Parliament and the control of British foreign policy 1900-1914: with special reference to the European alliance systems

Al-Ghailany, Yusuf A.M.

YUSUF A.M. AL-GHAILANY

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ABSTRACT

In 1900, when the other European great powers were already involved in two antagonistic alliance systems, Britain remained uncommitted and isolated; in 1914, she entered the continental war on the side of one of those alliances and against the other. This thesis studies this evolution from isolation to commitment from the perspective of Parliamentary opinion, discusses what the opinion of Members of Parliament was on this momentous transition, and seeks to elucidate the question of the extent to which Parliament was informed of the objectives and methods of British policy, and the extent to which it was able to influence or control them. The main primary source used is therefore Hansard, The Parliamentary Debates (4th and 5th Series). A full discussion is offered of all of the main debates in the House of Commons between 1900 and 1914 on foreign policy, and particular attention is paid to Parliamentary opinion on the 'balance of power' in Europe and on Britain's evolving relations with the two European alliance systems. The important question is raised of the extent to which Parliament was adequately informed of important developments such as the developing military commitment to France, the growth of the Anglo-Russian connection, and the failure to reach an understanding with Germany; and the extent to which it was therefore able to influence the vital developments which led to Britain's entry into the war of 1914. An argument is offered to show that, although there was from 1909 onwards a spirited Radical campaign in Parliament against the government's policy, the majority on all sides in Parliament supported that policy and was in favour of the balance-of-power policies which led Britain into war in 1914.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This study of the extent of Parliamentary control over British foreign policy in the years before the First World War seeks to establish how far Parliamentary opinion on the one hand, and the conduct of foreign policy by the Executive on the other, were the two faces of the same coin. It may be argued that indeed they could not be separated, and that the Government could not pursue a policy which did not have the strong support of a substantial majority in the House of Commons, since in the final analysis it was Parliament which had to vote the funds which financed the execution of policy, and which would have to vote the funds for a war if the Government's handling of foreign affairs should take Britain into war (as indeed was to happen in August 1914).[1] On the other hand, it is equally clear that the conduct of foreign policy remained,within the general understanding of Britain's unwritten constitution, a jealously guarded part of the Royal prerogative, exercised on the Sovereign's behalf by the government of the day, and conducted by the Foreign Secretary assisted by the Foreign Office and Britain's diplomatic representatives abroad. Although treaties were generally made public, they did not depend on Parliamentary approval in order for their ratification to be effective; although governments made much diplomatic information available to Parliament in the form of Command Papers or Blue Books, it was they who

controlled that information and selected what should be published. By their very nature, diplomatic negotiations had to be conducted in secrecy if they were to have much prospect of success, and it was only when they had come to fruition that their outcome would be communicated to Parliament. From this point of view, it must therefore appear that there was little that the House of Commons could do to exercise detailed supervision over the day-to-day running of foreign policy; the most that it could do was to attempt to set the overall parameters within which policy was conducted, and to comment on the results.

During the period from 1900 to 1914, Britain's position in the European balance of power moved from 'splendid isolation' to an increasing involvement in Continental affairs and an increasing commitment to one side of the European balance, the Franco-Russian Alliance, this process of course culminating in the ultimate Continental policy of entry into the European land war, and the despatch of the British Expeditionary Force in 1914. By the beginning of our period, the other five European great powers were already divided into two competing alliance systems: the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy (since 1882) and the Dual Alliance of France and Russia (since 1894). Britain remained uncommitted, and her adhesion to one or other of those systems was the last and perhaps the greatest remaining prize in the diplomacy of

Europe. Around the turn of the century, while the Boer War (1899-1902) made Britain's isolation appear dangerous and the cause of much weakness in her European and in her imperial situation, it was Germany which was making the running in urging the British to end their isolation by joining the Triple Alliance; but this opportunity, if it ever really existed outside the imagination of the German Emperor and a few British enthusiasts like Joseph Chamberlain (the Secretary of State for the Colonies), was missed.[2] Instead, starting with the Anglo-French entente of 1904, and continuing with the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907, British policy appeared to draw closer to the Franco-Russian Alliance, first of all in imperial and colonial questions, but subsequently (and most noticeably after 1909) in European affairs also. In part this was seen to be the natural consequence of the rise of the German naval challenge to Britain's traditional naval supremacy (the necessary precondition for the maintenance of 'splendid isolation'): it was indeed during Britain's most obvious period of isolation, during the Boer War, that Germany's Second Navy Law of 1900 made manifest her ambition to construct a powerful, compact and modern battle fleet which would enable her to exercise naval leverage against the existing dominant naval power, Great Britain. The Second Navy Law was translated into English and published by the navalist publisher, Brassey, even before it had been formally approved by the Reichstag, so it is obvious that it was well known to British public and political opinion from the outset. The growth of the German

fleet was to exercise a powerful fascination for British opinion, and to generate increasing alarm at the collapse of the old 'Two Power Standard', which culminated in the naval scare of 1909 (sometimes referred to by historians as the 'acceleration crisis'), which produced the famous slogan 'We want eight and we won't wait'. As a result of the stormy debates in the House of Commons on the German naval programme and the alleged inadequacy of the British naval estimates, which took place in March 1909 and which are discussed later in this thesis, the navalists on the Conservative benches and in the press and public at large did not have to wait, and did get their eight.[3] But it is worth noticing that it was also from this year onwards that the term 'Triple Entente' as a description of Britain's association with the Franco-Russian Alliance became common usage in official British diplomatic correspondence, as well as in press comment.[4] In a real sense, the replacement of the old Two Power Standard by a new one-power standard directed against Germany alone made the growing association of Britain with the existing anti-German alliance in Europe both necessary for British security and also, structurally, more or less inevitable. The extent to which this was recognised by opinion in Parliament forms an important part of the discussion which follows.

Government control over the Parliamentary timetable meant that it could usually restrict the opportunities for the

House of Commons to debate foreign policy questions. It was by the beginning of the Twentieth Century accepted that treaties which involved the cession of territory required Parliamentary sanction, as did those which involved any element of subsidy or other financial payment (this provision reflecting the Commons' financial control); while of course an agreement with a foreign power which required legislation to give it effect had to secure the approval of Parliament if the legislation was to be passed. But such treaties were relatively rare and did not provide occasion for frequent debate on foreign policy in general. The annual debate following the announcement of the government's programme in the King's Speech did provide an occasion to raise foreign policy questions among other matters, an opportunity sometimes taken by backbench speakers; but it is in fact noticeable that it was more usual for domestic questions of greater apparent urgency and interest to take precedence over foreign affairs. In extreme cases, a question with foreign policy implications might be raised on a Motion of Censure brought by the Opposition but this was an unusual procedure and almost unknown in foreign policy matters. On occasion, an MP was able to raise a foreign policy question by moving the adjournment of the House, but this required the cooperation of Mr. Speaker or else the support of a substantial body of members, and was not a tactic which could be employed very frequently. It was also possible to secure a debate by moving a reduction in the

financial estimates when they were reported back to the House of Commons, but this was an infrequently successful tactic. The only routine occasion on which foreign policy matters could be regularly raised was at Question Time, and indeed, Parliamentary Questions did provide the only regular opportunity for getting at the Foreign Secretary in Parliament; but of course it is of the nature of Question Time that members could ask questions but not make speeches, and to be accepted by the Clerks and allowed by the Speaker, the questions had to be genuine (or apparently genuine) requests for information. The House invariably had to accept a refusal by the Foreign Secretary to answer a particular question on the grounds of confidentiality or the national interest, and it was almost comically easy for successive Foreign Office spokesmen to avoid providing genuine answers. For all of these reasons, it was difficult for ordinary MPs to exercise much control over the formulation and conduct of policy, and much ingenuity was displayed in the long-running tussle between successive governments and the back benches for influence over policy.

This thesis is largely derived from a detailed study of those major debates on foreign affairs which did take place in spite of the obstacles to debate which have been outlined here. The debates provide the best and most coherent indication of the climate of Parliamentary opinion, and the ways in which governments responded to it or sought to influence it. The main

primary source which has been here exploited is therefore, of course, Hansard: and eleven major debates over this fifteen-year period have been identified and studied. They are as follows:

(1) The Anglo-Japanese Alliance : 13th February 1902.

(2) East India Revenues (Tibet) : 13 April 1904.

(3) The Anglo-French Convention : 1st June 1904.

(4) The Anglo-Russian Convention : 17th Febraury 1908.

(5) Navy Estimates : 16th-22nd March 1909.

(6) Estimates : Russia and Persia : 24th March 1909.

(7) Vote of Censure : 29th March 1909.

(8) Great Britain and Germany : 27th November 1911.

(9) Debate on the Address : Persia : 21st February 1912.

(10) Supply Committee : Foreign Office
Vote : 10th July 1912.

(11) Great Britain and the European Powers :
3rd August 1914.

Occasional reference has been made to discussion in the House of Lords, but essentially, this is presented as a study of opinion in the House of Commons, as the representative chamber reflecting and responsible to public opinion.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE DEBATE ON THE ANGLO-JAPANESE ALLIANCE OF 1902

1.1 The Negotiation of the Alliance

Although British policy had been moving towards a recognition of the identity of interest between Britain and Japan in China, the period of negotiation which led ultimately to the signing of the Alliance in January 1902 was protracted. The Alliance was not a sudden event. By October 1901, the foreign offices of the two countries were already studying the implications of a bilateral agreement, and were ready to move from the stage of informal discussion to that of offical negotiation; a momentous step for both, which could not have been undertaken without exhaustive prior scrutiny.[1]

Shortly after assuming office as Prime Minister of Japan, Katsura set out for his cabinet a broad political programme which was to lead to the conclusion of an agreement of some sort with a major European power with Far Eastern interests; essentially because the problems of Japanese policy since the Sino-Japanese war of 1895 had demonstrated that it was not possible for Japan, single-handed, to advance its interests on the East Asian mainland, or to establish the desired protectorate over the Korean peninsula.[2] However, it would be a mistake to infer from this that the affairs of the Far East were to be decided in Europe, or were being resolved in accordance with the

power-political relationships within Europe. Britain in particular was looking for a way of defending its interests in China and elsewhere in the Far East, without having to enter too closely into the Continental balance of power in Europe; this could be assured by an agreement with Japan. For the British, the idea of a bilateral agreement with Japan was the natural consequence of the failure of previous attempts to achieve regional understandings with Russia or Germany.[3] The British Foreign Secretary, Lansdowne, had already considered the general lines of an agreement before he entered into real discussions with Hayashi, the Japanese Minister in London, on 16th October 1901. It was clear that the Japanese were anxious to protect their position in Korea and would resist Russian encroachments there. In this important conversation, Lansdowne and Hayashi approached the idea of a general Anglo-Japanese alliance in the Far East, including suggestions for naval cooperation (which were important to both the Admirality and the Foreign Office, perplexed as they were by the problems of securing Britain's naval security worldwide).[4] Russian progress towards an agreement with China during October 1901, and reports that Russia was also seeking an arrangement with Japan, helped to overcome British reservations about becoming too closely identified with Japanese interests, since it was evident that the Russian proposals about Manchuria were inimical to British interests there and throughout the Chinese Empire.[5] The alliance with Japan seemed to Lansdowne and his colleagues to

offer the best available means of defending those interests against Russian encroachment, and the Alliance was duly concluded on 30th January 1902.

The genesis of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 is therefore to be found in the events in China since the Boxer rebellion and the foreign intervention in the summer of 1900. The British and Japanese governments took a similar view of these events and were in close and uninterrupted communication throughout.[6] The Alliance was a natural development from this identity of view, and was necessary to define further their common interests (particularly in view of the Russian occupation of Manchuria), and to formalise the mutual obligations into which they were prepared to enter. Under the terms of the Alliance, Britain and Japan promised each other to maintain neutrality if either were involved in war with one other power in defence of their interests in the Far East; but if the enemy was a coalition of two or more powers, then they would make war in full alliance and in common.[7] In so far as Japan secured specific recognition of her special interest in Korea, while Britain obtained only a general Japanese recognition of her interests in mainland China and the Yangtse Valley, it may well be argued (as it was at the time) that the Japanese gained more of value to them than did the British. However, to Lansdowne, the mere fact of there being a treaty which delivered Britain from her previous isolation in the Far East was of inestimable value, and it provided an offset to the danger of a Russian agreement

with China over Manchuria. Furthermore, Japan now recognised and became committed to the defence of Britain's commercial interests in the Yangtse, and indeed, in October 1902, became involved in the contest with Germany over the withdrawal of foreign troops from Shanghai.[8] As for Japanese preponderance in Korea, that was strategically significant to the British, even though it was, no doubt, inconsistent with the maintenance of full independence for Korea (and Britain was now committed to accepting the legitimacy of Japanese action there if threatened by the expansionist activity of another power, namely, Russia); a Japanese ascendency was regarded as being preferable to Russian expansion.[9]

Consequently, the Alliance with Japan could be presented as a great success for British diplomacy. It could be argued that it threatened no other peaceful power, and it promised to uphold the policy of the 'open door' to commercial activity to which Britain was committed in China.[10] It treated Manchuria as an integral part of the Chinese Empire, and therefore the commitment to the integrity of China must include a commitment to upholding that principle in Manchuria as well as elsewhere (unlike the abortive Yangtse Agreement with Germany of 1900).[11] And it identified the protection of the Korean peninsula, as well as of China as a whole, as being an interest scarcely less important to Britain than to Japan.[12] That the Alliance was renewed in 1905 (ahead of time, and after the Japanese victory

in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05), and for a further ten years, is sufficient evidence of how quickly it became central to Britain's Far Eastern policy.

It did however mark a significant departure in British policy, from isolation to commitment. In defending the Alliance in the House of Lords on 13th February 1902, Lansdowne sought to deflect criticism on this score by making a virtue out of the change, and arguing that British policy could no longer be governed, in the new international climate of armed alliances, by 'any musty formulas or old-fashioned superstitions'.[13] Of course it was an alliance with a non-European power, and limited in its scope to the Far East, so that it did not have to involve Britain in the European system of alliances; indeed, in so far as it provided an alternative to a German alliance, it offered a means of making 'splendid isolation' from European entanglements easier rather than more difficult to maintain.[14] It was to be the first in a series of such regional agreements designed to shore up Britain's imperial interests in areas where they were particularly vulnerable, but since its successors (the Anglo-French Entente of 1904, and the Anglo-Russian agreements of 1907) were concluded with European powers, they did, over time, have the effect of drawing Britain inexorably into the European balance of power. It is therefore appropriate for the historian to consider, as did some far-sighted commentators at the time, whether this Alliance with Japan should be considered as marking the definitive abandonment of Britain's isolation.

1.2 The Anglo-Japanese Alliance Debated

The Treaty was laid before Parliament (though not requiring Parliamentary approval for ratification) on 11th February 1902. It appeared in the London newspapers on 12th February. It was briefly debated in the House of Lords on 13th February, and was the subject of a longer debate in the House of Commons on the same day.[15] This debate was instigated not by the Government, but by a backbencher of the Liberal Opposition; Mr. Henry Norman rose at 4.30 p.m., after questions on the business of the House, to move the adjournment 'for the purpose of discussing a matter of urgent public importance', the Japanese Alliance; though the Speaker of the House did not grant the debate until, according to the rules of procedure, not less than forty Members had risen in their places to support Norman's motion.[16] There was in the rest of the debate no indication that the Government would have provided time for a debate if it had not been forced by the Opposition.

Norman observed that the Treaty had come upon Parliament and public 'as a bolt from the blue' when it appeared in the press. He evidently believed it to be a sudden development (which, as the preceding section has shown, it was not), and he demanded to know what reason lay behind what he considered to be its hasty publication. He was in no doubt about the momentous departure in policy which the Alliance represented:

> ... the subject in question is an offensive and defensive Treaty of Alliance, involving a momentous change from the traditional foreign policy of this country, and placing the British Empire in a situation in which it might be compelled to declare war in a cause which was not of its own seeking. [17]

This of course was no more than a statement of the traditional British isolationist argument against 'entangling alliances'[18], but it came surprisingly from Norman for two reasons. The first was that he was not, in foreign affairs, on the radical or Gladstonian wing of the Party but was, in fact, recognised as a Liberal Imperialist.[19] The second was that, as a recognised authority on Far Eastern affairs, who had published on both Japan and Russia, he was a long-standing advocate of closer relations between Britain and Japan. His objections to the terms of the Treaty were therefore not wholly convincing, and the Conservative defenders of their policy were able to discredit some of his points: Cranborne pointed out his inconsistencies, and was able to assure the House that the Alliance had not been hastily negotiated or lightly entered into.[20] Nevertheless, Norman did emphasise with some conviction that the Alliance raised the danger that Britain might be drawn into conflict with France and Russia if, in a war between Russia and Japan over Korea, France were to go to Russia's assistance under the terms of their Dual Alliance (dating initially from 1894, but extended in scope in 1899).[21] He also pointed to the danger that relations with Russia, which had recently been friendly, would be worsened by the Treaty which was so pointedly directed against Russia.[22]

After the official defence of the Alliance (to which we shall come shortly), the Opposition attack was continued by the Liberal leader, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, taking further some of the arguments suggested by Norman. He expressed the fear that the Alliance would not only antagonise the Russians, but would also bring Britain into conflict with the French, and that such a war against the Franco-Russian Alliance would inexorably spread from the Far East to other parts of the world where their interests were opposed to those of Britain. Campbell-Bannerman made it clear that the official Opposition view did not envisage a change of policy in the Far East, but that closer relations with Japan should not be allowed to get in the way of improving relations with Russia.[23] Later in the debate, the former Liberal leader in the House of Commons, Sir William Harcourt, underlined Campbell-Bannerman's argument that a war arising out of the Japanese Alliance could not be restricted to the Far East:

> ... and if you are going into a war such as you are contemplating, when attacked by two Powers - everybody knows whom you mean, it is no use endeavouring to conceal it - that war will not be waged in China, Korea, or the Gulf of Pechili; it will be waged in Central Asia. It will be waged by a Power which has the capacity of pouring unlimited forces into Persia and into Afghanistan, upon your Indian frontier. In this Treaty you are staking upon the dice the peace and the future of your Indian Empire. Your fleets will be engaged not only in the China Seas, but in the Meditarranean and in the Baltic.

How much wiser, maintained Harcourt, had been the policy of successive British governments since 1815 of abstaining from

being involved in alliances whose ostensible objective was always stated to be the maintenance of peace and the status quo (as was the case with the present Treaty):

> We have maintained without these alliances now, for the better part of the century, a great and potent influence in Europe, and now we are going to abandon that policy and embark upon a future which no man can foresee.[24]

He concluded by demanding that the government should give a proper explanation of its decision to depart from 'principles which have been consecrated by the traditions of nearly a century'.[25] Although these leading Liberal spokesmen stopped short of denouncing the conclusion of a binding alliance, which they characterised as being both defensive and offensive, and maintained that they were merely seeking explanations from the government, it was striking that both the Gladstonian and the Imperialist (or Roseberian) wings of the Liberal Party were united in their misgivings about the extent to which the Alliance with Japan represented a surrender of that traditional freedom of decision and action which had kept Britain out of so many conflicts over previous decades.

The Conservative government's explanations did not make much of the line taken by Lansdowne in the House of Lords, that it was no longer wise nor desirable to adhere to the old policy of isolation in an increasingly dangerous international environment, but rather, stressed that the objectives of the new Alliance were themselves entirely peaceful and concerned with

the maintenance of the status quo in China. Lord Cranborne, who was Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office (and Lord Salisbury's son), spoke for the government immediately after Norman:

> The real origin of this Treaty was the anxiety to maintain the status quo in China ... the policy of this country is almost everywhere the maintenance of the status quo.

This, he maintained, was the case with the three main concerns of the Treaty, the integrity of the Chinese Empire, the policy of the 'open door', and the special position of Japan in Korea. These requirements were already internationally recognised, and the special position of Japan in Korea had been recognised even by the Russians.[26] The other interested governments had very largely accepted or welcomed the new agreement, which gave real assurances for the stability and expansion of Britain's very substantial commercial interests in China:

> There are two Powers - Great Britain and Japan - who have a peculiar interest in maintaining the integrity of China, and the position of Japan in the Far East, and who are peculiarly able - the one on account of her Navy, and the other on account of the nearness of her military base - to maintain that policy. Under these circumstances, the question which presented itself to the Government, and now presents itself to the House of Commons, is could we not go one step further than we went in the previous conventions and agreements which I have described to the House? Could we not go a little beyond the mere declaration of our policy of preserving the open door and maintaining the integrity of China, by defining how that policy must be carried out? [27]

The answer to that question was evidently the Alliance then before the House, and Cranborne went on to stress its 'cautious' wording, and to minimise as far as he could the obligations which it entailed. The attempt, in Cranborne's evidently carefully prepared statement, to avoid answering the disquiet expressed by Norman, was no doubt the reason for Campbell-Bannerman's sharp retort that, 'I do not know that the noble Lord has completely satisfied us.'[28] It therefore fell to the Prime Minister, A.J. Balfour (who was Lord Salisbury's nephew) to satisfy them. Balfour invariably spoke without notes, responded in his lofty but shrewd way to the argument of the moment, and was the most formidable debater on the Conservative benches; he began his speech with a certain amount of sarcasm at Campbell-Bannerman's professed uncertainties. He did not attempt to minimise the magnitude of the step represented by the Japanese Alliance, and at the end of his speech he conceded that, 'this Treaty throws an obligation on this country which might possibly be onerous'.[29] But he justified the government's policy of accepting that obligation by stressing the complete identity of interests of Britain and Japan in the Far East, and their mutual commitment to the defence of the status quo, which was moreover in the interests of all the states whose nationals traded in China. He pointedly omitted the name of Russia from his list of peaceful trading nations (though later in his speech he did refer to his government's wish for good relations with Russia), and produced his most cogent, if chilling, argument:

> There can be no greater blow to the status quo in the Far East than that two Powers should coalesce to crush either us or Japan ... If we were at war with a Power in the Far East, the value of Japan to us is clear and manifest. But is it conceivable that we should permit two Powers to crush Japan? I do not think that it is... It is neither good for us that Japan should be crushed, nor that through a coalition of two Powers she should be obliged to mould her policy in a direction antagonistic to our interests. Now that this Treaty has been carried out, it is quite evident that that contingency cannot take place.[30]

The Alliance, Balfour insisted, would act as a powerful deterrent against the possibility of Russia adopting an 'adventurous policy' in the Far East, and would thus act to strengthen those forces making for peace and stability. Balfour's arguments were almost sycophantly endorsed by Earl Percy (who was to succeed Cranborne as Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office after Salisbury's death). After alleging gross inconsistency on the part of the Opposition leaders in their attitude towards 'splendid isolation', he went on to glory in its abandonment:

> If ever there was a Treaty which justified us in departing from our traditional policy, it is this Treaty. For my own part ... I think the greatest guarantee for European [sic] peace and the peace of the Far East, and the greatest guarantee against any further acts of aggression in those parts is that you should make your intentions known and show other countries that you have the power, if necessary, to enforce them. [31]

With such forthright warnings as these being uttered in the House of Commons, it is not surprising that the Russian Foreign Minister (who had himself been hoping for an agreement with Japan) should have been disconcerted by the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.[32]

Apart from a closing speech from a Conservative back-bencher, J.C. Macdona, which was even more sycophantic towards Salisbury than Percy had been towards Balfour, the only other speeches in the debate were from two members, one Conservative (Sir Howard Vincent), and one Liberal (Joseph Walton), who both prided themselves on sitting for industrial seats, and who both agreed in the view that the Treaty was highly desirable and would be of benefit to British trade and enterprise.[33] At the end of this debate, raised by a backbencher but dominated by the front benches on both sides, Norman explained that he had moved the adjournment in order to elicit information from the government and that, having attained that objective, he would now withdraw his motion. The House then proceeded with its ordinary business.[34] The Opposition, of course, could not have secured the repudiation of the Treaty even had they wanted to; if Norman had pressed his motion, the House might have adjourned, but that would hardly have affected the government's foreign policy. In any case, the government had a large majority in the House which could be relied upon to support its policy if necessary (it will be noticed that no Conservative speaker in the debate expressed any misgivings about the Treaty). Constitutional practice did not require Parliamentary approval for a treaty of this kind. There was no cession of territory involved, no financial implications, and no consequent legislation was needed. Consequently, all that Norman and the Opposition could secure was explanations from the Government, and the

opportunity for Members of the House to express their opinions. It will be noticed that, apart from the expression of some traditional misgivings by Harcourt and other Liberals, the House of Commons appeared willing to accept what was openly admitted by Government spokesmen to be the abandonment (at least in the Far East) of Britain's traditional policy of 'splendid isolation' and its replacement by a binding defensive alliance; the Opposition's attempt to portray the alliance as being offensive as well as defensive was not sufficiently effective to persuade any Conservative speakers that it was therefore unacceptable. One underlying reason why the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was so desirable from the British point of view was that, by shoring up Britain's previously over-extended position in the Far East, it removed the need for an agreement with another European power with interests in China; it was therefore easier rather than harder to resist the blandishments of Germany, that Britain should join the Triple Alliance in return for German support in China, and consequently easier to maintain the policy of isolation in Europe by a 'calculated departure' from isolation in the restricted and comparatively remote region of the Far East.[35] This, however, was not an aspect of the matter which was dwelt upon in the debate, either by the apologists on the Government side or the critics on the Opposition benches.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE ANGLO-FRENCH ENTENTE OF 1904

2.1 Growth of the Anglo-French Understanding

As already observed, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the European great powers, excluding only Britain, had divided themselves into two competing alliances (although there was room for doubt even then about the firmness of Italy's commitment to the interests of her partners in the Triple Alliance).[1] The purpose of these alliances were primarily political and military, to promote the strength and territorial security of each of the powers, but they were also intended to advance the interests of each of them in their particular spheres of influence, to avoid any danger of conflict or intrusion there, to resolve possible causes of antagonism, and to promote the commercial interests and cooperation of the various alliance partners. The rapprochement between France and Russia, begun in 1891 and complete by the beginning of 1894, seemed likely to lead to an alliance of the two, not only against Germany and the powers of the Triple Alliance (the ostensible purpose of the agreement), but also to their cooperation against Britain. It was known in the 1890s that Britain remained generally closer in sympathy to the Triple Alliance, if only because the British recognised their common interest with Austria and Italy in preventing Russian expansion at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, and particularly Russia's acquisition of the strategically vital Straits between the Black

Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.[2] It was to some extent this adhesion of Britain to the purposes of the Triple Alliance which helped to bring about the alliance of Russia and France.[3]

It is true that the Russian government did not give the French full and unequivocal support in the acute crisis in Anglo-French relations in 1898, the Fashoda affair; but the following year the French Foreign Minister, Delcassé, secured a renewal and extension of the Franco-Russian Alliance, primarily to improve the security of the allies in south-eastern Europe, but also to facilitate future cooperation against the British.[4] And, of course, the Russians were deeply antagonised by the conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which we have already considered, which they quite rightly perceived to be directed against themselves and their ambitions in China and Korea.

So far as the French were concerned, their principal, though not their only, grievance against Britain lay in Egypt, which the British had occupied in 1882 and from which they stubbornly refused to withdraw in spite of occasional promises to do so, and frequent French demands that they should. The abortive French expedition to Fashoda was an attempt to re-assert a French presence in the Valley of the Nile, and to bring about a situation in which the British could be induced to end the occupation of Egypt, as the French wished, and end the British hegemony in the Eastern Mediterranean.[5] The interconnection of

the questions of Egypt and the Straits, and their common hostility to British power in the Eastern Mediterranean, was a powerful stimulus to Franco-Russian cooperation there, although Russian interests in Egypt were, of course, less than France's; and it was clear that if there were war between Britain and France it would be about Egypt, but if there were war between Britain and Russia, it would be about the Straits and Constantinople (and perhaps Persia too).[6] The nightmare of those who feared the dangers of Britain's isolation in European affairs as well as in the Far East was that a conflict with either France or Russia might become a conflict with both; precisely of course the anxiety on which the German Emperor counted in his plan to draw the British into a closer and more binding commitment to the Triple Alliance.[7] The Kaiser had, however, miscalculated when he supposed that the antagonism between Britain and her two main imperial rivals, France and Russia, could not be reconciled, and that Britain would in the end be forced to enter the Triple Alliance on Germany's terms. There was, as later events showed, a different strategy which Britain could follow, of reconciling the differences with France and Russia by trying to negotiate about their sources of irritation and areas of conflict. If the British and French felt themselves frustrated by their mutual hostility, and if each felt itself to suffer from the hostility of the other, then they had a strong incentive to reach an agreement which would obliterate their differences. This was

the recognition which led to the signing, on 8th April 1904, of the agreements between Britain and France which we know collectively as constituting the beginning of the Anglo-French Entente; these agreements adjusted a range of historic Anglo-French disputes in various parts of the world, of which the central part of the deal was the recognition of special interests of France in Morocco, and of Britain in Egypt.

The recognition by the British of France's special interests in Morocco was the price which they had to pay to secure French recognition of Britain's special position in Egypt. By itself, this would have made the Agreement attractive to a large section of influential British opinion, such as Lord Cromer, the great Egyptian pro-consul, who repeatedly urged upon Lord Lansdowne, the British Foreign Secretary, that no price was too high to secure French support for Britain's administration of Egypt[8]; but it had wider implications and attractions as well. The French were aware that one of Lansdowne's arguments in support of an Anglo-French settlement of outstanding disputes, and one which was particularly attractive to his colleagues in the Cabinet, was that it would probably turn out to be the precursor of a better understanding with Russia as well; a longstanding objective of Conservative policy-makers which, if achieved, would also remove the danger of the Japanese Alliance drawing Britain into conflict with Russia.[9]

Some historians consider that this last consideration was for a time the most powerful incentive to achieving an understanding with France.[10] In February 1904, Japan and Russia went to war over Manchuria and Korea. This presented the British government with the real threat of becoming involved if France were to assist Russia, since the Japanese would then be able to invoke the terms of their alliance with Britain and demand British assistance (though what the Japanese really wanted from their alliance with Britain was not British military support, but merely that British political weight should keep France and other European powers neutral). The prospect of being sucked into the Far Eastern conflict on opposing sides, and possibly seeing it therefore spread to other areas where their interests had historically been opposed, gave both the British and the French added impetus in the search for that general and comprehensive settlement which they had been pursuing since King Edward's visit to Paris in May 1903. As early as the end of 1902, the British government had come to the conclusion that it was powerless to prevent the extension of French influence in Morocco, that its own interests there were of much less importance than its interests in Egypt, and that it should therefore be possible to reach an accord which would end its difficulties in the administration of Egypt (largely caused by French opposition on the Egyptian Debt Commission) by a comprehensive settlement with France.[11] The French Foreign Minister, Delcassé, had previously hoped to achieve both the expulsion of Britain from Egypt, and also the

acquisition of Morocco by France, by means of cooperation with Germany,in spite of the long-standing Franco-German enmity which resulted from Germany's annexation of Alsace-Lorraine in 1871; but in 1900 the German government had insisted that, as an essential preliminary to such cooperation, France should join in a general recognition of the existing territorial status quo in Europe, which would of course have entailed French acceptance of Germany's possession of Alsace-Lorraine. As it was axiomatic in French politics that no minister could survive in office if it became public knowledge that he had assented to the loss of the 'lost provinces', Delcassé concluded that he could not rely upon the goodwill of Germany, nor achieve his ambitions with German help. He was at length converted by the French Ambassador in London, Paul Cambon, and by the colonialist politician, Etienne, to the alternative of an entente with the British.[12] The outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war in February 1904 thus provided only an added impetus to a process of diplomatic raprochement which was already gathering its own momentum, and which had the support of important organs of the newspaper press in both countries.[13] It would be fair to say that the Anglo-French Agreement, when published soon after its signature in April 1904, caused less surprise to British public opinion and to Parliament than had the Japanese Alliance two years previously; it also proved to be genuinely more popular and less controversial, and as we shall see, was approved by the House of Commons without a division. Although this was not an aspect of the question

much noticed in the Parliamentary debate, it was privately expected that French good offices would, in due course, lead to an improvement in relations with Russia also, which would help to relieve Britain of anxiety about the security of its Indian frontiers, as well as about Russian encroachment in China.[14] Any such development would, however, have to wait until the war between Russia and Japan was over; for the time being, the main preoccupation of the British government and the House of Commons was with the terms of the Agreement with France.

2.2 The Anglo-French Agreement : 8th April 1904

The Anglo-French Agreement fell into three parts, which were published and debated by the House of Commons, together with some secret articles which naturally remained unpublished and whose content became the source of much speculation in the press and Parliament, until they were finally published by the Liberal Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, in November 1911, when they were found to be much less sinister than had often been supposed.[15] As has been already observed, the core of the entente was the Egypt-Morocco barter, which formed the main subject of the first agreement. Britain declared that she had no intention of altering the political status of Egypt, while France undertook no longer to ask for a time limit to be placed upon the British occupation, and to support whatever means Britain judged necessary to carry out its administration;

in return, France declared that she had no intention of altering the political status of Morocco, and Britain undertook not to oppose whatever action France judged to be necessary there, but to lend it her diplomatic support. Thus Britain assigned Morocco to France's sphere of influence and France recognised British preponderance in Egypt. At the same time, both guaranteed for at least thirty years equality of commercial opportunity in their respective areas; the freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal was reaffirmed, and likewise that of the Straits of Gibraltar, where it was affirmed that the northern coast of Morocco would not be fortified. The second of the agreements contained an adjustment of competing French and British interests in Newfoundland and sub-Saharan Africa; the French surrendered their historic rights in the Newfoundland fisheries in return for a monetary indemnity from Britain, and significant British territorial concessions in Africa, involving the cession of British territory in the Gambia, Nigeria, and the Iles de Los; these concessions allowed the French to acquire some 14,000 square miles of formerly British territory (while still retaining the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon off the Newfoundland coast). Although Percy, in presenting the agreement to the House, asserted that the second agreement 'related entirely to Newfoundland', it is clear that the cessions of territory were significant to France's position in West Africa, and indeed that they were crucial in getting the French to accept the agreement, even though it did not give them the whole of

the Gambia, as they had wished. The position of the Iles de Los, directly opposite to Konakry, the capital of French Guinea, made their possession of great significance to the French, whereas their importance to the British had substantially declined since the ending of the former trade in African slaves. The third agreement constituted a general adjustment of Anglo-French differences in the whole region lying to the east of the African continent. The French surrendered their former rights in the island of Zanzibar in return for Britain's acceptance of France's position in Madagascar. The division of the peninsula of Indo-China (which we now more commonly call South-East Asia) into separate spheres of influence was agreed, with France predominant in the east of the peninsula and the British in the west. A joint administration or condominium of the disputed Pacific islands known as the New Hebrides, was to be established. In short, as Percy was at pains to emphasise to the Commons, the Agreement removed from the sphere of future controversy between the two states most, if not all, of the disagreements which had previously bedevilled relations between them; the fact that the French continued to press for the cession of the whole of Gambia is one instance of those old disputes which remained unresolved.[16] But on the whole, the Conservatives had good reason to feel satisfied that they had successfully resolve their differences with France, and that they were therefore less vulnerable to German pressure and had less need to seek Germany's support against their imperial rivals. In this sense, the French <u>entente</u>,

like the Japanese Alliance, made the preservation of Britain's isolation from specifically European entanglements easier to maintain.

The secret articles of the Agreement, however, may be held to cast doubt on this view, and would undoubtedly have occasioned comment inside and outside Parliament had they been known in 1904. Of the five secret articles, not all were particularly alarming to isolationist sentiment; the third and fourth related to France's arrangements with Spain over spheres of influence in Morocco, and were witheld from publication for largely technical reasons; the second and fifth contained assurances to the French about British intentions in Egypt. It was the first which appeared to contain an open-ended commitment which might, in due course, extend the scope of the entente well beyond the imperial bargain which it ostensibly was; it provided that, if either government found itself forced by circumstance to alter its policy in either Egypt or Morocco (which may be interpreted as diplomatic euphemism for annexation or occupation), their agreement would continue to function and each would therefore be able to count upon the diplomatic support of the other. No doubt, the British agreed to this provision because they were so eager to secure French support for their proposed reforms in the administration of Egypt, and in particular, wished to be sure of France's diplomatic pressure being applied to other European states, most notably Russia, on behalf of Britain's

desire to get the Khedivial Decree (relating to the reconstruction of the Egyptian administration) accepted by the Public Debt Commission; and no doubt they scarcely appreciated the extent to which this would, in turn, commit them to the political support of French ambitions in Morocco, as has recently been argued.[17] But it can hardly be denied that it was this provision and the British commitment to French ambitions in Morocco which it contained, which led the British government to stand beside France in the first Moroccan crisis, which erupted little more than a year after the signing of the Agreement and which for a few months appeared to raise the danger of a Franco-German war in which Britain would be involved. This British support was, indeed, largely and publicly confined to the diplomatic sphere, but it also generated a military dimension which had not been envisaged in the original agreement, but which was embodied in the secret Anglo-French 'military conversations' which began in January 1906.[18] These developments were, of course, unknown to Parliament, just as the secret articles remained unknown in substance until their publication in 1911. On the other hand, it should be emphasised that the secret articles, like the published agreements, did not envisage Anglo-French cooperation in European questions; they did not in any way commit Britian to the European alliance system on the side of France and Russia, and against Germany; and they did not provide for military or naval, as opposed to diplomatic, cooperation between Britain and France in either colonial or European questions. In keeping the secret articles secret, the

Conservative government was not witholding from Parliament information about a political or military commitment to France or to the Franco-Russian alliance in the European balance of power; for no such commitment was entailed in the terms on which the Anglo-French entente was concluded. The entente was not, in either its published or its secret formulation, addressed to the European balance of power; and it was not a military alliance. As Dr. Monger has so pertinently observed, Lansdowne's 'natural preoccupation had been with imperial and naval affairs', while it was his Liberal successor, Grey, whose 'thoughts were increasingly concentrated on Europe'.[19]

2.3 The Debate on the Anglo-French Agreement

The debate in the House of Commons took place on 1st June 1904.[20] This is an example of a debate which took place in the time allotted to government business, for the very good reason that the Agreement required the sanction of Parliament for two reasons: it involved the payment to the French of financial compensation for the loss of economic rights in the Newfoundland fisheries; and it involved the cession of territory in West Africa. In this respect the Commons debate was quite unlike that on the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, moved by Norman on a motion to adjourn (as we have seen in Chapter One); the substantive debate on the Anglo-French

entente was, technically, on the second reading of a Parliamentary Bill, the Anglo-French Convention Bill, and was introduced by the Government's official spokesman on foreign affairs in the House of Commons, Earl Percy, who was the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Percy, however, made it clear that the House was free to debate the merits of the Agreement as a whole, and was not confined to the specific provisions of the Bill; indeed, he was evidently anxious that they should be considered in their wider context, since the Bill was exclusively devoted to the financial and territorial concessions to be made by Britain, while the compensating advantages which Britain would thus obtain were contained in the Agreement but not in the Bill.[21] In his presentation of the Agreement, he emphasised that while Britain surrendered some rights and interests, she also gained a great deal that she had long attempted to secure. In Morocco, she effectively surrendered nothing that she actually possessed, but did secure a French guarantee of the open door to commercial enterprise, and therefore British trade could expect a real advantage as a result. He maintained that the cessions of territory in West Africa were of no great significance, while the surrender of French rights in Newfoundland put an end to a long-standing anomaly in the dual ownership of some of its territory. Above all, he emphasised the enormous benefits to the British administration of Egypt which must follow from the ending of French obstruction and its replacement by French

support, thus freeing Britain to embark on the major reform of that administration which was embodied in the Khedivial Decree. As his final justification for the Agreement, he looked forward to a new era of Anglo-French cooperation in 'Africa, as well as in Asia'; he did not mention Europe.[22]

While Percy was the opening speaker for the Conservatives, it was Balfour, the Prime Minister and his Party's leading foreign policy expert, who wound up the debate for the Government; perhaps an indication of the importance which he attached to the new treaty. After dealing in his customary lofty manner with some of the detailed criticisms which had been made in the debate, he addressed himself to the allegation that the Agreement represented a 'complete reversal of Lord Salisbury's foreign policy' (that is, the policy of isolation from European entanglements), and that it would be a barrier to any subsequent agreement with Germany, which the government in Salisbury's time had sought to achieve. These charges he categorically rejected:

> I entirely deny there has been any reversal of the traditional policy of our Party. I entirely deny that anything has been done prejudicial to the interests of Germany or any other Power. It would indeed be a blot upon our Agreement with France, from which we hope so much for the peace and amity of the world, if it were regarded as a stumbling-block in the way of similar arrangements with other Powers in other parts of the world. [23]

He then went on to stress in forceful and eloquent language the advantage to both Britain and France of removing old sources of

friction between them, and to insist that it was:

> ... the common verdict of both sides of the House ... that this great instrument will be looked back upon as the beginning of a new and happier era in our international relations. [24]

Throughout his speech it was the global detente between Britain and France which he emphasised, as had Percy; and, as we have seen, he denied that the Agreement in any way altered the European balance of power.[25] Such was the gist of the official Conservative justification of the Anglo-French Agreement.

Balfour was right when he said that the Liberal opposition also supported the Agreement. Both Grey and Campbell-Bannerman spoke eloquently of the benefits which they expected to follow from the Agreement, and adopted what was, in effect, a bi-partisan attitude towards it. Sir Edward Grey's contribution was particularly significant since, as a former Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (under Rosebery) he was an acknowledged expert in the field and was indeed a likely candidate to become Foreign Secretary in a future Liberal administration (as he did in December 1905). That he, well known to be a convinced Liberal Imperialist as well, should have been chosen to put the Liberal view immediately after Percy had finished was a clear indication that, in this matter at least, the official line of the Liberal Party would be an imperialist one, and therefore supportive of the Conservative achievement.[26] While conceding that, as a kind of commercial bargain between the two countries, the

Agreement might be open to objection on points of detail, Grey praised it almost extravagantly 'from the point of view of general policy', and looked forward to the increasingly close Anglo-French cooperation which he believed it would bring:

> Take Article 9, for instance of the Agreement which related to Egypt and Morocco, 'The two Governments agree to afford one another their diplomatic support in order to obtain the execution of the clauses of the present declaration regarding Egypt and Morocco'. The words 'declaration regarding Egypt and Morocco' are in themselves somewhat vague, and the phrase 'diplomatic support' is again vague. Everything depends upon the spirit and not the letter; but it is precisely because so much does depend on the spirit that there are, in that clause alone, great opportunities, looking to the probabilities of future politics, for the two nations using the Agreement, by a liberal interpretation of that article, to draw closer to each other. There will be continual opportunities of befriending each other under that one clause alone, if it be interpreted in the spirit in which I believe the Agreement is conceived. [27]

This broad interpretation may be seen as going some way beyond the formulations even of Percy and Balfour, towards envisaging a developing cooperative relationship over a wide area of policy; and it may be observed that it was indeed Grey as Liberal Foreign Secretary who, in January 1906, authorised strict British support for the French position in Morocco at the Conference of Algeciras, agreed to the 'military conversations' between the two General Staffs being made official, and gave Cambon the nearest that he could get to a British commitment to

the defence of France, without actually taking the matter to the Cabinet.[28] There does indeed, as this speech of Grey's suggests, seem to be some force in Monger's contention that it was Grey rather than Lansdowne who saw the French entente in European as well as in imperial terms.[29] However, he went on to further justify the Agreement as assisting Britain to consolidate her existing position in the world and impose restraint on the danger of further imperial expansion; he welcomed the Agreement unreservedly, and pleased the Liberal benches by expressing the hope that it would serve as a 'working model' for other such agreements.

The importance of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's declaration of support for the Agreement was not merely that, as Leader of the Liberal Opposition, his words set the seal on bi-partisanship, but more particularly that he was in foreign affairs a Gladstonian Liberal rather than an imperialist, and therefore his endorsement meant that both wings of the Liberal Party would support the Agreement. He praised it as:

> ... a great instrument for bringing together two neighbouring nations and two old rivals ... and for promoting friendship and co-operation between the two nations. [30]

He concluded with the expectation that the House would share the 'general feeling of the country', which he declared to be 'one of intense satisfaction at the conclusion of this convention'. With such endorsements from the two leading spokesmen for the Opposition, Balfour could afford to be complacent and to shrug

off the criticisms offered from the benches behind him as well as from some Opposition speakers. As we have seen, the motion was agreed without a division, the second reading of the Bill approved, and its third reading (a mere formality) committed for the following day.

In between these four speeches from the front benches, two from each side giving the official Ministerial and Opposition views, there were seven speeches from the back benches, three from the Conservative side and four from the Liberals, and it was in these speeches that such criticisms of the Agreement as the House made were offered. Among these speakers, there were the two most formidable back-bench experts on foreign affairs, Thomas Gibson Bowles (Conservative) and Sir Charles Dilke (Liberal). Gibson Bowles was an independent-minded Tory, perhaps even a maverick, who had a long record of embarrassing his own front bench on a range of issues connected with foreign affairs, imperial defence, and finance (as a result of which he was never rewarded with office in spite of his obvious talents).[31] Bowles managed to combine the most original arguments of the whole debate, both for and against the Agreement, in a single speech; he enjoyed some amusement at the expense of the mutual admiration expressed by Percy and Grey, condemned the imperial core of the bargain, and then welcomed it as a return to the traditional policy of the balance of power in Europe:

> These two declarations together amount in Egypt, Siam and Morocco, to no less than the partition of three new Polands - to a compact of plunder. It will not, and cannot come to good either for England or for France. I have felt it right to criticise the convention from that point of view. But I must now say that from a European point of view ... this Agreement is of the highest import and may be of the greatest advantage. .... This present Agreement with France is a return to the older, simpler, and as I think, better system of the balance of power ... The balance of power, instead of being an arrangement to keep the peace of Europe by an agreement between all the Powers [as had been the case with the Concert of Europe], is an arrangement to keep the peace by an Agreement between two or three Powers. ... This balance of power ... is an effectual method of keeping aggressors in order ... I believe that no combination can be so effectual in producing a balance of powers as the combination of England and France and, from that point of view, I think great good may result. There are not absent from Europe at the present moment dangerous elements. ... There are stalking through Europe ambitions which must be curtailed and which may be developed to a greater extent than seems [likely] at present. Against such it is well to raise a visible barrier in England and France.[32]

Without mentioning Germany by name, Bowles appealed to the concept of the balance of power so overtly as to make it quite clear that he regarded the Anglo-French entente as in effect a European alliance directed towards the control of German ambitions (as indeed we know that the French regarded it).[33] This was an interpretation which went far beyond anything offered by the two front benches on the subject, and indeed constitutes one of the most striking statements (in Parliament at least) in this period of Britain's vital interest in maintaining a European balance against Germany.

Nor was Gibson Bowles alone in supposing that the ulterior purport of the Agreement was anti-German. This view was also supported, if only obliquely, by the Liberal Sir Charles Dilke, who was acknowledged to be the foremost authority on the Liberal benches on all matters of imperial defence and foreign affairs. Having entered the House of Commons as early as 1868, he quickly became, with Joseph Chamberlain, one of the leading radicals in domestic questions, but first held office as Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office (1880-82) under Lord Granville in the Gladstone administration of 1880-1885. From that experience he developed an abiding commitment to the defence of Britain's imperial interests and, deprived of all prospects of cabinet office by his involvement in the most celebrated divorce case of the 1880s, made himself by travel, study and writing, an unrivalled expert on a wide range of public questions, but primarily foreign policy and defence. Having congratulated the Government on bringing the Agreement before Parliament at all, he went on to assert (erroneously) that 'Lord Salisbury's idea was always a German alliance' and that, consequently, the entente represented an:

> ... extraordinary new departure in the foreign policy of the country, the completeness of the reversal of the policy of Lord Salisbury, and the complete acceptance by the Government of the views we have been urging for years on this side of the House. [34]

Dilke supported Grey's approbation of the Agreement as a vital resolution of old Anglo-French antagonisms, and although he

could not resist displaying his expertise in criticism of detailed aspects of it, he summed up strongly in favour of the Agreement.[35] A close reading of his remarks suggests that one of Dilke's reasons for approving the rapprochement with France was that it would put an end to the old project (properly associated with Chamberlain rather than with Salisbury) for an accommodation with Germany; he did not go nearly as far as Gibson Bowles in regarding it as a positive barrier against German ambitions.

The remaining back-bench speeches were, by comparison, lacking in interest and authority. Three Opposition back-benchers (Robson, Walton and Emmott) objected to those provision in the agreement which, they maintained, sacrificed British commercial interests to the French, especially in Morocco and Siam, and criticised the failure to obtain satisfactory compensatory advantages. Two Conservatives (Moon and Rollitt) seemed to find it necessary or politic to defend the already impregnable position of their government in these matters.[36] Gibson Bowles had already indicated the withdrawal of his critical amendment to the motion, and Balfour, in his reply to the debate, concentrated on refuting Dilke's allegations about the reversal of the foreign policy of Lord Salisbury, rather than on commenting upon the much more interesting observations of Gibson Bowles on the European balance of power. The outcome was that an undivided House endorsed the Bill and therefore the policy of the Anglo-French Agreement; as did the House of Lords when it took the second

reading of the Anglo-French Convention Bill in August. In that debate, it was not what was said (by Lansdowne for the Government and by Ripon for the Opposition) which was interesting, since both spoke blandly in favour of the Agreement; but what was not said by Lord Rosebery. Rosebery was already known to be a critic of the entente with France, unlike his acolytes in the Commons such as Grey; and as a former Prime Minister as well as Foreign Secretary, his criticisms would have been potentially damaging to the Government's policy, and also to the prospects both of Liberal Imperialism and of bi-partisanship and continuity in foreign policy. But on this occasion, as on others, Rosebery (who was already withdrawing from active participation in Liberal politics into a kind of sulky disdain) chose not to exercise the undoubted influence which he possessed, had he cared to use it.[37]

The outcome of the debates in Commons and Lords was a resounding endorsement from Opposition as well as Government supporters for the new course of entente with France. It was widely justified in terms which were generally imperial rather than European, and which stressed the desirability of removing sources of friction with France rather than building defences against Germany; nor was the ulterior objective of an understanding with Russia given any publicity. Only Gibson Bowles, the maverick Tory, and to a degree Dilke,

the independent Liberal, noticed the longer-term European and balance of power implications, and their observations did not apparently elicit any response at that time. But if their remarks are read in conjunction with Grey's ardent advocacy of increasing Anglo-French intimacy, then it appears that the House of Commons was in a sense alerted to the future implications of the Agreement. It preferred, however, to remain with the Government's more anodyne justifications; and it may be noted that, in the absence of any intervention by Rosebery, there was no principled criticism of the underlying direction which British policy was not to take.

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CHAPTER THREE

BRITAIN, RUSSIA AND THE 'FORWARD POLICY' : THE CASE OF TIBET, 1904

3.1 The Anglo-Russian Rivalry in Asia to 1904

We have now seen that both of the treaties which definitively ended Britain's period of 'splendid isolation', the Japanese Alliance of 1902 and the French entente of 1904, were profoundly influenced by the problem of relations with Russia, the greatest threat to Britain's imperial interests in Asia. The former was an attempt (successful, as the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05 demonstrated) to find an ally to restrict the threat of Russian expansion in China: this imperative was made explicit in the Parliamentary debate on the Alliance. The latter was both an attempt (again successful) to avoid Britain being drawn into war against the Franco-Russian Alliance and also (and hopefully) the precursor of an improved bilateral relationship with Russia herself. Though this aspect of the French Agreement of 1904 was not recognised in the debate in Parliament, it was an object of French diplomacy to bring Britain and Russia closer together in an anti-German coalition, just as it was an object of British policy to end the rivalry with Russia by a comprehensive settlement of areas of conflict in Asia - not merely in China (which was largely resolved by Japan's victory in 1905), but more particularly in those regions of Central Asia which lay

between the frontiers of the Russian and Indian Empires, and which included the remote but strategically sensitive region of Tibet. After a period of prolonged and intense suspicion and friction between Britain and Russia during the Conservative administration, the projected Russian rapprochement was eventually achieved under the Liberal government of Campbell-Bannerman, with Grey as Foreign Secretary, in the Anglo-Russian Convention of August 1907.[1]

One of the three areas covered by the agreements of 1907 was Tibet, which had been a source of friction between Britain and Russia since the turn of the century, and which had provoked an acute crisis in Anglo-Russian relations at the time of the British military expedition to Lhasa, commanded by Sir Francis Younghusband, in 1903-04. The Younghusband expedition provoked the only foreign policy debate in the House of Commons during the Conservative administration of 1900-05, which was seriously unwelcome and embarrassing to the Government.[2]

It is not difficult to account for the long delay in achieving a settlement of outstanding questions with Russia, which was the ultimate foreign policy ambition of both Conservative and Liberal politicians.[3] The Anglo-Japanese Alliance had been taken as a threat and an affront by the Russian government, and Britain's pro-Japanese orientation during the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05 confirmed Russia's

worst suspicions of British hostility. This antagonism reached its most acute phase during that war, as a result of the Dogger Bank affair of October 1904 (in which Russia's Baltic fleet, on its way to the Far East and its ultimate destruction at the hands of the Japanese in the battle of the Tsushima Strait, fired upon and sank some vessels of a British fishing fleet in the North Sea). This episode created severe resentment in British public and political opinion and brought the two countries to the brink of war, which was averted only by the deliberately restrained policy of the Balfour government and by the Russian government's recognition of its fleet's vulnerability to Britain's naval preponderance in European waters; the French were therefore able to mediate a settlement which avoided recourse to an Anglo-Russian war.[4] But it was a further obstacle to any improvement in Anglo-Russian relations so long as the war in the Far East continued, and before its conclusion in the Peace of Portsmouth of 5 September 1905 (the result of American rather than British mediation and pressure).[5] The outbreak of revolution in Russia precluded for the time being any substantive diplomatic discussions between the two governments. It was not until May 1906, when the new Liberal administration had been in office in Britain for almost six months and a new Ambassador, Sir Arthur Nicolson, was despatched to St. Petersburg, that the time was judged to be ripe for an attempt to reach a settlement with Russia.[6] It was therefore not the Tibetan crisis of 1904 alone which was responsible for the problems in Anglo-

Russian relations, and which delayed the movement towards reconciliation which bore fruit in 1907; but the Tibetan question was one of the three important matters dealt with in the Anglo-Russian Convention of that year, the terms in which it was dealt with were very much influenced by the crisis provoked by Younghusband's mission, and the terms in which the Tibetan Convention was concluded did evidently owe a good deal to the manner in which Parliament, the Liberal Opposition, and even to a degree the Conservative Government itself, had viewed the Tibetan question as it was manifested in the affair of the mission. It was partly the desire to avoid additional causes of friction with Russia, but also a reaction against the 'forward policy' (the aspiration toward further and continual expansion of the frontiers of the Indian Empire at the expense of its weaker neighbours) which informed the Parliamentary debate.

The debate on Tibetan policy, which took place in the House of Commons on 13th April 1904 on a government motion relating to the East India revenues, although it did not cover the whole field of Anglo-Russian relations in Asia was, nevertheless, full of interesting insights into their state in the difficult months following the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05. It will here be necessary to review briefly the animosity which was characteristic of Anglo-Russian relations in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries.[7]

In Asia, it was the inexorable advance of the frontiers of the Russian Empire in Central Asia towards the frontiers of British India which appeared to the British to pose a serious threat to their security in India, despite the protection of the towering mountains which guarded India's frontiers, and despite the long and difficult march which any advancing Russian army would have to make before it could become a real menace. In Europe, it was the long-standing Russian ambition to secure control of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, and thus gain access by sea to the Eastern Mediterranean which was most threatening to British security. This problem had already led Britain to go to war against Russia in 1854, and to take the leading role in curtailing Russian ambitions at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. After that check, the Russians concentrated most of their energies on further expansion in Asia, leading to increasing tension and occasional crises in the relations between the two great imperial powers during the 1880s and the 1890s. The Russian advance in Central Asia led British policy-makers to feel great alarm about the security of India, and to seek ways of checking any further expansion. It was partly the difficulty of checking Russian expansion in Asia without allies in Europe which led British statesmen such as Chamberlain to question the continuing validity of the policy of isolation; on the other hand, a direct understanding with Russia became correspondingly more attractive to those such as Salisbury, and later Grey, who were determined to avoid Britain

becoming too dependent on the patronage of Germany; from the late 1890s onwards, Germany was already emerging both as a colonial rival in Africa and in the Pacific, and as a growing naval power in European waters (a subject to which we shall of course have to return in a later chapter). The natural alternative to the policy of alliance with Germany was the settlement of causes of friction with Germany's European opponents, France and Russia. The efforts of Salisbury's Conservative government from 1895 onwards to restore Britain's international position may be seen to have reached their culmination in the French entente of 1904, but above all in the Russian Convention of 1907, concluded by their Liberal successors. Among the milestones along the route to the 1907 Convention may be mentioned the Anglo-Russian agreement on China and Korea signed in St. Petersburg on 28 April 1899; under the terms of this agreement, both sides renounced any intention of infringing the sovereign rights of China in regard to railway development: a renunciation evidently more sincere on the part of the British than of the Russians, but clear evidence of the evolution away from the policy of strict isolation taking place in the late years of Salisbury's administration. That sense of isolation was much heightened by the crisis in Britain's relations with other European powers, notably Russia, occasioned by the Boer War of 1899-1902, which enabled the Russians to improve their position in Persia unilaterally.[8]

Persia was without doubt the primary area of Anglo-Russian rivalry along with the Central Asian areas around Afghanistan and Tibet. Russian activity in northern Persia made great progress during the late 1890s and the early 1900s, and began even to threaten the traditional supremacy of Britain in southern Persia and the region of the Persian Gulf (the conventional terminology used by the British to refer to the Gulf in this period). So acute did anxiety on this score become that the British government felt it necessary to warn the Russians that Britain would not assent to their penetration to the shores of the Gulf, and that if Persia were put under intolerable pressure to make concessions to Russia in the south, Britain would not hesitate to abandon her traditional policy of support for the independence and integrity of Persia, and would take any necessary counteraction in the Gulf. The situation in the Gulf was by this time further complicated by the prospect that the German project for a railway to Baghdad, with a probable extension to the head of the Persian Gulf at Kuwait, was likely to be realised with the enthusiastic approval of the Ottoman government.[9]

Even before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, the Dogger Bank affair, and the Younghusband expedition to Lhasa, therefore, relations between Britain and Russia were strained across the whole area of their rivalry, but above all in those areas which were regarded by the British as being strategically sensitive to the defence of India. It was ultimately mediation

between Russia and Britain by the French which was to prove effective in promoting the reconciliation of the two great imperial rivals in Asia. At the end of October 1903, the Russian foreign minister, Count Lambsdorff, visited Paris and held talks with his French counterpart, Delcassé. Lansdowne had already had discussions with the French ambassador in London, Cambon, about the problems in Anglo-Russian relations, and had sought to enlist French assistance in persuading the Russians to take a more constructive position. At this stage the Russians, still expecting to achieve great gains in the Far East without having to make significant concessions to the Japanese or to their British allies, were unwilling to enter into serious negotiations, and the escalating confrontation between Russia and Japan over Manchuria and Korea naturally made Anglo-Russian relations increasingly difficult. By the beginning of 1904, with war between Japan and Russia increasingly probable, the prospect of constructive negotiations between London and St. Petersburg had for the time being disappeared. The outbreak of war between Russia and Japan on 9 February 1904 only completed the process whereby improved relations between Britain and Russia were frustrated by the ambitions of Russia and the inability of the British to offer her any sufficient concessions.[10] Even so, contact was maintained, as for instance in the friendly conversation which Edward VII held with the Russian Minister in Copenhagen on 14 April 1904; future events were to make this more significant than it might otherwise have

been, since the Russian Minister was Alexander Isvolsky, who was to become Russia's foreign minister after the 1905 revolution and who was to be, with Grey, the main architect of the Convention of 1907.[11] In addition, and after the conclusion of the Anglo-French entente, the French continued to work for an Anglo-Russian rapprochement and to prevent the frictions of the Russo-Japanese war (particularly the Dogger Bank crisis) from producing an irremediable rupture in relations. Even though he had himself been driven from office by the time the negotiations between Grey and Isvolsky got underway in the spring of 1906, they were a real success for the patient diplomacy of the French foreign minister, Delcassé. There was no lack of willingness on the part of the Conservatives during the declining months of their administration to explore the prospects of an understanding with a Russian government chastened by its defeat at the hands of Japan. After the renewal of Britain's alliance with Japan, and the restoration of peace between Russia and Japan, the French found a ready response to their probings on an Anglo-Russian accord in London. The movement towards the negotiations which finally produced the agreements of August 1907 may be dated from 3rd October 1905, when the Russian ambassador sounded out the Conservative foreign secretary, Lansdowne, about the possibilities of an improvement in Anglo-Russian relations.[12]

In Anglo-Russian relations there was, therefore, much reason for hostility but also the possibility of reconciliation, particularly if the Russians were prepared to moderate their

expansionist ambitions in Central Asia in return for reaching a wider understanding with Britain which would be in the power-political interests of both empires. The question of Tibet in 1904 offers a good example of both tendencies, and a clear demonstration of Britain's willingness to subordinate imperial ambitions for the sake of stability on the frontiers of empire.

3.2 The Tibetan Question and the Younghusband Expedition

From at least 1900 onwards there had been persistent and apparently well-substantiated rumours of Russian intrigue in Tibet, which raised the prospect in the minds of the British of a Russian protectorate on India's north-east frontier, just beyond the client states of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan; and with the ability to threaten the stability of that frontier through the strategically sensitive southern extremity of Tibet, the Chumbi Valley.[13] The Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, was determined to frustrate what he saw as a Russian forward policy on India's north-east frontier, and in January 1903 he was recommending to the India Office in London that a mission should be despatched to Lhasa which would impose agreement on the Tibetans over a whole range of questions, including the failure of Tibet to implement previous agreements on frontier questions, and would regulate the future relations of Tibet with India in a sense favourable to Indian interests and the extension of Indian influence. The mission he proposed was to be accompanied by an appropriate military force, and it would be able to convince the

Tibetans that they could not play Russia off against Britain but must abandon that attempt and come to a closer understanding with Britain.[14] The Cabinet in London was not disposed to allow Curzon to adopt a forward policy of his own in order to meet the forward policy of Russia in Tibet, and would not sanction a military mission. But it accepted that negotiations with Tibet on the frontier question and on trade relations were necessary in themselves, and so sanctioned the sending of a diplomatic mission led by Francis Younghusband (an officer in the Indian army whose vigorous espousal of the forward policy had attracted Curzon's notice); the mission was to advance no further into Tibet than was necessary to make diplomatic contact with the Tibetan negotiators. It was the failure of this diplomatic mission to find any competent authority with which it could negotiate which (as Curzon had evidently expected and intended) required it to advance deeper and deeper into Tibet, first of all to Gyangtse, and ultimately to Lhasa itself; and which also led to its being given a military escort for its protection. Even when the British government found itself in the position of having after all to agree to what had in effect become a military expedition, it still sought to maintain the fiction of its purely peaceful character for its own parliamentary reasons. There were two reasons for this, one general and one particular. The general one was that the Conservative government seems to have been genuine in its reluctance to embark on another imperial adventure at Curzon's behest, so soon after the troubles brought on it by the South African war into which it had entered at the

behest of another great imperial pro-consul, Lord Milner. It was genuinely concerned to minimise the importance of the mission, and to avoid the protests which would follow in the press and in the House of Commons if the mission led to war. At a place called Guru in Tibet, on 31 March 1904, the well armed, though heavily outnumbered, Younghusband mission fought a battle with a large Tibetan force, leaving seven hundred Tibetans dead; once news of this engagement reached the British press, there could no longer be any hope of concealing the military character of the mission, and the agitation in the British press became more intense.[15]

The other reason, and a more particular one, was that the mission, if acknowledged to be a military enterprise, would be in clear violation of the Government of India Act of 1858 which, in paragraphs 54 and 55, prohibited the use of Indian forces beyond the frontiers of India without the House of Commons having approved the expenditure. During the early week of the session of 1904 a number of backbenchers, including the government's own supporters such as Thomas Gibson Bowles, as well as the more predictable Liberals and Radicals, had produced a stream of embarrassing parliamentary questions on this aspect of the mission, and there had been some warning sounds even in the House of Lords.[16] Once it admitted that the mission was a military one, the government would have to seek Parliament's approval under the terms of the Government of India Act, and its attempts to avoid the embarrassment of a debate in the House of

Commons would fail. On 13 April 1904, the secretary of state for India, Brodrick, wrote to inform Curzon that a number of Conservative backbenchers had threatened to vote against the government unless it was able to satisfy the House that the policy on Tibet had not changed from the previous November, when its pacific policy had been publicly emphasised.[17] The slaughter at Guru thus had the effect of compelling a reluctant Cabinet to concede a debate on Tibet, and to emphasise that there was no intention of annexing any territory or of establishing any kind of permanent representation there. On 13 April 1904, Brodrick moved for the government:

> That this House consents to the revenues of India being applied to defray the expenses of any military operations which have or may become necessary beyond the frontiers of His Majesty's Indian Possessions, for the purposes of protecting the Political Mission which has been despatched to the Tibetan Government.

Full debate then finally ensued.[18]

3.3 The Debate 'East India Revenues (Tibet)', 13 April 1904

As we have seen, this debate (like that on the Bill giving effect to the Anglo-French Convention which was shortly to follow it, but unlike that on the Anglo-Japanese alliance) was held in government time and on a government motion, because the right of Parliament to assent to expenditure was involved, and indeed in this case enshrined in statute, the Government of India Act of 1858. The Secretary of State for India, St. John Brodrick, in introducing his motion, had a number of unhappy

tasks of which perhaps the most difficult was to defend the Viceroy Lord Curzon from the widely held and widely expressed accusation that he was an exponent of the forward policy who had intrigued to involve Britain in a blatant example of it in Tibet. He had also to seek to minimise the policy differences between the British government and Curzon, and to insist that he and his colleagues approved of the mission (including its advance deeper into Tibet under the protection of a military escort), while Curzon was fully and indeed enthusiastically in support of the restricted definition of the mission's stated objectives as expessed in the celebrated telegram of 6 November 1903, which had been published in the Blue Book on Tibet issued by the government a few weeks previously, in response to the agitation in press and Parliament.[19] He seems to have succeeded better in the former than in the latter objective , stressing that any diplomatic mission in those wild regions had to be accompanied by a force for its protection, and praising the wise and pacific policies of Curzon. He stressed that the decision to allow the mission to advance into Tibet was taken only after the patience and diplomacy of Younghusband and the Indian government had been exhausted by the evasive tactics of the Tibetans (who in effect refused to appear), and also as the culmination of a long period of violations by Tibet of Agreements such as that of 1890, which was supposed to demarcate the frontier between Tibet and Sikkim. At the same time, observed Brodrick, the Tibetans had been pursuing closer relations with

Russia as a counterweight to Britain, and thus increasing the danger of a Russian presence on the Indian frontier. The Indian government could not acquiesce in any change in the political status quo in Tibet, and the despatch of the mission to ensure a resolution of these problems had become a necessity; the security of Indian required that no external power other than British India should control Tibet, and the Tibetans had to be brought to recognise British ascendancy and to regulate their relations with Britain accordingly. Brodrick then moved the adoption of the resolution standing in his name, and sat down.[20]

He was supported later in the debate by his predecessor at the India Office, Lord George Hamilton, who in a more effective speech than Brodrick's also dwelt on the long and patient efforts of the Indian government to get Tibet to implement the Convention of 1890, adding that:

> ... while I was at the India Office [between 1895 and 1902] I think we perhaps erred on the side of patience and forbearance.

He also stressed the danger to British interests of a Russian presence in Tibet, and the difficulty of placing reliance on the assurances offered by Russian diplomats:

> It is easy enough for a great country like Russia to undertake not to hoist her flag; but if one of her officials does hoist it, it becomes very difficult to remove it; and, if the Russians did not do so, the Tibetans would suppose they had the support of the whole power of Russia.[21]

The ringing endorsement that the government adhered to the policy of the telegram of 6 November 1903 (that there would be no annexation of Tibet or Tibetan territory, no military occupation, and no permanent diplomatic representative installed) was left to the third official spokesman for the government, the Prime Minister himself. Closing the debate for the proposition, he criticised the Opposition (to whose arguments we shall turn shortly) for minimising the causes that had legitimately entitled Britain to send the Younghusband mission into Tibet, and for being unsuitably sceptical about the nature of Russian intrigues there:

> It must be distinctly understood that if Tibet were, by any unhappy accident, to become the centre for intrigue and influence of any power other than Tibet, our difficulties and our responsibilities would not be diminished, but greatly increased by leaving Tibet alone.

Like his colleagues, he paid fulsome tribute to Curzon, but on the other hand, his references to the celebrated telegram must have extinguished any hopes that Curzon and the advocates of the forward policy may still have entertained that the government could be won over to any advance of imperial control in the direction of Tibet:

> The telegram of the 6th November 1903, which does not stand alone in the Blue Book as representing the views of His Majesty's Government, but merely repeats, in very precise terms, the general policy of His Majesty's Government indicated throughout the whole [of the Blue Book] - that telegram was most carefully considered by the Cabinet before it was sent. It represented a policy - not merely a departmental of the Secretary of State [for India] in Council, but it

> also represented the carefully thought out views of the Government. It represented those views on 6th November 1903; it represents those views in April 1904. No change whatever has occurred; and I do not think that any change is likely to occur ... We do not want to add any further responsibilities to the difficulties which are constantly weighing upon the statesmen who have in their charge the destinies of our Eastern Empire.[22]

This declaration, which clearly represents the Balfour ministry's formal rejection in public of Curzon's forward policy (however much it was accompanied by praise for his noble services to India), was quite sufficient to rally the government's own supporters to vote for the motion: although there had been some backbench Conservative criticism in the debate, there were no Conservative votes cast in the division against the government. Indeed, a small number of Liberals, including the redoubtable Sir Charles Dilke, voted with the government, while the great majority of the Liberals followed their Party leaders in abstaining. In a sense then the debate turned into a triumph for the government, to such an extent that one may legitimately wonder why they had sought to avoid the debate for so many weeks; though of course, in spite of all protestations, it did serve to make clear the rift on policy between Curzon and Balfour. However that may be, the House voted 270 in favour of the government, and only 61 against, these including, as The Times remarked sarcastically, 'a handful of little Englanders' going into the lobby with the predictably dissident Irish Nationalist members.[23]

However, before this happy outcome for the oratorical presentation of the Prime Minister, there had been some telling criticisms of his policy from his own back benches, as well as from the Opposition, and it is to the case against the government that we must now turn. Campbell-Bannerman offered a reasoned and on the whole temperate criticism of the government's whole policy towards Tibet, arguing that it was unduly alarmist, that it magnified the importance of the admitted frontier violations, and that it had allowed itself to be pulled too far in the direction of the forward policy by the exaggerations of Curzon. His sharpest remark was directed at the hapless Brodrick, whom he accused of failing to satisfy the House by his omission of any sufficiently convincing endorsement of the 6 November telegram. On the other hand, he gave a hint even so early in the debate of his party's intention to abstain, and thus to give tacit endorsement to the Younghusband mission.[24] It may be recalled that Campbell-Bannerman was not and never had pretended to be an expert in foreign affairs (and it is striking that the Liberals' acknowledged expert in the Commons, Sir Edward Grey, a convinced Liberal Imperialist, did not contribute to the debate; and since the division lists do not record abstentions we cannot tell from Hansard whether he was present or whether he had diplomatically absented himself); but Campbell-Bannerman <u>had</u> been Secretary of State for War under Gladstone and Rosebery (1892-1895) and would be well aware of the practical impossibility of trying to disavow

a military mission once British troops had been committed and had indeed come under fire. More vigorous denunciations of the policy of the mission came from the Liberal backbenches.

The first backbencher to be called to speak after the front-bench spokesmen for government and Opposition had finished was Thomas Lough. The Speaker had clearly made an appropriate choice here, since Lough was a prominent leader of the public agitation against the mission which had preceded the debate, so he was an ally of the chief press campaigner Sir Henry Cotton, and it was known that the debate had in fact been precipitated by the news that he proposed to move the adjournment on a matter of urgent public business and raise the Tibetan question, if the government did not itself bring forward a motion.[25] Lough, a radical Liberal, denounced the slaughter at Guru and demanded assurances that the government was still bound by the telegram of 6 November 1903 (since so far Brodrick and Hamilton had failed to give them). He criticised the failures of both British and Indian governments to view the border disputes and the difficulties about trade from a Tibetan point of view, and he attacked the idea that there was anything threatening to British interests in the contacts between Russia and Tibet, which he maintained were of a purely religious character (relating to the affairs of Buddhist communities in Russia). In conclusion he vigorously condemned the 'military character' of Britain's Tibetan enterprise and insisted on clarification of the policy.[26]

After a brief and uninteresting contribution from a Conservative backbencher, E.R.P. Moon, who merely repeated the official line of his leaders, another Radical Liberal, Charles Trevelyan, denounced the government from the back benches and developed the most significant argument of the whole debate. He complained of the way in which the government had mistreated the House and trampled on its rights before the Easter recess. He maintained that the government had deliberately evaded its constitutional duty to seek Parliament's approval for 'any military expedition outside the frontiers of India':

> Here the policy had been deliberately decided upon; Parliament was actually sitting, and for weeks and months the military expedition was waiting to advance into Tibet. The only thing that was said was that it was a political mission, but it was accompanied by an armed force of 1,000 or 2,000 men ... Obviously the expedition was a military expedition and it was playing with words to call it a political mission, and it was not treating the House in a proper way to preclude them from discussing the reasons for this expedition before it was entered upon.

He had already observed that by these proceedings the government had effectively deprived the House of its rights:

> However much the House might object to this mission its power over it had been altogether nullified. It was impossible now to turn the mission back, and all the House could do was to raise its protest; it could do nothing to cure the past and exercise very little influence over the future.

The rest of Trevelyan's impassioned speech was more conventional, very much along the lines of Lough's remarks. It may be noted

that not even an advanced young Liberal like Trevelyan was prepared to repudiate a British military force once it had gone into action.[27]

The view that the government had indeed acted unconstitutionally and in defiance of the established rights of Parliament was supported by the only other speaker from the Conservative backbenches, Thomas Gibson Bowles. This was less surprising than it may seem at first. Gibson Bowles was of independent spirit, and unlikely to secure office in a Conservative Cabinet because of his illegitimate birth and maverick temperament; he had been prominent in using Parliamentary questions to force the government to publish papers and hold a debate, and this was not the first nor would it be the last occasion on which he put his principles above his party. We have already seen in the last chapter that he would make a strikingly independent contribution to the debate on the Anglo-French entente on 1 June 1904; he had already campaigned vigorously against the government in the House of Commons and in the press over the defence of Gibraltar (which he held to be wholly inadequate); and eventually he left his party and actually stood against its leader in a by-election in 1906 on the issue of free trade.[28] He was perhaps therefore a predictable critic, and evidently his speech did not (and indeed was not meant to) persuade any Conservatives to vote against Brodrick's motion, and indeed after Balfour's reaffirmation of the policy of the telegram of November 1903, he himself voted in the government

lobby. He was nevertheless a forceful critic and did as much as any of the Liberal speakers to elicit Balfour's crucial statement. He would have none of Brodrick's contention that the mission was a peaceful and political one:

> The expedition had never been anything else than a military operation; it was an armed entry into a friendly state without the consent and agaisnt the desire of that state. It was necessarily and inevitably a military occupation; according to the Blue Book it was clearly recognised as such, and resistance was not only to be expected, but was actually announced to have taken place as far back as October last. Therefore, it was in its beginning, it had continued to be, and it still was, a military operation beyond the frontiers of India. This was not the first time the question of legality had been raised in regard to this subject. He was aware [from advice cited by Brodrick] that it had been held by a legal authority - who was probably instructed by the person desiring the advice - that a subsequent consent of the House of Parliament was all that was required but that, in his opinion, made nonsense of the Act of Parliament. He greatly regretted that the Government had not thought fit at an earlier period to ask for the consent required by the India Government Act of 1858, and that they should have awaited the action or massacre at Guru before applying for that sanction.

He held up to a degree of ridicule the fears of Russian penetration of Tibet, and declared that Asia was surely large enough for both Britain and Russia. He warned the government against allowing itself to be stampeded by Curzon's zeal for the forward policy into stationing a permanent diplomatic representative and ended with what was in effect a veiled warning to Balfour, that so long as Balfour could reaffirm the telegram of 6 November 1903, and assure the House that there would be no annexation and no resident in Tibet, there would be no backbench Conservative revolt.[29]

After these Tory pyrotechnics, the speech of the Liberal frontbench spokesman who wound up for the Opposition was fairly tame, though even so more forthright than Campbell-Bannerman had been; he did reiterate the crucial demand of the House, that the Prime Minister should reaffirm the policy of the telegram of November 1903. Unlike Campbell-Bannerman, Fowler was prominent on the Liberal Imperialist wing of the party and a leading member of the Liberal League (the supporters of the strongly imperialist line taken by Lord Rosebery in foreign and imperial affairs). He had been Secretary of State for India under Rosebery in 1894-95 which may explain why it was he, and not Grey, who spoke for the Liberal Imperialists in this debate (since Campbell-Bannerman would have found it hard to keep his more radical supporters in line with the Liberal front bench's policy of absention if he had permitted the imperialist wing of the party to both open and close the debate for the Opposition).[30] As spokesman for the official Liberal view on empire, Fowler could hardly follow the line of Lough and Trevelyan, but he did emphasise the need to maintain proper Parliamentary control over the Viceroy. He echoed Gibson Bowles' view that Asia was large enough for both great imperial powers and argued that Russia had 'no serious aggressive designs on India' and that there was 'no reason to fear any aggression from Russia as far as Tibet is concerned' (thus looking forward by implication to the policy of reconciliation with Russia which was to be followed by Grey as Liberal Foreign Secretary after December 1905).

For the Liberals, Fowler gave the crucial assurance that they would not disavow the mission, since the country would not allow it to be deserted; in return, they expected Balfour clearly to tell us 'whether he adheres to the despatch of 6th November'.[31]

With that offer from the Liberals, and Balfour's compliance with the general view that he reaffirm his rejection of the forward policy, the government's overwhelming majority in the division was a foregone conclusion. Beneath the party controversy and the sarcasm and resentment expressed by each side towards the other, there evidently in the end lay a substantial community of view, that the time for imperial adventures in Central Asia in competition with Russia was past. That community of view was in the end to ensure substantial bi-partisan support for the Asian agreement which was concluded by the Liberals in 1907.

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CHAPTER FOUR

PARLIAMENT AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS 1904-1907

4.1 Britain and the Crisis of 1905

Chronologically of course the debate on the Younghusband mission preceded that on the Anglo-French entente, but it has been appropriate to consider it out of its chronological sequence because it offers, as we have already seen at the end of the last chapter, an insight into the development of a bi-partisan policy towards imperial frontiers in Asia, and policy towards Russia in particular, which in retrospect can be seen to have prepared the way for the achievement of Sir Edward Grey and the Liberal Government in securing agreement with Russia on their imperial rivalries in Asia in August 1907. For reasons which will be considered later, there was no debate on the Russian Convention until February 1908. It is a remarkable fact which requires some explanation that there was no major foreign policy debate between that on the French entente in June 1904 and that on the Russian agreement in February 1908, although several momentous developments in foreign affairs took place during that period which one might expect that backbenchers (and indeed the Opposition front bench) would have wished to discuss, particularly in so far as Britain was involved.[1]

We have already seen that one of the underlying motives for the conclusion of the Anglo-French entente was to prevent the two western European powers from being drawn into the war

in the Far East between Russia and Japan, on opposing sides. This aspect of the entente was successful, as indeed were other aspects, and indeed the French were able to prevent the Dogger Bank crisis from escalating into war between Russia and Britain, and were instrumental in getting the Russians to agree to international arbitration to settle the dispute peacefully. This was an early sign that the French would use their influence to bring Britain and Russia closer together, in the hope of creating a triple grouping with their Russian ally and their British entente partner to act as a more effective counterweight to the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy in the European balance of power.[2] For the time being, no more could be done than maintain correct rather than friendly relations, and leave the Russian forces both on land and at sea to be defeated by the new and growing power of Japan. Neither France as the ally of Russia, nor Britain as the ally of Japan, were at all closely involved in the American mediation which resulted in the Treaty of Portsmouth of September 1905, which established Japanese preponderance in Korea and evicted the Russians from Manchuria. Since these terms were naturally distasteful to the Russians and since they still resented Britain's alliance with Japan, there was as yet no prospect of working towards any kind of Anglo-Russian rapprochement. In any case, the renewal on revised terms of the Anglo-Japanese alliance in 1905, which rendered the Russians even more embittered and isolated, made it in the short term less important to the British to have an agreement

with Russia, since the renegotiated terms included the remarkable provision that the casus belli would arise if either partner were involved in war with Russia alone (i.e. even if unsupported by any ally), and since the Japanese agreed to extend the scope of the alliance to cover Britain's Indian frontier with Russia in Central Asia. This was done deliberately in order to deter the Russians from seeking to compensate themselves for their disasters in the Far East by resuming their forward policy in Central Asia, and a powerful deterrent it was. In so far as it would convince the Russians that they had now no prospect of a further successful advance in Asia in opposition to Britain and Japan it was expected that, in the long term, it would promote a review of Russian foreign policy and lead to a settlement with Britain (which of course is precisely what it did). In the immediate situation, however, Lansdowne and Balfour had a more practical and political objective. They wished to profit from Japan's success against Russia to improve Britain's imperial position, and to renew the alliance on more favourable terms while it was still a Conservative government that was in office. Anticipating that the increasing domestic difficulties of the government (and particularly the increasingly bitter struggle within the ranks of the Conservatives over the question of free trade versus tariff reform) might precipitate an early general election, which might result in the return of a Liberal government, Lansdowne and Balfour were anxious to pre-empt the question of

renewing the alliance, and to pass on to their successors a renewed alliance which they would find it difficult to abandon. Of course they knew that Grey and the other Liberal Imperialists were in favour of the alliance, and would maintain it, but they could not know at that stage what the complexion of a new Liberal majority would be, how strong in it would be those they slightingly called 'Little Englanders', nor whether control of foreign policy would remain in the hands of the Liberal Imperialists as it had been under Rosebery or whether it would pass to the Gladstonians. For all of these considerations the alliance with Japan was renewed ahead of time, and in an extended form.[3]

Meanwhile the Moroccan crisis of 1905 threatened to throw the European power-system into turmoil, and to force the British to decide how far their commitment to France in Morocco would in practise extend; for on 31 March 1905 the German Kaiser made a speech in Tangier declaring Germany's support for Moroccan independence (against French encroachment) and thus challenged not only France, but the cohesion of the Anglo-French agreement on Morocco concluded in 1904. There is no doubt that this German demonstration of power was calculated to test the <u>entente</u> and break it up before it could become established as a stable diplomatic relationship which might affect (as of course the French wished it to) the balance of power in Europe as well as those extra-European areas to which it publicly referred. Equally there is no doubt that the Kaiser

and his Chancellor Bülow had chosen the moment well to mount their challenge: Russia, France's ally was, as we have seen, deeply embroiled in the war with Japan in the Far East, and was unable to act decisively in the European power-balance; in addition, the escalating chaos inside Russia, which followed the outbreak of the revolution on 22 January 1905, meant that the Tsar and his ministers were wholly preoccupied with dealing with the domestic situation (and saving their skins) and had neither energy nor resources to support France against a German challenge. For all practical purposes thorughout 1905 and well into 1906, Russia was non-existent as a European power and useless to France as an ally. Consequently, Germany had the best opportunity she was likely to have to force France to abandon her new friendship with Britain and agree to subject her ambitions to German approval. Pressure could be applied even up to the threat of war, since the French defences were known to be in poor condition, Russia could not be expected to implement the French-Russian alliance, and any British intervention on land was expected to be derisory; it is no accident that it was during this crisis that the Chief of the German General Staff, Graf von Schlieffen, put the finishing touches to his plan for an offensive against France through Belgium, a plan which at that time was clearly conceived as being practically entirely for a war on one front, i.e. against France alone.[4] The first fruits of this policy were the resignation of Delcassé, the French foreign minister regarded by the Germans as the architect of the entente cordiale (and who was indeed the advocate of a

closer Anglo-French alliance in the short term and of an Anglo-Russian rapprochement in the longer term), and the agreement of the French government to submit the Moroccan question to an international conference.

Delcassé resigned on 6 June 1905. Although he himself believed that his fall had been engineered by the German government because it feared that he was about to emerge as a triumphant mediator between Russia and Japan, it was accepted with alacrity by his colleagues because they feared that he was going to force upon them an alliance with Britain, as a prelude to war with Germany. In fact there had been conversations between Lansdowne and the French ambassador in London, Cambon, about Anglo-French cooperation in resisting German demands in Morocco, which Cambon and Delcassé had interpreted as being an offer of alliance; but it is clear that Lansdowne had merely been urging close consultation and not an alliance.[5] On the other hand, at the end of June (and so even after the fall of Delcassé), he was warning the German ambassador that public opinion in Britain would not allow the government to stand aside if Germany should force a war upon France. Curiously, or perhaps significantly, this warning (which was repeated in July and again in September) does not appear in the British accounts of the relevant interviews.[6] These warnings may be seen as constituting the first signs of that evolution in British policy which was to convert the colonial entente of 1904 into something which came increasingly to resemble a military

understanding, however much British politicians in both parties might wish to back away from acknowledging it. There were evidently further informal and unofficial contacts between military men on both sides during the autumn of 1905, which were intensified after the resignation of the Balfour administration in December 1905, and before the incoming Liberal government was firmly in control of events. Since these conversations were conducted from the headquarters of the Committee of Imperial Defence, with the knowledge and participation of its military and naval professional members, and of its secretary, but without the authorisation of the Prime Minister, they were of very dubious legitimacy and probably of doubtful utility to the French. But they did undoubtedly create an expression in French minds that the British were preparing to assist them in war against Germany, if the international conference which was scheduled to assemble at Algeciras (on the bay of Gibraltar in Spain) should break down. And indeed, on 3 January 1906, the new Liberal Foreign Secretary, Grey, warned the German ambassador, Count Metternich, that British opinion would make it impossible for Britain to stand aside if France were involved in war over Morocco, a warning he deliberately reiterated on 19 February.[7] In this he went somewhat further than the more cautious language employed by Lansdowne, but he went much further when he told Cambon, in reply to the French ambassador's direct question on 10 January that, in the event of a Franco-German war it was his opinion that British public feeling would be 'strongly moved in favour of France'; Lansdowne had never

made any such statement to the French. Grey was probably seeking to avoid the direct question put to him by Cambon, asking for a guarantee of British military assistance, and in his considered response delivered to the French ambassador on 31 January, he declined to give any more definite assurance; but on the other hand, he informed Cambon of the warning which he had delivered to the Germans, a step which Lansdowne had never taken and which must have been calculated to reassure Cambon of the reality of British support.[8] Cambon was the more ready to accept Grey's assurance because he went further than Lansdowne had done in another vital respect: he gave official authorisation to the hitherto unofficial conversations which had been going on between the military of the two countries, which were intended to work out the details of Britain's military and naval assistance to France in the event of a Franco-German war. Grey did this with the approval of the Secretary of State for War, R.B. Haldane, and with the acquiescence of the Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman; the only other cabinet ministers who were informed were Lord Ripon (a Liberal elder statesman who led for the government in the House of Lords), and perhaps Asquith, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and leading figure in the government after Campbell-Bannerman. Although Grey and Haldane were both at pains to stress that the military conversations were merely technical and did not commit Britain to going to war, it is in retrospect clear that they represented the next stage (and a major stage) in the conversion of the <u>entente</u> from an imperial to a European connection, and one with a potential military dimension. A British government had now defined the

independence of France as a vital British interest and had brought itself to contemplate the possibility of military action on the European continent in defence of that interest.[9] At the Algeciras Conference, which ended with a peaceful settlement to France's advantage in April 1906, the British delegation gave full support to the French position and the Germans found themselves almost isolated; the following month a new British ambassador, Sir Arthur Nicolson, was sent to St. Petersburg to open formal negotiations with the Russians for an Anglo-Russian agreement.[10] This was the next stage in the abandonment of Britain's old policy of isolation and in the progression towards a closer position to the Franco-Russian alliance.

4.2 The Negotiation of the Anglo-Russian Agreements of August 1907

This is not the place to enter into a detailed account of the negotiation of the terms of the three agreements with Russia which were eventually signed on 31 August 1907.[11] The negotiations of course took place in secret and, although the existence of them was suspected, no information was divulged until the publication of the terms of the Convention after its signature. There was therefore little scope for MPs to do much more than ask occasional Parliamentary Questions during 1906 and 1907, to which they received generally uninformative answers. But there was one area covered by the negotiations and included in the final agreements which might have been expected to attract

their attention and call for debate, and that was Tibet and the aftermath of the Younghusband expedition, which they had debated in 1904. Without further debate in the Commons (though not without further Questions, and not without a debate in the Lords)[12], the mission advanced to Lhasa and, in September 1904, imposed on the Tibetans an agreement of considerable severity, the so-called Lhasa Convention; had it been accepted as it stood by the British government, it would have made a mockery of all the previous assurances given to Parliament (and indeed to the Russian government) about Britain's intention to abstain from permanent intervention in the internal affairs of Tibet; it represented a substantial departure from the policy enunciated in the celebrated telegram of November 1903. Not only did it impose an indemnity upon Tibet, but it also provided for a military occupation of the strategically sensitive Chumbi Valley for seventy-five years; and it also empowered a British Agent stationed at Gyangtse (inside Tibet) to visit Lhasa to negotiate on commercial questions. This was something very close to the forward programme desired by Curzon, and it caused consternation in London, not only for that reason but also because it would antagonise the Russians and render a future agreement with them more difficult to achieve. Consequently, Balfour and Brodrick agreed on a reduction in the indemnity and reduced the period of military occupation from seventy-five to three years. Furthermore, Lansdowne went out of his way to reassure the Russians (even though they were so deeply embroiled in the war with Japan as to be incapable of making any effective

protest against the Tibetan adventure) that Britain, notwithstanding the provision for commercial relations with Tibet, regarded herself as being as much bound as any other power by the clauses prohibiting foreign intervention or penetration in Tibet.[13] The way was thus cleared for improving relations with Russia when that should become possible, and the bipartisan rejection of Curzon's forward policy on India's frontier was reaffirmed.

It was therefore not particularly difficult for the British and Russian negotiators to reach agreement on Tibet, when Nicolson began his discussions with the new Russian foreign minister in the mildly 'liberal' government which followed the revolutionary upheavals in Russia in 1905 and the early months of 1906. This new minister, Alexander Isvolsky, was himself of a liberal outlook and anxious to repair Russia's relations of intimacy with France and to achieve a rapprochement with Britain which would begin in Asian questions, but which he hoped would eventually lead to Britain being drawn into the European balance of power on the side of Russia; in particular, he hoped to secure Britain's agreement to a revision of the rule of the Straits (that is, those connecting the Black Sea with the Mediterranean) in Russia's favour. To secure these objectives, Isvolsky was prepared to abandon, or at least to suspend for the foreseeable future, Russia's historic ambitions and longstanding forward policy in Central Asia, particularly in Tibet (as we have seen, agreement there was relatively easily reached) and also in Afghanistan, which was immediately on Russia's southern frontier and which

had come under increasing Russian pressure since the 1880s. Under the terms of the convention on Afghanistan, the Russians accepted that that mountainous country, strategically poised between their frontier to the south and the north-west frontier of British India, lay outside their sphere of influence and within the British sphere; henceforward they agreed to abstain from having direct relations with the Amir of Afghanistan in Kabul, and to conduct any necessary discussions with him (as for instance over frontier violations) through the agency of the British, who would maintain direct relations with Kabul. This extraordinarily cumbersome arrangement represented a considerable sacrifice of longstanding ambition on the part of the Russians, and one which Isvolsky had difficulty in getting the Russian military to accept, but it was one which the Russians nevertheless tried loyally to implement over the next few years.[14] In so far as Russia secured a settlement favourable to her ambitions, and Britain one which did no more than protect her strategic interests, it was in Persia. Under the terms of the arrangement about Persia, the country was notionally divided into three zones: a Russian zone of influence in the north of the country (including the capital Tehran), a much smaller British zone of influence in the south-east of the country (Seistan, adjacent to the Indian frontier), with a neutral zone in between separating the two great powers from each other. Each power undertook not to seek concessions for railways, telegraph lines or banks (the typical instruments of informal imperial expansion) in the zone of the other, while they

would only do so in the neutral zone with the agreement of the other. Since the Russian zone was larger, more populous and more wealthy than the British, since it included Tehran, and since the Russians now gained British acquiescence in their already well-established ascendancy there, it may be observed that they secured a Central Asian advantage in return for the surrender of their other Central Asian ambitions.[15]

Where Isvolsky did not secure the advantage he had hoped for was in the question of the Straits, which Grey declined to include in the formal negotiations or to incorporate into the final agreements. In the British view, the function of the Convention was not European, and the Straits question was unquestionably a European question in the full sense, since the signatories to the successive Straits Conventions which regulated it were all European powers. Any agreement on the Straits would have required the admission to the negotiations of other European powers, which would have altered the bilateral nature of the Convention and would quite probably have prevented its conclusion. The most that Grey would do was to offer the Russians an inducement to conclude the Asian bargain, and then implement its terms loyally, by holding out to them a prospect of 'a friendly agreement about Asiatic questions , which should work well', as being a preliminary condition to any arrangement about the Straits.[16] Clearly, and not only on paper, the British were not at this stage prepared to view their new relationship with Russia as extending beyond the confines of Asia. In return, the Russians declined to give Grey something

which he very much wanted; namely, explicit recognition of Britain's preponderant position in the Persian Gulf. Isvolsky explained that he could not go so far, since the interests of other European powers (he meant Germany) would thereby be affected, so that they would have to be consulted (the same argument as Grey had used about the Straits). In 1903, in the context of the Baghdad railway and the prospect that the Germans would seek to extend the line to the head of the Gulf and establish a railway terminus and port there, Lansdowne had formally declared in the House of Lords that Britain would:

> ... regard the establishment of a naval base or of a fortified port in the Persian Gulf as a very grave menace to British interests, and we should certainly resist it with all the means at our disposal.[17]

Grey would have liked a Russian declaration that would have committed the Russians to abandoning any long term ambitions of their own for a port on the Gulf, and also to supporting Britain in resisting any equivalent encroachment by the Germans. The most that he could do with Russian consent, however, was to publish with the Anglo-Russian Convention a despatch stating that the Russians did not dissent from the view that Britain had special interests in the Gulf.[18] It may be observed that the entire northern (Persian) shore of the Gulf, from the Shatt-al-Arab to Bandar Abbas at the mouth of the Gulf, lay in the neutral zone; here the British already had considerable commercial interests and controlled the existing means of communication, and here the search for commercially exploitable

quantities of oil was already under way (and was shortly to be successful). That the British were content with an agreement which kept the Russians away from the shores of the Gulf, while confining their own zone to the immediate vicinity of the Indian frontier, suggests that the security of India really was their prime concern; and that in any event the control of an oil-bearing region quite clearly was not.

4.3 Parliament and Foreign Affairs 1904-1907

Clearly, then, the months and years from the Anglo-French entente to the Anglo-Russian Convention were filled with momentous events in foreign affairs, some of them secret but most of them freely open to any Member of Parliament who read the newspapers. It must therefore be asked why there was no major foreign policy debate in this period. First of all, there were of course some obvious technical reasons why this should have been so; for example, if Parliament was not sitting, it could hardly hold a debate; and in three of the years in question (1904, 1905 and 1907) the Parliamentary session began in February and ended in August, so that Parliament was sitting for barely half of the year and there was a period of six months during which there could by definition be no debate. Thus Younghusband's Lhasa Convention, concluded on 7 September 1904, could be contemplated in tranquillity by the Balfour government since Parliament was in recess, and only the Russians need be conciliated; the Russians protested about it on the basis of an article in The Times of 17 September, and duly received assurances, but MPs could make their views known only by themselves writing to

the newspapers.[19] By the time that Parliament reassembled on 14 February 1905, the government had drastically revised the Lhasa Convention along the lines laid down in November 1903, and further took the sting out of potential Parliamentary criticism by publishing a third and final Blue Book on Tibet.[20] Such reference as there was in the House of Commons came in the debate on the Address, when both Campbell-Bannerman and Gibson Bowles offered criticisms of the government for still being dragged along by Curzon, but there was no serious problem for Balfour such as there had been in the previous year's debate.[21] Much the same thing was true in the case of the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese alliance in 1905. The revised treaty was signed in London on 12 August 1905, Parliament having been prorogued the previous day; Balfour had apparently had no difficulty in finding good reasons to delay the signature until that had happened. The treaty was published as a Parliamentary Paper on 26 September so that, of course, comment from MPs, whether favourable or unfavourable, had to be made in public speeches or in the press, but not in Parliament.[22] It is true (as Professor Nish tells us) that, in anticipation that there was about to be a renewal of the Alliance, 'much of the debate on Foreign Office supply on 3 August [1905] was in anticipation devoted to the new alliance', and that two of the speeches, those of the redoubtable Dilke and of George Harwood, were critical.[23] But such discussion was by definition uninformed and could easily be brushed aside by the government as speculation;

it was no substitute for the kind of wide ranging debate which the first Japanese Alliance had attracted, and it is perfectly clear that the government preferred it that way. By the time that Parliament reassembled on 13 February 1906, it was a very different House of Commons with a very different membership, including a large number of new and inexperienced Liberal and Labour MPs. Not only had, for instance, Gibson Bowles gone, Balfour himself had for the time being gone, and there was a new government in office which could hardly be pursued about a treaty concluded by its predecessors (though Grey, the new Foreign Secretary, had made it clear that the Liberal administration remained committed to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance). Consequently, even the most attentive reader will scan the debate on the Address in the Commons in vain for any discussion of the new treaty, which indeed by now was no longer new. It was left to the Liberal leader in the House of Lords, Lord Ripon, to state that the new government accepted the treaty 'in the spirit in which we believe it was made' and to reiterate the government's intention 'to carry out strictly and readily the obligations it imposes on us'[24]. If Balfour was fortunate that the Lhasa Convention happened to be concluded while Parliament was in recess it is clear, as Nish tells us, that the Japanese Alliance was deliberately delayed so that effective Parliamentary discussion could be avoided.

Critics of the Conservatives' attitude towards the rights of Parliament and particularly the House of Commons might, with

some justice, conclude that their record remained one of unregenerate obstruction right down to the end of their period in office. It may seem more surprising, but it is nevertheless the case, that the incoming Liberal administration behaved in very much the same fashion. So far as the House of Commons was concerned, this can best be illustrated by the timing of the Anglo-Russian Convention and the debate upon it. Parliament was prorogued on 28 August 1907; the Anglo-Russian Convention was signed on 31 August, but a scrutiny of the late stages of the negotiations does not suggest that there was any last minute hitch to hold up the signature. The effect of signing only three days after the end of the Parliamentary session was that it was six months before the Convention was debated in Parliament, the text having been published as a Blue Book on 29 January 1908;[25] and even so, the debate in the Commons was held on an Opposition motion. The Liberals, like their Conservative predecessors, held to the traditional view that ratification of a treaty of this nature (not involving cessions of territory or having financial or legislative implications) did not require Parliamentary sanction. Nor is this the only example of Grey's attitude of reserve towards Parliament, though in the case of the Anglo-French military conversations which began on an official basis only after he had assumed office, in January 1906, it may well be argued that, from a pragmatic point of view, all those considerations which made Grey and Campbell-Bannerman unwilling to inform the cabinet of what had

been done (for fear of provoking a controversy so damaging that the hard-won unity of the new government would be destroyed, the cabinet would break up, and the fruits of the great Liberal majority which had just been won at the polls would be lost) - that those considerations applied even more strongly to any revelation in Parliament that the War Office was being allowed to plan for the despatch of a British expeditionary force to France.[26] It may be added that it was just as much the responsibility of the Prime Minister and of the Secretary of State for War as it was of the Foreign Secretary to bring these talks to the notice of the cabinet, and it may be inferred that all three drew back from the prospect of the split between Radicals and Liberal Imperialists which such a revelation would produce. If they could not inform the cabinet, then necessarily they could not inform Parliament; and by definition, Parliament could not debate what it did not know about. Only those cabinet ministers who attended the meetings of the Committee of Imperial Defence, the Prime Minister's advisory committee on defence matters, knew of the existence of the conversations, and until the Agadir crisis of 1911 at least all preferred to accept Grey's rationalisation that, as the staff talks were non-commital and non-binding, they did not involve any obligation requiring the agreement of the cabinet, still less of Parliament. And of course, and as a matter of plain diplomatic fact, they were not (at least until the exchange of Notes between Grey and Cambon in November 1912) the subject of anything remotely resembling a treaty or other diplomatic document requiring any

kind of formal approval. There was a further consideration, that any public revelation of Anglo-French joint military planning would inevitably alarm and antagonise the German government and inflame German public opinion, would increase the German sense of isolation and so worsen the international climate, and would make the prospect of an improvement in Anglo-German relations, to which Grey was genuinely committed, increasingly remote.[27] There were thus reasons of both principle and pragmatism to justify keeping cabinet, Parliament and public opinion in ignorance of this momentous development in the Anglo-French entente, which fully explain why it should have taken place without the scrutiny of Parliament.

This will not, however, explain why the House of Commons of its own volition took no greater interest in matters of which it did know, particular the evolution in the full light of publicity and of press comment of the Moroccan crisis of 1905-06, and the Algeciras Conference which led to its resolution in the first three months of 1906. After all, the debate on the Address in February 1906 took place while that Conference was sitting, and the King's Speech contained the customary references to the government's pacific intentions in foreign affairs - a perfectly adequate pretext for a Dilke or other self-styled expert on foreign affairs to make a speech or raise a debate. In fact, as already observed, the Commons debate on the Address in February 1906 is, from our point of view, remarkable chiefly for the absence of any significant discussion of foreign policy; and that in the Lords consisted

largely of anodyne observations about maintaining the continuity of policy. The new House of Commons was evidently much more interested in domestic questions, even at a time of such major upheaval abroad; there was much lively invective, but it was on topics other than foreign affairs - on free trade and tariff reform, on the burning issue of so-called 'Chinese slavery' (in South Africa), on education, on the reform of trade union legislation, on Ireland - on all those issues on which the election had been fought and won and which would engross the attention of Parliament over the coming months and indeed years.[28] The large new Liberal majority contained a large Radical wing which was as yet ignorant of foreign affairs for the most part, and content to follow the lead of Campbell-Bannerman and his colleagues, of trusting the supposedly experienced and judicious Grey to do what was necessary to defend the interests of Britain while Radicalism got on with the more exciting business of social and political reform at home. It may be inferred that the party in Parliament as well as in the cabinet accepted the tacit agreement whereby the Liberal Imperialists were permitted to set the foreign policy agenda of the government while the Radicals set its domestic agenda.[29] As for the Conservatives, they were still too chastened by their crushing defeat at the polls, too divided over the more damaging issue of tariff reform, and bereft of a leader who was also their most effective performer in the House, to have much stomach to challenge the government on foreign affairs. Only Joseph Chamberlain (himself the arch tariff-reformer, already ailing, but in the absence of Balfour the only heavyweight figure on the Conservative front bench) raised

a question of information on the Algeciras Conference. Otherwise, and for the time being, the House was more interested in other matters. Consequently, and throughout the sessions of 1906 and 1907, Grey was left more or less free to develop his own lines of policy without serious dissent in Parliament or any significant claim to take control of the formulation of policy. The revival of Parliamentary activity in the field of foreign affairs did not, for the reasons we have surveyed, occur until 1908 when relations with Russia and with Germany began to cause increasing concern. The first major occasion when this concern manifested itself came in February 1908 when, significantly, it was the Opposition rather than the government's own backbenchers who voiced criticism of a major item in Grey's foreign policy programme, the Anglo-Russian Convention, signed on 31st August 1907.

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE ANGLO-RUSSIAN CONVENTION OF AUGUST 1907

5.1 The Anglo-Russian Convention and the Balance of Power in Europe

It has frequently been asserted by historians that the real purpose behind the Anglo-Russian Convention was to adjust the balance of power in Europe to the advantage of Britain and France and against Germany, by completing the formation of a triple grouping of Britain, France and Russia, the so-called 'Triple Entente'.[1] We have already seen that the Liberals came to office on 11 December 1905, with Grey as Foreign Secretary, already committed to seeking an accommodation with Russia, as the Conservatives before them had desired. Shortly after assuming office, Grey told the Russian ambassador, Count Benckendorff, of his desire for an agreement. The Algeciras Conference, beginning on 16 January 1906, provided an opportunity for Britain and Russia to work together in support of France and so foreshadowed the way in which a Triple Entente could work diplomatically to the advantage of its members, and Grey told the House of Commons of his hope that the friendly cooperation of Britain and Russia would 'naturally result in the progressive settlement of questions in which each country has an interest'.[2]

This statement of course could be construed as applying either to relations in general and including Europe, or merely to Asian questions in particular, but the weight of evidence seems to suggest that Grey was at this stage primarily concerned with the latter. There is however no doubt that Isvolsky favoured an agreement with Britain for reasons which were primarily European, and that the French also wished to promote an Anglo-Russian rapprochement in order to tilt the European balance of power against Germany. We know that Isvolsky discussed the question with his ambassadors in both London and Paris in March 1906, when they agreed that in order to prevent Germany from obtaining too great an ascendancy over the direction of Russian policy, it should continue to rest upon the indestructible basis of the alliance with France, reinforced by an agreement with Britain.[3] This would enable Russia to escape from the isolated position in the Far East imposed on her by the Anglo-Japanese alliance and her defeat in the Russo-Japanese war, and avoid having to become dependent on Germany for her security in Europe, and to achieve this it would be worth exploiting the British desire for a settlement of the Anglo-Russian rivalries in Central Asia and Persia. It would however be necessary to avoid antagonising Germany, and so there could from the Russian point of view be nothing in an agreement which was obviously directed against Germany or injurious to Germany's interests.[4]

Parallel with the negotiations for an agreement with Britain, Russia also sought to reach an understanding with Japan, which led to the conclusion of treaties in effect establishing Japanese and Russian spheres of influence in China (which restored to Russia economic ascendancy in northern Manchuria); this compromise, when added to the other understandings and alliances between Britain, Japan, France and Russia, had the effect of establishing something like a quadrilateral grouping in the Far East which effectively took China out of the field of international competition for the future.[5] Having resolved the rivalries with Britain in Central Asia and with Japan in the Far East, Russian policy would be free to revert to re-establishing Russian power in Europe and in particular to securing successes and restoring Russian prestige in questions such as that of the Straits.[6] Thus from the outset the Russians saw the limited agreements on Central Asia as the first step in the development of close relations with Britain in other areas of policy, notably Europe. It remains to be seen whether this was the view taken of it by British policy-makers or by the British Parliament.

It is usual to regard the Convention of 1907 as completing the process whereby Britain escaped from the position of isolation which had characterised her European and global situation in 1900. It is also usual to see it as insuring the British against the danger of a German hegemony in Europe. For the Russians it was to provide a period of security during which the process of recuperation from defeat and revolution could be accomplished. R.P. Churchill observes of it that, although fear of Germany had done much to bring the two former imperial rivals together, the Convention was a defensive not an offensive instrument, and was not intended for aggression against Germany.[7] At the turn of the century, the German government had believed that such a reconciliation was impossible, and that therefore Britain (and perhaps indeed Russia) would be obliged to secure their position against each other by joining the German system of alliances; it is therefore unsurprising that in 1907 and thereafter the Germans should have assumed that the real point of the Convention was turned against them.[8] There is indeed some evidence much quoted by historians such as Monger, who take the same view of British policy as did the Kaiser and his advisers, that anxiety about German ambitions both in the Middle East and in Europe was indeed the underlying reason for the agreement with Russia. The British were worried about German economic activity in the Persian Gulf and its hinterland, and feared for their preponderance in the region once the Baghdad railway reached the head of the Gulf. The fear that German policy in Persia was intended to create a situation

which would justify an:

> ... intervention on the Moroccan pattern acted ... as a stimulus to the negotiations with Russia; and it was the hope of British policy-makers that Anglo-Russian co-operation in the Middle East would enable them to neutralise the most dangerous aspects of German policy in general, and of the Baghdad railway in particular.[9]

Even more significantly, as early as the period of the Algeciras Conference and while the Moroccan crisis remained unresolved, there was considerable discussion in London of the effect which an Anglo-Russian agreement could have on the European situation. The War Office offered the opinion that it would 'tend to weaken German's military position in Europe and therefore to strengthen our own as well as that of France'[10]. Grey himself was 'impatient to see Russia re-established as a factor in European politics' and, in an important memorandum on what would happen if the Algeciras Conference broke up without agreement, argued as follows:

> The door is being kept open by us for a rapprochement with Russia; there is at least a prospect that when Russia is re-established we shall find ourselves on good terms with her. An entente between Russia, France and ourselves would be absolutely secure. If it is necessary to check Germany it could then be done.[11]

After the conclusion of the Convention there were several expressions of satisfaction which emphasised the importance of Anglo-Russian cooperation in adjusting the balance of power in Europe. Grey expressed his satisfaction 'from the point of view

of general policy', that events were drawing Britain and Russia closer together; a view much quoted in support of the interpretation of the Convention as being fundamentally concerned with the European balance.[12] Grey defined the policy of the agreement with Russia as being:

> ... to begin an understanding with Russia [in Asia], which may lead gradually to good relations in European questions also,

and even the normally Gladstonian Campbell-Bannerman remarked that it would 'make things easier in Europe'[13]. We may reasonably conclude from this evidence that, while the overt terms of the Convention were confined to Central Asia and Persia, and while the regulation of Anglo-Russian relations there was the primary and ostensible purpose of the agreement, there was from the outset a recognition that it had other functions and would develop other purposes to the disadvantage of Germany; it would strengthen Britain's hand in resisting the Baghdad railway in the Middle East, and it would adjust the balance of power in Europe to the advantage of France and Britain by diverting Russian energies away from imperial adventures and back into European questions. In these calculations, little attention was paid by the British to the price which the Russians were likely to demand in terms of British support for their ambitions in Europe; and there was insufficient recognition that, the Russians having made the agreement at a time of weakness and on the basis of existing positions in Central Asia and Persia, without regard to future prospects, they were likely as they

recovered their strength to chafe at the restrictions it placed on their freedom of action.[14] If they on the whole stood by the bargain they had made with regard to Tibet and Afghanistan, their role in Persia was increasingly interventionist and contrary to the spirit of the Convention, and this was in the long run to cause Grey severe difficulties in defending the Convention in Parliament. That he continued to do so is a clear indication that there were, for him and his advisers in the Foreign Office, clear advantages in maintaining close relations with Russia which outweighed the disadvantages of being associated with her policy in Persia.

5.2 The Anglo-Russian Convention Debated, February 1908

As we have seen, the Liberal government laid the Convention signed on 31 August 1907 before Parliament in time for the new session which began on 29 January 1908. It was debated in the Commons at what was practically the earliest opportunity, on 17 February. Since the achievement of an agreement with Russia on imperial questions had been one of the longstanding ambitions of the Conservatives, and particularly of Lord Lansdowne as Foreign Secretary from 1900 to 1905, it may at first sight seem surprising that the debate should have taken place, not on a government motion to take note of the Convention, but on a Conservative motion which, while it welcomed the principle of the agreement, was critical of its terms.[15] It was as an understanding relating to Asian affairs that the Convention was debated in both Lords and Commons, and there was no discussion of its bearing on the European balance of power

or British security against German am bitions, except briefly in the context of the Baghdad railway; in this Parliament was of course following the terms of the Convention as printed and as presented and justified by the government. Nor was Grey unduly disturbed by the Conservative criticisms, for in the House of Lords debate Lansdowne had, as expected, emphasised the continuity of Grey's Russian policy with his own, and his speech was regarded as 'summing up in favour of the Convention'[16]. Predictably, Curzon attacked the agreement as throwing away 'the efforts of our diplomacy and our trade for more than a century', but it was entirely predictable that he should do so, and he could be discounted since he was so clearly at odds with the leadership and policy of his own party on this issue. The debate in the Commons was more critical for the government because of the danger that many of its own supporters would join the Conservatives in criticising the policy of the Convention, albeit from a different point of view. The Secretary of State for India, John Morley, who was himself a Gladstonian of the old school and strongly committed to the Convention as resolving international antagonisms and ensuring the stability of the Indian frontier, expected what he called a 'compound attack' from the advocates of the forward policy on the one hand, and the extreme Radicals hostile to any understanding with the 'despotic bureaucracy' of Russia on the other.[17] There had indeed been protests against the Convention from local Liberal associations, some Chambers of Commerce, branches of the Independent Labour Party and of the Social-Democratic Federation

and other humanitarian and radical bodies. But this criticism was all based, as Morley rightly noticed, on hostility to Russia and on considerations directly connected with British interests in Persia, and not at all on any perception of the Russian agreement as an anti-German instrument.[18] The only MP to criticise the Convention in its bearing upon Germany was the Earl of Ronaldshay, a Conservative back bencher who was a convinced Curzonite (he had indeed been Curzon's aide-de-camp in India) and who attacked the Convention root and branch; but he accused the government of seeking a combination with Russia against Germany for the purpose of blocking the Baghdad railway (not wholly mistakenly, as we have seen); even he did not suggest that they were building an anti-German combination in Europe.[19]

Why then did the Conservatives put down their motion and therefore raise a debate which would re-open the old wounds of Curzon and the forward policy? From the speeches of Earl Percy, who had been Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs under Lansdowne and who introduced the motion, of Balfour himself, and of other Conservatives, it is clear that they genuinely believed that the Persian agreement had given away too much to Russia, had not secured for Britain a sufficiently large or valuable sphere of influence in the south, and had seriously damaged Britain's commercial interests in Persia to the benefit of the Russians.

This last was an argument calculated to appeal also to Liberals who had commercial links with Persia or who represented constituencies which traded there, and would show the foreign policy of the government in a weak and even unpatriotic light. The debate of course also gave an opportunity for Radical criticism, which would be embarrassing to Grey, but there is no reason to suppose that the Conservatives wished to discomfit him to the extent that the principle of the Convention would be jeopardised; after all, as Lansdowne had stated in the Lords, the policy of the Convention was their policy also, and indeed at the end of the debate Balfour was to withdraw the Opposition motion, so that there was no division and consequently no opportunity for opponents of the Convention, whether imperialist or Radical, to demonstrate whatever strength they had. It is only from the speeches of those who were called by the Speaker that we can gauge the feelings of the House on this, the first major foreign policy initiative of the Liberal administration.

In moving the Motion, Earl Percy was at pains to stress that the Opposition was fully in support of the broad principle of the Convention and would, when it returned to office, carry out both its spirit and its letter; just as the Liberals had upheld the alliance with Japan when they came to power, so the Conservatives would uphold the agreements with Russia. But there were objections on important points of detail. On Tibet, Percy feared that the government had gone too far in excluding Britain as well as Russia from seeking any concessions in Tibet, and had thus thrown away the benefits as well as the

disadvantages of the Younghusband expedition. On Afghanistan, he constructed an ingenious argument to show that the agreement with Russia would give her a right of supervision over British relations with the Amir, even though Russia was herself precluded from maintaining any contacts on her own account. But his main criticisms were reserved for the agreement on Persia, which he argued had surrendered too many British interests in return for too few benefits; in particular he feared that the large neutral zone including the whole Gulf littoral would be left open to commercial penetration by third powers, while Russia would be able, quite legitimately under the terms of the agreement, to monopolise the commercial development of the north; and he maintained that substantial and existing British trading interested which crossed the frontiers of these two zones would be sacrificed:

> The more explicitly and liberally we recognise the right of Russia to complete control over the trade of the whole of northern Persia, the more careful we ought to have been to safeguard British interests in southern Persia. [But, for example] the ... British route running from Baghdad through Khanikin [on the Turkish-Persian frontier] to Tehran, which carried British trade to the amount of nearly a million [pounds] a year, and is the most important of all, has been placed from start to finish in the Russian sphere, and under the absolute control of our chief commercial competitors ...

In addition, an incentive had been given for the Russians to reach an agreement with the German company financing and constructing the Baghdad railway, for a Baghdad-Khanikin-Tehran branch line which, under their joint control, would effectively exclude British enterprise. (It may in passing be

observed that this was indeed the deal struck by Germany and Russia at the Potsdam meeting in 1910, though in the end it proved to be abortive.) But to Percy, the most serious danger was that the frontiers of the spheres of influence, in the agreement defined in economic and political terms, would in practice become strategic frontiers which would have the effect of advancing Russia's effective frontier deep into Persia and so actually reducing drastically the area of the buffer zone between the two great empires:

> What I am afraid of in connection with the Government's policy is that, unless there has been a clear understanding as to the character and the limits of the influence which the two Powers are at liberty to exercise in their respective spheres, we shall one day find ourselves in the position of having either to resign the exiguous rights we retain in Persia under this Convention or to take the serious step of occupying territory in order to assert those rights effectively.

Percy concluded by inviting Grey to make such explanations as would allay the anxieties of the House on these points, and on the vexed question of his inability to secure unequivocal Russian support for Britain's position in the Persian Gulf.[20]

After Grey's long and detailed defence of his policy, to which we shall turn in due course, the Conservative criticism was continued by the Curzonite Earl of Ronaldshay, who was particularly critical of the Persian part of the Convention. Quite apart from the folly of building up the power of Russia in Persia in order to 'scotch' the German railway project (an intention angrily denied by Grey), there was the folly of admitting:

> ... that we no longer were prepared to uphold our position of ascendancy in the provinces of southern Persia, which only a few years ago a representative of the late Government [i.e. Lansdowne] declared in terms which could not be mistaken we could not abandon for any cause whatever. We had also placed the southern capital of Persia, Ispahan, under Russia.

The small triangle of territory in the south-east, Seistan, he regarded as a wholly inadequate compensation for what had been surrendered, and it was not convincing to claim that the immunisation of the region from railway development by Russia was a real gain, since the Russians had never had any intention of actually attempting to build a railway in such difficult terrain. Ronaldshay's experiences in India had evidently made him equally well equipped to criticise the Afghan part of the Convention, which he did with vigour and in language of which Lord Curzon in the 'other place' must certainly have approved; in short, he argued that what Britain had done was to surrender the ability to make preparations to defend Afghanistan from a future Russian military encroachment. Similarly, as regards Tibet, he complained that Britain had now deprived herself of the means of enforcing Tibetan compliance with existing trade agreements, and objected bitterly to the introduction of Russia into the question of the evacuation of the Chumbi Valley.[21] As the next speaker, Dilke, remarked Ronaldshay had gone even further than the official line offered by Percy in his attack upon the Convention.

Since this was a debate on an Opposition motion, it is curious to observe how few Conservatives spoke on it, in contrast to the number of Liberals. Apart from the usual four front bench spokesmen (two from each side), of the twelve backbenchers who spoke, only two were Conservatives, while ten were Liberal supporters. Curious or not, this provided ample opportunity for the Liberal exponents of Britain's imperial and commercial interests to expose their uncertainties about their own government's policy. There were no Labour or Irish speakers (though members of both parties were later to become vehement critics of the Convention for its imperialist and pro-Russian tendencies) and, since there was no division, it is not possible from the columns of Hansard to know how many of them were even there. Apart from Ronaldshay, evidently speaking as representative of the Curzonites, the only other Conservative speaker until Balfour wound up for the Opposition was Evelyn Cecil who, representing what he called 'a great commercial constituency' (Aston Manor), emphasised the great commercial sacrifices which Britain was making and asserted that the bargain was not a fair one; and expressed forebodings that the past record of Russian adherence to promises made did not offer much grounds for confidence that this time the agreements would be observed.[22] This view aligned Cecil quite closely with those Liberals who also feared that, for the sake of securing an essentially political bargain with Russia to safeguard the frontiers of India against further Russian encroachment, the Foreign Office had too readily sacrificed the interests of British

commerce. This position was taken by Joseph Walton, who was another representative of a major industrial constituency (the Barnsley division of Yorkshire) and who had also travelled in Persia:

> It was a very great disappointment to him to find that the Baghdad and the Ispahan trade route[s] into Persia were included in the Russian sphere, and he thought that it would have been more equitable if these had been placed in the neutral zone. He felt that there was a special responsibility on a Liberal and Free Trade Government, which objected to protecting our markets by imposing tariffs on goods coming into this country, to uphold and extend British markets in every part of the world.

Walton also feared that the terms governing the acquisition of concessions in the neutral zone, where British trade was at present preponderant, would facilitate the building of a Russian railway to a port on the Gulf, which would mean that in due course British interests would find themselves threatened by a Russian as well as a German railway.[23] However, by general consent the most informed and alarmist statement of commercial interest came from another Liberal backbencher, H.F.B. Lynch, whose family firm Lynch Brothers had extensive shipping and communications as well as commercial interests on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Mesopotamia), as well as on the Karun River in south-west Persia and on the Persian littoral of the Gulf in general. Paradoxically, Lynch was (like Grey) a Liberal Imperialist and might have been expected to approve the imperial defence aspects of the Convention, but he had prepared a powerful

attack upon the Convention for sacrificing not only undoubted and important economic interests in Persia, but also for abandoning those elements in Persia who were sympathetic to Britain, and looked to Britain to defend the cause of constitutionalism against the autocractic alliance of the Shah and the Russians; there was thus, according to Lynch, not merely a commercial but also a political disaster in the Persian agreement. So lengthy indeed was Lynch's indictment that he was unable to deliver more than a summary of his main points, and was reduced to publishing his full text in the Asiatic Quarterly Review.[24] It was therefore not merely as a merchant, but as a traditional Liberal, that Lynch criticised his leaders:

> Whenever a people were engaged in a struggle for freedom [such as the Persian constitutional revolution of 1905-09], or ... in a struggle after self-realisation, they always felt that England, and especially the Party to which he had the honour to belong, would take their part and sympathise with them and, if circusmtances permitted, convert that sympathy into practical support.

This aspect appealed to Liberal principle (which was to become a common theme in the later Radical attacks on the Convention) and gave added weight to his exposition of the trade and communications of Persia; but as he was warming to his theme in regard to Tibet and Afghanistan as well, he was 'given to understand that two right hon. Gentlemen [i.e. Balfour and Morley] desired to address the House', and was obliged to sit down. But he had said enough to indicate a potentially powerful alliance between commercial and imperial interest on the one hand, and Liberal and indeed Radical principle on the other, in mounting the later assaults

on Grey's policy of the agreement with Russia.[25] He received some support for his point about the commercial loss to British interests involved in the Convention from the Liberal MP for Stirlingshire, Mr. Smeaton, but less than he might, for Smeaton was disposed to believe that the strategic benefits of securing Seistan were real, and that the progress of the Russian people towards constitutional government (signs of which he was apparently able to discern) would, in due course, make Russia a supporter rather than an opponent of the constitutional movement in Persia.[26]

And indeed, the defence of the Convention offered by Grey in his major speech early in the debate did seem to have rallied most Liberal speakers to the government's side, and to have gone a long way to reassuring the leaders of the Opposition (if indeed their support had ever been genuinely in doubt). Grey's approach was twofold: to stress the strategic advantages which Britain gained by Russian exclusion from Tibet, from Afghanistan, and from the south-east corner of Persia, namely Seistan, which would make the Indian frontier much safer from future Russian threats than would otherwise have been the case; and to point out that the supposed sacrifices made by Britain in the north of Persia were more apparent than real, since Russian trade and influence were already predominant in the north, whereas the regulations governing developments in the neutral zone and the reassertion of Britain's special interests in the Persian Gulf effectively insured her position there. He even managed to argue that the very imprecision of the Persian

Gulf declaration was a strength and that he would rather have that than a statement confined to Britain's determination to resist any military penetration. He shrewdly insinuated that Percy's attack was a very different matter from the supportive statements made by Lansdowne in the Lords, and was thus able by implication to invite Balfour to sum up by endorsing the Convention. And reviewing recent developments in the Persian constitutional struggle, he was able to anticipate criticism from his own Radical supporters by observing that, without the policy of the Convention to keep them in line, both Britain and Russia would have found themselves drawn into intervention already; given that Tehran, the capital, was in the north where Russian influence was predominant, and given that the Shah's only reliable troops (the Persian Cossack Brigade) were commanded by Russian officers, such intervention would inevitably have been more to the benefit of the Shah and the reactionaries than would British support for the constitutionalists.[27] Ultimately, however, he based his defence on strategical imperatives:

> Anyone who has studied the question of Agreement between Great Britain and Russia would see that the first point all through in the minds of those who considered it has not been the commercial but the strategical importance of it. It is the strategical position which makes the Agreement desirable and essential; and when you study the strategical position you will find that the key to the whole of it is Seistan.

There followed a long exposition of this strategical imperative in Grey's most magisterial vein. Apart from Seistan, he argued that the Russian recognition that Afghanistan lay beyond the

area of Russian influence was a major reassurance for the defence of India, and that the understanding about consulting Russia about relations with the Amir was a small price to pay. As for Tibet, nothing important had been surrendered by Britain, while Russia had agreed to abandon any pretence to influence there. Grey concluded by urging upon the House that the Convention both strengthened the position of Britain in Asia and improved the prospects for peace.[28]

The official defence of the Convention as expounded by Grey received strong support from an important group of Liberal backbenchers, particularly from those who regarded themselves as experts on questions of imperial defence, like Sir Charles Dilke, and from Liberal Imperialists like J.D. Rees; so that, at this stage, Lynch found himself separated from his fellow Liberal Imperialists, and aligned rather with those few Radicals who spoke up at this stage. Immediately after Rondaldshay's Curzonite onslaught, the redoubtable Dilke gave strong support to Grey's defence of the Convention on strategic grounds (though he had some reservations about aspects of the agreement on Afghanistan), and he looked forward to the reduction of defence expenditure which it would make possible.[29] Sir Henry Norman criticised the arguments advanced by Curzon in the Lords, and from the weight of his long experience in foreign policy (it was he who had provoked the debate on the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902), he spoke approvingly of Grey's achievement in reaching this reconciliation with the Russians.[30] J.D. Rees, another longstanding exponent of Britain's imperial interest from

the Liberal benches, was also approving and urged that 'the India Office as well as the Foreign Office had great cause to be satisfied with the settlement that had been effected'. He thought that the greatest danger to Indian defence would be a Russian railway through Persia to the Gulf, and that the agreement in general and the despatch on the Gulf question in particular had done enough to obviate that problem.[31] Two retired Indian civil servants lent the weight of their experience in Grey's support; Sir John Jardine said that:

> ... all those who had had Indian experience, and who had shared in however small degree the great burden which rested upon the Government of that country both night and day, would feel great satisfaction that this country had started a policy of friendliness with Russia, and had actually come to terms with her.[32]

Sir Henry Cotton, who had been one of the main movers in the press campaign in 1903-05 against the Younghusband expedition, expressed complacent satisfaction that the Liberal government had in effect adopted his policy on Tibet, and had 'sounded the death-knell' of the forward policy (though he had some reservations about the Persian agreement).[33] Other Liberals cast doubt on the strictures uttered by Walton and Lynch about the effect of the agreement on trade in Persia: Ellis Griffith thought the damage to trade much exaggerated, and that the advantages of the Convention as a whole far outweighed it[34]; Thomas Hart-Davies, a Radical who had served in the Indian judicial service, though that 'commercial affairs would protect themselves', and that the Convention would 'go a long way towards securing peace with Russia, and with the whole world'[35]; though

Smeaton, while favouring the agreement in general, did endorse the opinion of Walton (and later Lynch) that there would be some genuine loss of trade.[36]

When Balfour came to sum up for the Opposition, therefore, enough had been said from the Liberal benches to make it clear that the Conservative motion of criticism, if pressed, would have no prospect of success, while the relative silence of Conservative members might well have suggested that they would be unhappy about voting against a policy which was essentially a continuation of that of their own party previously. Balfour implied as much when he acknowledged that he was convinced that Grey, in securing Seistan against the danger of Russian strategic railway development, had 'obtained something for this country which has genuine strategic importance', and when he agreed that 'nobody on either side of the House desires that we should mix ourselves up with the affairs of Tibet'. While insisting that a better bargain could have been struck with the Russians, he ended by conceding that what had been achieved had 'substantial advantages' for Britain and should lead to better relations and greater security.[37] In reply to a jibe from John Morley, the Secretary of State for India, who summed up for the government to the effect that Balfour and Percy should never have put their motion down and would be appalled if it were actually carried, Balfour admitted that he had no intention of dividing the House and withdrew the motion, which he attempted to justify as being merely procedural and 'the most innocuous form of motion possible'[38]. Morley then elicited from him an admission that the Conservatives

would accept and observe the Convention when they returned to office, and stressed that both Balfour in the Commons and Lansdowne in the Lords had in effect summed up in favour of the Convention.[39] That Morley, ardent Gladstonian and opponent of the 'Empire of Swagger' should be so forthright an advocate of the policy of the Convention, and should be so insistent on the advantages of security and economy that it would bring to India, was one important reason why so many Liberals who were by no means Liberal Imperialists should support it; and indeed, as we have seen, on the Liberal benches it was only those whose trading interests in the region gave them an imperialist tendency (Walton, Lynch) who found themselves in alignment with that section of the Opposition which was imperialist to the point of almost lamenting the abandonment of the forward policy (Percy, but above all Ronaldshay). Clearly the consensus of the House was in favour of the Convention, and there was as yet remarkably little sign of the Radical unease which Morley had feared. Only Lynch, and briefly Cotton, anticipated the deep concern for the progress of constitutional reform in Persia which was to surface in Radical circles during and after 1909, and there was as yet no major objection to an agreement with autocratic Russia.

Nor was there any disposition to interpret agreement with Russia as being specifically connected with the balance of power in Europe, or with the European alliance-systems. There was no Gibson Bowles (he had lost his seat in 1906) to observe, as he had done in the debate on the Anglo-French <u>entente</u>, the

relevance of the Russian agreement to the 'older, simpler and, as I think, better system of the balance of power'.[40] The House of Commons seemed oblivious to those calculations of European significance made by some British policy-makers in private. It was as an Asian deal that the Convention was presented to them, and as an Asian deal that they accepted it. The idea of the Convention as completing a Triple entente of Britain, France and Russia, which was so common by late 1909, was not in evidence in its public discussion in early 1908.

5.3 Radical Disenchantment with the Russian Connection : the Persia Debate of March 1909

The first signs of Radical discontent with the policy of the Convention were voiced by Lynch in the debate of February 1908. They were reinforced, again by Lynch but with other support this time, on 24 March 1909. When the supply resolution was moved, providing that money be voted to the government 'for or towards defraying the charges for Civil Services and Revenue Departments' for the following year, Lynch moved an amendment to reduce the Foreign Office vote by £100, 'in order to raise an urgent question of foreign affairs' : a relatively rare example of a classic technique for raising a debate on a technicality but with the approval of the Speaker.[41] His case was the stronger, as he explained, since he had tried to elicit a reply from Grey in the debate on the Address at the beginning of the session, but evidently without success, and indeed on the present occasion it is clear that Grey had thought it advisable to attend and to reply to the concerns expressed by Lynch and by his other Radical

allies, now much more active on the Russian connection than they had been in the debate on the Convention in February 1908. The chief concern expressed by Lynch was that Russian military influence was growing in northern Persia, thus threatening the strategic position of Britain's Indian possessions and raising the prospect that Britain would have to intervene militarily herself in response. It may be observed that Lynch was already anticipating what was to become the main grievance against Russian action in Persia, a full month before the major Russian incursion got under way in late April.[42] Russian military intervention threatened the continuing existence of Persia as a buffer state protecting India, and according to Lynch was part of a calculated policy of military support for the Shah, Russia's client ruler in Tehran, and emphatically against the constitutional and nationalist movement (which had, until August 1907, enjoyed a degree of sympathy and support from Britain). Lynch demanded that this illegitimate action by Russian officers should be halted, and that Britain should exercise its influence in support of the constitutional movement, and seek to secure Russian cooperation in promoting good government in Persia.

Lynch was supported most vigorously by John Dillon, the Irish Nationalist, who broadened his speech into a general criticism of Grey's entire policy towards Russia; also by another Irish member, Swift MacNeill, who complained at great length that proper constitutional control over foreign policy had been lost to the high-handed actions of the Foreign Office, inadequately supervised by Grey. The Radical criticism was continued towards

the end of the debate by G.P. Gooch, who called for a policy of active support for the Persian constitution and a repudiation of Russian intervention. Even Joseph Walton, who praised the wisdom of Grey's Russian policy, which he maintained had already done much to promote stability in Europe, 'having regard to the co-operation of England, Russia and France in the Near East, in the present Balkan difficulty' (he meant the so-called Bosnian crisis), urged a much stronger line in support of the restoration of the Persian constitution, and looked forward to British influence being used to involve Russia in this policy. Only Rees (Liberal Imperialist in the course of a metamorphosis into a Conservative) was doubtful whether the House could really say anything useful on the internal affairs of Persia.[43]

To this select though not yet particularly powerful group of Radicals, Grey replied at some modest length in defence of his Persian policy, insisting that it was designed to promote constitutional government and stability in Persia, while avoiding excessive interference by Britain and Russia. As to the influence of Russia in Tehran and the north, he used an argument that was to become increasingly familiar whenever the question of Persia came up: that Russia's position in the north was an accomplished fact well before the conclusion of the Convention, and that the agreement of the two great powers had in fact helped to restrain rather than encourage Russian policy:

> Without the Anglo-Russian Convention, had the old suspicion continued to exist between the two Governments, the old belief that we were working to take advantage of each other and to undermine each other's influence in Persia, it is, I think, absolutely certain that ... the amount of intervention would have been much greater.

This spirited defence of a policy which was already beginning to look discreditable to a growing section of Radical opinion was given general support by the only speaker from the Conservative benches (where they were perhaps enjoying the spectacle of party disunity opposite them): Earl Percy, still acting as Conservative front-bench spokesman on foreign affairs. The House then voted to approve the original Supply motion without Lynch's technical amendment.[44] Clearly the government was at this stage still able to secure the general assent of the House to its policies towards Russia and Persia: but the genesis of the Radical revolt which was to prove so strong in 1911 was already apparent.

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CHAPTER SIX

THE ANGLO GERMAN ANTAGONISM : THE NAVAL QUESTION 1909

6.1 Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism

We have dwelt at some length on the reception of the agreement with Russia, since that completed the network of agreements which the British entered into between 1900 and 1914, and which were consolidated into the so-called 'Triple Entente' which drew Britain into war in Europe at the beginning of August 1914. That war was of course fought against Germany, and was the consequence of Britain's failure either to reach a similar agreement with Germany or to convince the German government that, in the event of war, Britain would stand beside France and Russia against German aggression. It will therefore be necessary to review British relations with Germany, even though there was no German agreement equivalent to those with France and Russia; indeed, the failure to achieve one must be regarded as the principal failure of Liberal foreign policy after December 1905. There can be no doubt that the Liberals came to office genuinely committed to complementing the entente with France with an understanding with Russia (which they achieved) but also with Germany (which they did not).[1] Nor is it the case that there was no existing area of friction with Germany susceptible to being resolved by an equivalent understanding; while there were perhaps no territorial conflicts as there had been with France and as there were with Russia, there were disagreements over major issues such as the Baghdad railway (which we have already touched upon), but above

all over the growing naval rivalry between the two countries, the resolution of which was a big prize which the Liberals would dearly like to have secured. This is not the place to describe in detail the rise of the Anglo-German antagonism over the question of naval armaments, nor the intense rivalry which developed in the area of battleship construction, particularly after the launch of the revolutionary new battleship type, the Dreadnought, by the British in 1906. This topic has been exhaustively examined by other scholars elsehwere.[2] But it will be necessary here to consider the view taken by the House of Commons of the Anglo-German naval rivalry, the extent to which that rivalry determined the development of Britain's relations not only with Germany but also with her entente partners, and the consequent bearing of German policy upon Britain's place in the European balance of power and in the European alliance-systems.

Following the German navy laws of 1898 and 1900, which projected a compact and substantial German fleet operating in European waters and capable of taking on and damaging if not destroying the British fleet, the British Admiralty had identified Germany as Britain's most likely naval opponent in war no later than 1904.[3] The destruction of the Russian fleet at Tsushima in 1905 relieved the British of some of their naval anxieties and apparently made the 'Two Power Standard' as a yardstick of naval security absolutely safe for the foreseeable future, but the launch of the Dreadnought in 1906 provided the

Germans with the opportunity to overtake the British in the most modern type of battleship and had thus, by 1909 at the latest, made the two-power standard obsolete and had forced the British Admiralty to adopt a one-power standard plus a margin of safety against Germany as the effective criterion against which Britain's own building of first-class battleships and battle cruisers had to be assessed. Consequently, although under the leadership of Campbell-Bannerman the Liberals felt sufficiently confident in 1906 and 1907 to propose to the Germans a reduction in the construction of warships, and indeed to adopt a unilateral reduction in Britain's construction (for which they were to pay a heavy price in the debate on the Conservative motion of censure in March 1909), the winter of 1908-09 saw an ominous revival of British anxieties about the security of Britain's naval predominance, on which not only European but also Imperial safety was seen to depend. These anxieties culminated in the so-called 'acceleration crisis' of early 1909, the bitter four days of debate on the 1909 Naval Estimates, and the Motion of Censure moved by Arthur Lee and debated in the Commons on 29 March 1909.[4] The naval scare was powerfully supported by the Tory and navalist press, which has been authoritatively shown to have been receiving confidential information from the Admiralty on the German naval programme, and which it published in order to embarrass the Liberal government and to build up an irresistible agitation for a large increase in the naval programme.[5] The problem was not merely the rate of

construction of first class battleships (of the German equivalent of the Dreadnought type) announced in the Novelle of February 1908 (an amendment to the basic German Navy Law of 1900), which provided for the construction of three first class battleships and one first class battle-cruiser in each of the four years from 1908 to 1912, although this escalation was substantial and alarming enough (especially since the British had themselves departed from the rate of four Dreadnoughts a year laid down in the Cawdor memorandum under the Conservatives in 1905, but abandoned by the Liberals in the hope of reducing the pace of the Anglo-German naval rivalry).[6] More alarming still, the British Admiralty was in the winter of 1908-09 gathering intelligence that the German Admiralty was anticipating the published programme by issuing orders for essential equipment such as guns and armour, so that in effect there was a real (or at least an apparent) acceleration of the German programme; this would force the British to fix their own naval construction for coming years, not upon that published by the German government, but upon their own estimate of the potential shipbuilding capacity of the German shipyards. Before the naval estimates were presented to the House in March 1909, Grey had held a number of confidential conversations with the German ambassador, Metternich, in an attempt to remove any misunderstandings on the question of German acceleration, but the German assurances were not sufficiently categorical to convince Admiral Sir John Fisher and the Admiralty Board that the govern ment could safely base its future policy upon the published programme. Instead, the

Cabinet (after a prolonged and bitter controversy) came forward with a programme announced to the Commons by the First Lord of the Admiralty, Reginald McKenna, in the opening day of debate on the estimates on 16 March 1909; the House was asked to approve funding for four first class battleships immediately, while giving the government power to lay down a further four (the so-called 'contingent Dreadnoughts') without further Parliamentary sanction, if the progress of the German programme was deemed sufficient to justify them; and this programme was all to be counted within the financial year 1909-10, and was to be without prejudice to whatever the Admiralty deemed to be necessary for 1910 and subsequent years.[7]

It was the debate on these estimates which confronted the Liberal government with its most serious Parliamentary crisis over a matter touching on foreign policy, and not only in its relations with its own Radical supporters (who had regularly criticised what they regarded as 'bloated expenditure' on naval armaments),but also with the Conservative Opposition, which had usually until now been reliable in its support for Grey's essentially conservative and imperialist policies.

6.2 The Debate on the Naval Estimates, March 1909

The debate on the estimates took place over four days, between 16th and 22nd March 1909, the House sitting as a Committee of the Whole House for this purpose, so that Members were allowed (as they would not be in ordinary debate) to speak

more than once. These debates have been thoroughly examined in a classic work, Woodward's Great Britain and the German Navy, Chapter 11, so it is not proposed here to analyse them exhaustively, but rather to examine them in their relation specifically to foreign policy rather than defence, and with reference to British relations with Germany.[8] Of course the estimates were discussed annually and to include each year's debates in a study of foreign policy would unbalance the study, giving undue attention to what was frequently a matter of defence policy rather than foreign policy. The debate of 1909 is however the best example of the way in which the two areas of policy sometimes interconnected, particularly since so many of the contributions to debate put their arguments in the light of Anglo-German relations. The Radicals on the benches behind the government, for instance, were apt to complain that what they regarded as grossly inflated estimates were the result of Grey's failure to achieve, or indeed to pursue with sufficient vigour, that policy of a naval understanding with Germany which had been associated with Campbell-Bannerman over the first two years of the government's existence. For the navalists (overwhelmingly represented on the Conservative benches), it had been the weak policy of Campbell-Bannerman, his inability to resist the pressure for economy from his own Radical supporters, and his eagerness to conciliate Germany in the vain pursuit of an agreement with Germany, which had brought Britain's naval defences to such a low point that minimum naval security could no longer be guaranteed even by such a large programme as the government now

proposed: Asquith, McKenna and Grey thus found themselves caught in an uncomfortable crossfire between the official Opposition and their own nominal supporters.

Over the four days of debate, apart from the four official government spokesmen advocating their programme of four Dreadnoughts plus the four 'contingent' Dreadnoughts, there were forty-two different speakers, many of them speaking more than once. Of these, eleven may be identified as Radicals, Irish and Labour, taking the traditional position of hostility to armaments expenditure associated with Radicalism at this time; on the other side, there were nineteen Conservatives (including Balfour and Arthur Lee) adopting a strong navalist position and criticising the Liberals most vigorously for allowing the situation to arise where it now became possible for Germany to overtake Britain's necessary lead in first class battleships; apart from McKenna, Asquith, Grey and Macnamara (the government's front bench team on this issue), there were eight Liberals who took a ministerialist position and may be counted as supporting McKenna's programme; while there were three Liberals and one Labour MP who took such a strong navalist line that their rhetoric was more oppositional than supportive, although their support for the government would reassert itself in the division lobbies. When the votes were counted in the divisions at the end of the second day, the government had what at first sight may seem to be unexpectedly comfortable majorities in view of all the criticism; 246 to 152 on the procedural motion

to take the vote, and on the substantive motion to approve the expenditure, a very comfortable majority of 322 to 83.[9] This majority however was not as clear-cut as it looked, and calls for some comment.

Those who voted 'Aye' on the first motion were voting merely to bring that day's debate to an end by moving to the division; both the navalist and the Radical critics of the government could therefore vote together in their wish to continue the debate (and indeed did so), particularly if they had not themselves had the opportunity of speaking. This explains the size and the cross-party character of those voting in the minority on the first division. The second division was, however, a very different affair since the polarisation was now between those who supported (however reluctantly) the programme proposed by the Admiralty, and those who continued to find it excessive. A close scrutiny of those who voted <u>against</u> the second motion reveals that they were entirely composed of the government's critics on the Radical, Labour and Irish benches, while those who voted <u>for</u> the motion were drawn not merely from Asquith's own loyal Liberal supporters (whom we have categorised as ministerialists), but also in substantial numbers from the Conservative opposition, and also from those maverick Liberal and Labour (there were no Irish) navalists who were in a sense more ministerialist than the ministerialists. To an extent, there is no mystery about this; it would hardly be possible for those(navalists) who thought the government's proposed programme was hardly adequate to go into the lobby with those who thought it was excessive or, in

other words, on a substantive motion to vote with 'extremists' of the opposing persuasion; thus in the lobbies, if not in the debate, the Liberal government could in practice enjoy the support of the Opposition even if they found it embarrassing. Thus mainstream Liberals plus Conservatives could agree that the rise of the German navy must be met by at least the minimum programme of eight Dreadnoughts implied in the statement of McKenna, and explicitly promised by Asquith in the event of German acceleration being established.[10] Opposition was confined to the traditional opponents of 'bloated' expenditure on armaments. But it is precisely their weak showing which calls for comment; it was, after all, a major part of their case that the problem was not merely with the general disposition of governments to waste scarce resources on expensive armaments, but with the specific failure of the Liberals to seek with sufficient energy an agreement with Germany, which would clear the way for reductions in naval expenditure. In a Parliament which had an overall Liberal majority, with a Gladstonian majority plus a large Radical wing, together with a small but significant Labour party of around 40 with an Irish Nationalist party of over 80, a vote in favour of economy on armaments expenditure of no more than 83 (with a majority for the advocates of a big navy of over 230) must seem derisory. The real question must be, what happened to the Radical vote and the cause of agreement with Germany to complement the existing agreements with France and Russia?

The answer here lies not with anything said in debate by the navalists on the Conservative side, but by the devastating revelations made by McKenna in his opening speech, and above all by Asquith in his extraordinary appeal to his own back-bench critics. The whole debate was characterised by exchanges of a complicated nature about rates of progress in naval building, dates of completion, and arms and shipbuilding capacity, in which the Opposition spokesmen (especially Balfour)[11] had sought to show their superior knowledge and wisdom. But Asquith's purpose was different, to reassure his anxious supporters on the Radical benches that the situation was as grave as the government said it was, and that the government's programme (dismaying as it might be), was essential; in other words, he sought to head off the Radical revolt against a big navy programme which he feared. His closing statement on 16 March produced an effect which was reported to be devastating to his own supporters:

> I speak quite frankly to the House, because I am obliged to tell them these matters in order to let them understand why we economists [in naval estimates] have presented these Estimates to the House: there has been such an enormous development in Germany ... in the provision for gun mountings and armaments of those great monsters, those Dreadnoughts which are now the dominating type of ship ... that we could no longer take to ourselves, as we could a year ago with reason, the consoling and comforting reflection that we have the advantage in the speed and the rate at which ships can be constructed. ... I think that Hon. Members on this side of the House should think twice or thrice before they refuse to the government the power which we are asking the House to give.[12]

This powerful appeal to patriotism and to party loyalty had its effect, and goes a long way to explaining why Radical critics

kept out of the 'No' lobby when the vote was taken (though most of them still could not bring themselves to enter the 'Aye' lobby). The next day, the same day as the division was taken, one of the Radicals' leaders, A.G.C. Harvey, rose to explain that, in the light of the Prime Minister's solemn observations, he was withdrawing the hostile motion which he had previously put down; and although he went on to regret the wasteful expenditure on armaments and to express the hope for an agreement with Germany, he did not press his amendment and he did not vote against the government in the critical vote (though he apparently could not bring himself to vote for them either). The essential gain which Asquith had achieved was the abstention of Radical critics such as Harvey.[13]

So long as representative Liberal Radicals like Harvey withdrew their resistance to the government's programme, it did not matter so much to Asquith if there remained a hard core of opponents determined to vote against the estimates in any eventuality. Their most effective spokesman was the Labour MP Arthur Henderson, who had also put down an amendment against the estimates and who insisted that those who thought like him were entitled to show their opinion in the division lobbies, even if they were a minority. Of the withdrawal of Harvey's amendment, he complained that there had been 'too much wire-pulling in connection with this debate', and insisted that, since his own amendment was not to be called, he and his friends would insist on 'availing ourselves of the only opportunity there is left to us, to divide against the main question: "That the Speaker do now leave the Chair", to show our protest', which they duly did,

and so revealed their own relative ineffectiveness against the powerful appeal already made by Asquith.[14] When the debate resumed the next day, the navalists pressed on with their accusation that the programme proposed was inadequate to secure the safety of Britain's naval and imperial communications, with a powerful speech from Commander Carlyon Bellairs, a Liberal who in 1909 joined the Conservatives, apparently because of his dissatisfaction with the movement's naval policies. Bellairs gave the most naked expression in the whole debate to the submerged fear of Germany which underlay the navalist position:

> When we are asked whether we are going to war with Germany, my answer is that the object of increasing our Navy is to prevent a war with Germany. We cannot lose sight of the fact that Germany has undertaken three [sic] aggressive wars within the last 50 years. The German Empire was founded in blood, was consolidated in blood, and was extended by blood. We know that the prevailing sentiment of the German people is hostile to this country. (cries of 'No, No')...[15]

But of course the moral that Bellairs (and those who thought like him) drew from this gloomy scenario was <u>not</u> that Britain should therefore draw closer to the natural anti-German coalition in Europe for mutual protection, but on the contrary, that she should take more energetic measures to ensure her own security on her own; the German alarm did not, or not necessarily, lead to the conclusion that Britain should develop a balance-of-power policy in Europe, but rather that there was no substitute for maintaining powerful naval defences single-handed. This

position, though as we have seen most characteristically expressed by a vehement navalist from the Liberal benches, may be seen as underlying the views of navalists on all sides of the House, including the Conservative benches; it was left to the Radical critics of the government to point to the foreign policy implications of the Anglo-German naval rivalry, and of course their solution was not for a balance-of-power courtship of France and Russia, but rather an engagement with Germany herself. As the rising Labour MP Fred Maddison put it, on the fourth and last day of debate:

> I believe there are resources of statesmanship which have not been exhausted, or yet entered upon, with a real belief that they could accomplish something. My charge against the diplomatist is that he has not had so much faith in diplomacy as the soldier has in war. When once the diplomatist believes that he has mighty powers, something more substantial will be achieved. [16]

Without naming Grey, he could hardly have uttered a sterner reproof to the author of the cabinet's German policy; but he was for the moment in a small minority. The House adopted the estimates without further division, and the Conservatives pressed ahead with their strongly navalist motion of censure against the government.

6.3 The Conservative Motion of Censure : 29 March 1909

This motion arose directly out of the debates in Committee on the naval estimates, and particularly the perception of the Conservatives that the Liberal government was vulnerable to the

accusation that it had failed adequately to provide for national security in naval armaments against the potential threat of the dramatic rise in German naval power. It was Asquith himself who provided the justification for it. In his powerful speech on 16 March, which was primarily addressed to his own backbenchers and which was designed to deter them from voting against the government on grounds of economy, he at the same time offered to the navalist Opposition what might be termed a hostage to fortune; if the new naval situation created by the threat of German acceleration was so threatening as to demand that the 'economists' on the Liberal benches should swallow their traditional principles, and accede to the demand for an unprecedented and large construction programme, then clearly the government was on its past record culpable for not having made adequate provision, and sooner. This attack was all the more powerful since the Conservatives could point out that if the Liberals had adhered to the Cawdor programme of naval construction which they had inherited in 1906, instead of reducing it in successive years from 1906 to 1909, the window of opportunity offered to the Germans to overtake Britain in naval strength would never have been opened. This was the essential justification for the vote of censure, and it is not easy to avoid the conclusion that to a large extent the Liberals had indeed brought this particular problem upon themselves.

Though the motion was essentially Balfour's, it was moved for the official Opposition by Arthur Lee, their spokesman on

naval affairs. In deploying the arguments against the Liberals' inadequate defence policies, he was at pains to deny that there was any objection to the German naval programme, or that the problem arose from inadequate diplomacy. He asserted that the German government had:

> ... acted strictly within their own rights, and it is peculiarly absurd for this country to accuse them of treachery when they apparently made no secret of their programme. Accordingly, Britain has no legitimate grievances against Germany. The grievance, if there is any, is against the British Government which landed the country in this predicament.[17]

Lee clearly sought to limit the Opposition's accusations of governmental inadequacy to the specific area of naval provision. But the government was not prepared to accept this restriction. It is perhaps significant that the leading spokesman for the Liberals immediately after Lee had sat down was not, as one might expect, the First Lord of the Admiralty, but the Foreign Secretary. Nor can this be because McKenna was not able to be present, because Hansard shows that he responded to some of Balfour's jibes when the latter summed up at the end of the debate, after Asquith had given the final statement of the government's position.[18] Of course Grey, as a heavyweight Parliamentary spokesman for the government, was able to deliver a strong defence of the naval policies of the cabinet, and no doubt he was a better and more convincing House of Commons apologist than was McKenna; but he was also able to set the defence of the government's record on naval construction in the context of Anglo-German diplomatic relations, which he did at some length, arguing that:

> ... since the present Government came into office there has been peaceful progression and improved relations between ourselves and Germany... As long as the Morocco barrier which existed at Algeciras was liable to be erected again, of course we had a certain feeling of discouragement that the improvement of the moment might be again set back. That disappears with the agreement [of February 1909] between Germany and France. And now as regards our future diplomatic relations with Germany, I see a wide space in which both of us may walk in peace and amity. Two things, in my opinion two extreme things, would produce conflict. One is an attempt by us to isolate Germany ... Another thing which would certainly produce a conflict would be the isolation of England, the isolation of England attempted by any great Continental Power [i.e. Germany] so as to dictate and dominate the policy of the Continent. That always has been so in [our] history. [19]

This remarkable statement by the Foreign Secretary firmly set the debate about naval security in the context of the European balance of power, and moved the discussion from the question of naval security within the framework of imperial structures to the narrower but more immediate question of the European balance of power. Grey did not need to allude to the understanding with France or with Russia explicitly to ensure that the supporters of the government were aware that, behind the question of German naval potential, lay the whole question of Britain's European relations; but this was not a matter on which the two front benches were divided, and the vote of censure was not focused upon it, so it is not surprising that the House did not follow Grey in this line of argument, but preferred to concentrate upon the specific accusation that defence expenditure, rather than foreign policy, had left Britain dangerously exposed to the rise of German naval

power. On this occasion, as in the debates on the naval estimates which we have just considered, the House clearly viewed naval defence as being a matter largely divorced from the day-to-day questions of diplomatic alignment.

Whatever their motives in bringing forward this vote of censure (and there is evidence from their speeches in Hansard that the Liberals at least thought that the Conservatives were exploiting the issue for electoral purposes), the Conservatives found themselves in difficulty in the House of Commons when the question came to a vote. In the speeches themselves, the balance of argument was more or less even; Mr. Speaker called seven Conservative back benchers who supported Balfour's motion of censure, and seven Liberals who opposed it. In addition, one Labour MP spoke in support of the government (there were no Irish speakers).[20] In the division, however, the Opposition was heavily outvoted, there being 135 votes in favour of the motion of censure, but 353 against it; so that the government emerged from this damaging episode with a strong endorsement of its policies, in spite of the strength of the Conservative case.[21] The reason for this is clear, that the Conservatives almost wholly failed to attract support beyond their own Parliamentary strength (since Bellairs was in the process of abandoning his former Liberal loyalties anyway, his vote for the motion is hardly surprising), whereas the government was able to rally in its support many Radical and Labour members who were critics of its heavy expenditure on naval

armaments but were wholly unable to vote for a Conservative motion which in effect called for even more; thus, for instance, of those who had spoken against McKenna's estimates in Committee over the previous days, both Henderson (Labour) and Maddison (Labour) went into the lobby in support of the Liberal government, as did Harvey (Liberal-Radical), Brunner (Liberal-Radical), Cotton (Liberal-Radical) and indeed most of the front bench's other Radical critics. Thus the tactics of the Conservative opposition had the paradoxical effect of uniting the Liberal ministerialists and the Radicals in defence of the government's naval programme, and exposing their own relative numerical inferiority. Their motion might just as well have been designed to consolidate the natural majority in that Parliament in support of the government, and it entirely failed to tempt the government's own Radical critics into the lobby along with the Conservatives themselves. Thus the real strength of the government's position was revealed by the various divisions on 17th and 29th March; in practice they could count on the support of the Conservatives to give them a large majority in favour of their naval programme against their own back bench critics, whereas they proved able to rely upon those very same critics to support them when the Conservatives sought to brand that naval programme as inadequate. Thus Asquith, Grey, McKenna and their colleagues were able comfortably to survive the onslaught from their critics both on the right and on the left, and to pursue the course of policy in naval construction and in the development of Anglo-German relations which they had set themselves.

It may be supposed that the Parliamentary fury over the naval question was therefore irrelevant to the development of foreign policy, but this would be an error. There is good evidence in the diplomatic record that the debates in the House of Commons did indeed have their effect upon German opinion; and that the evident determination of even a well-intentioned Liberal administration to protect Britain's naval supremacy at whatever cost had a salutary effect upon German policy. It is no coincidence that, less than three months after the government's announcement that it was (as expected) proceeding with the four contingent Dreadnoughts of the 1909 programme, the German Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, came forward with comprehensive proposals for negotiations on the naval and related issues in Anglo-German relations.[22] Of course the content of these negotiations was unknown to Parliament, and indeed they did not in the end result in the kind of agreement for which Grey would have hoped or which he would have been able to recommend to the House; nevertheless, the extensive negotiations which took place between the autumn of 1909 and the spring of 1912 clearly owed something to the determination showed by both government and Parliament in the debates and divisions of March 1909. At the very least, as one historian of this question has argued, they served to convince the German government that, on the one hand, the British would go to whatever lengths were necessary to preserve their naval security; but that, on the other, a genuine agreement with Germany enabling them to reduce their naval expenditure was so attractive that they would

perhaps be willing to pay a high political price to secure it.[23] However embarrassing the naval debates of 1909 may have been in domestic terms (though, as we have seen, the government was well able to survive them), in international terms they proved to be conducive to the development of Grey's long term strategy of an understanding with Germany on the naval question.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

PARLIAMENT AND THE BALANCE OF POWER IN EUROPE: THE DEBATE OF NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1911

7.1 Parliament and Foreign Affairs 1909-1911

From the middle of 1909 onwards, the British government was actually pursuing a balance-of-power policy as regards Germany, though reluctant to acknowledge this publicly. As early as May 1909 Grey circulated British embassies abroad with an instruction to avoid the use of the term 'triple entente' with regard to the combination of France, Russia and Britain:

> The expression is one which is no doubt convenient, but if it appeared in a Parliamentary Bluebook it would be assumed to have some special official meaning, and might provoke inconvenient comment or inquiry.[1]

Sir Charles Hardinge, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, explained privately that this was also to save Grey embarrassment in Cabinet, and to avoid offending Germany.[2] In private Grey was however more unguarded, on one occasion at this time observing to the German ambassador that:

> ... it was a question of preventing the balance of power from being destroyed. If ... France and Russia were convinced that England was no use, and they must abandon her and make friends with the Triple Alliance, the result would be a quintuple alliance which would leave England isolated.[3]

This policy was evidently therefore defensive rather than offensive, aimed at preventing the domination of Europe by Germany but not,

as the Kaiser was prone to allege, securing her isolation or encirclement. In particular, Grey had no intention of doing anything to strengthen the connection with Russia, least of all by converting it into an alliance, which in the spring of 1909 the Russian government appeared to be seeking.[4] This was an option firmly ruled out by Hardinge, with the approval of Grey and Asquith, on the grounds that it would be unnecessarily provocative to Germany, would provoke a furious reaction in public and Parliamentary opinion, and was not necessary to maintain Britain's international security.[5] It will be noticed that there were held to be perfectly sound foreign-policy reasons for not adopting a policy which, however, would also increase Grey's Parliamentary difficulties: Hardinge's memorandum was apparently composed in the immediate aftermath of the Lynch debate on Russian action in Persia (March 1909) which we noticed at the end of Chapter Five, and also the naval debates of the same month.

Apart from the continual irritant of Parliamentary Questions, however, after the German/naval and the Russian/Persian debates of March 1909, the government was once again left free to develop its policies abroad without serious Parliamentary criticism. Between March 1909 and November 1911 there was no debate on foreign policy in the House of Commons, although (as in the period 1904-1908 which we noted above in Chapter Four) there were important developments in foreign affairs. During the most acute phase of the Bosnian crisis, during February-

April 1909, the House was preoccupied with the naval and Russian questions, as we have seen. The discussions on the Russian connection between April and August 1909 were not discussed in Cabinet, let alone in Parliament, although there was a spirited Radical campaign outside Parliament against the visit of the Tsar to Cowes in August 1909.[6] Even more significantly, the major Anglo-German negotiations on the naval question, which began after Bethmann-Hollweg's proposals of 21 August 1909, which were broadened to include the Baghdad railway and Persia, and the possibility of a comprehensive Anglo-German political formula, and which continued with interruptions right through to 1910 and into the Summer of 1911 - these vital negotiations were not made the subject of Parliamentary debate, so the government was not obliged to justify its cautious approach towards the German proposals.[7] These negotiations were suspended by the Moroccan crisis precipitated by the despatch of the German gunboat Panther to Agadir on 1st July 1911, but even that acute international crisis with all its dangers of war was not debated in Parliament until it was over: this being the reason for, though not the only subject of, the great Commons foreign affairs debate of November and December 1911.

The reasons why Parliament had once more apparently fallen silent on foreign policy may briefly be indicated, as they are essentially the same as operated during 1904-1908. Primarily, in this period the main controversies in Parliament and between parties were about major domestic issues which

naturally and inevitably diverted Parliamentary attention away from the apparently more remote questions of foreign policy: in particular, the acute constitutional crisis which arose from Lloyd George's 'People's Budget' of 1909, and which led to the confrontation between the House of Commons and the House of Lords, the two general elections of 1910 (January and December), and the great Parliament Act of 1911 which finally established the legislative as well as the budgetary supremacy of the Commons.[8] The battle over these crucial constitutional matters not only absorbed the attention of politicians of all parties, of the press, and of public opinion; but also, and from our point of view even more significantly, it naturally tended to monopolise the Parliamentary timetable, so that there was neither demand nor scope for debates on foreign affairs. Thus, for example, when the Agadir crisis was at its peak around 21 July 1911, the cabinet discussed what Grey should say to the Germans in private, but the pressure of Parliamentary business was such that the public statement of the British position was made <u>not</u> in Parliament (as might be expected) but by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lloyd George, at his traditional after-dinner speech at the Mansion House on 21 July 1911. Historians have perhaps not sufficiently noticed the light which this episode sheds on the irrelevance of Parliament to much of the government's conduct of foreign policy in this period.[9] It is, of course, as true as ever that Parliament could not debate what it did not know about, and that the Foreign Office preferred to avoid public discussion of sensitive negotiations

such as those with Germany on the naval and related questions, for fear that premature disclosure or ill-judged comment would destroy whatever prospect of success there was: and this combination of secrecy and ignorance will adequately explain the inability of MPs to influence even such an important question of foreign policy. That, indeed, was precisely the complaint made by the Radicals when finally they got to have a debate on foreign policy in November 1911.

When Parliament reassembled after the summer recess of that year, it was in the middle of rumours and anxiety that Britain had come uncomfortably close to war with Germany over the summer, a war which public opinion and Parliament would have been powerless to influence, so that Radical opinion was predictably alarmed; while Conservative opinion was uneasy that the Admiralty had not been sufficiently alert to the danger of a German attack. This public concern would no doubt have been all the greater had it been generally known (as of course it was not) that the Committee of Imperial Defence had, at its epic meeting of 23rd August 1911, discussed the possibility of British intervention in a war between France and Germany arising out of the Moroccan crisis, and that there had been open dissension between the War Office and the Admiralty over the form which such intervention should take.[10] But if ordinary Members of Parliament did not know, the members of the Cabinet did, so that there was not only a Cabinet crisis over the military connection with France, but also an insistence in Cabinet that Grey should allay the legitimate

anxieties of Parliament and the public by an open exposition of the government's policy in the crisis. This was the genesis of the extraordinary and unprecedented debate which was held, on a government motion, on 27 November 1911 and continued on 14 December.[11] The motion 'that the foreign policy of His Majesty's Government be now considered' was moved by Grey himself, the first and only occasion in this period when the Foreign Secretary invited the House to a wide-ranging review of the government's foreign policy in general, rather than confining discussion to a specific treaty or issue. That this was done at all indicates how seriously the Prime Minister and Cabinet took the unrest in their own party and in the country over the conduct of foreign policy.

7.2 The Debate of 27 November 1911 : Grey on the Defensive

Grey opened the debate with a long defence of his policy in the recent crisis, and a review of Britain's relations with France and Germany in it, and apparently hoped that this would set the agenda for the rest of the debate (in which hope he was to be disappointed, for his Radical critics were not about to let slip such a rare opportunity to criticise other aspects of foreign policy). Having delivered his defence of his policy in the recent crisis, which was evidently convincing and satisfied all but the irreconcilable Radicals, Grey went on to discuss the principles of his conduct of policy: he explained that he did not believe in secret diplomacy in the sense of secret treaties unknown to Parliament:

> It would be foolish to do it. No British Government could embark upon a war without public opinion behind it, and such engagements as there are which really commit Parliament to anything of that kind are contained in treaties or agreements which have been laid before the House. For ourselves we have not made a single secret article of any kind since we came into office.

He went on to justify the entente with France and Russia as promoting the cause of peace:

> Our friendship with France and Russia is in itself a guarantee that neither of them will pursue a provocative or aggressive policy towards Germany ... Any support we would give France and Russia in times of trouble would depend entirely on the feeling of Parliament and public feeling here when the trouble came, and both France and Russia know perfectly well that British public opinion would not give support to provocative or aggressive action against Germany.[12]

Grey received a warm endorsement for his explanations and policy from Mr. Bonar Law (speaking for the first time on foreign affairs as Leader of the Conservative Opposition), whose main contribution was to stress the importance of continuity in foreign policy between the two parties of government[13]; and indeed it was clear throughout the debate that, after his exposition, Grey was not going to have trouble from the official Opposition but could indeed expect their support for the firm line which he had taken. But this of course could not save him from the criticisms of the Radical members behind him, or indeed those leaders of the minor parties who were supporters of the government on most domestic (and Irish) issues, but radical critics on foreign policy. Speaking for Labour, Ramsay MacDonald offered

a comprehensive attack on Grey's policies towards France, Germany and Russia and threw in the question of 'bloated armaments' for good measure.[14] For the Irish, John Dillon repudiated Grey's proposition that the House was not kept in ignorance, and scorned Bonar Law's affection for the doctrine of 'continuity' in foreign policy:

> ... the moment there is agreement between the two Front Benches to withdraw the foreign policy of this country from the sphere of party politics, that moment you set up an inevitable and by logical sequence a secret system of foreign policy ... What is the nature and extent of the obligations by which this country is bound to France in connection with affairs in Morocco? The Foreign Secretary made an able speech, but he gave us no categorical answer to that point.[15]

These speeches set the tone for the rest of this day's debate. Of the five Conservative back-benchers who spoke, James Hope was generally supportive of Grey's policy in Morocco, while Mr. Goldman was chiefly concerned about the prospects for British trade there; but Mark Sykes, the Earl of Ronaldshay, and Colonel A.C. Yate were all, in differing degrees, critical of the government's policies in the Middle East and, particularly and predictably, in Persia where it was alleged British interests were in danger of being sold out to Russia.[16] Of the five Liberals who were called to speak two, namely Sir J. Compton-Rickett and (unsurprisingly) Asquith gave their support to the Foreign Secretary; the other three, namely Noel Buxton, D.Mason and Sir Henry Dalziel, while paying lip-service to Grey's rectitude and respect for the House, were critical of important

aspects of policy: Buxton urged a much more sympathetic attitude towards what he regarded as legitimate German colonial ambitions, Mason was furiously critical of British acquiescence in Italy's war of imperial conquest in Tripoli, and Dalziel followed Buxton in urging on Grey that he should make a real attempt to foster better relations with Germany.[17] The only other speaker on this day was Keir Hardie (Labour) who mounted a powerful socialist-radical criticism of the whole tendency of British policy, especially in regard to Russian policy in Persia, and the ignominy of Britain's apparent acquiescence in it; in this speech Hardie echoed the concerns expressed in 1909 by Lynch about the effect upon Indian defence of Russia's military preponderance in northern Persia.[18] Thus already, on the first day of the debate, there was emerging that combined criticism from both right and left of Grey's Russian policy, which he had hoped to avoid. This obliged him, towards the end of the debate, to reply with his usual (almost weary by now) defence, that without the Anglo-Russian Convention the situation in Persia would have been a great deal worse, Russian intervention would have been unrestrained, and a conflict between Britain and Russia there would have been highly probable. He went on to defend some aspects of Russian policy in Persia, insisting that the Russians were doing no more than defend their legitimate interests, and defended his policy there against the accusation that it was merely subservient to Russia's.[19] Since there was no division at the end of this debate, it is not possible to determine just how widespread was the dissatisfaction with Grey outside the

ranks of those who spoke, but the coming together of imperialist and Radical sentiment against him, to the extent that he felt the need to offer a reasoned defence, is significant.

Since Grey's two speeches in this debate were the nearest he came to providing a general statement of his principles of policy, in the forum of Parliament, it may be instructive to compare them briefly with another statement which he gave, in private, only six months previously. This was on the occasion of the Imperial Conference in May 1911, when Asquith convened a special meeting of the Committee of the Imperial Defence to which the prime ministers of the Dominions were invited, so that Grey could 'preface its deliberations by an exposition, comprehensive and strictly confidential, of the international situation.'[20] Much of what he said was banal, and most of it could equally well have been said publicly in Parliament; indeed, there are respects in which what he said to the Commons in November was more informative than what he said to the Dominion prime ministers in May. But there was one important respect in which he availed himself of the privacy of the occasion in May to expound with some frankness his overt balance-of-power policy with regard to Germany:

> There is no danger ... of our being involved in any considerable trouble in Europe, unless there is some Power, or group of Powers, in Europe which has the ambition of achieving what I would call the Napoleonic policy ... If we are ever involved in trouble, it will not be for the sake of any ideas of aggrandisement or ambition, or any other vain, empty things of that kind. We do not need to pursue any

> policy of ambition in Europe. There is nothing that we want to attain there. If there is trouble in Europe in which we are engaged and in which we have to appeal to the Dominions, it will be solely because, if we do not take part in it, we shall see that the combination against us in Europe may be such that the command of the sea may be lost. As regards the European policy generally and the present situation, I can only say that we are on the best of terms with the Powers of France and Russia.[21]

Here was a clear linkage of the naval rivalry with Germany and the development of the Triple Entente, a clear implication that Britain must maintain the balance of power (against Germany) in Europe, in order not to become isolated and lose command of the seas, on which her survival as an imperial and trading nation crucially depended. This was not a perception which he shared with the House of Commons in November: perhaps his international credibility would have been greater if he had, but unquestionably his domestic problems with the Radicals would have been even greater than they were.

7.3 The Resumed Debate, 14 December 1911 : The Radical Offensive

Because there were so many MPs still anxious to speak in the debate, it was adjourned to a later date, and resumed on 14th December. This occasion proved to be the field day for the Radicals and other critics of the government's policy.[22] Of the twenty speakers (apart from Grey himself), only four were Conservatives, and the rest were overwhelmingly Radical, Labour and Irish Nationalist critics of Grey; indeed, the Speaker evidently ran

out of Conservatives to call to speak at all, so that of the last eleven contributors to the debate after Grey himself had spoken, there was only one who was not a foreign policy radical, and even he (Alfred Bigland, a Conservative) spoke in favour of reaching an agreement with Germany.[23] Apart from Grey himself, there were no front-bench speakers on either side to support him, and only one backbencher who unambiguously resisted the Radical demand for a change of policy, a negotiated agreement with Germany on the naval question, and greater consultation with Parliament on foreign affairs; this was Mr. John Baird, a Conservative and former diplomat (though of no great distinction).[24] Such support from the other side of the House can have been of little comfort to Grey, and did him no good at all with his own back-bench critics, but the absence of front-bench support from either side does suggest that the government and the Foreign Secretary himself had decided that the best way to deal with the Radical onslaught was simply to let it have its say and burn itself out. Grey's own statement, coming about halfway through this, the second day of debate, was largely devoted to the question of Russian policy in Persia, and Britain's own complicity with that policy, which had by now become the overt subject of the debate. He justified his speaking again (which technically he was not entitled to do) because he had so many specific questions to answer, which had been raised by Members and required a response. Much of this was concerned with the details of the present crisis in the affairs of Persia, in which the Russian government was

resisting the efforts of the Persian constitutional government to reform its administration with the assistance of foreign advisers, notably the American financial adviser, Mr. Morgan Shuster.[25] Here Grey was reduced to defending the almost indefensible, since the crime of Mr. Shuster in Russian eyes was no more than that he had sought to appoint British financial officers in the Russian sphere, without consultation with Russia; an act entirely within the rights of an independent state if Persia still was one (and which the Anglo-Russian Convention declared her to be), and only inadmissable if she were already a Russian protectorate (which with British connivance she was now becoming, but which was not admitted either by Russia or Britain). Having made the best that he could of a difficult case, Grey went on to a defence of his policy against the Radical accusation that it was secretive and that he did not adequately inform Parliament; but what he did not do was to address the accusation that his policy towards Russia in Persia was subservient because what he was really following was a balance-of-power policy in Europe, which would be upset if Russia were to be alienated.[26]

But on this occasion this was indeed the main charge laid against him by his Radical accusers. Of those Liberals who gave qualified support to Grey's policies, both Sir Henry Norman (as we have seen, a longstanding back-bench expert on foreign affairs) and Mr. Atherley-Jones (a loyalist with obvious qualms of conscience) concentrated on the Moroccan issue and urged the

need for an understanding with Germany.[27] The remainder, including such powerful advocates as Swift MacNeill (Irish Nationalist, and longstanding critic of British foreign policy), Arthur Ponsonby (Liberal-Radical and former diplomat), and Josiah Wedgwood (another independent-minded Liberal Radical), mounted a sustained and repetitive attack on Grey's policies across the board; from this chorus of criticism four main themes, distinct though interconnected, may be isolated. In the first place, there was a restatement in more extreme form of the call made by Norman and Atherley-Jones for a fundamental review of policy towards Germany, an ending to the hostility on naval and other questions which had brought the two countries so close to war, a recognition of Germany's legitimate aspirations to imperial expansion, and a genuine and determined effort to reach a cordial understanding on all these questions with Germany. This demand was made in particular by William Barton (Liberal), by J.H. Whitehouse (Liberal), by John Lyttelton (Labour), by Allen Baker (Liberal), by Sir William Byles (veteran Liberal of the Gladstonian era), by Joseph King (Liberal) and by Charles Duncan (Labour).[28] In the second place, there was the constant criticism of Russian policy in Persia, the criticism of Grey's policy for supporting that of Russia, the demand for a renewed insistence on Russia observing the Convention or else Britain abandoning the Russian connection, and the demand for measures to encourage the constitutional movement in Persia. This line was taken in particular by Crawshay-Williams (Liberal), by Arthur Ponsonby (Liberal), by Barton (Liberal), and by Philip Morrell

(Liberal) most authoritatively on Persia.[29] In the third place, practically every speaker from the Liberal and Radical groupings raised the question of the excessive secrecy in which it was alleged that the Foreign Office conducted foreign policy, and there were widespread demands for the Foreign Secretary to provide more information in the form of Blue Books, to speak more frequently and freely about the principles underlying his policies in the House and in response to Parliamentary Questions, and also in the country at large; and above all to listen to the opinions of his supporters in Parliament and to public opinion so as to follow a more genuinely 'Liberal' policy. It was generally asserted that it was secret diplomacy and the uncontrolled pursuit of power-politics which had brought the country so close to war over the summer, and that a large injection of democracy in the control of policy was the right remedy. Those who dwelt most powerfully on this theme were Hugh Law (Irish Nationalist), de Forest (Liberal), Whitehouse (Liberal), Byles (Liberal) and that redoubtable trio for the Radical alliance, Swift MacNeill (Irish Nationalist), Ponsonby (Liberal), and Wedgwood (Liberal). These and the rest of the Radicals summed up their dissatisfaction in the proposition that the disastrous aspects of Grey's Russian and German policies were only made possible by the existing secrecy and by the absence of proper Parliamentary discussion and control.[30]

The diagnosis was taken one stage further in discussion of the fourth Radical theme, particularly in the powerful speeches of Ponsonby and of Wedgwood. For example, Ponsonby:

> Our attitude in Persia is being regarded throughout this country as weak and undignified. We are playing second fiddle to Russia ... Russia has us in tow, and we seem to be disinclined to assert our own opinion or to assist in any way to carry out in what we believe to be its true spirit the Anglo-Russian Convention ... What is the policy which makes us act in the peculiar and illogical way? In all these matters there is one governing principle at the bottom of the whole of our foreign policy, namely the principle of the balance of power. This principle of the balance of power means a continual adjusting of the scales of the balance, a perpetual interference, the making of ententes and alliances ... It means a constant tension throughout Europe and throughout the world... This policy of the balance of power is at the root of all our difficulties, and until this policy is gradually abandoned, it is hopeless to think that we can get on better terms with Germany. Germany will be placed in the opposite scale of the balance.[31]

And again, Wedgwood:

> We have this question of the balance of power raised to a sort of fetish which the whole of the Foreign Office Staff, and the Foreign Secretary as well, worship ... The pursuit of these two aims - balance of power in Europe, and [the defence of] British material interest - was not the Liberal foreign policy [of former years], and never has been the Liberal foreign policy until now.[32]

As we have seen, this diagnosis was essentially correct, and in private, Grey had indeed admitted the balance-of-power character of his diplomacy, and had identified the danger of a German hegemony in Europe as the chief threat to British interests, against which the solidarity of the triple entente was the best guarantee. He did not admit as much in the Commons, but Ponsonby and Wedgwood and their supporters were right. Unhappily for them, even the publicity of debate did nothing much to advance their

cause for a reconstructed system. When they had exhausted their fire, the debate was concluded without a division, and there was evidently no way in which their arguments, however vehement, could be translated into action.[33] What we may, however, conclude is that by the end of 1911 at the latest, Parliament was fully aware of the European implications of the policy of the ententes.

7.4 The Radicals and Foreign Policy in 1912

If the debates of late 1911 did nothing else, they made Grey sensitive to the charge that Parliament did not get adequate opportunity to discuss foreign affairs under the existing arrangements between the two main parties for arranging the business of the House. In 1912 therefore two such opportunities were afforded, one in the debate on the Address in February, and the second on the Foreign Office vote in the Supply debates of July 1912.[34] The King's Speech had contained extensive reference to the Persian crisis, and on the sixth day of debate, Ponsonby was called to move an amendment on it highly critical of government policy. His speech was full of the standard Radical denunciations of Grey's policy of maintaining solidarity with Russia, which he characterised as contrary to Liberal opinion, destructive of the national honour, and injurious to Britain's strategic interests on the Indian frontier.[35] He was ably seconded by Morrell, who sought to demonstrate that the Convention of August 1907 included assurances of maintaining the integrity and independence of Persia, assurances now falsified by Russian policy; and by the Irish

Nationalist, John Dillon.[36] Other Persia specialists from the Conservative benches spoke, contesting the view that the Russians were in breach of the Convention and insisting that the increasing disorder and insecurity in Persia made firm action to restore security for lives and trade necessary.[37] Grey replied at length, giving the standard defence of his policy and supplying the House with information and explanation, but it is clear that he did not go very far to satisfying the Radicals since Ponsonby, when he came to withdraw his critical amendment, stated that although it had been 'useful' in providing opportunity for the debate, Grey's speech had left him 'deeply disappointed'.[38] And indeed another Radical Liberal, Noel Buxton, speaking after Grey, made clear his continuing dissatisfaction with the underlying tendencies of British policy:

> The Persian history of the last three years has been merely a symptom of the Anglo-German situation, in fact it has been a sort of by-product of that situation. ... All these objections ... would be removed if the Government adopted the suggestion of [setting up] a Foreign Affairs Committee, and that would possibly have mitigated the situation in regard to Germany during the last two or three years and have left us freer in regard to the question of Persia.[39]

The Radicals thus had their debate, put up their most effective spokesmen, withdrew their motion, and were left exactly where they were before, with the old and to them discredited structures of Cabinet, Foreign office and Diplomatic service still in control of foreign policy.

The debate of 10 July 1912 was taken on the fourteenth day of debate on the estimates, when the Foreign Office estimates were selected for discussion; the Conservative backbencher, the Earl of Ronaldshay (who it will be remembered had spoken critically of the Anglo-Russian Convention in the debate of February 1908) moved a reduction of £100 in the Foreign Office vote.[40] The Persian situation and the problems it raised for Anglo-Russian relations was one of the major subjects of this debate, but it was not the only one, and MPs took the opportunity to raise a variety of other topics, including the naval balance of power in the Mediterranean, the administration of Egypt, the revolution in Portugal, the Baghdad railway, and the admission of foreign pilots to British territorial waters. Of greatest interest to us was the open acknowledgement with which two Conservatives (Ronaldshay himself, and George A. Lloyd) prefaced their criticism of the government's Persian policy, that Britain's policy <u>in Europe</u> was, and should be, based upon the balance of power and Britain's adhesion to the Triple <u>Entente</u> (a term which they both explicitly used).[41] As Ronaldshay put it:

> Our foreign policy today is based upon the Triple Entente. ... The whole keystone of our foreign policy today is to be found in a closer understanding between this country and France and Russia... I believe that policy to be absolutely necessary to maintain the balance of power in Europe. ... Everybody knows it was ... the prospect of the Triple Alliance obtaining a position in Europe of overwhelming military superiority which drove this country to abandon its policy of isolation. ... There was every prospect of that tremendous military machine being enormously enhanced when, in 1900, Germany brought in their Navy Law and proceeded to add to that

> immense military force an enormous naval fleet. The only object of this country throwing in its lot, as it were, with France and Russia was in order to restore the balance of power.[42]

As we have seen throughout our account, this represents a gross over-simplification of the process whereby British policy evolved from 'splendid isolation' in 1900 to the Triple Entente of 1909 and thereafter, and it is notable that Grey, when he replied to the debate, himself avoided using the words 'Triple Entente', but he was quite happy to endorse the underlying principle; he said the 'starting point of any new development in European foreign policy is the maintenance of our friendship with France and Russia'.[43] In summing up for the Opposition, Bonar Law went so far as to ascribe the use of the term 'Triple Entente' to Grey, described 'the good understanding with France and Russia' as being the 'keynote of our foreign policy'; and he committed the Conservatives to maintaining it as 'the national policy of this country' whenever they should be returned to power.[44] It was therefore very clear that, whatever Radical objections there might be to Grey's balance-of-power policy, it enjoyed overwhelming support from the Conservatives (as indeed was to be demonstrated in August 1914).

The Radicals did indeed have their say, notably Ponsonby, Dillon, Buxton and Whitehouse, who between them roundly criticised Britain's cont inuing association with Russia in Persia, and called for renewed efforts at a reconciliation with Germany.[45] To an extent their objections coincided with those of the Conservative

imperial lobby which attacked the continuing surrender of Britain's influence and interests in Persia to the Russians, and who were at this date particularly alarmed about the prospect of a trans-Persian railway threatening the security of India.[46] But Grey's stubborn defence of his policy, and obviously the general endorsement of it offered by Bonar Law, enabled him to emerge from the debate with his policy intact. Of course there was no way, short of carrying Ronaldshay's motion and directing it to a specific area of policy,in which the House of Commons could effect any particular change, and the support of the official Opposition and the relatively small numbers of the Radicals ensured that this would not happen; instead, the Chairman of Committees left the Chair without division being taken, so the Foreign Office estimates were approved. The Liberal loyalist Sir Joseph Walton, who made a speech strongly supportive of Grey's policies, offered an important and poignant observation on at least one reason for Parliament's lack of influence over foreign policy:

> No more important Debate could take place in this House than on foreign affairs, and it is somewhat to be regretted that, when we only have practically one night in the whole Session in which to discuss foreign affairs, the attendance of Members should be so limited. Perhaps we may regard it, however, as an expression of the feeling of all parties in this House of entire confidence in the Foreign Secretary.[47]

If Walton was right (and in the absence of a division list it is not possible from Hansard to say how many beyond the 17 MPs who

spoke were present), the attempt by Radicals and Tory imperialists to enforce a change of policy over Persia and elsewhere had run out of supporters and perhaps of enthusiasm.

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EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION

BRITISH ENTRY INTO THE WAR OF 1914

1. Parliament and Foreign Affairs 1912-1914

When Grey delivered his magisterial and justly celebrated statement to the House of Commons on 3 August 1914, on the eve of the First World War, he stated unequivocally that the House was entirely free to decide whether Britain should go to war or not.[1] In view of all that we have here discussed about the difficulties in the way of Parliamentary control of foreign policy, the plausibility of this statement may be doubted, and even more so when the developments of the period 1912-1914 are considered. Between the debates of February/July 1912 and that of August 1914 (as in the years 1904-1908 and again 1910-1911), the most significant developments in Britain's relations with the European systems of alliances took place beyond the reach of Parliamentary scrutiny and indeed of official Parliamentary knowledge, so that it was once again impossible for the Commons to exert influence.

Those speakers in the Supply debate of July 1912 who urged a better understanding with Germany could not have known of the failure of the secret Anglo-German negotiations which followed Haldane's visit to Berlin, nor that the British government had actually offered to the Germans a 'political formula', which had been refused by the Kaiser because it fell short of the promise of absolute neutrality which had by now become the minimum German condition for any naval agreement.[2] Whether the Radicals

would have agreed with Grey and Asquith that the formula offered was the limit of the concessions that Britain should be prepared to make to secure a naval understanding, they were not given the opportunity of pronouncing. All they were told was what the new First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, said on presenting the naval estimates on 18 March, that circumstances appeared to necessitate further increases in shipbuilding, and that Britain would maintain a sixty percent margin of superiority over the German fleet.[3] There were no further serious negotiations between Britain and Germany after April 1912. The proposals which Churchill made from time to time for a 'naval holiday' were indeed made in the House of Commons in 1912-1913, and were thus accessible to discussion; but the very fact that they were made publicly and were not accompanied by serious diplomatic conversations in private indicates that they were made for public consumption, and not as substantive negotiations.[4]

Instead, the British government found itself compelled by the growing naval power of Germany in the North Sea to contemplate withdrawing Britain's first class battleships from the Mediterranean so that they would be available to maintain the margin of superiority over Germany. This would mean leaving Britain vulnerable in the Mediterranean, and dependent upon France to defend her interests in the western basin at least. Since at the same time the French were going further in the transfer of their own main naval forces from their Atlantic and

Channel bases to the Mediterranean, it clearly made good sense in terms of 'grand strategy' to come to a mutually beneficial arrangement; the difficulty from the British government's point of view was that the French, understandably, wished to use the naval conversations and the Mediterranean naval agreement which resulted to secure from Britain a more precise and binding definition of the Anglo-French entente than had previously existed; ideally, the French prime minister, Poincaré, would have liked something amounting to a defensive alliance, though he was willing to be guided by the experienced Cambon into accepting something less, so long as it had Cabinet approval.[5] We know that the British ambassador in France took the view that Poincaré and the French appreciated the 'Parliamentary difficulties' which made an outright alliance impossible.[6] Although informed observers in the Commons could observe the naval redistributions which took place and comment upon them, they could not comment upon the political formula hammered out between Grey and Cambon and embodied in the important Grey-Cambon letters of November 1912, because this crucially important exchange of notes was not laid before Parliament: it did not amount to a treaty and it was maintained by the Cabinet (which did approve it) that it did not involve new obligations of which Parliament should be made aware. This exchange, as Williamson tells us, 'completed the formal political evolution of the entente', and it was as close as the French were able to come to committing the British to their side in a future Franco-German war.[7] It may be thought remarkable that the Cabinet, particularly its Radical wing, should not have

found it necessary to lay the Grey-Cambon letters before Parliament, but a careful reading indicates that indeed they did not commit Britain to more than consultation in the event of the danger of aggression, and an undertaking that if they agreed on common action against Germany, then they would consider 'what effect should be given' to the plans drawn up by their respective General Staffs. There was indeed no explicit prior commitment, and the Cabinet could regard the text as doing no more than putting on paper what Grey had on previous occasions made verbally to Cambon, a statement of the non-binding character of the military conversations. Indeed, from the point of view of the Cabinet, the text of the letters was precisely a safeguard against the danger that, without them, an obligation would have been incurred by the very fact of the naval understanding. Poincaré had tried to secure, in the final sentence, an assurance that the plans of the General Staffs would form the basis of joint action if it was agreed that such action was necessary: this was the sticking point for the British ministers, who would agree to no more than the undertaking to take those plans into consideration; and in this the Radicals and Asquith were evidently in agreement, that they would not be committed in advance to a continental strategy, even if they did decide to go to the assistance of France.[8]

These letters, approved in Cabinet, were not reported to Parliament and therefore not the subject of formal debate. Their general content did evidently become a matter for speculation, and

did reach the House of Commons. For instance, on the very first day of the Debate on the Address in the new session of 1913, Lord Hugh Cecil picked up Asquith's remarks about foreign affairs in his opening speech, to enquire about the rumoured military understanding with France:

> There is a very general belief that this country is under an obligation, not a treaty obligation, but an obligation arising out of an assurance given by the Ministry in the course of diplomatic negotiations, to send a very large armed force out of this country to operate in Europe.[9]

When Asquith interrupted him with the categorical assurance, 'I ought to say that it is not true', he was not misleading the House, as we have seen; and this was the position which government spokesmen continued to adopt when the question was raised on other occasions, and which indeed Grey himself still adhered to in his great speech of 3 August 1914. In spite of suggestions to the contrary, it would be wrong to impute undue cynicism or insincerity to Asquith or Grey in this matter, particularly since we know that Asquith himself was temperamentally opposed to the sending of a large expeditionary force to France.[10] There seem to have been just enough arguments on the government's side to justify its decision not to involve Parliament in the Grey-Cambon letters, so long as they were not then subsequently used to present Parliament with a fait accompli. That is why Grey stressed that Parliament did indeed remain free to decide. The question remains, whether it was, and whether it did.

2. Grey's Statement and the Debate of 3 August 1914

Of course Grey made it quite clear in his speech what he thought was the path of honour and of self-interest for Britain to take. Having reiterated his view that Parliament's decision was not fettered by prior commitments of which it was ignorant, he read out the Grey-Cambon letter (omitting the final sentence, which had caused so much trouble in Cabinet), not in order to show a debt of honour but precisely to prove that there was no obligation to France. However, he went on to point out that, the French coastline being practically undefended, British public opinion would not allow Germany to take action against it unhindered, and that he had already promised France (subject to the approval of Parliament) that German naval action against her in the Channel would not be tolerated: an undertaking, of course, stopping far short of continental intervention by Britain. This was however made far more probable by the question of the long-standing guarantee of Belgian neutrality, to which he turned next, and which was already threatened by the German ultimatum. Here was an issue where he could take his stance on the sanctity of international treaties and international morality, and on which he could wrap himself in the mantle of Gladstone (which he did at some length). His key sentence was this:

> If, in a crisis like this, we run away from those obligations of honour and interest as regards the Belgian Treaty, I doubt whether, whatever material force we might have at the end, it would be of very much value in face of the respect we should have lost.

Returning to France, he argued:

> There is but one way in which the Government could make certain at the present moment of keeping outside this war, and that would be that it should immediately issue a proclamation of unconditional neutrality. We cannot do that. We have made the commitment to France that I have read to the House which prevents us from doing that. We have got the consideration of Belgium which also prevents us from any unconditional neutrality ... If we did take that line ... and say we would stand aside, we should, I believe, sacrifice our respect and good name and reputation before the world, and should not escape the most serious and grave economic consequences.

He concluded by expressing his confidence that, if the march of events forced the government to go to war, it would have the support of the House.[11]

This confidence was immediately reinforced by a short statement from Bonar Law for the official Opposition, stating that his party had already informed the government that it would give it full support in the event of a resort to war and that he stood by that position.[12] John Redmond, speaking for the Irish Nationalists (significantly, it was he and not any of his more inflammatory Radical colleagues) also pledged their support.[13] Only Ramsay MacDonald, speaking for Labour, sounded a dissenting note: he urged that Britain should remain neutral and not become involved in war on the side of Russia.[14] Although both government and official Opposition clearly wished to end the proceedings there without debate (there being no formal question before the House on which a debate could take place), in the face of Radical pressure for a debate (notably from Morrell, raising points of order), Asquith conceded a debate for later the same day.[15]

As soon as Asquith had moved the adjournment so that the debate could proceed, Grey announced formal confirmation of the German ultimatum to Belgium, and then sat down to listen to a procession of Radical speeches opposing the recommendation for war, of varying degrees of vehemence. Only two Liberal speakers, Sir Arthur Markham and William Pringle, gave unreserved support to Grey's policy; one or two others, including the loyalist, Sir Albert Spicer, were prepared to trust the Foreign Secretary but urged further negotiation with Germany to avert a calamity.[16] Apart from them, no fewer than fourteen Liberals and one Labour member spoke against Grey, including a predictable roll call of foreign policy Radicals: Morrell, Harvey, Keir Hardie (Labour), Ponsonby, Rowntree, Jardine, Byles, King: some of these (notably King) became involved in angry exchanges with the Opposition, and some of the speakers towards the end, notable Jardine and Byles were (as Hansard puts it) 'indistinctly heard' because of the mounting unrest on the Tory benches.[17] The burden of all these speeches may be summarised as follows: that the decision for war was premature if the war was for the interests of Britain or the integrity of Belgium; that it looked more like a war for the defence of France in the balance of power; that it involved Britain in support of Russia, a despotic and aggressive power; and that it was being undertaken out of hostility towards Germany rather than out of any rational calculation of where Britain's true interests lay. We may take Arthur Ponsonby's contribution as being representative:

> I think we have plunged too quickly, and I think the Foreign Secretary's speech shows that what has been rankling all these years is a deep animosity against German ambitions. The balance of power is responsible for this-this mad desire to keep up an imposibility in Europe, to try and divide the two sections of Europe into an armed camp, glaring at one another with suspicion and hostility and hatred, and arming all the time, and bleeding the people to pay for the armaments. Since I have been in this House [he entered in 1908], I have every year protested against the growth in the expenditure upon armaments. Every year it has mounted up and up, and old women of both sexes have told us that the best way to prepare to maintain peace is to prepare for war.

Evidently Ponsonby was so moved by the gravity and potential tragedy of the occasion that he was less than his usual urbane and coherent self, but the force of his observations is clear: that a balance-of-power policy, the policy of the Triple Entente as a deterrent against the Triple Alliance, had in the end not preserved the peace but brought on the war; and he ended with an appeal to Grey even at this late stage to keep Britain out of it.

That appeal was of course in vain. For the Opposition Balfour, supporting the policy of the government, proposed that the debate be concluded, and for the government Seely formally moved the closure.[18] The question, that the House should adjourn, was put and agreed to without a division, and once again the numerical weakness of the Radicals was exposed even on so great a question as that of war: the government having the evident support of the House as a whole, including a majority of its own supporters, of the Irish (notice that none of the Irish Radicals

joined in the Radical chorus), and of the official Opposition, was clearly in an impregnable position. The House of Commons thus acquiesced in what was effectively a decision to go to war; to those unfamiliar with the proceedings of Parliament, it may seem ironical that this was on a motion no more serious than a simple motion to adjourn the House.

This point requires some elucidation. When Balfour urged that the adjournment debate be concluded, he gave two reasons: that the speeches of the Radicals were doing the House no credit (he was very scathing about them); and that the motion was merely for the adjournment, and that the Prime Minister had promised that there would be occasion for debate on a proper motion on another occasion. For Balfour (whose long experience of Parliamentary procedure was almost unrivalled), the adjournment debate was therefore an occasion for discussion but not for decision. He supposed that the substantive debate would take place when the government came before the House to ask for the supply necessary to embark on war, and in this supposition he was correct. Equally, when Grey had assured the House that the decision for war rested with Parliament, he was technically correct, since only the House of Commons could vote the funds for the war, and at least in theory the House could withold funds for a war of which it disapproved. But (as the debate on the Younghusband expedition in 1904 had shown), the House did not in practice find it possible to refuse supplies for a military enterprise that had already commenced; and by the time the government

sought its supplies, on 6 August 1914, Britain was already at war and it was evidently unthinkable that even the most ardent pacifist (which most of the Radicals were not) would actually divide the House against the war, still less that he would secure a majority. With the House sitting in Committee, Asquith moved a resolution that £100,000,000 be voted to the government for the prosecution of the war.[19] After Bonar Law had signified the support of the Conservatives, the next speaker was none other than Arthur Ponsonby, the impassioned opponent of war only three days previously, who indicated his intention to vote for the resolution, saying that 'at a moment of this sort I consider that there is not time for reproaches or recriminations'; and he was in due course followed by Wedgwood, Rowntree, and other of the Radicals.[20] There is no need to follow this (rather brief) debate in any detail: it ended without division and, as Hansard records, 'Resolution agreed to, nemine contradicente'.[21] If this was the substantive vote, as Balfour had implied, of course it was taken too late to be effective, as the country was already at war; though it must be added that all the indications were that the House, had it been called upon to take the decision on 3 August, would not have refused the government the endorsement which it sought.

3. Conclusion : The House of Commons and the Balance of Power

From what has gone before in this study, it is clear that the House of Commons regarded those treaties which are generally taken as embodying the end of British isolation (the alliance

with Japan of 1902, the entente with France of 1904, and the agreement with Russia of 1907), and which were laid before it as constitutional convention required, and which were duly debated, from an imperial rather than a European standpoint. In so doing they were largely following the lead given by government spokesmen, who studiously ignored whatever implications for the European balance of power the treaties contained, even where (as in the case of the Russian agreement) they were potentially very considerable. There were very few MPs prepared to notice the potential which these new connections,ostensibly imperial, would have in involving Britain in the competing network of European alliances; those who did, or who were prepared to say so in Parliament, were back-benchers like Gibson Bowles on the Conservative side and Dilke on the Liberal, who tended to welcome the hidden implications anyway. Since Parliament evidently took insufficient notice of their predictions, it found itself already committed to those relationships with European powers which from 1909 onwards became consolidated into that grouping known as the Triple Entente. As we have seen, 'Triple Entente' was an expression frowned upon by the government in 1909, but by 1912 it had become the common currency of Parliamentary discussion of Britain's European policy. This development was undoubtedly accelerated and hardened by the growing recognition of the danger to Britain's naval security posed by the rapid rise of the German navy in the new era created by the development of the Dreadnought type of battleship; a recognition which came close to panic in the debates on the

naval estimates held in March 1909. Thereafter, the policy of the government rested on two pillars, the maintenance of an adequate margin of security over the growing German fleet, and the maintenance of the Triple Entente as a balancing and deterrent factor against the danger posed by German ambitions in Europe and the naval sphere. Once the (genuine) attempt to reach a direct understanding with Germany had failed, which may be definitively dated no later than March-April 1912 although the writing was on the wall a year previously, the government saw no viable alternative policy to the association with France and Russia, which goes some way to explaining why the Cabinet agreed to the closer definition of the French connection in the Grey-Cambon letters of November 1912.

As we have seen, this exchange was not reported to Parliament, just as the Anglo-French military conversations whose implications it sought to clarify had not been revealed to Parliament; so that from 1906 onwards both Houses were discussing foreign policy (when they did discuss it) without being in possession of all the relevant information. When the Radicals complained in the great foreign policy debates of November-December 1911 that they were groping in a twilight of partial information, they spoke more truly than perhaps even they knew. The Grey-Cambon letters did not essentially change this position, which had obtained since 1906; they merely formalised it. This aspect of the Anglo-French relationship is perhaps the best, though it is not the only,example of the proposition that by definition Parliament could not control, and could only in the most hazy

sense influence, developments of which it was kept in ignorance. Thus the Radicals between 1909 and 1912 tended to concentrate their fire on the failure to reach an understanding with Germany, and what they perceived to be the ignominy of Britain's connection with Russia, while hardly at all noticing the significance of the growing association with France; it was, after all and above all, the French connection which took Britain into the war of 1914. Once it was accepted that German policy threatened the balance of power in Europe which had become the guiding principle of British policy under Grey, then the independence of France came to be identified as a vital British interest: this was the essence of British policy from 1906 onwards, though without any Parliamentary sanction or even significant discussion.

The foreign policy debates of 1911 and 1912 show that it was possible for the House of Commons to force debates even when there was no specific treaty to discuss, but the inconclusive nature of those debates also shows how difficult it was for the legislature to exercise control over the government's external policies. But it should not be assumed that the actual policies pursued would have been substantially different even if they had been exposed to a much more searching Parliamentary scrutiny.

We have seen some evidence that Parliamentary hostility to binding or 'entangling' alliances may have inhibited the government from entering into alliance with France or Russia or both; but it is equally possible that the government used the known

antipathy of Parliament to such alliances as an excuse to avoid alliances which in any case it did not regard as necessary or desirable. There was in many respects a closer identity of view between government and Parliament than this study may at some points have suggested; this is because of the activities of the foreign policy Radicals (as we have loosely called them, since they included Labour and Irish MPs as well as Liberal Radicals). From 1909 through to late 1912 they were a very noisy group, and they resurfaced in force in August 1914 (briefly). But they were never more than a minority, and a small one at that, as their poor showing in the division on the naval estimates in March 1909 showed. Usually they were too weak to force a division, or chose to avoid one by not putting down an amendment, perhaps because the division lobbies would demonstrate their numerical weakness. There is no reason to think that the House of Commons as a whole shared the Radical programme, and every reason to conclude that the debates of July 1912 and August 1914 showed that it did not. The doctrine of the 'continuity' of foreign policy was not merely a convenient fiction: it genuinely represented the identify of view between the two front benches, somewhat to the frustration of some backbenchers. But it also ensured that the great bulk of the Conservatives (who after the elections of 1910 were equal in numbers to the Liberals themselves) could be relied upon to support the policies espoused by Grey, and which they believed (on the whole correctly) that he had inherited from Lansdowne and Balfour. The noise made by the Radicals should not be allowed to drown out the rather obvious

perception that the House as a whole supported what it knew of the government's policies, and was prepared to trust it; only when it appeared to be weak on the question of national defence (as in the naval debates of 1909) did it run into trouble, and even then it was able to win all the necessary votes easily. Once the hope of a genuine understanding with Germany which did not compromise Britain's perceived vital interests had been falsified, there was broad cross-party support for the government's attitude towards the European alliance-systems: a closer affiliation with the Franco-Russian alliance, as a counter balance to the Triple Alliance and a deterrent to potential German ambitions. This was the policy which took Britain inexorably into the devastating war which began in August 1914, but it cannot be denied that Britain entered that war with the whole-hearted support of the British Parliament, and for reasons of the European balance of power which the great majority in Parliament had long since accepted.

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NOTES

INTRODUCTION -

1. The discussion here offered on the role of Parliament in the control of foreign policy is derived from: Bishop, D.G., The Administration of British Foreign Relations (Syracuse, 1961); Chester, D.N. and Bowring, N., Questions in Parliament (Oxford, 1962); Flournoy, F.R., Parliament and War (London, 1927); Gosses, F., The Management of British Foreign Policy before the First World War (Leiden, 1948); Greaves, H.R., Parliamentary Control of Foreign Affairs (London, 1934); Robbins, K.G., 'The Foreign Secretary, the Cabinet, Parliament and the Parties'; and 'Public Opinion, the Press and Pressure Groups'; both in Hinsley, F.H. (ed.), British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey (Cambridge, 1977); Richards, P.G., Parliament and Foreign Affairs (London, 1967); Steiner, Zara S., The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy 1898-1914 (Cambridge, 1969). A valuable discussion, O'Leary, L.A., The Influence of Parliament on Sir Edward Grey's Foreign Policy (Cambridge M.Phil. Thesis, 1991), appeared too late for inclusion in the sources, but does not appear to differ significantly from the analysis presented here.

2. Koch, H.W., 'The Anglo-German Alliance Negotiations: Missed Opportunity or Myth?' (History, 1969); also Grenville, J.A.S. Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy: the Close of the Nineteenth Century (London, 1964), pp. 344-369.

3. Woodward, E.L., Great Britain and the German Navy (Oxford, 1935), pp. 203-239; Marder, A.J. From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow, Vol.1 : The Road to War 1904-1914 (Oxford, 1961), pp. 151-171; Sweet, D.W., 'Great Britain and Germany 1905-1911', in Hinsley (ed.), British Foreign Policy under Grey, pp. 227-229; and Sweet, D.W., British Foreign Policy 1907-1909: The Elaboration of the Russian Connection (Cambridge Ph.D. Dissertation, 1971), pp. 391-401.

4. Gooch, G.P. and Temperley, Harold (eds.), British Documents on the Origins of the War 1898-1914 (London, 1926-1938), Vol. IX, Part I, No.7; see also Vol. VI, No. 182; and Sweet, D.W., British Foreign Policy 1907-1909, pp. 402-403.

CHAPTER ONE -

1. Nish, I.H., The Anglo-Japanese Alliance : the Diplomacy of Two Island Empires 1894-1907 (London, 1966), pp.99-163. On the negotiation of the Alliance, see also Langer, W.L., The Diplomacy of Imperialism 1890-1902 (New York, 2nd edition, 1950), pp. 747-777; Grenville, J.A.S. Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy : the Close of the Nineteenth Century (London, 1964), pp. 227-243, 390-416; Monger, George, The End of Isolation :British Foreign Policy 1900-1907 (London, 1963), pp. 46-66.

2. Nish, Anglo-Japanese Alliance, p. 167.

3. Grenville, Salisbury and Foreign Policy, pp. 130-176, 291-318, 327-369, 390-391; Nish, Anglo-Japanese Alliance, pp. 167-176, 180-181, 231; Langer, Diplomacy of Imperialism, pp. 753-759.

4. Nish, Anglo-Japanese Alliance, pp. 174-188; Steiner, Zara S., 'Great Britain and the Creation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance', Journal of Modern History, XXXI (Chicago, 1959), pp. 29-31.

5. Nish, Anglo-Japanese Alliance, pp. 179-180.

6. Nish, Anglo-Japanese Alliance, pp. 230-231.

7. Gooch, G.P. and Temperley, H.W.V. (eds.), British Documents on the Origins of the War 1898-1914 (London, 1926-1938), Vol. II, Nos. 124, 125, for the text of the Treaty and covering despatch. See also Langer, Diplomacy of Imperialism, pp. 777-778; Nish, Anglo-Japanese Alliance, pp. 216-218.

8. Nish, Anglo-Japanese Alliance, p. 233.

9. Monger, End of Isolation, pp. 57, 61.

10. The History of the Times, Vol. III : The Twentieth Century Test 1884-1912 (London, 1947), p. 374.

11. Langer, Diplomacy of Imperialism, pp. 702-705, 722-3, 781-782.

12. History of the Times, III, p. 358.

13. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, Series 4, Vol. CII (Lords), cols. 1174-1178.

14. Sweet, D.W., British Foreign Policy 1907-1909 : the Elaboration of the Russian Connection (Cambridge Ph.D. Thesis, 1971), pp. 3-4.

15. For the debate in the Lords, in which there spoke Lords Spencer, Lansdowne and Rosebery (in favour of the Alliance) see Hansard, 4s, CII, 1172-1181. For the debate in the Commons, see Hansard, 4s, CII, 1272-1313.

16. Hansard, 4s, CII, 1272.

17. Hansard, 4s, CII, 1273.

18. See, for instance, the use of this expression by Sir William Harcourt, Liberal Leader in the House of Commons, on 5 March 1896 (Hansard, 4s, XXXVIII, 296); on the isolationist tendency of British policy under Salisbury, see Howard, Christopher, Splendid Isolation (London, 1967), passim; and Grenville, Salisbury and Foreign Affairs, pp. 16-23, 434-440.

19. Matthew, H.C.G., The Liberal Imperialists : the Ideas and Politics of a Post-Gladstonian Elite (Oxford, 1973), pp. 155-156, 208.

20. Hansard, 4s, CII, 1281-1282.

21. Hansard, 4s, CII, 1275-1276. For the Franco-Russian Alliance see Andrew, Christopher, Theophile Delcassé and the Making of the Entente Cordiale (London, 1968), pp. 119-135.

22. Hansard, 4s, CII, 1278-1279.

23. Hansard, 4s, CII, 1288-1294.

24. Hansard, 4s, CII, 1300-1301.

25. Hansard, 4s, CII, 1303.

26. Hansard, 4s, CII, 1282-1283.

27. Hansard, 4s, CII, 1285.

28. Hansard, 4s, CII, 1288.

29. Hansard, 4s, CII, 1297.

30. Hansard, 4s, CII, 1295-1296

31. Hansard, 4s, CII, 1311-12.

32. Langer, Diplomacy of Imperialism, pp. 781-783.

33. Hansard, 4s, CII, 1304-1310.

34. Hansard, 4s, CII, 1312-1313.

35. Sweet, British Foreign Policy 1907-1909, pp. 3-4. For German blandishments, see Gooch and Temperley (eds.), British Documents, Vol. II, Nos. 32, 82, 85, 86, 94.

CHAPTER TWO -

1. See, for instance, the exchange of notes between the Italian and French governments, 1900-1902, printed in Pribram, A.F., The Secret Treaties of Austria-Hungary, Vol. II, (Cambridge 1921), pp. 226-289; and Bosworth, Richard, Italy and the Approach of the First World War (London, 1983), pp. 54-62.

2. On the so-called Mediterranean Agreements of 1887 and subsequently, entered into by Britain, Austria and Italy, see Lowe, C.J., Salisbury and the Mediterranean 1886-1896 (London, 1965), passim.

3. See the terms of the renewed Treaty of Triple Alliance of 1891 in Pribram, Secret Treaties, pp. 151-163, and especially paragraph 2 of the Final Protocol, p. 161; also, on the negotiation of the Franco-Russian Alliance, Pribram, Secret Treaties, pp. 204-219; and Kennan, George F., The Fateful Alliance (Manchester, 1984), passim; and Dickinson, Goldsworthy Lowes, The International Anarchy 1904-1914 (London, 1926), pp. 104-105.

4. Andrew, Christopher, Theophile Delcasse and the Making of the Entente Cordiale (London, 1968), pp. 91-135.

5. Langer, W.L., European Alliances and Alignments 1871-1890 (New York, 2nd edition, 1950), pp. 251-278, 281-318; and Langer, W.L., The Diplomacy of Imperialism 1890-1902 (New York, 2nd edition, 1950), pp. 101-141, 259-297, 537-577.

6. Dickinson, International Anarchy, 104-107.

7. Howard, Christopher, Splendid Isolation (London, 1967), pp. 2-13 and passim; Gooch, G.P. and Temperley, H.W.V., British Documents on the Origins of the War 1898-1914 (London, 1926-1938), Vol.I, No.62.

8. Monger, George, The End of Isolation : British Foreign Policy 1900-1907 (London, 1963), pp. 129-130.

9. Monger, End of Isolation, pp. 132-135.

10. See especially Edwards, E.W., 'The Japanese Alliance and the Anglo-French Agreement of 1904', History, Vol. XLII, pp. 19-27; and Monger, End of Isolation, pp. 124-126; but compare Rolo, P.J.V., Entente Cordiale: the Origins and Negotiations of the Anglo-French Agreement of 8 April 1904 (London, 1969), p. 243, where he casts doubt on this particular point of view. It may however be noticed that Rolo's book is derived from the printed rather than the unprinted primary sources.

11. Monger, End of Isolation, pp. 111-114, 127-131, 144-145; Andrew, Delcassé and the Making of the Entente Cordiale, pp. 194-196.

12. Andrew, Delcassé and Entente Cordiale, pp. 158-200.

13. Andrew, Delcassé and Entente Cordiale, pp. 201-211 and ff.

14. Rolo, Entente Cordiale, pp. 200-201, 271.

15. For the text of the Agreements, see British Documents, II, Nos. 416, 417. The best comprehensive discussion of the terms will be found in Rolo, Entente Cordiale, pp.255-269, and see also Gooch, G.P., Before the War : Studies in Diplomacy (London, 1936-1938), Vol. I, The Grouping of the Powers, pp. 48-81. For the British government's public exposition of the terms, see the speech by Earl Percy in the Commons debate of 1 June 1904, in Hansard, 4s, CXXXV, 499-516.

16. Sweet, D.W., British Foreign Policy 1907-1909 (Cambridge Ph.D. Dissertation, 1971), pp. 246-251.

17. Sweet, British Foreign Policy 1907-1909, p. 6; Monger, End of Isolation, p. 189.

18. British Documents, III, Nos. 210-221: Monger, End of Isolation, pp. 236-256; Williamson, S.R., The Politics of Grand Strategy : Britain and France Prepare for War 1904-1914 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1969), pp. 57-88.

19. Monger, End of Isolation, 280.

20. Hansard, 4s, CXXXV, 499-577.

21. Hansard, 4s, CXXXV, 499-510.

22. Hansard, 4s, CXXXV, 500-516.

23. Hansard, 4s, CXXXV, 572.

24. Hansard, 4s, CXXXV, 575.

25. Hansard, 4s, CXXXV, 567-575.

26. Hansard, 4s, CXXXV, 516-524.

27. Hansard, 4s, CXXXV, 517-518.

28. Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 72-82.

29. Monger, End of Isolation, p. 280.

30. Hansard, 4s, CXXXV, 567.

31. Naylor, Leonard E., The Irrepressible Victorian : the Story of Thomas Gibson Bowles (London, 1865), pp. 143, 149, and passim; in 1906 he stood at the by-election in the City of London as an independent against his former party leader, Balfour, and in due course joined the Liberals.

32. Hansard, 4s, CXXXV, 534-536.

33. Andrew, Delcassé and the Making of the Entente Cordiale, pp. 210-211, 214; Rolo, Entente Cordiale, pp. 270, 273-274.

34. Hansard, 4s, CXXXV, 536-537. On Dilke's remarkable career and position of authority, see Gwynn, S.L. and Tuckwell, Life of the Right Honourable Sir Charles Dilke : a Victorian Tragedy (London, 1917), passim.

35. Hansard, 4s, CXXXV, 538-545.

36. Hansard, 4s, CXXXV, 545-567, 575-577.

37. Matthew, H.C.G., The Liberal Imperialists : the Ideas and Politics of a Post-Gladstonian Elite (Oxford, 1973), pp. 200-213.

CHAPTER THREE -

1. Sweet, D.W., British Foreign Policy 1907-1909 : the Elaboration of the Russian Connection (Cambridge, Ph.D. Thesis, 1971), pp. 1-61, passim; Williams, Beryl, 'Great Britain and Russia, 1905 to the 1907 Convention', in Hinsley, F.H. (ed.), British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 133-147; Monger, George, The End of Isolation : British Foreign Policy 1900-1907 (London, 1963), pp. 104-146, 281-295.

2. For a valuable recent account which gives due weight to the Parliamentary discussion, see Hull, A.M.A., Colonel Younghusband's Mission to Lhasa, 1904 : Parliament, the British Government and the 'Forward Policy' in Tibet (M.A. Thesis, University of Durham, 1988); also Fleming, Peter, Bayonets to Lhasa (London, 1961); and Lamb, Alistair, Britain and Chinese Central Asia : the Road to Lhasa 1767-1905 (London, 1960).

3. For a brilliant discussion of the central role of the Russian problem in British foreign policy, see Wilson, Keith, The Policy of the Entente : Essays on the Determinants of British Foreign Policy 1904-1914 (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 2-3, 59-84, and passim; and more modestly, Sweet, British Foreign Policy 1907-1909 : the Elaboration of the Russian Connection, pp. 30-61, 401-417, and passim.

4. Monger, End of Isolation, pp. 169-175.

5. Monger, End of Isolation, pp. 214-215; Nish, Ian H., The Anglo-Japanese Alliance (London, 1966), pp. 335-338.

6. Sweet, British Foreign Policy 1907-1909, pp. 31-32; Monger, End of Isolation, p. 283; Gooch, G.P. and Temperley, Harold (eds.),British Documents on the Origins of the War 1898-1914 (London, 1926-1938), Vol. IV, pp. 204-221, 329-330.

7. On this subject, see McLean, David, Britain and her Buffer State : the Collapse of the Persian Empire 1890-1914 (London, 1979); Monger, George, The End of Isolation : British Foreign Policy 1900-1907 (London, 1963); Churchill, R.P., The Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 (Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1939); Gooch, G.P., Before the War, Vol.I, The Grouping of the Powers (London, 1936); Williams, Beryl, 'Great Britain and Russia, 1905 to the 1907 Convention', in Hinsley (ed.), British Foreign Policy under Grey, pp. 133-147. On the Nineteenth Century background, Tealakh, Gali, O., The Russian Advance in Central Asia and the British Response 1834-1884 (Durham Ph.D. Thesis, 1991) usefully supplements Gillard, D.R., The Struggle for Asia 1828-1914 : a Study in British and Persian Imperialism (London, 9177); Kazemzadeh, Firuz, Russia and Britain in Persia 1864-1914 : a Study in Imperialism (New Haven, 1968); and Greaves, Rose, L., Persia and the Defence of India 1884-1892 (London, 1959).

8. Churchill, Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, pp. 15-40.

9. Churchill, Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, p. 43; Monger, End of Isolation, p. 51; McLean, Britain and her Buffer State, p.23.

10. Churchill, Anglo-Russian Convention, pp. 54-59: Gooch, Before the War, Vol.I, pp. 74-75.

11. Gooch, Before the War, Vol.I, p.289; Churchill, Anglo-Russian Convention, pp. 65-66.

12. Gooch, Before the War, Vol.I, pp. 81-82; Churchill, Anglo-Russian Convention, pp. 71-93.

13. Hull, Colonel Younghusband's Mission to Lhasa, 1904, pp. 15-20, 23-36; Lamb, A., 'Some Notes on Russian Intrigue in Tibet', Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society (1959); Lamb, A., British India and Tibet (London, 1986), pp. 216-230.

14. Mehra, P., The Younghusband Expedition : an Interpretation (London, 1968), p. 161.

15. Hull, Younghusband's Mission to Lhasa, pp. 41-60.

16. Hansard, 4s,CXXX (Lords) 26 Feb. 1904, 1010-1050.

17. Fleming, Bayonets to Lhasa, pp. 153-154.

18. Hansard, 4s, CXXXIII (Commons), 13 April 1904, 85-136

19. Papers Relating to Tibet (Commons) 5 Feb; (Lords) 8 Feb. 1904, Cd. 1920.

20. Hansard, 4s, CXXXIII, East India Revenues (Tibet), 13 April 1904, Brodrick, 85-98.

21. Hansard, 4s, CXXXIII, Hamilton, 105-110.

22. Hansard, 4s, CXXXIII, Balfour, 125-132.

23. Hansard, 4s, CXXXIII, Division List, 131-136; Hull, Younghusband's Mission to Lhasa, pp. 93-94.

24. Hansard, 4s, CXXXIII, Campbell-Bannerman, 99-103.

25. Hull, Younghusband's Mission to Lhasa, pp. 71, 86, citing The Times, 13 April 1904.

26. Hansard, 4s, CXXXIII, Lough, 110-112.

27. Hansard, 4s, CXXXIII, Trevelyan, 114-117.

28. Naylor, The Irrepressible Victorian : Gibson Bowles, pp. 143, 149, and passim; Bowles, T. Gibson, Gibraltar: a National Danger (London, 1901), passim; Hull, Younghusband's Mission to Lhasa, pp. 42-43.

29. Hansard, 4s, CXXXIII, Gibson Bowles, 117-122.

30. Matthew, H.C.G., The Liberal Imperialists (Oxford, 1973), pp. 297, 300, and passim.

31. Hansard, 4s, CXXXIII, Fowler, 122-125.

CHAPTER FOUR -

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2. Andrew, Christopher, Delcassé and the Making of the Entente Cordiale (London, 1968), pp.247-248, 251-252.

3. Nish, Anglo-Japanes Alliance, pp. 298-299, 312-322, 323-335.

4. Monger, End of Isolation, pp. 186-235; Ritter, Gerhard, The Schlieffen Plan : Critique of a Myth (London, 1958), pp. 96-128, and passim.

5. Andrew, Delcassé and the Making of the Entente Cordiale, pp. 279-301; Monger, End of Isolation, pp. 188-192; Schmitt, Bernadotte E., The Coming of the War 1914 (New York, 1930), Vol.I, pp. 32-33; Sweet, British Foreign Policy 1907-1909, pp. 13-16; Gooch and Temperley (eds.), British Documents on the Origins of the War, Vol. III, nos. 90-93.

6. British Documents, III, 132(a); Monger, End of Isolation, p. 204.

7. British Documents, III, 229, 296; Monger, End of Isolation, pp. 268-269; Sweet, British Foreign Policy, pp. 17-18.

8. British Documents, III, 219, 220.

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10. British Documents, IV, 204-221, 329, 330; Monger, End of Isolation, p. 28; Nicolson, Harold, Lord Carnock : a Study in the Old Diplomacy (London, 1930), pp. 59-67.

11. On the Anglo-Russian Convention, see Churchill, R.P., The Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 (Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1930); Monger, End of Isolation, pp. 281-295; Williams, Beryl, 'Great Britain and Russia 1905 to the 1907 Convention,' in Hinsley, F.H. (ed.), British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 133-147; Sweet, British Foreign Policy 1907-1909, pp. 32-61.

12. Hansard, 4s, CXXXIV (Commons), 1378-80; CXXXV (Lords), 12-22; Hull, Younghusband's Mission to Lhasa, pp. 100-112.

13. Hull, Younghusband's Mission to Lhasa, pp. 116-120.

14. Sweet, British Foreign Policy 1907-1909, pp. 43-45, 66-73.

15. For the text of the Anglo-Russian Convention of 31 August, 1907, see British Documents, IV, Appendix I; for detailed discussion of the terms, see Churchill, Anglo-Russian Convention, pp. 177-308, and more briefly, Sweet, British Foreign Policy 1907-1909, pp. 41-45; and Williams, 'Great Britain and Russia, 1905 to the 1907 Convention', in Hinsley (ed.), British Foreign Policy under Grey, pp. 141-147.

16. British Documents, IV, No. 276 (author's italics); this also amplified in BD, IV, 258, 268, 507, 510.

17. See British Documents, IV, p.371; and Monger, End of Isolation, pp. 120-123.

18. British Documents, IV, 455 and Ed. Note, p. 497.

19. Hull, Younghusband's Mission to Lhasa, pp. 118-122.

20. 'Further Papers Relating to Tibet', No. III, 14 February 1905, Cd. 2370.

21. Hansard, 4s, CXLI, 134-154; Hull, Younghusband's Mission to Lhasa, pp. 122-124.

22. Nish, Anglo-Japanese Alliance, pp. 330-344.

23. Nish, Anglo-Japanese Alliance, p. 342; Hansard, 4s, CLI, 161-165.

24. Hansard, 4s, CLII (Lords), 19 February 1906, 32; Nish, Anglo-Japanese Alliance, p. 343.

25. Anglo-Russian Convention; Convention signed on 31 August, 1907 between Great Britain and Russia, containing arrangements on the subject of Persia, Afghanistan, and Tibet, 29 January 1908, Cd. 3750.

26. On the political implications of the military conversations I have particularly made use of Wilson, Keith, The Policy of the Entente : Essays in the Determinants of British Foreign Policy 1904-1914 (Cambridge, 1985), passim, but especially chapters 2-5; also Sweet, British Foreign Policy 1907-1909, pp. 17-19, 23-26; and Monger, End of Isolation, pp. 236-256.

27. Sweet, D.W., 'Great Britain and Germany 1905-1911', in Hinsley (ed.), British Foreign Policy under Grey, pp. 216-219.

28. Hansard, 4s, CLII, February, 1906, passim.

29. Sweet, British Foreign Policy, pp. 19-23.

CHAPTER FIVE -

1. See for instance, Pribram, A.F., England and the International Policy of the European Great Powers 1871-1914 (London, 1931), pp. 114-119; Monger, End of Isolation, p. 281; and the bibliographical footnote in Sweet, British Foreign Policy 1907-1909, p.50, note 130; Wilson, Keith, The Policy of the Entente, challenges this view and holds that it was fear of Russia in Asia rather than of Germany in Europe which forced the British to make the Convention.

2. Churchill, Anglo-Russian Convention, pp. 113-113.

3. Gooch, G.P., Before the War, Vol.I, The Grouping of the Powers (London, 1936), p. 291; Churchill, Anglo-Russian Convention, p.120.

4. Hayes, Paul, Modern British Foreign Policy : the Twentieth Century 1880-1939 (London, 1978), pp.122-123; Steiner, Zara, Britain and the Origins of the First World War (London, 1977), pp. 79-80; Lieven, D.C.B., Russia and the Origins of the First World War (London, 1983), pp. 28-32.

5. Edwards, [illegible].W., 'The Far Eastern Agreements of 1907', Journal of Modern History, XXVI (Chicago, 1954).

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