

Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens

101 Printemps | 2025

Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881): His Lives and Afterlives (Colloque SFEVE) —
Frontières et déplacements (Congrès SAES)

Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881): His Lives and Afterlives (Colloque de la SFEVE 25-26 février 2024)

Separate Essays

Disraeli and the Eastern Question 1875–78: Finance, Defence and Politics



Disraeli et la Question d'Orient, 1875-78 : Finances, Défense et Politique

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<https://doi.org/10.4000/13qt5>

Résumés

English Français

This essay considers an aspect of the great ‘Eastern’ (Ottoman and Balkan) crisis of 1875–78, which has never been properly treated before: the policies of Disraeli (Earl of Beaconsfield), that secured a great British triumph, at once peaceful and painless. His actions were original and unusual—as one might expect—but they also drew on long established ideas about British strength in international relations. What was original was the emphasis he placed on the show of strength: politically, by manipulating parliamentary and public proceedings as symbolic gestures, and by troop and naval movements, actual or projected. This was the so-called policy of ‘determination’ or ‘demonstrations’. The conventional aim of this apparently aggressive policy was to avoid Crimean ‘drift’ and so uphold peace. It was supported by presenting Britain as politically united (thereby marginalising Gladstone’s opposition), and by conceiving of British military resources in thoroughly traditional fashion: as a small, mobile force that could be transported by sea to a wide range of possible destinations. Above all, Disraeli traded on Britain’s financial strength as compared to Russia’s weakness, and hence inability to fight a major European war—ideas that were orthodox in both Britain and Russia as well as the international money markets. These instruments of strength and manipulation produced the collapse of Russia’s position, as between the peace terms she imposed on the Turks at San Stefano and the European settlement at the Congress of Berlin.

Cet essai examine un aspect de la grande crise « orientale » (ottomane et balkanique) de 1875-78, qui n’a jamais été traité de manière adéquate auparavant : la politique de Disraeli (comte de Beaconsfield), qui avait pour résultat le grand triomphe britannique, pacifique et sans douleur. Ses actions étaient originales et caractéristiques, mais elles s’appuyaient également sur des idées établies de longue date concernant la force britannique dans les relations internationales. Ce qui

était original, c'était l'accent qu'il mettait sur l'usage de la force : politiquement, en manipulant les procédures parlementaires et publiques comme des gestes symboliques, et par des mouvements de troupes et de navires, réels ou projetés. C'est ce qu'on appelle la politique de « détermination » ou de « démonstration ». L'objectif conventionnel de cette politique apparemment agressive était d'éviter la « dérive » de la Crimée et de maintenir ainsi la paix. Elle était soutenue par la présentation d'une Grande-Bretagne politiquement unie (marginalisant de cette façon l'opposition de Gladstone) et par une conception tout à fait traditionnelle des ressources militaires britanniques : une petite force mobile pouvant être transportée par mer vers un large éventail de destinations possibles. Avant tout, Disraeli a misé sur la puissance financière de la Grande-Bretagne par rapport à la faiblesse de la Russie, et donc sur son incapacité à mener une grande guerre européenne, idées qui étaient orthodoxes en Grande-Bretagne, en Russie, et sur les marchés monétaires internationaux. Ces instruments de puissance et de manipulation ont entraîné l'effondrement de la position de la Russie, entre les conditions de paix qu'elle a imposées aux Turcs à San Stefano et le règlement européen au Congrès de Berlin.

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : Disraeli (Benjamin), Beaconsfield, question orientale, politique anglaise, réalités derrière la diplomatie

Keywords: Disraeli (Benjamin), Beaconsfield, Eastern Question, English politics, realities behind diplomacy

Texte intégral

- 1 The title of this essay has been much used and it must be explained. The deficiency of Seton-Watson's classic text, *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question* is well known: its starting point was not Disraeli but Gladstone. This was belatedly set to rights by Milos Kovic in *Disraeli & the Eastern Question* (Kovic 2011, vii–viii). Aided by new sources, it was the first narrative of its subject from a governmental perspective. Yet it left plenty of room for further discussion. For Kovic the Eastern Question was 'the problem of the Balkans and the Levant', and he has written an account 'not just [of] what Disraeli thought and knew about the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire . . . but why he thought the way he did'.¹ He has immersed himself in British politics, but still they are placed in relation to the history of the Balkan peninsula. To this extent his perspective and that of previous studies are the same. The agenda here is different. Note, first, that Disraeli took no political interest in either the Ottoman Empire or the Balkans. As he repeatedly told parliament or anyone else who would listen, his policies sought only 'to maintain the honour and interests of this country', 'the Empire of England' (*Hansard* ccxxix.1521, ccxxxi.1146).² England was the object of his loyalty, the totem to which he had been assimilating all his life. His early travels and literary and historical imaginings were not forgotten—the numinous quality of the Near East to him is apparent throughout—but they had no direct relevance.³ His conception of his task was exclusively political. What counted ultimately was not so much the wording of the final diplomatic settlement, but how England's position in great power politics was understood and assessed at home and abroad. In this political conception, international relations were conceived in terms of power and its 'elements' (*Hansard* ccxxxii.51). Disraeli's definition of diplomacy as 'force without violence' (*Hansard* ccxiv.83) indicates that for him foreign policy had to be conceived as the apex of a structure of force or power: that is, in terms of its political, military and economic foundations—the 'realities behind diplomacy'⁴—where financial strength was the principal measure of power in the British case. It is only this dimension, rather than diplomacy in its conventional, limited meaning, which can explain the apparently miraculous transformation whereby the peace treaty enforced on the Turks by the Russian army at San Stefano in March 1878 melted away under British pressure, and gave Disraeli the greatest triumph of his career.⁵ In short, we must do what has not been done before: seek to understand Disraeli on his own terms. Not only is this indispensable for an understanding of the crisis itself but it casts a fundamental light on Disraeli as a

political actor. Modern writing focusses almost exclusively on his handling of domestic politics, but his ideas about the conduct of foreign politics were differently framed. Not only does this cast him in a substantially new light but, because it stands at one remove from the domestic cockpit, it is easier for us to view him in the coolly detached light that he craved.

- 2 The nature of the task facing Disraeli and his Cabinet was one of deterrence under handicaps. From the autumn of 1876 they faced a mobilized Russian army of 400,000 men—an immediate war strength ten times their own—while subject to major domestic constraints, most obviously the agitation over the Bulgarian atrocities. He and his colleagues were required to defend vital British interests and set limits to Russian expansionism without going to war on Turkey's side. At the same time the balance of European power that supported Britain in the Crimea had been destroyed by the Franco-Prussian war. This had brought about the effective elimination of France as a player in great power politics, a situation only reversed (ironically) by her alliance with Russia in 1894. Disraeli recognised this as soon as it happened in 1871:

Not a single principle in the management of our foreign affairs, accepted by all statesmen for our guidance up to six months ago, any longer exists . . . We used to have discussions in this house about the balance of power . . . but what has really come to pass in Europe? The balance of power has been entirely destroyed, and the country which suffers most, and feels the effects of this great change most, is England. Now what has been the first consequence of the destruction of the balance of power by this war . . . ? The first consequence is that Russia repudiates the Treaty of 1856 [the Crimean War settlement]. (*Hansard* cciv.81–82)⁶

- 3 The principal power-political resource conferred by diplomacy, the support of another power, had been removed in the Near East. In this exposed position, it is apparent why Disraeli was so sensitive to the workings of the Three Emperors' League (Russia, Prussia, Austria) to the exclusion of Britain from the moment Ottoman instability became apparent in August 1875 (Zetland i.279); and equally why the crisis of 1876–78 is peculiarly resistant to a diplomatic analysis, since it was in effect a contest between two solitary, hostile powers, Russia and Britain, with Turkey as a third, alien presence. Much the most important 'diplomatic' communication was that between Russia and Britain, a communication that could only be a register of underlying power politics.
- 4 However, to the task of waging cold war amidst such difficulties, Disraeli proved peculiarly suited. This was partly a question of gifts of character—the profound detachment and reserve he displayed throughout life—but also of intellect: 'the unimpassioned sagacity that becomes . . . a statesman' (Disraeli 1832, 15). His approach in old age was the same as that he practised throughout his career: seeking to define with maximum clarity the limits of the politically possible, and then allowing himself the fullest freedom of ingenuity within that space. But where in great constitutional issues the roots of policy were necessarily partisan, in financial and foreign policy he could draw on bipartisan or centrist convention. Regardless of the fall of France, he remained loyal to the peace settlement of 1856 as a definition of British interests: that is, exclusion of Russia from Constantinople, the Straits and the Mediterranean. The Crimea was still 'a just and necessary war' in 1871 (*Hansard* cciv.84). Underlying this was an essentially pacific conception of foreign policy; low government spending to match; and support for Britain's distinctive preoccupation with commerce and the accumulation of wealth rather than military force (Ghosh 1984). In this respect he was a more representative figure than either Palmerston, a product of the Napoleonic wars who treated foreign policy as a separate sphere, a law unto itself, or Gladstone, a religious thinker who hoped that foreign policy could be subjected to fiscal restraint on ultimately moral grounds. Disraeli neither could nor would conceal his individuality. Even so, it was within an eminently conventional framework that he deployed his fertility and resource.

The Policy of Demonstrations

5 Though his intentions have been doubted—was he subject to ‘war-disease’? (Shannon 1992, 299 cf. Seton-Watson 554–59)—there can be no doubt that Disraeli (ennobled as Beaconsfield in August 1876) considered that his policy was the best way to maintain peace. There is only one piece of direct evidence showing him in warlike mood, and not by his own hand. In an interview with the Earl of Derby, Foreign Secretary and heir presumptive to the Tory party leadership, on 11 February 1878, the latter ‘Called on the Premier at his own request: found him excited and inclined to swagger, saying war was unavoidable: it would be a glorious and successful war for England: with more in the same style’ (Derby *Diary*). Now the context of this interview was the most acute point of the entire crisis, when the British fleet had been ordered up to Constantinople after days of reports and rumour that the Russians were occupying the city. Yet as a statement of policy, these remarks were no more than a conventional assertion, frequently repeated at calmer moments, that England would have to go to war to keep Russia out of Constantinople. As to the sentiment accompanying the policy, we have to reckon with the fact that Beaconsfield summoned Derby precisely in order to deliver this harangue, and Derby himself, in the quiet of later life, recognised his Chief’s practice of making ‘eccentric and outrageous utterances . . . [which] were carefully calculated for effect’ rather than ‘outbreaks of his real nature’ (Derby *Diary*, 4 Oct. 1886). At the time the Foreign Secretary signally lacked the sympathy and detachment required for such nice discrimination. A great breach with his old mentor had opened up after his first resignation in January 1878, and this was aggravated by both fatigue and illness. Taken overall, Derby’s diary and correspondence reveal a perpetual indecision as to whether Beaconsfield really intended war or not—an indecision Derby nursed to the end of his life.⁷ And while Beaconsfield may have been ‘inclined to swagger’, his actions were not, as we shall see, those of a man preparing for war. Against the one outburst recorded above may be set innumerable contrary utterances. At much the same time, in the Commons on 4–5 February, Gathorne Hardy (Secretary of State for War) became involved in a particularly fierce wrangle with the Liberal G. O. Trevelyan, when he repudiated with interest the latter’s assertion that the Prime Minister ‘had never concealed his desire to plunge this country into war’ (*Hansard* ccxxxvii.962),⁸ and no plausible *arrière pensée* will account for Beaconsfield’s writing privately to Hardy to thank him for his ‘vigorous vindication’ ([6] Feb. 1878, *Memoir* ii.51).⁹ His policy was undeniably assertive but, as he put it to the Queen (who believed that war was inevitable), ‘it is not sufficient to be bold, one must also be prudent’ (6 March 1878, CAB 41/10/23).¹⁰ As we shall see, the second half of this diptych was as important as the first.

6 The belief that he intended war was an almost inevitable consequence of pursuing a deterrent strategy, but this was not what that strategy meant to him. In June 1876, for example, he described his course as ‘a policy of determination, and yet [this] is consistent with a sincere love of peace, which, I believe, it will secure’ (to Manners 7 June 1876, *M&B* ii.903). His tone was unchanged under the graver circumstances of July 1877, at the time of the first British troop movement to Malta, which he recommended to Salisbury in the following terms: ‘It would have a great effect on the Continent, & like every war-like move of England, lead to peace’ (18 July 1877, B/Box 300). As this remark suggests, there was something distinctive about Beaconsfield’s deterrent strategy. Most deterrence throughout history has been based on military force. Hence the classical maxim, *Si vis pacem, para bellum*: if you want peace, prepare for war. However, Beaconsfield’s deterrent was only partly based on military force and made up in ostentation what it lacked in substance. What interested him was visual ‘effect’ rather than literal military force. From a very early date the policy was referred to within political circles as one of ‘demonstrations’—this was not Disraeli’s choice (he preferred ‘determination’), but it aptly caught the emphasis on deterrence by show.¹¹ For this reason it was taken up by Cabinet members, although the struggle that they had

in conveying what Disraeli was about is evident from this halting presentation by Stafford Northcote (Chancellor of the Exchequer): the basis of ministerial policy was ‘that respect in this world will not be given, or cannot, at all events, be relied upon to be given, to those who are not strong, who do not show their strength, or who do not show, at any rate, that they are ready, if necessary to use their strength’ (*Hansard* ccxlv.1344).

7 So what was the reality behind this invocation of the haze of appearances? Treading the grey area between war and outright neutrality, Disraeli had developed a novel set of ideas. The historical root of the policy of demonstration lay in the widely held belief that the Crimean war had been the result of ‘drift’ or inaction compounded by vacillation, drawing on Lord Clarendon’s famous (yet chilling) remark in February 1854 that ‘we are drifting towards war’ (*Hansard* cxxx.568)¹². Had Britain’s determination to go to war been made plain, the war would never have occurred. The idea of the foreign policy ‘demonstration’ was thus available to him from the 1850s on, albeit in political form only,¹³ and the point of the demonstrations of 1876–78 was to display decision and determination with crystal clarity so that the mistake of twenty years before should not be repeated. At the time of the first demonstration of British military force, the gratuitous reinforcement of the fleet at Besika Bay in May 1876, the Premier’s recurrence to the Crimean analogy was instinctive: ‘Whatever happens we shall certainly not drift into war, but go to war—if we do—because we intend it and have a purpose which we mean to accomplish’ (Zetland ii.49). From this time on, monitory references to 1854 stud his correspondence and conversation.¹⁴

8 The demonstrative policy drew on a second element of Disraeli’s thinking from the 1850s: the maxim that ‘expenditure depends upon policy’, rather than, as Gladstone argued, being subject to fiscal constraints.¹⁵ The obvious application of this conventional maxim was that there should be an alignment between foreign policy and defence expenditure, which was by far the largest item of current peacetime expense. However, in time of crisis Disraeli gave it a new twist. If military demonstrations were conceived as political instruments, they need not serve an exclusively military function. This was novel. Seen simply as a military reality, the demonstrative policy was ineffective: it made use of a fleet which could do nothing to save Bulgaria or Constantinople from the Russian armies; of troop movements in insignificant numbers; and votes of money for war preparations which it was not intended to spend.¹⁶ But then their primary role was not military but political: to enhance the credibility of deterrence, the ‘policy of determination’ rather than ‘drift’. At the same time there was a financial side to this policy. Although Beaconsfield believed in making freer use of money and material preparations to support diplomacy than the doctrinaire Gladstone, the amount of money that could be spent was still limited by a political constraint. The demonstrative policy was a peacetime policy, and it had to keep within an acceptable peacetime scale of expenditure and taxation. Beaconsfield did not suppose that political acts alone—speeches, despatches, motions in parliament—would be enough to deter Russia, but he did not therefore swing to the opposite extreme of making efficient military preparations for war, which would have been vastly expensive: of the order of £15 to £25 million.¹⁷ The policy of demonstrations intimated a real threat—an ultimate determination to go to war by the richest power in the world—but it was a cheap way of doing so, and before the £6 million Vote of Credit for war preparations was voted in 1878, it had cost next to nothing.¹⁸

9 Rightly understood, then, most criticism of ministerial policy on financial grounds was unfounded. Widest of the mark was the view put forward by Cabinet opponents such as Derby and Salisbury (a critic but later an ally of Disraeli). They talked of a possible expenditure of £1–200 million, ‘an additional threepenny Income tax for ever’, the ‘compromising of the future of the country by reckless finance’ due to a massive increase in the National Debt (Salisbury to Hardy 27 May 1877, SP D/7/46; Derby *Diary* 1 Jan 1878). But such expenditure would only have been incurred if the deterrent policy failed, so leading to war. The extent to which these dire estimates of cost were politically motivated may be gauged from the fact that when in May 1878 it was Salisbury’s turn to threaten war rather than warn against it—by now he had taken over

from Derby as Foreign Secretary—the estimated cost had diminished by a factor of ten, to £20 million (to Queen 22 May 1878, *QVL* ii.620–21). But in any case, since the power to incur expenditure was Britain's great strength and Russia's weakness, the threat of an expensive war was a strong card in Britain's hand (§§. IV–V below).

10 It is true that in the final analysis the demonstrative policy was not so cheap: the cost of supplemental defence expenditure under the Vote of Credit and the Indian expedition to Malta came to £61/2 million (*Hansard* ccxlii.1305). All the major charges made by Gladstone in his indictment of Tory finance at Midlothian derived from this: the difference between Conservative and Liberal expenditure; Conservative budget deficit as against Liberal surplus; the failure to provide a consolidated annual statement of expenditure; Liberal tax remission versus Conservative tax imposition (Gladstone 1879, 131–57). However, the basis of his reasoning was a personal one, the consequence of a twenty-year crusade against government expenditure in all its forms: on the assumption that extraordinary, foreign political expenditures were no different from ordinary, peacetime ones. But if extraordinary expenditure was extraordinary, then ordinary Conservative finance became an affair of economy and surplus. Gladstone's financial authority and the eminence he enjoyed in the press and out of doors—an eminence felt by Tories when they described him as 'the real leader of the Liberal party' (Northcote, *Times* 22 Dec 1879, 10a)¹⁹—made this type of accusation important, and even Liberal patriots were prepared, in more casual fashion, to include both 'vacillation... & expenditure' amongst the catalogue of the ministry's vices.²⁰ Even so it was the bland Northcote rather than Gladstone who represented the contemporary consensus when he excluded extraordinary expenditure from the annual financial accounts.²¹ The collapse of the Opposition when faced by Government calls for such expenditure—the demand for £6 million in January and the calling out of the Reserves in April 1878—showed how unrepresentative Gladstone's view was. When Derby resigned on the latter occasion, Beaconsfield could appeal to the linkage between military and financial policy as one admitted by every sane man:

I cannot conceive that any person with a sense of responsibility in the conduct of affairs could for a moment pretend that, when all are armed, England alone should be unarmed. I am sure my noble Friend whose loss I so much deplore [the Earl of Derby], would never uphold that doctrine . . . ; for to the individual of whom I did, I should say, *Naviget Anticyram* [Set sail for the island of the mad]
(*Hansard* ccxxxix.776)²²

11 And in the triumphant summer of 1878 he would answer the charge of extravagance still more simply, by pointing to the difference between the extra expenditure incurred in preserving the peace, and the altogether different financial dimensions of war: 'Had you entered into that war [with Russia], for which you were prepared, and well prepared, probably in a month you would have exceeded the whole of the expenditure you have now incurred' (*Hansard* ccxli.1766 cf. Hardy, ccxxxvii.979).

12 Even on the basis of this brief description, we may claim to have laid bare something that contemporaries acknowledged but supposed to be a mystery: that Beaconsfield's gifts of insight and originality were of an extraordinary kind. The demonstrative policy was strong in two distinct and apparently contradictory aspects. It proceeded from conventional premisses in its account of the origins of the Crimea, but to the reservoir of political strength this conferred, Beaconsfield added a novelty: the military and political demonstration. This enhanced the cogency of deterrence, yet it preserved both peace and the peacetime scale of expenditure and taxation. The acceptance of such conventional restraint combined with intellectual creativity, where others saw no room for manoeuvre, constitutes the essence of Disraeli's genius in politics. It marks all his attempts at constructive policy, though after a lifetime spent in political minority there were not many of them. The demonstrative policy was not necessarily more remarkable than income tax differentiation in 1852 or the promotion of social reform in 1874–75. (Household suffrage in 1866–67 was not his idea.) It did, however, enjoy the advantages

of a long maturation, bipartisan foundation, and (last not least) a parliamentary majority.

- 13 But while the originality of Beaconsfield's policy was notable and was undoubtedly connected to its ultimate success, it drew a plethora of criticism. He was attacked for being warlike and profligate, while a policy presented as pacific and putatively cheap, was in reality a sham. The list of pejorative descriptions of the demonstrative policy—'a mere game of brag', '*coups de theatre*', 'the policy of bluster', 'the reign of Bombast and impostures', 'a dunghill cock'²³—was almost as long as the gibes and flouts and jeers that accompanied Disraeli throughout his political career. The financial criticism of the Parliamentary class was not the same as Gladstone's condemnation of Beaconsfield's extravagance; rather it focussed on the gap between expenditure and policy, criticising the Prime Minister for adopting a foreign policy which he could not support. But still by this means the mainstream of Liberal politicians might reach an adversarial conclusion similar to Gladstone's, while preserving their claim to toughmindedness and realism in international relations. It was a view to which Hartington, the Liberal leader and obvious aspirant to Palmerston's mantle in foreign policy, frequently returned:

I do object most emphatically to this country being made ridiculous in the eyes of the world. What has this Government which talks about ascendancy in Europe done to secure the means by which that ascendancy is to be attained? Has it added to our military or naval strength? Not in one slightest atom. At a moment . . . when every country except our own can put in the field its whole male population, armed to the teeth, Lord Beaconsfield thinks it is wise and prudent and even decent to talk of ascendancy in Europe, although he has not made the slightest military preparation to maintain those boasts which he puts forth. (Hartington 1880, 91)

- 14 Hence the conclusion 'that England is less fitted, by her position and the nature of her resources, than any other power for a policy of Military demonstration' (Hartington 1880, 54).²⁴ The lie to such accusations was often given: that it foisted on the ministry an ambition to which it never pretended—'ascendancy' was only a political ascendancy not a material ambition—and without it the gap between resources and foreign policy did not exist.²⁵ But Hartington's remarks remain of significance, reflecting the ambivalence of the various Liberal factions from 1876 on—part tough-, part high-minded—and also the confusion they experienced in dealing with Beaconsfield's ingenious policy. Confusion was most evident when they described the vote of £6 million in January 1878 was as both a 'war' vote and a 'sham' vote (*Hansard* ccxxxvii.732, 825–26, 898, 978, 1016, 1105). On this occasion the Opposition were caught napping, but party discourse was not normally so shamefaced. One Liberal charge, played on by Hartington above, was that Beaconsfield risked war for no better reason than 'prestige' or status—and this remains conventional wisdom today.²⁶ So critics of the ministry could have it both ways: Beaconsfield's policy was both warlike and insubstantial.

- 15 Court, diplomatic and military circles presented a more radical critique of his political *modus operandi*. Here innate faith in the significance of military power had been given new credibility by Prussia's mobilization of a mass citizen army in the 1860s, which (it was held) must render the diplomacy of a nation without conscription impotent. This point of view was put to Beaconsfield by Lord Lyons—Ambassador in Paris and a potential Foreign Secretary—when the latter was in London in September 1877. As he reported to the Queen:

No diplomatic action of England on Russia either directly or indirectly, would, in his opinion, influence or control, that power.
Bismarck, always consulted, would say 'These are mere words, England can do nothing. Navies are no longer a power, & England has no soldiers'. This is what he does say.
Only way to influence Bismarck would be for England to raise a great army & make vast preparations. But would House of Commons sanction such steps on a mere hypothesis of war?

It never has done anything great, of that kind, till danger was at its doors. This is a remark of Lord Lyons. (20 Sept. 1877, B/XIX/C/315–16)²⁷

16 However, Lyons's agenda was not military but diplomatic. As French ambassador he was afraid that Bismarck might exploit Britain's preoccupation with Russia and Constantinople to deliver another body-blow against France in the wake of the 'war in sight' crisis of 1875. Hence Beaconsfield's verdict on this jeremiad, as the product of a mind 'absolutely cowed by P[rince] Bismarck' (18 Oct. 1877, B/XIX/C/335).

17 For a more authentic presentation of this view, we must turn to the soldiers themselves. The Duke of Cambridge, the Commander-in-Chief of the army who was consistently cold-shouldered by the ministry, habitually took a European-wide comparison of strength as his starting point for policy recommendations. Writing to Hardy in the autumn of 1876 he typically deplored 'the extent in which we are distrusted as a Nation in foreign countries, at all events as regards our power of offence' (22 Nov. 1876, T501/268). Now his proposed remedies, based on years of experience in dealing with politicians, were by no means unreasonable: they centred on an increase in army numbers by anything from 4 to 10,000 men and calling out the Reserves (Memoranda 24 Oct., 27 Nov. 1876, Verner ii.102–10)—the first of which resembled Gladstone's and Cardwell's course in 1870, while the second happened in fact in 1878. Yet he betrayed his distinctively military perspective by asking for both increases and asking for them in advance: six months before the Russo-Turkish war broke out. The meaning of such demands was plain: he accepted the ministry's intention of using only a limited force (one army corps), but he wished to prepare it efficiently for war, not for a demonstration, and this of course Hardy rejected (to Cambridge 26 Oct., 15, 23 Nov. 1876, Verner ii.104–05). Still Cambridge was overshadowed in his views by those of Sir Lintorn Simmons: Inspector-General of Fortifications. Due to the potential importance of such works (either at Gallipoli or in possible naval bases), he was a frequent point of reference for the Cabinet and was appointed Britain's military representative at the Congress of Berlin. Yet his views were far from politically agreeable.²⁸ In the autumn of 1876 he penned a set of bleak memoranda which, brushing aside the question of war and peace, had no difficulty in demonstrating the obvious: that Britain was unfit to fight a land war against Russia in Bulgaria. But he went further and asserted that if her military effort was thus confined to the mere siege defence of Constantinople, she 'would descend from her position as a first-class power'. Hence this conclusion: 'There never was a time when it was more necessary "to sit down and consult whether", with the force at the disposal of England, "she is able to meet the force that is against" her' ('Further Memorandum', n.d. B/XVIII/A/10).²⁹ By implication the only satisfactory means of rectifying this deficiency was to introduce conscription and a continental style military policy—a revolution that no politician would contemplate. If no such change was forthcoming, Simmons opined, Britain should abstain from military action altogether unless supported by allies. It was symptomatic of this mixture of ambition and self-doubt in the face of Continental military force that the resource of increased voluntary recruitment was estimated as virtually nil: 34,000 men over five years, of whom 'it [was] very doubtful if more than a very small number . . . would be obtainable' ('Report of Committee . . .' WO 33/32 ff.6–7). It followed that Britain could not maintain even two army corps in the field and hope to sustain a wartime casualty rate ('Memorandum' [c.19 June 1877]; WO 33/32 f.7). By this standard the Boer War of 1899 could never have been fought, let alone the opening years of the Great War.

18 Of course, the Court, the diplomats and the military were precisely those persons who found Continental polities with their strong state structures most sympathetic, and the parliamentary system most intractable. Few politicians shared even a fraction of their views. Nonetheless, this critique prompts the question as to what were the strengths behind the British policy that triumphed in 1878.

Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy

19 In a political conception of international relations, diplomacy—the recruitment of foreign assistance—must always be considered but in this case, for the reasons suggested, it was insignificant. It is true that the Concert or Councils of Europe were not set aside (as Gladstone liked to suggest) (Gladstone 1879, 115). The Constantinople Conference (1876–77), the London Protocol (1877) and the Congress of Berlin sufficiently illustrate that; but they did little more than record the prior agreements of the British and Russians. Writing on 8 March 1878 Beaconsfield gave staunch expression to this point of view:

Lord Beaconsfield is of opinion, that, throughout the transactions of the last two years, much too much consideration has been given to the disposition of other Powers. England is quite strong enough, when the nation is united as it is now, to vindicate & assert her own rights & interests. There have been terrible opportunities lost, & terrible acts of weakness committed by us during these two years, but the nation was perplexed, bewildered, & half-hearted. The nation is so no longer. She is fresh, united, & full of resources . . . We must think less of Bismarcks, & Andrassys, & Gortchakows, & more of our own energies & resources. (B/XIX/C/501–02)

20 The elementary political condition of success abroad was solidarity at home: it was this which would lead to a ‘satisfactory, & even triumphant, end’ (B/XIX/C/501–02). Just as the Eastern crisis effectively cancelled the normal importance attaching to diplomacy, it was equally unusual in the elevated importance it attached to domestic opinion and contest. Both the other major international crises Britain experienced in the century 1815–1914, the Crimean and Boer wars, provoked domestic debate, though the Great War did not—this was an attribute of parliamentary government; but the level of discord in the years 1876–78 was unique. Furthermore, it was conducted at two distinct levels: in parliament and the country, and within the Cabinet. In both cases Beaconsfield was the central actor.

21 He was first seized of the need to pursue ‘a policy of determination’ in May 1876 (to Queen 7 June 1876, *QVL* ii.457), when he rejected the Berlin Memorandum’s attempt to regulate the affairs of Turkey and sent ships to Besika Bay in the Dardanelles. This was the original demonstration. At home he applauded the Opposition for the ‘patriotic reserve’ that he had enforced upon them by delaying the publication of relevant correspondence from Turkey and removing the opportunity for debate. (Derby was complicit in this on grounds of secrecy rather than ostentation: the details of foreign policy need not concern the general public) (*Hansard* ccxxx.265).³⁰ However, being so quick off the mark in the face of what was only a moderate threat proved counterproductive. Disraeli’s desire to demonstrate domestic political unity produced precisely the reverse effect, since it supplied a context whereby the agitation over Turkey’s Bulgarian ‘atrocities’ in the autumn could take political root. The attempt to strangle information and discussion gave the first press reports of the atrocities a unique discursive monopoly. This bred the erroneous suspicion that the British naval demonstration of the previous May registered moral support for atrocities perpetrated in May, and the rumour once started proved almost impossible to eradicate.³¹ Ministerial policy turned these initial murmurings into a powder-keg which blew up in its face. In the government’s eyes, the ‘Eastern question’ in August 1876, when the popular agitation took off, related to Bosnia, Herzegovina and Serbia. Atrocities in Bulgaria were an irrelevance. Now the press reports were undoubtedly exaggerated (Disraeli, *Hansard* ccxxxi.1140–43),³² and they presented no political issue in fact: the government had no intention of fighting for Turkey, and few of the atrocitarians wanted to go to war against Turkey (Shannon 1963 esp. 118–28, 241–44). But since he was so set on conveying the determination of a united country Beaconsfield responded, as is well known, by dismissing the atrocities as irrelevant, eschewing any appeal to Christian sentiment and refusing to act ‘as if . . . under the control of public opinion’ (to Derby 6 Sept. 1876, *M&B* ii.925–26). But this affirmation of the policy of determination was largely responsible for the explosion of dissent that he so much wished to avoid. It gave Gladstone a point of entry, when he climbed aboard the atrocitarian bandwagon with

his famous pamphlet that linked together *The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*.

22 In this way agitation rooted in Christian and moral outrage took on political consequence. The explosion of popular feeling coincided with the first British mediation efforts in Serbo-Turk war, causing ministers to complain that every setback in these tortuous negotiations was due to the agitation wrecking British influence abroad and encouraging the Russians to keep the war going (Northcote to Beaconsfield 30 Aug. 1876, B/XX/N/13, Zetland ii.69). When the Duke of Cambridge complained (as we saw) that British armed force was not respected abroad, he was met by a typically ‘political’ counter from Hardy: ‘Our land force is no doubt despised, but it is the dissension which has arisen in foreign affairs which gives the strongest impression of our weakness’ (23 Nov. 1876, Verner ii.104). It is true that an armistice was arranged between the Serbs and the Turks, but then this was a sideshow. The importance of the atrocities lay in Bulgaria: first as an idea in British minds and then in fact. On the 26 September, Shuvalov, the Russian Ambassador, informed Derby of a Russian plan to send troops into Bulgaria. To be sure, it was to be accompanied by Austrian occupation of Serbia, but unlike Serbia, Bulgaria lay on the direct route between the Russian frontier and Constantinople. With this the ‘real’ Eastern crisis opened and Beaconsfield had no doubt that Gladstone and the atrocitarians had ‘stabbed’ the government ‘in the back’.³³ At home, while the popular agitation subsided, Gladstone’s intervention and the creation of a minority fraction within the Liberal opposition, meant that for over a year there could be no assumption of political unity at home, until signs of war fever gripped the country at the beginning of 1878. Only then could the nation once more be presented as ‘fresh, united, & full of resources’.³⁴ But for all the fact that he blundered, Beaconsfield was no stranger to political opposition. Through years of bitter experience, he was profoundly sensitive to it, and as we shall see, much of his conduct was Fabian. And sensitivity to weakness could actually be an instrument in the service of determination and demonstration: boldness must be accompanied by prudence, because without it, it would be self-defeating. On the other hand, whenever he felt sure of success, he would take the most aggressive course open.

23 Political aggression is apparent above all in the parliamentary proceedings, because parliament was the most visible of all public fora. (Modern historians unwisely discount it on this account.) Consider the events of 23 March 1877. Holding the whip hand in negotiations with Russia to settle her complaint against Turkey, Beaconsfield resolved that any settlement must be followed by the demobilization of the Russian army, put on a war footing the previous November. The first condition for successful enforcement of this point was Cabinet solidarity. Hence the monitory tone of his set-piece address to that body on the morning of the 23rd:

Affairs had now arrived at such a pass, that it was necessary, that they shd be conducted by an unanimous Ministry. With unanimity, security, & even triumph, were probable: witht union, feebleness, peril, & disaster, almost certain...
Ld Beaconsfield compared together the two policies now in conflict: the Imperial policy of England, & the Policy of Crusade. He sketched what must be the consequences of a nation indulging in sentimental eccentricity. He concluded by saying, that . . . without an united Cabinet on their Eastern Policy, he cd not do justice to Yr Majesty’s interests. (CAB 41/8/7)

24 The agreement of a somewhat alarmed Cabinet was the preamble to a more ostentatious act of aggression that evening in the Commons. The Radical MP Fawcett had tabled an anodyne motion on behalf of Christian subjects of the Turks, which was expected to form a quiet hour of a kind traditional on going into Committee of Supply. Opinions unrepresentative of the Liberal front-bench could be vented before the motion was withdrawn: it was just ‘a peg upon which a speech was to be hung’ (Northcote, *Hansard* ccxxxiii.462 cf. Gladstone c.418). But the ministry deliberately speeded up business to allow the resolution to come on early as the main business of the evening and met it with a direct negative. Knowing that Hartington would not support it, a crushing majority was recorded in the government’s favour (242:71), though not

without protest at this procedural manipulation (*Hansard* ccxxxiii.408, 417–18, 461–70).

25 In Beaconsfield's eyes this kind of manoeuvre was an essential political foundation to Anglo-Russian negotiation, and Russian acceptance of a demobilization procedure in the London Protocol a week later (31 March) seemed to show that political determination might overmatch the mass of a Continental army. This sense of the convertibility of domestic political strength into strength abroad informed every major parliamentary occasion from now on. First, the debate on Gladstone's resolutions on Eastern policy in May 1877, where Beaconsfield met the conciliatory suggestion by Northcote (now Tory leader in the Commons) that the discussion be allowed to peter out in an adjournment, by insisting on a division as 'absolutely necessary' (14 May 1877, draft B/XVI/B/48).³⁵ Again, in January 1878 when Northcote asked for a Vote of Credit which was not necessarily to be spent, he took care to announce that it 'would be, not only a Vote of Credit, but a Vote of Confidence' (*Hansard* ccxxxvii.561); and in the following week, despite compromise sentiment on both sides (Bourke, Weds. [6 Feb. 1878] B/XXI/B/689, Barrington reporting Hartington 6 Feb. B/XX/Ba/57),³⁶ the Vote of Credit was driven through, not by agreement but by large majorities amidst opposition chaos and disunity, majorities which were supposed to serve a deterrent function on the Russians with their army at the gates of Constantinople. As Beaconsfield reported on 7 February, the day the hostile Liberal amendment collapsed (295:96), '[he] believes, that the entry of the Russians into the city has been contemplated, & is perhaps yet intended . . . The collapse of the Opposition this afternoon in the House of Commons, & the certainty, that the vote will pass by an immense majority, is one of the influences that may tell' (B/XIX/C/463–64).

26 Of course, the changed climate of public opinion made Beaconsfield's task easier in 1878, but at no time previously was there any perceptible failure to enforce the 'policy of determination', and the view that British deterrence only began to operate at the last minute, after Derby's resignation in March 1878, is mistaken.³⁷ The elements of Beaconsfield's policy were consistently enforced from May 1876 on, and obstacles, though they might restrict, did not prevent this. Their effect was negative and invisible. Initiatives were not taken or postponed, rather than taken up and then followed by humiliating retreats. His Fabianism is most evident in the privacy of Cabinet, though this too was always a matter of political calculation. An example of the balance of gain and loss is provided by the proposed Vote of Credit for war preparations of June 1877. Having, with some difficulty, secured the consent of Cabinet to this measure, Beaconsfield repeatedly hesitated over its implementation in the anticipation of political difficulties. When after three weeks it was abandoned, he 'referred to the expectation of Gladstone & Co that a vote would be asked for, which would give them an opportunity of raising fresh agitation. They would look for it & would be disappointed' (Derby *Diary* 11 July 1877).³⁸ The use of the vote, which like that of 1878 was not necessarily to be spent, would be either as a preliminary to an expedition or, this not proving necessary, as a visible support for policy in the recess. But in Beaconsfield's mind the political costs grew so as to outweigh the gains. He envisaged a new recess 'agitation' playing on this large and mysteriously unspent vote, just as it had played the previous year on the motives behind the fleet being sent to Besika Bay.³⁹ Given a choice between demonstrative military preparation and concealing the fragility of its political foundation, Beaconsfield preferred concealment and giving priority to the political over the military measure of strength.

27 Where in public there was overt bullying and concealed restraint, in Cabinet it seemed for a long time as if the Premier's only tactic was the Fabian one.⁴⁰ Note here another past experience which marked a man in his 70s: his deep concern for unity in the face of the ever-present tendency of parties and Cabinets to disintegrate, beginning with Peel in 1846 and going forward to Cranbourne in 1867. References to Beaconsfield's conciliatory behaviour are legion, not least by Cabinet opponents. We might excuse Derby's favourable view of his chief on the score of personal regard: it was 'impossible to find any one more pleasant to deal with, or more willing to listen to &

consider objections to what he proposes', but this could not be said of Carnarvon or Salisbury (Derby *Diary* 11 July 1877).⁴¹ Their references go on to accuse Beaconsfield of weakness and short-sightedness, manoeuvring for the hour at the expense of the longer term, and from widely differing sources there came the judgement that he should have been more ruthless.⁴² Carnarvon considered that he might have been sacked as early as March 1877, nearly a year before the fact, while the Queen was looking forward to Derby's and Salisbury's resignations in June.⁴³ That Beaconsfield was conciliatory cannot be doubted, but the further criticism really reflected that he alone was responsible for the policy being pursued and that it was not understood. Like the Liberals in parliament who accused him of both war and sham policies, Beaconsfield's Cabinet colleagues never fully understood the mixture of conciliation and aggression that was intrinsic to the policy of demonstration. When he was at his most determined, critics accused him of aiming at war, so imputing a simple and settled view, but on occasion they were candid enough to admit that they could find 'no clue to the mysteries of D.'s conduct' (Salisbury to Lady Salisbury 6–8 Feb. 1877, Cecil ii.127; cf. Derby *Diary* 24 Nov 1877). And the idea of Disraeli as a mystery man in an 'Eastern' context was an old story that had been decades in the making.⁴⁴

28 Until the beginning of the Russo-Turkish war in April 1877 there was no significant disagreement in Cabinet on matters of fact, and Beaconsfield seems to have supposed that as the threat of war loomed closer his colleagues would fall into line, accepting with him that the atrocitarian agitation was largely emotional and founded on misunderstanding of his politics (to Lady Bradford 24 Mar. 1877, *M&B* ii.1001; to Queen 23 Mar., CAB 41/8/7). His forceful approach in late March 1877 reflected this assumption, and Carnarvon's supposition that he might have been sacked at this time was mistaken (Salisbury to Carnarvon 26 Mar. 1877, Cecil ii.138–39). But though the tactic of supplying a strong lead appeared to work then, its repetition in April did not. Rejection of Beaconsfield's proposal to send a British force to Gallipoli showed that there were divisions in the Cabinet just as there were in the country, even if they were not the same ones. So commenced eight long months, apart from a momentary fright in July, where conciliation and caution became the order of the day. During this period Beaconsfield manifestly did not lose sight of his long-term aim: all his moves, political and material, were directed towards successful deterrence, centring principally on the establishment of a force at Gallipoli. But political and Cabinet solidarity were essential to that end. While the Russian threat to Constantinople remained at a distance, Cabinet dismissals would be counterproductive. If he did not choose to go to Parliament for measures which the Cabinet had sanctioned, such as the June Vote of Credit, how much stronger was the argument against an actual expedition and consequential resignations. The Queen, typically and foolishly, demanded both the Vote and the Gallipoli expedition, but Beaconsfield answered her quietly, skilled manager that he was: 'some time must necessarily elapse before that issue is to be decided' (26 June 1877, B/XIX/C/279).⁴⁵

29 Still there would come a point when Fabianism ceased to serve the ends of deterrence. If the Russian threat to Constantinople became immediate, real need and the political pressure for military action would coincide. Hence Beaconsfield's frequently reiterated judgement that, in such a case, there would be 'a burst of indignation in this country that has not been equalled since 32' (a revealing comparison) and if incorrectly handled, it would lead to the ministry's dismissal (to Derby 6 Feb. 1878, Millman 1979, 380).⁴⁶ At this point recusant Cabinet ministers must be discarded. That Beaconsfield knew how to abandon caution for urgency was evident on the two occasions when the Russian threat to Constantinople was perceived as imminent: by his demand in July 1877 that even a temporary occupation of the city by Russia be made *casus belli*, and by the decisive measures put to Cabinet in December 1877 on receipt of news of the fall of Plevna (Pleven). The first, though it was rendered null by Turkish military success, was announced to the Queen with the kind of directness she appreciated, in the middle of a Marlborough House garden party: 'Lord Beaconsfield came up to me, looking quite brisk, and said, "The crisis has begun and I

shall need all your Majesty's support". He expected Lords Derby, Salisbury and Carnarvon would all resign, but that he hoped all would end well. It was on the declaration of going to [Constantinople] being a *casus belli!*' (13 July 1877, QVL ii.547).⁴⁷ However, Beaconsfield's problem was not one of decision or clarity but of how to manage the transition to more urgent deterrence in the light of volatile opinion. On one hand, he was prey to memories of Crimean war patriotism. Hence his cultivation of J. A. Roebuck, ostensible author of Aberdeen's fall in 1855 and still an MP; he paid attention to his speeches, consulted him at delicate moments, and made him a Privy Councillor on returning from Berlin in 1878 (Zetland ii.118, 149, 182). On the other, Disraeli the great parliamentarian had to pay the price of his elevation to the Lords: the recognition that he must now attend to the contrary and uncertain opinions of the Commons ministers and the Chief Whip, Hart Dyke. Here, too, the past hung over him.

30 The difficulties posed by these factors are graphically illustrated by the crisis surrounding Derby's first resignation in January 1878. On the 23rd Beaconsfield proposed to the Cabinet that the fleet be sent up to Constantinople and notice be given of a Vote of Credit for war preparations. Such measures reflected the first clear determination on his part that material deterrence would be confirmed, indeed compelled, by political opinion, rather than negated by political division. This can be seen from his advance request to the Queen for permission to accept Derby's and Carnarvon's resignations, and from the terms in which (in Derby's report) the proposals were announced:

Disraeli read a letter from Sir W. Dyke which bore some traces of being manufactured to order, and which purported to express the 'indignant discontent' of a large body of the Conservative members of Parliament at the undecided attitude of the Government and he proposed to send the fleet at once to the Dardanelles. (Carnarvon Memorandum, Add. MSS 60817 f.78v)⁴⁸

31 The point of forcing resignations now was just the same as that of not forcing them in the previous eight months: 'It will show that Yr Majesty's Government is determined' (to Queen 24 Jan. 1878, B/XIX/C/436). However, the transition from conciliation to overt determination was not clear-cut. On the evening of the 24th the fleet was recalled, the cause for its sailing being apparently removed, and with it the immediate cause of the two resignations. So both Carnarvon and Derby might have been taken back; Carnarvon more easily than Derby, since Derby had objected to the Vote of Credit announced in the interim, whereas Carnarvon did not. Yet Carnarvon was given his marching orders, while Beaconsfield decided not to accept Derby's resignation, despite what he told the Queen (25 Jan. 1878, CAB 41/10/12).⁴⁹ He now believed that the advantages of political solidarity and freedom to act militarily could run smoothly together, and though the fleet had been recalled, notice of the money vote for war preparations had been given and would not be withdrawn (Northcote, *Hansard* ccxxxvii.368). If Derby would come in on these terms, he might do so. However, Beaconsfield's actions were very much *de haut en bas*. He took just two steps to permit a reconciliation: without communicating directly to his old friend, he let Derby know that his resignation statement might be postponed over the weekend (to Monday 28th), and he asked Dyke whether, from a Commons point of view, Derby would be worth retaining (Derby to 'Disraeli' 25 Jan., B/XX/S/1305; Dyke to Beaconsfield, 25 Jan 1878, B/XX/S/1308). Beyond this he did nothing, but sat back to allow Derby and his colleagues (above all Northcote) to build bridges, as he knew they would. On the 27th Derby resumed his attendance at Cabinet.⁵⁰

32 So Derby's return was an act of political choice; it was not a 'surrender' compelled by back-bench opinion.⁵¹ Having previously got Dyke to testify to backbench militancy, Beaconsfield now drew from him the contrary opinion that 'the division' on the Vote of Credit '[might] be seriously affected' by Derby's resignation (Northcote 25 Jan., no. 2, B/XX/N/62; Dyke 25 Jan., B/XX/S/1308).⁵² This was what the Premier needed to guild

the pill of Derby's return to an outraged monarch, though a kernel of truth remained with respect to the advantage to be gained in regard to foreign opinion:

It is represented to me, by all the great authorities on these matters, that the retirement of Lord Derby is producing disastrous results on the Conservative party, both in Parliament & out of doors. A general disintegration is taking place. The vote of Monday next, which would have originally carried by a large majority, & on which I depended on exercising a great influence on Austria & Russia, is, with this disruption of the Cabinet, not only endangered, but even problematical. (26 Jan. 1878, B/XIX/C/443)⁵³

33 It was the last instance of deriving advantage from conciliation as had been practised over the previous eight months, and here conciliation was indelibly mixed with demonstration. The passage of the Vote, despite its constitutionally questionable character, was assured from the start, and the collapse of the Opposition was only very partially the result of accidental Liberal confusion on 7–8 February, which should be seen as the occasion rather than the cause of an immense government triumph (328:124).⁵⁴ The only drawback related to the future: would Derby's continued presence hamper the more drastic measures that were now imminent? Hence Beaconsfield's initial worry that Derby's retention might be a Pyrrhic victory (to Salisbury 27 Jan. 1878, SP ii f.270b). But in fact, Derby had shot his bolt. He had to swallow the Vote of Credit and with it the preparation of an expeditionary force; and he felt unable to oppose what now became a lesser measure, the renewed despatch of the fleet through the Straits in early February (Derby to Queen 8 Feb. 1878, QVL ii.604). There followed a sequence of aggressive Cabinet decisions culminating in the resolution of 8 March to occupy a naval station in the Eastern Mediterranean.⁵⁵ Though opposed in principle to all of this, Derby failed to propose resignation at any stage, so marking his political impotence, and his final resignation three weeks later produced no sensible effect (Dyke to Beaconsfield 28 Mar. [1878], B/XXI/D/478).⁵⁶ Partly due to Beaconsfield's clarity of design and partly due to caution carried over from previous months, the difficult adjustment to urgent deterrence was achieved at minimal political cost.

34 The full significance of Beaconsfield's attempt to deter by signalling political determination to go to war if necessary, may now be seen. Excessive concentration on his goals proved his undoing over the Bulgarian atrocities. But though this impaired his position over the next 15 months, the new and more difficult context it created also showed his strength: he was too much of a politician to insist that real difficulties did not exist; that there could be boldness without prudence. And even so his determination and his ability to take the bulk of the ministry and the Commons with him, were feared, not questioned. Gladstone's famous remark that 'when you speak of the Government, you mean Lord Beaconsfield' was sufficient testimony (*Times* 31 January 1878, 10b),⁵⁷ all the more persuasive because unintended, to the success of his efforts to maintain a continuous front of political defiance throughout 1876–78. However, political strength alone was not enough. So now we turn to the material bases of British power.

Army and Navy

35 As noted, material demonstration was an essential component of Beaconsfield's deterrence: 'I cannot conceive that . . . when all are armed, England alone should be unarmed'.⁵⁸ However, so far as the army was concerned, he, like his Cabinet, never supposed that there were more than 40,000 troops or one army corps at his disposal—a negligible amount by Continental standards.⁵⁹ An illustration of the limited nature of his military thinking is provided by precisely those ruminations of July–August 1877 which convinced Seton-Watson that Disraeli was 'contemplating war' (Seton-Watson 219). Writing to the Queen he supposed that in case of war 'Russia must be attacked from Asia, that troops shd be sent to the Persian gulf, & that the Empress of India shd order her armies to clear Central Asia of the Muscovite & drive them into the

Caspian. We have a good instrument for this purpose in Lord Lytton, &, indeed, he was placed there with that view' (22 July 1877, B/XIX/C/285–86). Now it is true that this was written when the Queen was 'in her most excited state' and the language about armies clearing Central Asia was rhetorical bravado of the kind that was needed to mollify and gratify her warlike zeal (Derby *Diary* 16 July 1877). However, if the gloss is discarded, what remains is not fire-eating recklessness but a set of quite conventional ideas which were also presented in Cabinet.⁶⁰

36 One part of Beaconsfield's interventionist ambitions was a translation of demands voiced previously in which, accepting that much of European Turkey might be partitioned, he sought to protect Britain's naval position in the Eastern Mediterranean by the seizure of a port *from Turkey*. In the autumn of 1876 Batum, Sinope, and Varna had come under scrutiny in this context, places well known from the Crimean war.⁶¹ Now positions in the Persian Gulf, the Aegean and on the Syrian coast were added to the list of possible alternatives;⁶² and all were part of a search which culminated in the acquisition of Cyprus. However, the agenda here was not to confront Russia but to offset any Russian gains by seeking compensation at Turkey's expense. As Salisbury put it to Shuvalov, the Russian Ambassador, in the run-up to the Anglo-Russian negotiations of April 1878, 'what we shall ask concerns us more than it concerns you' (4 April 1878, Seton-Watson 381).⁶³ If a war against Russia were to break out, a military outpost had to be considered as one of the possible means towards the required end of British security, and here is the starting point of Beaconsfield's interest in sending troops to the Persian Gulf and 'Central Asia'. In the former case there was no precise target—what he said to Layard (the Ambassador in Constantinople) on the subject was no more precise than what he wrote to the Queen (to Layard 27 Nov. 1877, Add. MSS 39136 ff.119-v; Layard to Beaconsfield 12 Dec. 1877, B/XVI/C/132)—but Central Asia meant Batum: an obvious point of naval access by which Britain might monitor the Russo-Turkish frontier in the Caucasus. However, by 1878 any Black Sea ambitions inherited from the Crimea, even of this limited kind, were dismissed, although Beaconsfield still fought to keep Batum out of Russian hands—apparently with success—at the Congress of Berlin (Kovic 266–81).

37 Beaconsfield was interested in these locations precisely because they did not involve large numbers of troops. Hence the contrast he drew between these schemes and the effort involved in 'a great military expedition, like the Crimean', even if, by post-1870 standards, this was no great expedition at all (to Queen 22 July 1877, B/XIX/C/285–86). Their character was nicely illustrated in the historical analogy the Premier applied to a proposal to march British troops from Batum to Tiflis (Tbilisi): 'We want no allies . . . The situation is much the same as when Wellington went to the Peninsular, except that a Turk as a soldier is worth 20 Spaniards. What allies had we then?' (to Derby 13 Sept. 1877, *M&B* ii.1051). The strategy advocated here was the traditional one of attacking a continental opponent at the periphery using the limited number of troops available, while supposing that an essentially peace-time scale of expenditure could be maintained. Another mid-century precedent—the five-month Persian 'war' of 1856–57 fought by a mixed body of 10,000 British and Indian troops⁶⁴—points a similar moral for a possible Gulf sortie. Hence the dismissal of such suggestions by Lintorn Simmons, with his firm belief in a continental strategy: acting from the periphery, 'a British Army, although they might prevent or defer the entire conquest of the [Ottoman Empire], could produce little or no effect on the vital energies of Russia' (to Hardy 26 July 1877 B/XVIII/A/12).⁶⁵

38 But not all soldiers were so detached from the elementary realities of Britain's situation. Those with greater Indian and 'small-war' experience contemplated an Indian expedition as a cheap way for a small army to inflict maximum irritation on Russia. The outstanding example was Garnet Wolseley who, in the midst of his meteoric ascent (at this point he was Inspector-General of Auxiliary Forces), wrote a memorandum on the 'Eastern Question' in November 1876 which expressed this point clearly:

One hears it sometimes said, 'Well, granted that Russia intends going to Constantinople: we are well aware how fatal to us her doing so will be, but what can we do? She has immense armies with which we have no military force that can cope . . .' Men that argue after this fashion have not, I think, clearly studied Russia's position in Asia, nor are they sensible of how weak she is there, and how slight is her hold upon provinces where we can easily strike her a deadly blow from our secure base in India.

39 To strike such a blow he required only 5,000 British and 5,000 Indian troops, a force which could be drawn exclusively from the available Indian establishment, and almost exactly the same as the numbers used against Persia in 1856 (10 Nov. 1876, WO 33/29 f.425). Wolseley, too, stood in the long-standing British tradition of fighting via inexpensive sideshows in the service of Imperial rather than continental interests, and it is evident why he was so much in favour with the Government at this time. (He was designated Chief of Staff to Lord Napier in the event of an expeditionary force being sent to the Dardanelles in February 1878 and in July he became the first High Commissioner of Cyprus.) The one area which is signally absent from Beaconsfield's list of possible theatres of war was the Bulgarian mainland, even though it was the only direct way of preventing a Russian seizure of Constantinople. But then Bulgaria involved Continental warfare: 'Prime Minister observed . . . that, as for large armies, it was not for us to reconquer Bulgaria; that we were masters of the sea . . .' ('Note on the Cabinet of 15th[14th] Augt. 1877', B/XIX/C/304).

40 Naval mastery was the more obvious physical component in British policy, and fleet movements, actual or projected, play a prominent role in 1876–78. Yet the navy's efficacy in isolation was doubtful. It was, of course, comforting to reflect on its primacy vis-à-vis the other European powers, and on the Mediterranean supremacy which was guaranteed thereby. Hence the sentiment that 'On the water side all is easy' (Beaconsfield to Hardy 30 Sept. 1876, *Memoir* i.373).⁶⁶ But was this any use against a land power such as Russia? Derby voiced his doubts when he resigned:

It has been said that a war between this country and Russia, no other Power taking part in it, would be not very unlike one of those duels between German students of which we used to hear, fought with sword blades of which only an inch or two at the ends was left bare. They might inflict a cut here and a gash there, they might cut off a nose or do injury to an eye, but they were powerless to inflict any vital wound. (*Hansard* ccxxxix.795)

41 More specific problems were raised by Constantinople and the Straits. The assumption of all British policy from the autumn of 1876 on was that only a land force could keep the Russians out of Constantinople. The Cabinet were agreed that by itself the fleet could do nothing, and Beaconsfield tried repeatedly to impress this point on the Queen: even if British troops had occupied Gallipoli, 'it is understood, that the presence of Yr Majesty's fleet at Constantinople would exercise no paramount influence on events; that it cd only bombard the city while it would be subject to a ruinous fire from commanding positions' (20 Jan. 1878 B/XIX/C/ 429–30).⁶⁷ A further problem was that British troops never did occupy Gallipoli in fact, and so at any stage 'the Russians might be at the Dardanelles before they occupy Constantinople, and our fleet might be caught in a trap' (Beaconsfield to Layard 6 June 1877, Add. MSS 39136 ff.33v-34).⁶⁸ Naval opinion was divided as to the truth of this (Millman 1979, 311 & n.16), but the Cabinet on two occasions agreed that the fleet's line of communication through the Dardanelles must be protected by auxiliary means. Had they had any faith in the potency of the fleet (as distinct from relying on the deterrent effect of war, for which firing on or by the fleet would be the occasion), they would never have sent it up to Constantinople and then felt obliged to ask the Russians for an undertaking not to occupy the Dardanelles(!) (Millman 1979, 391–96; Derby *Diary* 28 July 1877). It can be seen, then, that Beaconsfield's claim to the Queen in March 1878 that, in the case of war and a Russian occupation of both the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, Admiral Hornby could nonetheless force the Bosphorus and 'cut off the Russians from their supplies via Black Sea', so placing British diplomacy 'in a commanding position', was extravagant in

every particular, and one repudiated by both Hornby and Smith (to Queen 8 March 1878 no.2, B/XIX/C/500–01).⁶⁹ At a time of crisis rhetorical suavity towards the monarch was replaced by outright deception, but then she was a special case—a totem in Disraelian political theory but gullible and with no public voice.

42 The real position of the fleet was thus a poignant one. Apparently, a strong card in the Cabinet's hand, it was weak relative to a power such as Russia which had no naval pretensions. In this respect the naval campaigns of 1854–56 and the Black Sea Clauses in operation down to 1871 had left little for the navy to do.⁷⁰ Its only possible use at Constantinople was demonstrative, 'a fair representation of the power of England' (Hardy, *Hansard* ccxxxix.932); yet a ministry avowedly pursuing a policy of deterrence based on demonstration felt that the fleet was not credible. It is an object lesson that the elements of strength in international relations must be measured according to specific circumstances. Prestige or status as a Great Power was in some sense notional, and its real worth necessarily varied from case to case. However, before accepting Bismarck's gibe that 'Navies are no longer a power' (Beaconsfield to Queen 20 Sept. 1877, B/XIX/C/315–16), we should not overlook the navy's capabilities as an auxiliary, which were as important as its combat strength, if not more. Most obviously it was a means of transporting troops to Gallipoli, Malta, Batum or wherever, a resource which no Continental power possessed after Trafalgar, and it was only this which enabled the 'outpost' strategy to be pursued. Secondly, the fleet had a major role to play as an instrument of economic warfare, due to its capacity to impose a blockade—another constant in British strategy between the Napoleonic Wars and 1919. However, while this was discussed, it could be of no relevance except in the worst-case scenario which never came to pass: where Russia had occupied the Straits and Britain was at war with her.

Economy, Finance and Foreign Policy

43 We turn next to Britain's real material strength: her wealth. In the literature on the 'realities behind diplomacy' it is customary to pay lip service to the British economy as a pre-eminent reality but no more, and this, together with the shadow cast by later relative economic decline, has produced a pretty limp view of British power and influence abroad (Porter 33–37; Kennedy 20–27). However, serious inquiry as to the ways in which politicians paid attention to the economy, and what they might deduce from this, has hardly been undertaken. A general judgement would be that at all times from the 1690s until 1939, the principal measurement of economic strength was not a direct one but financial: in terms of government credit and the money power which enabled war to be carried on. This was the 'financial reserve' which so gladdened the hearts of Victorian politicians. Low defence expenditure in peacetime due to the absence of a large land army allowed for the accumulation of wealth; that created a reserve which could be tapped in war through high borrowing and taxation.⁷¹ In its simple form this scheme only considered the alternatives of war and peace, but in the unusual, half-way situation of a prolonged foreign crisis, the latent power of Britain's wealth—at its apogee relative to the rest of Europe—could also be made into a factor of diplomatic strength. This was what Disraeli proceeded to do. It was another unusual component in the 'diplomacy' of the Eastern crisis, though Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain had also to operate in an analogous situation in 1935–39. Even so in his focus on peacetime and low expenditure Disraeli was a representative figure, however unusual his behaviour within those limits. There was no 'new method of Government policy and finance' such as Gladstone imputed (Gladstone 1879, 142).

44 The idea of the strength that accrued to Britain from her financial reserve had been in his mind since the late 1850s, but a more specific conception of its use emerges in response to the new power-political constellation created by the Prussian victory over France in 1870–71:

some distinguished statesmen have been speaking of England as a country that is past as regards political power, and as one that has sacrificed all her reputation and her real power merely to the accumulation of wealth. Well I am glad that during the fifty years of peace . . . we have enjoyed [since 1815] we have accumulated wealth and it is a great consolation to me to know that if—which God forbid—we should have to defend ourselves and assert our position in the world, we could enter, as I am sure no other Power could, into a third campaign without finding the sinews of war fail us. It is a great source of strength to England to feel that if she enters into a quarrel that is necessary and just, she is not likely to find her resources exhausted; whereas, it would be difficult to fix on any other Power, with all their boastfulness, that in the second or third year of hostilities would not be found upon the different Exchanges of Europe endeavouring to raise loans to an amount, moreover, not as large as we could raise by a single tax.

(*Hansard* cciv.94; cf. Disraeli at Aylesbury, *Times* 3 May 1859, 6c etc)

45 The message directed at Bismarck here was still more serviceable against an impoverished Russia, and Beaconsfield made a much better-known statement of this doctrine at the Guildhall in November 1876: ‘If [England] enters into conflict in a righteous cause . . . her resources, I feel, are inexhaustible. She is not a country that, when she enters into a campaign, has to ask herself whether she can support a second or third campaign. She enters into a campaign which she will not terminate till right is done’ (*Times* 10 November 1876, 8d).

46 As noted, the general idea was by no means Beaconsfield’s alone. Salisbury would follow in his wake in the more acute circumstances of early 1878: ‘Supposing we cannot get [the required terms] and have to fight,—my impression is that the war will be more expensive than bloody. But, as Russia possesses the men and we possess the money, that is not a characteristic calculated to make us specially uneasy’ (to Odo Russell 17 Apr. 1878, Cecil ii.244).⁷² Even Derby after his resignation would admit that Britain could ‘easily’ bankrupt and blockade Russia, though he preferred to dwell on the losses caused to British holders of Russian stock (of whom Beaconsfield was one) and purchasers of her corn (*Hansard* ccxxxix.795). Indeed, albeit in crude and distorted form, the idea of British wealth as a totem had even reached the music hall in 1878:

We don’t want to fight but by jingo if we do,
We’ve got the ships, we’ve got the men, we’ve got the money too. (Hunt 1877)

47 So the only people who dismissed the financial criterion of strength were soldiers, such as Lintorn Simmons: ‘I pass over the financial difficulties of Russia believing that however ruinous a war may be, the sinews will always be forthcoming if required as has always been the case in all wars’ (Memo. 30 Oct. 1876 cf. 29 Oct. 1877, FO358/3). But such thinking was alien to civilians and politicians. The financial factor was not all-sufficient, and ‘total’ wars such as the Napoleonic and World Wars would require extreme measures such as the suspension of convertibility; but that it should be ignored was out of the question and reciprocal drawing on the financial reserve in wartime through high taxation is evident in both these cases. This shared awareness was an offset to the absence of any precise public understanding of the policy of demonstrations.

48 But here it may be asked: did not economic depression in the 1870s have an impact on confidence in the power to make war? Not in fact. Politicians were well aware of price deflation and depression after 1873 and also of the severity of the cyclical downswing of 1878–80. Northcote, for example, could refer to ‘an unprecedentedly prolonged check’ or even on one occasion to ‘the great depression’, but the economic historians’ later idea of a ‘Great Depression’ embracing a unified period of 15 years or more was absent (Northcote, *Times* 22 October 1878, 4e, 16 January 1880, 10b. Cf. Saul). Like modern historians contemporaries traced the origin of their ills back to the ‘excessive . . . speculation’ of 1873 (Northcote, *Times* 16 January 1880, 10b), but they did not feel they were dealing with something portentous and of long-term significance; rather, they were faced by something familiar albeit severe in degree and, as the term ‘check’ implies, recovery was always presumed to be imminent. Indeed, it seemed to

have arrived in the winter and spring of 1879–80 and was a factor encouraging Beaconsfield's snap dissolution of parliament in March 1880.⁷³ Equally important is the fact that the chronology of the depression did not run in parallel with that of the foreign crisis. It was only at the beginning of 1878 when, relying on the evidence of the quarterly revenue returns from taxation or (more simply) the consolidated price index, politicians first became aware that they were in the grip of depression.⁷⁴ Thus for most of the long period of diplomatic tension from May 1876 to May 1878 there was no concern about the country's financial health. When the bad news raised its head, it occasioned unease but the topic only became prominent after the Congress of Berlin was over.⁷⁵

49 There was no conspiracy of suppression here. In times of foreign crisis, the link between politics and the economy reflected the primacy of politics, not the economy. Crisis was seen as a cause of depression by the disturbance it occasioned to trade, and so discussion should focus on the rights and wrongs of foreign policy.⁷⁶ Commentary after August 1878, when the depression was at its most severe while foreign tension relaxed, reinforces the view that the relation between the economy and the government's financial strength was indirect. Politicians on both sides insisted that the depression left Britain's capacity for war unaffected—as for example the Liberal, Sir William Harcourt in April 1879: 'England is a great and wealthy State. In spite of the depression of the times, its resources are vast and unexhausted. In support of a policy which the nation deems essential to its interests and honour, England never has failed, and never will fail, to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to sustain its credit at home and abroad' (*Times* 10 April 1879, 10d; cf. Northcote, 21 October 1878, 11c). At the Guildhall the following November Northcote (as Chancellor of the Exchequer) appealed to what was for the government the acid test of financial strength, its ability to pay for war, when he pointed out 'that Consols [government stock] stand higher than they did' (*Times* 11 November 1879, 4e). The price of 3% Consols over the period 1877–80 may be tabulated thus:

January 1877	95¼ / 95½
January 1878	94¼ / 94½
January 1879	96 / 96 1/3
January 1880	97½ / 97¾ ⁷⁷

50 The low point, which was not very low, came in January 1878, when the sense of foreign crisis was most acute; and after this time prices continuously strengthened. The first feature was predictable, the second perhaps less so: but between them they show how little the direct measure of the government financial reserve for war was affected by the depression. Worsening depression caused Beaconsfield anxiety on domestic political grounds in the winter of 1878–79, but still Consols were rising: most obviously because of the relaxation of foreign tension but also because of measures taken by the government in regard to Debt repayment. Thus, Northcote was happy to 'call the attention of the Committee [of the whole House] to the very great strength which that silent process for the reduction of the Funded Debt lends to our financial system. If there comes a great emergency, you have a resource to fall back upon which is of the utmost value' (3 April 1879, *Hansard* ccxlv.294). Of course, Liberals could not be expected to join in plaudits for the well-integrated nature of Tory finance or the merits of the New Sinking Fund, but here was another source for bipartisan confidence that the cyclical depression of 1878–80 did not impinge on Britain's financial reserve.

51 The importance of public finance as a measure of strength applied to foreign powers as well. Calculations made on this score in Russia as well as England were a principal determinant of policy throughout the period 1876–78 (Pravilova c.5), and it is not too much to say that, alongside the policy of demonstration, this is one of the great facts of the Eastern crisis which has yet to receive its due. Thus the first indication in Disraeli's eyes that the affairs of Turkey would result in major international difficulties was not

the revolt in Bosnia-Herzegovina of July 1875, but the Ottoman bankruptcy in October: ‘this extraordinary, and quite unforeseen, bankruptcy of the Porte has set everything again in flame, and I really believe “the Eastern Question”, that has haunted Europe for a century, wh[ic]h I thought the Crimean War had adjourned for half another, will fall to my lot to encounter’ (Zetland i.298; cf. *Times* 10 November 1875, 10c).⁷⁸ The bankruptcy was as fundamental to Disraeli as the Bulgarian atrocities to Gladstone in framing pessimism as to the Porte’s chances of survival. As Derby reported in November 1875, ‘he is full of the Turkish business, thinks the end is coming, does not see how the power of the Sultan is to be propped up’ (Derby *Diary* 3 November 1875), and although Gladstonians might have been surprised to learn this, all subsequent ministerial policy reflected this assumption. It was for this reason that throughout the years 1876–78 Disraeli was envisaging the partition of European Turkey and made no attempt to contest Russian claims in Armenia, as had been orthodox in the Crimea. (Preserving an opening for Britain at Batum was a different matter.) Thus, disbelief in Turkey’s capacity to wage war was a continuous accompaniment to policy-making. In early 1877 he commented: ‘I cannot learn that Turkey has any adequate resources: no money; not many men’, and he supposed that the Russo-Turkish war would last no longer than the time it took the Russian infantry to march to Constantinople, something which might ‘be calculated to a nicety’ (to Derby 9 Feb. 1877, 22 Oct. 1876, *M&B* ii.998, 971). Hence too his reliance on military estimates which first put this period at 64 days and then moderated slightly to 100.⁷⁹ Hence the urgency of Cabinet deliberations between April and July 1877. In this respect the apparently illusionless Beaconsfield was as vulnerable as anyone else to doctrinaire reasoning deriving from the orthodox beliefs of the day.

- 52 By the same token the Turkish victories gained at Plevna (July–December 1877) were something of a shock, causing Beaconsfield to complain that he felt it ‘difficult to speculate on [their] military fortunes’ (to Queen 24 July 1877, B/XIX/C/287). But since his adherence to financial criteria was unshaken, his estimate of Turkish financial resources was coloured by her military success. On 5 December, when Turkish power to resist was beginning to appear indefinite, he wrote to Derby ‘that Turkey herself is now a powerful ally . . . After a fierce campaign, she has still 400,000 men in the field, armed with admirable weapons, and it is not impossible by any means, that the loan which she has opened at Bombay and Calcutta, may be subscribed to the amount of some millions’ (*M&B* ii.1071 cf. Zetland ii.136). In a similar frame of mind Beaconsfield wrote to Layard that while Parliament would never guarantee a Turkish loan—there had only ever been one guaranteed loan, in 1855 (Platt, 197–207)—nonetheless ‘some substantial assistance might be afforded to the Porte, if we could contrive to purchase some territorial station conducive to British interests’ (27 Nov. 1877, Add. MSS 39136 f.118-v). Of course, the motive here was the ever-present interest in securing a strategic *piéd à terre* for Britain, but unlike previous suggestions of the kind he now supposed that money channelled towards the Turks was not necessarily wasted. Yet any revision of Beaconsfield’s assessment of Turkish strength was conditional. It was never supposed that Russia would lose the war, and the question at issue only shifted to the extent of wondering how long the Turks would hold out, rather than how swiftly the Russians could march to Constantinople. After the fall of Plevna in December 1877, Cabinet proceedings resumed all the frenetic urgency of the previous spring and summer.

Russian Finance

- 53 Important as the assessment of Turkey’s finances was, it was the conviction of Russian financial weakness that was of central importance. Gladstone, quite as much as Disraeli, could appeal to

the enormous difference in the position of the Russia of 1853 and of the Russia of 1876. The Russia of 1853 was in the possession of her full and unbroken

resources. By the Crimean War those resources in men, in money, and in credit, as well as in reputation, were so far impaired that in some respects even now, after 20 years of peace, Russia is not where she stood in 1853. (31 July 1876, *Hansard* ccxxxi.178)

54 In speaking thus, he was not merely defending the uphill Crimean struggle in which he had been complicit. Russia's suspension of convertibility in 1858 had been a direct consequence of her inability to finance the Crimean war by any other than inflationary means, and this humiliation was confirmed by a failed attempt at resumption in 1862–63. (Substantial inflows of German and then French capital did not begin until the 1880s.) In Britain, where the gold standard and a convertible currency were taken for granted, this failure was all one needed to know, and the poverty underlying it was probably enhanced rather than diminished in the financiers' imagination, which demanded confidence above all things.⁸⁰ Should Russia enter a new war, her financial impotence was taken for granted: an inconvertible currency meant that she could only borrow abroad with difficulty and at cost, and even in peacetime she was reliably supposed to be at the limit of her taxable resources, making inflationary war finance a certainty. In sum, Russia could not hope to fight for long, or against a first-class power, except at the risk of collapse: 'she is in excellent circumstances so long as she keeps the peace, or as long as she engages in only minor hostilities, but if she attempts to begin a war of the first magnitude'—with a European power—'the whole thing will go to pieces, for there is not money enough to support it' (*Economist*, Leader, 'Russian Finance' 8 July 1876, 792). This pronouncement by the *Economist* in July 1876 was dramatically confirmed on the outbreak of war. Throughout 1876 and early 1877 the rouble declined only marginally on the foreign exchanges, but in the six months after war broke out in April 1877, it plummeted by nearly 30%, reflecting massive uncovered note issues. The image of Russia's financial straits common to British financiers and politicians of every hue was well founded.⁸¹

55 But while the presumption of Russia's financial weakness was widespread, Beaconsfield made use of this idea in his own way. If Russia's large army was something of a paper tiger due to its lack of a solid financial foundation, then the 'demonstrative' policy found a further powerful support. The principal thrusts of hostile criticism—that the policy either tended to war or that it would be exposed as a sham—fall to the ground: it was not a sham because it rested on Britain's wealth; it would not lead to war with Britain, because Russia was too impoverished to risk it. The more explicit British policy became, the more likely Russia was to halt aggressive moves against Turkey. Such was the meaning behind the Premier's assertion that 'every war-like move of England, lead[s] to peace' (to Salisbury 18 July 1877, B/Box 300), a sentiment frequently repeated in the two years up to the Congress of Berlin. If one foundation of Beaconsfield's political strategy derived from the experience of the Crimea and the need to avoid drift, the second rested on financial calculation.⁸²

56 He was always aware of Russia's weakness, but it was not until the autumn of 1876 that her financial condition became prominent. When in September the Tsar first proposed the Russian occupation of Bulgaria, Beaconsfield's reaction was instinctive: 'Russia is not in a state to go to war: she has not a rouble in her military chest' (to Queen, 2 Oct. 1876, CAB 41/7/16). At the same time, he began to quiz Lionel Rothschild as to the purpose of Russian bullion movements. (Rothschilds acted as banker for Disraeli's personal holding of Russian railway shares).⁸³ As a banker, Rothschild made the reassuring reply that they were probably 'not for any extraordinary purposes', but the *Economist* took a more political view: that these bullion movements heralded the first Russian loan attempt for war preparations (an attempt which effectively foundered) (B/XXI/R/222; *Economist* 14 October 1876, 1203–04). Beaconsfield's judgement was along the same lines: 'Russia is full of mischief, & yet "willing to wound & yet afraid to strike."' That's her finance: still, she will go trying it on, trusting to no physical opposition, till she, as before, commits herself' (to Derby 17 Oct. 1876, *M&B* ii.953).

57 At the beginning of November 1876 the news seemed to be good: an armistice had finally been arranged between the Turks and the Serbs in a conflict where ‘Russia was in fact, though not in form, in the field’ (Derby, *Hansard* ccxxxii.665 cf. *Diary* 11 October 1876).⁸⁴ Russia had also agreed to a conference which would attempt to settle the Turkish provinces but, crucially, she refused to renounce her plans for occupying Bulgaria. Yet intelligence from the City continued to indicate that, if pushed, Russia must cave in. The steadiness of the rouble on the exchanges testified to disbelief in war, not to Russian strength, and on 5 November Monty Corry (‘a prince among private secretaries’) (*M&B* ii.154) reported to his chief an interview with a prominent City banker:

Christopher Weguelin has just been giving me his views on affairs—“Well, thank God, all is right now! [referring to the armistice] Our information, even before the taking of the Servian positions [by Turkey], was that Russia would not fight. When Reuters [the Russian Finance Minister] left St Petersburg for Livadia he was visibly in a most anxious mood, and made no secret of his intention to resign, should he find the Emperor bent on a war which must prove Russia’s financial ruin. He returned in high spirits. We drew our conclusions—that the Czar had found the Turk far stronger than he expected, and dared not risk an encounter...”. Making all allowance for the influence of wishes on judgement, this is interesting as being the view of a man usually remarkably free from prejudice, and the ablest partner in the London house which has, probably, the largest interest in Russia and much information. (B/XVI/B/11)⁸⁵

58 Here was one foundation of Beaconsfield’s Guildhall speech given four days later. But he added an aggressive, political dimension: a speech consciously directed at ‘the old cox-comb’ Gorchakov (the Russian Chancellor), contained in its conclusion (quoted above) a most absolute assertion of Britain’s financial power and, by implication, of Russia’s weakness in a long war (*Times* 10 Nov. 1876, 8d; Zetland ii.89).

59 Yet Beaconsfield’s approach had an international side as well as a patriotic one, since at this date working through collective European agency still appeared viable. So alongside stark warning and talk of military preparation in Cabinet, Britain also co-operated in promoting a conference of the European powers to propose reforms to the Turks that would yield a peaceful settlement in both Serbia and Bulgaria. An armistice in Serbia at the beginning of November allowed the conference to go ahead at Constantinople in December (Derby *Diary*, 2 November 1876). In the run-up to it, the portents continued mixed. The Russian Ambassador Shuvalov’s reaction to the Guildhall address was, apparently, to accept its message: ‘If English statesmen would consider themselves advisers of the Emperor they would see that they would counsel him to Consolidate his Commerce & his improvements & not seek for extensions [of territory] which would prove a source of weakness’ (Borthwick to Corry 13 Nov. 1876, B/XVI/C/24).⁸⁶ Shuvalov is usually portrayed as the ally of Derby against a supposedly warlike Prime Minister, but with his intense sensitivity to his country’s financial plight one wonders whether he did not convey as much support and solace to Beaconsfield as to the Foreign Secretary and his wife (Ghosh 2004). Less comforting was the news, two days after this report (15 November), of Russian army mobilization. Still Beaconsfield was undismayed: ‘I am far from taking a gloomy view of affairs. I think we shall win, if we clearly know the object we aim at, & then are becomingly firm’ (to Corry 15 Nov. 1876, B/XVI/B/2). But like his Cabinet colleagues he still assumed that the balance of probability pointed towards a Russo-Turkish war, with the conference acting only as a postponing agent. His final summary to Salisbury, Britain’s representative, on the eve of the conference indicates this. All the variables, political, financial and strategic, are weighed:

It is possible that Russia may wish to avoid, honorably, a struggle, wh the state of her finances & the unpreparedness of her armies, & her want of naval power, may make her desirous to postpone.

It was always one of her principles never to engage the Porte except she had command of the sea. Now, that condition is just reversed. Nevertheless, 1st, the

bankruptcy of the Porte; 2ndly, the assumed alienation of England from the Turks, partly produced by the Bulgarian outrages, & partly by the non-payment of Turkish dividends, have prevailed on her, apparently, to take a step at wh she first hesitated. (to Salisbury 29 Nov. 1876, *M&B* ii.975)

60 The Constantinople conference is commonly regarded as a failure, because war broke out not long afterwards. Yet this is a mistake. The proceedings of this period should rather be seen as part of a continuous pattern of behaviour. In fact, the conference resolved the dilemma weighed here, seeing the first of a series of diplomatic retreats by Russia, which continued up to the outbreak of war. She abandoned her plans for a military occupation of Bulgaria, thus providing confirmation of the hypothesis of her weakness, and of the justness of the outspoken tone Beaconsfield had adopted. However, such thinking was not confined to the privacy of the Cabinet. It had become the talk of Constantinople as well and a perceived consequence of such talk was that Turkey rejected the modest demands for reform agreed by the European Powers,⁸⁷ a rejection it upheld when a moderated version was presented in January 1877. As a result, Russia retained her ground for military action and the possibility remained that she might invade when the weather improved in April. Even so the majority view was different. Russian concessions at Constantinople showed ‘her valour . . . oozing out of the palms of her hands’ (Salisbury to Mallet 11 Jan. 1877, Cecil ii.122 cf. Hardy *Diary* 2 January 1877). It had to be supposed that she wanted peace, if only England could help her to it in dignified fashion, while the delay until the campaigning season began allowed time in which to achieve this. Beaconsfield had already formulated this response on Christmas Day 1876, when Turkey’s resistance to the Powers was first emerging: ‘99 out of a 100 will tell you that war is certain between R[ussia] and T[urkey]. But when everybody wishes for peace, and, most of all, Russia, I can’t help hoping that some golden bridge may be constructed . . . to extricate R. from its false position’ (to Lady Bradford, *M&B* ii.983). The construction of such a ‘bridge’ (a repeated refrain)⁸⁸ was his principal achievement before war broke out.

61 The sequel to the Constantinople conference, then, was not war but a renewed attempt at peace predicated on Russian concession. It was initiated by Beaconsfield in February, seconded by Salisbury rather than Derby, and met halfway by Shuvalov.⁸⁹ The result was the London Protocol of 31 March 1877, which effectively gave Turkey a further, indefinite stay from European coercion (*de facto* one campaigning season), if she would only sign another paper pledge to reform herself. The concession embodied in these terms was highlighted by another aspect of Russia’s financial exigencies, which surfaced in the new round of negotiations: since November she had incurred considerable expense due to the partial mobilisation of her army. Thus, when Shuvalov first presented the draft protocol for signature in mid-March, the published British record of his accompanying address was as follows:

After the sacrifices which Russia had imposed upon herself, the stagnation of her industry and of her commerce, and the enormous expenditure incurred by the mobilisation of 500,000 men, she could not retire nor send back her troops without having obtained some tangible result as regards the improvement of the Christian populations of Turkey. The Emperor was sincerely desirous of peace, but not peace at any price...

Under these circumstances it appears to the Russian Government that the most practicable solution . . . would be the signature by the Powers of a Protocol which should, so to speak, terminate the incident.

This Protocol might be signed in London . . . and under the direct inspiration of the Cabinet of St James.⁹⁰

62 Of course this allowed for subsequent invasion—‘not peace at any price’—but in principle it laid the basis for peace. At the same time, it included a confession of Russia’s inability to keep her army waiting. Yet a year-long wait was precisely what the final Protocol involved, and the British Cabinet was able to force another Russian retreat by attaching a demobilization procedure to the agreement, should Turkey accept it.⁹¹ Not surprisingly in these circumstances, Beaconsfield predicted peace throughout

March and early April, and equated Russia's submission to the Protocol negotiations with 'a glorious diplomatic triumph' (Zetland ii.108 cf. Salisbury to Beaconsfield, 12 Mar. 1877, B/XX/Ce/202). Derby had no faith in a glorious diplomacy, but even he accepted that to the public 'out of doors [the agreement] will probably be considered a diplomatic success.' (Derby *Diary* 29 March 1877). Thus were financial strength and weakness translated into political equivalents.

63 These hopes collapsed with the outbreak of war in April, yet it produced no change of mind. The blame for war lay with the 'tremendous infatuation' shown by the Turks in refusing terms so much to their advantage, but insofar as Russia was responsible this was, for both Beaconsfield and Salisbury, the product of 'miscalculated swagger'—a miscalculation of her strength (Zetland ii.118 cf. Salisbury to Lytton 27 Apr. 1877, Cecil ii.142). So, Beaconsfield returned to ideas voiced in the autumn of 1876: occupying the Gallipoli peninsula as a 'material guarantee', and the possibility of a naval blockade, as a second element in a policy of conditional neutrality.⁹² However, both strands were rejected in Cabinet in April 1877, since both, including blockade, were in breach of neutrality. The latter was settled in a jotting across the table:

[Beaconsfield] Is blockade necessarily an act of War? [Cairns, the Lord Chancellor] I think, certainly, yes. Of course, the nation against which it is directed may choose not to treat it as such . . . (B/XX/Ca/302)

64 The Premier was thus left to rely on the effects of Turkey's closure of the Straits and the operation of her navy on Black Sea trade.⁹³ But for the majority of the Cabinet, the state of the Russian Exchequer, having failed to deter her from war altogether, became irrelevant in the expectation of a swift Russian military victory. The only other Cabinet member who harped at this time on Russia's 'desperate' financial condition was Salisbury; but whereas between November and March he had worked closely with Beaconsfield, a collaboration which foreshadowed his rise to the Foreign Secretaryship in 1878, their positions now diverged. For Salisbury, imminent financial chaos, leading Russia to the brink of revolution, indicated that she did not pose a serious military threat to Constantinople: even if the city were seized, she would not have the power to make any damaging use of it.⁹⁴ This was quite consistent with his former opinions, but now it was an argument against what he supposed was Beaconsfield's aim of allying with Turkey. (This was the High Churchman at work in him.) Under all these circumstances, interest in the financial and economic basis of the Russian war effort remained fallow in the spring and early summer of 1877.

65 This situation was changed by the Turks' success at Plevna at the end of July 1877, which gave new life to Beaconsfield's analysis of Russian weakness. When news of the Russian defeat arrived, he was at once alive to the idea that, though Turkey might lose ultimately, it would take the Russians two years to enforce surrender rather than one as previously supposed. This was the context where 'no second campaign'—his mantra about the impossibility of an extended war since it rendered Britain's capacity to deter irresistible—became the 'Shibboleth' of government policy (to Queen 7 Nov. 1877, B/XIX/C345).

66 Such was the logic behind Beaconsfield's important letter to Layard of 6 August, where he assessed the possible future courses of the war (Add. MSS 39136 ff.72–75v). Of three possibilities, he began with the one most remote in time: 'If there is a "second campaign", I have the greatest hopes this country will interfere . . .'. Here one might consider the niceties of such an intervention—the launch of expeditions to Batum and elsewhere at Turkey's expense or the seizure of a material guarantee at Gallipoli 'without a declaration of war against Russia' (to Layard 27 Nov. 1877, Add. MSS 39136 f.120)—but this would be to miss the main point: that there should be 'no second campaign'. Whenever Beaconsfield discussed the idea of a second campaign, it was on the assumption that, so far as Russia was concerned, it was scarcely credible. This gloss supplies the key to the second course he envisaged, the one most favourable to Britain and that which he had immediately in view: 'The thing is—to secure another campaign, or rather the necessity for one, for, if Russia is told by England, that "another

campaign” will be a *casus belli*, she may be inclined to make what P[rin]ce Gortchakow calls “*une paix boiteuse*” (compromise peace).⁹⁵ If the war could be prolonged undecided till winter, and Russia was then faced with the option of fighting a second campaign under the threat of British intervention, she would most probably make peace, and according to Beaconsfield’s terms. The imposition of a peace settlement rather than fighting in a second campaign was the goal envisioned in this letter, and this became the focus of Beaconsfield’s activities until the end of the year. Still there remained a third, much less favourable possibility: ‘The danger is, if the Russians rally, again successfully advance, & reach Adrianople this autumn. What then is to be done? With her suspicions of England, Turkey would be ruined’. In fact, the outcome of events did not fit precisely into any of the three courses postulated here, but straddled the latter two: Russia did win and reach Adrianople in one campaign, but the campaign was so prolonged that Turkey—and the ministry—were able to escape consequential ruin. But however imperfect Beaconsfield’s prediction of future contingencies, the power of his analysis was still such as to make his policy a principal determinant of what was to come.

67 The new objective which appeared in August, then, was to limit the war to one campaign, to be followed by British mediation for peace. Russia would be pressured into accepting this limit by convincing her that commencement of a second campaign would be construed as *casus belli* by England. The threat had added relevance since, after writing to Layard, the Premier’s ever fertile mind seized upon another course by which the Russians might hope to reach the period of the second campaign—spring 1878—on an economically and financially viable footing: a winter armistice. He speculated that Russia’s reaction to her defeat at Plevna might be ‘to clear Bulgaria of the Turks and make it the Bulgarian winter quarters’—a device paralleling the armistice secured by the Serbs in 1876, which he had described as ‘equivalent to renewed war with renovated energies’ (15 Aug. 1877, 1 Sept. 1876: Zetland ii.128, 70).⁹⁶ An armistice would both conserve military expenditure and open the Straits to Russia’s Black Sea ports and trade. Such was the meaning behind Beaconsfield’s otherwise paradoxical assertion to the Queen that the Russians were ‘preparing everything for a second campaign, & on that they will stake everything’ (21 Aug. 1877, B/XIX/C/307). If, however, a second campaign were presented as *casus belli*, a winter armistice became a much less likely option.

68 The difficulty was how to present the ‘no second campaign’ threat to Russia in credible form. The obvious route lay via a diplomatic note sanctioned by the Cabinet and Derby, but the objections to this were still more clear. Since April, Beaconsfield had been continuously probing means of forcing the Cabinet to show some sign of its determination to Russia, rather than waiting till the latter’s armies reached Constantinople. Before Plevna such efforts had met with only very limited success, to the extent of the Cabinet’s agreeing on 16 July ‘to make something like an ultimatum notice to Russia’ (CAB 41/9/2) and the story was repeated on 14 August after the first Turkish victory. Having reviewed what was then the less likely possibility of Russian victory in one campaign, without reaching a conclusion, Beaconsfield directed attention to Britain’s course in the event of Russia requiring a second campaign to defeat Turkey:

He wished the Cabinet now to discuss, & eventually to consider, our policy under these circumstances, & he shd propose, that when it was apparent, & avowed, that the first campaign cd not be decisive, the Cabinet shd meet, & consider the course to be adopted to prevent a recurrence to arms in the spring.

There was much & general discussion on this matter, & a general, if not universal, opinion, that the British policy, under such circumstances, would be to prevent a second campaign. (‘Note on the Cabinet of 15th [14th] Augt’, CAB 41/9/9)

69 This qualified indecision seems feeble, but so long as the Turks held on at Plevna, Russian strength would decay. British politicians—including Liberals⁹⁷—would place greater emphasis on her financial exhaustion; and by the time it was ‘apparent & avowed’ that the first campaign could not be decisive, Britain’s basis for enforcing

mediation would be so strong that the Cabinet would need little persuading and any recalcitrants could be sloughed off without political danger. So, Beaconsfield had little appetite for a fight in Cabinet on the second campaign issue and foreign affairs were barely considered thereafter until December.⁹⁸ But in any case, he had discovered another route by which to convey his views to the Russians.

70 At the beginning of August Colonel Fred Wellesley, British military attaché in Bulgaria, returned to England at the Tsar's behest to make a peace sounding, the latter being 'much disturbed by the quasi *Casus Belli*, secret memorandum' of 16 July, despite its limp formulation (Beaconsfield to Queen 6 Aug., 1877, B/XIX/C/293). This was encouraging, as was Wellesley's assessment of Russia's military capability. He supposed that, despite Plevna, Russia would ultimately defeat Turkey, but that if the Tsar was seized of Britain's determination to oppose Russian preponderance in the Near East, the war might stop: 'He thinks the Emperor *would* stop if he were told this, for if we, who were so much richer and more powerful, hesitated to make war, how much more would Russia hesitate to do so, who was bankrupt?' (Queen's Journal 8 Aug. 1877, QVL ii.561).⁹⁹ Here was an opportunity. Wellesley was despatched with a confidential message of a much less qualified kind, so as to convey 'the real intentions of [Her] Majesty's Government': that Britain would regard Russia's entry into a second campaign as *casus belli* without any cavils (6 Aug. 1877, CAB 41/9/7).¹⁰⁰ To anyone habituated to open and parliamentary government, the defects of such secret diplomacy were clear: there was a discrepancy between the tenor of the private threat and the public stance of the Cabinet. But this was not evident to the Russians and Beaconsfield could also rely on the traditional Continental exaggeration of the importance of the British monarch to lend the message credence. Hence his involvement of the Queen in this little conspiracy, though she seems not to have understood the point of it (to Beaconsfield 9 Aug. 1877, QVL ii.561). Here then was a show of determination in secret.

71 The Tsar's initial reaction to Wellesley's message was gratifying enough. As the Colonel reported, 'the knowledge which the Emperor now possesses of the real state of affairs, has already had much effect, and . . . every effort will be made to bring the war to a speedy termination' (Wellesley to Queen 30 Aug. 1877, QVL ii.565–67).¹⁰¹ However, August was by no means the end of the campaigning season, and throughout September it was still possible that a comprehensive victory might lead to Turkey's defeat within the bounds of one campaign. No clear answer could be given to a message seeking to prevent a second campaign, until the Russians thought they might have to fight one. But by the beginning of October, Beaconsfield had still no news from Wellesley and on the eve of the first autumn Cabinet, he vented his frustration to the Queen: '[Lord Beaconsfield] has never mentioned to Your Majesty before, but now must express his mingled perplexity & astonishment at the silence of Colonel Wellesley. Never can [there have been] a business on which Yr Majesty & himself took more pains & precaution, & never was there so perfectly sterile a result' (4 Oct. 1877, B/XIX/C/326). It was true that Wellesley had been ill, yet he was known to have had conversations with the Tsar. So the Cabinet, which held 'a hypothetical discussion' about future prospects and strategy, was even more abstracted than it might have been (6 Oct. 1877, CAB 41/9/11).

72 However, the information drought was then broken. After the Cabinet Beaconsfield retired to Brighton to recruit his strength and over in the next three weeks his principal political contact was with Shuvalov. On 9 October Shuvalov called on the bronchitic minister and gave him an effective answer to Wellesley's message: 'He thought there wd not be, what was called, a second campaign; that they [the Russian army] would continue the present one; that something might occur in the late autumn, or the early winter, wh: might afford an opening' for a diplomatic settlement. For good measure he cast an oblique glance at the effect of a British blockade on Russian seaborne trade in the case of war (to Queen 10 Oct. 1877, B/XIX/C/330–32). After further such heartening conversations, Beaconsfield was again confident of the British position and made a determined attempt to impress the fact on the Queen, though this proved to be one of many vain attempts to explain to her 'bright, candid spirit' (26 Oct. 1877,

B/XIX/C/338) a political rather than a crudely literal approach to foreign policy. In August,

When the ‘Shibboleth’ [No second campaign] was first mentioned . . . it was the intention of the Russians at least, as far as we cd arrive at their plans, to close the present campaign as soon as possible, & prepare for a second & more effective one. Their intention was to base this on an armistice, and we shd have had before us, five months of warlike preparations & dangerous intrigues.

It was the policy of England to baffle this scheme if possible, & Yr Majesty, & Yr Majesty’s Govt have Lord Beaconsfield thinks *baffled* it. Russia now affects to think that no second campaign will be necessary, & that the present one need not close. This is the result of the message by Wellesley to the Emperor, & his subsequent conversations with his Imperial Majesty, & of the other means that have been adopted to influence . . . the opinion of the Russian Government. (7 Nov. 1877, B/XIX/C/345)

73 The Russians thus appeared to have acted on Wellesley’s message and accepted a limitation on their military strategy. Was this not a confirmation of Beaconsfield’s analysis of Russian weakness, and a vindication of the political and financial strength evinced ‘by holding determined language?’ in contrast to the Russian wager on ‘a mere game of brag’ (Derby *Diary* 25 September 1877, Lyons reporting Beaconsfield.)

74 But while there was truth in this, it was not the whole story. Having accepted the limit regarding a second campaign, the Russians now sought to achieve victory by a prolonged first campaign. The Prime Minister’s aim thus shifted, almost imperceptibly, from enforcing peace mediation in the interval after a first campaign of ordinary length, to locating the moment when he might offer and enforce mediation to close a campaign unnaturally prolonged.¹⁰² That moment was the decision of the fate of Plevna. Immediately before its fall in mid-December, though this was expected, Beaconsfield remained confident of underlying Russian weakness, and her willingness to make peace in the face of British determination (to Derby 5 Dec. 1877, *M&B* ii.1071; cf. to Queen 1 Nov. 1877, B/XIX/C/340). However, after it fell in fact, it came as a body blow to find that Russia’s acceptance of the supposedly impossible winter campaigning season should in fact yield an advance of more than 300 miles to the gates of Constantinople in just six weeks.¹⁰³ Where in the second half of December Beaconsfield had carried the Cabinet painfully but successfully towards a proposal of mediation, backed by a Vote of Credit for possible war preparations, by mid-January its predicament appeared to be critical. Still the fact that the campaign had been so prolonged supported Beaconsfield in the view that Russia’s financial weakness would ultimately tell, and this idea is in evidence throughout the apparently dark days from late December 1877 to March 1878. At Christmas, in a bid to secure what he took to be the wavering allegiance of Salisbury in favour of bold measures, he revealed the secret of the message sent via Wellesley: ‘The Emperor accepted this statement with confidence . . . and he acted on it’; and from this he drew the familiar moral ‘that a firm front shown by England would terminate the war without material injury to our interests’ ([c.25 Dec. 1877], *M&B* ii.1082). He was further encouraged by Shuvalov, who continued to dwell on Russia’s financial embarrassment and by reports on the poor condition of the Russian army after the armistice on January 31.¹⁰⁴ The personal element in Beaconsfield’s policy of determination was never more clearly demonstrated than after the imposed Russo-Turkish treaty of San Stefano (March 3). Even a well-informed and staunchly anti-Russian judge such as Layard supposed that essentially the treaty would stand and that Russia had scored a great victory (to Beaconsfield 20 Mar. 1878, B/XVI/C/140). Beaconsfield was unmoved. As in the previous summer, he held that a war would require an assault aiming to exploit Russian financial and economic weakness: she would be blockaded and defeated not by main force but by having ‘to keep her armies in exhausting restlessness’ (to Queen 10 Feb. 1878, B/XIX/C/468–69). But as before this was a remote contingency only. Beaconsfield remained adamant that, when confronted by decisive action to demonstrate British intentions, Russia would back down¹⁰⁵. San Stefano was not conclusive. Instead, as he commented in a phrase that Winston

Churchill would lift from Buckle's *Life of Disraeli*, 'It is not the beginning of the end; it is the end of the beginning' (to Queen 10 Feb. 1878, B/XIX/C/468–69).

75 The beginning of the end came with the climax of the demonstrative policy in late March 1878. After a delay Russia formally communicated the terms of San Stefano, but without any adequate assurance allowing for their subsequent revision by a European conference. Still confident that direct Anglo-Russian negotiations would ensue (to Queen 24 March 1878, B/XIX/C/508–09), Beaconsfield proposed to the Cabinet on 27 March that the Army Reserve be called out and that 6,000 Indian troops should be moved to Malta. The latter was the most exquisite demonstration of all, as well as being a striking testimony to his distinctive 'imperialism', whereby India was seen not as an 'incubus' (at Manchester 3 Apr. 1872, Keble ii.530), a product of absence of mind, but as an integral part of English *imperium*. This proposal started from the traditional idea of a limited Indian expedition with limited costs but, instead of being sent to Persia (1856) or Abyssinia (1867), the troops were now to be introduced into the European theatre, so as to suggest an infinite resource: 'After all the sneers of our not having any great military force, the imagination of the Continent will be much affected by the first appearance of what they will believe to be an inexhaustible supply of men' (to Queen 12 Apr. 1878, *M&B* ii.1157–8). In a word, Britain might have a mass army with no disqualification of race. The rubric under which he made these proposals summarised his approach over the past 18 months: 'He dwelt on the weakness of Russia, with finances ruined, and armies suffering from disease. An emergency had arisen; every State must now look to its own resources' (Derby *Diary* 27 March 1878).¹⁰⁶ Such was the policy which led in fact and without any mystery to the revision of San Stefano in the Salisbury-Shuvalov pact of April-May, and from there to the final triumph at Berlin.

Conclusion

76 The characteristic feature of Disraelian foreign policy was the extreme degree to which it was brought into harmony with political calculation and financial policy. If it worked, as it did in this case, it brought excellent results. It was pacific and hence, in any large sense, cheap; but it was also demonstrative and effective, with a material basis in Britain's wealth or, more narrowly, the financial reserve for war available to government. Thus, it was able to satisfy 'a public which . . . wishe[d] to have the results of victory without the sacrifices of war' (Derby *Diary* 1 January 1878).

77 The septuagenarian Premier was very like other mortals in that he was governed by ideas he had formed as a result of political experiences twenty to thirty years before, in the 1850s: the policy of demonstration; the link between expenditure and foreign policy; and the priority accorded here to the financial reserve. After 1871 one of the foundations of this worldview had ceased to exist: the power balance supplied by Anglo-French *entente*. Yet this did not create an insuperable problem. Regardless of the longer-term consequences of 1871, the crisis of 1876–78 still conformed to the pattern of the limited European conflicts of the mid-century that began with the Crimean War, and the short-term time-horizon of 'no second campaign' reflects this. (The new dispensation created by the formation of consolidated alliance systems would only commence with the Dual Alliance of 1879.) The Russia of the 1870s was not the Russia of 1812 or even of 1914, and was confronted by Britain which, as the richest power in Europe, was a strong power, despite her lack of a land army. Skilfully as Disraeli played the British hand, his strong cards were ones she had possessed since the Napoleonic wars, and, whether judged by the test of Russia's retreat, the approbation of Bismarck,¹⁰⁷ or the greed of Austria, British money talked. On the other hand, this strength was of a particular kind. It should not be over-estimated and any talk of a '*pax Britannica*' except on the high seas is mistaken.¹⁰⁸ To outface a Continental army immune to naval threat, and to reach a convincing yet peaceful settlement, required political management and intellectual resource of a high order, and the outcome far transcended the waste of the Crimea. Understandably, then, Disraeli's biographers

chose his handling of the Eastern crisis as one of the pillars on which his reputation should rest (*M&B* ii.1234–40; Blake 651–54). Here I have sought to show that he was justified not merely by the outcome, but by a clarity and penetration in the analysis of an immensely complex and long drawn out sequence of events, which entirely overshadowed his colleagues. The outcome was not guaranteed—after a quarter-century spent in opposition Disraeli knew better than anyone that ‘there is no gambling like politics’¹⁰⁹—but it was intended.

78 The crisis also casts a powerful light on Disraeli’s politics in general. As I have suggested, they were a combination of conventional *nostra* and freedom within the space defined by convention. His views on constitutional questions have no direct connection to the ideas about foreign and financial politics presented here, but the same general consideration applies there as well. Disraeli was without question the most alien or exotic member of the nineteenth century British political class, through a combination of Jewish descent and the literary and intellectual inheritance deriving from his father. He took up these marks of social discrimination and flaunted standing apart as evidence of superiority—cryptically racial and more obviously intellectual.¹¹⁰ Thus political agency and reflection on politics co-existed in him in a most unEnglish combination. As a sympathetic *Times* leader writer commented once he became politically prominent, ‘he show[ed] the world . . . that it was the politician that had been the novelist and not the novelist that had turned politician’ (2 April 1857, 9a). His later patronage of men of letters such as Layard and Lytton, like the writing of *Lothair* (1869–70) and *Endymion* (1878–80), is eminently characteristic in this sense. But proud individuality is only half the story. Disraeli was like the majority of his Jewish contemporaries in Western Europe in his desire to assimilate: individuality had to find or create a place in the world around it.¹¹¹ Here is the root of his allegiance to convention. However as with all assimilation, this was self-conscious. It could never be implicit or intuitive as it was for a native. His desire to penetrate and master the innermost *sancta* of the indigenes—a man whose ‘politics are described by one word, and that word is ENGLAND’ (Disraeli 1832, 14)—was matched by all too visible industry and originality in the attempt to do so, qualities which marked him out as a man of mystery or (in the eyes of *Punch*) sphinx.¹¹² Even in the successful conduct of policy in 1876–78 there is little sign that the policy of ‘demonstrations’ was understood at home—as a show of strength rather than histrionics, ‘some new theatrical stroke’ (Gladstone 1879, 34)—until it could be seen more simply as a response to the imminent threat of war in 1878. However, it was understood abroad, not least in Russia.

79 The result like its author was mixed. On one hand, there was a political triumph and peace was preserved. Disraeli would not have cared in the slightest that, when it became politically appropriate, British defence of Constantinople as a vital interest was set aside in 1896 (Lowe 1965). But he would have been appalled by the situation whereby Britain allowed herself to be sucked into Balkan politics in 1914 unthinkingly and with catastrophic results. The crucial item on the debit side was Gladstone’s assertion of control over domestic tradition by the most spectacular of his ‘political demonstrations’ (Gladstone 1879, 21): the critique of Beaconsfieldism in the platform campaigns at Midlothian in 1879–80. His indictment (it was supposed) was then ratified by national condemnation in the election of 1880, and this forms the end-point of the first major narrative of the Eastern crisis: George Carslake Thompson’s *Public Opinion and Lord Beaconsfield 1875–1880* (1886). But still the crisis remains *locus classicus* for the study of Disraeli and Victorian politics, and of political behaviour and international relations at any date.

Note on ‘Prestige’

80 It is widely supposed that Disraelian policy was based on an idea of ‘prestige’, illicit grandeur, and Derby was an exponent of this idea in the privacy of his diary. In December 1877 he recorded that Beaconsfield

sees things in a way that is not intelligible to me: holding that the mere fact of Russia and Turkey coming to a mutual understanding as to terms of peace will be disgraceful to us, even if the terms themselves are unobjectionable. This is the foreign view, which treats prestige as the one thing needful in politics. (Derby *Diary* 18 December 1877 cf. 14 August 1877)

81 However, besides the evident weakness of this as a critique, it has nothing to say about prestige as an idea except as a pejorative that could be applied to Beaconsfield's politics in almost any sense. The only thing we find out about prestige is that it was foreign. Etymologically this was true—the term is French by origin—but this only made it vaguer and more various in its meanings. For example, it was conventional wisdom that British rule in India must rest in large degree on prestige, since it could not rest on force except as a last resort; 'prestige' thus served as a substitute for a more recognisably European idea of legitimacy.¹¹³ It remained alien and exotic, but it could have legitimate as well as pejorative connotations (*OED* s.v.). However, any definite usage is absent in the Eastern crisis, except in the unusual case where Salisbury, as Secretary of State for India, considered it to be legitimate for the British to uphold their 'prestige' in the 'Oriental' context of Constantinople (to Lytton 27 Apr. 1877, Cecil ii.142). So, when (for example) Gladstone invoked the term in the *Bulgarian Horrors* in 1876, his target was not Disraeli, but the vulgar Russophobia excited by the fleet movement to Besika Bay: 'partisans exulted . . . in the increase of what is called our prestige, the bane . . . of all upright politics' (Gladstone 1876, 21). Although the word crops up in Opposition discourse during the Eastern crisis,¹¹⁴ it is not frequent, and it only becomes at all prominent in the rough-and-tumble of the election of 1880. Hence Gladstone's gradation of a set of vulgarities at this time: 'brag is on the road to prestige, and prestige to jingo' (to Granville, 10 Feb. 1880, Ramm no.173).

82 None of this touches Beaconsfield. Not only did he regard his policies as serving real and substantial ends, but he had no sympathy with the idea of prestige itself. For example, the use of the term in its Indian context—legitimate compensation for lack of physical presence by show—displays (one might think) a possible similarity to the policy of demonstration pursued in the 1870s. Yet Disraeli argued consistently against the idea that British rule in India rested on prestige from 1842, when he inveighed against aggression in Afghanistan down to the Royal Titles Act of 1876 (*Hansard* lxiv.447–48; ccxxvii.408–9 cf. cxlvi.537). In his eyes India must be ruled on the basis of loyalties that could be expressed in ordinary, European terms: hence 'Empress' of India. Given this repugnance, it is unsurprising that during the Eastern crisis he hardly used the term, and when he did he gave it the same pejorative flavour as did Derby and the Opposition. A report of a conversation with Lyons in October 1877 catches the difference between Beaconsfield's and the 'Continental' standpoint of the Court, soldiers and diplomats: 'Lord Lyons sighs over the absence of our prestige. The best way if it is lost' (to Queen 18 Oct. 1877, B/XIX/C/335).¹¹⁵ Prestige applied only to foreign empires, not to Britain's which rested on liberty and traditionary influence.

83 In short foreign diplomats were principal users of the term. This explains how Derby (as Foreign Secretary) picked it up, and they, like Derby, used it as a cant term to cover their own grievances. For example, when the German Ambassador Münster wrote scornfully of Beaconsfield pursuing a policy of 'prestige' in 1878, all he meant by this was that British policy was too much subject to French influence (Dugdale i.90). Again, Gorchakov might fulminate that '*le Cabinet anglais, fourvoyé, voudrait rétablir son prestige sur les ruines de notre considération*' (to Shuvalov 17 Mar. 1878, *SR* xxvi.557),¹¹⁶ but this was only a complaint at Britain's refusal to allow Russia to settle the agenda for the Congress of Berlin unilaterally; not a deeper comment on her policy. The nearest approach to a considered idea of prestige was supplied by Shuvalov. He viewed the British polity as akin to a classical Greek democracy, where government was the instrument of a blind public opinion, determined more by psychological impulse than political calculation. Hence '*La guerre de la part de l'Angleterre n'avait d'autres motifs que des rancunes, des caprices et des questions de prestige*' (to Gorchakov 23 Mar. 1878, *SR* xxviii.218, no.413a; cf. 4 Mar. 1878, xxvi.546). But this is

still an illustration of how remote was the mental world of a man justly considered the most perceptive and Anglophile of the diplomatic corps in London. And it is from this source that Seton-Watson's interpretation of Beaconsfield's policy as a policy of prestige derived, and later historians have followed in his wake (Seton-Watson 39, 88, 552 etc.).¹¹⁷ In short, talk of prestige is a red herring, a distraction.

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Annexe

Timeline

July 1875	Insurrection in Bosnia against Turkish rule
October	Turkish default on loan payments
16 May 1876	Cabinet rejects Berlin Memorandum by 'the three Northern powers'
22, 24 May	Cabinet orders concentration of Mediterranean fleet at Besika Bay (at entrance to Dardanelles)
2 July	News of Serb declaration of war on Turkey (in support of Bosnians)
Late August onwards	Agitation in Britain over Turkish 'atrocities' in Bulgaria, committed in suppressing rebellion there
2 November	Serbian-Turk armistice
Dec. 1876 – Jan. 1877	Constantinople Conference (European-based attempt at settlement)
31 March 1877	London Protocol (final settlement proposal)
24 April	Russia declares war on Turkey
1 August	News of first major Turkish victory in defence of Plevna (Pleven)
11 December	News of the fall of Plevna
17 January 1878	Parliament opens three weeks early
23 January	Fleet ordered to Constantinople; Carnarvon, Derby resign; fleet recalled; Derby reinstated
25 January	Northcote tables motion for £6 million Vote of Credit (passed 8 February)
31 January	Russo-Turkish armistice at Adrianople; creeping Russian advance continues
8 February	Fleet again ordered to Constantinople (passes Straits 13 February)
3 March	Russo-Turkish peace treaty at San Stefano (8 miles from Constantinople)
27 March	Cabinet decides to call out army reserves; Derby finally resigns
12 April	Cabinet decides to move 6,000 Indian troops to Malta
29 April	Negotiation of Salisbury-Shuvalov pact begins (basis of final settlement); ratified 30 May
4 June	Anglo-Turkish Convention: Cyprus ceded to Britain in return for guarantee of Asiatic Turkey
13 June	Congress of Berlin opens
2 August	Government majority of 328:195 in debate on Berlin settlement

Notes

1 Millman, *Britain and the Eastern Question 1875-1878* (1979) is, as the indistinct title reference to Britain suggests, a learned *omnium gatherum* without clear direction. Curiously it omits the Congress of Berlin.

2 The latter phrase requires an essay of its own. Note here only that Disraeli conceived of England and her Empire as a seamlessly one—a traditional conception of empire deriving from ancient Rome in contrast to Joseph Chamberlian's later 'new imperialism', which launched the idea of a metropole ruling over detached colonies and which is today hegemonic. Because England ruled India directly—an essential attribute of classical *imperium*—it might even be regarded as the most important piece of empire. It was connected to English politics whereas the devolved white dominions were not. This was unusual.

3 Compare Parry 2017, 570–604.

4 Compare Kennedy 1981.

5 Compare Parry 2007, 104; Kovic 251, 261, 269.

6 Kovic fails to distinguish between the local balance of power or forces in the Near East between Russia and Britain, and the ordinary signification of ‘balance of power’, balance across Europe as a whole: Kovic 58, 59, 209, 313, etc.

7 Derby *Diary*, 25 April, 17 July, 27 November 1877, 1 January 1878; Shuvalov 29 Mar. 1878, *SR* xxviii.226 no.433.

8 Cf. *Hansard* cc.824–37 1057–68 (Trevelyan). Hartington felt bound to accept Hardy’s vindication as conclusive.

9 For other pacific statements at times of crisis, e.g. B/XIX/C/288,452-3, CAB 41/11/4; *M&B* ii.1132; Dugdale i.90.

10 This was a favourite formula: ‘proud reserve’ (at Manchester, *Times* 4 April 1872, 6a), ‘becomingly firm’ (B/XVI/B/2), ‘pluck and prudence’, ‘firmness and tact’ (Zetland ii.103, 112) etc.

11 The first actual demonstration was the reinforcement of the fleet at Besika Bay in May 1876, and it was subsequently described as such *Hansard* ccxxxi.195 (Gladstone), 223 (Hartington). However, Disraeli referred only to a ‘symbol and . . . guarantee of our power’ (c.212), and he puts demonstration in inverted commas to Northcote: 2 Sept. 1876, *M&B* ii.923. Two new uses of ‘demonstration’ had entered the language in the 1830s, one military—in the sense of a feint or manoeuvre—and one political: the public meeting (*OED*). The 1870s usage took something from each of these to describe a political instrument in military garb.

12 An inconsistency in Derby’s position was that (as Lord Stanley) he was sympathetic to this logic in 1854, but would have nothing to do with it in 1876–78: *Diary* 27 May 1854 (ed. Vincent 1978). In the 1870s the only person to deny the pejorative connotation of Clarendon’s remark was a survivor of the Aberdeen coalition, Gladstone: *Hansard* ccxxxi.175–76.

13 Eg. at Aylesbury, *Times* 9 March 1858, 7b.

14 To Hardy 21 Oct. 1876, T501/266; Derby *Diary* 30 June, 17 Dec 1877, 27 Mar 1878 cf. *M&B* ii.1080 on Theodore Martin’s *Life of the Prince Consort* for 1854–56.

15 Eg. *Hansard* clv.172; at Aylesbury, *Times* 1 April 1857, 8c; MacGregor c.I.

16 There were precedents for the use of money votes for war preparations as diplomatic weapons: thus Pitt’s £1 million in 1790 or Gladstone’s (reluctant) £2 million in 1870 parallel that for £6 million in 1878 to a degree; but there was no precedent for the immediate military unreality of Beaconsfield’s policy. Some criticisms of Palmerston might seem to foreshadow those of Beaconsfield. Pam was frequently associated with ‘bluster’ and on one occasion Gladstone talked of ‘a system of military demonstrations’: ‘Prospects Political and Financial’, *Quarterly Review* (January 1857), ci.277. But essential differences remained. In the eyes of his critics Palmerston was distinguished by levity and intellectual shallowness and his policy was criticised for indulging in talk of war without meaning it (e.g. Gladstone, *Quarterly Review* ‘The Declining Efficiency of Parliament’, Sept. 56, xcix.558). Beaconsfield’s determination was, if not really understood, never doubted. Kovic’s linking of Disraeli to Palmerston is a recent example of a longstanding misconception: (Kovic 100, 115, 146, 309, 317).

17 The War Office estimates of June 1877 suggested a cost £12 or £21 million, depending on whether one or two army corps were mobilized: B/XX/Ha/127, from ‘Memorandum of proposed arrangements in case of war, with approximate Estimate of the Cost’, n.d. [c.19 June 1877], National Archive, henceforth WO: WO33/32. Add to this naval costs which, following the actual scale of expenditure in 1878, may be put at £2–3 million.

18 Though there was no visible expenditure, there were supplementary estimates for 1876/7 and 1877/8 totalling £326,000 which were linked to extraordinary war preparations: *Hansard* ccxxxii.1978, ccxxxviii.1623-5: Hardy, Loyd Lindsay, Col. Stanley.

19 Cf. Balfour at Edinburgh, *Times* 13 Dec 1879, 5f-g.

20 Eg. Barrington reporting Rosebery 25 Apr. 1878, B/XX/Ba/69; Hartington, *Hansard* ccxlii.1121; Hartington 1880, 33).

21 Eg. *Hansard* ccxxxix.536–37.

22 Note the parallels between this speech and that given on the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war: *Hansard* cciii, 1293, 1297.

23 Derby *Diary* 25 September 1877; Gladstone 1879, 34; Cardwell to Gladstone 2 Nov. 1878, Add.MSS: Add. MSS 44120 f.234; Derby to Granville 18 June 1878, PRO 30/29/26A&B; Harcourt, *Times* 17 Apr 1879, 4e.

24 On Palmerston’s mantle: to Harcourt 4 Oct. 1879, MS. Harcourt Dep.78 f.113; n.16 above.

25 Eg. Northcote at Wolverhampton, *Times* 23 Oct 1878, 10d; Cranbrook at Sheffield, 6 June 1879, 10a.

26 See the Note on ‘Prestige’ at the end.

27 Cf. Carnarvon *Diary* 22 Nov. 1874, Add. MSS 60906, for a similarly gloomy prognosis at an earlier date. The Queen was one of Lyons’s strongest backers as a replacement for Derby, but

Beaconsfield never considered him: to Beaconsfield 25 June, 13 Dec 1877, *M&B* ii.1019, *QVL* ii.576.

28 Cf. Hardy *Diary* Jan 31, 1877, where a contretemps with Hardy prompted him to offer his resignation.

29 Cf. Simmons's memoranda for Cambridge, Hardy 30 Oct.1876, 2 Feb. 1878, FO 358/3, 358/2 resp., for further glances at conscription.

30 Gladstone 1876, 7-10 was fully alive to this strategy.

31 Eg. (Gladstone 1876, 27–32), *Hansard* ccxxxii.11 and ccxxxiv.407–08, for the development of this charge.

32 A position upheld by modern research cf. Millman, *SR* 1980, lviii.218–31.

33 Beaconsfield to Hart Dyke 28 Sept. 1876, garbled citation in Kovic 157 cf. *Derby Diary* 26 September 1876; *Times* 10 November 1876, 8d; Beaconsfield to Salisbury 29 Nov. 1876, *M&B* ii.975 etc.

34 Modern research tends to confirm Gladstone's view that this was patchy: *Hansard* ccxxxvii.949–51 cf. Cunningham xiv.429–53. But there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of socially elite, metropolitan conviction on this subject: Zetland ii.158; Beaconsfield to Queen 5 Feb. 1878, B/XIX/C/462; Hardy *Diary* 26 February 1878.

35 Beaconsfield's first reaction to the Turkish success at Plevna was to make an aggressive speech in the Lords, so as to impress the Russians publicly: to Layard 6 Aug. 1877, Add. MSS 39136 f.75v. However, given the alternative of a secret message via Col. Wellesley (below s.III), he decided not to speak and caused the debate to collapse: *Hansard* ccxxxvi.667-8 cf. Granville to Gladstone 6, 9 Aug. 1877, Ramm nos.78, 80.

36 Gladstone's conciliatory speech of the 4th (*Hansard* ccxxxvii.928–59) was a move in the same direction cf. Hardy *Diary* 5 February 1878, Northcote to Queen 4 Feb 1878: Millman 1979, 377–78. Contrast Gladstone's wish to record *nem.con.* assent to his vote of £10 million in April 1885: *Hansard* ccxcvii.849–51,1127–28.

37 Blake 1966, 607–08, 642, 652, derived from Seton-Watson 376–79; Parry 2007, 101–04. Contrast Beaconsfield, 17 Jan. 1878, *Hansard* ccxxxviii.31-4.

38 Cf. Beaconsfield to Queen 26, 28 June B/XIX/C/279; *Derby Diary* 7 July 1877

39 Note that there was renewed agitation in December 1877 after the announcement that Parliament would be recalled early: see Palmer's *Index to the Times Newspaper* s.v. 'Public Opinion and the War', from 19 Dec. 1877, Hardy *Diary* 11 January 1878; Beaconsfield 17 Jan. 1878, *Hansard* ccxxxvii.38.

40 Jon Parry's idea that 'the cabinet as a whole was in charge of policy' is, however, a step too far: *Disraeli* 101.

41 Compare Carnarvon, 1879 Memorandum, Add. MSS 60817 ff.64,80; Beaconsfield to Queen 12 Jan. 1878, CAB 41/10/5; Northcote, 'Notes on the Foreign Policy of the Late Government' Add. MSS 50063A f.298.

42 *Derby Diary* 1 January 1878 (see already 26 August 1871); Salisbury to Lytton 15 June 1877, Cecil ii.145-6, hence Balfour memo. 8 May 1880, Balfour 1930, 113.

43 Carnarvon, 1879 Memorandum, Add. MSS. 60817 f.64; Queen to Beaconsfield 25, 27 June 1877, *M&B* ii.1019-21.

44 A famous example: *Punch*, 8 Aug. 1857, Cartoon: 'The Asiatic Mystery'.

45 In this context it is the distance between Disraeli and the Queen that stands out. The high function he wished to attribute to monarchy as an institution, and hence to its ministers, fades into the background: see eg. *Coningsby* (1844), VII.4.

46 Cf. Beaconsfield to Derby 22 May 1877, *M&B* ii.1012; *Derby Diary* 12 July 1877

47 The proposal was put to Cabinet the next day: CAB 41/9/1.

48 Cf. Dyke to Beaconsfield 23 Jan. [1878] B/XXI/D/471; Beaconsfield to Queen 23 Jan. 1p.m., B/XIX/B/1096.

49 Since Carnarvon had himself been on the point of resigning in the previous three weeks, he considered parting fairly inevitable, *Hansard* ccxxxvii.437–45.

50 Derby to Northcote 25, [26] Jan. 1878, Add. MS 50022 ff.162, 164, Northcote to Beaconsfield 26, 27 Jan. 1878, B/XX/N/63, B/XX/S/1309; Derby to Beaconsfield 27 Jan. 1878, B/XX/S/1310.

51 Blake 1966, 638; Millman 1979, 370; Parry 2007, 102.

52 The only hard evidence about backbench feeling points the other way. A 'secret' deputation of 40 MPs claiming to represent 110 in all, waited on Northcote on the evening of 23rd January to demand government action. The 'secret' was in the press the same day: B/XX/N/58, *Hansard* ccxxxvii.1121–22; *Slavonic Review* xxv.234.

53 Supplemented by a stage-managed letter: Northcote to the Queen 26 Jan. 1878, *QVL* ii.598–600.

54 Northcote to Queen 7, 8 Feb. 1878 summarises the diplomatic and parliamentary confusion: *QVL* ii.601–04.

55 Both Beaconsfield and the Queen now saw that Derby would present little further trouble: Queen to Beaconsfield 15 Feb. 1878, B/XIX/C/480; reply 16 Feb. 1878, CAB 41/10/19. Omitting to force Derby out on 8 March was the culminating proof of his inconsequence.

56 Amongst the Opposition neither atrocitarians nor Palmerstonians had any love of Derby. The High Church Carnarvon found some sympathy with the former.

57 But for all his personal ascendancy, Beaconsfield did not possess ‘dictatorial powers’: Kovic viii, 202, 240 etc. Kovic’s attribution of this phrase to Carslake Thompson (240 n.787) is mistaken. The latter has a chapter heading ‘The Dictatorship’ but this means only that ‘The Cabinet became as it were autocratic’: ii.352–53.

58 *Hansard* ccxxxix.776.

59 References where Beaconsfield is alleged to have spoken of greater numbers of troops—100,000 or more—are all second- or third-hand: Derby *Diary* reporting Lyons, 25 Sept. 1877; Granville to Gladstone 21 Nov. 1877, Ramm no.92; Holland i.209 n.1.

60 Beaconsfield ‘Note on the Cabinet of 15th[14th] Aug.’ B/XIX/C/304; to Layard 6 Aug. 1877, Add. MSS 39136 ff.72–5v.

61 Hunt to Beaconsfield 22 Nov. 1876, B/XX/Hu/86–7; Hardy *Memoir*, i.376–8; Beaconsfield to Salisbury 29 Nov. 1876 *M&B* ii.976.

62 e.g. Beaconsfield to Layard 27 Nov. 1877, Add. MS 39136 ff.117–22; Cabinet resolution 8 Mar 1878 (drafted by Cairns), B/XIX/B/1206.

63 Gladstone’s critique of the Cyprus Convention shows that he understood this: Gladstone 1879, 124–26.

64 Cf. Simmons memo 12 May 1877, FO 358/2.

65 Cf. Cambridge to Hardy 12 Aug. 1877, T501/268.

66 Cf. *Hansard* ccxxvii.1906–07 (Hunt); ccxxiv.1987–91 (Hunt, Goschen); ccxxxviii.1415 (Smith).

67 Cf. Beaconsfield to Queen, 16 July 1877, B/XIX/C/283; Hardy to Beaconsfield 14 July 1877 B/XX/Ha/142.

68 Cf. Beaconsfield to Queen 21 Jan. 1878, B/XIX/B/1087.

69 Contrast Smith to Beaconsfield 1 March, 1 Apr. 1878 PS6/38, B/XVI/F/23 resp.; Hornby to Admiralty n.d., B/XVI/F/17.

70 On the naval priorities governing Crimean War strategy: Lambert 1990.

71 Eg. *Hansard* clxvii.337. Cf. MacGregor c.II. For statistical analysis of the senses in which British defence expenditure was low: Hobson 461–506.

72 Cf. Salisbury to Smith 16 May, PS6/108; *Hansard* ccxxxvii.557, Northcote.

73 Beaconsfield, *Times* 11 November 1879, 4c; to Layard, 31 May 1880, Blake 721: ‘The stir was an American spirit & already languishes’; Hartington, Address, *Times* 11 March 1880, 13d.

74 For the revenue returns eg. Northcote, *Times* 9 October 1877, 9b; *Economist* October 6, 1877, 1183. Newmarch’s general price index, calculated on a basket of 32 articles and published in the *Economist*, yields the following picture:

1 Jan.	1873	2947	1 Jan.	1878	2520
1 Jan.	1874	2891	1 Jan.	1879	2225
1 Jan.	1875	2778	1 June	1879	2202
1 Jan.	1876	2711	1 Jan.	1880	2538
1 Jan.	1877	2723	1 July	1880	2479

After a decline from the speculative high of 1873, there is relative stability across 1875–77, before the winter of 1877–78 marks the first sharp decline. Some recovery in late 1879–early 1880 is also apparent.

75 For an early discussion: Stanley (Secretary of State for War) at Barrow: *Times* 23 August 1878, 6a–b.

76 e.g. Northcote at Exeter, *Times* 9 Oct. 1877 p.9b; Harcourt at Oxford, *ibid.*, 14 Jan. 1879 p.6a; Convenors’ Address, London Workmen’s Conference, *Daily News* 11 Apr. 1878 in G. Carslake Thompson, *Public Opinion and Lord Beaconsfield* (1886), ii.423; Granville to Gladstone 18 Sept. 1878, *Ramm*, no.120.

77 *Economist* 20 January 1877, 75; 5 January 1878, 15; 25 January 1879, 101; 3 January 1880, 23.

78 Disraeli knew the Porte was in difficulty (e.g. Zetland i.275; cf. Derby *Diary* 22 January 1875), but the bankruptcy still came as a shock. In this he was no different from investors: the Turkish loans of 1873 and 1874 were well subscribed, Blaisdell 70–72.

79 64 days: Lieut.-Col. Home 'Memo' [c.20 Oct. 1876] B/XVIII/A/86, followed by Beaconsfield: B/XVI/B/63. 100 days: Simmons Memo. 19 Apr. 1877, FO 358/3, Beaconsfield to Queen 23 Apr. 1877 'Memorandum', QVL ii.529.

80 For the exaggerations of the money market, *Economist*, Leader, 'The Financial Position of Russia' 28 July 1877, 878–79.

81 Ruetz 14, tabulates the fall of the rouble in Berlin, then the chief source of foreign lending to Russia. In London fortnightly quotations of foreign currency rates in the *Economist* give the following picture:

Date	Rouble Index Value	Rouble: Sterling Rate	Reference
31 Dec. 1875	100	7.80	1876, 16
2 May 1876	99	7.87	1876, 547
3 April 1877	94	8.28	1877, 396
30 Oct. 1877	74	10.55	1877, 1314
5 April 1878	73	10.66	1878, 405
6 Aug. 1878	81	9.60	1878, 956
2 Dec. 1878	73	10.73	1878, 1499

The cost of the war to Russia was put at 988 million R in June 1878, a figure which tallies with Beaconsfield's report of Gorchakov's (not so casual) estimate of £100 million. The final, book cost was 1,075 million R. This was paid for by (i) borrowing: 200 million R at home, 140 million R abroad; (ii) note issue, unfunded debt: 660 million R; (iii) devices such as withholding soldiers' pay; (iv) one tax increase: to demand payment of customs in gold, offset against the decline in trade during the war: Petit 63–66; *Economist* 16, 30 June, 20 July, 31 Aug 1877, 698, 762, 853, 1052; Beaconsfield to Northcote [21 June 1878], M&B ii.1197.

82 The dislocation caused by the Turkish war was sufficient to inspire the radical political protest that led to the assassination of Alexander II in 1881.

83 My transcripts from the Rothschild archive perished in an office clearance, but data for individual clients can easily be found.

84 This was what Disraeli meant when he said the Serbian war had been declared by 'secret societies': at Aylesbury, *Times* 21 September 1876, 6b.

85 Weguelin (1838–81) was a partner in Thomson, Bonar & Co. of London and St. Petersburg, a director of the Bank of England 1867–81, and briefly Liberal MP for Youghal 1868–69.

86 For his own pessimistic evaluation of Russia's financial position: to Gorchakov 20 Apr. 1877 SR v.418 (1926–27). See too Gorchakov's instruction to Ignatiev 24 Nov. 1876, SR iv.450–51.

87 Particularly by Salisbury: to Carnarvon 19 Jan 1877, Cecil ii.123; *Hansard* ccxxxii.693 (20 Feb. 1877).

88 Eg. Salisbury to Lady Salisbury 11 Feb. 1877 Cecil ii.127; Carslake Thompson ii.173–74.

89 Shuvalov to Gorchakov 7 Feb. 1877, SR iv.741 (1925–26); Beaconsfield to Derby 9 Feb. 1877, M&B ii.998.

90 Derby to Lofthouse 13 Mar. 1877, *Parliamentary Papers* 1877, XCI.412 no.6, 'Turkey No.8'. Cf. Hardy, *Hansard* ccxxxiii.1102 (13 Apr. 1877), Shuvalov to Gorchakov 21 Feb. 1877, SR iv.748 (1925–26).

91 Beaconsfield to Queen 23, 29 Mar. 1877, CAB 41/8/7,9.

92 On blockade see Algernon Turner's memorandum n.d. [Oct. 1876/Apr. 1877] B/XVI/D/83.

93 Cf. *Hansard* ccxxxv.1389–90 (Dilke, Bourke); *Economist* 28 July 1877, 884.

94 To Lytton 27 Apr., 8 June, 6 July 1877, Cecil ii.142, 154–55; Taylor 59. Despite Derby *Diary* 8 March 1878, Kovic's idea that Salisbury's motivation was personal is not convincing: 217.

95 Emphasis added.

96 Bulgaria for the British meant the land North of the Balkan mountains, with Roumelia to the South.

97 Cf. Gladstone to Granville 7 Aug. 1877, Ramm no.79; Halifax to Granville 19 Oct. 1877, PRO30/29/26B.

98 Derby *Diary* 14 August–4 December 1877.

99 Beaconsfield saw Wellesley the same day, 8 Aug: B/XIX/C/294. For the Russian background: Wellesley c.20, Sumner, 617–19.

100 Cf. Beaconsfield to Queen, Wellesley to Queen, both 9 Aug. 1877, B/XIX/C/ 294-7; Wellesley memorandum 17 Aug., *M&B* ii.1046–47 etc. The abundance of documents reflects the importance Beaconsfield attached to this message.

101 Copy in B/XIX/C/310–12.

102 The Cabinet of 5 October discussed possible courses of action in the event of there being a second campaign, that of 5 November did not: Derby *Diary* 5 October 1877; 'Memorandum' by Cairns 7 Oct. 1877 CAB 41/9/12; Beaconsfield to Queen 7 Nov. 1877, B/XIX/C/344-5. Hence Derby's comment 'I find the Premier constantly shifting his ground': *Diary* 24 November 1877.

103 Cf. Beaconsfield to Layard 21 Feb. 1878, Add. MSS 39137 ff.28v-29.

104 Situation reports on the Russian army made by the military attaché at Constantinople (Dickson) were circulated to the Cabinet. There is a complete run in the Simmons Papers, FO 358/4. For Cabinet perceptions: Hardy *Diary* 19 March 1878; Derby *Diary* 27 March 1878, reporting Beaconsfield.

105 To Hardy 27 Mar. 1878, *Memoir* ii.56; to Queen 18 Mar. 1878, B/XIX/C/506-7.

106 Cf. Beaconsfield to Queen 19 April, 7 May 1878, B/XIX/C/537, 544.

107 Bismarck too had an acute appreciation of the financial resources underpinning Great Power diplomacy, and his relation to Bleichröder parallels Disraeli's links with the Rothschilds: cf. Stern c.13. However, Bismarck fell short of 'the old Jew' when in 1887 he attempted to manipulate the Berlin bourse against Russian stock in order to coerce her diplomacy, but succeeded only in causing ownership of that stock to pass from German to French hands.

108 Chamberlain, 1988, defaults on her title.

109 A favourite epigram eg. Disraeli 1880, c.82.

110 See the ideal self-portrait embodied in Sidonia: *Coningsby*, III.1.

111 Robertson 1999 is seminal.

112 See eg. the cartoons in Kovic 123, 171, 207.

113 Eg. Salisbury to Disraeli 7 June 1876, B/XX/Ce/77, Lytton to Disraeli 16 July 1876, B/XX/Ly/233; Granville to Argyll 9 Oct 1878, PRO 30/29/22A/4 f.337 (draft).

114 Eg. *Hansard* cxxxiii.424, Gladstone; c.1125, Ashley. The Palmerstonian Ashley thought 'prestige' could be quite legitimate.

115 Cf. to Layard, 11 Oct. 1877, Add. MSS 39136 f.99v, *Hansard* ccxli.1768-9.

116 Cf. [18] March 1878, 547–48, where even Gladstone (in 1871) is indicted as a slave of prestige. The latter document, no.377, is misdated because the Russian date, 6 March, was taken for a Western one

117 Cf. Millman 1979, c.22; Parry 2007, 105; Kovic 2011, 68, 85, 135, 221.

Pour citer cet article

Référence électronique

Peter Ghosh, « Disraeli and the Eastern Question 1875–78: Finance, Defence and Politics », *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens* [En ligne], 101 Printemps | 2025, mis en ligne le 08 avril 2025, consulté le 06 mai 2025. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/cve/15996> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/13qt5>

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