggests that those 'abuses' were of an unavoidable nature. The Radicals saw their arguments as well-founded, given that the information available to them did not appear to tally with Grey's 'tranquilising statements' and explanations. The success or failure of their campaign and the vindication of their ideological position would depend upon the evidence emerging from future diplomatic exchanges, and the extent to which policy proved to be compatible with national interests (of which Liberal principles were seen as an integral part), or continued to display apparent flaws and inconsistencies. The debate had provided the Radicals with a platform from which to assail Grey, to force him either to adopt such policies as satisfied them, or to secure sufficient support by which to achieve the reforms of the policy mechanism they thought necessary. Indeed, as the later stages of the debate on the 27th November, and more substantially the continuation of the debate on 14th December 1911 clearly shows, once the theoretical positions had been established in the discussion of the Agadir Crisis and related policies, the Radicals forced Grey to examine other ongoing diplomatic activity, most notably that surrounding the Persian Question.¹²⁴ It is through an examination of this crisis and the parliamentary role therein that the Radical and Foreign Office positions established on 27th November can best be assessed, and an examination of the extent to which a tangible influence was exerted and desirable in the light of the overall

diplomatic position can be undertaken.

Chapter III: PARLIAMENT AND THE PERSIAN QUESTION 1911-12:
THE RADICAL POSITION

The outlook in foreign affairs is so serious... blunder after blunder has been made ... if only the company were better educated and there were not so much concealment and mystery.

Ponsonby letter to Lloyd George, September 1912

As we have already seen, in the period following the Agadir Crisis, Radicals in the British parliament were quick to criticise both the content and conduct of Grey's foreign policy. Their campaign agitating for an increase in official information for the legislature, seeking to insure that policy would again be made accountable to Westminster, was fully underway by the time of the debate of 27th November. However, their interventions into the murky world of foreign affairs could only hope to succeed should the Radicals prove able to sustain a consistent barrage of dissent against substantiable examples of misconduct by the Foreign Office. It was one thing for the Radicals to claim that the Foreign Secretary had provoked their assault:-

The Foreign Secretary's silence during this period of serious international unrest [summer 1911] is the chief cause for the recent agitation for more information and greater publicity.¹

and predictable that they should demand the issuing of official statements and papers, for the government to clarify matters and restore confidence in Britain's position as a peaceful, non-aligned nation. It was quite another matter to build upon and exploit the apparently settled issue of the 'manner' of policy as the basis for a review and revision of the 'matter' of policy.² As Grey

was only too pleased to argue, the Moroccan dispute and Anglo-German relations had been repaired by the time the Radical campaign gained significant momentum. It was, therefore, greatly to the advantage of the concerned Radicals that 'the Persian pot again began to bubble'.³ The re-emergence of a Persia in crisis at this time provided policy critics with an established vehicle with which to assess and challenge ongoing British diplomacy. Here was a nation in which Britain had a declared and long-standing interest; and, under the terms of the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention, a degree of responsibility. Various elements in the Persian question conspired to provide the Radicals with the perfect combination with which to test both the 'manner' and the 'matter' of Grey's diplomacy. To them it was clear that Russia was involved in worsening the problems facing the Persian government: Russia, Entente partner of Britain but reactionary Empire traditionally disliked by British Liberals. Indeed, it increasingly appeared that the 1907 Convention, the basis of the Entente and in which Britain had supposedly an equal status with Russia vis à vis Persia, was being used as a pretext for Russian abuses in Persia; and the British Foreign Office, far from restraining their St Petersburg counterparts, appeared only too willing to acquiesce or conspire in Russian moves. I do not propose at this point to study the principles of Grey's Entente policy in the light of the developments in Persia; or to study and assess the determinants and consequences of Grey's Russian diplomacy. This chapter aims to outline the nature and direction of parliamentary involvement in the Persian Question in the light of the Radical attempts to reassert the supervision of foreign policy by the legislature. By examining both debates and

parliamentary questions, it may be possible to determine the extent to which policy changes were demanded, to assess the practicality of such alternative lines of policy as were advanced, and to gauge the extent to which any influence can be said to have been exerted over the Foreign Secretary.

The Persian Question and the related issue of Anglo-Russian relations was not, of course, a new topic of discussion in Westminster. The Radical wing of the Liberal Party, the Labour MPs in Westminster, and, perhaps ironically, some Conservative Imperialists afraid for imperial security and the Indian frontier in particular, had expressed concern over the government's moves in 1907. Many had been disturbed by the prospect of an alignment with 'a regime which denied its subjects constitutional reform and maintained its authority by means of secret police and arbitrary justice'.⁴ The secrecy which had prevailed during the negotiations with Russia had merely served to exacerbate fears and suspicions. In 1908, Keir Hardie's motion attempting to censure Edward VII's visit to Reval had attracted the support of 59 MPs (who were rewarded in turn with exclusion from a subsequent Royal garden party). 1909 witnessed agitation during the return visit of the Tsar, to Cowes.⁵ It was the situation in Persia, though, that made the position of Anglo-Russian relations so delicate, and gave the Radicals a vehicle with which to challenge the value of continued Entente co-operation. The period 1906 to 1909 saw civil war and revolution in Persia as democratic nationalists challenged the incumbent royalist autocracy.⁶ Almost inevitably, the cause of the former attracted the sympathy of British Liberals, and the Radicals especially. Persia

had been a major cause of diplomatic rivalry and tension between Britain and Russia for decades before 1907, and as such already held the attention of those interested in international affairs.⁷ The 1907 Convention served to attract increased attention from those Radical elements naturally suspicious of Whitehall and supportive of the democratic and anti-Russian forces at work in Persia. As such, it was natural that as McLean suggests, 'Persia thus developed into a test case of Grey's Liberal principles'.⁸ The Radicals were able to use Persia as a barometer, a gauge as to exactly how valuable the Convention and resulting Entente would prove in upholding of fundamental Liberal principles. At the same time, they were able to assess Grey's Liberal mettle, by measuring the extent to which he used what they believed to be his considerable influence to secure a victory for the revolutionary and democratic cause.

The events in Persia during the period 1907-11 whilst the Convention was in operation have been studied in depth elsewhere.⁹ It is sufficient at this juncture to point out that developments in Persia during those years tended to uphold the suspicions and fears of the British Radicals. The activities of Russians, such as Colonel Liakhoff, the pro-Shah leader of the Persian Cossack Brigade who played a prominent role in suppressing the national assembly in 1908, did little to alter the view that the traditional, oppressive policies of St Petersburg remained. The failure of Whitehall to offer any sustained counter to such Russian abuses tended to encourage the Radicals' belief that the Foreign Office saw the preservation of the newly won Entente as of more importance than the defence of principle and the assistance of

'struggling nationalities'. The Radicals responded with the formation by Browne and Lynch, of a Persian Committee in October 1908, intent on applying pressure for a stronger pro-Persian diplomacy both in Parliament and in public.¹⁰ The Committee was kept abreast of events in Persia with information from Browne's contacts with Persian exiles, Russian correspondents, and ex-students in the British consular and diplomatic service; and as such was able to offer both rapid and well-informed commentaries on Persian affairs.¹¹ At the same time, some Conservatives, afraid of possible Russian penetration to the Persian Gulf and Indian frontier, seen to undermine long term imperial security, and of the effects on British commercial and private interests that increasing chaos would cause, began to voice concern that Grey's handling of affairs was inadequate.¹² As markets in the south began to close, and unchecked regional banditry plagued communications, their concerns multiplied. The fall of the Shah in 1909 was followed by an apparently unopposed Russian occupation of northern Persia, to 'safeguard lives and property', and provided more evidence for claims that either the Convention was failing to achieve its brief, or that, in acquiescing so readily to Russian moves, Grey was guilty of pursuing a Machiavellian policy incompatible with Liberal principles. However, as we have already seen, several factors concerning domestic politics in Britain combined to permit Grey a respite from constant scrutiny and criticism in 1910.¹³ Moreover, Persia, in the wake of the successful nationalist revolution, was permitted a respite from civil upheaval, and enjoyed a period of relative stability in which it was hoped a securely based constitutional system could be established. The result of these factors

taken together was, for Grey, a period relatively free from challenges to his Anglo-Russian and Persian policy.¹⁴

The Agadir Crisis restored Radical attention to foreign affairs in general, and later to Persia in particular, with a vengeance. No sooner had the House of Commons returned from the summer recess (on 24th October 1911) than Grey found himself bombarded with demands for information about recent events. If the Moroccan Crisis initially held centre stage, then concern over recent events in Persia ran it a close second, and indeed increasingly came to the fore as once again the premier issue in the Radical-Foreign Office struggle. Some measure of the concern felt over Persian affairs can be gauged when it is realised that in the month prior to the foreign policy debate of 27th November 1911 (initiated by Grey, who vainly attempted to concentrate upon issues related to Agadir¹⁵) some 42 questions and supplementaries were tabled on Persia.¹⁶ Whereas the Foreign Secretary was able to answer his critics from a position of relative strength *vis à vis* Morocco and Anglo-German relations because that crisis had passed and consequently the scope for a sustained campaign had been curtailed, the developing situation in Persia provided an ongoing crisis which continually supplied the Radicals with fresh ammunition as they argued for changes in diplomatic conduct and supervision. When it is remembered that this parliamentary-exploited ulcer festered on right through the 1912 session, seriously embarrassing Grey in his relations with Russia and with little to suggest that a cure was imminent, it is hardly surprising that the Foreign Secretary chose later to admit in his memoirs that 'Persia tried my

patience more than any other subject'.¹⁷

From the outset, Persia provided the Radicals with issues of both 'manner' and 'matter' with which to test Grey. The resulting struggle once again pitted a Liberal left concerned primarily with the defence of principle against a Foreign Secretary who faced a series of unavoidable problems that hampered his attempts to resolve diplomatic crises and placate agitated domestic opinion. The Radicals may not have known or appreciated the practical exigencies that faced Grey, and as a result were quick to incur his wrath because their arguments often flew in the face of what the embattled minister saw as being the only viable policy alternatives.¹⁸ However, and just as they had proven in the debate of 27th November 1911, such failings neither reduced nor weakened the importance of the Radical cause. One of their most persistent and persuasive complaints was once again that excessive secrecy was maintained by Whitehall, and that vital information was being kept from Parliament. If one consequence of this tended to be that criticisms expressed ignorance and caused Grey embarrassment, then the Foreign Office had nobody but itself to blame.¹⁹ Throughout their campaign, criticisms of conduct and developments were accompanied by consistent demands for a greater supply of official information:-

In view of what has taken place ... it is about time for this House to insist upon knowing something more about foreign affairs than it has hitherto.²⁰

May I conclude by making a plea that more of the fresh air and light of democratic opinion be allowed to penetrate into the stuffy darkness of diplomacy?²¹

I do not think that we are always treated quite fairly with regard to foreign affairs ... we are told that we must not interfere ... it is indiscreet to ask ... I hope that he [Grey] will consult us and take the opinion of the House before arriving at any definite decision.²²

One disaffected MP went so far as to complain that Grey appeared to resent the tabling of questions²³; another, that the Foreign Office denied information, preferring instead to issue fait accompli.²⁴ Philip Morrell, designated with Ponsonby to be the spokesman for the Liberal Foreign Affairs Committee on Russia and Persia, and the tabler of some 80 parliamentary questions on Persia between October 1911 and February 1913, complained at the height of the agitation in the winter of 1911 that insufficient data was being offered by the Foreign Office, during an adjournment motion he proposed on the subject of Persia.²⁵ His concern was echoed by a fellow MP:-

Really we are entitled to information of a larger and more ample character ... I trust that at the first possible moment we shall have a full statement.²⁶

The supplying of parliamentary papers was no less an issue of contention. Irish Nationalist John Dillon and Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald were in the forefront of demands both at question time and in relevant debates for greater access to documentary evidence that would permit a more measured and informed assessment of Grey's diplomacy by MPs.²⁷

In itself an issue of foreign affairs 'matter', the issue of the supply of information to Westminster is important to any understanding of the struggle

for control of foreign affairs. It is necessary to remember that the Radicals could base their arguments and criticisms only upon such evidence as they could lay their hands on, and that such perceptions as they formed regarding developments could only be as complete and accurate as that evidence itself. If their sources were prone to inaccuracy, bias, or incomplete reports, then it remained the responsibility of those with a greater understanding either to provide evidence correcting misinterpretations, or to accept criticism with the stoic conviction that matters would so resolve themselves as to provide a conclusion vindicating their position. In a letter of September 1912 to Lloyd George, Ponsonby complained that he and his colleagues were being kept uninformed as to the Grey-Sazonov talks at Balmoral, that The Times was the sole confidant of the Foreign Office, and that MPs were not 'likely to know much more after we have asked questions in the House'.²⁸ He contended that a number of MPs from all parties feared that the Foreign Secretary was involved in a gradual partition of Persia. In the light of information subsequently available to the historian concerning the Balmoral meeting, Ponsonby's fears vis à vis partition appear to have been misplaced. However, taken in the context of the time, and given that accurate information concerning both events and policy was apparently so hard to come by, it is hardly surprising that the Radicals treated the Foreign Secretary's statements with such a degree of scepticism. When their criticisms proved unfounded, even counter-productive, the Radicals remained undaunted, arguing that any problems that they caused were due to Whitehall's penchant for excessive secrecy which, necessary or not, did little to improve the handling of power

political issues. The Foreign Office could have countered ignorant critics either by pursuing a consistent release of accurate information, or by providing successful diplomatic coups ending the diplomatic crises that provoked concern. Failure to provide either could only tend to fuel fears that something in Britain's diplomacy was amiss, be it in 'manner' or 'matter'; and that as a result, agitation for change was justifiable. If the practical exigencies that determined the attitude adopted by Grey towards the supply of information precluded him from issuing the answers sought by the Radicals, they were not to know, and could only assume the worst and continue to campaign for change using issues such as Persia as their justification.

When dealing with the Persian Crisis in Parliament, the Radicals found themselves able to draw upon a host of 'manner' issues with which to expose the severe failings they feared underwrote Grey's policy 'matter'. Liberal attitudes towards foreign policy at this time were dominated by two basic principles. Firstly, it was deemed essential that any premeditated creation or manipulation of a 'balance of power' system, any moves to enmesh Britain in a series of power political commitments, or any policy that could destabilise international affairs by increasing tension between power blocs, should be opposed. Secondly, it was felt that Britain, as the premier democratic power in Europe, should act as liberal champion for any oppressed nationalities and weak states.²⁹ Evidence from Persia throughout late 1911 and 1912 suggested to Grey's critics that in fact the opposite was true of his policy. The Foreign Secretary's moves appeared to be dominated by considerations of 'balance'

politics, sacrificing the independence and integrity of Persia and giving Russia a free hand. Russian troops had remained in Persia since 1909, but Grey showed little inclination to force their removal.³⁰ The return of the ex-Shah from a supposedly 'secure' exile in Russia provoked Russophobe Liberals to suspect complicity by St Petersburg, especially when rumours reached London that Russian steamships had transported the ex-Shah's forces to Persia and had waited to assist in any withdrawal should his counter-revolution fail. Once more, Whitehall offered little reaction.³¹ The fiasco of the Stokes appointment, with an apparent volte face by the Foreign Office over the employment by the Persians of a former British military attaché once Russian opposition to the move emerged, merely confirmed earlier suspicions that Grey, far from championing the interests of Persia, was in fact following the wishes of St Petersburg all too closely.³² Indeed, the only independent initiative that the minister sanctioned was for an increase in Britain's own military presence in the south of Persia - and this in spite of Persian protests against such action.³³ The resulting concern and suspicion that persisted over Grey's Persian policy was then finally transformed into outrage by the Shuster affair. This unfortunate saga brought the value of the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention and the integrity of Grey's diplomacy into serious question. Indignant Radicals began to fear that Persian independence, previously compromised by a pro-Russian bias on Grey's part, was about to be replaced by an effective partition of that country. The consequences that such a move would entail could only be to Britain's cost - not the least of which would be the apparent abandonment of her liberal tradition and the concomitant loss of prestige.³⁴

As with the period prior to the Autumn of 1911, the events in Persia in the days after the clash between Shuster's treasury gendarmes and Consul-General Pokhetonov's guards over the disputed property of Shoa-es-Sultaneh have been clearly outlined elsewhere.³⁵ Similarly, the respective British and Russian attitudes adopted towards Shuster have been examined. The important point to make here is that the Radicals did not know the nature and extent of Russian interests and fears that were communicated in official transactions to Grey;³⁶ but were able to witness the open, practical reactions to those fears, and took them at face value to be evidence of Russia's continued imperialism. Worse still for the Foreign Secretary, the Radicals were equally ignorant of the true British position *vis-à-vis* developments in Persia, and could only see in Grey's apparent acquiescence and tacit support for his Entente partner clear proof of misconduct. His answers in Parliament did little to quell their fears. Taken in tandem, the combination of increased military activity in the north of Persia and the inexplicable diplomatic coercion of the Persian government could only confirm Radical misgivings - all the more given their ignorance over other matters vital to a fuller understanding of the overall diplomatic position. After the Russian Ultimatum of 2nd November 1911, the questioning of Russian motives and actions in the House increased dramatically.³⁷ Of greatest significance were the questions which concentrated upon the 1907 Convention and its compatibility with the recent events in Persia.³⁸ Grey's obvious reluctance to offer any complete answers whilst affairs were in progress suggested to many that the Convention was being abused, no matter what Grey said his reasons for prevarication were, or what the

Convention should be seen to encompass. The Foreign Affairs debates of 27th November 1911 and 14th December 1911 therefore provided the Radicals the perfect opportunity to challenge blatant inconsistencies between their position and Grey's practised policy. They sought to use Grey's embarrassment over Persia to undermine his overall position, thus undermining his explanation of the post-Agadir diplomatic restabilisation, and to explode the myth that Parliament needed only a tacit say in foreign affairs. In short, the Persian Crisis became the main vehicle used by Grey's critics in their campaign for a restoration of democratic control of policy, and the rescuing of principle from the Foreign Office's neglect.

Although Grey chose not to make a statement concerning Persia on 27th November 1911, the Radicals and other MPs concerned in Persian affairs took the chance afforded by the debate to force Persia onto the agenda.³⁹ The main thrust of their argument was that the 1907 Convention had failed to achieve its purpose - or, at least, the purpose which they had argued it should have. Ramsay Macdonald questioned the value of any agreement with the Russians which St Petersburg proved only too willing to contradict, and expressed concern that the Foreign Office appeared all too ready to sacrifice principles and Persia in order to promote material advantages. Dillon argued that the Convention should be applied as its original brief intended, precluding both British and Russian intervention, and as a guarantee of Persian independence and integrity. However, the Irish MP feared that this laudable aim had been hastily abandoned, and that the Foreign Secretary now stood

silently by as Russia worked to undermine the Tehran government. Mark Sykes, Unionist MP for Central Hull, argued that the concession to Russia of the premier political and strategic centres of the country was contrary to any upholding of its independence and integrity, and complained that the much-vaunted improvement in frontier security which had been cited as a justification for the convention had not been realised. The Earl of Ronaldshay (another Conservative imperialist) suggested that the Convention's value rested with its ability to permit Persia, free from foreign interference, to recover internal stability under its new constitution. He was, however, worried that such a recovery would prove impossible should Britain continue to permit Russia to pursue its aggressive policies in Persia. Noel Buxton reaffirmed his fears that, behind Grey's Persian policy as behind his Moroccan, the spectre of the 'balance of power' raised its ugly head. Britain could not assert any diplomatic influence over Russia vis-à-vis Persia because of the need for her aid in an anti-German alliance, and consequently remained silent whilst St Petersburg usurped Tehran's authority. Put simply, the Foreign Secretary's critics argued that his Agreement with Russia was worthless unless the principles upon which it was based were upheld, but that all the evidence they had pointed only to the negation of those principles. Grey sought to counter these claims by placing the Convention and recent history into a pragmatic context. The Agreement had always been predicated on the recognition of Russian interests in north Persia as they existed by 1907, and could not be invoked against Russian moves that legitimately sought to defend them. It had succeeded in reducing tension and preventing costly diplomatic conflicts between Britain and

Russia. By providing a framework for diplomatic co-operation and mutually agreeing to refrain from further expansion, the two Great Powers had indeed done much to strengthen Persian independence, which without the Convention would have been placed in increasing jeopardy. However, such claims fell on sceptical ears, as did Grey's argument that by ignoring specific interests outlined in the Convention Persian officials had themselves provoked the confrontation with Russia.⁴⁰ The Radicals cared little for the hypotheses of the Foreign Secretary; they remained concerned with the practical examples of illiberal diplomacy which they saw in Grey's handling of Persian affairs. The principles behind the Anglo-Russian Agreement were under scrutiny, and answers were required to remove suspicions that those principles were incompatible with acceptable standards of honour and prestige.

Diplomatic developments merely deepened Grey's problems. The Russians showed no inclination to withdraw their coercive military presence from north Persia, or accept Persian promises to investigate the cause of the dispute.⁴¹ Indeed, and in spite of the formal acceptance of the Ultimatum of 2nd November in its entirety,⁴² St Petersburg escalated the crisis on 28th November with a second and more severe set of demands.⁴³ MPs in Westminster had already expressed concern that the Foreign Office had attempted to influence Persia into accepting the initial Russian Ultimatum, and as such were party to a breach of the principle of non-intervention.⁴⁴ They now found themselves presented with evidence of direct Russian interference and apparent British complicity. It was bad enough that Shuster and his British

employee Lecoffre were to be dismissed from service in the Persian government. It was intolerable that the Entente powers should insist upon a say in the appointment of any foreign nationals to the Persian civil service. Such a demand contravened the fundamental rights of Persia as a sovereign nation. Offence was also taken at the Russian demand for an indemnity, which was seen as a deliberate attempt to establish a binding economic influence over a near-destitute Persia. To be fair to Grey, he too was in private greatly opposed to such moves.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, with a continuation of the 27th November debate pending, the Radicals wasted no time in questioning Grey over the 'manner' of his concurrent diplomacy. They also burdened the Foreign Secretary with the task of proving that that his diplomacy was compatible with the spirit of the 1907 Entente. Morrell and Dillon demanded to know the Foreign Office position over the use of Britain's name in the demand for consultation prior to any foreign appointments to the Persian civil service, and over the second Russian Ultimatum of 28th November in general.⁴⁷ On 4th December Morrell forced an adjournment debate on the Persian issue, and used the opportunity afforded to him to outline the Radical position as to what the Anglo-Russian Convention embodied.⁴⁶ As previous critics had before him, Morrell declared present Russian diplomacy to be incompatible with that document, and insisted that the British government should protest to St Petersburg. The next day, Ponsonby asked if the declaration made by the British Minister in Tehran on 4th September 1907 on the nature of the Convention still represented the position of the government. When informed that his source was not recorded as an official communication, the MP for

Stirling Burghs was presented with an anomaly in Anglo-Persian diplomacy of potentially serious proportions, an anomaly he was only too ready to pursue.⁴⁸

All the while, the Radicals were assisted in their efforts by worried Tory imperialists, of whom Curzon, ex-Viceroy of India and well-respected expert on Asian affairs, was the most vociferous. The Radicals appreciated the 'Curzon factor' only too well:-

At all events in this Persian Question... a nod from Curzon will have more effect upon the Government than the frowns of our collective wisdom.⁴⁹

On 7th December in the House of Lords Lord Curzon heavily criticised Grey's Persian policy on a variety of issues.⁵⁰ He argued that the 'declared interests' conceded to Russia in the north of Persia had been excessive, and that the result of those concessions had been to encourage demands for administrative powers to insure the continued security of any 'economic' advantages that those interests embodied. This, according to Curzon, was the first step on the road towards political influence and eventual partition and annexation; the very scenario that for reasons of imperial security the 1907 Convention had been meant to avoid. All the while, the failure of Britain to uphold the ideals and responsibilities implicit in the Agreement reflected badly upon her prestige and honour, and weakened her standing in international circles and in the eyes of her colonial subjects tied to Persian affairs by religious affinity (the Islamic factor). Such support from an authoritative source strengthened Radical claims that severe flaws in policy existed, and that problems in 'manner' were only evidence of errors in 'matter'.

Curzon's declarations on Persia provided a happy parallel for the political

Left's campaign:-

While Russia has issued the Ultimatum, we seem to have incurred the odium. I cannot think this testifies to a very happy diplomacy. It throws a rather lurid light upon the halcyon days we were led to expect when the Anglo-Russian Agreement was signed.⁵¹

Because concern over such an important issue in the conduct of foreign affairs was seen to be wider than mere Radical Liberal disquiet, the Radicals were able to claim that official dismissals of their case as unsubstantiated and idealistic scaremongering were wrong, and that the problems they perceived were in fact real and in need of serious consideration.

The debate on foreign affairs cut short on 27th November 1911 was continued on 14th December a greater concentration on Persian affairs, which had in the intervening period come to dominate the entire issue of policy, was inevitable.⁵² Sir Henry Norman, Liberal MP for Wolverhampton South (and a noted Liberal Imperialist), saw fit to challenge inconsistencies in the Radical arguments against diplomatic agreements, and described himself as in principle a supporter of the Convention. However, he also expressed grave misgivings about recent developments in Persia which he felt suggested that the central principles upon which the Agreement was based were being violated. The Liberal MP for Leicester, Crawshay-Williams, who claimed a professed interest in Persian affairs, again voiced claims that the diplomatic activity of 1907 had

devolved upon Britain a duty to honour her pledge to uphold Persian independence. It was after all demanded by Liberal principle that Britain support a fellow constitutional power in time of crisis. And in any case, the prospective threat of partition, and consequently increased problems of defence resulting from the creation of a contiguous frontier with Russia, would eventually force the government to clarify its position with regard to the Persian Question. Such considerations surely made it expedient to use the 1907 Convention as a vehicle for fostering Persian recovery, so as to pre-empt the future problems that would otherwise emerge. The Unionist MP Baird echoed Radical calls for a clear statement of intent by Grey to end the destabilising atmosphere of uncertainty and doubt. The Foreign Secretary attempted to offer the clear explanation that was demanded. He also tried to show that Anglo-Russian policies towards Persia were entirely compatible with the 1907 Agreement. He again argued that the Convention had sought to identify and recognise respective Anglo-Russian interests as the best way to avoid harmful confrontations, and to allow Persia to develop in peace as an independent state. Those who interpreted the Convention as an acceptance by the Entente powers that they had become responsible for the upholding of Persian independence and integrity were mistaken. All that the Convention had committed Britain and Russia to was the respecting of independence and integrity whilst Persia instituted a programme of self-development as the basis for political and economic stability. Grey attempted to justify the Russian ultimata of November by arguing that Persia was remiss in failing to recognise and accept the expressed interests of her neighbours, and that she

should avoid the pursuit of antagonistic initiatives. Most importantly, he outlined a six point proposal for restoring internal stability to Persia, and, by establishing cordial relations with Britain and Russia, the means with which to avoid future disruptive clashes.⁵³ Grey predicted that the Russian promises that the military occupation of the north was a provisional measure, to last only until order was restored, would prove good. This would prove that co-operation on all sides under the Convention could engender definite progress, and vindicate his Entente diplomacy. In spite of this, the Radicals refused either to be placated or to accept his arguments. Ponsonby again cited the letter of 4th September 1907 of Spring-Rice to the Persian Foreign Minister as evidence that the Convention had included a guarantee to the Persians, and that since then this pledge had been neglected as the operation of a 'balance of power' policy had seen Grey favour Russia at Persia's expense. The 1907 Agreement was not wrong in itself, but subsequent Russian abuse and British inaction had tainted it. Morrell attacked the Foreign Secretary for failing to act against Russian moves, and questioned his inaction. The attack on Shuster, the demand for veto over foreign civil service appointments, and the claim for an indemnity all pointed to unwarranted Russian interference in Persian institutional reform and to a blatant attempt at economic exploitation. The Russians were using the Convention as a screen behind which to conceal their increasing interference in Persia's economic and political affairs.

The debates of 27th November and 14th December failed to resolve the arguments over British foreign policy in general, or as specifically concerned Persia, to the satisfaction of either Grey, or his critics. Because the

Persian Crisis itself was far from reaching a clear solution, and as a result neither of the Westminster protagonists could vindicate their position by providing conclusive evidence of either success or failure, such a resolution was unattainable. The struggle was once more forced to concentrate on assessing on-going and largely unresolved developments in the light of the aims of the 1907 Convention. Russian diplomatic and military coercion had already brought those aims into question, as had the ready nature of Grey's acceptance of Russian explanations. The Foreign Secretary's defence of Russian initiatives did little to comfort the worried Radical-Curzonite Lobby. The information that emerged during December and January appeared more and more to vindicate their position, and to show either undue naivety or willing compliance on Grey's part in what Shuster was to call 'the strangling of Persia'. Parliament was in recess from 16th December to 14th February 1912, but events moved apace in Persia. The second ultimatum was eventually complied with, but only at the expense of a coup d'état by the Persian cabinet who forcibly removed the hostile opposition of the Mejliss and suppressed the constitution. Clashes at Resht and Tabriz between Russian troops and Persians, and rumours of Russian atrocities in the north, increased fears that St Petersburg had no intention of reducing its military presence.⁵⁴ The Radicals pursued an extra-parliamentary campaign, using a resurgent Persia Committee and sympathetic organs of the Liberal press to maintain pressure on Whitehall and accrue as much ammunition against policy misconduct as they could. The new session opened with the debate on the Royal Address and the Radicals were again presented with a chance to force the Persian and foreign affairs issue on to

centre stage.

The debate of 21st February 1912 on the Royal Address marked the peak of Radical agitation over Persia, and arguably of their campaign for greater parliamentary control of foreign policy.⁵⁵ The events of the previous months in central Asia had provided enough material of sufficient weight to enable the Radicals to sustain the momentum of their post-Agadir campaign. Now, with evidence that Grey's policies had neither delivered the successes which he had so recently promised, nor remained true to sacred Liberal principle or the expressed aims of the 1907 Convention, his critics could launch a retrospective attack upon the course and nature of the Foreign Secretary's diplomacy. The Radicals for once enjoyed the advantage of being able to assess and criticise on an issue which was on-going despite having been a cause of concern for a significant length of time. For once, the usual prevarications or dismissals offered by the Secretary of State to divert their criticisms could be circumvented. Ponsonby, Morrell and the other Radicals were well established in their position, ready at any time to comment upon on any issue - and concomitantly Grey's position was less secure.

Ponsonby's speech that opened the debate was perhaps the classic exposition upon what the Radicals understood to be the Persian Question, and that nation's relations with Britain and Russia.⁵⁶ Grey may have denied that the by-now infamous Spring-Rice letter of 4th September 1907 was an official communication of policy, but Ponsonby was nevertheless able to argue that

Persia had based her understanding of the Convention upon it, and that the statement that 'their object...was not to allow one another to intervene' which outlined the intentions of the Anglo-Russian powers in their negotiations, had come to encapsulate Persia's reaction to it.⁵⁷ The defence of the principles of independence and integrity, and the hopes for Persian recovery, had been based upon this understanding. However, the actions of Russia after 1907 and especially during 1911-12 had deliberately contravened those principles. Officials in St Petersburg had managed to provoke a crisis with Shuster, who had based his reformist policies upon the Spring-Rice guarantee, with the express purpose of increasing their influence and preventing Persian recovery (which could only take place if she were left free from outside interference). The resulting crisis had destabilised the existing regime in Persia and enabled Russia to sponsor a coup d'état against the Mejliss as a result of which their influence, diminished since the deposition of the Shah in 1909, was restored. In spite of this, Grey had claimed success for his policy, notably in a speech given in Manchester (which Ponsonby cited with contempt):-

That which we hoped to achieve by the Anglo-Russian Convention has been achieved, and on both sides the Agreement has been absolutely kept.

Ponsonby also cited a Russian press article, which claimed that new forward interests could not be relinquished, as evidence that the Russians remained an expanding imperial power, and consequently argued that the promised troop withdrawals were unlikely. In the light of such evidence, the Spring-Rice interpretation of the Convention was invalid, and its entire position



thrown into question. Ponsonby continued this theme by arguing that the Anglo-Russian Joint Note of 18th February showed clearly that the Entente powers persisted in the policy of interference in the economic, administrative and political affairs of Persia.⁵⁸ He argued that it was unwise to permit the Entente governments to dictate terms for a loan, because as such the financing of developments would be less a means to encourage independent restabilisation, and more a political lever with which to undermine self-government. The consequences of sacrificing Persian independence were once again rehearsed; as well as the cost to commerce and imperial security, national prestige and honour and principles of justice would be lost. Behind this disastrous policy could be seen the dread spectre of anti-German balance of power commitments - a rapprochement with Berlin had therefore become the essential precursor to the repairing of the Persian situation. Ponsonby's attitude to this issue and the Anglo-Russian Entente were summed up nicely:-

Democracies seek no quarrel; they desire to avoid quarrel. On the other hand...that cannot be said of autocracies.⁵⁹

Morrell, too, recited the usual list of concerns, and echoed Ponsonby's suggestion that it had been fear of a successful Shuster that had prompted Russia into forcing the crisis. He sought assurances from Grey that the government would press for a restoration of effective Persian self-determination (to include for example, the recalling of the Mejliss) and the complete removal of the Russian occupation force. In short, Morrell wanted evidence that the 'spirit' of the 1907 Convention as expressed by the Spring-

Rice letter would be upheld. Because it failed to do this, neglecting Persian independence and self-administration, the Joint Note was roundly criticised.⁶⁰

Dillon, O'Grady and Buxton all contributed to the recapitulation of the Radical position, bemoaning intervention, excessive secrecy, and the underlying 'balance of power' considerations that so dominated policy. The Liberal MP for Coventry, David Mason, rallied those concerned at the illiberal nature of policy of the time with an encouraging cry and a warning to those who currently abused their positions in power:-

If the lamp of freedom is, perhaps, burning
dimly in the hands of those who at present
hold it, it does not mean that it does not exist.⁶¹

Once more, Grey found himself unable to offer a telling counter to either satisfy or discredit his critics. Russian troops remained in the north of Persia. The diplomatic moves in progress, of which the Joint Note of 18th February was the prime example, followed all too well the route towards the erosion and collapse of Persian independence outlined by Curzon and the Radicals. Worse still, the reassurances that were offered began to sound both hackneyed and predetermined, inflexible non-answers designed to placate parliamentary worries concerning an issue which Grey either could or would not resolve. The Russian occupation, 'temporary and provisional' though it may have been, persisted. The Convention, the only hope for Persian recovery and the peaceful preservation of Britain's material interests in the region, was patently not fulfilling its brief. The Foreign Secretary could claim that in the end his policies would bear fruit and be vindicated, but no

consistent or lasting evidence to support his case could be found. And, of course, the upshot of these failures was to further convince his critics that it was the very nature of his policies that precluded a just solution, and consequently that a review of both the nature and machinery of policy was urgently required.

It is therefore ironic that the very weakness of Grey's position as concerned Parliament was at the same time a crucial element in his eventual weathering of the storm of criticism. The Foreign Secretary's answers continued to sound contrived and unconvincing. The Persian Crisis continued to defy both Grey's predictions and his promises of an imminent return to stability. The seemingly endless incidence of events which contradicted his claims ensured that his policy was constantly brought into disrepute.⁶² In short, the Persian Question denied the beleaguered minister any respite. However, the result of this persistence was to remove the 'novelty' value of Persia as a vital, fresh issue for the Radicals to latch onto in their campaign. Gradually, outrage and concern dwindled, and were replaced by resignation and despair. It was feared that no answer would be forthcoming unless a new and radically different line of policy and set of responsibilities were adopted, not necessarily compatible with the Radicals' position.⁶³ Just as Grey had argued during the debates of 27th November and 14th December 1911 concerning criticisms of his Entente policies, the failure of the Radicals to offer a practical policy alternative for British involvement in Central Asia seriously undermined their position.⁶⁴ For all their criticism of the Convention, the Radicals failed to show

that any other policy could have achieved a more satisfactory state of affairs in Persia. By consistently pursuing a policy course which at least preserved a semblance of Persian independence, if not integrity, Grey could claim greater success than those who, tied by conscience to a set of laudable ideals, could not provide a practical alternative capable of achieving their idealistic ends. Just as their failure to formulate a workable format for a Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs prevented the Radicals from achieving the creation of a parliamentary watchdog,⁶⁵ so their inability to advance a practical policy format prevented them from achieving a radical change in policy 'matter'. At the same time, interest in domestic politics once again began to overshadow foreign affairs as Ponsonby for one knew it would.⁶⁶ Home Rule and Welsh Disestablishment began to dominate both the minds of the majority in Parliament, and the time used up in debate.⁶⁷ The very factors that had made the Persian Crisis the perfect vehicle for Radical agitation after Agadir were undermined. For want of a better analogy, the 'bubbling pot' went off the boil and could do no more than simmer, spitting occasionally to attract attention, but never sufficiently to engender any great enthusiasm. Precisely because Persia refused to stabilise; precisely because banditry persisted; precisely because aristocratic and tribal rebelliousness continued to undermine moves towards restoring a central authority; and precisely because no practical policy free from unsavoury compromise could be agreed upon to solve the crisis - for these reasons Persia lost the ability to keep the issue of policy control centre stage. Indeed, Persia may well have come to discourage uncommitted Liberals from grasping the nettle of foreign policy, especially as such a course could

only adversely affect domestic business and weaken the Government.⁶⁸ Grey found it increasingly easy to excuse Russian moves in the north as it became clear that chaos persisted and precluded withdrawal. He was at the same time able to show clearly why he was loath to commit himself to any active intervention for fear of accepting excessive levels of responsibility. As problems mounted in Persia, so paradoxically problems for Grey lessened vis à vis Westminster. As long as Persia remained no more than a disquieting nuisance, with only tertiary impacts upon fundamental British interests, it proved increasingly expedient to let sleeping dogs lie.

That is not to say that Persia ceased to be of concern, or that it disappeared from the parliamentary schedules. The assessment of the problems facing the Radicals and the extent to which the Persian issue faded in importance can only be a retrospective judgement. It was certainly not clear that the Debate on the Royal Address marked the pinnacle of successful agitation. If, subsequently, the ability to motivate MPs into calling for a review of the foreign affairs process declined, it was not obvious at the time. Sir Arthur Nicolson's comments in a letter of 1st July 1912 to the new Minister at Tehran, Townley, reflects concerns to the contrary:-

We are always worried by thoughts of how our action will be viewed below the gangway of the House of Commons.⁶⁹

The number of questions tabled on Persia showed no immediate decline, nor did the concern which they expressed. Morrell, Dillon and MacDonald continued to demand information about the documentary

definition of the 1907 Convention accepted by the Tehran government,⁷⁰ the Joint Note of 18th February 1912 (and responses⁷¹), and recent events in Persia.⁷² It was clear that the Radicals remained unconvinced that the spirit of the Agreement was being observed, and that as long as Russian moves to exert an undue influence in Persia remained unopposed, Grey's diplomacy remained suspect. The Radicals were able to claim at least one success. Some five papers were laid in the House concerning Persia between 10th March 1912 and 3rd July 1912, a release of official documentation far in excess of usual levels.⁷³ It would be wrong to forget Temperley and Penson's warning that as regarded the Blue Books 'much was omitted and texts were frequently curtailed'⁷⁴ (thus supporting Radical fears that information was being tailored to uphold policy). Grey stated privately:-

I desire to publish enough to show that declaration of Anglo-Russian agreement respecting integrity and independence of Persia were not lost sight of, but I do not wish to publish what would embarrass the Russian Government.⁷⁵

However, the fact remains that any increase in the issuing of information, no matter the quality, was a victory for the Radicals. As one commentator has subsequently remarked, 'Grey had been forced from his Whitehall isolation'.⁷⁶

Criticism of Grey's handling of the Persian Question continued throughout the summer. The Meshed Incident and outcry over apparent attempts at religious persecution by the Russian forces in the north made certain that the issue remained on the agenda.⁷⁷ Once again, the lack of official reaction encouraged fears of acquiescence and collusion. The Radicals

were able to exploit the opportunity for further debate and inquiry offered by the Civil Services and Revenue Department Estimates Committee on Foreign Office supply on 10th July 1912.⁷⁸ The Radicals and Curzonite lobbies once more sought to illustrate the flawed nature of policy. According to Ronaldshay, Russia had clearly failed to fulfil its promises to respect British interests vis à vis the Persian 'buffer state' and as such had brought the value of the Convention into doubt. In particular, the antagonising of Islamic peoples that the atrocities caused had threatened to undermine stability in British colonies where the indigenous population were bound to support their co-religionists over and above dubious Entente partners.⁷⁹ If, as was claimed, Persia was prone to 'periodic oscillations' which led to such chaos and disorder, and consequently military reactions, then it was surely the duty of Britain to clarify once and for all her position as to minimise her role as an element causing confusion. The Foreign Office should ensure that policy sought to reap maximum advantages for Britain's commercial and strategic interests in the region, but only so far as this proved compatible with Persian wishes. Ponsonby insisted that on no account should policy give Russia carte blanche. As regarded the future of Persia, it was felt essential that the constitution should be restored as a prerequisite for restabilisation and internal development. According to Dillon, progress had to be made free from further untoward external interference, true to the spirit of self-determination. Buxton demanded that 'balance of power' considerations be jettisoned as the essential precursor to the reaffirmation of the spirit of the 1907 Convention as the guarantee of independence and integrity. Ponsonby, who went so far as to

claim that Persia had become the dominant policy issue of the day, again offered the definitive statement as to the Radical position:-

All the fears which we expressed at the beginning of the Session, on the [King's] Address, have been justified.⁸⁰

When, on 26th July, Curzon rose in the Lords to launch another tirade against the government's policy, ably assisted by Lord Lamington who had recently returned from Persia and thus enjoyed the rare luxury of first hand experience, the Radical campaign appeared to remain in the best of health.⁸¹

However, as I have already suggested, the virility of the campaign was on the decline. The number of difficult and embarrassing questions asked in the House fell steadily after the Meshed Incident in April. Grey had been forced to concede such 'acceptable' documentation as he had by July, but was loath to go further - and proved able to withhold further papers by adopting the old tactics of prevarication which so infuriated the Radicals. They were able to ask for more information, to express concern that the Russians had still failed to withdraw,⁸² to enquire if the Balmoral Meeting in September 1912 had led to any redefining and reinterpretation of the 1907 Convention.⁸³ They could apply pressure, trying to force the Foreign Secretary to provide unconditional emergency aid for Persia and to press for a restoration of the Mejliss.⁸⁴ But, crucially they lacked fresh hard evidence that could prove that, amongst the series of ongoing problems in Persia, British and Russian policy contradicted Grey's reassurances and guarantees. Grey was able to explain

away developments playing on the Radicals' lack of concrete proof. Apparent Russian support for the Governor of Tabriz (a known adherent of the ex-Shah) against the Tehran government; perceived moves by the Entente powers to install a known royalist noble as regent; and suspicious reticence in the supplying of a long-promised and much-needed loan - these were all explained away because no Radical could prove that the position defined by Grey as the basis of his Persia policy the previous winter had been contravened.⁸⁵ The 'matter' of his policy was therefore intact, and as a result any short term failures in conduct could be explained away in the time-honoured fashion:-

The state of affairs is not very settled at present in Persia.⁸⁶

His Majesty's Government has given...support... but not in a form that can correctly be described by any harsh word such as pressure.⁸⁷

Grey argued that progress towards the establishment of independent internal development programmes and the removal of Anglo-Russian involvement in Persian affairs could not be made until stable government had been restored.⁸⁸ As a result, any Anglo-Russian initiative of apparently illiberal nature in the short term should be seen as intent on facilitating that laudable, long term aim. The failure of his critics to offer a different proposal, capable of catering for all the interested parties involved, made this position all the stronger.

As the above examples suggest, without definite proof that diplomatic moves were flawed, the Radicals lost the ability to do much more than infer to that effect. No new Spring-Rice letter emerged to compromise Grey's position

and force further statements of intent explaining policy and allaying suspicions. Grey could thus rebuff Radical assertions safe in the knowledge that the effective ignorance of his critics was in turn his and the Entente's strength. As a result, and even though demands for information and questioning of specific issues persisted, the campaign centred around the Persian question ceased to be a significant concern. And, ironically, as Unionist MPs such as Rees and Lonsdale began to call for the adoption of British intervention à la Russe in south Persia to safeguard British interests, particularly after the death of one Captain Eckford, Grey was even able to pose as a moderate Liberal, intent on protecting policy from calls for excessive imperialistic interventions.⁸⁹

How, then, should the historian view the Radical agitation over Persia, and the wider struggle for parliamentary control of foreign policy? A J P Taylor has argued that in the wake of the agitation against his policies, Grey adopted a new course more attuned to the demands of his Radical critics.⁹⁰ If the events in Persia and debates in Westminster of this period are considered, it is clear that such a view cannot be upheld, at least as concerns the Persian question and the related issue of policy control. McLean is correct to argue that the Radical campaign had little apparent success in changing Grey's attitude towards the Persian situation, nor indeed in prompting a change in policy to a position equating with the Radical cries for a defence of the 'independence and integrity' of Persia with a concomitant hardening of attitudes to Russian interventions.⁹¹ However, it is necessary to put the Persian question and the Radical involvement in that crisis into a context which allows

for the point of the overall Radical campaign, that which this study seeks to evaluate. Persian Committee aside, it is important to remember that the Radicals were not concerned solely with Persia. The crisis provided them with the perfect test case with which to argue that the machinery of foreign policy, conduct and control, was flawed and in need of reform. A reflection back to the statement of 6th December 1911 issued by the Liberal Foreign Affairs Committee is apt at this juncture:-

The idea is prevalent that Parliament has abrogated its function in regard to foreign things...this is not in accord with the doctrine of democracy...the nature of this function should at least be considered...there should be more discussion, no discouragement of question, and fewer appeals for silence.

The main reason for this was also outlined:-

It is obvious that a Liberal Government has difficulty in carrying out its views... This may be partly balanced by the expression of views in Parliament.⁹²

The Radicals were arguing that foreign affairs should be readmitted, or at least restored, to the orbit of parliamentary business on a wider scale such as had existed in the times of Gladstone. As a result, policy would be made accountable to the public. This would ensure, as Ponsonby's letter to Lloyd George in September 1912 recognised, that where problems emerged between practical policy alternatives and party political or ideological principle, all elements would receive due attention and policy would reflect and cater for both vital national interests and the conscience of domestic opinion.⁹³ Liberals

would understand that initiatives seen previously as excessively 'conservative' were in fact dictated by circumstance and only adopted after careful consideration by the elected legislature. In the case of Persia in the period here under consideration, the policy in operation and problem under examination may not have been debated to the satisfaction of those involved, and a policy course based on the democratic compromise outlined above may not have been reached. Nevertheless, both as an individual issue and in the wider context of policy control, it was discussed. Indeed, as a central element in the struggle for a greater parliamentary role in the panacea of foreign affairs conduct, the Radical campaign assumes new proportions. With some six Commons debates and over 250 questions and supplementaries being considered between October 1911 and March 1913, quite a considerable amount of 'parliamentary function' was taken up. For a group who unashamedly admitted that the defence of principle was their major intention, such a success, the acknowledgement in practical circumstances that the function of Parliament included the debating of foreign affairs, merits at least qualified applause. This conclusion is all the more attractive when the successful campaign for the release of official information release is remembered. Murray, in his somewhat dubious contribution to the debate, is perhaps over-stating the obvious when he concludes that 'the most significant result [of the agitation] was that at last foreign affairs had a hearing'.⁹⁴ Even so, it cannot be denied that the agitation over Persia, if failing to achieve any lasting practical changes such as the Radicals hoped for, at least ensured that the issue of parliamentary control received both an airing and a prolonged

trial.

Furthermore, it is necessary to place the material failings of the Radicals' arguments into context with the situation facing them. It is important to remember that the Radicals could only base their arguments and criticisms upon such evidence as was available to them at that time; and that the view they took concerning developments could only be as accurate as that evidence allowed. Their failure to provide viable alternatives to Grey's policies should be considered in this light. If their sources were prone to inaccuracy, bias, or sketchiness, then it remained the responsibility of those with a greater understanding of affairs to either provide sufficient data to correct mistaken or unfair criticisms, or to accept those criticisms content in the stoic conviction that the eventual resolution of affairs would vindicate their position. It is of course possible with the benefit of hindsight to castigate the Radicals for their excessive attachment to principle, and their failure to perceive that the wider strategy-led view of affairs which Grey and his colleagues were forced to adopt precluded such inflexibility; but to what end? I have already argued that the weakness caused by ignorance of key material and strategic considerations provided the Radicals with one of their strongest cards - their ability to refute all attempts to blame them for problems caused by the weakening of Britain's 'internal cohesion'. Buxton's staunch rebuttal of Grey's charge that 'mischief' motivated Radical demands for a review of affairs embodies the whole point of the Radical position; the motivation behind their agitation was to secure a 'clarification...bringing forward the facts' to enable the democratic role of

Parliament to function.⁹⁵ The Radicals may not have understood the realities of power political developments, and may have launched attacks upon policy which in the light of day deserve censure because they undermined Grey's position, and by association the national interest, to no good effect. The point is that this was not their fault. They did not create the concern about foreign policy *vis à vis* Agadir or Persia; nor did they undertake their campaign seeking political advantage, or out of malice. Motivated by the liberal-democratic traditions they had inherited from their Radical forefathers, the Liberal Foreign Affairs Group pursued a campaign dictated by conscience, sustained by staunch belief. If their fears were to prove unfounded, or if by accident they contributed to the problems facing the Foreign Secretary, then they were not to know. The Foreign Office always held the whip hand; it could have countered critics, either by releasing information to refute their mistaken claims, or by engineering diplomatic successes to end the fears and concerns which provoked them. Failure to do either could only increase fears that something was indeed amiss; and that consequently agitation for a review of policy content and conduct was justified. If the practical exigencies facing Grey precluded him from taking Parliament into his confidence, or proved so complex as to frustrate his best attempts at solving the diplomatic problems which confronted him, the public faces of which were paradoxically the very causes of concern which prompted the Radicals' involvement, they were not to know. If their campaign for democratic control contributed to Grey's problems, they should not be censured for it. Morally, the Radical position defies reproach.

The ultimate success or failure of the Radicals in their struggle for democratic control was not resolved by the end of the 1912 session, and consequently the Radical position cannot be assessed here as if it were either vanquished or vindicated.⁹⁶ It has been possible merely to consider the nature of the ongoing campaign from a Radical perspective, highlighting their problems and assessing their position and arguments in terms of what they were capable of both knowing and undertaking. A wider understanding of the issue here at stake, and the placing of the Radical agitation into a wider more complete context, can only be achieved if the position of the Foreign Secretary throughout the crisis is considered. As a result, the only conclusion which may be drawn from this study of the Radical involvement in the Persian Question 1911-12 is that there were indeed a series of dilemmas, inconsistencies and ill-defined responsibilities in need of consideration, and that their agitation brought some of them to the surface. The twin issues of parliamentary procedure and Liberal principle were addressed simultaneously, and with some success. Whether, in the light of practical considerations concerning the operation of foreign policy, the 'bringing to the surface' of such 'manner' and 'matter' was desirable, is another question. Central to the issue of democratic control, it is this question that I shall consider in the following chapter.

Chapter IV: PARLIAMENT AND THE PERSIAN QUESTION 1911-12:
THE REALITIES OF POLICY

I stake everything upon pulling the Agreement
through all difficulties

Grey to Hardinge, 28th January 1912

In the preceding chapters I have attempted a consideration of the background to and nature of the Radical campaign for greater parliamentary involvement in the business of foreign policy. As we have seen, the Agadir Crisis provoked renewed interest from a Radical lobby long concerned about the nature and operation of foreign policy, but frustrated in attempts to address the issue in Parliament. The re-emergence of the Persian Crisis further increased this interest; and, because of its persistence, provided those already critical of current diplomacy with the perfect opportunity to scrutinise Grey's policies as they operated in the field. We have seen how the Persian Crisis provided an embarrassing problem for the Foreign Secretary. Any diplomatic developments which brought into question issues of principle or procedure would inevitably provoke hostile reaction from his own backbenches and fuel the arguments of Radicals calling for a review of policy content and conduct. Developments in Persia from late 1911 and throughout 1912 saw just such a situation emerge. Moreover, because his critics all too often concentrated on abstractions such as principle (as opposed to more binding material considerations) and compounded this with an albeit unintentional habit of basing their arguments on incomplete information, the likelihood of practical diplomacy appearing to contradict the Radicals' ideologically strong

position was high. As a result, the ability of the Foreign Secretary to deflect their criticisms, and to resist their demands for changes in both the political and procedural nature of foreign policy, was compromised.

He was forced to concede ground in some areas, notably the releasing of information; and reduced to uncomfortable prevarication, even dissembling, in others. Although it is impossible to gauge the extent to which Grey was influenced by the domestic agitation, it is fair to contend that the Radical campaign weighed heavily upon his mind. Their success in bringing apparent anomalies in diplomacy to the attention of Parliament cannot be ignored. Even if they failed to achieve a complete review of both the content and conduct of Grey's diplomacy, the Radicals ensured that it was aired in front of the legislature as a topic of debate. In this way, they successfully ensured that an element of principle and idealism was restored to the foreign policy equation - indeed, that the traditions of Liberal democracy which they valued were upheld.

However, when it is remembered that considerations existed of which the Radicals were ignorant but of which the Foreign Office were only too well aware, it becomes necessary to consider a further dimension in the equation. What was Britain's scope for action? And, in the light of this, how should Grey's handling of Persia be placed in the context of the struggle for democratic control? It is clear that the Radicals tended to see matters in simplistic, single issue terms. They often failed to allow for the fact that

apparently separate developments in the diplomatic field could interact, linking events otherwise unconnected by geographical or chronological ties and with consequences for which they were quite unprepared.¹ Their campaigns tend to reflect this. The excessive attachment to principle, and failure to appreciate the nature of practical exigencies facing policy makers, was without doubt encouraged because the Radicals were denied access to the vast and accurate sources of information available to Whitehall. As I have discussed, unnecessary and excessive secrecy was an issue attacked strongly in the Radical campaign, and was often cited as a major qualification for erroneous claims and statements made from their positions of ignorance. Even so, it is important to remember that, if their ignorance and consequent ability to uphold principle enabled the Radicals to argue their case all the more convincingly, then the Foreign Secretary was not afforded a similar luxury as he dealt with the practical side of policy. Persia was but a single factor in a much wider and precariously balanced diplomatic infrastructure. To force any issue in Persia was to risk the collapse of that infrastructure.² The entire facade behind which lay the truth of imperial and domestic security, and Britain's status as a stable Great Power, were considerations that dictated policy in Persia. Radical protestations against illiberalism on Grey's part, and general parliamentary disquiet, were of course factors of which Grey was obliged to take note³ - but not to any greater extent than considerations of national security. As a result, any assessment of the Foreign Secretary's performance in Parliament at this time should be based on two levels. Firstly, by assessing the extent to which, in a quantitative sense, Grey was able to deal successfully with the problems and

criticisms that presented themselves in Parliament, it becomes possible to understand how contemporary parliamentary members viewed his policy - in both its aims, and its operation. Identifying these contemporaneous sentiments is crucial to any attempt at clear understanding of the events and issues that constituted the struggle for control of policy. It must be remembered that in 1911-12 statements made on foreign policy issues were not influenced by knowledge of the cataclysm that would shortly result in the Great War, and which has tended to cloud post facto assessments of the period with hindsight. At the same time, it is necessary to place such attitudes as were adopted into a context where they may be assessed alongside the fundamental considerations that determined Grey's actions. It is therefore necessary to attempt as the second element in the overall assessment a qualitative survey of the issues at stake. I have already undertaken in the introduction a consideration of Britain's position and policy 1911-13, attempting to put into perspective Grey's position vis à vis the states system of the time.⁴ This chapter will seek to examine this position in light of the Persian Crisis. At the heart of the matter rests the extent to which the Foreign Secretary was forced to compromise principle in his Persian policy and pursued a pragmatic line commensurate with national interests - and to what extent his failure to provide a complete explanation for Parliament can be justified. Just as Persia provided Grey's Radical critics with a perfect opportunity for assessment of his conduct, so it provides the historian with a perfect opportunity for assessing the arguments over policy brought to light by recent historiographical work. By examining these complementary elements in Grey's handling of the Persian Question it

may be possible to understand more clearly the nature of the struggle for mastery over foreign policy, and consequently to reach a conclusion as to the role of Parliament in foreign affairs business.

As the consideration of the Radical campaign has suggested, in quantitative terms, Grey's handling of the questions and criticisms which assailed him in Parliament over his Persian and Anglo-Russian policy does not appear to have been overly successful. It is clear that the Foreign Secretary wished to avoid the subject as far as possible, and that such 'tranquillising statements' as he made would be sufficient to alleviate concern and divert attention to other matters.⁵ The volume of questions asked and the amount of debating time absorbed by Persia from October 1911 right through the 1912 Session bears testament to Grey's failure to realise that aim.⁶ He was unable to satisfy his critics that his conduct was true to Liberal principles. More damagingly, he also found it difficult to convince his detractors that he had been candid in his promises to the House, and that their acceptance of diplomatic initiatives had not been secured by insincerity, if not duplicity, on his part. In the months after the Agadir Crisis, those campaigning for greater parliamentary involvement in foreign affairs sought to use apparent flaws and inconsistencies in the British role in the Persian Question to sustain their position. As has been illustrated in the previous chapter, the Radicals were able to 'force Grey from his Whitehall isolation'.⁷ The number of answers and statements that the minister found himself obliged to offer reflects both the measure of their success in achieving more debate, and the extent to which

Grey himself proved unable to restore confidence. His failure meant that his parliamentary position was significantly weakened. However, the concerns voiced over the impact that the Persian Question had upon British prestige, honour and security had a wider significance for Grey than parliamentary embarrassment. As a poor reflection upon 'internal cohesion', any sustained dissent was bound to impact adversely upon Britain's standing in the international states system.⁸ Grey was only too aware of his predicament when he reflected that Persia 'tried my patience more than any other subject'.⁹ For all his ability to restrict the amount of potentially damaging information to a minimum, and even though he found it possible to exploit the ignorant and two dimensional perspectives of his critics, the Foreign Secretary was denied the opportunity for offering a coup de grace with which to undermine the Radical position. As long as the Persian Crisis defied his attempts at a solution, Grey found it impossible to provide concrete evidence that would vindicate his actions without compromising his diplomatic position. It is ironic that whereas MPs such as Ponsonby complained that Grey all too often prevaricated and evaded their questions, Grey complained that the dictates of diplomatic courtesy and pragmatism overrode his genuine desire to supply the proof with which specific criticisms could be refuted and his integrity defended.¹⁰ McLean sums up the position nicely when he says that 'Grey himself had to be more circumspect' than his critics even though this did little to improve his parliamentary position.¹¹ Put simply, had Grey provided the completely candid statements necessary for any attempt to allay fears, counter criticisms, correct misunderstandings, and remove the dissent that so troubled his parliamentary

and diplomatic position, he would have succeeded only in revealing and therefore deepening the more worrying problems of imperial security which his policy sought to cover. Viewed in this light, any reticence on the part of the Foreign Office in supplying accurate information for Parliament is understandable. Interference from that quarter did little to stabilise Britain's international position or relationships with other powers. To pursue a policy of good relations with foreign powers at the expense of domestic consensus would only serve in the long run to weaken those diplomatic relations. Similarly, to ignore international relations by providing exclusively for the whims of domestic politics could only provoke confrontations that would eventually upset short term domestic harmony. Some form of working compromise was essential - but the interference of Parliament made such a compromise almost impossible. All too often it was found that the demands of one could not be met but at the expense of the other; and this was itself impractical. The only solution for the policy makers was to achieve success in one field sufficient to permit the establishment of a working equilibrium with the other. It was consequently expedient to let Parliament know of affairs in details only once matters had been resolved to a point where a reopening of negotiations was neither practical nor desirable. The stalling tactics used to distract Parliament during diplomatic negotiations and frequent refusals to permit debate once diplomatic settlements had been reached which so incensed the Radicals reflected a belief that the reconciling of domestic and diplomatic positions, and in particular the problems experienced over the release of sensitive information, provided a dilemma which defied solution. It may be that a wish to supply greater

amounts of information existed, on Grey's part if not on those of his Whitehall colleagues; but this wish was never allowed to overcome the restrictions of practical diplomacy.¹²

This does not of course change the fact that in a quantitative sense Grey's handling of the Persian Question did little to improve his parliamentary position. The nature of both developments in Persia and related diplomatic initiatives, taken in context and contrasted with the Foreign Secretary's parliamentary performance, seems to suggest that if anything the split between Grey and his Radical critics was widening. The major examples of apparent misconduct and confusion with which the Radicals confronted Grey caused him no little embarrassment. They argued against a policy that, as they saw it, ignored the independence and integrity of a sovereign power; independence and integrity which also happened to be guaranteed by an international Convention to which Britain was a signatory. They cast into doubt the extent and value of British honour and prestige, and questioned the continuation of close links with Entente partner Russia. Such a campaign could only reflect badly upon Grey's diplomacy; and indeed, if the arguments of subsequent political theorists are to be upheld, by association their agitation threatened to undermine Britain's international status. Grey found himself in a near impossible situation. He found himself unable to reveal such information as he had proving that his conduct had been as correct as possible, for fear that by clarifying specific issues he would destabilise wider positions. He also found himself able to do little more than hypothesise as to the effects on Britain and

Persia of alternative scenarios should the bases of his policy be undermined. His defence came to rest on the rhetorical but vital question: what would happen if Anglo-Russian cooperation were to be ended?¹³ Grey undoubtedly hoped that this would suffice until a solution to the Persian Crisis could be found that would prove acceptable to the majority of interested parties. With this, he would be able to issue a convincing statement which would at a stroke mollify Parliament and defuse the Radical campaign - and permit a restoration of the equilibrium between domestic and diplomatic considerations vital to the practice of stable foreign policy.

However, precisely because no universally acceptable solution to the Persian Crisis could be reached, the Foreign Secretary's position remained particularly vulnerable. The Persian Question defied all attempts at resolution. As Grey himself put it, 'the condition of Persian Affairs being so distracting, so vacillating and so chaotic...in one or two things...there are [unavoidably] inconsistencies'.¹⁴ It was almost impossible for the Secretary of State to issue assurances or guarantees committing himself to a definite course of action on specific questions. The well-named 'periodic oscillations' to which Persia was prone defied any degree of certainty, and consequently any binding promise of action. Grey was forced to admit in the House that some albeit unavoidable inconsistencies existed in his conduct of policy. These inconsistencies were taken by his critics to be the proof they needed to substantiate their claims that serious flaws existed in the underlying principles that determined policy, and that examination and reform of the machinery of policy formation and control

was consequently in order.

Unfortunately, diplomacy was by no means the exact science that many of the Radical critics appeared to take it to be. Grey argued from the outset that occasional failures of policy in the field (the 'manner' of policy) did not mean that the bases of that policy (the 'matter') had been flawed. He held fast to the fact that history showed that Persia had been beset by a general crisis which predated his involvement, and that as a result it was quite wrong to attribute all of that country's woes to his policy.¹⁵ Indeed, Grey answered his critics with the consistent claim that, but for the adoption of his policy, the predicament facing Persia would have been all the worse. It must be remembered that for Grey, the Persian Question was an issue of both wide scope and long-term perspective. Events such as the Shuster Affair, the Meshed Incident and the counter-revolutionary activities of supporters of the ex-Shah were all issues that in their severity caused great concern. However, they were also short term individual crises which required policy initiatives compatible with a long term and all-encompassing solution to Persia's problems. As Foreign Secretary Grey knew this, and concentrated upon searching for an all round answer instead of attempting ad hoc willy-nilly responses to separate crises. Because of this, it was and is neither practical nor fair to assess Grey's policy on the merits and failings of his handling of short term, single-issue problems. His Radical critics failed to realise that Grey's policy could not be designed with a solely Anglocentric settlement in mind. With their traditional aversion to diplomatic ties with other powers, epitomised

by the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention, and their ill-concealed mistrust and loathing of illiberal imperialism and autocracy, as they felt was epitomised by Russia, the Radicals found it all too easy to see fault in Grey's Persian policy. They failed either to allow for the fact that, like it or not, Russia was a powerful factor in any Central Asian equation, or for the fact that in time Grey's policy of partnership and cooperation might produce benefit for Britain. I have discussed in the introductory chapter Grey's overall foreign policy position and the considerations facing Britain's policy makers at this time, issues such as 'balance of power' bias and 'Russophilia' or 'Germanophobia'. Radical understanding of such things in the context of Britain's international position at that time was arguably minimal. If the failure of Persia's constitution is considered as a case in point, it becomes clear that their position was riddled with intransigence and naivety: this caused them to fail to see the implications for Grey's policy of such 'abandoning' of Persian liberalism. The Radicals, and indeed initially Grey, had hoped that the constitution would provide the domestic political stability upon which socio-economic recovery and therefore Persian survival as an independent state could be based.¹⁶ They failed to see that the collapse of the constitution, over which he had little control, did as much to undermine Grey's position and force him to adopt a new attitude towards Persia as did any evil Machiavellian Russophile bias on his part.¹⁷ Many found it impossible to bridge the gap between idealism and pragmatism that both geographical distances and cultural traditions engendered.¹⁸ The Unionist MP for South Somerset Aubrey Herbert highlighted the problem facing Radical MPs in their assessment of the Persian

political situation during the debate on the King's Address of 21st February 1912:-

I think it is a very fine thing that there is this feeling...that His Majesty's Government should have done more for the integrity and Constitution of Persia...that a real spirit of chivalry...is anxious to hold out its hand to any people that strive towards...democracy through the gates of freedom and constitutionalism.

But...a Constitution in Europe and a Constitution in the East are very different things indeed...the Persian people [are] not fully educated...of what the Constitution means.¹⁹

Put simply, the issues of 'manner' which provided the basis for the campaign over Persia and control of foreign policy were often misunderstood by the Radicals and taken, out of context, to be proof that policy aimed at solutions incompatible with Liberal principle or national interest. Grey's problem was simple. In light of his own admitted margin of error, and his inability to be completely candid as a result of diplomatic considerations, he had to allay Radical fears and suspicions to insure that his policies could be sustained until their successes could be appreciated, his position vindicated.

Easy to say; but for Grey, this proved to be easier said than done. Entrenched as they were in a position of extreme scepticism, his critics proved to be anything but easy to satisfy. They persisted in their asking of awkward questions - questions for which the harassed Foreign Secretary appeared ill-prepared. The Stokes Affair can be seen as a case in point. The apparent

volte face by the Foreign Office over Stokes' appointment as the head of a Persian treasury gendarmerie was as I have previously shown seized upon by Dillon as evidence that Grey had taken Russia's side in a dispute to the detriment of Persian interests and in this case the personal liberty of a British subject. The Foreign Office had used its influence over the military to deny Stokes the opportunity of joining Shuster's proposed police force, and this after Stokes had received assurances that as long as he resigned his commission in the Indian army no objection or obstacle to the move would be raised.²⁰ Grey's answers were hardly satisfactory. He attempted to shift the blame for the apparent change of heart away from Whitehall by claiming that Stokes had mistaken Foreign Office advice for definite promises, and that as a result had caused confusion by inaccurately claiming that he had official sanctioning of his move. This merely portrayed the handling of affairs by Whitehall in a bad light - their incompetence in failing to clarify matters with Stokes had led to confusion and embarrassment. Furthermore, when he argued that his influencing of the military to veto the appointment had been justifiable on grounds of political desirability and national interest, Grey did little to avert fears that illiberalism and a pro-Russian bias dominated policy considerations.²¹

However, close examination of the diplomatic exchanges between 7th July 1911 and 15th October 1911 produces a clearer understanding of the Stokes Affair in the context of the overall diplomatic position. Grey's initial position had indeed been to adopt cautious, conditional acceptance of the proposed appointment.²² It was seen as a justifiable part of Shuster's economic

recovery programme and consequently compatible with British long term hopes for the socio-political restabilisation of Persia. However, this position was altered once it had become clear that Russia saw the move as being contrary to her interests in the north Persian sphere of economic influence allotted to her in 1907.²³ The prospect of a British officer coming into conflict with expressed Russian interests in north Persia was hardly palatable. It must be remembered that Shuster had threatened to deploy his gendarmes against the forces of counter-revolution during Mohammed Ali Shah's abortive return²⁴, and that in the near future his forces would clash with Russian representatives over Shoa-es-Sultaneh's property.²⁵ A clash appeared a definite possibility. It was feared that the result of any antagonising of Russia would be at best demands by St Petersburg for compensations inimical to long term British hopes for Central Asia, and at worst the initiation of an aggressive policy directly opposite to the spirit of the 1907 Convention. Grey knew that in both cases he would be unable to offer more than token resistance, that Russia would impose her will upon the region, and the question of British imperial security and the defence of India would again arise to tax the government. In the light of such considerations, the sacrificing of Stokes was inevitable. Grey initially attempted to impose conditions upon Stokes' employment, and when the Persians refused to accept them, followed the suggestions of his Russian colleagues by blocking the appointment.²⁶ In terms of policy 'manner' Grey did indeed compromise over the Stokes Affair, letting Russian protests dominate policy and preventing the ex-attaché changing allegiance. In purely parliamentary terms, the affair caused Grey both embarrassment and harm,

because it smacked of incompetence and malpractice, and because Grey could not successfully explain away his conduct without compromising his wider diplomatic position. However, if considerations of policy 'matter' are allowed for, and Britain's position vis à vis the states system as outlined in the introductory chapter is considered, then the affair assumes different proportions. It appears that Grey's diplomatic position was in fact strengthened by his handling of this issue. By sacrificing Stokes as a diplomatic pawn, Grey was able to increase both his influence and leverage over the Russians. As one Foreign Office official astutely remarked once the matter was settled, if in future the Russians attempted to increase their influence over the Persian government by offering 'military advisers' and the like, 'we may legitimately use some of their own arguments [against appointments incompatible with the spirit of the 1907 Convention] upon them'.²⁷ The inability of the Secretary of State to use this success in his short term struggle with his Radical critics at home reflects the problem facing a Foreign Secretary in dealing with an open democratic legislature. To have revealed to Parliament the nuances of the diplomatic strategy being pursued would have been to expose them to the involved states, and would have rendered any advantages gained valueless. At the same time, had Grey followed the wishes of the pro-Stokes lobby and snubbed Russian objections as being unwarranted interference in Anglo-Persian relations, the most likely consequences would have been the collapse of the Entente policy, the recommencement of the Great Game in Central Asia (with Britain at a distinct disadvantage), and the re-emergence of the security dilemma which had prompted Anglo-Russian

rapprochement in the first place. It would be wise to reflect upon the view of affairs espoused by Nicolson:-

It would be disastrous to our foreign policy were the understandings between Russia...and ourselves to be weakened in any way.²⁸

Her friendship is really of importance...even at the risk of being considered an infatuated Russophile...we should put up with perhaps occasional annoyances in Persia to remain on the best footing with Russia.²⁹

In the light of the findings of recent historical studies of Britain's ante bellum security position, Nicolson's 'infatuations' can be sympathised with. The problem for the Foreign Secretary was that, just as Lord Selborne had found in November 1901 when attempting to apply a revised Two Power Standard naval formula, the ability of a minister to explain the dominant policy issues that dictated courses of action was minimal. His parliamentary reticence and issue fudging should be seen in this light. As Keith Wilson rightly says, attempting to reveal either the basis for or the likely consequence of foreign policy was bound to be an 'embarrassing and no doubt thankless task'.³⁰

When dealing qualitatively with the Foreign Secretary's handling of the Persian Question, it is important to remember that Grey faced a number of problems that weakened his overall position. All too often, Britain found herself in a position where she was forced to respond to crises precipitated by more dynamic participants; and in such circumstances, Grey had little influence or control over the initial developments that caused tension.³¹ The need to

maintain a working equilibrium between considerations of domestic politics and international security, already considered, complicated matters further. It was imperative that at all times policy should be pursued within the parameters of an accepted scope for action. Grey found that as a result of these combined considerations, and especially because he was forced to respond with little forewarning to events in which his scope for action was in any case restricted, that it was impossible to attempt much more than a recourse to the 1907 Convention. The Agreement was after all meant to be the definitive statement of policy in this field, the embodiment of the principles upon which his diplomacy was based. Unfortunately, and as became increasingly obvious during the course of parliamentary debate, the 1907 Convention was not the definitive document that Grey hoped it to be.³² Indeed, it left such a margin of ambiguity as to be the basis for several incompatible interpretations of Anglo-Russian partnership and policy *vis à vis* Persia.³³ As a result, the Foreign Secretary was forced to deal not only with questions on the nature of current events in Persia and his attitude towards them, but also with questions concerning the very Convention he had hoped would provide a stable base from which to promote recovery. He had to explain and defend the very basis of his policy by offering a definition of the spirit and aims of 1907 at once both acceptable to Radical principles and the dictates of practical diplomacy. Already handicapped by relative diplomatic weakness as an involved but basically non-dynamic factor in the Persian equation, Grey faced potential hamstringing as the spectre of unsustainable yet irresistible domestic Liberal principle threatened to deny him the only practical policy courses out of the

crisis.

The period from the start of the Shuster Affair through to the issuing of the Anglo-Russian Joint Note on 18th February 1912 provides the historian with a chronological test case with which to assess both the nature of the problems facing Grey, and his success in dealing with them. From 9th November 1911, the handling of Persia became as much an issue of abstract principle as of practical policy. When Morrell, Ponsonby and Dillon rose to question whether the military and diplomatic initiatives of Russia in the wake of the Shoa-es-Sultaneh property dispute were compatible with the spirit of the 1907 Convention, the Radicals forced Grey to attempt to produce an acceptable definition of an ongoing aspect of his foreign policy, and to act accordingly.³⁴ It must be remembered that the Stokes Affair and the abortive return of the ex-Shah had already attracted parliamentary concern, and the issue of foreign troops on Persian soil was already an issue of some controversy.³⁵ The Agadir Crisis and war scare had brought the question of parliamentary involvement in foreign affairs to the fore, as the debates of 27th November and 14th December would soon show. The Persian Question and the operation of the 1907 Convention provided those concerned over foreign policy with the perfect opportunity for testing Grey's diplomacy and, if necessary, pressing for change. The Radicals' position *vis à vis* Persia and the Convention, indeed as it concerned the issue of democratic control of foreign policy, has already been considered. The issue at stake here is whether or not Grey's parliamentary conduct can be explained and upheld in the light of

diplomatic considerations.

It is important to remember that for Grey's policy to succeed, two aims had to be realised. Persia had to be preserved as a sovereign buffer state, capable of preventing Russian penetration to the Gulf and Indian frontier. In order to achieve this, it was essential that Britain establish and sustain close ties with St Petersburg; that a modus vivendi for Central Asian co-existence be reached.³⁶ The 1907 Convention had been created to realise both these aims.³⁷ Russia was persuaded that the recognition of defined interests in north Persia by Britain, and the hints of possible diplomatic support for further unspecified initiatives, was a diplomatic coup that she could not resist. It should be remembered that at the time those negotiations were underway, the Russian position had been weakened by the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese debacle, and the socio-political upheaval of the 1905 Revolution. Any form of diplomatic agreement which would allow her both to recover some diplomatic prestige, and the time to initiate internal recovery, with a concomitant review of her own foreign policy situation whilst free from pressures of imperial confrontation, was bound to prove attractive to the St Petersburg government. The price for Russia in this case, the acceptance of conditions preventing her from undertaking unilaterally any expansionist policy into Central Asia which could prove harmful to British interests in the region, proved acceptable. As a result, Grey was able to achieve a guarantee that, unless specified interests were compromised, Russia would not to increase her military presence in Persia or to work against that nation's independence without first securing

British support. The Foreign Secretary, having established this modus vivendi at a time of Russian weakness, had subsequently to ensure that once Russia recovered sufficient poise to again assume a dynamic role on the international scene, any new initiatives should remain compatible with the 1907 Convention, and Britain's strategic position. The Persian Question, because it threatened to compromise those Russian interests which tied her to the modus vivendi of 1907, and posed frequent problems which necessitated Anglo-Russian involvement in Persia's domestic affairs, confronted Grey with his largest headache vis à vis sustaining the modus vivendi. We have already seen that even in the days before the crisis period of the Shuster Affair the Agreement had been placed under strain, and Grey had been forced on several occasions to accept Russophile interpretations of the terms of the Convention so as to ensure that its fundamental purpose was not undermined.³⁸ It is against this background that the domestic contest for a review of policy should be set.

In his memoirs on the subject, Grey states his case by putting the Persian Question clearly into perspective:

The real cause of trouble was that the 'integrity and independence' of Persia, so tenderly cherished, did not in practice exist...Persia was honeycombed by concessions, particularly to Russia...I had never expected that the hands of the clock, which had already marked so much time in the lapse of Persian independence, should be put back, but I hoped that the clock might be stopped.³⁹

In other words, any interpretation of the Convention that failed to

recognise that the situation as it existed in 1907 was the point from which future co-operation should start, and that Russia by that time already had a large series of interests in Persia which she subsequently retained a right to defend, was fatally flawed. The 1907 Convention marked the diplomatic ground zero. From that point on, the future conducting of relations would be tempered by both mutual recognition of and allowance for respective interests. Russia took this to mean that those interests that she had defined in the north could be pursued free from British interference. Unfortunately, Radicals in Westminster tended to see in the Convention only a duty to Persia. Russian moves in the north were not seen as consolidating accepted positions of interest, but as violations of arguably non-existent sovereign rights and breaches of faith. Grey sought to curb over-zealous Russian initiatives that could be mistaken for expanding imperialism so as to play down domestic Liberal outrage. At the same time he was forced to concede that for the Convention to succeed he could not deny Russia such interests as he had conceded. As his letter of September 1907 to Runciman shows, the only alternatives Grey could see to co-operation and tolerance were aggressive, exploitative policies pursued at one another's expense - and as Britain could not pursue such a course (indeed, no-one suggested that she should), only Russia could benefit from such a scenario.⁴⁰ As such, Grey knew that his hands were tied to the helm of his Entente ship. A 'free hand' policy for Persia and Anglo-Russian relations was indeed a fiction.

Examination of Grey's conduct at home and in the diplomatic field

during the Shuster Affair tends to uphold this view of Anglo-Russian relations and the Persian Question. Grey had been aware of an increase in Russian activity from at least mid-October, when Neratov outlined his fears that Persian chaos threatened to disrupt Russian interests, and complained that Shuster's reform programme showed no consideration for Russia's position.⁴¹ Grey had criticised Russian proposals made at that time because he felt that they were not merited by existing circumstances.⁴² The Foreign Secretary was made aware of the Shoa-es-Sultaneh incident on 16th October, weeks before his denial in the House of having any information as regarded its causes. He also knew of the contents of the initial Russian Ultimatum on 2nd November, eleven days before the Earl of Ronaldshay brought a Times report on the matter to the attention of the Commons.⁴³ The reason for the lack of direct involvement in the affair, either in response to Persian calls for aid and advice, or in answer to domestic parliamentary enquiries, may be deduced from Grey's highly revealing communication to Sir George Barclay on 8th November 1911:-

Though one feels that she [Persia] has a certain right on her side... we cannot interfere between Persia and Russia in matters in the Russian sphere of interest that do not concern us.⁴⁴

Grey clearly felt that Britain's position established by the Convention could not be sustained if he were seen to intervene; and, as a result, moved to dissociate himself from events as far as possible. He found himself obliged to take Russian promises of restraint at face value, and to work on the premise that trust was his only option.⁴⁵ However, and as has been discussed previously, the Secretary of State was unable to achieve the complete disassociation he

wished for. Like it or not, the Convention had devolved upon Britain some sense of responsibility for Persia; and the mistaken interpretations that emerged at home of exactly what that responsibility comprised, coupled with fears that Russia, ignorant of the political problems facing Grey at home, might push her claims too far, compelled the Foreign Secretary into a more dynamic role. Grey subsequently outlined his position clearly in a communication to Buchanan:

I am afraid of new [Russian] demands...that I could not defend as being consistent with the Agreement. In that case the whole question of foreign policy would become involved. I doubt whether the Russian Government realise how easily one question might affect larger questions.⁴⁶

Unfortunately for him, he could not be so explicit in the Commons.

The Foreign Secretary was forced to defend his policy in Persia, both from naive and erroneous criticisms at home, and Russian exploitation abroad. He knew only too well that his involvement could not be overly aggressive or controversial, at least until the situation had settled and clarified itself sufficiently to enable well-reasoned and sustainable arguments to underwrite policy. The employment of British nationals by the Persian Government as treasury officials in the Russian sphere was a cause of acute embarrassment.⁴⁷ Grey was forced to oppose such an increase in Britain's influence in the north because it was incompatible with the spirit of the Convention - and as a measure of good faith went so far as to offer tacit support for those Russian demands for satisfaction from Persia that were acceptable under the Agreement.⁴⁸ He dared not antagonise Russia, or give her grounds to doubt

the value of the partnership with Britain. Grey was well aware that reactionary elements in the Russian administration were seeking an opportunity to force Neratov into adopting extreme demands wholly incompatible with any Anglophile pro-Entente policy.⁴⁹ He knew that he had to prevent these elements from succeeding at all costs; and so he conceded as much as he dared to keep the pro-Entente members of the Russian administration in the ascendancy. Grey found it prudent, publicly at least, to assume an air of reasoned detachment, making it plain that Britain was not seeking to intervene, and that as long as certain interests were not compromised, she would remain a passive bystander. While this 'wait and see' attitude caused indignation amongst the pro-Persian lobby, it nevertheless enabled the Foreign Secretary to work behind the scenes, prodding the more dynamic protagonists towards a position of compromise. Initially at least, such a course appeared to be successful. Russia seemed to have moderated her position and offered assurances of good faith.⁵⁰

However, it soon became clear that Russia was intent upon advancing her demands so as to secure maximum advantage from her northern interests. The military sanction with which she had applied pressure was to be maintained despite Grey's calls for a more restrained approach.⁵¹ The British Radicals saw only the spectre of imperial expansionism, and refused to accept the Foreign Secretary's explanations that attempted to justify the Russian initiative.⁵² The increase in domestic pressure for an explanation of policy, and the real threat that Russia was about to achieve an unacceptable influence over

the Tehran Government by seizing the Persian capital, forced Grey to deepen his involvement in the crisis. It began to appear that the Convention was under threat; that Russia, with her forward policy, was 'restarting the clock' working towards Persia's collapse and making an Anglo-Russian collision in Central Asia unavoidable.⁵³ Grey was forced to accept that to fail to take a hand was to risk the collapse of his diplomatic position and to give credence to Radical claims that his policy was flawed.

Once again, the need to act confronted Grey with the dilemma of how to act. He was yet again caught between a need to placate domestic critics, who constituted a serious threat to his political position, and a duty to safeguard Britain's international position by sustaining a viable Anglo-Russian Entente. It was all well and good for outraged MPs to argue that there was no merit to be had in maintaining cordial links with Russia at the expense of principle and the moral high ground. It was quite another matter to provide a viable policy alternative by which Britain's international security could be upheld. Indeed, in terms of the Persian Question, no such provision was made by Grey's Radical critics. I have previously suggested that their displays of naivety and ignorance concerning crucial policy issues cannot in itself be allowed to detract from their overall argument, because ignorance and the issue of democratic control were central elements in their campaign.⁵⁴ However, because Grey's position in Persia has been shown to lack any real scope for complete openness, it becomes clear that for all the moral justification and parliamentary strength of the Radical position, diplomatic

considerations and especially the Entente of necessity took precedence. Policy was bound to work towards achieving a solution acceptable to both idealism and pragmatism. However, policy would always tend to favour Russophile considerations because as the principal dynamic factor in the diplomatic game they were of greater potential significance to Britain's national interests than abstract Liberal principles. Faced with a choice between a bruised conscience and a collapsing strategic position, Grey was bound to tolerate the former, and remedy the latter.

Grey's conduct from the end of November 1911 on should be viewed with this in mind. By offering tacit support for the Russian position during the Shuster Affair, Grey hoped to tread a middle path.⁵⁵ He had no doubt that the Persian authorities bore a large share of responsibility for both the nature and persistence of the crisis facing their country.⁵⁶ He was also convinced that it was vital that the Convention be upheld. It was the only guarantee of diplomatic conduct which could allow Persia respite from foreign intervention and time to effect the social, economic and political recoveries essential to her long term survival as a sovereign nation - and therefore as a viable 'buffer state'. It was the basis for good Anglo-Russian relations, the means by which Russian policy could be drawn into an Anglocentric orbit and prevented from compromising British interests.⁵⁷ To ensure that the clock towards Persian collapse remained stationary, and that the Great Game did not begin anew, Grey had to prove to Russia that co-operation was both viable and valuable. However, he was also quite aware that to go too far in appeasing Russia held

as much danger for his position as did any antagonism. If Russia was allowed to pursue an overly aggressive line, even if in good faith and within the spirit of the Agreement, then she might well unwittingly provoke the very problems that Grey hoped to avoid.⁵⁸ The issues of excessive demands and prolonged occupation of north Persia worried Grey; if her demands were not met satisfactorily, and Russia found it impossible to retain face without prolonging the occupation, it could prove increasingly difficult for the Russians to extricate themselves. The concomitant chance that the occupying forces would face escalating local resentment and increasing civil disorder, and would therefore find withdrawal even less practical without political and economic guarantees which the weak Persian government could not deliver, no doubt influenced the Secretary of State.⁵⁹ A socio-political crisis of this nature could force the Entente powers into confrontation; the threat to respective interests posed by the internal collapse of Persia would force direct intervention and effective partition - and it was precisely this situation, given that no mutually satisfactory basis for partition could be found, that troubled Grey. Grey's policy was dictated by a dual imperative. He had to preserve the modus vivendi with Russia that allowed Persia to survive, by providing enough support for Russia to convince St. Petersburg that the Agreement was worth the price she had paid for it. He also had to insure that no developments be allowed to compromise the recovery or sovereignty of Persia, so as to prevent the moves to partition and confrontation that he feared would follow.

The Convention dominated Grey's mind, because it was through this

Agreement that he hoped to achieve success in both elements of the dual imperative. It provided the diplomatic mechanism by which Russia had been ensnared within an Anglocentric orbit, and provided the stimulus to cooperation which enabled Grey to exert his moderating influence over his Russian counterparts. Moreover, if Persia could be brought to accept the conditions upon which it rested, the Convention offered a realistic basis for Persian recovery.⁶⁰ However, and like all compromises, the success of the Agreement was dependent upon the credibility it possessed and the value which the respective players saw in it. Furthermore, it was essential that the relative importance of each party be allowed for when compromising and conceding relative advantage. This itself hampered Grey's attempts to resolve matters, because finding a common basis for promoting Persian recovery and satisfying Russia that compromise was merited was fraught with difficulty. The result was of course that the premier consideration, the preservation of cordial Anglo-Russian relations, came to override that of the lesser, Persian survival. Anything that worked against this had to go; and in November 1911 Shuster was top of the list. His plans for making Persia economically viable again took too little account of Russian economic and commercial interests, and therefore the principal carrots which had lured Russia to accept the Convention in 1907. Furthermore, the methods used by Shuster to implement his plans had proved far too antagonistic.⁶¹ For that reason, he was faced not only by Russian demands for his removal, but by British support for those moves.⁶² Grey also found it expedient to join in Russian demands that in future Persian governments must recognise the Convention as a binding modus operandi.⁶³

The Russians saw that as a result of this they could exploit their northern interests to the full and free from Persian interference. Grey hoped that, as well as this, Persian acceptance of the Convention would enable the undertaking of a recovery programme upheld by international law, based around negotiated co-operation, and precluding any further blatant intriguing against Persia by a Russia both committed by self-interest and shackled by duty. Of course, it was necessary to ensure that Russia did not upset matters. Grey's opposition to any increased military operations, the indemnity demand, and moves intent on promoting a counter-revolution in Persia in favour of the ex-Shah show that Grey was quite prepared to issue velvet-lined threats of confrontation should Russia go too far.⁶⁴ Even though the practical scope for pursuing any confrontation was minimal, and the chance of success even less, Grey was aware that for Russia to respect his position, a degree of bravura was necessary to sustain the bluff, the myth of British power. Without this, his position would have lost vital credibility, and his diplomacy may well have failed.

The domestic problems facing Grey merely served to make matters worse. Grey could not afford to be seen as anything other than the champion of the Convention. Furthermore, and in spite of personal misgivings concerning the reliability of Russian promises, the Foreign Secretary was compelled to uphold the Russian position against the criticisms of the Radicals.⁶⁵ By playing on the ignorance of his critics, blaming elements within the Persian government for the crisis, and arguing that the Convention

remained the basis of a policy compatible with national honour and prestige, Grey was able to weather the storm, if not outrun it. His playing upon official ignorance and diplomatic etiquette persisted. The posing of the hypothetical question that challenged his critics to offer a viable alternative to his policy further sustained his position. Their inability to provide an answer, or indeed to overcome fundamental inconsistencies in their moral as well as practical positions, allowed Grey to draw the sting out of their criticism without damaging his own position further.⁶⁶ Grey no doubt hoped that he would eventually find a viable balance between domestic and diplomatic considerations. Nevertheless, he felt compelled to resolve his diplomatic problems before turning upon domestic issues. It would be wrong to assume that Grey was either unaware or unconcerned by the arguments of the Radical-Indian lobby.⁶⁷ Certain diplomatic initiatives echoed the sentiments they expressed in the House.⁶⁸ However, whilst the Radicals viewed events from a single issue perspective, namely Liberal idealism, Grey, although sympathetic to their position, remained convinced that the wider context was by definition more important than any specific issue. It was absurd to place national security in jeopardy over affairs of comparatively trivial importance. To end close relations with Russia over the already transitory independence of Persia was ridiculous - especially if in any case the ending of the former would signal the extinguishing of the latter. In a letter to J A Spender of the Westminster Gazette dated 24th September 1912, Grey laid bare his views on the subject:-

I am bombarded by letters here from people who want me to break with Russia over Persia; how on earth can we help Persia if we do?⁶⁹

It was much more sensible to promote good relations with Russia whilst allowing her to exercise a firm influence over Persia which, moderated by British diplomacy and the Convention, would help remove many of the causes of crisis within that country.⁷⁰ As McLean puts it, 'he [Grey] could hope that sooner or later his critics over Persia, and indeed his policy at large, would...be duly silenced by some masterstroke of diplomacy'.⁷¹

Grey's formula for ending the ongoing Russo-Persian confrontation was outlined in the memorandum sent to Sazonov on 8th December 1911.⁷² In his presentation of this plan to Parliament, Grey displayed some sympathy for his critics' arguments and the position of Parliament as regarded the overall diplomatic equation.⁷³ In this instance, the quantity and complexity of the issues at stake, compounded by the 'periodic oscillations' to which matters involving Persia were prone, had prolonged the negotiations and prevented him from issuing an early explanation of events. In spite of Radical claims to the contrary, it is evident that Grey was sincere in his wish to publish enough to defuse the domestic uproar that was damaging his overall credibility. He was unusually candid with Parliament. His statement to the House on 14th December was made unusually soon after the completion of discussions with St Petersburg.⁷⁴ It may well be that, by publicly announcing his initiative at the same time as the recuperated Sazonov resumed his duties from Neratov, Grey hoped to catch his Russian counterpart at a disadvantage and force him into compliance.⁷⁵ The Russian position was in any case thrown into temporary

confusion and destabilised by the change of ministers in St Petersburg.⁷⁶ Up to this time, Grey would have been hard pressed to offer any explanation to the House that would have been sufficient to appease both his domestic critics and his diplomatic counterparts. Just as he had claimed that, during the negotiations over the Agadir Crisis, he had been prevented from offering any definite statement to the House, so Grey had found himself constrained from premature commentary for fear of upsetting negotiations, and unable to offer idle speculation as to the possible outcomes for the events and initiatives underway in Persia over which he had little direct control.⁷⁷ Because he was not a dynamic player in the Persian Question, and was temporarily impotent in the face of new developments, Grey had to be cautious when responding to them. Whilst not as ignorant as many of his critics of the nature and implications of on-going events in Persia, the Foreign Secretary was unable to provide the instant riposte to questions raised as the Radicals proved to be in understanding the full scope of his policy. In light of these handicaps, it is not unreasonable to recognise Grey's handling of the Shuster Affair as being unavoidable, given the inherent weakness of Britain's position. He proved able to maintain the loyalty of the Russian government to the 1907 Agreement, and at minimal cost. Moreover, he also ensured that Britain's role in the Crisis, and the settlement that resulted from it, was compatible with levels of honour and prestige befitting her apparent 'great power' status. Although unable to secure the complete withdrawal of Russian troops from north Persia or the abandonment of the indemnity demand, Grey was able to prevent the seizure of the Persian capital (with all the implications that would have held for

Persian independence and integrity) and to insure that the indemnity was symbolic rather than punitive in extent.⁷⁸ Of paramount importance was establishment of the principle that the moves to secure the future quiescence and development of Persia, and therefore the basis for re-establishing cordial Entente relations free from the effects of regional instability, should be undertaken as a joint Anglo-Russian initiative, just as Grey's memorandum of 8th December had suggested. The Foreign Secretary succeeded in reaffirming the spirit of 1907, ensuring that the premier British interests at stake were to be included in a joint diplomatic statement that would advocate consultation for all issues of dispute. It was no doubt hoped that the previous weakness of Britain's position as an initially peripheral non-dynamic player, could thereby in future be avoided.

The memorandum to Sazonov of 8th December 1911 provided the impetus towards a joint package aimed at solving the Persian problem in the short term. This was eventually realised in the Joint Note of 18th February 1912 (the work principally of Barclay and Poklewsky in Tehran).⁷⁹ The Russians agreed to offer a public guarantee aimed at dispelling fears that she would provide military aid for a counter-revolution in Persia. They also agreed to open negotiations over a loan for Persia as the basis for promoting socio-economic and political recovery. The Persian Government, formed as a result of the December coup d'état that had witnessed Shuster's departure, having already accepted the Russian ultimatums, accepted the terms of the Joint Note on 20th March, and therefore committed future administrations to

policies allowing for the premises of the Anglo-Russian Agreement.⁸⁰ Most importantly, the concessions given to Russia under the 1907 Convention which secured Russian interest in preserving cordial relations with Britain were reaffirmed. Grey's conduct had achieved the overall diplomatic balance he and his Foreign Office colleagues deemed vital to imperial security. In his letter of 23rd January 1912 to a private critic, he had argued that the Agreement was vital not only to continuing Persian independence but also to the stability of Britain's imperial position in Central Asia.⁸¹ In these terms, he argued that his policy throughout the crisis, by upholding the one and securing the other, had been the only policy available. In light of the considerations at stake that have been discussed here, this argument appears to have been vindicated.

It would be quite wrong, however, to give the impression that the Persian Question or the domestic parliamentary agitation were resolved as quickly or as tidily as Grey might have wished. Persia was still in a state of socio-economic and political turmoil.⁸² As a result, the interests that had been guaranteed by the Convention and the diplomacy of the period up to early 1912 were in reality no more guaranteed than they had been before those negotiated compromises. The diplomatic success enjoyed by Grey depended upon the establishment of a machinery for initiating joint diplomatic initiatives, and avoiding confrontation over an independent sovereign Persia in which improved socio-economic and political conditions would remove the old causes of argument. However, with the existing presence of Russian troops in the north as the only check against total anarchy, and with St. Petersburg

promising a withdrawal of those troops only once her interests were secure and Persian order was established, the chances of a swift return to even the relative and dubious 'independence and integrity' of the period prior to the Shuster Affair was unlikely.⁸³ In short, Persia continued to pose an insoluble riddle, being a morass in which apparently irreconcilable issues and interests combined to defy attempts at rational settlement. The very nature of the political situation in Persia meant that the problems were bound to persist. The central administration found itself unable to reconcile conflicting political and tribal interests within the country; nor was it able to assert effective control over disaffected, rebellious regional governments.⁸⁴ As a result, Persia's government could not fulfil her promises to guarantee the Anglo-Russian conditions accepted in the statement of 20th March. Persia, through her government, had effectively recognised that her continued independence could only be guaranteed by accepting the Anglo-Russian conditions - and then found herself unable to meet those conditions as promised.⁸⁵ A solution to the Persian Question was still needed, and it became increasingly clear that it would prove difficult to reach a solution in which both an independent Persian 'buffer state' and a viable Entente partnership could be sustained.⁸⁶ Persia resisted all attempts at restabilisation short of direct intervention; but the partition of Persia could only result in a head-on Anglo-Russian collision which was exactly the scenario British diplomacy sought to avoid. Even had the establishment of a contiguous frontier with Russia been tolerable, the fact remained that such a frontier itself defied easy establishment. H F B Lynch's comments in the Times no doubt haunted Grey:-

England and Russia are engaged in the impossible task of finding a common formula for the expression of opposite policies.⁸⁷

It is important to remember that, in spite of the Convention, it was still feared in Whitehall that Russia harboured long term imperial ambitions incompatible with Britain's strategic position.⁸⁸ Moreover, domestic critics were by no means satisfied by the diplomatic compromise of March 1912. Persia had been forced to compromise her integrity for an illusion of independence. Her constitution had been suspended indefinitely, sacrificed in favour of a government more amenable to Anglo-Russian interests. Her future economic and political development had apparently been mortgaged under pressure so as to suit Anglo-Russian concerns. Foreign troops remained, atrocities occurred, socio-political chaos detrimental to long term recovery and economic stability persisted. Grey still had to find a formula with which to defuse matters sufficiently to enable some salvaging of his diplomatic position, and which would not provide any new ammunition for parliamentary critics intent upon forcing a domestic foreign policy revolution that could only destabilise Britain's international position by openly airing her dirty laundry.

An answer to the Persian Question was beyond Grey, at least until the cataclysm of world war sufficiently changed the nature of the Great Game in Central Asia. Delay and prevarication, drawing out the decline of Persia by means of controlled compromise, remained the safest course for Grey as he steered the ailing British position through the endless Persian minefield. Because he could not offer an answer in this field, his handling of Parliament

changed tack. Once it became clear that the diplomacy of November 1911-January 1912 had not led to any marked improvement in Persia's condition, it became expedient to stress that the complexity of the situation conspired against swift recovery. The continued ignorance of his critics still enabled Grey to fudge issues, and when this proved insufficient to defuse their arguments, he was able to point out that it was impossible both to intervene to actively champion Persian recovery and to simultaneously refrain from violating Persian integrity. At the same time it proved expedient to continue the policy of conciliation towards Russia, to tolerate Nicolson's 'annoyances', and prolong the irreconcilable policies of 'buffer state' and Entente as long as possible and with a minimum of compromise.⁹⁰ It would be quite wrong to infer that Persia ceased to be a major cause of concern for the policymakers, especially in terms of the continuing Radical activity in Parliament. However, it is important to recognise the significance of the fact that, after 20th March 1912 right up to the end of the 1912 session, no further diplomatic confrontations occurred to rival the Shuster Affair. No major rupture in Anglo-Russian relations threatened as a result of Persia. Persia's failure to recover boded ill for long term regional strategy, but in preserving the 1907 Agreement as the basis for close links with Russia, the Foreign Secretary maintained perhaps the only basis from which a later diplomatic agreement commensurate with Britain's strategic position could be advanced, if and when Persia did indeed collapse. Grey's diplomacy never lost sight of the strategic implications at stake, and consequently his policy was always intent on upholding Britain's real interests much more than the idealistic intangibles his critics espoused. Parliament's

intervention in the Persian Question did little to help Grey or his diplomacy. Uninformed comments made in the House, and a failure to come to terms with all the issues at stake, meant that interference from Westminster tended to hinder and undermine foreign policy far more than it bolstered diplomacy. Had the policy been truly flawed, this may have been excusable. The fact that ignorance was freely admitted, and cited as evidence of malpractice, suggests that the bulk of the Radicals indulged in their campaign without due consideration for its effect on the national interest. Those such as Ponsonby who recognised that an element of secrecy was inevitable for foreign policy to succeed, and yet still argued for as much openness as possible without outlining a practical means by which to achieve this, let idealism obscure the practical consequences of their stand. Grey told the House of his concerns in no uncertain terms:-

I am not sure that it is not public opinion which is more at fault very often than diplomacy.⁹¹

As a result, Grey's suppressing the truth and resorting to subterfuge should be seen not so much as a Machiavellian abuse of power, but as a recognition that recourse to open democratic debate, indeed to honesty, was not in the national interest. Grey's periodic abuse of Parliament, in this way, can arguably be defended as an unpalatable but unavoidable necessity, wholly in the national interest.

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CONCLUSION

Many of the situations that arose during the Persian Question and which caused Grey so much trouble forced the Foreign Secretary into active diplomacy where in all probability inaction would have been preferred. It would be wrong to portray Britain's involvement in the Persian Crisis 1911-12 as either aggressive or dynamic. Instead, Grey's diplomacy was reluctant, compelled by ill-defined responsibilities to Persia and Russia, and more importantly a need to uphold the fundamental bases of imperial security. As individual issues, events such as the Shuster Affair and the Meshed Incident had little to do with British policy in Persia. There is little or no point in seeking to attribute those crises to any flaws in policy initiated from Whitehall. However, because Britain was at the same time a signatory of the 1907 Convention and a power with extensive economic and political interests in the region, Grey could not ignore the fact that such events held implications for Britain's position. Furthermore, when Britain's overall diplomatic position is considered, and the problem of imperial security, indeed of 'great power' status, is allowed for, it becomes clear that the Persian Question provided as great a policy dilemma as any other on-going issue for the British Foreign Office.

Nobody disputed the fact that the 1907 Convention, as well as securing for Britain a series of special interests in both the economics and politics of the region, had devolved upon her some degree of responsibility for Persia. Grey's

problems in the period presently under consideration seem to have been increased greatly because the nature of that ambiguous responsibility both needed and defied definition. The confusions caused by the 1907 Spring Rice letters, and the incompatibility of the definitions supplied respectively by British Liberals and Russian politicians, meant that Grey found it extremely difficult to operate any policy without offering offence to either domestic political opinion or the interests of Britain's indispensable Entente partner. To compromise either relationship could only serve to reflect badly upon national honour and prestige; and if Martin Wight is correct to argue that 'honour is the halo round interests [and] prestige is the halo round power', then to weaken either could only damage Britain's standing in the states system.¹ Every time an abuse of the spirit of the 1907 Agreement was perceived, Grey found himself obliged to explain and guarantee the nature of Britain's official attitude towards events in Persia. Such explanations had to allow for both the British Radicals' and Russian Government's interpretation of the Convention, so as to sustain a viable policy base both at home and abroad. As a result, the Foreign Secretary was at the mercy of the dynamic factors that determined the course of the Persian Crisis. His parliamentary position was by itself precarious. He was bound to uphold national honour by ensuring that Persian independence and integrity was not compromised or sacrificed, and also to safeguard commercial and strategic interests in the teeth of regional socio-political chaos. His diplomatic position, taken in context with these parliamentary considerations, made it almost impossible to avoid causing some degree of offence.

How could Grey adopt an attitude acceptable to all the interests at stake? Each and every element in the Persian Question appeared to be riven with irreconcilable inconsistencies. Russia was at the same time the co-signatory to the Convention, the major external threat to Persia (and as such the Convention), the premier Radical bugbear, and (if Wilson is to be believed) the major strategic concern for the Whitehall policymakers. Persian independence and her position as a 'buffer state' against Russian expansion to the Gulf and Indian frontier, provided the cornerstone for Grey's regional policy and imperial security; and yet the continued independence of a Persia which refused to recover internal stability and persistently threatened to undermine close Anglo-Russian relations and consequently Britain's overall diplomatic position appears to have been incompatible with Britain's prevalent strategic interests. Britain could not adopt an aggressive policy in the region for fear of compromising her domestic and diplomatic position and revealing material shortcomings; nor could she stand idly by and watch her regional and overall position collapse. The solution adopted to this problem was to concentrate upon the essential issues, and to suppress as far as possible any lesser considerations. Consequently the problem posed by parliamentary rebellion against foreign policy, which, until diffused, threatened potential disaster by destabilising the overall diplomatic position, was nevertheless put to one side, because it offered less immediate danger to the national interest. In the same vein, Persian integrity was sacrificed to consolidate the Entente. Just as Grey found himself forced in the diplomatic arena to respond to events (as opposed to initiating them), so his domestic critics could only respond to events

and 'abuses' as they learned of them. As a result, Grey found it easier to play upon their ignorance and naivety than to confront the diplomatic problem head on. By resorting to subterfuge it proved possible to minimise the extent to which his critics' well-meant but impractical interventions could harm both domestic and diplomatic positions. The limited and often edited nature of information released to Parliament, and the unsatisfactory nature of the explanations he offered in the House, should be seen as necessary expedients vital to the preservation of the overall diplomatic position. Grey was in effect conducting a rearguard action, defending an increasingly fragile position. He was delaying as far as possible the point when dissimulation could no longer be sustained and the façade of British pre-eminence would be exposed; the point when the extent of her weakness would be such so as to force her to reveal how far she was unable to defend her imperial interests and compromise the Ententes by revealing openly their true nature. Grey's policy used compromise and concession to achieve what material strength could no longer sustain, hoping to preserve Britain's position until such time as a redistribution of power amongst the leading nations would work in her favour to permit self-sufficiency. With this in mind, as Wight says, internal cohesion was and is an important element in power politics.² Grey knew this, and in spite of personal sympathy with many of the principles which motivated his critics, he eventually secured sufficient cohesion by denying them access to controversial and dangerous information. By thus starving the Radical MPs of the evidence they needed to continue their campaign, and aided by the emergence of other domestic political controversy, Grey was able to restore the degree of stability

to Parliament and his domestic position necessary to enable the pursuing of the policies that circumstances elsewhere dictated. The idealist may frown at this knowing abuse of democratic power and Parliament. The pragmatist can only accept that he had little choice.

References - Chapter I

- 1 For a good cross-section, see, W Ashworth, An Economic History of England 1870-1939 (London 1972); D French, British Economic and Strategic Planning 1905-15 (London 1982), Chapter 1; Z Steiner, Britain and the Origins of the First World War (London 1977), pp.11-15
- 2 The naval situation throughout this period is covered in A J Marder, From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow; The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era 1904-19, 5 Volumes (London 1961-70); E.L. Woodward, Great Britain and the German Navy (Oxford 1935), R F MacKay, 'The Admiralty, the German Navy, and the Redistribution of the British Fleet 1904-05' in G Jordan (ed.), Naval Warfare in the Twentieth Century (London 1977)
- 3 M Wight, Power Politics (London 1979), pp 48-52
- 4 ibid., p.50
- 5 The historiographical debate is outlined below p.10 passim
- 6 In particular French, Strategic Planning. Steiner, Britain and the Origins, p.2 accepts that a new course in policy was adopted when it became clear that Britain faced 'over-extended responsibilities and a shrinking power base'
- 7 The most recent work has been published in Review of International Studies 15, No 2 (1989). See also Moorhead Wright, Theory and Practice of the Balance of Power 1486-1914 (London 1975); Wight & Butterfield (eds), Diplomatic Investigations (London 1966)
- 8 Wight, Power Politics, Ch.16
- 9 ibid., p.168; Wight follows on by arguing that 'The balance of power leads to considerations of military potential, diplomatic initiative, and economic strength.'
- 10 See H S Weinroth, 'The Radicals and the Balance of Power', Historical Journal, XIII (1970), pp.653-82; he argues that even the most fervent Radicals were aware that British security and her socio-economic stability were tied to some extent to wider and uncontrollable developments in international affairs, and that as such the Radicals were never really isolationist
- 11 A J A Morris, Radicalism Against War (London 1972); and Weinroth, 'Radicals and the Balance of Power', HJ, XIII (1970), pp.653-82 provide a useful survey of the Radical attitudes in this period

- 12 Lord Courtney cited in G P Gooch, Life of Lord Courtenay (London 1920), p.501
- 13 Two of the most attractive are Eyre Crowe's memorandum of 1st January 1907, reproduced in G P Gooch & H W V Temperley (eds), British Documents on the Origins of the War 1898-1914 (London 1926-32), Volume III, Appendix A, and discussed by K M Wilson, The Policy of the Entente: Essays on the determinants of British Foreign Policy 1904-14 (Cambridge 1985), p.59; and Grey's statement to the Committee of Imperial Defence on 26th May 1911 reproduced in G P Gooch & H W V Temperley (eds) B.D. VI, pp.782-84
- 14 Wight, Power Politics p.181
- 15 The essence of this assessment rests in the extent to which various powers could be determined and weighted as dynamic factors in the power politics of the day, and, given that weighting, how far they could be seen as threats (active or passive) to the British position at that time. It is important to remember that such assessments did not automatically lead to exclusive positions of 'phobia' or 'philia' such as have been adopted by later studies, and it is evident that policy in nearly all cases reflected a recourse to practical diplomatic initiation dictated by Anglomania rather than 'phobia' or 'philia' bias. A consideration of this in the light of subsequent historical work is offered below p.10 passim
- 16 From a letter of 28th February 1911 to Goschen cited K Wilson, Empire and Continent: Studies in British Foreign Policy from the 1880s to the First World War (London 1987) pp.38-9 .
- 17 See in particular K Wilson, Policy of the Entente, Ch.4 'The Dissimulation of the Balance of Power'; K Neilson, 'Wishful Thinking: The Foreign Office and Russia 1907-17' in BJC McKercher and DS Moss (eds), Shadow and Substance in British Foreign Policy (Alberta, 1984) on respective British and Russian interpretations of the other's position
- 18 'Russia' (1836) in 'The Political Writings of Richard Cobden Vol.I' cited Wight, Power Politics, p.184
- 19 This view is best conveyed in G W Monger, The End of Isolation: British Foreign Policy 1900-07 (London 1963); Z S Steiner, Britain and the Origins, and The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy 1898-1914 (Cambridge 1969); K Robbins, Sir Edward Grey - a Biography (London 1971); P M Kennedy, The Rise of Anglo-German Antagonism 1860-1914 (London 1980); F H Hinsley (ed), The Foreign Policy of Sir Edward Grey, (Cambridge 1977)
- 20 K Wilson, The Policy of the Entente; and Empire and Continent, op.cit

- 21 Wilson, Policy of the Entente Ch.6 argues for a re-examination of the actual threat posed by Germany to Britain, and the idea that any accusations that Germany was following an anti-British policy, thus forcing a response by Britain, was in fact a 'myth' created by the Whitehall elite to conceal other truths
- 22 D French, British Economic and Strategic Planning 1905-15 (London 1982)
- 23 French, British Planning, Ch.1
- 24 ibid., p.12 for examples of shortfalls in domestic production taken from the 'Royal Commission on Supply of Food and Materials in Time of War 1905'
- 25 ibid., p.13. A useful bibliography for studies of Britain's economic position at this time, and especially for her financial and commercial position, is provided by Dr French
- 26 ibid., pp.13-18
- 27 The justification for a large navy was, of course, that it was the only means by which the continued supply of commercial goods that Britain depended upon could be safeguarded
- 28 ibid., p.15 One result of this was, as French points out, a reluctance to increase peacetime defence expenditure beyond a level 'commensurate with a reasonable margin of safety'. He cites Grey's own views upon the subject:-
- I call expenditure on armaments unproductive because it brings no direct return. I do not say that it is unnecessary. It is, of course, a form of insurance (undated memo to Mallet)
- 29 French, British Planning, p.18
- 30 Grey's views on the likely consequences for commerce of a war were reported in The Times on 4th February 1914, and are cited by French, British Planning, p.18. They echoed the fears of the Unionist MP Yerburch, President of the Navy League who had spoken in similar terms to the Commons in 1901 (Hansard, 4s, XXXXVIII, 655, cited French, British Planning, p.18).
- 31 ibid., Ch.2, p.22
- 32 Wilson, Empire and Continent, Policy of the Entente, op.cit.

- 33 Above pp.5-10
- 34 Above pp.5-10
- 35 French, British Planning, pp.14-16
- 36 See above p.13 no.²⁷
- 37 Wilson, Empire and Continent, pp.41-2:- 'The response at home [to proposed changes in naval strengths and strategy] caused Lord Selbourne to tell the Cabinet in November 1901 that his recommended application of the Two Power Standard was not one that could be publicly stated: 'an avowedly lower standard would be misunderstood and denounced' '
- 38 Giving Radical pressures groups such as the Persian Committee and, more seriously in the case of this study, the Liberal Foreign Affairs Committee, exactly the sort of ammunition they required with which to attack policy; and, of course, Unionist MPs the chance to denounce Liberal policy
- 39 Above pp.9-10
- 40 Nicolson to Goschen 15th April 1912 cited in Steiner, Foreign Office, p.151 argued: '[Germany] would give us plenty of annoyance but it cannot threaten our more important interests, while Russia especially could cause us extreme embarrassment and, indeed, danger in the Middle East and on our Indian Frontier'. Grey, in a letter to Hardinge dated 28th January 1912, echoes this view: 'And of course if the Agreement [1907 Anglo-Russian Convention] were to go, everything would be worse both for us and for Persia.' Cited in Hinsley (ed), Grey's Foreign Policy, p.251
- 41 B Williams, 'The Strategic Background to the Anglo-Russian Entente of August 1907', Historical Journal, IX, no.3 (1966)
- 42 See Crewe to Hardinge 20th October 1911:- 'England and Russia are engaged in the impossible task of finding a common formula for the expression of opposite policies.' Cited by David McLean, Britain and her Buffer State: The Collapse of the Persian Empire 1890-1914 (London 1979), p.138. McLean sets out clearly the importance of the Persian Gulf area to the protagonists in the 'Great Game', pp.14-16
- 43 Grey eventually acknowledged this to his Minister at Tehran in a letter of 15th June 1914:- 'Our whole policy in Persia calls for reconsideration'. Cited McLean, Buffer State, p.138

- 44 Sanderson to Spring-Rice 6th August 1907:- 'We could not pursue such a really successful policy...without efforts and sacrifices which the public and parliament would not agree to'. Cited Wilson, Policy of the Entente, p.6. Grey expands upon the theme in a letter to Runciman of September 1907, outlining the alternative scenarios for Anglo-Russian activities in Persia, reproduced in G M Trevelyan, Grey of Fallodon (London 1937), pp.187-8
- 45 Above pp.16-17
- 46 K Neilson, 'Wishful Thinking: The Foreign Office and Russia 1907-17' from McKercher and Moss (eds), Shadow and Substance
- 47 K Neilson's, 'Wishful Thinking', McKercher & Moss (eds), Shadow and Substance, p.151
- 48 ibid., p.175
- 49 The issue of even limited entanglements was one of the main causes of political furore in Westminster. For a more detailed survey of this and other Radical concerns, see Chapter II below
- 50 In this lies the essence of 'The fiction of the free hand' (Wilson, Policy of Entente, Ch.5). Because definite guarantees were not possible, Grey was forced to offer large quantities of evidence sufficient to persuade Russia of good faith and trust; to fail to pursue such a Russophile line would have been to seriously compromise Britain's diplomatic position and as a result her imperial security and Great Power status
- 51 The Radicals and the India Lobby; their concerns vis à vis Persia are considered in Ch.3 below
- 52 See Nielson, 'Wishful Thinking' in McKercher and Moss (eds), Shadow and Substance. The arguments put forward by Dominic Lieven in 'Pro-Germans and Russian Foreign Policy 1890-1914' in International History Review, no.II (1980), pp.34-54 are particularly interesting
- 53 Hardinge to Nicolson 20th November 1908 cited McLean, Buffer State, p.101:- 'Grey has constantly...had to appear in the House of Commons as the advocate of the Russian Government'
- 54 B.D. V, no.860; Hardinge to Nicolson, 10th May 1909
- 55 B.D. X, no.637; Nicolson to Buchanan, 3rd January 1911
- 56 Nielson, 'Wishful Thinking' in McKercher and Moss (eds), Shadows and Substance, p.173

- 57 Hardinge to Nicolson, 20th November 1908, cited McLean, Buffer State p.101:

[Evidence of apparent anomalies in Russian actions] is entirely owing to their lack of control over their officials.

See also the attitude adopted concerning accusations that Russian officials had aided the return to Persia of the ex-Shah in summer 1911 as outlined in B.D. XI, no.788 (23rd July Buchanan report); and in response to the actions of Russian Consul-General Pokhetonov in the Shoa-es-Sultanah property dispute as disavowed by the Russian Minister at Tehran Poklevski-Koziell (B.D. XI, no.834; 2nd November 1911 Barclay to Grey, cited from the footnotes)

- 58 Cited H. Nicolson, Sir Arthur Nicolson, Bart., First Lord Carnock: a study in the old diplomacy (London 1930), p.354
- 59 Wight, Power Politics, p.181
- 60 Cited Moorhead Wright, Theory and Practice, pp.128-34, from National Review, January 1913
- 61 This position is fully discussed in Wilson, Policy of the Entente, Ch.5
- 62 Wight, Power Politics, p.98 (undated)
- 63 For example, the history of the Entente Cordiale and the issue of military assistance as outlined in the Lansdowne Guarantee suggests that for France such considerations determined the value of continued Anglo-French co-operation. Also, even though the 1907 Convention did not contain any clauses pertaining to Europe, the Bosnian Crisis exposed clearly the limited value of co-operation with Britain for Russia vis à vis Europe, and therefore Grey was forced to give support where he could elsewhere - such as in Persia during the Shuster Affair up to the Anglo-Russian Joint Note of 18th February 1912 (discussed fully in Chapter IV below). See D W Sweet, 'The Bosnian Crisis' in Hinsley (ed), Grey's Foreign Policy, pp.178-192
- 64 The 1907 Convention provided a formula that recognised the respective interests of Britain and Russia in Asia, and indicated that future issues that emerged concerning these positions would be resolved without recourse to destabilising diplomatic confrontations. The aims of the Convention are outlined in its preamble; and Article V, outlining an undertaking to negotiate over all issues of contention, is of particular interest. The Convention as it affects Persia is reproduced in W M Shuster, The Strangling of Persia (London 1912), introduction pp.xxiv-xxviii

65 In this vein, Lloyd George's Mansion House Speech of 21st July 1911 provided a clear statement that Britain would not allow her interests to be ignored in any international settlement in which she had a stake. It also intimated support for France against German aggression along the lines expressed in above.⁶³ This is discussed in detail in Chapter II, Section II, below. A similar example as provided by the resistance shown to Russia over the restoration of the Persian ex-Shah (B.D. XI, Ch.XC), which it should be remembered was coupled with other compromises compatible with above.⁶⁴ It is worth recognising that Grey would have been hard pressed to force the issue and retain a viable working relationship had he failed to persuade Sazonov that the diplomatic cost of any schism outweighed any localised gains

66 See note ⁶¹

References - Chapter II

- 1 S E Koss, Sir John Brunner; Radical Plutocrat (Cambridge, 1970), pp.240-41
- 2 Cited by Arthur Ponsonby, Democracy and the Control of Foreign Affairs, (London 1912), p.21
- 3 Ponsonby, Democracy and Control, pp.21-22
- 4 P Richards, Parliament and Foreign Affairs, (London 1967), pp.22, cited by Morris, Radicalism Against War, p.10
- 5 Morris, Radicalism Against War, pp.1-12
- 6 H S Weinroth, 'The Radicals and the Balance of Power', Historical Journal, XIII (1970), pp.653-82
- 7 Weinroth, 'Radicals and the Balance of Power', HJ XIII, p.661 reproduces an extract from the Manchester Guardian of 16th November 1906 which epitomises this:-

Unless our understanding with France is treated as the nucleus for a wider understanding embracing all the Powers, its value is greatly mutilated.
- 8 Weinroth, 'Radicals and the Balance of Power', HJ XIII, pp.659-61, argues that the Radicals, initially encouraged by Grey's adherence to legality as the principle upon which the settlement of the First Moroccan Crisis was to be based, became disillusioned once it became clear that Germany had become isolated in the face of Anglo-French co-operation. This, it was feared, showed that Britain's erstwhile role as impartial arbiter had been sacrificed to more recent alliance considerations. Weinroth subsequently cites an article from the Daily News (20th November 1908) in which the states system was described as moving towards a situation in which 'two groups [are] becoming more defined' (p.671) - this after the events of the Bosnian Crisis had confirmed the fears first raised by the First Moroccan Crisis
- 9 ibid., pp.672-3. Weinroth argues convincingly that the naïvety of the Radicals' understanding of foreign affairs is clearly evident in this period. They failed to show any awareness that, in spite of the statements expressing optimism over prospects for general rapprochement, and in spite of the minor agreements that were concluded, the fundamental causes of division were not satisfactorily addressed. The alliances that had been forged, and the confrontations which had occurred, had not been developments prompted by single issues or problems. Nor could

these alliances or divisions be waived aside or dismissed with ease, once difficulties arose. Very real policy constraints, of increasing complexity and importance, precluded this. The Radicals displayed little appreciation of the breadth of foreign policy or of its complexity: a failing which, as I shall argue later, seriously weakened their position throughout the ante-bellum period, and specifically in their campaign for control of foreign affairs.

- 10 For a narrative of events in the domestic scene throughout this period, see P Rowland, The Last Liberal Government: To the Promised Land, 1905-10, (London 1968); Vol II, Unfinished Business, 1911-14 (London 1971)
- 11 Morris, Radicalism Against War, pp.259
- 12 For a cross-section of views upon the Agadir Crisis, and the diplomatic events of the summer of 1911, see: M L Dockrill, 'The Agadir Crisis' in Hinsley (ed), British Foreign Policy under Grey, Ch.14; Wilson, Empire and Continent, Ch.5, pp.89-109; Steiner, Britain and the Origins, pp.70-78; R A Cosgrove, 'A Note on the Lloyd George's Speech at the Mansion House, 21st July 1911', Historical Journal, XII, no.4 (1969), pp.698-701; T Boyle, 'New Light on Lloyd George's Mansion House Speech', Historical Journal, XXIII, no.2 (1980), pp.431-3; A J P Taylor, The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848-1918, (Oxford 1954). Morris, Radicalism Against War, Ch.6-8, remains the most comprehensive account of Radical involvement and attitudes *vis à vis* foreign affairs at this time, and as such provides much of the basis for the following narrative survey of events, slanted as it is towards a Radical perspective. See also: Weinroth, 'Radicals and the Balance of Power', HJ XIII, pp.653-82; J A Murray, 'Foreign Policy Debated; Sir Edward Grey and his Critics 1911-12' in W C Askew and L P Wallace (eds), Power, Public Opinion and Diplomacy, Essays in Honour of E M Carroll, (Durham, North Carolina, 1959); Koss, Radical Plutocrat, pp.240-6
- 13 Morris, Radicalism Against War, pp.259. Ironically, the Crisis provided the basis for several impassioned pleas by Ramsay MacDonald which played an important part in ending the serious industrial disputes that had threatened to undermine Asquith's Government
- 14 Morris, Radicalism Against War, p.245 comments that from all quarters, Radical, Foreign Office and Press, the attitude seemed to be one of 'unity in the face of crisis'
- 15 See K O Morgan, The Age of Lloyd George, (London 1971), p.160 passim for the text of this speech
- 16 Morris, Radicalism Against War, p.260. The memorandum is reproduced in T P Conwell-Evans, Foreign Policy from a Back-bench 1904-18, (Oxford 1932), pp.58-59

- 17 G P Gooch, Life of Lord Courtney, (MacMillan, 1920), p.571
- 18 Morris, Radicalism Against War, pp.263-4
- 19 The Committee issued a statement of purpose on 6th December 1911, clearly outlining its position. This is reproduced in Conwell-Evans, Foreign Policy from a Back-bench, pp.80-82. This echoed the sentiments of the open letter sent by Buxton and Ponsonby to the Times, published on 22nd November 1911, cited by Rowland, Last Liberal Government, Vol II, p.130. There is a brief but useful discussion of Ponsonby's role in the formation of the Liberal Foreign Affairs Committee in R A Jones, Arthur Ponsonby: the Politics of Life (London 1989), pp.74-9. Its main sources are the Ponsonby MSS and Conwell-Evans, Foreign Policy from a Back-Bench, to which I have made extensive reference in the course of this study. Dr Jones's preoccupations are however primarily with procedure rather than with the content of policy
- 20 Gooch, Life of Lord Courtney, pp.572-3, reproduces the objective of this group
- 21 Koss, Radical Plutocrat, pp.240-60
- 22 Morris, Radicalism Against War, pp.294-99; K Wilson, 'The Opposition and the Crisis in the Liberal Cabinet over Foreign Policy of November 1911', Ch.6 in Empire and Continent, pp.110-125
- 23 See p.42
- 24 This term is used as a term of convenience, covering not only that faction of the Liberal Party to which it has been traditionally applied but, in the context of this study, to those opposing Grey's foreign policy. As such it includes Irish and Labour MPs
- 25 See above pp.34-42
- 26 Morris, Radicalism Against War, p.268
- 27 In his speech to the House during the debate of 27th November, Noel Buxton commented on a need to change foreign policy as it affected Anglo-German relations, in terms of both 'manner' and 'matter' (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 125). The use of Buxton's terminology in this study in no way attempts to suggest that Buxton intended his comments about the nature of policy to be taken as I have done; it is at best merely an inference from his brief remarks, used as a convenient means of distinguishing between two facets of policy

- 28 Above pp.34-40
- 29 Above pp.29-34
- 30 As David McLean, Britain and Her Buffer State, p.3 comments:-
 Parliament could always produce a handful of brilliant, pious or eccentric individuals, gifted in oratory and skilled in debate, to champion the cause of the weak...in any struggle against [illiberal] domination.
- 31 This position is nicely summarised in the epigraph from Ponsonby cited as the heading of this Chapter, p.28 above
- 32 Grey had from the time he took office sought to advocate continuity and consistency in policy as the best method of defending national interests. The City Speech of 21st October 1905 exemplifies this; see G M Trevelyan, Grey of Fallodon (London 1937), pp.90-92
- 33 See Chapter 1 pp.8-10 concerning Martin Wight's assessment of 'internal cohesion' as a factor in power politics
- 34 As his comments in the debate upon the dangerous nature of uninformed speeches and 'political alcoholism' clearly show.
Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 54-55
- 35 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 43-65
- 36 Murray, 'Grey and his Critics', from Wallace and Askew (eds), Power, Public Opinion and Diplomacy, p.150
- 37 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 106
- 38 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 43
- 39 Grey summed his attitude up in a subsequent communication to Buchanan concerning Persia (20th February, 1912) stating that 'I desire to publish enough to show that [the publically stated] declaration of Anglo-Russian [policy] was...not lost sight of, but I do not wish to publish what would embarrass the Russian Government, or show that there was any strain' (cited by Keith Wilson, British Foreign Secretaries and Foreign Policy from Crimean War to First World War, (London 1987, p.195). Grey appears to have held good to the advice of Hardinge outlined to Nicolson (20th November 1908; cited McLean, Buffer State, p.101):-

We have to suppress the truth and resort to subterfuge at times to meet hostile public opinion

- 40 Whitehall was only too well aware of this. HC Norman's comment that, in response to Radical anger over the Stokes Affair (discussed fully in Chapter IV pp.128-32) and a perceived pro-Russian bias on Grey's part, 'a tranquillising statement, such as that suggested [by Buchanan, British Ambassador to St. Petersburg] was made to the House yesterday by the Secretary of State', shows that a controlled supply of information was in fact favoured, in so much as it deflected unwanted attention. For Norman's observation, see B.D. XI, no.803; Buchanan to Grey, 9th August 1911 (footnote)
- 41 This is outlined in the third section of his statement, Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 58 ff
- 42 Cited in D McLean, 'English Radicals, Russia, and the fate of Persia 1907-13', English Historical Review 93, (1978), p.348
- 43 In defending his record and his role as a true champion of Liberal principle, Grey argued that the problems of the summer had occurred precisely because his policy had insisted upon the upholding of both stated principles and national interests. However, in answering claims that too little attention had been paid to upholding the former, Grey argued that excessive attachment to principle and failure to allow for practical considerations could only lead to catastrophe:-
- Such a policy...would be disastrous... [in fact] not a policy
[but] the negation of policy
- (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 60)
- Grey recognised only too well that balance played a vital role in foreign affairs issues. The pursuance of any one consideration to the exclusion of all others would only provoke a complete collapse, and the enforced abandonment of that sacred consideration in spite of all efforts to the contrary. The abandonment of the Ententes, because the diplomatic line they encouraged did not always accord with the highly-strung principles of Liberal Radicalism, would be just such a negation of policy (see below p.61)
- 44 Grey's Hansard account is largely corroborated by documents and communications to be found in B.D. VII, pp.322-417. However, the veracity and value of such carefully worded sources, when it is remembered that Whitehall was aware that they might have to endure scrutiny at a later date when included in Blue Books, should not be overstressed. See H Temperley and L A Penson, A Century of Diplomatic Blue Books, 1814-1914 (Cambridge 1938), for an examination for Grey's 'Blue Book Policy'. It is also important to remember that specific anomalies about conduct remained. Why, for example, did Grey fail to request a confirmation of German recognition of Britain's declaration of 4th July 1911 (B.D., VII, no 356)?

- Why was the Mansion House Speech used to convey a message of the weight attributed to it instead of official channels?
- 45 Also as established at Algeciras, whereby prior consultation to any redistribution of interests vis à vis Morocco had been agreed
- 46 See above, pp.37-38. For speech, see K Morgan, Age of Lloyd George, p.160
- 47 A summary of the diplomatic activity is provided in Hinsley (ed), Grey's Foreign Policy, Ch.14; Also see B.D. VII, Chapters 14 & 15, nos.356, 373, 388, 395, 399, 411, 417, 419, 430 for the most important documentary exchanges
- 48 B.D. VII, no.426
- 49 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 55
- 50 The speech of Captain Faber was here cited as an example; Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 55
- 51 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 120. See below pp.71 ff.
- 52 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 43-4
- 53 B.D. VII, nos 417, 419
- 54 Grey was able to add a twist of irony here in the wake of German Foreign Office revelations to the Reichstag which had been made without prior consultation with London, a move inconsistent with usual practice. He, at least, had adhered to the usual conventions
- 55 See above, p.42. Wilson's observations are made in Empire and Continent, pp.115-16
- 56 See Wilson, Empire and Continent, pp.115-16
- 57 B.D. II, no 417 reproduces the texts of the 1904 secret articles
- 58 See Lansdowne's note to Grey concerning publication of 22nd November, B.D. VII, no.711; Lansdowne's notes to Bonar Law of 22nd November cited in Wilson, Empire and Continent, pp.116. Grey's note to Bonar Law cited in Wilson, Empire and Continent, p.117. It is interesting to consider how little room the Tories had to distance themselves from Grey, because it was ostensibly their policy from 1904 that he pursued
- 59 As Grey said: 'No British Government could embark upon a war without public opinion behind it.' (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 58)

- 60 Wilson, Empire and Continent, Ch.5, passim
- 61 See Grey's communication to Metternich, the German Ambassador, that had been determined in the Cabinet Meeting of 21st July (as Asquith reported to the King on the same day, cited Wilson, Empire and Continent, p.93), see B.D. VII, no.411; and the hidden message of Lloyd George's speech at the Mansion House op.cit.
- 62 For example, Eyre Crowe's comments that the expedition to Fez was 'only a more flagrant example of the vicious policy which the French Government are pursuing in Morocco, whereby, trading on the friendliness of this country, they are ready to make important political bargains with Germany at our expense' (B.D. VII, no.179). It was widely felt that the French cause 'was not one in itself which we could go to war about with them' ('Pease Diary', 21st July 1911, cited Wilson, Empire and Continent, p.96). Hardinge in his letter to Nicolson of 27th July 1911 added further to the feeling of dissatisfaction, writing, 'I am not at all satisfied with the attitude of the French throughout this question. They seem to regard England as a country to be utilised when necessary, and to be ignored when the circumstances permit' (cited Wilson, Empire and Continent, p.104)
- 63 Wilson, Empire and Continent, p.105
- 64 See Chapter I, pp.10-27. The importance placed upon maintaining the Ententes in Whitehall cannot be overstressed. Nicolson clearly showed his concern to Sir George Barclay, Minister at Tehran, when he wrote on 24th October 1911 that 'it would be disastrous to our foreign policy were the understandings...to be weakened in any way whatsoever' (cited by Steiner, The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy 1898-1914 (Cambridge, 1969) p.131), and echoed it six months later to Goschen in Berlin on 15th April 1912, arguing that 'it would be most unfortunate were we to revert to the state of things which existed before 1904 and 1907' (cited Steiner, Foreign Office, op.cit.). The diplomatic correspondence of the summer of 1911 highlights the fact that, for all the dissatisfaction with French policy displayed by senior Whitehall officials (above ⁶²), the Entente remained sacrosanct. Two comments by Crowe, previously outspoken in his criticism of the French, sum up the prevalent attitude: '[I am] sorry beyond words at the line we are taking. It seems to me our cabinet are all on the run and the strong hints we are giving to France [that she must concede] make me ashamed as well as angry' (from a letter to Bertie, Ambassador to Paris, of 20th July 1911, cited Steiner, Britain and the Origins, p.72; made before the cabinet decision of 21st July to uphold the Entente); 'This is a trial of strength, if anything. Concession means...defeat, with all its inevitable consequences' (B.D. VII, no.372)
- 65 Wilson, Empire and Continent, pp.102-03

- 66 See above ⁶⁴
- 67 This puts the position facing Grey outlined on pp.48-50, and in particular the comments of footnotes ³⁹ and ⁴², clearly into perspective
- 68 See Chapter I p.8-10
- 69 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 58; Sir Edward Grey, 27th November 1911
- 70 As Grey put it to the House, 'It is cordial friendship alone which provides sufficient mutual tolerance and goodwill to prevent difficulties and faction that would otherwise arise' (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 59)
- 71 The example outlined below in Chapter IV pp.129-32 of Grey's handling of the Stokes Affair, and of Anglo-Russian relations *vis à vis* Persia and the 1907 Convention, clearly upholds the position. See also Wilson, Empire and Continent, pp.103-5, where he argues that 'a degree of British control over French policy was certainly present in the Agadir Crisis' (p.103). Of particular interest is a passage taken from Bertie's note to Nicolson on 14th May 1911: '[The Entente] is useful to us as a security against France committing imprudences' (p.103)
- 72 See Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 59
- 73 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 60 ff covers Grey's outline of the disasters that would accompany a switch to isolationism
- 74 See above p.50 footnote ⁴³
- 75 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 61
- 76 The Radicals had yet to face the dilemma which led to the 1912 Mediterranean naval agreements with the French; it proved impossible to remain isolated and sustain a politically acceptable naval influence. Morris, Radicalism Against War covers this particular issue in Chapter 8
- 77 See Chapter 1 pp.12-14 for David French's assessment of the political economies which constrained policy makers from adopting such a line. It is hardly surprising that Grey did not dwell upon the impracticality of this course; he could not offer more than the observation that negligence could promote weakness without revealing how weak the position already was
- 78 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 161; Grey's response to Mason's suggestions for a change to a more 'desirable' policy
- 79 Above pp.30-31 for Weinroth's argument

- 80 Above pp.51-53 passim
- 81 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 59. This argument complemented Grey's position vis à vis the value of the Ententes outlined on pp.59-61 above - that the restraint which friendly states could exert upon each other would encourage greater stability across the states system
- 82 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 61
- 83 Wilson, Empire and Continent, Ch.3; see also Wilson, Policy of the Entente, Ch.6
- 84 As Steiner notes, Germany had provided an attractive lure for pro-alliance Tories in the years prior to the Entente. However, and as she recognises, 'there were no grounds for such a modus vivendi ... British and German interests did not mesh; no true quid pro quo existed'. (Steiner, Britain and the Origins, p.27). Furthermore, as the studies of the abortive Haldane Mission of early 1912 have shown, little had changed from the time of Salisbury's initial vetoing of moves towards an Anglo-German alliance. See Hinsley (ed), Grey's Foreign Policy, Ch.15 on Anglo-German relations 1911-14; and RTB Langhorne, 'The Naval Question in Anglo-German Relations 1912-14', Historical Journal, 13, 1 (1970); Steiner, Britain and the Origins, pp.94-9.
- 85 French defences and military worries in the post-Dreyfus era, and Russian weakness after the debacle with Japan, meant that at the time of the respective agreements both powers were more receptive to proposed agreements that could improve their relative positions, especially if political concessions and recognitions from Britain accrued material advantages that could be cited as public diplomatic successes
- 86 See in particular: Fritz Fischer, Germany's War Aims in the First World War (London 1967), and War of Illusions (London 1973); V R Berghahn, Germany and the Approach of War in 1914 (London 1973)
- 87 Although it would be wrong to ignore the fact that the German military threat against European powers, with the possible establishment of an effective hegemony over the continent, caused concern in Britain, the fact remains that in terms of any one-to-one conflict, Germany posed little direct danger to Britain. The principal threat, that of Germany's navy, was considered only in scenarios where it could be used in combination with the fleets of other powers, or once the Royal Navy had been weakened in an ongoing war (Wilson, Policy of the Entente, pp.110-11). Without a viable naval threat, Germany's military strength could not be brought to bear against Britain. The problems facing the Germany military strategists, illustrating this position, are discussed in P M Kennedy, 'The Development of German Naval Operations Plans Against England 1896-1914' in P M

Kennedy (ed), The War Plans of the Great Powers 1880-1914, (London 1979) pp.171-199. With no effective way to prosecute a war against Britain along the maritime basis necessary, it is even possible to question whether or not the domestic socio-economic problems outlined in David French's British Economic and Strategic Planning 1905-15, as discussed in Chapter I pp.12-20 above, would have played a significant role.

However, the threat of German political interference with and pressuring of powers to whom Britain was bound by ties of common interest, and who could offer a definite military threat to British possessions in a manner denied to Germany, was a real concern. The basis for the Ententes, from the British perspective as a way to escape a security dilemma of critical proportions, was inevitably threatened by any German initiative capable of upsetting amicable Anglo-French and Anglo-Russian relations. Whether intentional or coincidental, German diplomacy throughout the ante-bellum period tended to distract Britain's Entente partners, luring them away from the advantages of continued co-operation, and as a result was bound to attract hostile reactions from Whitehall, of the nature of Hardinge's 4th June 1909 comment to Bryce (cited by Wilson, Empire and Continent, p.56):-

We cannot close our eyes to the fact that German policy is unfriendly to us [because it threatens] to drive a wedge into our Entente with France and Russia.

- 88 Cited by Wilson, Empire and Continent, p.55
- 89 Nicolson to Bertie, 8th February 1911 (cited Wilson, Empire and Continent, p.56)
- 90 Goschen to Nicolson, 29th April 1911 (cited Wilson, Empire and Continent, p.90)
- 91 See Chapter I pp.18-27 for a discussion of the relevant historiographical debate
- 92 Wilson, Policy of the Entente, p.34, summarises the position nicely:- 'His [Grey's] colleagues [in the cabinet] believed that a political formula [for Anglo-German rapprochement] sufficiently elastic to permit its acceptance by France and Russia could be devised...he himself shared Nicolson's view that to find such a formula was 'a task beyond the ingenuity of man.' This puts Grey's remarks to the House about making 'new friends at the expense of old friends' (above p.62 footnote ⁷⁵) into perspective
- 93 For example, the naval negotiations after August 1909, which were widened to include discussions about the Baghdad railway and Persia; and the Haldane Mission of 1912, and the subsequent negotiations over the partition of the Portuguese Colonies. See Hinsley, Grey's Foreign Policy, Ch.15 for a discussion of these issues

- 94 Cited Wilson, Empire and Continent, p.67
- 95 Hardinge to Goschen, 28th June 1910, cited Wilson, Empire and Continent, p.66
- 96 See above p.49 footnote ⁴²
- 97 Wight, Power Politics, p.181; see above Chapter I p.8 ff.
- 98 See above p.56, footnote ⁶² for evidence within Whitehall about dissatisfaction with French policy. Problems concerning the operation of the Anglo-Russian Entente are considered in Chapter IV, below; Grey's own views upon the subject are clearly elucidated in Sir Edward Grey, Twenty Five Years, Vol I (London 1925), pp.168-70
- 99 See above pp.55-59
- 100 Buxton's citation of Gladstone in the debate epitomised the Radical attitude vis à vis 'correct' principles:-
- That is ascendancy to which [Britain] might reasonably aspire, to sustain the character of a Power no less just than strong, jealous of honour (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 125).
Ironically, Grey's apparent failure to uphold justice and honour as he deferred against supporting Persian or German claims are best explained by weaknesses, not strengths, of which the Radicals were ignorant
- 101 Buxton led calls in the House for a 'recognition of the legitimate aspirations of Germany' (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 125) which he feared had not been displayed during the summer.
- 102 Minute of 29th April 1912, cited as a footnote by Wilson, Empire and Continent, p.47
- 103 From a letter to a friend of 13th January 1913, cited in Trevelyan, Grey of Fallodon, p.219
- 104 Dillon, already unhappy about the unsatisfactory nature of Grey's statements concerning the Ententes was particularly angry about the failure of the Foreign Secretary to provide a Blue Book for the House before the debate. He claimed that this omission was indicative of ten years of secrecy and of the removal of foreign policy from the party political agenda that Wilson has argued dominated policy in this period (see above p.55, footnote ⁵⁸) Asquith countered:-

The point has been made that there should be a fuller disclosure of the foreign policy of the Government to the

country, and particularly to the House of Commons. In spirit I am in sympathy with that desire. [However], diplomacy is of necessity a secret game...the processes of diplomacy must be carried on under the cloud of confidence. (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 107)

- 105 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 78
- 106 George Orwell, '1984', cited Dictionary of Quotations (Bloomsbury 1987), p.258
- 107 Previously cited p.41 footnote ¹⁹
- 108 It was felt by some that the Foreign Secretary deliberately controlled the supply of information to the House, to guarantee that parliamentary involvement in foreign affairs would be compatible with ongoing policy considerations. Keir Hardie was particularly vocal in outlining the procedural options open to the Government by which to evade awkward questions and delay the release of potentially sensitive information (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 134-5)
- 109 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 120
- 110 Unionist MP for Hull. See Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 97 ff
- 111 This wish was most eloquently put by Ramsay MacDonald (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 74-80); but was common both in this and later debates on foreign policy issues
- 112 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 106-10
- 113 Dalziel questioned Grey's claims that no government could go to war without public support. He doubted the ability of Parliament to veto any war in progress, even with a popular mandate, for fear of a military or political reaction. Furthermore, he expressed reservations about claims that a valid causis belli would be needed to elicit parliamentary support for the conversion of an Entente to a military alliance, given that the existing professions of common interest made without legislative sanction had proven sufficient for respective British and French officials to take steps towards joint action (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 163). It is interesting to compare this position with the events of July and August 1914
- 114 Ponsonby, Democracy and Control, p.22
- 115 Or, indeed, Buxton's suggestion that experts could be called upon to cooperate with the Foreign Office when new perspectives upon diplomatic developments would be needed (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 122)

- 116 This problem was to hinder the Liberal Foreign Affairs Group in its own enquiry into the possibility of establishing a Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs. See Ponsonby MS, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS 659/135; a proposed 'Constitution for a Standing Committee of the House of Commons on Foreign Affairs' was discussed by members of the Liberal Foreign Affairs Group, but failed to attract unanimous support - Ponsonby himself dissenting
- 117 It is impossible to agree with AJP Taylor, The Troublemakers, p.125 who decides that Grey adopted their policies. However, if one allows, admittedly with the benefit of hindsight, for the fact that an airing of the issues forced the Foreign Secretary into more complete statements on emerging issues, exercised more of the 'parliamentary function' they had feared was being eroded, and made Grey allow more in his dealings with other powers for the importance of 'internal cohesion' to his diplomatic position, then, in terms of their brief, they achieved a qualified success (even if they themselves could not see it)
- 118 More than one member echoed the views of Ronaldshay, who equated the strength of policy with the extent to which it upheld principles of morality and honour during his criticism of the abandonment of Persia to Russia (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 116)
- 119 See, for example, how MacDonald's calls for more information were issued in tandem with his argument that 'bad policy' should be changed (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 74)
- 120 Sykes and Keir Hardie (Unionist and Labour) both argued this point; and Sykes can hardly be labelled as a Radical in the general Liberal sense
- 121 See the statement of purpose cited above p.71 footnote ¹⁰⁷; also Arthur Ponsonby, Democracy & the Control of Foreign Affairs, pp.21-2
- 122 Democracy and Control, p.22; '[Parliaments are responsible to] the source from which they derive their authority ... the people'
- 123 'Government by public opinion presupposes that the supreme statesman in democratic government is public opinion. Many of the shortcomings of democratic government are due to the fact that public opinion is not necessarily a great statesman at all.' Cited by Hinsley (ed), Grey's Foreign Policy, p.88
- 124 It is important to point out that questions upon the situation in Persia and the value of the 1907 Anglo-Russian Question advanced both before and during the debate of 27th November prompted Grey to speak for a second time on the 27th. However, as Grey sought to concentrate upon Agadir and general policy on the 27th, this chapter has attempted to focus upon

these issues. The Persian Question and its importance in the debate of 27th November 1911 is discussed more fully in Chapter III below; see in particular pp.91-93, 99-100

References - Chapter III

- 1 Ponsonby, Democracy and the Control of Foreign Affairs (London 1912), p.24
- 2 As Radicals often complained, 'we are told the matter is settled and it is no good interfering', (Hansard, 5 s, XXXX, 1947; Ponsonby 10th July 1912)
- 3 J A Murray, 'Foreign Policy Debated from Wallace and Askew' (eds), Power, Public Opinion and Diplomacy, p.143
- 4 D McLean, 'English Radicals, Russia and the fate of Persia', English Historical Review, 93 (1978), p.339
- 5 ibid.
- 6 For the events of this period as seen by British observers of the time see E G Browne, The Persian Revolution 1905-09 (London 1910; republished 1966)
- 7 British foreign policy towards Persia in the period prior to the 1907 Convention is examined most thoroughly in D McLean, Britain and Her Buffer State, (London 1979), Chapters 2-4 passim
- 8 D McLean, 'Radicals, Russia and Persia', EHR 93, p.339
- 9 E G Browne, The Persian Revolution, and Morgan Shuster, The Strangling of Persia, (London 1912), provide a contemporary if biased account of events. More recent historical works include:- I Klein, 'The Anglo-Russian Convention and the Problem of Central Asia 1907-14' in Journal of British Studies, II (1971); R L Greaves, 'Some Aspects of the Anglo-Russian Convention and its Workings in Persia 1907-14' in Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 31 (1968); D McLean, Buffer State, and 'Radicals, Russia and Persia', EHR 93. The standard history for Persia at this time is F. Kazemdadeh, Russia and Great Britain in Persia 1864-1916, (New Haven, Conn. 1968)
- 10 Browne was professor of Arabic at Cambridge and regarded as the most distinguished Persian scholar of the day. Lynch was Liberal MP for Ripon 1906-10, owner of shipping interests in the Persian Gulf and an experienced Middle East traveller. Cited from McLean, 'Radicals, Russia and Persia', EHR 93, p.340
- 11 ibid., p.340
- 12 ibid., p.341

- 13 See above pp.33-34. Lynch proved to be one of the casualties in the general elections of 1910, to Grey's relief
- 14 As a result of these developments, the Persian Committee ceased to function; it was to reform anew in August 1911. See McLean, 'Radicals, Russia and Persia', EHR 93, pp.342, 344
- 15 In spite of an obvious wish to avoid commenting upon Persia in Parliament, Grey was forced to break silence during the debate of 27th November. See above p.49 footnote ³⁹
- 16 Hansard, 5 s, Volumes XXX-XXXII, passim
- 17 Grey, Twenty Five Years, Vol I p.169
- 18 At one point, an exasperated Grey was to question the extent to which the Radicals understood basic geography: 'I sometimes wonder whether anybody who talks about Persia in this House knows where Tehran is' (Hansard, 5 s, XXXX, 1981)
- 19 See above pp.71-73
- 20 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 78; 27th November 1911, Ramsay MacDonald
- 21 Hansard, 5 s, XXXIV, 638; 21st February 1912, Ponsonby
- 22 Hansard, 5 s, XXXX, 1947; 10th July 1912, Ponsonby
- 23 '[Grey's] attitude ... to those who take an interest ... simply seeking for information ... [he] seems to resent them even the putting of questions.' Hansard, 5 s, XXXIV, 690; O'Grady, 21st February 1912
- 24 Hansard, 5 s, XXXIV, 651; 21st February 1912, Dillon
- 25 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 1161-67; 4th December 1911
- 26 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 1166-7; 4th December, 1911 King
- 27 As well as instances already cited see: Dillon, 14th November 1911 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXI, 176); MacDonald, 20th February 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXIV, 430); Dillon, 22nd February 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXIV, 718); MacDonald, 29th February 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXIV, 1514); MacDonald, 25th March 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXVI, 4); Dillon, 30th July 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXXI, 1819); Dillon, 23rd January 1913 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXXVII, 585). The success of this agitation, reflected by the publication of relevant Blue Books, is discussed below p.107
- 28 Ponsonby MS, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS 659/80-82

- 29 McLean, Radicals, Russia and Persia, EHR, 93, p.338. This reprises the theme discussed in Chapter II Section I passim
- 30 Morrell's question about Russian troop deployments in north Persia on 31st October 1911 marked the first enquiry on this topic of the Parliamentary session (Hansard, 5 s, XXX, 687). Grey's answer to such enquiries, as exemplified by his responses to Morrell on 2nd November 1911 (Hansard, 5 s, XXX, 980) and Ronaldshay on 7th November (Hansard, 5 s, XXX, 1452), in which he claimed that the unstable situation in Persia justified both British and Russian moves to secure expressed interests did little to assuage fears. Queries on this subject became commonplace as a result
- 31 This in spite of the Protocol of 7th September 1909 (Cited from the Blue Book 'Persia No.1 1909', Cd. 5120, No.232, pp.130-131) Concerned with Mohamamed Ali's abdication it stated that 'the Imperial Russian Government promise on their side to take all effective steps to prevent any ... agitation on his [the ex-Shah's] part'. The participation of Russian vessels is mentioned in Browne, The Persian Crisis of December 1911; how it arose and whither it may lead us, (Cambridge, 1st January 1912), pp.10-11
- 32 Dillon attacked Grey over his handling of the Stokes Affair, highlighting the deference shown to Russian wishes, and the collusion between Whitehall and the military by which the appointment was blocked (Hansard, 5 s, XXX, 980; 2nd November: Hansard 5 s, XXXI, 498; 16th November). Shuster provides further evidence of this in appendix D of The Strangling of Persia
- 33 See the questions of King, 31st October 1911 (Hansard, 5 s, XXX, 686); and Lloyd and Dillon, 2nd November (Hansard, 5 s, XXX, 978 ff)
- 34 These events elicited the poignant enquiry of Morrell, 4th December 1911; 'How far [is] our honour...affected by the attitude we are taking?' (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 1162)
- 35 See above p.82 footnote ⁹. The essentials of the clash were communicated to Whitehall on 16th October by Barclay (cited in B.D. XI, no.834; Barclay to Grey 2nd November 1911, as a footnote)
- 36 See for example O'Bierne's telegram outlining Neratov's attitude towards Persia of 19th October 1911, B.D. XI no.828
- 37 The terms of the ultimatum were transmitted by Barclay on 2nd November, B.D. XI, no.834
- 38 See especially Morrell and Dillon, 9th November (Hansard, 5 s, XXX, 1794); Ponsonby and Dillon, 16th November (Hansard, 5 s, XXXI, 175 and 207); O'Grady, 16th November (Hansard, 5 s, XXXI, 499)

- 39 Citations are made from Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 43-165 unless otherwise stated
- 40 Shuster came in for particular criticism for his role in provoking the crisis
- 41 See Barclay to Grey, 6th November 1911, concerning Persian promises; B.D. XI, no.838
- 42 Barclay communicated the news of the Persian apology on 24th November; B.D. XI, no.865
- 43 Buchanan forewarned Grey of this on 26th November; B.D. XI, no.868
- 44 See the comments of Mitchell-Thomson, 28th November (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 181) alleging that British pressure had been exerted upon Persia to secure acceptance of Russian demands
- 45 B.D. XI, Ch.XC, III deals with relevant diplomatic correspondence in this period.
- 46 30th November 1911, Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 560 ff
- 47 3 points were stressed:- i) the Convention was based upon Persian independence and integrity, ii) the spheres of influence were purely economic, iii) non-intervention was an expressed aim of the contracting powers. See Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 1161 ff
- 48 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 1201. The Spring-Rice letter of 4th September 1907 is reproduced in Shuster, Strangling of Persia, pp.xxix-xxx
- 49 Cited as an extract from Lynch's letter to Browne of 31st October 1911 by McLean, 'Radicals, Russia and Persia', EHR 93, p.346
- 50 This debate is reproduced in Hansard, 5 s (Lords) X, 677-700
- 51 Hansard, 5 s (Lords), X, 684; Curzon, 7th December 1911
- 52 This debate is covered in Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 2543-2662. It is from this source that all citations are drawn concerning the debate, unless otherwise stated
- 53 The terms are reproduced in B.D. XI, no.900, the enclosure of the relevant memo. to Sazonov
- 54 Shuster, Strangling of Persia, pp.189-90 provides a chronological if bias account of the coup d'état. E G Browne, The Reign of Terror at Tabriz (Cambridge 1912), provides a lurid account of the incidents in Resht and Tabriz

- 55 This debate is covered in Hansard, 5 s, XXXIV, 628-696. It is from the source that citations are made, unless otherwise stated
- 56 Hansard, 5 s, XXXIV, 628ff. Subsequent citations concerning Ponsonby's speech come from this source unless otherwise stated
- 57 The Anglo-Russian Note to the Persian Government of 11th September 1907, which had been drawn up under the auspices of Grey's telegram to Spring-Rice on 7th September, had been reproduced in the Blue Book, but Spring-Rice's earlier letter had not. This fact, coupled with the change in syntax, caused the confusion seized upon by Ponsonby. The Joint Note of 11th September 1907 was reproduced in the Blue Book 'Persia, Number 1, 1912' (Cd.6077, CXXII, 51), laid before the House on 10th March 1912. The Spring-Rice letter of 4th September 1907 is cited previously (above p.95, footnote ⁴⁸)
- 58 Later printed in 'Persia No. 1 1912', (Cd.6077, CXXII, 55)
- 59 Hansard, 5 s, XXXIV, 638
- 60 In particular, Morrell attacked the apparent forcing of Mornard as Shuster's replacement upon the Persians as proof that the Entente powers were interfering in the administrative affairs of Persia, without good cause or authority to do so
- 61 Hansard, 5 s, XXXIV, 661
- 62 Unionist MPs such as Yate, Rees and Lonsdale consistently complained that commercial and strategic interests were being adversely hit because Persia refused to settle. As a result, Grey was ironically caught between two angry groups - the Radicals who accused him of unfairly and excessively interfering in Persian affairs, and some Unionists who argued that he was not doing enough! This, increasingly, was to be to the Foreign Secretary's advantage
- 63 Curzon's outline of possible future developments in Persia ironically suggested that to change the 1907 Convention would be to inevitably adopt greater responsibility for Persia. In arguing that the abused Agreement lay at the root of problems, he failed to convince that without the Convention matters would have been any better. See Hansard, 5 s (Lords), X, 678ff; and Hansard 5 s (Lords), XII, 672-95
- 64 See above pp.61-63
- 65 See above p.74, especially footnote ¹¹⁶
- 66 'The rise of self-conscious democracy...has led to much more time being devoted to questions of social reform, domestic relations and the condition of the people...in these circumstances... few [MPs] are found...to follow

closely the course of foreign affairs', from Democracy and the Control of Foreign Affairs, pp.7-8

- 67 Murray, Radicalism Against War, p.170
- 68 Ponsonby's pamphlet 'Democracy and the control of Foreign Affairs' was apparently a failure thus reflecting the lack of interest shown publicly. His publisher, A C Fifield, informed the MP of this on 4th March 1912, adding that he suspected that some pressure had been applied upon the Liberal press to avoid 'rocking the boat'. (Ponsonby MS, Bodleian Library, Oxford MS 659/58). Ponsonby himself was the victim of an attempt by the Liberal hierarchy at 'gagging' when he was sounded as a possible party whip, a position he recognised dictated 'blind obedience'. He declined the offer (Ponsonby MS, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS 659/92-3)
- 69 Cited McLean, Buffer State, p.91
- 70 MacDonald, 29th February 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXIV, 1514); MacDonald, 25th March 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXVI, 4)
- 71 Dillon, 22nd February 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXIV, 718); Morrell, 5th March 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXV, 180); Morrell, 21st March 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXV, 2039)
- 72 MacDonald, 25th March op.cit.
- 73 The laying of these papers before the House is recorded by Hansard as follows: 'Persia No.1, 1912', 9th March 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXV, 515); 'Persia No.2, 1912', 26th March 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXVI, 186); 'Persia No.3, 1912', 28th March 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXVI, 572); 'Persia No.4, 1912', 11th April 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXVI, 1387); 'Persia No.5, 1912', 3rd July 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXX, 1104)
- 74 Temperley & Penson, A Century of Diplomatic Blue Books 1814-1914, intro., p.ix
- 75 Grey to Buchanan, 20th February 1912, cited by K Wilson, British Foreign Secretaries and Foreign Policy, p.189
- 76 Murray, 'Grey and his Critics', from Wallace and Askew (eds), Power, Public Opinion and Diplomacy, p.166
- 77 See: Morrell and Wedgwood, 16th April 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXVII, 168 ff); Morrell, 23rd April 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXVII, 910); Wedgwood, 29th April 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXVII, 1483); Morrell, 30th April 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXVII, 1663); Morrell, 7th May 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXVIII, 199)

- 78 This debate is recorded by Hansard, 5 s, XXXX, 1933-2040. All citations concerning the debate are drawn from this source unless stated otherwise
- 79 This point was not new, having been previously made by, amongst others, Ronaldshay on 27th November 1911 (op.cit.), Crawshay-Williams on 14th December 1911 (op.cit.), and Curzon on 7th December 1911 (op.cit.)
- 80 Hansard, 5 s, XXXX, 1946
- 81 For this debate, see Hansard, 5 s (Lords) XII, 672-95
- 82 See: Ponsonby, 10th October 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXXII, 496); Morrell, 22nd October 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXXII, 1893)
- 83 Ponsonby, 10th October op.cit.
- 84 See: Mason, 9th October 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXXII, 329); Morrell, 7th January 1913 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXXVI, 973); Morrell, 11th February 1913 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXXVII, 681)
- 85 The issue of the governship of Tabriz was dealt with by Grey on several occasions in the House, most notably in response to a question tabled by O'Grady on 22nd October 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXXII, 1892) and in the form of a written answer to Dillon on 6th February 1913 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXXVIII, 56). Morrell first questioned Grey about the regency on 31st October 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXXIII, 535), and did so again on 7th January 1913 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXXVI, 973). Grey denied any complicity, but as B.D. XII no.803 shows, Grey had discussed Saad-ed-Dowleh's candidacy with Sazonov and so was being liberal with the truth in this instance. Morrell raised the issue of the loan in conjunction with the issue of the regency on 7th January 1913 (op.cit.)
- 86 Hansard, 5 s, XXXXVIII, 4, 6th February 1913 Grey answering a Morrell query
- 87 Taken from the written answer to Dillon of 6th February 1913, cited above footnote ⁸⁵
- 88 Answer to Morrell, 7th January, cited above footnote ⁸⁵
- 89 Rees and Lonsdale tabled some 35 questions and supplementaries between February 1912 and the end of the 1912 Session, advocating a hawkish line of intervention to end banditry and disorder which damaged commerce. See in particular: Lonsdale question about trade and the possibility of British policing in south Persia, 12th December 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXXV, 737); Rees demands about retaliatory measures in the wake of Eckford's death,

11th February 1913 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXXVIII, 680); Grey's resisting of such calls, as exemplified by his answer to a Yate query on 7th January 1913 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXXVI, 975) conveyed an impression of persisting Liberalism which his Radical critics were forced to applaud

- 90 A J P Taylor, The Troublemakers, p.125
- 91 McLean argues that 'there is little evidence that he ever changed his foreign policy as a consequence of...parliamentary pressure'. 'Radicals, Russia and Persia', EHR 93, p.350
- 92 Conwell-Evans, Back-bench, pp.80-82
- 93 Ponsonby feared that an illiberal Persian policy would cause liberal disillusionment and cause a Unionist recovery. Ponsonby MSS, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS 659/80-82
- 94 Murray, 'Grey and his Critics' from Wallace and Askew (eds), Power, Public Opinion and Diplomacy, p.171
- 95 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 120, 27th November 1911
- 96 The Liberal Foreign Affairs Group continued to operate throughout 1913, and after the outbreak of war in August 1914 the activities of the Union of Democratic Control showed that the cause of liberal democratic control had survived. See M Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics during the First World War (Oxford 1971)

References - Chapter IV

- 1 The practicality of Radical calls for action supporting nations such as Persia over and above Russia was considered as early as 1907 by Sanderson:- 'We could not pursue a really successful policy of antagonism towards Russia without efforts and sacrifices which the public and parliament would not agree to' - Sanderson letter to Spring-Rice, 6th August 1907, cited McLean, Buffer State, p.75
- 2 Nicolson, in his letter to Goschen of 5th December 1911, outlined his fears on this subject, saying that 'it would be disastrous if our Entente ... were to break down in Persia. The effects would not be confined to that country alone, but would really lead to a complete alteration in the international situation' (cited Keith Neilson, 'My Beloved Russians: Sir Arthur Nicolson and Russia 1906-16', International History Review, 9 (1987), pp.521-54). Grey sought to convey this message to the House, notably at the outset of his speech to the House on 14th December 1911 when he criticised 'rash' Radical outbursts which had unthought-of consequences (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 2598)
- 3 As Nicolson pointed out to Townley, 'We are always worried by thoughts of how our action will be viewed below the gangway of the House of Commons' (Letter dated 1st July 1911, cited McLean, Buffer State, p.91)
- 4 See introductory Chapter, pp.10-27
- 5 See above pp.48-50
- 6 Discussed above pp.111-114
- 7 See above p.107 footnote ⁷⁶
- 8 See above pp.8-10
- 9 Grey of Fallodon, 'Twenty Five Years', Volume I (Hodder & Stoughton 1925), p.169
- 10 See above p.49 footnote ⁴²
- 11 McLean, 'Radicals, Russia and Persia', EHR 93, p.348
- 12 In spite of his frequent failures to tell the truth, Grey's comments in his letter to Ponsonby of 20th December 1911 (cited in footnote ¹⁰ above) hint at a sympathy for the Radicals' position and a possible regret that circumstances precluded complete veracity or openness
- 13 A question which for all their condemnation of policy, the Radicals failed to answer

- 14 Grey to the House of Commons, 10th July 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXX, 1983)
- 15 This was outlined most clearly in the debate of 27th November 1911, following his answer to Goldman's question on Morocco. See Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 153 ff
- 16 See McLean, Buffer State, p.139; 'Grey sided with the revolutionaries [constitutionalists] in Persia as the best hope of finding a stable authority which could hold the country together'
- 17 The hope that the new constitution would help produce a climate in which social, economic and political stability might be established in Persia was a fundamental element in the 'Buffer State' concept for sustaining the defence of India without large scale military expenditure. This recovery was a major consideration in the thinking behind the 1907 Convention, as was the creation of lasting cordial relations with Russia. For Grey to recognise that any element in the Convention had failed to achieve the hoped for result was to imply that the overall policy for achieving imperial security was in jeopardy. By accepting as he did that the constitutional experiment had failed to provide the improvements necessary to sustain a viable sovereign Persian 'Buffer State', Grey was admitting that he had been overly optimistic, and that recovery was possible only if a different system of government was allowed to take charge. Grey wanted a government able to work effectively both for domestic recovery and with due deference to Russia - but at this time showed no sign that Persian independence should be sacrificed to Russia. Just as he had promoted the constitutional experiment as the best hope for Persia 1907-09, so he accepted in 1911-12 that it had failed and another approach was necessary. Only by 1914 can evidence be found to suggest that a radical revision of the dual 'Buffer State' - Anglo-Russian Entente policy was thought necessary. As McLean shows, it was only at that time that Whitehall accepted that one could not be upheld without compromising the other:-

Our whole policy in Persia calls for reconsideration - (Grey to Townley 5th June 1914, cited McLean, Buffer State, p.138)

The first principle of our foreign policy must be genuinely good relations with Russia. For us the fate of Persia is of necessity a secondary consideration (unsigned memo dated 21st July 1914, cited Buffer State, p.139)

- 18 Grey's exasperation about this can be appreciated in his comment to the House on 10th July 1912, 'I sometimes wonder if everybody who talks about Persia in the House knows where Tehran is' (Hansard, 5 s, XXXX, 1981)
- 19 Hansard, 5 s, XXXIV, 670

- 20 See above p.89, and in particular footnote ³²
- 21 ibid., see Hansard, 5 s, XXXI, 498, 16th November 1911 for Grey's position vis à vis Stokes as put to Dillon in the House
- 22 B.D. XI, no.778; 7th July, Grey to Barclay, footnote outlining acceptable conduct for Stokes: B.D. XI, no.791; 26th July, Grey to Buchanan, on the initial attitude adopted towards the appointment and Shuster's reforms
- 23 B.D. XI, no.799; 5th August 1911 Buchanan to Grey, concerning Russian protests. B.D. XI, no 800; 7th August, Grey to Barclay on the response to the Persian Government: B.D. XI, no.801; 7th August, Grey to Barclay on advice for Stokes: B.D. XI, no.802; 7th August, Grey to Buchanan on reassuring the Russian Government
- 24 B.D. XI, no.798, 4th August, Buchanan to Grey, outlined acting Foreign Minister Neratov's fears for the Convention should Stokes lead a gendarmerie in north Persia, the more so in light of Grey's assurance of 26th July which had guaranteed British non-intervention in any civil war should the ex-Shah return (B.D. XI, no.790)
- 25 Mentioned above p.90; see in particular footnote ³⁵
- 26 B.D. XI, no.800 op.cit. for the conditions: B.D. XI, no.815; 18th August 1911, Grey to Barclay outlining Whitehall's shift to opposition
- 27 B.D. XI, no.827, Vansittart footnote. As Grey illustrates in his communication to O'Bierne of 12th October 1911 (B.D. XI, no.824), he was well aware of the importance which could be attached to following an apparently Russophile line over Persia. The response from the embassy in St Petersburg which commented upon the sincere gratitude and satisfaction of the President of the Council (a known critic of the Anglo-Russian Entente) bears out this position (B.D. XI, no.827)
- 28 Nicolson to Barclay, 24th October 1911, cited by Steiner, Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, p.130
- 29 Nicolson to Buchanan, 22nd April 1913, cited Steiner, op.cit., p.131
- 30 Wilson, Empire and Continent, pp.41-2. Previously cited in the Introductory Chapter, p.17 footnote ³⁷
- 31 On many occasions Grey answered concerned MPs with the response that His Majesty's Government was not directly involved in the events under scrutiny, or that no definite information was available. Whilst it would be fair to say that Grey often stretched these points to the limit, it is fair to point out that a modicum of truth may be attached to such answers

- 32 The most obvious evidence of this was provided by Ponsonby with his questioning of Spring-Rice's letters to the Persian government in September 1907. See above p.95 ff
- 33 One of which, the Radicals' interpretation, provided the justification for the protracted parliamentary agitation analysed in Chapter III
- 34 Hansard, 5 s, XXX, 1794ff, 9th November 1911
- 35 See above pp.128-32 for the Stokes Affair. As McLean points out, there had been a consistent Russian occupation of the north from April 1909 onwards (McLean, 'Russia, Radicals and Persia', EHR 93, p.342), but as I have discussed in Chapter III, the Radicals rarely missed the chance to embarrass Grey by making questions about its persistence
- 36 McLean, Buffer State, outlines the importance of Persia in the 'Great Game' (pp.14-16); and provides a detailed survey of how the Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907 attempted to remove the perceived threat to Britain's strategic position which Russian ambitions were thought to pose (Chapter 5 passim)
- 37 A great deal of material has been published concerning the 1907 Anglo-Russian Entente. Amongst the most interesting, in addition to David McLean's works (op.cit.) are: R P Churchill, The Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 (Cedar Rapids 1939); R L Greaves, 'Some Aspects of the Anglo-Russian Convention and its working in Persia 1907-14' in Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 31, (1968); I Klein, 'The Anglo-Russian Convention and the Problem of Central Asia' in Journal of British Studies II, (1971); B S Williams, 'The Strategic Background to the Anglo-Russian Convention of August 1907' in Historical Journal 9 (1966); F Kazemzadeh, Russia and Britain in Persia 1864-1914 (London 1968); D W Sweet and R T B Langhorne, 'Great Britain and Russia 1907-14' in Hinsley (ed), The Foreign Policy of Sir Edward Grey (Cambridge 1977)
- 38 See above pp.129-34
- 39 Grey, Twenty Five Years, Vol I pp.166-7
- 40 Cited by G M Trevelyan, Grey of Fallodon, (London 1937), pp.137-8
- 41 B.D. XI, no.828; 19th October O'Bierne to Grey
- 42 B.D. XI, no.831, 23rd October, Grey to O'Bierne: B.D. xi, no.845, 14th November, Grey to O'Bierne
- 43 B.D. XI, No.834; 2nd November 1911 Barclay to Grey cites 16th October telegram in footnote. Morrell first questioned Grey about the property

- dispute on 9th November (Hansard, 5 s, XXX, 1794); Ronaldshay's citation occurred on 13th November (Hansard, 5 s, XXXI, 44)
- 44 B.D. XI, No.841; 8th November, Grey to Barclay
- 45 As he put it on 16th November; 'We are quite satisfied that [the] Russian Minister...is loyal to the Agreement.' B.D. XI, No.849
- 46 B.D. XI, No.885; 2nd December 1911, Grey to Buchanan
- 47 B.D. XI, No.840; 6th November, Grey to Barclay
- 48 The Russians demanded Shuster's removal because his gendarmes had been at least partially to blame for the clash with the Consul-General's men, and that as this had damaged Russian prestige, his position under the Convention was untenable (B.D. XI, No.848; 15th November 11, O'Beirne to Grey). Grey found it easy to accept this demand because he saw both the Stokes and Lecoffre appointments and Shuster's letter to the Times as a wanton provocation of Russia by Shuster. This provocation was of greater immediate concern to Grey than the deepening of the socio-economic crisis that Shuster's removal would cause. (B.D. XI, No.851; 17th November Grey to O'Bierne accepting Russia's demand in principle: B.D. XI, No.840 *op.cit.* for appointments of Stokes and Lecoffre: Shuster's letter to the Times of 21st October is reproduced in Shuster, Strangling of Persia, p.358ff.)
- 49 See B.D. XI, No.849; 16th November, Grey to O'Bierne
- 50 See B.D. XI, No.854; 19th November, Buchanan to Grey
- 51 B.D. XI, No.860 22nd November, Buchanan to Grey - the footnotes to this are of particular interest
- 52 On 23rd November Grey told Ponsonby in the House that he had received an assurance from St Petersburg that Russian troops would remain only until her demands were met by Persia (Hansard, 5 s, XXXI, 1354). When on his return to Whitehall Grey learned from Buchanan's communication of 22nd November that this assurance had been undermined (B.D. XI, no.860), he left the ambassador with no doubts as to his anger; 'I have given in reply to questions in Parliament only a general assurance that the advance of Russian troops was temporary [but] it is deplorable that specific assurances given [by the Russian Government] should have been set aside' (B.D. XI, No.861)
- 53 See above pp.136-7 for Grey's 'stopping the clock' metaphor
- 54 Above pp.114 ff

- 55 B.D. XI, No.845; 'I see that the Russian government having taken their view must carry their point...it is for them to make their own case' (Grey to O'Bierne, 14th November)
- 56 Grey made certain that his views were understood. See B.D. XI, no.864 (24th November):- 'We cannot in view of renewed attacks by Shuster on the Russian Government raised objections to proposed Russian demands': B.D. XI, no.871, 28th November, Grey to Buchanan:- 'The situation certainly became intolerable when the official of one government distributed attacks upon another government'. This echoes the statement made to the House on 27th November, op.cit.
- 57 Grey's statement to the House during the debate of 14th December may be taken as the definitive exposition for his public position *vis à vis* the Convention (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 2598-2613). Grey agreed with a Russian proposal demanding Persian acceptance of the Convention as a condition in any settlement - 'I do not see why we should not join in demanding recognition...it might be proposed as an alternative to one or two [excessive demands]' (B.D. XI, No.866 footnote. This was issued as an instruction to Buchanan on 30th November, B.D. XI, No.878). This view concerning restraint of Russia was echoed by Buchanan in his communication to Nicolson, 24th January 1912 - 'Our only chance...is to be on the friendliest possible terms with Russia... We shall then be able to exercise a restraining influence on her and to keep her in line with us' (cited McLean, Buffer State, p.104)
- 58 Grey continually instructed his representatives in St. Petersburg to argue for the removal of troops because he feared the consequences of mismanagement. See B.D. XI, no.887 paragraph 4, Grey to Buchanan as an illustration of this
- 59 Curzon in his speech to the Lords on 7th December, offered a well-informed critique of both the Convention and the Persian Question, outlining his fears in just such a fashion. It is certain that Grey was aware of these arguments, if not convinced like Curzon that the Convention was likely to help in their realisation. See Hansard, 5 s (Lords), X, 678-700
- 60 Grey argued this point consistently in the House; but as McLean points out, Grey and the Foreign Office increasingly pursued policy recognising that this recovery was unlikely and that the pragmatic maximisation of influence was necessary. McLean reflects upon this, citing Hirtzel - 'In the order of moral ideas we ought no doubt to stand for the independence and integrity of Persia' (27th May 1913 to Crowe) before concluding that 'in implementing...policy officials found themselves obliged to compromise standards of official conduct'; McLean, Buffer State, p.140

- 61 See McLean, Buffer State, pp.83-4. Grey argued in the Commons on 14th December that Persia could not ignore the existing interests of her neighbours (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, op.cit.) but in practice that was precisely what Shuster did, as his involvement in the Shoa-es-Sultaneh property dispute and anti-Russian propaganda in the press show (op.cit.)
- 62 Above p.142 footnote ⁵⁶
- 63 Above p.142 footnote ⁵⁷
- 64 The opposition to the military intervention is covered in footnote ⁵⁸ above. Grey to Buchanan, 30th November (B.D. XI, no.878) condemns the indemnity demand; as does Acland's answer to Morrell in the Commons on 4th December (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 1165). Grey was no doubt aware of the political capital that Russia could gain should Persia prove unable to meet any indemnity. However, his concern over possible Russian support for another attempt by the ex-Shah to return to Persia exceeded even this, as his communication to Buchanan of 5th December, which complained at Neratov's reticence in ruling out such an operation (B.D. XI, no.897)
- 65 See above p.140, footnote ⁵² for an example of this
- 66 On the one hand the Radicals condemned policy for sacrificing Persian integrity in order to maintain a 'balance of power', and called for the government to intervene against Russia so as to defend Persia. On the other hand, they opposed any intervention which would increase commitments for Persia and a diluting of her sovereign status; or indeed any policy which would force increases in Britain's defence budget. These two demands were hardly compatible
- 67 See McLean, 'Radicals, Russia and Persia', EHR 93, pp.347-8
- 68 His opposition towards military occupation, concern over atrocities, and reactions against the indemnity demand, for example
- 69 Cited McLean, 'Radicals, Russia and Persia', EHR 93, p.349
- 70 The memo enclosed in Bertie's communication to Grey of 8th December 1911 highlights this view. (B.D. XI, no.900)
- 71 McLean, 'Radicals, Russia and Persia', EHR 93, p.346
- 72 See B.D. XI, no.900, 8th December 1911, Bertie to Grey - especially the attached memo. Sazonov had been convalescing, after an illness, in Paris, and was but newly returned to duties in St. Petersburg
- 73 Grey outlined his proposals in the debate of 14th December, op.cit. His response to Swift McNeil's complaints about excessive secrecy show

- particular candour (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 2611-2)
- 74 Indeed, as Buchanan's communication to Grey of 13th December shows, Sazonov had only resumed his duties on 13th December (B.D. XI, no.903)
- 75 Grey used this form of leverage on several occasions, through Buchanan; see B.D. XI nos.875, 878, 904 for particular instances of this
- 76 Buchanan to Grey, 14th December, highlights this, especially the footnote (B.D. XI, no.904)
- 77 This was all the more important in the light of inconsistent Russian behaviour. For Grey's position vis-à-vis Parliament and Agadir on this issue, see above pp.53-5
- 78 Grey had long feared that the presence of Russian troops on Persian soil would itself provoke trouble which would prevent their withdrawal. Barclay's report of clashes between Russian forces and Persian nationalists at Resht and Tabriz on 22nd December 1911 (B.D. XI, no.907, Editor's note), and Buchanan's communiqué of 27th December, which stated that in the light of Russian casualties, Sazonov could not order a withdrawal (B.D. XI, no.909), merely confirmed those fears. However, the success enjoyed in preventing the imposition of an excessive indemnity went some way to compensating for this. As Buchanan reported on 14th December, '[Sazonov] assured me that the Russian Government would not be hard on Persia and had no intention of extorting a large sum from her' (B.D. XI, no.904)
- 79 This was reproduced in the Blue Book, 'Persia No.2, 1912' (Persia No.2 1912-13, Cd 6103, CXXII, 55, Copy of Notes exchanged between the Persian Government and the British and Russian Ministries in Tehran, 18th February 1912 to 20th March 1912)
- 80 ibid.
- 81 Letter to Dr Hodgkin, B.D. XI, no.914
- 82 And Grey was forced albeit grudgingly to concede that, in spite of his diplomatic activity, progress was slow, and problems remained. See above p.125 footnote ¹⁴
- 83 Grey was forced to concede that the Russians could not be expected to remove their troops whilst chaos persisted, in spite of his opposition to their presence already documented, and in the face of Radical criticism. See the answers given to Morrell and Dillon, 30th July 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXI, 1819), and Ponsonby, 10th October (Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 495)

- 84 The activities of Shuja-ed-Dowleh, the Russian backed Governor of Tabriz, aroused Radical concern in October 1912, and reflected the weakness of the central administration. See O'Grady, 22nd October, Hansard, 5 s, XXXXII, 1891ff
- 85 This in turn provoked the Unionist lobby in Westminster to press for more aggressive intervention on Grey's part to defend British interests in the south of Persia along the same lines as the Russians had in the north. Attacks upon consular officials prompted Lonsdale to demand action on 27th March 1912 (Hansard, 5 s, XXXVI, 417); Rees demanded that greater measures be initiated to defend commercial activity in the wake of complaints made by the Viceroy of India (Hansard, 5 s, XXXVIII, 5, 6th May 1912); and the death of Captain Eckford in December 1912 merely added weight to their campaign (see Hansard, 5 s, XXXXV, 1268, 17th December, Rees). Grey refused to initiate moves along Russian lines, fearing the cost of commitment - but he did admit that their more direct action had improved regional stability, (see his statement made during the 10th July debate op.cit.)
- 86 'Russian friendship and Persian integrity...proved incompatible', McLean, Buffer State, p.139
- 87 Cited McLean, Buffer State, p.138
- 88 This fear is clearly expressed in statements made by senior officials throughout this period, as epitomised by Nicolson's comments cited on p.132 above (footnotes ²⁸ and ²⁹). McLean, Buffer State, pp.144-5 argues this point convincingly, and concludes by observing that British hegemony on the Persian Gulf (always an aim of the 'Buffer State' policy) was only realised once the Great War forced Russia to abandon her expansionist drive through Persia. The success of the 1907 Convention rested in its 'halting of the [Russian] drive' - but even Grey came to admit that despite 'stopping the clock' in 1907, by 1914, a new approach was needed, and that 'Our whole policy in Persia calls for reconsideration' (cited McLean, Buffer State, p.138). In the final analysis, the maintainance of the principle behind British foreign policy - close ties with Russia - forced Grey to consider abandoning the apparatus by which the principle had been attained (the 'Buffer State' and restraining clauses of the 1907 Convention vis à vis Persia). The Great War, paradoxically, proved a blessing in disguise, at least as far as Britain's Central Asian strategy was concerned.
- 89 ibid.
- 90 Sazonov's visit to Balmoral, and the discussions he had with Grey on possible changes in the regency in Persia, illustrates Grey's readiness to concede ground in the interests of the Entente. B.D. IX (i), nos 803-810
- 91 Hansard, 5 s, XXXII, 2610, 14th December 1911

References - Conclusion

- 1 Martin Wight, Power Politics, p.97
- 2 See above, Introductory Chapter p.8-10

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