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Abstract

The Making of Imperial Defence Policy in Britain, 1926-1934

Orest Babij
Faculty of Modern History
DPhil Dissertation
Hilary 2003

Although the period between 1926 and 1934 was relatively peaceful, Imperial Defence policy-making in Britain focused on threats along the periphery of the Empire. This included a short-lived, but serious, concern over communist expansion in China and Afghanistan and a fear that American naval construction would undermine the Royal Navy's position in the world. The first threat receded by 1928 and the second was met by negotiating the highly successful London Naval Conference of 1930. Throughout these years, the need to reorient the Imperial Defence system to meet a perceived Japanese threat in the Far East, and the Treasury's opposition to the very idea, remained constants within policy-making circles. The world-wide depression led to serious defence cutbacks which the services met largely by cutting back even further on war reserves and mobilization potential. The Japanese assault on Manchuria in 1931, and then in Shanghai in 1932, exposed the inability of the Imperial Defence system to meet a Far Eastern threat. This led to pressure from the navy, in particular, for an increase in service estimates, but the economic situation and the World Disarmament Conference kept the government from agreeing to any significant change in policy. From 1931-1933, Imperial Defence concerns were centred on the Far East, but Hitler's rise to power in March 1933 turned attention back toward Europe. Nevertheless, the first large-scale review of Imperial Defence deficiencies, the Defence Requirements Sub-Committee, presented a report which balanced the needs of European and Far Eastern defence. In the spring of 1934, however, the Cabinet found itself unable to come to a consensus on the DRC's recommendations and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Neville Chamberlain, stepped forward with his own defence vision. He discounted the need for Far Eastern defence and re-oriented defence policy toward homeland defence. It was his intervention that set the tone for British rearmament in the 1930s.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....i

List of Abbreviations.....vi

List of Journal Abbreviations.....vii

Introduction.....1

Chapter One: The Imperial Defence System After the Great War.....6

Chapter Two: The Red Menace and the Empire.....26

Chapter Three: Imperial Defence at Sea: Anglo-American Relations and Naval Disarmament, 1927-1930.....70

Chapter Four: Depression, Disarmament and Defence, 1930-1932.....120

Chapter Five: 1933-1934, Distant Threats, Near Threats, or Both?.....153

Chapter Six: Chamberlain, Strategic Uncertainty and the Air Threat.....191

Conclusion.....226

Bibliography.....231

Abstract

Prior to the First World War, there was little concept of a purely British defence policy. Instead, contemporaries used the term Imperial Defence which was rarely precisely defined but its key elements were widely understood by soldiers and politicians alike. At its heart was the guiding assumption that the defence of Great Britain was fundamentally linked to the defence of the Empire and that the converse was also true. As a result, Britain developed a complex, world-wide web of naval bases, army garrisons and coaling stations to tie the Empire together physically. After the First World War, air bases and air squadrons were added to the list. As the system grew more complicated it became more formalized with the creation of an entire bureaucratic structure in London. The strengths, and the weaknesses, of the system were ably demonstrated during the First World War.

After the war, the system survived, although in a radically changed environment. The defence services in Britain had to adapt to rapidly changing technology. For the army this meant grappling with the problems and internal conflict caused by mechanization. The navy had to incorporate carrier-borne aviation and the total switch to oil. The RAF, the newest of the services, was faced with the fact that the fast pace of change in aerial technology meant that its aircraft became rapidly obsolete. Concurrently, during the first half of the 1920s, both the navy and the air force developed programmes to meet what were perceived to be the new, post-war threats. The navy focussed on reorienting its entire force structure in order to be able to fight a war against Japan. This aim dominated naval policy throughout this period. The air force took advantage of a short-lived perception of a French air menace to win approval for its desired strategic bomber programme. At the same time, it argued for the increased use of aircraft in colonial policing duties. The army, although widely engaged in disparate theatres for years after the end of the First World War, had no overarching enemy against which to plan and to justify its programmes. As the world situation became more settled in the mid-1920s, and as defence budgets were continually cut, the three services found themselves increasingly at odds with one another over funding for their programmes. This damaged the Imperial Defence structure. Even though the international situation appeared to have stabilized by the mid-1920s, not all threats to Imperial Defence had

disappeared and these continued to affect the debate over the appropriate level and distribution of spending on Imperial Defence.

Among the foremost threats to British control and authority in the mid-1920s was the challenge posed by international communism. The army and the Indian General Staff worried about its potential appeal to millions of Indians while, at the same time, they feared the revival of the Russian threat to India through Afghanistan. Many Conservative politicians believed that communist revolution, supported by the Soviet Union, was possible at home. All were concerned that communist advisors to the Chinese Kuomintang aimed at undermining the British position in China. Several key events between 1925 and 1927 served to accentuate these fears. A border clash between Afghan and Soviet forces over an island in the Oxus (Amu Darya) river revived memories of the Great Game. The 1926 General Strike convinced many Conservatives that revolution at home was close at hand. Finally, the capture of the British concession in Hankow by Chinese nationalists closely allied to the left-wing of the KMT, led to the subsequent threat of a Chinese advance on Shanghai. Together this threatened to undermine British prestige in the Far East, with incalculable consequences for its position elsewhere in the Empire. As a result, dealing with a perceived Soviet and communist threat to the Empire became a critical component of Imperial Defence policy in the middle of the 1920s, a fact largely underestimated by most historians. Despite the concern raised by this threat it never fully materialized for two principal reasons. First, Stalin's consolidation of his power in the Soviet Union ended the internationalist phase of the Soviet experiment as he focused attention on domestic development. Second, Chiang Kai-shek purged the left-wing of the KMT in the spring of 1927 and sought a temporary modus vivendi with the Treaty powers. The KMT's success in the Northern Expedition stabilized the situation in China and appeared to remove the threat of forcible Treaty revision that had haunted the British from 1925-1927.

While the red scare receded in the late 1920s, other Imperial Defence concerns did not go away. Throughout the decade, the Royal Navy had feared that its global pre-eminence was under challenge from the United States and Japan. Although the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-22 established an equilibrium among the capital ships of the major naval powers, it had the unintentional effect of launching a competition in large cruisers. This worked to the Royal Navy's disadvantage. The RN felt itself forced to build the large ships

in order to maintain Treaty ratios with Japan and the United States. However, the large ships did not suit its requirements and were a drain on resources. The Geneva Naval Conference in 1927 presented the Royal Navy with an opportunity to negotiate an equilibrium in this class of vessels as well. However, its plans were grounded by the British inability to grant the United States parity in this class of ship not only for reasons of prestige but out of concern that this would undermine the Royal Navy's position relative to the Imperial Japanese Navy. When this became apparent, British policy-makers were willing to let the conference collapse rather than undermine this pillar of Imperial Defence. The result, however, was a deterioration in Anglo-American relations and the possibility of a new, trans-Atlantic naval race. This was averted by the London Naval Conference in 1930 which ended a decade of focus on cruiser construction. The results of the conference were very favourable for the Royal Navy and proved to be the critical factor in maintaining naval construction in the early 1930s.

Nevertheless, throughout this period the Treasury remained opposed to almost all naval expenditure. In large measure this was driven by its desire to cut defence spending generally. More specifically, however, the Treasury worked from a completely different strategic basis than the navy. The Treasury understood that the navy's sometimes ambitious programmes were geared toward the potential of fighting a war with Japan and this, the Treasury believed, was a completely unlikely and thoroughly preventable possibility. In fact, the Treasury believed that a renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was possible and would obviate the need for most new naval construction.

The Treasury's concern over the level of defence expenditure increased in the period after 1929. At first this was a result of its estimate that, given current and proposed programmes, defence expenditure would actually increase after 1931. It was also a reflection of the Treasury's desire to increase its control over defence policy-making. It did this, in part, by promoted the further use of aircraft in substitution for naval and army forces. However, the onset of the world economic crisis heightened the perceived urgency for cuts. In retrospect, no matter what Treasury policy might have been, it would have been difficult for any government not to have reduced defence expenditure during this acute economic crisis. During this period, the services made difficult decisions on maintaining their priority programmes at the expense of general readiness.

Together, the service chiefs tried to address other problem areas such as coastal defences, which had been neglected for a decade. Given the difficult times, however, they could do little but take note of the problems.

As inter-war defence budgets reached their nadir in 1931, the international strategic situation began to shift. In particular, Japanese offensives in Manchuria threatened to undermine the delicate order maintained in the Far East since the Washington Conference a decade earlier. The European situation also began to change for the worse as Hitler and the Nazi party capitalized on economic disenchantment in Germany. The defence services in Britain sensed the change and each one went through an internal audit to determine its exact deficiencies and to determine the amount of money required to repair the situation. The navy, in particular, tried to capitalize on the deteriorating situation in the Far East to argue for increased naval expenditure. But, the continuing economic difficulties, the ongoing Disarmament Conference, combined with Treasury opposition and the FO's belief that Japan would be held in check by a fear of the Soviet Union, combined to remove the urgency from the issue. Nevertheless, from 1931 to the middle of 1933 the Far East remained the epicentre of concern for Imperial Defence. Hitler's rise to power in Germany in March 1933 galvanized the other service departments and led to a united effort by the COS to force the government into increasing defence expenditure generally. The German withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference that October pushed the government into taking some action. Diplomatically, it attempted to find a method of regulating what was now seen as inevitable German rearmament. Militarily, the government appointed a Defence Requirements Committee (DRC) to look into the deficiencies of the three services and make recommendations for future programmes.

Although it was born out of the crisis caused by the German withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference, the DRC report, when it was finally submitted in March 1934, was an Imperial document that largely reflected the navy's concern over the British position in the Far East. While it made reference to Germany as the "ultimate enemy" that Britain would have to face, nearly half of its total recommended expenditure was for items connected with the defence of the Far East. By the time this document reached the Cabinet, however, the international situation had changed again. Japan appeared to be increasingly bogged down in its war in China. At the same time, fears arose that Germany was launching a massive air rearmament

effort. While this shifted some attention away from the Far East, there was still a great deal of concern in the Cabinet over the British position in this region. However, in this period of strategic flux, the Cabinet found that it could come to no definite conclusion. The Disarmament Conference was in its death throes, and ministers understood that this meant some level of rearmament, but they found it difficult to find a consensus as to what this meant. Increasingly there was a desire to make a significant statement on defence in the hope of forestalling the need for wide-scale rearmament. At this point, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Neville Chamberlain, stepped forward to dominate the proceedings. He was biased against any large commitment of resources to the Far East where, he believed, British interests could be secured by a new agreement with Japan. Instead, his focus was on the German threat and, in particular, the air threat. The Cabinet rebuffed his attempt to completely gut Far Eastern defences, but it was willing to accept his arguments for aerial rearmament. His desire for the announcement of a large increase in front-line bomber squadrons appealed to the desire to be seen to be doing something significant. But, it was a fundamentally flawed proposition. The build up such a force within the budget he proposed meant that reserves were sacrificed and a "shop-window dressing" force was created. It also failed to appreciate that an air deterrent was no deterrent to Hitler.

Nevertheless, it was Chamberlain's intervention in the spring of 1934 that set the tenor and basis for British rearmament in the 1930s, not the DRC report. It was a flawed intervention that hamstrung British defence and foreign policy. Chamberlain also broke with the previous assumption that had underlied Imperial Defence, namely that the defence of Britain was tied to the defence of the Empire. Instead, he argued that Britain could, and should, go at it alone. In the circumstances of the 1930s, this was not a realistic vision.

List of Abbreviations

ADGB	Air Defence of Great Britain
ATB	Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CinC	Commander in Chief
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CNS	Chief of the Naval Staff
CO	Colonial Office
COS	Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee
DCAS	Deputy Chief of Air Staff
DCM	Ministerial Committee on Disarmament
DCNS	Deputy Chief of Naval Staff
DCOS	Deputy Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee
DRC	Defence Requirements Sub-Committee
FAA	Fleet Air Arm
FO	Foreign Office
FSC	Fighting Services Committee
FSL	First Sea Lord
HDAF	Home Defence Air Force
IIC	Industrial Intelligence Sub-Committee
IDC	Imperial Defence College
IGS	Indian General Staff
IJA	Imperial Japanese Army
IJN	Imperial Japanese Navy
IO	India Office
JDC	Joint Home and Overseas Defence Committee
JPC	Joint Planning Committee
KMT	Kuomintang
LADA	London Air Defence Area
LNC	London Naval Conference
LNT	London Naval Treaty
NPC	Naval Programme Committee
PSOC	Principal Supply Officers Sub-Committee
PUS	Permanent Under-Secretary
RAF	Royal Air Force
RN	Royal Navy
TA	Territorial Army
USN	United States Navy
WO	War Office

List of Journal Abbreviations

AFS	Armed Forces and Society
AHS	American Historical Review
BDFA	British Documents on Foreign Affairs
BIHR	Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research
BJIS	British Journal of International Studies
CJH	Canadian Journal of History
CMRS	Cahies du monde russe et sovietique
DBFP	Documents on British Foreign Policy
DH	Diplomatic History
DS	Diplomacy & Statecraft
DSt	Defence Studies
EAS	Europe-Asia Studies
EHR	English Historical Review
ESR	European Studies Review
HJ	Historical Journal
IHR	International History Review
JAS	Journal of Asian Studies
JBS	Journal of British Studies
JCH	Journal of Contemporary History
JEH	Journal of Economic History
JEEH	Journal of European Economic History
JIH	Journal of Interdisciplinary History
JMilH	Journal of Military History
JMH	Journal of Modern History
JRUSI	Journal of the Royal United Services Institution

JSMS	Journal of Slavic Military Studies
JSS	Journal of Strategic Studies
MA	Military Affairs
MAS	Modern Asian Studies
NM	The Northern Mariner
NWCR	Naval War College Review
PSQ	Political Science Quarterly
RR	Russian Review
TCBH	Twentieth Century British History
WS	War and Society
WIH	War in History

Introduction

When viewed from the ideological and strategic certainties of the Cold War, the challenges that defence policy-makers faced in the late 1920s and early 1930s must have been difficult to appreciate. Now, with the end of the Cold War, and after a decade of strategic uncertainty and of the effects of fiscal restraint and the so-called 'peace dividend', the problems of this period can be viewed from a different perspective. The period from 1926 to 1934 was marked by the lack of a clearly defined external threat to the British Empire, by tremendous fiscal pressure engendered by the world-wide depression and by political pressure from disarmament groups and the peace lobby. However, the making of defence policy did not stand still. Although there were few major crises, numerous small ones crept up and demanded attention. The defence services still had a requirement to maintain their forces and improve their capital equipment. As well, they had to develop and adapt their own policies toward disarmament. At the same time, Imperial Defence policy was dominated by the need to be ready to meet foreign threats along the periphery of the Empire. This included the threat of Soviet expansion in the mid-1920s and constant concern over the possibility of an eventual Japanese challenge to the Far Eastern order.

Although the eight years between 1926 and 1934 were relatively peaceful, the British Empire's strategic position underwent a great transformation. In 1926 the world seemed at peace and there were bright hopes for the future. Two years later, this feeling of well being was best expressed with the signing of the Kellogg Pact outlawing war. In 1924, the Dawes Plan eased the tempestuous issue of reparations, and the signature of the Locarno Treaties in 1926 seemed to finally lay to rest the problems that has been created by the First World War. The financial stability that resulted from the Dawes Plan, in particular, led to a large improvement in the European economy. After many long years it finally appeared that Europe was on the road to recovery and prosperity. In the Far East, relations between the Great Powers were regulated by the agreements reached at the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-22. This world-wide stability was underpinned by the League of Nations. To many this body seemed to offer the hope that future conflicts could be resolved without recourse to the bloodletting of 1914-1918 and they hoped that, under its auspices, greater world-wide disarmament could occur. To realists, the League appeared to be a useful tool for helping to regulate international relations and to increase global security; both beneficial for the prosperity of the British

Empire. The League and the Locarno Treaties, however, could not solve all the defence problems of a global empire such as the British Empire.

In fact, the peaceful situation in Europe in 1926 only accentuated British fears that the communist government of the Soviet Union was trying to undermine and overthrow British rule throughout the world. These fears culminated in the China crisis of 1927. But, this threat receded within a year, and, by the end of 1928, the Empire, too, appeared at peace. Even the constant problems of internal security within the Empire appeared to have diminished. This world-wide shift to stability was mirrored domestically as the political turbulence of the early 1920s was replaced by a period of fairly stable, Conservative government. Although unemployment remained stubbornly high, overall Britons were becoming more prosperous. Thus, by the late 1920s, the British Empire appeared to have entered a period of peace, stability and potential prosperity.[1]

By 1934, however, the assumptions which had underlined the strategic policy of the 1920s were no longer valid. The global balance of power had begun to shift as new threats emerged both on the European continent and on the periphery of the British Empire. In large measure, this change was spurred on by the debilitating effects of the Great Depression which, more than any other factor, contributed to the collapse of the

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[1]This leads inevitably to a discussion of the extent of British power in the inter-war years. For many years historians have accepted the thesis that, between the two world wars, Britain was a declining power. Pre-eminent exponents of the idea of British decline have been Correlli Barnett, The Collapse of British Power, (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972); Bernard Porter, The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-1970, (London: Longmans, 1975); Keith Robbins, The Eclipse of a Great Power: Modern Britain, 1870-1975, (London: 1983); Paul Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500-2000. (New York: Fontana Press, 1988). For a more specific view of decline prior to the First World War see Aaron L. Friedberg, The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1985-1905, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). For a Marxist explanation of British decline see Paul Warwick, "Did Britain Change?: An Inquiry into the Causes of National Decline", JCH, 20, (1985), 99-134. Over time the Empire even came to be viewed as a distraction and a liability which prevented British policy-makers from focussing on more urgent problems nearer home. Michael Howard, The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of the Two World Wars, (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1972). The publication of Paul Kennedy's The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers, however, was the catalyst for a revisionist rebuttal to the idea of British decline. This school has argued that the declinist school's focus on economics has overlooked other measures of power and, as a result, has ante-dated the decline of the British Empire. As well they argue, that the declinists overstate the extent of British power in the late nineteenth century and underestimate it in the inter-war years. See Gordon Martel, "The Meaning of Power: Rethinking the Decline and Fall of Great Britain", IHR, 13, 4(1991), 662-694; Keith Neilson, "'Greatly Exaggerated': The Myth of the Decline of Great Britain before 1914", IHR, 13, 4(1991), 695-725; John R. Ferris, "'The Greatest Power on Earth': Great Britain in the 1920s", IHR, 13, 4(1991), 726-750; B.J.C. McKercher, "'Our Most Dangerous Enemy': Great Britain Pre-eminent in the 1930s", IHR, 751-783. The best discussion of the nature of British power is David Reynolds, Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the 20th Century, (London: Longman, 1991).

1920s international system. It was now that Japan and Germany were not content with their place in the post-war order and that they were prepared to mount an aggressive challenge to that order. A British response to these challenges had to be formulated, and this led to a serious debate about Imperial Defence policy between 1932 and 1934.

The evolution in British policy that occurred as a result of the change in the strategic climate from 1926 to 1934 has not been studied in depth by historians. Much of the literature on British inter-war imperial, foreign or defence policy has been periodic, focussing either on the years before 1926 or on the period of rearmament after 1933.[2] Even those general histories that do exist tend to skim rather quickly over the years between 1926 and 1934.[3] Studies of specific topics, such as Anglo-American relations, naval policy, disarmament or the development of the Singapore base provide more details of this time period, but, by their nature, they do not provide a broader view of the development of Imperial Defence policy.[4] Over a decade ago, John Ferris led the way in showing how a broad and multi-faceted approach to studying the British Empire's defence problems could shed new light on the development of British strategic policy. His work, however, ends in 1926 at the time of Locarno and no recent work has gone beyond that year. This is a serious lacuna, for Britain's Imperial Defence policy changed dramatically between 1926 and 1934. To understand the development of Britain's rearmament and defence policy after 1934, it is important to understand how, and why, the direction of rearmament was set in 1934 and how Imperial Defence policy changed between 1926 and 1934. That is the purpose of this thesis.

It will begin by defining and describing the Imperial Defence system and its components as they

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[2] For the period prior to 1926 see the excellent John Ferris, The Evolution of British Strategic Policy 1919-1926, (London: MacMillan, 1989). Also: Anne Orde, Great Britain and International Security, 1920-1926, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978); Ephraim Maisel, The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1919-1926, (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 1994). Margaret George, The Hollow Men: An Examination of British Foreign Policy Between the Years 1933-1939, (London: Leslie Frewin, 1965)

[3] Winston Churchill, The Second World War: v.1, The Gathering Storm, (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1948); Charles Loch Mowat, Britain Between the Wars, 1918-1940, (London: Methuen & Co., 1955); F.S. Northedge, The Troubled Giant: Britain Among the Great Powers, 1916-1939, (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1966); A.J.P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1961); Richard Lamb, The Drift to War, 1922-1939, (London: W.H. Allen, 1989)

[4] There is an extensive literature on these subjects. It will be discussed as each topic is addressed throughout the thesis.

appeared in the mid-1920s. Chapter Two will consider how Britain dealt with the last perceived threat to the Empire in the 1920s, namely the challenge posed by the Soviet Union and the scare over communist subversion between 1926 and 1928. As this threat receded, and although no new threat immediately appeared on the horizon, challenges to the Imperial Defence structure remained as naval disarmament came to the fore in 1927. Naval disarmament regulated the size and composition of the Royal Navy, and, thus, naval disarmament directly affected the backbone of Imperial Defence. Consequently, it is important to understand how Britain confronted the naval disarmament challenge, and this is the subject of chapter three. By 1930 this challenge had been met and a satisfactory agreement had been concluded at the highly successful London Naval Conference. This was followed by a period of introspection, as far as Imperial Defence was concerned, as the general financial crisis of the early 1930s, combined with a lack of immediate threats to the Empire meant that no new, large initiatives could be undertaken. Imperial Defence policy still had to be developed, though, and decisions on coast defence, naval construction and defence spending all had to be made. All this changed after the Japanese assault on Manchuria in 1931. While this did not affect British interests directly, it underscored the fact that Britain's possessions in the Far East were relatively undefended at a time when Japan was becoming increasingly assertive in the region. This led to a renewed debate over Imperial Defence, but any response was limited by the government's concern over the continuing financial difficulties which had beset Britain and its desire to attempt to make a success out of the World Disarmament Conference. The transformation of Britain's strategic position between 1930 and 1932 forms the core of chapter four.

By the start of 1933, Britain had begun slowly to improve its defences in the Far East. However, just as this process began, Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany complicated the Imperial Defence problem. In both cases, the British wished to deter the aggressive impulses of the two powers thereby protecting British interests and forestalling another great power war. By late 1933 it was clear that to do this would require some rebuilding of Imperial Defences, combined with a measure of skilful diplomacy, and this is discussed in chapter five. The costs associated with completely rebuilding Imperial Defences, however, were judged to be so high that priorities had to be set. The professional military and diplomatic advisors to the government mapped out a series of priorities in the winter of 1934. Chapter six discusses the Cabinet's rejection of these priorities that spring. Led by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Neville Chamberlain, the Cabinet set a different course for

Imperial Defence policy, one that established the parameters of British rearmament throughout the 1930s.

This is not a study of imperial policing or the maintenance of internal security throughout the Empire. These items will be touched upon only when they affect grand strategy. Also, the changing political and defence relationship between the White Dominions and Westminster, and the growth of Indian, and colonial nationalism in general, although both had some effect on the Imperial Defence system, are not the subjects of this thesis. Rather, this is an examination of how, between 1926 and 1934, the Britain Empire reacted to external threats to its position and how it prepared for the potential eventuality of fighting another Great Power war. It is a study of how the Imperial Defence system changed in the years after the Great War and of the genesis of the key decisions on Imperial Defence policy in 1934.

Chapter 1: The Imperial Defence System After the Great War

Prior to the Second World War there was no real concept of British defence policy or of national defence. Contemporaries spoke of Imperial Defence, a term which they had inherited from Victorian times. Imperial Defence was never precisely defined but it was well understood by military men, diplomats and politicians alike. It encompassed both the defence of the Empire against internal subversion and rebellion, and defence against outside attack. The guiding assumption of Imperial Defence, however, was that the defence of Great Britain was fundamentally linked to the defence of its Empire. The reverse was also true:

> The problems of Imperial Defence arise out of the unique conditions of the British Empire. Scattered over the globe in every continent and sea, peopled by races of every colour and in widely differing stages of civilisation, the component parts of the Empire have this much in common from the point of view of defence, that with occasional and insignificant exceptions they are able to maintain order with their own resources supplemented in some cases by Imperial garrisons maintained for strategical reasons. But for any larger emergency requiring mutual support or co-operation they are dependent on the sea communications which unite them.[5]

Thus, the fates of the metropole and of its outlying possessions were bound together.

Over the centuries, a system of world-wide naval bases, army garrisons, and coaling stations had been developed to tie the Empire together physically. Following the First World War, these were supplemented by Royal Air Force (RAF) squadrons stationed at strategic points in the Middle and Far East. These forces were backed by a Main Fleet, a Home Defence Air Force (HDAF) and an Expeditionary Force, all capable of being mobilized in an emergency. During and after the First World War this system grew increasingly complicated and ever more formalized.[6] British defence planners understood that in any future great power war the resources of the entire Empire would have to be harnessed if Britain was to survive. It was the Imperial Defence system, however, that allowed Great Britain to defend its possessions, harness their resources and project its power when and where required. Altogether, the system was flexible as it allowed Britain to respond to trouble either on the periphery of

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[5] "A Review of Imperial Defence, 1926, by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee", 22 June 1926, CID 701-B, CAB 4/15.

[6] This Imperial Defence System had matured in Victorian times and was based on the intellectual underpinnings of the writings of Philip and John Colomb, Sir John Knox Laughton and Sir Julian Corbett. See Donald M. Schurman, The Education of a Navy: The Development of British Naval Strategic Thought, 1867-1914, (London: Cassell, 1965); idem., Julian S. Corbett, 1854-1922: Historian of British Maritime Policy from Drake to Jellicoe, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1981); Andrew Lambert, The Foundations of Naval History: John Knox Laughton, the Royal Navy and the Historical Profession, (London: Chatham Publishing, 1998).

Empire or to concentrate resources at home to meet a closer threat. But the Imperial Defence system was not based solely on military resources. Rather it incorporated diplomatic, commercial and financial strategies with pure military power into a grand strategy of protecting the Empire. Before proceeding to an examination of how this system functioned between 1926 and 1934, it is important to look at how the system, and each of its components, emerged from the Great War and how they changed in its aftermath. Each service, although it was a part of the system both at an abstract and at a practical level, was also an individual player with its own agenda and its own plans. These all need to be described and understood. There was also a common co-ordinating machinery for Imperial Defence and the extent of this, and its limitations, also have to be understood before a true picture of Imperial Defence policy can emerge.

The Cabinet was the authority ultimately responsible for all decisions affecting Imperial Defence, and its conclusions were put into effect by the various defence departments. Yet, in the absence of a Ministry of Defence, there remained a need to provide the Cabinet with timely and considered advice on Imperial Defence matters and to coordinate the implementation of Cabinet decisions. This dual function was performed by the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID), which was the central administrative and advisory organ for dealing with Imperial Defence issues. This body was created in 1904 on the recommendation of the Esher Committee, which had been investigating the reorganization of the War Office in the wake of the Boer War. In the ensuing years, the CID grew in size and complexity and spawned numerous sub-committees, that dealt with issues from the preparation of war plans to the study of the Defence of India.[7] From 1916 until 1923 the CID itself was in suspension but many of its sub-committees continued to function. After 1923, the CID once again became an integral part of the Imperial Defence machinery and the scope and extent of its responsibilities continued to increase. As a result, in 1923, the Salisbury Committee recommended the establishment of a Chiefs of Staff sub-committee (COS) of the CID to

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[7] The early development of the CID can be traced in Nicholas D'Ombrain, War Machinery and High Policy: Defence Administration in Peacetime Britain, 1902-1914, (London: 1973) and, to a lesser extent, in John Gooch, The Plans of War: The General Staff and British Military Strategy, 1900-1916, (New York: Wiley, 1974). The seminal work on the CID is F.A. Johnson, Defence by Committee: The British Committee of Imperial Defence, 1885-1959, (London: 1960). This latter work, however, has become dated, as it was written before the archives for this period were open.

provide collective military advice to the CID.[8] In 1932, the COS spawned its own sub-committee, the Deputy Chiefs of Staff sub-committee (DCOS). Concurrently, numerous other committees were set up with a view to institutionalizing the administrative knowledge gained during the First World War and to ensuring that preparations were made to facilitate the transition from peace to war in the future. These committees also provided advice on current matters as was required by the CID. Included in this type of committee were the Principal Supply Officers Committee (PSOC), the Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War (ATB), the Oil Board, the Manpower Committee and the Air Raids Precautions Committee, among others.[9] Committees, such as the Joint Planning Committee (JPC) and the Joint Home and Overseas Defence Committee (JDC) prepared contingency plans for the defence of British possessions or ports and for operations in a variety of theatres of war. Lastly, ad hoc sub-committees were created as they were required in order to deal with particular issues. Thus, in 1921 a committee looked at the future of the capital ship, while a year later a new committee was struck to recommend a solution to the perceived air menace from France. In general, these committees provided advice and recommendations to the CID and to the Cabinet on both significant and, often times, relatively minor aspects of Imperial Defence.

For the Royal Navy, the aftermath of the Great War meant a great deal of readjustment, apart from the

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[8] "Memorandum on the Committee of Chiefs of Staff Prepared for the Commonwealth of Australia", 3 Aug 1926, CID 713-B, CAB 4/15. See also H.G. Welch, "The Origins and Development of the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence, 1923-1939", Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of London, 1973. See also John Gooch, "The Chiefs of Staff and the Higher Organization for Defence in Britain, 1904-1984", NWCR, 39,1(1986), 53-65.

[9] This administrative sub-structure of the CID has come under increasing historical scrutiny in recent years. Various committees associated with import management and merchant shipping have been explored by Martin Doughty, Merchant Shipping and War: A Study in Defence Planning in Twentieth Century Britain, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1982). The work of the ATB and the Oil Board are covered in Orest Babij, "The Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War", The Northern Mariner, 7, 3(1997), 1-10 and idem., "The Royal Navy and Inter-War Plans for War Against Japan: The Problem of Oil Supply", in Greg Kennedy, ed., The Merchant Marine in International Affairs, 1850-1950, (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 84-106. The PSOC has been well documented in G.A.H. Gordon, British Seapower and Procurement Between the Wars: A Reappraisal of Rearmament, (London: MacMillan, 1988). Not all views of the CID have been complimentary. The formalized and intricate committee structure of the CID has been criticized for slowing or blocking decision-making and thereby retarding effective rearmament in the 1930s. Gaines Post Jr., Dilemmas of Appeasement: British Deterrence and Defence, 1934-1937, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

problems caused by massive demobilization.[10] Since the beginning of the century, the navy had been preoccupied with the threat posed by the German High Seas Fleet. Now, this threat sat at the bottom of Scapa Flow and the Weimar Republic was barred from creating a navy that could pose a challenge to Britain's control of the North Sea or its maritime trade. Nevertheless, the navy's fundamental role in Imperial Defence remained unchanged, as the Chiefs of Staff made clear in their first annual review of Imperial Defence:

> the Mother Country, the central arsenal and reserve for the whole Empire, is dependent for the essentials of life on the maintenance of a network of sea communications extending not only to the territories of the Empire, but to every part of the world. The maintenance of these sea communications, therefore is the first principle of our system of Imperial Defence. The whole fabric is built upon the assumption of the command of the sea. Unless freedom and security of sea passage throughout are assured, the system breaks down.[11]

To achieve security of sea communications, the naval staff laid out a doctrinal framework that placed the Main Fleet, built around the capital ship, as the principal deterrent to attack:

> Our naval strategy, therefore, is based on the principle that a fleet of adequate strength, suitably disposed geographically and concentrated against the enemy's fleet, provides the "cover" under

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[10] The seminal work on the inter-war navy is Stephen Roskill's two volume study, Naval Policy Between the Wars, (London: Collins, 1968 and 1976). While numerous, more recent, works have appeared on naval strategy and naval policy, nothing comes close to the scope of Roskill's work. There has been a recent doctoral dissertation that has tried to provide a broad overview of the Royal Navy in the 1920s and 1930s by attempting to integrate naval strategy, policy and a social history of the navy. Christopher Bell, "British Ideas of Sea Power, 1919-1941", Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Calgary, 1998. Many of the older works on the Royal Navy in this period have been critical either of the Royal Navy's strategic planning or of its ability to modernize and cope with the technological changes of the inter-war. Paul Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery, (New York: Charles Scribener's Sons, 1976); Arthur Marder, Old Friends, New Enemies: The Royal Navy and the Imperial Japanese Navy, Strategic Illusions, 1936-1941, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); idem., "The Influence of History on Sea Power: The Royal Navy and the Lessons of 1914-1918", in From the Dardanelles to Oran: Studies of the Royal Navy in War and Peace, 1915-1940, (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 38-47. Recent works have tended to focus on specific issues or on discrete time periods and have, on the whole, been less critical of the navy's performance in these years and have been more sympathetic to the problems it faced and the solutions it found. Jon Tetsuro Sumida, "'The Best Laid Plans': The Development of British Battle-Fleet Tactics, 1919-1942", IHR, 14, 4(1992), 681-700; Orest Babij, "The Royal Navy and the Defence of the British Empire, 1928-1934", in Keith Neilson and Greg Kennedy, eds., Far Flung Lines: Studies in Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman, (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 171-189; Joseph A. Maiolo, The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany, 1933-39: A Study in Appeasement and the Origins of the Second World War, (London: MacMillan, 1998). Nevertheless, some historians still find room for criticism, especially of governmental decisions relating to the navy. John Ferris, "'It is Our Business in the Navy to Command the Seas': The Last Decade of British Maritime Supremacy, 1919-1929", in Keith Neilson and Greg Kennedy, eds., Far Flung Lines, 124-170.

[11] "A Review of Imperial Defence, 1926, by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee", 22 June 1926, CID 701-B, CAB 4/15.

which security is given to widely dispersed territories and trade routes.[12]

Its task in war would be to try to engage the enemy's main fleet, to destroy it and thereby to secure supremacy on the seas for the Royal Navy. The naval staff, however, was realistic, and understood that a more likely scenario was that the enemy fleet might refuse to join battle and that the "struggle for sea supremacy is prolonged, and supremacy seldom absolute".[13] In this instance, the task of the British Main Fleet would be to neutralize the enemy's fleets and squadrons by keeping them in port, thereby achieving the same object as destruction. No neutralization could ever be complete, and, invariably, individual enemy units would break out and threaten British commerce or conduct sporadic attacks on isolated territories. For this reason, detached cruiser squadrons were required to supplement the Main Fleet. If they proved insufficient, it would be necessary to resort to the convoy of merchant shipping. Concurrently, the detached cruiser squadrons were a resource to be employed in attacking the enemy's trade.

The strength and composition of the post-war Royal Navy were guided in large part by the agreements on naval limitation reached at the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-22.[14] In capital ships, Britain agreed to a 'One Power Standard', which, in practice, meant that the RN was tied to parity with the United States Navy

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[12] "London Naval Conference, 1930, Basis of Naval Strategy", 17 Jan 1930, LNC (E) 10, ADM 116/2746.

[13] Ibid. The influence here of the ideas of Sir Julian Corbett is pronounced. See Julian S. Corbett, Some Principles of Maritime Strategy, (London, 1911).

[14] The Washington Naval Conference was long viewed by historians as the moment when the United States surpassed Great Britain as a great naval power. Robert Gordon Kaufman, Arms Control During the Pre-Nuclear Era, (New York: 1990); Christopher Hall, Britain, America and Arms Control, 1921-37. (London: MacMillan, 1987); William R. Braisted, The United States Navy in the Pacific, 1909-1922, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1971); Paul Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery, (New York: 1976); Michael Vlahos, The Blue Sword: The Naval War College and the American Mission, 1919-1941, (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1980). John Ferris, "The Symbol and Substance of Seapower: Great Britain, the United States and the One-Power Standard, 1919-1921", in B.J.C. McKercher, ed. Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s: The Struggle for Supremacy, (London: MacMillan, 1991), 55-80, has taken issue with this view by arguing that the Washington Conference left Britain with a favourable level of naval power. Other works on the Washington Conference include: T.H. Buckley, The United States and the Washington Conference, 1921-1922, (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1970); J. Kenneth MacDonald, "The Washington Conference and the Naval Balance of Power", in John B. Hattendorf and Robert S. Jordan, eds., Maritime Strategy and the Balance of Power: Britain and America in the Twentieth Century, (New York: St. Martin's, 1989), 189-213; John Maurer and Erik Goldstein, eds., The Washington Conference, 1921-22: Naval Rivalry, East Asian Stability and the Road to Pearl Harbour, (London: Frank Cass, 1994); Emily O. Goldman, Sunken Treaties: Naval Arms Control Between the Wars, (1994); Malcolm H. Murfett, "Look Back in Anger: The Western Powers and the Washington Conference of 1921-1922", in B.J.C. McKercher, ed., Arms Limitation and Disarmament: Restraints on War, 1899-1939, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), 83-103.

(USN) while it maintained a superiority over the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) at a ratio of 5:3.[15] The RN was allowed to build two new capital ships to compensate for the more modern American fleet, but, other than that, no new capital ship construction was allowed before 1931. In addition, each country's aircraft carrier tonnage was limited to 135,000 tons. Smaller ships were not limited, except that cruisers were not allowed to exceed 10,000 tons, armed with eight-inch guns. A British attempt to have the submarine abolished, however, failed. The result of the conference was a massive reduction in the size of the world's principal navies, in particular, the RN. An unintentional result was that the world's three largest naval powers, the United States, Great Britain and Japan, began a competitive building race in large, 10,000 ton, eight-inch gun cruisers that lasted until an equilibrium in these vessels was set at the London Naval Conference of 1930.[16]

While the Washington Naval Conference regulated the size of the RN, naval policy after the Great War was also largely driven by the fact that, shortly after the end of the Great War, the RN began to consider Japan as the next possible aggressor that it would have to face.[17] As a member of the naval staff pointed out, however, the strategic problems of a war with Japan were immense:

> Should we ever find ourselves at war with Japan it would be the first time in the history of the British Navy that the Main Fleet would be permanently based thousands of miles from Home Waters...In this eventuality we should be faced by conditions entirely different from those under which we fought in the late war.[18]

In many respects, the RN was inadequately prepared to fight a maritime war against a great power on the periphery of the Empire. In the decades before 1914, the base infrastructure needed to support the Main Fleet had been built around the threat posed by the German High Seas Fleet in the North Sea. Consequently, there were no bases capable of supporting the Main Fleet east of the Suez Canal. Furthermore, many of the RN's ships, such as its "C" class cruisers, had been designed specifically for fighting in the North Sea. They had a very short steaming radius and their cramped quarters were highly unsuitable for tropical climates. Moreover, the overseas bases that did exist

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[15] On the 'one power standard' see Ferris, "Symbol and Substance of Seapower", 55-80.

[16] For a discussion of the competitive naval race in the early to mid-1920s see John Ferris, The Evolution of British Strategic Policy, 1919-1926, (London: MacMillan, 1988).

[17] See the minutes from April-June 1919 in ADM 1/8570/287.

[18] Barry Domville minute, Oct 1921, ADM 116/3300.

had not had their defences modernized and, due to the overall shift from coal to oil as the motive fuel for the RN, they lacked adequate quantities of oil in reserve to support extended fleet operations.

In the post-war reorganization of the Royal Navy, the Main Fleet was split between Great Britain and Malta. This left no capital ships east of Suez and only a small number of light forces grouped in the East Indies and China stations. Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, after his tour of the Dominions in 1919, had suggested the creation of a great Pacific fleet composed of at least eight battleships and eight battle cruisers plus all the requisite auxiliary vessels. This proposal was not practical politics and, as one historian has described it, "bordered on fantasy".[19] It was rejected. Instead, the RN planned that, in case of war, it would move its Main Fleet from its Home and Mediterranean bases to the Far East in order to confront the IJN. After relieving the garrisons at Hong Kong and the other British possessions in the Far East, this fleet would steam north, where it would either defeat the IJN in battle or else bottle it up in its ports. This would allow the RN to impose a commercial blockade on Japan and thereby pressure Japan into accepting British terms.[20] This was still a grandiose plan that called for significant capital construction projects including a principal naval base in the Far East, forward operational bases and "a train of supply and fuel ships on a large scale".[21] In 1921, the Admiralty secured Cabinet approval for the construction of a major naval base at Singapore, which would become regarded as the linchpin of Imperial Defence in the Far East.[22] While sketch plans existed for operations beyond Singapore, initially at least, the Admiralty concentrated

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[19] Roskill, Naval Policy, v.1, 278-280.

[20] This plan was first sketched out in "British Imperial Naval Bases in the Pacific", 26 April 1919 and minutes, ADM 1/8570/287. This plan became known as the "Main Fleet to Singapore strategy", but in the Admiralty was referred to as the "War Memorandum Eastern". It was expanded and revised numerous times over the inter-war years yet its fundamentals remained unchanged. "War Memorandum Eastern", 20 Jan 1920, ADM 116/3124; "War Memorandum, 1923", Feb 1923, ADM 116/3124; "War Memorandum Eastern, 1924", 29 Aug 1924, ADM 116/3125; "War Memorandum (Eastern), 1931", July 1931, ADM 116/3118; "War Memorandum (Eastern), 1933", 19 Sept 1933, ADM 116/3475; "War Memorandum (Eastern)", March 1938, ADM 116/4393.

[21] "British Imperial Naval Bases in the Pacific", 26 April 1919, ADM 1/8570/287.

[22] A great deal has been written about the ill-fated Singapore naval base and the vicissitudes involved in its construction. Too much of this literature, however, takes too narrow a focus on the base itself and not on its role in overall Imperial Defence strategy. In this the literature falls into the same trap which befell many contemporaries, which was to regard the base as an end in itself and not as a means of facilitating the projection of British power. James Neidpath, The Singapore Naval Base and the Defence of Britain's Eastern Empire, 1919-1941, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); Ian Hamill, The Strategic Illusion: The Singapore Strategy and

its planning on the complexities of moving the fleet to the Far East.[23] Concurrently, the navy sought to establish a one-year's supply of oil fuel for the fleet, which it calculated at 7.5 million tons. This would ensure an uninterrupted supply of oil at the outbreak of war and would provide the Main Fleet with enough fuel when it reached Singapore to continue on to Hong Kong and engage the IJN if required.[24]

The need to rebalance the fleet to fight a Far Eastern war, along with the RN's perceived need to maintain pace with the IJN and USN in large cruisers, made cruiser construction policy an intractable political problem in the 1920s. The navy's primary aim throughout this period was to get government approval for a "steady uninterrupted programme over a prolonged period".[25] The RN's cruiser fleet was under significant strain in this period. Many of its war built cruisers, in particular the Cambrian and Caroline classes, had been built for service with the Main Fleet in the North Sea. Therefore, they had only a short sailing range and cramped crew quarters that were unhealthy in tropical environments.[26] Thus, they were ill-suited for Far Eastern operations. All the war-built cruisers has seen heavy service which had aged them prematurely. Altogether, this meant that the RN could be faced with a batch obsolescence in its cruiser fleet in the 1930s. In order to avoid this, and to maintain a modern fleet capable of Far Eastern operations as well as to keep naval dockyards and skilled workers employed, the RN

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the Defence of Australia and New Zealand, 1919-1942. (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1981); Paul Haggie, Britannia at Bay: The Defence of the British Empire Against Japan, 1931-1941, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); W. David MacIntyre, The Rise and Fall of the Singapore Naval Base, 1919-1942, (London: MacMillan, 1979); Malcolm H. Murfett, "Living in the Past: A Critical Re-Examination of the Singapore Naval Strategy, 1918-1941", WS, 11, 1(1993), 73-103; Raymond Callahan, "The Illusion of Security: Singapore, 1919-1942", JCH, 9(1974), 69-92.

[23] This was logical. "Passage of the Fleet to the East", July 1925, ADM 116/3123; "Passage of the Fleet to the Far East", 2 March 1925, ADM 116/3125. The secret anchorages and re-fuelling sites are detailed in ADM/116/3862. Most historians tend to focus on this first stage of a contemplated war with Japan, although there are a few exceptions. See "British Advanced Naval Bases in a Far Eastern War, 1934-35", ADM 116/3338. Ian Cowman, "An Admiralty 'Myth': The Search for an Advanced Far Eastern Fleet Base before the Second World War", JSS, 8, 3(1985), 316-326; idem., "Defence of the Malay Barrier?: The Place of the Philippines in Admiralty Naval War Planning, 1925-1941", WIH, 3, 4(1996), 398-417; Christopher Bell, "'How are we going to make war?': Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond and British Far Eastern War Plans", JSS, 20, 3(1997), 123-141; idem, "British Ideas of Sea Power, 1919-1941", 82-151.

[24] Babij, "The Royal Navy and Inter-War Plans for War Against Japan".

[25] "British and Japanese cruiser Strength", Admiralty Memorandum, 15 Aug 1927, ADM 116/3440. Emphasis in the original.

[26] Ibid.

pressured the Cabinet to approve a ten-year building programme. In the early 1920s, however, this proved difficult.[27] Governments were averse to committing to such a long-term construction programme at a time when their primary concern was with decreasing defence expenditure. As a result, the navy had to fight every year for new construction. Nevertheless, pushing through a multi-year building programme remained a cornerstone of naval policy throughout the 1920s.

Overall, the RN's plans for war with Japan called on the Imperial Defence system to operate in a manner for which it had not originally been intended. The main purpose of the system always had been to allow for the uninterrupted passage of trade and supplies between the Mother Country and the outlying dependencies. It was also designed to allow Britain to project power, but on a small-scale, suitable for seizing small colonial possessions or helping to suppress uprisings. Now, the system had to be redesigned to allow it to support large-scale British operations on the periphery of the Empire. This was a difficult and very expensive task, involving the development of an adequately defended and extensive logistical and base infrastructure in the Far East. The need to enhance Britain's ability to project power in the Far East became the driving force behind naval policy in the 1920s. But the navy's needs had to be balanced against the claims of the other services, both of which had their own roles to play in Imperial Defence.

For the British Army, the transition from war to peace arguably was more difficult than for the RN.[28] At the same time as the army underwent a massive demobilization, it was also involved in operations spread across the globe that lasted for years after the signature of the official peace treaty in 1919: intervention in Russia,

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[27] Ferris, Evolution of British Strategic Policy, is an excellent treatment of the navy's attempts to push through this programme.

[28] There is a lack of sufficient scholarly work on the inter-war British Army. The seminal work is Brian Bond, British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). Apart from this and a few shorter pieces such as Brian Bond and Williamson Murray, "The British Armed Forces, 1918-1939", in Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, eds., Military Effectiveness, v.II, the Interwar Period, (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1988), there are no other broader studies. What work there is tends to focus on specific issues, such as the British Army and counterinsurgency operations. T.R. Moreman, "'Small Wars' and 'Imperial Policing': The British Army and the Theory and Practice of Colonial Warfare in the British Empire, 1919-1939", JSS, 19, 4(1996), 105-131. Much more has been written on British ideas of armoured warfare. J.P. Harris, Men, Ideas and Tanks: British Military Thought and Armoured Forces, 1903-1939, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1995); Brian Holden Reid, J.F.C. Fuller: Military Thinker, (London: MacMillan, 1987); Richard M. Swain, "B.H. Liddell Hart and the Creation of a Theory of War, 1919-1933", AFS, (1990), 35-51.

occupation duties in Germany, counter-insurgency in Ireland, upheaval in Egypt, commitments in the Near East, and, for the Indian Army, a brief war with Afghanistan.[29] By the mid-1920s, however, these post-war crises had receded, and the army was able to settle into a more regular peacetime routine of imperial policing and garrison duties. British infantry battalions were distributed across the world in such places as Aden, Singapore, Egypt, Gibraltar, Malta, Hong Kong and at other key bases. By far the largest overseas commitment for the British Army was the garrison in India, which, in 1927, numbered 45 infantry battalions and 62 artillery batteries.[30] In fact, providing overseas garrisons was such an important role for the British Army that it was organised around this need. This system, known as the Cardwell system after its Victorian progenitor, required that the army maintain "an approximate equilibrium between the number of units maintained overseas and the number maintained at home".[31] The units at home, among which were counted the units in Northern Ireland and Germany, were the depots for reliefs for the overseas battalions. , they could be formed into an Expeditionary Force for extra-European operations, if required. They would be supplemented, eventually, by divisions formed from the Territorial Army (TA). The army also had to provide a large number of anti-aircraft and searchlight batteries at home as part of the Air Defence of Great Britain (ADGB) system.

In addition to its regular garrison duties, the army maintained the coast defence fortresses at the principal British naval bases, although, in order to cut costs, they were manned mostly by local volunteers or the Territorial Army. The construction of new fortifications was paid for by the army, and so the start of any new defensive works, such as at Singapore, significantly affected army estimates. As overall defence expenditure was cut back in the 1920s, the army found itself squeezed because of the need to maintain its overseas garrisons. Budgets could not be reduced simply by cutting the size of the army. Some relief was provided by reducing the number of overseas battalions, but these garrisons could be reduced only so much. By 1927 there were 11 fewer infantry battalions

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[29] Keith Jeffery, The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918-1922, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Thomas R. Mockaitis, British Counterinsurgency, 1919-1960, (London: MacMillan, 1990).

[30] "The Present Distribution and Strength of the British Army in Relation to its Duties", November 1927, CID 847-B, CAB 4/17.

[31] Ibid.

employed on garrison duty overseas than in 1914 but the army was concerned that this left the Empire too exposed.[32] So, it desired to increase the number of battalions stationed in Egypt and the Far East, but this was not possible in the relatively peaceful period of the late 1920s. In order to reduce its budget, the army was forced to find savings in other areas, for instance by scaling back the level of readiness of the TA and of the Expeditionary Force. In 1927, at the request of the army, the Cabinet decreed that the Expeditionary Force did not have to be prepared to fight a European war and, instead, that it should be organized for an extra-European, in other words, imperial, conflict.[33] This decision reflected the already low level of readiness of the Expeditionary Force which could mobilize nowhere near as quickly as the BEF had in 1914.[34] Furthermore, successive budgetary cuts made it increasingly difficult for the army to find the money for modernization programmes such as mechanization, and for experimentation with armoured vehicles. These were key issues, for senior officers realized that they had to modernize the army. The infantry-heavy divisions of 1914 were no longer applicable to modern war. Now they required more heavy weapons, tanks and armoured vehicles.[35] In addition to this, the horse was on the way out, particularly in the artillery and in the logistics services.[36] In fact, mechanizing the army's support structure was a major priority in the 1920s, but all these reforms had to be made at a time when the army estimates were lower, in real terms, than they had been in 1914.

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Cabinet 45(27), 28 July 1927, CAB 23/55.

[34] A 1928 study by the War Office estimated that it would take over 6 months to mobilize 5 divisions, 1 cavalry brigade and corps troops. Mobilization was so slow because of the lack of sufficient reserves of manpower and equipment and also because of the constraint of finding enough shipping to move the Expeditionary Force overseas. "Present Distribution and Strength of the British Army in Relation to Its Duties", 12 March 1928, CID 861-B, CAB 4/17.

[35] Ibid.

[36] "Sub-Committee on the Strength and Organisation of the Cavalry-Report", 3 May 1928, CID 872-B, CAB 4/17. This committee concluded that "there is every reason to believe that Cavalry officers, and the class which provides them, are quite ready to look facts in the face, and...to take no exception to the change from horses to machine". This statement was a little optimistic. This committee had only been struck on the insistence of Winston Churchill, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and among its annexes were numerous statements by high-ranking, retired officers, defending the need for horse-borne cavalry. Nevertheless, the process of changing the cavalry to armoured car and mechanized machine gun units had already begun and would continue throughout the inter-war period.

Much of the British Army's strength in the 1920s was devoted to the defence of India and its mobilization plans for an extra-European war were really based on the perceived need to defend the North-West Frontier of India from a Russian attack through Afghanistan.[37] Yet, at the same time as India was a significant Imperial Defence commitment, the large Indian Army was an asset to the Imperial Defence system for it provided Britain with a pool of manpower for use elsewhere in the Empire. This had been the case before the First World War and, during the war, large numbers of Indian troops had served outside of India. With the rise of Indian nationalism in the 1920s, and, as a result of the Montagu-Chelmsford political reforms of 1919, the Indian government had a greater say over the use of Indian troops outside the sub-continent. Although this placed further restrictions on the use of Indian Army troops for Imperial Defence, it did not end the practice.[38] In the mid-1920s, one Indian battalion garrisoned Aden and another was part of the Hong Kong garrison. Throughout the inter-war period, the Indian army continued to be viewed as a potential Imperial reserve in the event of a larger threat east of Suez.[39]

While both the navy and the army struggled throughout the 1920s to meet their commitments with increasingly smaller budgets, the Royal Air Force (RAF) found that it benefited from the changed circumstances of Imperial Defence after the Great War. It was the youngest of the three services, having been established as an independent service department only in 1918.[40] Nevertheless, in the 1920s it performed a variety of important roles within the Imperial Defence system, of which one of the key ones was to police large tracts of the Empire with a few squadrons of aircraft and armoured cars. After a successful intervention by RAF planes against Dervish rebels in Somaliland in 1920, Winston Churchill, at the time the Secretary of State for War and Air, pressed for the adoption of aircraft as a substitute for military forces in the maintenance of order in Iraq. This idea was taken up

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[37] This topic is taken up in detail in chapter 2.

[38] On the increasing difficulty of using Indian troops outside of India see J.O. Rawson, "The Role of India in Imperial Defence Beyond Indian Frontiers and Home Waters, 1919-1939", unpublished DPhil dissertation, Oxford University, 1976.

[39] Keith Jeffery, "'An English Barrack in the Oriental Seas'?: India in the Aftermath of the First World War", MAS, 15, 3(1981), 369-386.

[40] There is a voluminous literature on the RAF between the wars, but only a few surveys of the entire period. The key work in this regard is Malcolm Smith, British Air Strategy Between the Wars, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984). Also a survey, but far less satisfactory, is H. Montgomery Hyde, British Air Policy Between the Wars, (London: 1976).

with great enthusiasm by Sir Hugh Trenchard, the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS), as a way to ensure the independent survival of the RAF. This concept was accepted by a British Cabinet intent on decreasing government, especially military, expenditure, and, by the mid-1920's, the RAF was responsible for such things as policing Iraq, Transjordan and Palestine.[41] As time went on the RAF tried to expand its control over other territories and to widen the scope of air substitution to include the replacement of coastal artillery by aircraft. This policy ran counter to the accepted wisdom of the other services, who tended to view it as a cynical ploy to enlarge the RAF at their expense. The debates and battles over the policy of air substitution formed an important backdrop to the development of Imperial Defence policy throughout the 1920's and well into the 1930's. The hostility this generated between the three services hindered effective cooperation in the COS and CID and retarded the modernization of the Empire's coast defences.

Apart from its role in policing the internal security of the Empire, the RAF also provided a few squadrons dedicated to supporting the army, so-called Army Cooperation squadrons, and it provided the aircraft, training and the bulk of the pilots for the Fleet Air Arm (FAA). This arrangement was unsatisfactory for all the services. The RAF maintained control of the squadrons in direct support of the other services because, doctrinally, the Air Staff believed in the concept of unified air operations and because it feared that if the other services gained control over their own air arms then the rationale for an independent air force might wither. In addition to these roles, the RAF was also responsible for the Air Defence of Great Britain (ADGB) Command, formed on January 1, 1925. This consisted of an integrated system of command and control, a chain of warning systems and fighter squadrons, all provided by the RAF, and anti-aircraft guns and searchlights provided by the army.[42] This system had been

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[41] On the origins of air control see David Omissi, Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force 1919-1939, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990). For a critical look at the use of air control see Charles Townshend, "Civilization and 'Frightfulness': Air Control in the Middle East Between the Wars", in Chris Wrigley, ed., Warfare Diplomacy and Politics: Essays in Honour of A.J.P. Taylor, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986). Apart from the fact that air control provided a rationale for an independent air force in the peaceful era of the 1920's, operations in the Middle East provided valuable training for RAF pilots and aircrew and allowed the RAF to develop and test doctrine. Jafna L. Cox, "A Splendid Training Ground: The Importance to the Royal Air Force of its Role in Iraq, 1919-1932", JICH, 13, 2(1985), 157-184. Air control proved most effective in sparsely inhabited, rural areas. In more densely populated Palestine, it was less effective. David Omissi, "Technology and Repression: Air Control in Palestine, 1922-36", JSS, 13, 4 (1990), 41-63.

[42] The first post-war air defence scheme was sketched out in "Report of the Joint Air Ministry and War Office Committee on Anti-Aircraft Defence", 9 April 1923, CID 118-A, CAB 3/4.

developed as the London Air Defence Area (LADA) during the First World War as a response to the Zeppelin, Gotha and Giant raids.[43] Ultimately, this system became Fighter Command on the eve of the Second World War and was responsible for protecting the south of England from air raids from the Continent.[44]

However, while it was responsible for developing and commanding the defensive aspect of the ADGB, the RAF maintained a belief that the best protection against strategic bombing was to possess a strong enough bomber force either to deter a potential enemy from attacking or, in case of war, to take the fight to his country.[45] Although there were significant disagreements within the RAF and the Air Ministry over counter-bombing targeting and the relative proportion of defensive fighters to bombers required, there remained a consensus that the independent striking arm of the RAF could play a crucial, if not the crucial, role in a future war. This theory was more fully developed between 1922 and 1924. At the time, the combination of a deterioration in Anglo-French relations and the growth of the French air force led to concern that Britain's inability to respond to a French air attack would weaken its diplomatic position in Europe and leave it at the sufferance of its traditional enemy across the Channel.[46] This led to calls for the build up of the RAF at home.[47] As a result, the government authorized the

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[43] On the World War One origins of the ADGB system see John Ferris, "Airbandit: C3I and Strategic Air Defence during the First Battle of Britain, 1915-1918" in Michael Dockrill and David French, eds., Strategy and Intelligence: British Policy During the First World War, (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), 23-66. Also, idem., "Fighter Defence Before Fighter Command: The Rise of Strategic Air Defence in Great Britain, 1917-1934", JMH., 63(1999), 845-84.

[44] The official history of the ADGB is B. Collier, The Defence of the United Kingdom, (London: HMSO, 1957). More recent works are: Neil Young, "British Home Air Defence Planning in the 1920s", JSS, 11, 4(1988), 492-508 and Alexander Rose, "Radar and Air Defence in the 1930s", TCBH, 9, 2(1998), 219-245.

[45] Two of the classic works on the RAF and strategic bombing are: Neville Jones, The Origins of Strategic Bombing, (London, 1973) and C. Webster and N. Frankland, The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany, 1939-1945, v.1, Preparation, (London:1961). There is, however, a voluminous quantity of literature on this subject. B.D. Powers, Strategy Without Slide Rule: British Air Strategy, 1914-1939, (London: 1976); Malcolm Smith, "'A Matter of Faith': British Strategic Air Doctrine before 1939", JCH, 15(1980), 423-442; Allan D. English, "The RAF Staff College and the Evolution of British Strategic Bombing Policy, 1922-1929", JSS, 16, 3(1993), 408-431; Phillip S. Meilinger, "Trenchard and 'Morale Bombing': The Evolution of Royal Air Force Doctrine Before World War II", JmilH, 60(1996), 243-270; Scot Robertson, The Development of RAF Strategic Bombing Doctrine, 1919-1939, (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995).

[46] John Ferris, "The Theory of a 'French Air Menace', Anglo-French Relations and the British Home Defence Air Force Programmes of 1921-1925", JSS, 10, 1(1987), 62-83; Young, "British Home Air Defence Planning"; Hines H. Hall III, "British Air Defense and Anglo-French Relations, 1921-1924", JSS, 4, 3(1981), 271-284. In reality, though, any strategic role for the French Air Force was severely limited by its subordination to the army at this time. Robert J. Young, "The Strategic Dream: French Air Doctrine in the

construction of a 52 squadron Home Defence Air Force (HDAF), composed of both bomber and fighter aircraft, which was to be completed by 1929. But, as concern over the French threat diminished by 1925, and as the international climate appeared more benign, the Cabinet pushed back the completion date for the HDAF from 1929 to 1935.

As the HDAF sank in priority, the RAF began to emphasize the potential of using aircraft to bind together the Empire. Its role in policing vast tracts of the post-war Empire had already been confirmed, but the RAF now highlighted its ability to complement the Imperial Defence system in other ways. The great advantages of air forces, according to Trenchard was their mobility and their speed. Thus, "with air mobility...which becomes possible by the establishment of air ports in all parts of our dominions, and the running of civil air lines, our Empire would be linked up by a network of *organised air routes*".[48] So, the development and expansion of a system of air routes throughout the Empire also became a priority for the RAF:

> The Air Staff are convinced that the primary object of Imperial air policy during the next few years should be to increase the mobility of the Air Arm to the fullest possible extent, by developing air routes over which squadrons can be rapidly moved for the reinforcement of any threatened areas...it should particularly be our object to develop air bases and fuelling stations.[49]

Doctrinally, this concept mirrored naval ideas on Imperial Defence and the maintenance of sea communications, as the air staff freely admitted:

> air security...depends not upon the strength of any air units maintained locally, but upon the efficacy of our arrangements rapidly to bring large air forces to the threatened point when the need arises...these principles have been those which have traditionally governed British naval strategy...[50]

Incidentally, the development of imperial air routes gave new life to the HDAF, which now became the imperial

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Inter-War Period, 1919-1939", JCH, 9, 4(1974), 57-76.

[47] "Report of the Sub-Committee on Continental Air Menace", 26 April 1922, CID 106-A, CAB 3/3.

[48] "Mobility of Air Forces in relation to the Defence of the Empire", 2 Nov 1926, AIR 8/81. Italics in the original. There is little scholarly literature on imperial air routes. See Robert L. McCormack, "Imperial Mission: the Air Route to Cape Town, 1918-1932", JCH, 9, 4(1974), 77-97. Robin Higham, Britain's Imperial Air Routes, 1918-1939, (London: G.T. Foulis, 1960) focusses on civil aviation in the Empire.

[49] "Air Power and Imperial Defence", October 1926, CID 721-B, CAB 4/15.

[50] Ibid.

strategic air reserve. At a time when the range of aircraft was limited and their reliability questionable, large numbers of landing fields, aerodromes and emergency strips had to be completed. It was an immense undertaking and a costly one. But, by 1925, an air route had been opened between Egypt and India through Iraq. As well, plans were underway to extend this route across India to Singapore and, eventually, to Australia and Hong Kong. Other routes were to be developed across Africa, south to Capetown and linking West and East Africa.

All the air policies - air policing, the development of imperial air routes and strategic bombing - were, at heart, not complementary to the older services, but a substitute for the older services. The result of this was that relations between the three services were often poor, as each was afraid that any decision which went against it might have broader repercussions. But, the dispute over air substitution reflected another problem of making defence policy in the 1920s: the need to consider and to factor rapid technological change into long-term Imperial Defence planning. Because of this rapid change, there was a great deal of technological uncertainty. Each service reacted somewhat differently to this problem. One of the principal reasons why the navy desired a long-term building programme was to avoid batch building and, consequently, batch obsolescence. Building yearly permitted the Admiralty to outfit each new ship with the latest technology. The RAF, for its part, was willing to accept a smaller overall number of aircraft in order to ensure that its squadrons were equipped with the latest models. In considering the outfitting of the Expeditionary Force, army planners realized that, "It would certainly seem uneconomical to maintain a large store of war material which in these days of invention rapidly becomes out-of-date...".[51]

The three defence departments were not the only ones concerned with Imperial Defence. The Board of Trade, the Colonial Office, the India Office, the Dominions Office, the Treasury and the Foreign Office all had roles to play in the Imperial Defence system. Of these the Treasury and the Foreign Office were the key departments.[52] The Treasury was the government's principal financial advisor. Each year Treasury clerks carefully scrutinised each department's estimates and were able to question every item of expenditure. This gave the

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[51] "Present Distribution and Strength of the British Army in Relation to its Duties", 12 March 1928, CID 861-B, CAB 4/17.

[52] The Board of Trade was primarily concerned with commercial relations, which are not the focus of this thesis. The Colonial Office and the Dominions Office were important in the context of internal security but less relevant in term of external threats.

Treasury the power to affect service estimates and to try to fit service expenditure into its own strategic conceptions. Under its strong-willed Permanent Secretary, Sir Warren Fisher, the Treasury began to move beyond being a simple accountant of Imperial Defence expenditure. Fisher believed that the Treasury should be able to tender independent strategic advice on Imperial Defence issues even if this took it out of the realm of pure finance.[53] These independent views were most pronounced in two areas. First, the Treasury supported the RAF as a cost-effective method of substitution for the older services. As one Treasury clerk remarked in 1929, "the Air Ministry policy of 'substitution' is largely also the Treasury policy".[54] Second, the Treasury developed its own views on Anglo-Japanese relations, which were crucial to its estimates of the potential for a threat in the Far East. From the 1920s through to the 1930s, the Treasury consistently believed that war between Britain and Japan was impossible.[55] Even when Japan did begin to threaten British interests in 1931, the Treasury argued that the costs of Far Eastern defence were more than Britain could sustain. Thus, the Treasury opposed defence expenditure for items which were designed solely for a war with Japan, and it always pushed for closer Anglo-Japanese relations, to the point of advocating a return to something approaching the Anglo-Japanese Alliance which had been abrogated in 1921. The Treasury's foray into the foreign policy field, however, brought it into conflict with the Foreign Office (FO).

The FO was an absolutely crucial department for Imperial Defence. The defence services provided the physical security for the Imperial Defence system, but it was the FO which advised the government on the development of likely external threats to the Empire. It was also the FO's responsibility to advise the government on the direction of foreign policy and to work, on a day to day basis, on preventing the emergence of any new threats. Yet, the FO's ability to influence the Cabinet, like that of any department, was heavily dependent on the strength of its Minister's position in Cabinet and his ability to influence his colleagues' opinions. Under the strong leadership of an Austen Chamberlain, the FO held a commanding position in Cabinet on foreign policy issues. But, under a weaker leader, such as John Simon, the FO's voice was not as strong. Nevertheless, although the FO's

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[53] G.C. Peden, "Sir Warren Fisher and British Rearmament Against Germany", HJ, XCIV, (1979), 29-47.

[54] W.R. Fraser minute, 5 Dec 1929, T 161/534/S.35241.

[55] The Treasury's views on Anglo-Japanese relations will developed fully in Chapter 3 through 6.

relative strength varied, from 1925 until 1937 it "dominated the foreign-policy making process".[56] This gave the FO tremendous influence over decisions that affected Imperial Defence in the years 1926-1934 and a knowledge of the perceptions and opinions of its key members are central to understanding the development of Imperial Defence policy.

In addition to departmental priorities, there were other, broader planning assumptions behind defence expenditure in the interwar period. Perhaps the most known and most widely misunderstood assumption is the so-called "ten year rule". Basically, this was a brief statement on defence, first enunciated in 1919, which laid down that defence expenditure should be based on the assumption that there would be no major war for ten years. At the time it was first proposed, as Great Britain was undergoing a period of general demobilization and was faced with no great power threats, the proposition made sense. However, since then it has been heavily criticized by historians for undermining the defence services throughout the 1920s by giving the Treasury a foundation on which to lay its criticisms of defence expenditure. In effect, they argue, it led to Treasury control over defence expenditure.[57] However, as John Ferris has already pointed out, the rule was rarely applied in the early 1920s and it was only in 1925 that the Treasury really applied it against naval expenditure.[58] It was only in 1928 that the rule was placed on a revolving footing and, as will be shown in chapters three and four, the rule rarely had a decisive influence on defence expenditure. Although it was often quoted by contemporaries, other factors, such as the 1931 financial crisis, the need for increased domestic expenditure, or the individual priorities of Ministers played a far larger role in shaping defence expenditure. Although the "ten year rule" certainly affected the debate around defence expenditure, it did not shape it to the exclusion of all else.

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[56] B.J.C. McKercher, "Old Diplomacy and New: The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1919-1939", in Michael Dockrill and Brian McKercher, eds., Diplomacy and World Power: Studies in British Foreign Policy, 1890-1950., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 80.

[57] Paul Kennedy, The Realities Behind Diplomacy, (London: Fontana Press, 1981), 231; Correlli Barnett, The Collapse of British Power, (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972); N. Gibbs, Grand Strategy, v.1, Rearmament Policy, (London: HMSO, 1976); P. Silverman, "The Ten Year Rule", JRUSI, 116(1971); Stephen Roskill, "The Ten Year Rule: The Historical Facts", JRUSI, 117(1972); K. Booth, "The Ten Year Rule: An Unfinished Debate", JRUSI, 116(1971), 58-59.

[58] John Ferris, "Treasury Control, the Ten Year Rule and British Service Policies, 1919-1924", HJ, 30(1987), 859-883.

The government and public service, though, did not conduct their decision-making in a vacuum. Elected politicians, in particular, were cognizant of the need to take into consideration a variety of outside influences, including Parliament, the press, various interest groups and public opinion, however they defined it. Whatever decisions were agreed to in Cabinet, whatever international treaties were signed, eventually they all had to be defended by Ministers in Parliament. Thus, Parliament and public opinion tended to set the broad limits on what policies governments felt they could pursue. For instance, throughout the period covered by this thesis, governments could not ignore calls for international disarmament, particularly due to the size and importance of the League of Nations Union and other peace-related interest groups. However, when it came to developing specific policies or taking specific actions, public opinion was less influential. So, while the government had to be seen as pursuing international disarmament, the specifics of its proposals were developed without outside consultation. Just as important as public opinion was the Ministers' perceptions of public opinion. In 1933-34, the government's perception of the public reaction to German rearmament in the air significantly influenced the government's decision on defence expenditure, as will be seen in chapters five and six.

In addition to general public opinion and interest groups, individual writers such as Sir Herbert Richmond and Basil Liddell Hart also provided a source of outside opinion to policy-makers. Richmond, although a serving member until the early 1930s, was critical of much of the navy's strategic thought. For instance, as Commander in Chief East Indies Station, Richmond wrote a lengthy critique of the navy's 1924 Far Eastern war plan.[59] His comments, though, did little to influence the further development of these plans. Prior to the London Naval Conference of 1930 his frustrations boiled over and he published several articles in support of smaller capital ships, a view diametrically opposed to that of the Admiralty Board. This move pretty well ended his career and, although he did catch the ear of the Prime Minister, he had little real effect on the course of the conference.[60] Liddell Hart, for his part, was a popular commentator on military policy and he reached a significant audience as the military correspondent for the Daily Telegraph. Liddell Hart was well connected, a fact underscored by the voluminous correspondence in his private papers. Throughout the inter-war period he was often very critical of established

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[59] "CinC East Indies Remarks on War Memorandum-Eastern", 13 April 1925, ADM 116/3125.

[60] Barry D. Hunt, Sailor-Scholar: Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, 1871-1946, (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1982), 190-200.

defence policy and was a military theorist in his own right. In fact, his writings have proven immensely influential. However, before the late 1930s, Liddell Hart's influence on the development of defence policy was limited.[61] His timed interventions on specific issues could lead to action, such as when he helped prod the War Office into forming the Experimental Mechanized Force in 1927.[62] Liddell Hart's writings on what he termed the "British Way in Warfare" providing some intellectual underpinnings to those who wanted to avoid building up forces to fight on the continent. However, his ability to influence decisions on broader questions of Imperial Defence was very limited in this period. Certainly, he had little to no effect on key issues such as naval disarmament, air substitution or the Defence Requirements Sub-Committee (DRC).

Altogether, these were the key internal elements that defined, produced and maintained the Imperial Defence system in the inter-war period. However, the system was influenced by, and had to react to, outside events and powers. In particular, the system was dependent on the perception of what threats the British Empire faced at any given time. The following chapters will examine how the Imperial Defence system developed and responded to the various challenges that confronted it during the relatively peaceful years of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

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[61] On Liddell Hart see: Brian Bond, Liddell Hart: A Study of His Military Thought, (London: Cassell, 1977); John J. Mearsheimer, Liddell Hart and the Weight of History, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[62] Harold Winton, To Change an Army, (London: Brassey's, 1988), 78-79.

Chapter Two: The Red Menace and the Empire

In their first ever Annual Review of Imperial Defence, written in June 1926, the COS summed up the current situation for the British Empire by stating that "there is not at present in sight any prominent threat to our own security, or any great likelihood of our being forced into military intervention abroad".[63] This was just as well, as the COS also pointed out that British defence commitments, both in Europe and in the Empire, outstripped the defence forces to meet them. However, there was one area of concern. The COS warned that the Soviet Union appeared to be spreading its influence throughout Central Asia and the East, perhaps hoping ultimately to threaten British rule in India. The question of whether the COS were correct in their appreciation of Soviet intentions became a central element in discussions of Imperial Defence policy in the mid-1920s. If they were right then there were potentially significant ramifications for defence spending and priorities. Their assessment, however, was tested by events in Afghanistan from 1925-1927 and, most importantly, by the nationalist resurgence in China.

On the third of January, 1927, a mob of Chinese anti-foreign protestors clashed with British marines guarding the small, isolated British concession in Hankow, a provincial Chinese city far inland along the Yangtse river. During the day, the situation gradually deteriorated and the British consul-general, Herbert Goffe, concluded an agreement with the local Chinese authorities in the hope of averting serious violence. He agreed to withdraw the British marines protecting the concession in return for the Chinese authorities agreeing to guard the concession from the outside. However, the next day, after the marines had been withdrawn, a mob moved into the concession and by evening it was under Chinese control. Goffe, conscious of the complications that could arise from any armed clash between Nationalist Chinese and British forces, held back from ordering an immediate reoccupation of the concession[64]. His action averted any rapid escalation, but the forcible occupation of a British concession by a Chinese mob struck at the heart of the British position in China and immediately became a major crisis for policymakers in London with potential ramifications for foreign and defence policy, not just in the Far East but also throughout the Empire and Europe.

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[63] "A Review of Imperial Defence, 1926", 22 June 1926, CID 701-B, CAB 4/15.

[64] Goffe telegram, 3 Jan 1927, FO 371/12430/F67/67/10; Goffe telegram, 4 Jan 1927, FO 371/12430/F83/67/10; Goffe telegram, 5 Jan 1927, FO 371/12430/F92/67/10; Vice-Admiral Tyrwhitt [CinC, China Station] telegram, 5 Jan 1927, FO 371/12430/F120/67/10.

Two factors made the incident at Hankow significant. First, after some debate, Britain responded by sending a division of troops to protect the British concession at Shanghai. This episode, thus, demonstrated Britain's ability to use force, combined with diplomacy, to protect its imperial interests and highlighted the workings of the Imperial Defence system. Second, British policymakers did not view the Hankow incident as an isolated occurrence. For some time Britain had been on the defensive in China, as the post-war Chinese nationalist awakening clashed with British commercial and political interests in the Middle Kingdom. Early on, Chinese nationalists, based in the southern city of Canton, had forged close links with the Chinese communist party and with the Soviet Union. As a result, British policymakers perceived events in China as part of a broader Soviet strategy which aimed at undermining, and eventually destroying, the British Empire. In these years there were genuine British fears that the Soviet Union was actively conspiring to overthrow British rule in India, in China and throughout the Empire. Between 1925 and 1928, because of incidents like Hankow in China, clashes along the Afghan-Soviet border, and the domestic crisis inspired by the General Strike of 1926, the British fear of Soviet intrigue reached new heights.

Dealing with the Russian, and later, Soviet, threat to the British Empire was a classic dilemma of Imperial Defence with antecedents stretching back to the eighteenth century.[65] Recently, Keith Neilson has shown that, prior to the First World War, British foreign defence policy was not solely animated by the German threat but rather that Russia was a significant factor throughout this period.[66] As a result, he has concluded that a good deal of British pre-war diplomacy has been misunderstood. Similarly, inter-war British historians have tended to overlook the importance of the Soviet Union in British policy-making, and this has tended to skew interpretations of British decision-making. In the 1920s, and particularly between 1925 and 1928, fears of Soviet expansion dominated discussions of Imperial Defence. Before considering this period in more detail, however, it is important to understand the context of the development of Anglo-Soviet relations after the Great War.

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[65] Edward Ingram, In Defence of British India: Great Britain in the Middle East, (London: 1984); *idem.*, Commitment to Empire: Prophecies of the Great Game in Asia 1797-1800, (Oxford: 1981); *idem.*, The Beginning of the Great Game in Asia, 1828-1834, (Oxford: 1979); Malcolm Yapp, Strategies of British India: Britain, Iran and Afghanistan, 1798-1850, (Oxford: 1980); Rose Louise Graves, Persia and the Defence of India, 1884-1892, (London: 1959); D.R. Gillard, The Struggle for Asia, 1828-1914, (London: 1977).

[66] Keith Neilson, Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia, 1894-1917, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

From the beginning, Anglo-Soviet relations were fraught with difficulty. Even after the withdrawal of the British intervention force in Russia, and the abandonment of any real hope of forcibly overthrowing the Bolshevik regime, large segments of British popular and official opinion remained hostile to the Soviet Union.[67] Apart from a widespread dislike of communist doctrine, and a lingering revulsion among conservatives over the murder of the Russian royal family, there were numerous concrete causes of friction between the two powers. The Soviet repudiation of Tsarist debts and confiscation of British property and concessions was one of the principal sources of this friction. This was exacerbated by a widespread perception among British policymakers that the Soviet Union was engaged in a world-wide propaganda campaign against British interests, one which not only threatened Britain itself but also struck at the heart of British imperial power.

Nevertheless, post-war British governments slowly accepted the existence of the Soviet regime and warily began to resume relations. In 1921 David Lloyd George, the Prime Minister and leader of the Coalition government, signed a trade agreement with the Soviet Union, but it was not until the First Labour government of James Ramsay MacDonald that de jure recognition was extended in 1924.[68] Throughout these first three years, Anglo-Soviet relations were overshadowed by the wider problems of arriving at a general post-war settlement. Instead, they centred for the most part on trade.[69] This is not to say that Soviet actions did not spark concern. Lord

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[67] These feelings, however, were not universal. Many on the left in Britain gladly welcomed the new, Soviet experiment. F.M. Leventhal, "Seeing the Future: British Left-Wing Travellers to the Soviet Union, 1919-1932", in J.M.W. Bean, ed. The Political Culture of Modern Britain: Studies in Memory of Stephen Koss, (London: Hamish, Hamilton, 1987), 209-227; Martin Durham, "British Revolutionaries and the Suppression of the Left in Lenin's Russia, 1918-1924", JCH, 20(1985), 203-219; David Caute, The Fellow Travellers: A Postscript to the Enlightenment, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973); Paul Hollander, Passionate Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba, 1928-1978, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

[68] On the initiation of Anglo-Soviet relations see: M.V. Glenny, "The Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement, March 1921", JCH, 5, 2(1970), 63-82; Richard K. Debo, Survival and Consolidation: The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1918-1921, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 248-271, 311-343; idem., "Lloyd George and the Copenhagen Conference of 1919-1920: The Initiation of Anglo-Soviet Negotiations", HJ, 24, 2(1981), 429-441; Richard H. Ullman, Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917-1921, (3 vols., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961-72).

[69] For the development of Anglo-Soviet trade relations see: Andrew J. Williams, Trading with the Bolsheviks: The Politics of East-West Trade 1920-1939, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); Roger Munting, "Becos Traders and the Russian Market in the 1920s", JEEH, 25, 1(1996), 69-96; Geoffrey Jones and Clive Trebilcock, "Russian Industry and British Business, 1910-1930: Oil and Armaments", JEEH, 11, 1(1982), 72-81.

Curzon, the Foreign Secretary, maintained a chilly relationship with the Soviet Union.[70] Soviet propaganda activities in Britain and the Empire, and her support for nationalist rebels in the colonies further reduced the temperature.[71]

Anglo-Soviet relations worsened in late 1924 after the publication of the intercepted Zinoviev letter in which the president of the Third International appeared to exhort British communists to foment revolution.[72] But, Stanley Baldwin's Conservative majority, which came to power in the late autumn of 1924, in part due to the furore aroused by the publication of the Zinoviev letter, did not break off relations with Moscow. However, the Conservative Cabinet was deeply split over the entire issue of Anglo-Soviet relations. This became even more pronounced after the signature of the Locarno agreements appeared to settle European issues, allowing attention to shift toward imperial concerns.

This Cabinet split centred less over whether the Soviet Union posed a threat to the British Empire, and more over how Britain could best meet this threat. There was a widespread consensus within the senior ranks of the Conservative caucus and the Whitehall bureaucracy that the Soviet Union was an expansionist power, which

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[70] The most recent work on Curzon at the Foreign Office is G.H. Bennett, British Foreign Policy During the Curzon Period, 1919-24, (London: MacMillan, 1995). More dated, but still useful, studies of the Conservative Party's attitudes towards the Soviet Union are: Richard Schinness, "An Early Pilgrimage to Soviet Russia: Four Conservative M.P.s Challenge Tory Party Policy", HJ, 18, 3(1975), 623-631; idem., "The Conservative Party and Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1925-7", ESR, 7(1977), 393-407.

[71] On the British response to perceived Soviet subversion in these years see: Christopher Andrew, Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community, (London: Sceptre, 1986), 259-354; Richard J. Popplewell, Intelligence and Imperial Defence: British Intelligence and the Defence of the Indian Empire1904-1924, (London: Frank Cass, 1995).

[72] On the controversy surrounding the Zinoviev Letter see: John Ferris and Uri Bar-Joseph, "Getting Marlowe to Hold His Tongue: The Conservative Party, the Intelligence Services and the Zinoviev letter", DS, 8, 4(1993), 100-137. For the previous debate on this subject it is useful to read Sybil Crowe, "The Zinoviev Letter: A Reappraisal" JCH, 10, 3(1975), 407-432; Christopher Andrew, "The British Secret Service and Anglo-Soviet Relations in the 1920s: Part I: From the Trade Negotiations to the Zinoviev Letter", HJ, 20, 3(1977), 673-706; idem., "More on the Zinoviev Letter", HJ, 22, 1(1979), 211-214; E.H. Carr, "The Zinoviev Letter", HJ, 22, 1(1979), 209-210. For a recent review of the relationship between the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Comintern see: Andrew Thorpe, "Comintern 'Control' of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-43", EHR, CXIII(1998), 637-662.

was attempting to spread its influence worldwide through propaganda and subversion.[73] While Soviet activities raised concerns that it was attempting to inspire revolution within Britain, it was also widely believed that the British Empire was the principal target of Soviet actions, especially in Asia and the Far East.[74] Events in Afghanistan and China between 1925 and 1927 appeared to confirm this hypothesis. Yet, while British policymakers agreed that the Soviet Union posed a serious threat to the Empire, they disagreed over the extent of this threat and over the response that Britain should adopt. Within Baldwin's Cabinet there were three strong voices which argued in favour of severing ties between Britain and the Soviet Union as a method of dealing with the threat: Winston Churchill, the Chancellor of the Exchequer; William Joynson-Hicks, the Home Secretary, and Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India. Austen Chamberlain, the Foreign Secretary, and the FO opposed any such drastic action and were less apprehensive about the extent and immediacy of the Soviet threat. The FO and Chamberlain were able to maintain control of Anglo-Soviet relations and prevent a break with Moscow until the spring of 1927. In large measure, this was due to the authority Chamberlain possessed as Foreign Secretary and to the support that he enjoyed from the Prime Minister.[75]

Of the service departments, it was the War Office (WO) that was most concerned over the Russian threat to the British Empire.[76] In part this was a result of its overseas commitments, particularly on the Indian sub-continent, and in part it was due to the anti-Soviet views of its senior leadership. But, a serious Soviet threat could

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[73] The standard work on Anglo-Soviet relations in this period is Gabriel Gorodetsky, The Precarious Truce: Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1924-27, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). This work, however, does not pay much attention to the wider, imperial aspects of the Anglo-Soviet relationship. Much better in this regard is Keith Neilson, "'Pursued by a Bear': British Estimates of Soviet Military Strength and Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1922-1939", CJH, 28(1993), 189-221.

[74] There was less concern about the Middle East. There was enough anti-Bolshevik sentiment in the region that Soviet influence was limited. John Darwin, "An Undeclared Empire: the British in the Middle East, 1918-1939", JICH, 27, 2(1999), 167. For a contemporary impression of the aloofness of the region from Soviet influence see "Note on Russia and Eastern Unrest by Inter-Departmental Committee on Eastern Unrest", 2 May 1927, CID 797-B, CAB 4/16.

[75] B.J.C. McKercher, "Austen Chamberlain's Control of British Foreign Policy, 1924-1929", IHR, 6, 4(1984), 587-590. A recent study also has concluded that Baldwin had "great confidence" in Chamberlain as the Foreign Secretary. Richard S. Grayson, Austen Chamberlain and the Commitment to Europe: British Foreign Policy, 1924-29, (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 284.

[76] "The Extension of Soviet Influence in Asia", 15 Dec 1925, CID 655-B, CAB 4/14.

also help to justify expenditure on the army. The General Staff argued that the recent Locarno agreements in Europe had prompted the Soviet Union to focus its energies in Asia. The aim of Soviet policy, in the WO's eyes, was to pierce the cordon of buffer states surrounding British India and, ultimately, to threaten the sub-continent itself. Soviet agents were working hard to expand their influence both in Afghanistan and China, especially in the province of Sinkiang, which had a long, contiguous border with India. Soviet efforts, in the view of the General Staff, were marked by remarkable persistence, as the Soviet authorities:

> ...are maintaining the offensive along every possible avenue. There has not been the faintest indication of any slackening or desire for peace on their part. No sooner does activity in one theatre die down than immediate attempts are made to exploit another line of advance.[77]

As a result, in discussions of the Soviet threat to British and imperial interests, the WO tended to side with the hard-liners such as Churchill, Birkenhead and Joynson-Hicks.

In the FO, the WO view was perceived as alarmist, portraying a one-sided picture which tended to exaggerate Soviet successes.[78] The FO's own appreciation of the Soviet threat, and its estimate of the requisite British response, were summed up by Charles Orde, a senior clerk in the Northern Department.[79] In a covering note, Chamberlain outlined the policy that he had advocated for Anglo-Soviet relations since coming into office in 1924. This had been to:

> ...avoid a breach of the diplomatic relations established before we took office, and neither to court nor to show fear of that Government, but to leave them alone in the expectation that sooner or later they would discover that they have more need of us than we have of them.[80]

In his analysis of Soviet policy, Orde argued that its only consistency was its antagonism to the British Empire. Recent events, he warned, had shown an increased truculence on the part of the Soviets in Afghanistan, Persia and China, where they were trying to turn the governments against Britain. But, since communist propaganda did not seem to find fertile ground in these countries, the Soviets had switched to supporting nationalist movements,

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[77] Ibid.

[78] Henry F. B. Maxse Minute, 5 Jan 1926; William Strang Minute, 17 Jan 1926; Charles Orde Minute, 19 Jan 1926, FO 371/11775/N32/3/38.

[79] Charles Orde Minute, 12 Feb 1926, FO 371/11789/N 640/640/38.

[80] "Foreign Policy of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics", 16 Feb 1926, CID 671-B, CAB 4/14.

"Communism has been replaced as slogan [sic] by the idea of nationality, but the machinery is the same as before". Neither Orde nor Chamberlain saw anything new in this. "The Soviet Government in foreign policy becomes more and more like the unregenerate Czardom", wrote Chamberlain, adding that eastern nations had begun to see that, "the revolt against *bourgeois* Imperialism which they preach is only the old policy of absorption by Russia in a new guise".[81] Consequently, Chamberlain's belief remained that the British response to Soviet provocation had to be what Orde had described as a policy of "patience, expectancy and non-interference". Any active opposition to the Soviet Union would only work to the latter's advantage.[82] What is also significant about this memorandum, apart from its pronouncement of the Soviet threat, is that it shows that Chamberlain had begun to perceive a possible split between nationalism and communism in the east. Over the following year he would to try to exploit this perceived difference to Britain's advantage, especially in China.

In the interim, however, the FO's moderate response to the perceived Soviet threat to the Empire came under strain in 1926 for three reasons. First, a border clash between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union at the end of 1925 reawakened what had been, since the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907, the relatively dormant issue of the Russian, now Soviet, threat to Afghanistan and the defence of India.[83] Second, the British General Strike raised the spectre among Conservative backbenchers and the die-hard Ministers of revolution in Britain.[84] Third, the disorder in China, coupled with the apparent subservience of the Chinese nationalists to their communist advisors, continued to highlight the precarious nature of the British position there. As a result of these widespread threats,

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[81] Ibid.

[82] Chamberlain minute, 31 Jan 1925, FO 371/10984/N16/16/97.

[83] On the 1907 Entente and the pre-World War One history of the Defence of India question see Neilson, Last Tsar. This is not to say that the issue had disappeared entirely. A great deal of British policy during the convulsions of the Russian Civil War was animated by a desire to establish a more secure defensive perimeter for India. See John D. Rose, "Batum as Domino, 1919-1920: The Defence of India in Transcaucasia", IHR, 11, 1(1980), 266-287; Keith Neilson, "'For Diplomatic, Economic, Strategic and Telegraphic Reasons': British Imperial Defence, the Middle East and India, 1914-1918", in Keith Neilson and Greg Kennedy, eds., Far Flung Lines: Studies in Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman, (London: Frank Cass, 1997); and John Fisher, "'On the Glacis of India': Lord Curzon and British Policy in the Caucasus, 1919", DS, 8, 2(1997), 50-82. In 1919 India fought a brief border war with Afghanistan. See Keith Jeffery, The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918-1922, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

[84] For the broader issues surrounding the strike see Gabriel Gorodetsky, "The Soviet Union and Britain's General Strike of May 1926", CMRS, 17, 2-3(1976), 287-310.

at home and along the periphery of the Empire, concerns that Soviet expansion was becoming a reality increased and made pursuing a moderate course more difficult.

At the end of 1925, news reached London that Soviet troops had occupied the island of Urta Tagai in the middle of the Oxus (Amu Darya) river, which formed the boundary between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union.[85] This island had previously been under the de facto possession of the Afghans, and the resulting crisis nearly led to war between the two powers.[86] Sir Francis Humphrys, the British Minister in Kabul, succeeded in defusing the immediate crisis by restraining the Amir of Afghanistan and having the entire issue of Urta Tagai referred to a commission of enquiry. Lord Birkenhead, however, seized on this crisis to push the question of the Soviet threat to India, and the Empire generally, before the Cabinet. While he believed that it was in Britain's interests to dissuade the Amir from going to war with the Russians, Birkenhead asked the following question:

> If Russian policy in Asia is--as the available evidence leads me to believe--that of hemming India in with a circle of Bolshevik States, and, if northern Afghanistan is destined to be the next region to be drawn into the orbit of the U.S.S.R., what is to be the policy of Great Britain?[87]

He went on to ask whether the integrity of Afghanistan remained essential to the defence of India. In the Secretary of State's mind it did, but the problem for Britain at this time, as it had always been, was how to ensure the integrity of Afghanistan and to prevent any movement of the Russian frontier closer to the Hindu Kush. He recognized that "the real defence of the Afghan frontier, when it has seemed to be threatened, has been conducted by diplomacy at St. Petersburg".[88] Now, Birkenhead asked that the CID be tasked to conduct a thorough study of this question. In his own mind, he was unequivocal as to what stand had to be taken:

> If the Russian government are given clearly to understand that a military occupation of Afghan Turkestan or its absorption into the U.S.S.R., in whatever way effected and however disguised, will be regarded as a casus belli, the danger may be reduced to its proper proportions.

The FO saw Birkenhead's appreciation as impracticable. Both Sir William Tyrrell, the Permanent Under-

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[85] Sir Francis Humphrys telegram, 20 Dec 1925, FO 371/10984/N 7028/16/97; Humphrys telegram, 19 Dec 1925, FO 371/10984/N7064/16/97; Humphrys telegram, 31 Dec 1925, FO 371/11737/N43/43/97.

[86] See the brief summary in Lord Birkenhead's memorandum "Afghanistan", 17 June 1926, CID 142-D, CAB 6/5.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

Secretary (PUS) at the FO, and the Northern Department felt that it was useless to threaten unless Britain had the means by which to carry out that threat.[89] The Soviet Union, according to one of the Northern Department's clerks, Henry F.B. Maxse, was "...politically and militarily (if possibly not economically) invulnerable". Thus, Britain could do little more than work to prevent the Amir from going to war and try to orient him in a British direction through subsidies.

Shortly thereafter, Birkenhead's paper was discussed at a meeting of the COS. Here, General Sir Claud Jacob, the Secretary of the Military Department of the India Office, pointed out that British forces could not intervene effectively in Afghanistan due to the lack of adequate strategic railways in north west India. After a long discussion, the COS referred the matter to the CID.[90] Before doing so, however, they submitted their own report, in which they outlined their appreciation of Soviet means of striking at India. While the COS felt that the Soviet Union did not constitute an immediate large-scale military menace to Afghanistan, they were not sanguine about other Soviet methods of infiltration in Central Asia:

> the present policy of Soviet Russia towards India is identical with that adopted in the past by Imperial Russia. The methods of the Soviets are, however, more insidious, more intangible, and, therefore...more dangerous than those employed by their predecessors...their first objective appears to be the absorption by infiltration of the Northern provinces of Afghanistan, thus, in effect, pushing forward their frontier to the Mountains of the Hindu Kush. Should they succeed in their object, there can be little doubt that Afghanistan as an Amirate would cease to exist, general disintegration would set in, and the buffer between India and Russia in Asia would virtually disappear.[91]

The COS went on to confirm that "the integrity of Afghanistan as a buffer State is as important as in the past" and that it was therefore in Britain's interest to ensure that the Amir of Afghanistan should rely on British support to maintain the integrity of his country. However, they warned that "a war against Russia waged in Afghanistan would make a larger demand than we are at present prepared to meet in men and material not only on India but also on Imperial resources". As a result, the COS deprecated the idea of supplying the Amir with arms, and, instead, they recommended that, from a military perspective, the best policy to pursue would be to extend the existing railways from the Indian border to Kabul and Kandahar.

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[89] "Russia and Afghanistan", circa 22 June 1926, FO 371/11738/N3036/43/97.

[90] 35 Mtg COS, 6 July 1926, CAB 53/1.

[91] "Afghanistan-Report by the Chiefs of Staff", 12 July 1926, CID 143-D, CAB 6/5.

Before this matter was discussed at the CID, however, Birkenhead received further clarification of the status of the Urta Tagai dispute. The Indian government now concluded that there was little chance of an immediate recurrence of a crisis over the disputed island.[92] Indeed, Sir Francis Humphrys in Kabul had reported that the Soviets and Afghans proposed to sign an innocuous treaty of friendship. In such circumstances, Humphrys recommended that the best policy for Britain to pursue was one of aloof indifference, for otherwise the Afghans would, in their traditional way, attempt to play the British off against the Soviets to secure maximum advantage for themselves.

Although this telegram appeared to ease many of the immediate concerns about Afghanistan, Birkenhead still raised the question of the defence of India at the next meeting of the CID. After summarizing the recent Urta Tagai crisis, Birkenhead appeared to ignore the most recent, and most sanguine, appreciation by the Indian government.[93] Instead, he adopted a hard line, believing that the current negotiations between the Amir and the Soviet government would fail and that as a result the Amir might declare war on the Soviets. In such a case, Birkenhead asked, what would be the British attitude? He viewed it as entirely possible that Britain might end up at war with Russia over Afghanistan, and he asked that the COS should investigate where Russia was vulnerable to British attack. At this moment, Chamberlain, a former Viceroy of India himself, weighed into the discussion. He agreed with Birkenhead that Russian policy was hostile towards Afghanistan and that diplomatic representation on behalf of Afghanistan in Moscow would be ineffective. But, Chamberlain felt that Birkenhead was unrealistic in his appreciation of Britain's ability to respond to overt Soviet actions in Afghanistan. The Foreign Secretary felt that it was not possible "to contemplate a war with Russia in order to prop up Afghanistan", and he believed that any study would show that Russia was not at all vulnerable "except at a price that England would be unwilling or, indeed, unable to pay". Indeed, he advised the CID that Russia herself was frightened of being attacked by a hostile combination and that action such as railway building in Afghanistan could be seen by Moscow as aggressive and thus might precipitate a conflict. In the end, he felt that it was necessary to resist Russian encroachment on or behind the existing Indian frontier.

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[92] "Afghanistan", 12 July 1926, CID 144-D, CAB 6/5.

[93] Ibid.

Chamberlain's views did not go unchallenged. Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for Air, felt that Chamberlain's attitude of reserve held danger for Britain, as any Russian advance toward the Indian frontier would be a blow to British Imperial prestige throughout the East. Birkenhead, too, was unconvinced by Chamberlain's discourse, as he felt that "war with Russia would be inevitable in course of time". Churchill echoed this belief, and, like Birkenhead, he wanted to focus on those positive measures which could be taken to prevent Russian encroachment on the British Empire. In his mind this meant improving relations with Japan as a counterpoise to Russia, a view shared by Lord Salisbury, the Lord Privy Seal. Chamberlain reiterated that while he agreed that there was a serious Russian threat to India, he disagreed with Birkenhead and Hoare as to the kind of threat. In his view, the Russians would not engage in open warfare, but instead would try to "sow the seeds of revolution" through peaceful penetration.[94] Thus, while there was a consensus that the Soviet Union did pose some threat to India, there was no agreement on the type of threat and, consequently, on the measures which Britain could take to prevent the threat from maturing. The matter was referred back to the COS for a further report on the wider Imperial Defence issues which had been discussed.

The COS met, again with General Sir Claud Jacob present, barely a week after the CID meeting, to consider this new question, under terms of reference which had been written by Birkenhead after consultation with Chamberlain.[95] These terms directed the COS to consider whether the integrity of Afghanistan was still essential to the safety of India and the Empire, and, if this were so, what, if the Russians seized northern Afghanistan, could Britain do to dislodge them or to threaten them elsewhere. The COS concluded that maintaining the integrity of Afghanistan as a buffer state remained just as important as it had always been, for "a common frontier with Russia would be a canker for ever eating into the resources of the Empire".[96] On the second question, however, the COS could not express any definite conclusions, but they were blunt in stating that any war with Russia over Afghanistan would not end quickly, nor would it be confined solely to that region. This pessimistic impression echoed similar

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[94] This was not new. In the nineteenth century, British policy-makers had been concerned less with a direct Russian military threat to India than that Russian encroachment on the Indian frontier might encourage disaffection within India itself. M.A. Yapp, "British Perceptions of the Russian Threat to India", MAS, 21, 4(1987), 647-665.

[95] Neilson, "Pursued by a Bear", 196-97.

[96] "Afghanistan-Second (Interim) Report", 29 July 1926, COS 48, CAB 6/5.

discussions which had been carried out prior to the Great War.[97] If the Cabinet desired more definite answers, then the COS stressed that further study was required.

While the COS studied the military implications of the Russian threat, Chamberlain delivered a riposte, in the form of a memorandum written by Tyrrell, to both Birkenhead's and Churchill's comments at the previous CID meeting.[98] The PUS stated that there was consensus that Bolshevik Russia was consistently hostile to Britain and the Empire. Yet, he dismissed the idea of a war with Russia as unrealistic. Thus, Britain had to turn to diplomacy to solve her Russian problems. In Europe, the Locarno treaties had helped to secure that continent against the spread of communist propaganda. The starting point for British policy in the Far East, according to Tyrrell, had to be that Russia, not Japan, was the enemy. But, the obvious corollary of this, the revival of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, was not practical politics. Instead, the cultivation of friendly relations with Japan and the revival of a national spirit in China would have to be Britain's twin bulwarks against the Soviet threat to British interests in the Far East.

The COS's second report and Tyrrell's memorandum came before the CID in late November. The CID instructed Birkenhead to forward the COS report to the Indian government in order to ascertain its views on the situation in Afghanistan and the question of the defence of India.[99] Chamberlain laid great stress on Tyrrell's statement that "Russia is the enemy and not Japan", and he repeated the PUS's endorsement of Salisbury's recommendation of common action with Japan against Russia. For his own part, he let it be known that he agreed with Tyrrell's views; however, he did not elaborate on any possible British countermoves to Soviet policy. By this point, the Foreign Secretary had to tread carefully in discussing Soviet policy, because the FO's policy of patience was under siege from the "die hard" ministers and from Conservative backbenchers, who were clamouring for a break in relations.[100] These men had been frightened by the General Strike of May 1926 when evidence had

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[97] See Neilson, Last Tsar, 110-143.

[98] "Foreign Policy in Relation to Russia and Japan", 30 July 1926, CID 710-B, CAB 4/14.

[99] 218 Mtg CID, 25 Nov 1926, CAB 2/4.

[100] Sir Samuel Hoare [Secretary of State for Air] to Lord Irwin [Indian Viceroy], 18 June 1926, in Martin Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill: v. 5, Companion Part I, Documents, The Exchequer Years, 1922-1929, (London: Heinemann, 1979), 732. Hoare, himself, disagreed with the idea of breaking off relations, as did Irwin.

emerged of Soviet monetary support for the strikers.[101] To many Conservatives, the possibly of a communist revolution in Britain no longer seemed remote.

As the year wore on, consensus on Soviet policy in the FO began to break down. At first there was agreement that a break in Anglo-Soviet relations would be counterproductive. Chamberlain remained firmly opposed to any such action, and he attempted to steer the Cabinet away from this direction.[102] Privately, he admitted that Soviet provocation was next to intolerable and ample justification for breaking off relations. However, the real question was whether it was worthwhile to head down this route. In his mind, he felt that it was not.[103] Most of his senior advisors shared this opinion. As C.M. Palairet, the head of the FO's Northern Department and thus responsible for Anglo-Soviet relations, pointed out, a break in relations would not stop Soviet propaganda, and would serve only to confirm Soviet fears of British hostility.[104] The British Minister in Moscow went even further. Robert Hodgson argued that the Soviet Union had come to stay and that Britain should abandon its policy of aloofness and actively seek to come to terms with the Soviets.[105]

For the reasons outlined above, this was not practical politics in Britain. By the end of the year, however, the FO was working hard to avoid a break with Moscow.[106] The strain was telling on senior FO officials, and by December both Tyrrell and J.D. Gregory, the senior Assistant Under-Secretary of State, let their frustrations show. The PUS went to so far as to assert that "we are virtually at war with Russia".[107] The Soviet Union, Tyrrell felt, continued to undermine British interests and "the two most glaring instances of recent date are the assistance afforded by Russia to the coal strike in this country, and her successful efforts in destroying our trade with China".

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[101] Gorodetsky, Precarious Truce, 134-179; idem., "The Soviet Union and Britain's General Strike", 287-310.

[102] See his "Memorandum Respecting Anglo-Soviet Relations", 16 June 1926, CP 250(26), CAB 24/180.

[103] A. Chamberlain to Emmot [Conservative Peer], 22 June 1926, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/259.

[104] C.M. Palairet minute, 19 July 1926, FO 371/11786/N3316/387/38.

[105] R. Hodgson to A. Chamberlain, 6 May 1926, FO 371/11786/N2241/387/38.

[106] See the Northern Department Minute, 7 Dec 1926, FO 371/11787/N5452/387/38; "Russia: Memorandum by Mr Gregory", 10 Dec 1926, FO 371/11787/N5670/387/38.

[107] J.D. Gregory minute, 3 Dec 1926, W.Tyrrell minute, 4 Dec 1926, FO 371/11787/N5425/387/38.

Tyrrell and Gregory now argued in favour of a wait-and-see approach toward the whole question of a break with Moscow. Britain should maintain a "careful look out for any instances which would enable us, with universal approval, to break with the Soviets". Thus, by the end of 1926, some of Chamberlain's officials had begun to soften their attitude toward a break with Moscow. Instead they were reduced to attempting to delay this event for as long as possible, and, if it became necessary, to ensure that it would be done for the right reasons. The entire question of Afghanistan, which had not yet been resolved by the end of 1926, had helped to highlight the divisions in the Cabinet over these issues. But it was events in China throughout 1926 that had preoccupied British policymakers, and these had significant ramifications for Imperial Defence.

The principal problem in China was the clash between the treaty system and the Chinese nationalist movement that had arisen after the First World War.[108] Relations between Britain and the nationalists in southern China, led first by Sun Yat-sen, had never been good. The anti-imperialism of Sun's movement aimed at removing the rights and privileges which Britain and other foreign powers enjoyed in China and therefore directly threatened their interests. Chinese Nationalists believed that Britain was the country most responsible for the unequal treaties. Thus, it had to bear the brunt of Chinese dissatisfaction with the status quo.[109] For their part, British officials viewed with distrust the close collaboration between Sun's Kuomintang (KMT) Party and the Chinese Communist Party, and saw the two as simply extensions of a Soviet-inspired anti-British policy.[110] The former head of the FO's Far Eastern Department and now an assistant under-secretary of state, Sir Victor Wellesley, labeled Soviet policy in China as "the most sinister influence in the Far East".[111] These suspicions appeared to be confirmed by the prominent presence of Soviet advisors in Canton. In 1923, Moscow had sent Adolf Joffe to try to establish a united front between the Chinese communists and the KMT. He succeeded in brokering an agreement in which the two Chinese parties and Moscow agreed to work together to overthrow the Peking government. Shortly thereafter,

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[108] Arthur Waldron, "War and the Rise of Nationalism in Twentieth-Century China", JMilH, 57(1993), 87-104.

[109] Edmund S.K. Fung, "The Sino-British Rapprochement, 1927-1931", MAS, 17, 1(1983), 80.

[110] Edmund S.K. Fung, The Diplomacy of Imperial Retreat: Britain's South China Policy, 1924-1931, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 60.

[111] Victor Wellesley, "Memorandum on British Policy in China", 1 March 1925, BDFA., Kenneth Bourne and D. Cameron Watt, eds., Part II, Series E, v.29, (University Publications of America, 1994), 10.

Michael Borodin arrived in Canton as the chief Soviet agent, along with a host of Russian experts, military advisors and funds.[112] British distrust of the KMT was compounded by their personal dislike of Sun, who was labeled a dreamer and a visionary and perhaps even unbalanced.[113]

Serious trouble between the two sides began in May 1925, when a Chinese mob was fired upon by British-led municipal police in Shanghai.[114] The consequent anger led to a general strike in, and a Chinese blockade of, Hong Kong, the main conduit for British trade into China. This strike lasted for more than a year, and not only did it inflict serious damage to British trade in South China, but also it threatened to embroil Britain actively in the Chinese civil war. Among the many British officials in China and in London, there was a widespread perception that Bolshevik agents were behind this unrest. The Acting Consul-General in Canton, J.F. Brenan, commented that the "Cantonese have received much help and inspiration from their Russian advisors".[115] These concerns were loudly echoed by Colonial Office (CO) officials. The Governor of Hong Kong, Sir R. Stubbs, concluded in 1925 that the strike had been primarily organized by communist agitators from Canton, and the CO generally concurred with this view.[116] Over a year later, his successor, Sir Cecil Clementi, wrote back observing that "Russia is our bitter enemy in China and the Far East" and that "Borodin dictates Cantonese policy".[117]

Within the FO, however, there was no unanimity over the question of the extent of communist influence over the nationalist Chinese. Overall, however, the views of the men in China were regarded as somewhat alarmist. Basil Newton, one of the Far Eastern Department's experts, warned against using the boycott as a pretext for a general campaign against the Soviet Union. The Chinese, he believed, would learn to dislike the Bolsheviks, and

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[112] For the context of Soviet aims in China see: Conrad Brandt, Stalin's Failure in China, 1924-1927, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958).

[113] William Roger Louis, British Strategy in the Far East, 1919-1939, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 111.

[114] Ibid., 40-54.

[115] "The Kuomintang", 23 Nov 1926, FO 371/12456/F229/229/10.

[116] Sir R. Stubbs to Leopold Amery [Colonial Secretary], 26 June 1925, in Colonial Office to Foreign Office, 5 Aug 1925, FO 371/10946/F3668/194/10.

[117] Clementi to Amery, 26 Oct 1926, Cecil Clementi Papers, [Rhodes House Library, Oxford], MSS Ind.Ocn.s.352, Box 19.

the best strategy for Britain to adopt would be to expose communist treachery to the Chinese nationalists whenever possible.[118] Sir Francis Aglen, the British Inspector General of the Chinese Maritime Customs, wrote to the FO to warn that too much attention was being paid to Soviet activities in China. According to him, the Chinese had no natural leanings towards communism, and they were using the Russians for their own ends and would drop them when they had served their purpose.[119] William Strang, a clerk in the Far Eastern Department, pointed out that British losses in China were only partly the fault of Russian action.[120] These arguments, among others, began to turn FO opinion away from equating Chinese nationalism with communism, in contrast to the Colonial Office, which continued to take a hard line against the nationalists.

The conclusion that Chinese nationalism could be separated from communism supported the FO argument of maintaining strict neutrality in the Chinese civil war. It also supported the development of a new China policy, which was in its embryonic stages in the summer of 1926. Obviously, if fears of communist influence among the nationalist Chinese could be allayed, then the argument for the pursuit of a conciliatory policy by the FO could be strengthened. This new direction in China policy was a response by Foreign Office officials to the deteriorating British position in China and to the success of the Northern Expedition launched by Chiang-Kai-shek, who had taken the leadership of the KMT after the death of Sun Yat-sen.[121] Begun on 9 July 1926, the Northern Expedition was Chiang's attempt to unify China under the KMT by defeating those warlords who opposed the Nationalist government. After leaving their south China bases, KMT armies made swift progress northward, and, by early fall, captured Hankow in the west and Nanchang in Kiangsi province. As its armies achieved success, the KMT government became an important force with which British officials had to reckon.

It became obvious to the FO that, in the new dynamic in China, there was very limited scope for the use of force by the British and that the use of force to impose their will on the Chinese was impossible. As a result,

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[118] Memorandum by Mr. Newton Respecting Bolshevik Activities in China, 25 June 1925, FO 371/10943/F3008/194/10.

[119] Memorandum Communicated by Sir F. Aglen, 29 June 1925, BDFA, Part II, Series E, v.29, 135-136.

[120] W. Strang minute, 18 Nov 1926, FO 371/11775/N5080/3/38.

[121] An overview of the Northern Expedition can be found in James E. Sheridan, China in Disintegration: The Republican Era in Chinese History, 1912-1949, (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 164-182.

any policy based on such premises was doomed to failure.[122] Further, confrontation with the Nationalists served only to defeat the principal object of British policy in China, namely the expansion of trade.[123] Thus, the FO concluded that a new direction in Chinese affairs had to be taken; one which would aim at softening the KMT's anti-foreign sentiment.[124] The result was the so-called December Memorandum of 1926.[125] This was intended to form the basis of future British policy toward China and the nationalist movement. Fundamentally, this document committed the British to a policy of negotiated treaty revision in China. But, this was not intended as a capitulation to the Chinese revolution; rather, its moralistic tone covered a core of classic Realpolitik. As one historian admits, by promulgating the December memorandum, the British hoped "to retain the substance of important British interests by surrendering only what was considered to be of secondary or least importance.".[126]

However, despite this, the new China policy was a contentious and fragile step, and one which the Cabinet only grudgingly approved in December 1926. Even within the FO, it did not have universal approval. On the eve of his departure, the outgoing Minister in Peking, Sir Ronald Macleay, had telegraphed Chamberlain to argue that, in the light of his four years experience in China:

> I do not believe that Kuo Min-tang party are either able or anxious to throw off Soviet yoke...I fear we cannot conciliate the irreconcilable and that policy of a Kuo-Min-tang Government, if ever one is in control of the country, will under Soviet instigation be aggressively Nationalist and primarily and intensely anti-British.[127]

Much of the new China policy was dependent on the situation remaining relatively calm and on Chamberlain being able to convince the Cabinet to view Soviet actions as separate from Chinese actions. Any crisis in China had the potential both to destroy Chamberlain's work and to undermine his Soviet policy. Throughout 1926 the FO had

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[122] "Memorandum by Sir V. Wellesley", 20 Aug 1926, F3456/8/10 in BDFA., Part II, Series E, v.31, 74-79. See also his minute of 13 July 1926, FO 371/11690/F2818/2485/10.

[123] Fung, "Rapprochement", 81.

[124] Sir John T. Pratt, War and Politics in China, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1943), 202-203.

[125] "Statement of British Policy in China, Approved by the Cabinet on the 1st December 1926", 2 Dec 1926, BDFA., Part II, Series E, v.31, 297-300.

[126] Fung, Diplomacy, 103.

[127] R. Macleay telegram to A. Chamberlain, 24 Nov 1926, BDFA., Part 2, Series E, v.31, 276,

slowly lost ground in its attempt to avoid a break with Moscow. But, Chamberlain and the FO had also been unable to convince others that the perceived Soviet penetration throughout Central Asia and the Far East should be met with a policy of patience and conciliation.

As a result, when news of the Hankow incident reached the FO in early January 1927, Chamberlain received it as "a great shock",[128] and he urged an early consideration by the Cabinet of the possible British response. But, the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, in order to avoid any impression of panic left the meeting to the usual day, Wednesday.[129] This gave many ministers, senior officials and the COS an opportunity to weigh in with their views on what should be the British reaction to the recent events in China.

The COS prepared a detailed report on the Imperial Defence aspects of the problem.[130] They concluded that the key problem was "the protection of our interests in Shanghai". These interests were vast, and the prestige of the British Empire in the Far East rested on their maintenance. However, the protection of the large foreign concession at Shanghai required at least one division of troops and a squadron of aircraft. British resources alone, the COS emphasised, could not provide such a force quickly. In fact, any defence of the concession would have to be international and likely led by Japan, which, alone of the powers, had the capacity to reinforce Shanghai with sufficient troops before the expected arrival of Nationalist forces at the end of January. Military expediency was not the only reason for joint action:

> we should greatly deprecate isolated action except as the very last resort, as it would inevitably involve us in a war in which, in all probability, the whole of China would be united against us, with disastrous results to our vast interests throughout the East.

If needed, an Indian battalion could be moved from Hong Kong to Shanghai at short notice but any large-scale British reinforcements had to come from India, and would take at least six weeks to arrive in China. Overall, the COS were very careful to emphasise both that "by showing a bold front at Shanghai we may stop the rot...our attitude may lead to a war" and that the consequences of any such war could not be foreseen. Looking to the future,

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[128] A. Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 8 Jan 1927, AC 5/1/405, Austen Chamberlain MSS [University of Birmingham Library, Birmingham].

[129] S. Baldwin letter to [Sir Arthur J.] Balfour, 9 Jan 1927, Balfour Papers, Add MSS 49694.

[130] COS 39 Mtg, 11 Jan 1927, CAB 53/1. Due to the urgent nature of this crisis, the CID, to whom the COS normally reported, was bypassed. Instead, the COS reported directly to the Cabinet.

the COS recommended that the garrison of Singapore should be increased in order to provide a reserve for China and thus to prevent a repetition of the current British dilemma with respect to Imperial Defence.[131]

Other officials and Ministers considered the wider, imperial ramifications of the crisis in China. Lord Salisbury, the Lord Privy Seal, remarked, "It is probable that Hankow has shaken our prestige...". In a pointed reference to the December Memorandum, Salisbury asked Chamberlain, "I think HMG must clearly make up its mind how far retreat to prevent Chinese ill-feeling is to go".[132] He thus highlighted the vital importance for the British Empire in avoiding a repetition of the Hankow incident at any of the more critical British concessions, particularly Shanghai, while at the same time he reiterated the unease which many British ministers had felt over the policy embodied in the December Memorandum. Sir William Joynson-Hicks, unable to arrive back in Britain in time for first Cabinet meeting, wrote Chamberlain to express his views. Unsurprisingly, the Home Secretary adopted a hard line. In his mind, the Hankow incident had shown that the new China policy had not met with the hoped for reception. Once again he expressed his fundamental disagreement with one of the pillars of the FO's new China policy in that he did not " accept the FO theory that China will get rid of her Bolshevic [sic] advisors as soon as she gets her freedom. Au contraire I believe that the Chinese leaders are Bolshie in heart". According to him, there were two main options: either to blockade Canton or to threaten a forcible reoccupation of Hankow.[133]

It was obvious to most British policymakers that any diminution in British prestige, or in the perception of British resolve, in China could have a negative impact on the foundations of British rule elsewhere in the Empire. Arthur Hirtzel, the PUS at the India Office, wrote to Austen Chamberlain, reminding him that "the spectacle of Britain being driven out of China is a direct incitement to the Indian enemies of the British connection".[134] But, if the British took a stand at Shanghai, then "the whole card-house will collapse, and the danger with which India

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[131] "Situation in China, January 1927, Report by the Chiefs of Staff", 11 Jan, 1927, CID 756-B, CAB 4/16. "Permanent British Garrisons in the Far East-Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War", 21 Jan 1927, CID 288-C, CAB 5/6.

[132] Lord Salisbury to Austen Chamberlain, nd.[Jan 1927], Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260. David Reynolds, Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the 20th Century, (London: Longman, 1991) contains, in the first chapter, an excellent discussion of the importance of prestige as a factor in British rule.

[133] W. Joynson-Hicks to A. Chamberlain, 7 Jan 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260.

[134] A. Hirtzel to A. Chamberlain, 17 Jan, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260.

is faced in Afghanistan... will, with other dangers, be diminished". Chamberlain himself, though, needed little encouragement in this direction. He recognized the broader implications of the China crisis. Writing to David Lloyd George, leader of the Liberal Party, the Foreign Secretary emphasised that Lloyd George would "understand all that would be involved for our position throughout the Far East, in India, Afghanistan, Persia and even Turkey by a disaster at Shanghai".[135]

Not everyone, though, was supportive of armed intervention in China. When the Cabinet convened on January 12, it had before it the COS report and a separate memorandum prepared by Arthur Balfour, the Lord President and the senior Conservative statesman. Balfour placed the current British problems in the context of the overall changing situation in China, and struck a highly-balanced and cautionary note when considering the options available. With the December Memorandum clearly in mind, he wrote that Britain was conducting a "rear guard action" in China, but had to be careful, as such a policy could end up "either in unconditional surrender or in the unpleasant operation of dying in the last ditch".[136] In his view, the Chinese were duplicitous, outwardly promising to keep order in southern China while secretly inciting mob violence against the treaty powers in the hope of provoking a serious incident which might "set all China in a blaze". Soviet agents, he believed, were moving the Canton government in this direction. Against this backdrop, the British reaction had to be carefully considered. A massive military response was out of the question, as "the idea of landing an army to fight a united China, or a united Southern China, is absurd". This, however, did not rule out the possibility of landing troops to protect British citizens. A blockade of south China, on the other hand, was not quite so absurd to Balfour. He recognized that any blockade would be fraught with difficulties and that it would hurt British economic interests in China. Thus, he reasoned it should be attempted only if the British economic position were already deteriorating. But he also believed that such action could strengthen the British diplomatic position vis à vis the Canton government. These perambulations aside, Balfour's main aim was to argue that Britain had to take a strong line against the southern Chinese by adopting a three-pronged policy. First, Britain had to make it clear to the Chinese that it would not acquiesce in any mob-inspired, illegal faits accompli. Second, Britain could not be provoked into any large-

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[135] A. Chamberlain to D. Lloyd George, 19 Jan 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260.

[136] "The Situation in Canton-Memorandum by the Lord President of the Council", 11 Jan 1927, CP 3(27), CAB 24/184.

scale land operations nor into a complete surrender of its treaty rights. Finally, in the last resort, Britain had to be prepared to maintain maritime economic pressure on the Chinese. The principal aim behind this policy was to strengthen the efforts of the Foreign Secretary in negotiations with the Chinese in an effort to maintain the British position in China.

At the first Cabinet meeting of 1927, Chamberlain dominated the proceedings. He defended the decision on the part of the British Consul-General at Hankow to abandon the concession, arguing that a "great disaster" had been averted.[137] When it came to the defence of Shanghai, the Foreign Secretary did not challenge the COS's assertion that Japan was the only country with the capacity to deploy troops rapidly to protect the foreign concession in that city. Instead, Chamberlain addressed the question of whether Japan would be willing to send troops. On this issue, the Japanese were sending mixed signals. Up to this point, the Japanese government had been unwilling to take the lead on any Chinese questions. But, recent news from Tokyo seemed to indicate that there might be a change of heart on the part of the Japanese. The General Staff, at least, was reported to desire to enter into staff conversations to prepare plans for the defence of Shanghai.[138]

The success of any negotiations with the Chinese, however, Chamberlain believed, was dependent on whether Eugene Chen, the Southern Chinese foreign minister, was free to negotiate or whether he was "dominated by the Bolshevist element and the Russian agent Borodin". These latter comments reflected the lack of unanimity even within the FO as to the motivations behind the Nationalist takeover of the Hankow concession. The FO's men in China, such as Owen O'Malley, the British Counselor in Peking, who had been sent to Hankow on January 6, and Sir Miles Lampson, the British Minister in Peking, tended to view the Hankow incident as communist-inspired. O'Malley, for instance, had " little doubt that [the] disturbances were instigated by Russians and extremists".[139] In London, however, there was a different view. Sir John Pratt dismissed the influence of the communist advisors to the KMT:

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[137] Cabinet 1(27), 12 Jan 1927, CAB 23/54; Chamberlain to Lampson, 6 Jan 1927, FO 371/12430/F96/67/10; Chamberlain minute, 10 Jan 1927, FO 371/12430/F176/67/10; On 13 Jan 1927, O'Malley sent a report back from Hankow supporting Goffe's actions . O'Malley telegram, 13 Jan 1927, FO 371/12431/F340/67/10.

[138] Tilley [British Ambassador to Japan] telegram, 10 Jan 1927, FO 371/12448/F260/156/10.

[139] O'Malley to Clementi, 13 Jan 1927, Cecil Clementi Papers, MSS Ind.Ocn.s.352, Box 5.

> it is important to recognise that the Cantonese are not Bolshevik nor are they really under Bolshevik control or direction...The moment that the Russians ceased to support the purely nationalist aims of the Kuomintang and attempted to make the movement subserve some purely Russian aim it is probable that they would immediately lose their influence and be discarded.[140]

Not everyone in the FO concurred in Pratt's rejection of the notion of communist dominance over the KMT, but neither did anyone completely reject his comments. Wellesley, among others, remained uncertain about the extent of Bolshevik influence.[141] As a result, once again, there was no consensus in the FO on this subject which weakened its ability to provide guidance and advice to the Foreign Secretary and the Cabinet.

On this day, however, the Cabinet did not decide on any definite course of action, but it did ask the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) to begin planning the move of a mixed brigade to Shanghai as quickly as possible and requested that the ATB examine the feasibility of placing economic pressure on the Nationalist government of south China. In addition, Chamberlain was instructed to feel out the Japanese government on the issue of staff conversations for the defence of Shanghai. Three things clearly emerged from this meeting. First, the Cabinet appeared determined to protect British interests at Shanghai and wanted this made clear to the Chinese negotiators at Hankow. Second, Ministers were extremely reluctant to begin negotiations with the Chinese over Hankow before the return of the concession, but, at the same time, were hesitant to allow the talks to break down as a result. While making this latter view clear to O'Malley and Lampson, they gave the two diplomats a great deal of leeway on this issue. Last, the Cabinet made it very clear that under no circumstances was it willing to countenance a forcible reoccupation of the Hankow concession.

From the beginning of the crisis, there existed a consensus between Chamberlain and the COS that British interests at Shanghai had to be protected. In fact, Chamberlain admitted to Lord Stamfordham, the King's private secretary, that the COS's appreciation "really dominates and conditions any political directions which I can give".[142] The COS had already made it clear that Shanghai had to be defended, but they were merely taking a lead from the Naval Commander in Chief, China Station, Admiral Reginald Tyrwhitt, who as early as January 6 had

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[140] J.T. Pratt memorandum, 9 Jan 1927, FO 371/12448/F162/156/10.

[141] Wellesley minute, 11 Jan 1927, FO 371/12448/F162/156/10.

[142] A. Chamberlain to Lord Stamfordham, 15 Jan 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260.

recommended that a division of troops was necessary for the defence of Shanghai.[143] Tyrwhitt's recommendation was supported by the British diplomats in China, including O'Malley, Sidney Barton, the Consul-General in Shanghai and Lampson, who called the proposal "a welcome breath of reality".[144] On January 12, Tyrwhitt repeated his call for the immediate despatch of a division, and stated that any delay would be "disastrous".[145] He postulated that the arrival of a British division in Shanghai, apart from "disposing of the present menace", eventually would lead to the restoration of the concessions at Hankow and Kiukiang and "above all to the re-establishment of British prestige". The response of the FO's officials in London to Tyrwhitt's recommendations, however, revealed important differences between them, on the one hand, and the Foreign Secretary and the men in China on the other.

Within the FO, there was considerable apprehension of the possible negative ramifications of sending a division of troops to Shanghai and, consequently, resistance to the idea. FO officials shared Balfour's concern that any use of force in China would draw Britain into a potential quagmire.[146] At its most extreme, the reluctance to use force verged on defeatism. William Strang summarized one of his memoranda by concluding that "If we retire with good grace the Chinese will perhaps allow us to save what 'face' we can.".[147] This called forth a strong remonstrance from Chamberlain, who minuted "I do not conceal from myself the heavy blow which British prestige has suffered and I am frankly shocked when the Foreign Office talks Chinese and begins to ask how we can 'save face'".[148] As the days went by, however, FO officials found themselves unable to decide whether a division should be sent or not. Once again, Wellesley summed up what was at stake in the China crisis:

> The consideration which is always uppermost in my mind and which transcends in importance even our vast interests in China is the repercussion on our general position towards all oriental

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[143] "Situation in China, With Special Reference to Shanghai-January 1927", 17 Jan 1927, CID 761-B, CAB 4/16. Miles Lampson Diary, 6 Jan 1927, [Middle East Centre, St. Antony's College, Oxford].

[144] Lampson Diary, 6 Jan 1927; O'Malley to Strang, 15 Jan 1927, O'Malley Papers [St. Antony's College, Oxford]; Lamspon telegram, enclosing private telegram from Sir S. Barton, 14 Jan 1927, FO 371/12449/F375/156/10.

[145] CinC China to Admiralty, 12 Jan 1927, FO 371/12449/F351/156/10.

[146] Wellesley minute, 10 Jan 1927, FO 371/12430/F176/67/10.

[147] Strang memorandum, 10 Jan 1927, FO 371/12430/F176/67/10.

[148] Chamberlain minute, 10 Jan 1927, FO 371/12430/F176/67/10.

> nations which the wholesale evacuation of British subjects and the abandonment of our interests at the hands of the Chinese would have. It seems to me that it would shake our prestige to its foundations.[149]

He, and the members of the Far Eastern department, while recognizing the many advantages to sending a division to Shanghai, also saw many potential pitfalls, and, as a result, the FO was not able to give any firm or consistent advice on this issue.[150]

When the China crisis was again considered by the Cabinet on January 17, Chamberlain set the tone for the meeting, one which more closely reflected the COS's position, by declaring that the loss of Shanghai "would have lasting disastrous consequences on our position in Asia, and would have most serious reactions in India and on Japan".[151]

The Cabinet agreed with this appreciation, and, in effect, drew a line in China, concluding:

> That regard for the protection of British lives no less than the disastrous effect which the surrender of Shanghai to violence would have on the British position in China, Japan and India and throughout the East, precluded the possibility of basing any policy either on the evacuation...or on the surrender of Shanghai.[152]

Lord Cecil of Chelwood, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and chairman of the ATB, reported that the sub-committee had concluded that no useful economic sanctions could be applied against the Cantonese. Further, a pacific blockade of the south would not be effective in the long term, and would seriously hurt British and friendly Chinese businessmen.[153] Thus, in order to give teeth to this policy, the Ministers decided that there was no choice but to prepare to despatch a significant British force to Shanghai. This would be a classic application of the

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[149] Wellesley minute, 15 Jan 1927, FO 371/12449/F351/156/10.

[150] Wellesley memorandum, J.T. Pratt and G. Mounsey minutes, all 15 Jan 1927, FO 371/12449/F351/156/10; Pratt and Mounsey minutes, 15 Jan 1927 and Wellesley minute 16 Jan 1927, FO 371/12449/F375/156/10; Pratt memorandum, 9 Jan 1927, FO 371/12448/F162/156/10; Mounsey minute, 11 Jan 1927, FO 371/12398/F188/2/10; Pratt minute, 17 Jan 1927, FO 371/12449/F389/156/10. FO officials were also concerned lest Britain commit troops to the defence of Shanghai and then be left in the lurch by the other powers, notably Japan. Pratt minute and Mounsey minutes, 13 Jan 1927, Pratt memorandum 12 Jan 1927 all FO 371/12449/F304/156/10.

[151] Cabinet 2(27), 17 January 1927, CAB 23/54.

[152] Ibid.

[153] "Possibilities of Exerting Economic Pressure on the Nationalist Government of South China", 16 Feb 1927, CID 771-B, CAB 4/16.

Imperial Defence system. Britain would first deploy a Mixed Brigade from India, a squadron of aircraft and a battalion of Royal Marines.[154] The Cabinet further agreed that, in addition to the Indian Mixed Brigade, two British Brigades, one from Britain and one from the Mediterranean, should be sent. This would bring the total British ground forces being prepared for the defence of Shanghai up to divisional strength.

Nevertheless, the Cabinet was reluctant to act unilaterally until Japan's attitude was clear. While the Japanese had agreed to limited staff conversations, Chamberlain reported that there was still no firm indication that the Japanese government would commit troops to the defence of Shanghai. As a result, the Cabinet sanctioned all necessary preparations for despatching troops, but no sailing orders were issued in order to give the Foreign Secretary another opportunity to convince the Japanese to participate in a multinational effort at Shanghai.[155] Two days later, at a small meeting between the PM, several high-ranking ministers and the COS, the CIGS reported that he had spoken with the Japanese Military Attaché and that the latter had indicated that the Japanese believed the British were exaggerating the immediate danger to Shanghai. As a result, the Japanese did not feel it necessary to start any serious talks about reinforcements.[156] Those present agreed to send a telegram to Sir John Tilley, the Ambassador in Tokyo, asking him to get a definite answer from the Japanese government within 48 hours. On the evening of 21 January, a reply was received stating that the Japanese had no intention of deploying troops to Shanghai and so orders were given for the deployment of a British division to China.[157]

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[154] This demonstrates one of the great strengths of the Imperial Defence system. On the advantages of using Indian troops to police the Empire, and increasing constraints on their use in the inter-war period see: Keith Jeffery, "'An English Barrack in the Oriental Seas'?: India in the Aftermath of the First World War", MAS, 15, 3(1981), 369-386; J.O. Rawson, "The Role of India in Imperial Defence Beyond Indian Frontiers and Home Waters, 1919-1939", unpublished DPhil dissertation, Oxford University, 1976.

[155] On January 21, the Viceroy in India agreed to the despatch of Indian troops to China and reported that there were no difficulties in making shipping arrangements. The first troops were ready to sail on January 31. Viceroy telegram, 21 Jan 1927, FO 371/12449/F599/156/10.

[156] "The Situation in China-Draft Conclusions of a Meeting Held at 10 Downing St", 19 Jan 1927, in CID 764-B, CAB 4/16. This agreed with the FO's appreciations of the possibility of Japanese involvement. Pratt and Mounsey minutes, 19 Jan 1927, Wellesley minute, 20 Jan 1927, FO 371/12449/F481/156/10.

[157] Tilley telegram, 21 Jan 1927, Mounsey, Wellesley and Chamberlain minutes, 21 Jan 1927, FO 371/12449/F600/156/10. For some of the naval movements associated with this decision see: ADM 1/8711/144; The Order of Battle for the Indian Mixed Brigade is included in WO 32/2520.

The next morning, Chamberlain summarized the British reaction to the China crisis in a letter to his sister, Ida:

> Thus the big decision is taken; we are actively seeking a settlement of differences on a most liberal basis by negotiation but we won't be hustled or driven out of Shanghai as we were out of Hankow... So we have taken....the great decisions...the tension has been great. It is a great satisfaction that for all the crucial decisions, we have had absolute unanimity among us.[158]

Thus, by the end of January a united, determined, but moderate British response had emerged to the serious crisis provoked by the Chinese occupation of the Hankow concession. The British Cabinet was resolute in its intention to show to the Chinese that it intended to hold Shanghai, even unilaterally.[159] While this policy reflected in large measure the views held by officials in China, the COS, and, to a lesser extent, the FO, it is important to note that those who advocated offensive action were in the minority. Most officials and ministers realized that while Britain had to be resolute in defending its interests in China, it also had to be careful to avoid becoming an active participant in the Chinese civil war. Yet, while China policy was characterized by a considered and restrained response, such moderation in Britain's policy towards the Soviet Union began to diminish in this period.

In large part, this was due to the fact that the events in China had led to an increase in pressure for a breach with the Soviet Union. At a meeting in mid-December 1926, the Cabinet had decided to renew discussion of the whole question of Anglo-Soviet relations after the Christmas recess.[160] In the interim, Baldwin remained under pressure from his backbenchers, among whom there was widespread support for a breach. The crisis in China convinced some Tory journalists that the communists might win in that country, and confirmed the belief among many Conservatives that the KMT was the slave of its Soviet advisors.[161] This pressure placed Chamberlain in

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[158] A. Chamberlain to I. Chamberlain, 22 Jan 1927, AC 5/1/406, Austen Chamberlain MSS.

[159] Churchill, who was away on a tour of the Mediterranean at the time, was especially hawkish. He wrote to Baldwin arguing for the despatch of a second division. He also wrote to the Secretary of State for War letting him know that the Treasury would not oppose the extra expenditure needed for the SDF, although he told his Treasury officials privately that these additional costs might be covered by cuts elsewhere in service estimates. Churchill to Baldwin, 22 Jan 1927; Churchill to Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, 25 Jan 1927; Churchill to P.J. Grigg, 25 Jan 1927, all in Gilbert, Churchill, 917-921. Churchill also told Grigg his belief that "the real wish of Japan is to see all British, American and European influence eliminated in the yellow world".

[160] Cabinet 65(26), 15 Dec 1926, CAB 23/53.

[161] Schinness, "The Conservative Party and Anglo-Soviet Relations", 397-398.

a difficult position: he had to defend his Soviet policy at a time when he was already overworked dealing with the China crisis.

In an attempt to avoid an immediate breach, the FO advocated sending a note to the Soviets protesting against their propaganda activities. Chamberlain accepted this and hoped that it might prove a suitable compromise, for it would give him "a little time & others a warning".[162] Referring to the die hards, he also hoped that it would "give satisfaction to the more restless of our followers". On January 17, he announced to the Cabinet that a protest note was in the process of being prepared by the FO.[163] But, Chamberlain also commented on the difficulty of putting together a convincing note when so much of the information on Soviet activities was based on secret sources, mostly signals intercepts.[164] In advocating a policy of avoiding a breach with the Soviet Union, Chamberlain had the support of the Prime Minister who agreed with the idea of sending a protest note, but wished to avoid a breach for two reasons. First, such an action might "introduce one more disturbing element into a world that is already sufficiently restless". Second, there were strong domestic, political reasons for avoiding a breach. The Labour Party, in the view of many Tories, was split between moderates and extremists who supported the Soviet Union and forcing a breach with the Soviet Union might serve to heal the rift in the Official Opposition.[165]

While this was the main domestic reason for avoiding a breach, the principal concerns centred around issues of foreign policy. Chamberlain agreed with Gregory's December assessment that a breach would have a disturbing effect on Central and Eastern Europe, particularly Germany, and would thus be a step backward from Locarno. In addition, a breach could damage British interests in Turkey and Persia. But no one in the FO expected that breaking off relations would change the Soviet Union's policy. Instead, Chamberlain believed that it would "merely cause them to intensify all the acts of which we complain".[166] The effect in Britain itself of a breach would

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[162] A. Chamberlain to H. Chamberlain, 27 Feb 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 5/1/411.

[163] Cabinet 2(27), 17 Jan 1927, CAB 23/54.

[164] The Soviet codes had long been broken. On the intelligence dimension see: Christopher Andrew, "British Intelligence and the Breach with Russia in 1927", HJ, 25, 4(1982), 957-964.

[165] A. Chamberlain to A. Balfour, 22 Jan 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260.

[166] Austen Chamberlain Memorandum, "Diplomatic Relations with the Soviet Government", 24 Jan 1927, FO 371/12589/N342/209/38.

be minimal, for Soviet propaganda would not stop. Echoing Baldwin's fears, Chamberlain also highlighted the political damage which a breach might cause the Conservatives:

> There has been no opposition to our Russian policy so far. The MacDonalds and Thomases, the Snowdens and Clynes of the Labour Party know that the Soviet is as much their enemy as ours...But on this new issue they would be forced to combine with those in their own ranks whom they ought to be fighting...We should thus present both Oppositions with a cry on which they could all unite...[167]

His memorandum, along with a copy of Gregory's survey of the situation, written in early December, was presented to the Cabinet in mid-February, and copies also were sent to all the important Heads of Mission in Europe in order to ascertain their views.

The balance of opinion among these men was against an immediate breach with the Soviet Union, which is not to say that they viewed the Soviet threat to the British Empire with equanimity. Ronald Lindsay, writing from Berlin, agreed with Gregory's hypothesis that the Soviet Union was practically at war with Britain, but that this new "latent war" required new methods. A breach, in his mind, would only blind Britain by removing its representation in Moscow, and it might be "very long step indeed towards converting the present peculiar struggle into an armed conflict of the old fashioned sort". Thus, he came out unreservedly against a breach.[168] In Rome, Ronald Graham questioned whether "in a worldwide Empire built up so largely on prestige, we can afford to submit passively to vicious kicks in the tenderest portions of our anatomy without some damage to our constitution". He felt that a breach was inevitable, but desired an Anglo-American understanding first, something which Gregory labeled as "not practicable".[169] Max Muller, the Minister to Poland, commented that no real material advantage would be gained by Britain in forcing a breach, while Eric Phipps, the Ambassador to France, advised the FO that the French would not follow a British lead and effect a breach themselves.[170] Only George Clerk, in Constantinople, leaned

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[167] "Diplomatic Relations with the Soviet Government", 24 Jan 1927, CP-25(27), CAB 24/184.

[168] R. Lindsay to J.D. Gregory, 3 Feb 1927, FO 371/12589/N551/209/38.

[169] R. Graham to J.D. Gregory, 4 Feb 1927, FO 371/12589/N552/209/38; J.D. Gregory Minute, 9 Feb 1927, FO 371/12589/N590/209/38.

[170] W. Max Muller to J.D. Gregory, 9 Feb 1927, FO 371/12589/N682/209/38; E. Phipps to J.D. Gregory, 26 Jan 1927, FO 371/12589/N355/209/38.

unreservedly towards a break.[171]

This debate over the efficacy of a rupture with Russia must be viewed against the backdrop of events in the Soviet Union. In late 1926 and early 1927 a major war scare developed, fanned by public speeches made by prominent communists alleging a British-led conspiracy to attack Russia.[172] Hodgson reported his impression that the war scare was not contrived but instead represented "the feelings and emotions of the Communist party and the Soviet government" and that this fear had been communicated to the population at large.[173] Nevertheless, this news was greeted with relative calm in the FO, where one clerk remarked: "These speeches are somewhat colourless as compared with those which we are accustomed to".[174] By early February Hodgson predicted that the war scare would pass, as had the ones prior to it.[175] This time, however, the war scare did not die out; instead, it became an integral part of the bitter leadership struggle in the Soviet Union. The rhetoric that accompanied the war scare, and its drawn-out nature, heightened opposition among Conservative backbenchers to Chamberlain's moderate policy toward the Soviet Union and increased calls for a breach with Russia. In February, the Cabinet finally considered this question.

This time, however, the Cabinet backed away from breaking off relations. Chamberlain's insistence that an outright breach would have a negative effect on the world situation impressed Cabinet ministers enough to adopt the more moderate course of sending only a protest note, even though by this time the Foreign Secretary had begun to express some doubts about even this step.[176] Nevertheless, the Cabinet was not sanguine about the future of

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[171] G. Clerk to J.D. Gregory, 2 Feb 1927, FO 371/12589/N550/209/38.

[172] R. Hodgson to A. Chamberlain, 17 Jan 1927, FO 371/12588/N275/190/38; John P. Sontag, "The Soviet War Scare of 1926-27", RR, 34, 1(1975), 66-77; N.S. Simonov, "'Strengthen the Defence of the Land of Soviets': The 1927 'War Alarm' and its Consequences", EAS, 48, 8(1996), 1355-1364; Kenneth D. Slepyan, "The Limits of Mobilisation: Party, State and the 1927 Civil Defence Campaign", EAS, 45, 5(1993), 851-868; Lennart Samuelson, "Mikhail Tukhachevsky and War-Economic Planning: Reconsiderations on the Pre-war Soviet Military Build-Up", JSMS, 9, 4(1996), 812-13.

[173] R. Hodgson to A. Chamberlain, 28 Jan 1927, FO 371/12588/N530/190/38.

[174] A. Gascoigne Minute, 11 Feb 1927, FO 371/12588/N585/190/38.

[175] R. Hodgson to A. Chamberlain, 9 Feb 1927, FO 371/12588/N757/190/38.

[176] A. Chamberlain to A. Steel-Maitland, 26 Jan 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260.

Anglo-Soviet relations, believing that if Russian policy continued in its current form then a breach would be "inevitable". The problem for the British was that no "especially significant event", such as the publication of the Zinoviev letter, had occurred to warrant a rupture in relations.[177] Ministers did, however, agree with Churchill's view that, if bloodshed occurred in China as a result of the policy of Soviet agents there, then a breach would have to occur.[178] As such, the protest note was intended to prepare the ground for a possible future breach and to give the Soviet Union a warning of British displeasure and future intentions. After redrafting and further discussion, the note was approved and delivered on February 23.[179] Thus, Chamberlain's tactic of using the protest note to avoid a complete break worked in the short term. However, both he and the FO realized that this was only a temporary solution and that any incident in China or at home had the potential to raise the issue again in such a manner that a breach would be unavoidable.[180] It had taken the Cabinet over a month, however, to decide even to send a protest note. While this was due to the fact that it was such a contentious issue, the principal reason for the delay was the fact that the Cabinet had been preoccupied with the situation in China.

The Cabinet's decision at the end of January to deploy troops to Shanghai had not ended the crisis in China. Owen O'Malley had continued to negotiate with Eugune Chen in an attempt to find a diplomatic means by which the Southern Chinese would return the Hankow and Kiukiang concessions.[181] At the beginning of February, as transports carrying the Indian Mixed Brigade approached China, Chen announced that he would not sign any agreement on the return of the concessions if troops landed in Shanghai. This, along with the fact that the situation in Shanghai remained calm and that the International Settlement did not appear to be in any immediate danger, led the British Cabinet to consider holding up the troop transports at Hong Kong.[182] This proposal was opposed by

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[177] Cabinet 12(27), 18 Feb 1927, CAB 23/54.

[178] "Relations with the Soviet Government-Memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer", 16 Feb 1927, CP-61(27), CAB 24/185.

[179] Cabinet 13(27), 23 Feb 1927, CAB 23/54; "Draft Note to the Soviet Charge d'Affaires", nd., CP 64(27), CAB 24/185.

[180] A. Chamberlain to R. Lindsay, 1 March 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260.

[181] Kiukiang, a minor British concession, had been seized shortly after Hankow.

[182] Cabinet 6(27), 2 Feb 1927, CAB 23/54.

all the senior British diplomats and officers commanding in China.[183] Once again, though, the FO, disagreed with the advice proffered by the men in China. Given that the Far Eastern Department had never been happy about the despatch of the Shanghai Defence Force (SDF), it now tried to use Chen's demand to hold the troops up before Shanghai, as a gesture of British goodwill.[184]

In the Cabinet there was no agreement. On the one hand, many Ministers were leery of holding up the transports at Hong Kong lest this appear to be a sign of weakness. On the other hand, they had to take into account the views of the United States and Japan, both of which had expressed concern over what the Chinese reaction might be to the arrival of British troops in Shanghai.[185] In the end, however, the Cabinet was unwilling to go against the advice of the men on the spot in China. It decided to have all the approaching troops stop at Hong Kong but to give the naval Commander in Chief, China Station, the authority to deploy them to Shanghai as he felt necessary for the protection of British lives.[186] Shortly thereafter, as the Northern armies defending Shanghai retreated after suffering several defeats at the hands of the KMT, the Indian Mixed Brigade and the two British Brigades, en route, were ordered directly to Shanghai.[187] As a result, the International Settlement at Shanghai remained relatively safe, screened as it was by the equivalent of a British division of troops, the product of the Imperial Defence system.

However, at the end of March, a new crisis developed, one which again threatened to bring Britain into direct involvement in the Chinese civil war. On March 25 Nationalist Chinese troops entered the city of Nanking and ran amok. During the carnage, the British, Japanese and American consulates were looted and, worse still, three British

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[183] M. Lampson to A. Chamberlain, 6 Feb 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260; L. Amery to S. Baldwin, 3 Feb 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260. Lampson urged the FO not to give in to such threats from Chen. Lampson telegram, 3 Feb 1927, FO 371/12432/F1057/67/10.

[184] Pratt minutes, 31 Jan 1927 and 3 Feb 1927, FO 371/12450/F979/156/10; Pratt minute, 2 Feb 1927, FO 371/12432/F998/67/10; Pratt minute, 4 Feb 1927, FO 371/12432/F1057/67/10; Mounsey minute, 6 Feb 1927, FO 371/12433/F1237/67/10. The Far Eastern Department had already made such a suggestion immediately after the Cabinet had decided to send the SDF. Frank Ashton-Gwatkin memorandum, 22 Jan 1927 and agreed Departmental minute by Pratt, Mounsey and Wellesley, 24 Jan 1927, FO 371/12450/F656/156/10.

[185] Cabinet 7(27), 4 Feb 1927, CAB 23/54. Esme Howard telegram, 29 Jan 1927 and Pratt minute thereon, 31 Jan 1927, FO 371/12400/F880/2/10; Tilley telegram, and Pratt minute thereon, 1 Feb 1927, FO 371/12450/F938/156/10.

[186] Cabinet 8(27), 7 Feb 1927, CAB 23/54.

[187] Cabinet 11(27), 17 Feb 1927, CAB 23/54.

subjects were killed and the Consul General wounded. American and British gunboats anchored on the Yangtse bombarded the city in an attempt to stop the riots and landing parties were able to evacuate the consular officials.[188]

The immediate question for the British Cabinet was whether or not to retaliate and punish the Chinese for the incident at Nanking. They had before them a report from the British, American and Japanese Ministers in Peking, recommending that the powers demand reparations for the incident and the punishment of the culprits and that they threaten forcible action, such as a blockade, if the Nationalists did not acquiesce.[189] The FO concurred in this view, although it was not optimistic about the efficacy of a blockade.[190] As discussion continued on this subject over the next month, acute pressure was placed on the Cabinet to agree to move beyond simple retaliation and to use the Nanking incident as a pretext for forcibly re-occupying the Hankow concession and for reasserting British authority in China. This led Chamberlain ruefully to remark to his sisters, "Shanghai & Hongkong are for any & every violent measure, Peking for hitting someone on the head & that quickly, & my office for doing nothing. The Cabinet & I incline to a middle course".[191] The COS was immediately instructed to examine what sanctions could be taken against the Chinese.

In a report submitted to the Cabinet at the end of March, the COS, surprisingly, took a more optimistic view of the situation in China.[192] From a military perspective, they reported, the situation in China had changed to Britain's advantage. Prior to this time, Britain had possessed few means of pressuring the southern government, and such practicable actions as the bombing of Canton, had been "of doubtful value and uncertain effect". By late March, however, the water level on the Yangtse had risen enough that British warships and gunboats could patrol the entire river from Hankow to Shanghai, a distance of over 600 miles. As well, the withdrawal of the northern

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[188] Louis, British Strategy in the Far East, 132-33; Cabinet 19(27), 28 March 1927, CAB 23/54; Lampson telegram, 24 March 1927, FO 371/12475/F2730/1530/10; Lampson telegram, 25 March 1927, FO 371/12475/F2738/1530/10; Lampson telegram, 27 March 1927, FO 371/12475/F2827/1530/10.

[189] Lampson telegram, 29 March 1927, FO 371/12475/F2879/1530/10.

[190] Agreed Far Eastern Department minute, 29 March 1927, FO 371/12475/F2879/1530/10.

[191] A. Chamberlain letter, 1 May 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 5/1/416.

[192] "The Situation in China, March 29, 1927--Report by the Chiefs of Staff", 29 March 1927, CID 784-B, CAB 4/16.

armies meant that "Freed from the complication of the presence of the Northern forces, we are now in a position to take such action as we think fit along the river against the Cantonese". Therefore, the COS recommended that Britain interrupt the passage of KMT troops across the Yangtse at important centres such as Nanking and Hankow, that it stop all purely Chinese traffic on the river and that it seize the Cantonese fleet. In order to ensure the safety of British citizens in the event of such action, the COS advised that all British concessions upriver of Hankow be evacuated. Further, the COS emphasised that Britain had to act in concert with other powers, especially Japan and suggested a division of responsibility, namely that "the British should be the predominant partner on the Yangtse and in South China, and the Japanese in North China". This reflected the British fear that, as the KMT armies marched northward, the British Legation in Peking and the British concession in Tientsin might be threatened in the same way as Hankow and Shanghai.[193] There were not enough British troops, though, to protect these areas in northern China.[194] Thus, only international cooperation would allow the British to impose a full blockade of the Yangtse River and the approaches to Canton while protecting British interests and nationals in the north.

This was not the first time that the use of a blockade to restrain and punish the southern Chinese had been mooted in British circles. As early as the beginning of January, Balfour had viewed it as an effective tool. The ATB, however, had not been impressed with the efficacy of this instrument, and had stated as much in mid-February.[195] When the ATB report had been discussed in the CID at the beginning of March, it became clear that there were divergent opinions. On the one hand, there were the navy and the Colonial Office, which believed that a blockade could be made to work, and, on the other, Chamberlain, who tended to agree with the ATB's conclusions.[196] After the Nanking incident, however, the Foreign Secretary was more willing to consider the possibility of some military action, and the Cabinet generally accepted the COS report, although it asked Admiral

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[193] "The Situation in China, April 4, 1927-Report by the Chiefs of Staff", 4 April 1927, CID 787-B, CAB 4/16.

[194] "The Situation in China with Special Reference to Peking and Tientsin-Report by the Chiefs of Staff", 11 April 1927, CID 791-B, CAB 4/16.

[195] Orest Babij, "The Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War", NM, 7, 3(1997), 5-6.

[196] 222 Mtg CID, 4 March 1927, CAB 2/5.

Tyrwhitt to submit his considered opinion on the COS's plan.[197] The Cabinet also agreed to send another infantry brigade and more artillery out from England.[198]

In April, as a result of the Nanking incident, the British Cabinet came closer to authorizing direct military action in China than hitherto in the crisis, but, in the end, did not take this option. There were a number of reasons for this hesitancy, all of which highlighted the delicate and complicated nature of the British position in China. Again, Chamberlain and the COS dominated the discussion surrounding the question of sanctions against the Chinese. The Foreign Secretary was keen to secure international cooperation, especially from the United States and Japan, but he was concerned because he believed that:

> ..the other Powers are far too much inclined to leave us with all the onus of defence and to shelter themselves behind our actions whilst attempting to curry favour with the Chinese by dissociating themselves from it.[199]

In mid-April, the Western consuls at Nanking lodged an ultimatum demanding reparations from the Southern government, but neither the Americans nor the Japanese were willing to commit themselves to pursuing military sanctions in order to back up the ultimatum.[200] Single-handed British action was a possibility, but Chamberlain felt that there were three significant objections to such a course of action. First, it would concentrate Chinese hostility on Britain. Second, it might lead the other Western powers to lodge objections, and, last, "...it would, I think meet with insufficient support from the public here at home. The Great War still haunts every household".[201]

The nature of the British response was also a problem. Tyrwhitt objected to any broad military action such as a blockade of the Yangtse River and Canton. Instead, he argued that, if force had to be used, it should then be

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[197] Cabinet 20(27), 30 March 1927, CAB 23/54.

[198] Cabinet 22(27), 1 April 1927, CAB 23/54.

[199] A. Chamberlain to M. Lampson, 4 April 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260.

[200] B.J.C. McKercher, "A Sane and Sensible Diplomacy: Austen Chamberlain, Japan, and the Naval Balance of Power in the Pacific Ocean, 1924-29", CJH, 21(1986), 205-206; Harumi Goto-Shibata, Japan and Britain in Shanghai, 1925-31, (London: MacMillan, 1995), 50-58. Howard telegram, 8 April 1927, FO 371/12477/F3448/1530/10; Howard telegram, 1 April 1927 and F. Ashton-Gwatkin minute thereon, FO 371/12404/F3479/2/10; Tilley telegram, 11 April 1927, FO 371/12477/F3527/1530/10; Tilley telegam, 12 April 1927, FO 371/12477/F3588/1530/10.

[201] A. Chamberlain to M. Lampson, 11 April 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260.

in the form of a "definite operation against definite points".[202] As the month progressed, more and more Southern forces crossed the Yangtse river and the effectiveness of any possible blockade of the Yangtse diminished. As a result, the idea was quietly lowered in priority. Instead, possible sanctions now included destroying the Wusung forts, bombarding other Chinese forts along the Yangtse, destroying the arsenals at Hankow and Canton and seizing the Cantonese fleet.[203] Yet, none of these actions seemed entirely satisfactory, and Churchill appeared to sum up the mood of the Cabinet when he wrote:

> To fire off Naval cannon at obsolete Chinese forts, or worthless Chinese arsenals or ludicrous Chinese warships cannot lead to any lasting advantage. Punishing China is like flogging a jellyfish.[204]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer reiterated a suggestion that had been made at the last Cabinet meeting: that they use part of the Shanghai Defence Force, in conjunction with naval forces, to retake the Hankow concession, single-handedly, and by force, if necessary.[205] The COS were concerned that this option might not prove feasible if it required a long-term military garrison but, nevertheless, ordered the newly-created Joint Planning Committee (JPC) to prepare a plan for the re-occupation of the concession.[206]

This idea, however, did gain some acceptance at the political level, and, at the end of the month, the Cabinet agreed, in principle, to sanction the forcible re-occupation of the concession in Hankow.[207] Less than a week later, however, the Cabinet reconsidered this decision.[208] No other Powers had declared support for such action, and the Cabinet remained wary of single-handed action. As well, it was concerned lest the concession could

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[202] Commander-in-Chief, China, to Admiralty, 31 March 1927, FO 371/12476/F3047/1530/10.

[203] "The Situation in China, April 4, 1927--Report by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee", 4 April 1927, CID 787-B, CAB 4/16.

[204] "Sanctions", 25 April 1927, CP-133(27), CAB 24/186.

[205] Cabinet 27(27), 13 April 1927, CAB 23/54.

[206] COS 53 Mtg, 25 April 1927, CAB 53/2. The JPC had been created, at Beatty's suggestion, only a month before, COS 44 Mtg, 14 March 1927, CAB 53/2. The JPC submitted its report on the re-occupation of Hankow, four days later. "China-Action at Hankow-Report by the Joint Planning Sub-Committee", COS 86, 29 April 1927, CAB 53/3.

[207] Cabinet 28(27), 27 April 1927, CAB 23/54.

[208] Cabinet 29(27), 2 May 1927, CAB 23/54.

not be held during the period of low water, the next winter, when Hankow would be cut off from any reinforcements from Shanghai. British decision-making also was complicated by the fact that differences had begun to emerge among the KMT, as Chiang Kai-shek led a moderate, non-communist section of the Party in opposition to the extremists, headquartered at Hankow. This was an encouraging sign but, initially, it remained unclear which side would prevail.[209] However, as Chiang appeared to be the one leader who could minimize communist influence in China and negotiate with Britain, the British Cabinet was reluctant to take any action which might undermine and weaken him in his battle with the extremists. As a result, the Cabinet ended up pursuing a moderate policy by default, and no offensive action was taken in retaliation for the Nanking incident. Eventually, Chiang purged the KMT of the extremist and communist elements and eschewed mob violence as a tactic for treaty revision. The result of Chiang's domination of the KMT was to ease the tensions in China which gradually led to an improvement in Sino-British relations.[210]

Nevertheless, even as events continued to unfold in China, other Imperial Defence issues did not go away. In March 1927, Birkenhead once again brought the issue of the defence of India before the CID. The previous summer the Secretary of State for India had asked for the Government of India's opinion as to the necessity of maintaining the integrity of Afghanistan. He had received replies from the Indian government and the Indian General Staff (IGS) in the autumn and he now forwarded these to the CID. The views of both the IGS and the Indian Government shocked Birkenhead, for they contradicted the opinions of the COS and the India Office. The Indian government agreed with Whitehall that Russia's aim was to bring Afghanistan into its orbit through propaganda and subversion, not necessarily through the use of military force but emphasised the long-term danger that this would create.[211] Paradoxically, however, the Indian Government no longer believed that maintaining the integrity of Afghanistan was essential to the defence of India, as this was now considered "a relative, not an absolute, term; its essential meaning is no longer inviolability but power and willingness to function as a buffer

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[209] Pratt minute and Wellesley minute, 12 April 1927, FO 371/12404/F3524/2/10; Pratt minute, 13 April 1926 and Chamberlain minute, 21 April 1927, FO 371/12404/F3634/2/10; Lampson telegram, 25 April 1927, W. S. Toller minute, Strang minute and F. Ashton-Gwatkin minute, 26 April 1927, FO 371/12404/F4015/2/10; Lampson telegram, 27 April 1927, FO 371/12404/F 4082/2/10.

[210] Fung, "Rapprochement", 79-105.

[211] "Afghanistan", 7 Oct 1926, in CID 149-D, CAB 6/5.

State". This opinion was backed by the IGS, which argued that India did not have the military means to prevent a Soviet takeover of the northern provinces of Afghanistan. The natural defensive line in Afghanistan stretched from the Hindu Kush mountains in the middle of the country to the Helmand river in the west. Operations to the north of this line would be "hazardous and indecisive," and "No military decision can be reached in this theatre, and the exhaustion, to which alone we can look for results, will be on our side only". As such, India and Britain should focus on maintaining the integrity of Afghanistan to the south of the line of the Hindu Kush and the Helmand, but not necessarily of the whole country. In addition, although the IGS had prepared a detailed plan for the extension of the Indian railway system into Afghanistan, they cautioned against starting such a programme lest it provoke a negative Soviet response.[212]

Claud Jacob, on behalf of the IO, and George Milne, the CIGS, both replied angrily to this volte face on the part of the IGS and the Indian Government. In Jacob's opinion, the Indian government's attitude left the initiative to the Russians in Afghanistan, even though he, too, did not envisage a military threat to India's neighbour.[213] Instead, he believed that the Russian intention was to "disintegrate and absorb" both Afghanistan and Persia with an eye ultimately to absorbing India by similar means. As for the IGS's contention that India and Britain could acquiesce in a Soviet takeover of northern Afghanistan, Jacob was firm. The loss of northern Afghanistan would lead to chaos in the remainder of the country, and this would simplify its absorption into the Russian sphere. Thus, he concluded that the integrity of Afghanistan had to be maintained. He urged that the entire question should come before the CID as soon as possible because "the problem so closely concerns the defence of the Empire".

The WO commentary, written by the CIGS, also strongly deprecated the idea of abandoning the maintenance of Afghanistan's integrity, but it focused mostly on disputing the IGS's military appreciation.[214] The IGS's military plan was essentially defensive in nature, according to Milne, and this was wrong, for "We can defeat an enemy, more especially an Oriental one, only in one way, and that is by attacking him". As a result, the CIGS advocated an offensive campaign, not a defensive one, in case of a Russian attack into Afghanistan. In fact,

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[212] "Extension of Railways into Afghanistan", 7 Oct 1926, in Ibid.

[213] "Memorandum by Field Marshall Sir Claud Jacob, on Government of India Despatches Nos 9 and 10, both dated 7th October 1926", 29 Nov 1926, in Ibid.

[214] "Memorandum by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff on the Integrity of Afghanistan", nd., in Ibid.

according to Milne, the northern provinces of Afghanistan could be protected, and they had to be protected, as "what is really at stake is the integrity of the British Empire, and surely no effort is too great to ensure this". The best policy Britain and India could pursue in peacetime would be to adopt an aggressive policy of railway construction in southern Afghanistan. On this issue, the WO received strong support from Trenchard, who commented that "on the supposition that the whole resources of the British Empire will be involved, the policy advocated by the Government of India appears truly astonishing".[215] Along with the CIGS, the CAS believed that the best method of stopping a Russian advance into northern Afghanistan would be by taking offensive action. Trenchard was especially concerned that if Russia was able to establish peacetime bases in northern Afghanistan, then these would be very difficult to destroy by air attack in wartime.

While the above memorandum dealt principally with military issues, a second WO memorandum prepared for the CID outlined the General Staff's appreciation of political events in the East.[216] India was portrayed, once again as the ultimate objective of a series of Soviet actions spreading from Afghanistan, through Sinkiang and Mongolia to southern China. In Afghanistan, the Soviets were engaged in propaganda and subversion. This was a strategy which, the General Staff assessed, had worked well in China. The immediate aim of Soviet policy in Afghanistan was not to cause the disintegration of the country, but to develop it as an "advanced buffer" and the jumping off point for further penetration into India. If Soviet policy in China and Afghanistan was successful, the General Staff warned, then "the Russian ring around India would be virtually complete without the necessity of having to fight for this object". But, they further cautioned that, although the Soviets were using non-military means of penetration, this did not rule out the possibility that a frontier incident, or some other action, could precipitate a war in Afghanistan.

Once again, the WO's views received a mixed reaction in the FO. The Northern Department remained skeptical of the General Staff's assertion that "a Russian Ring" was being formed around India. It doubted that there would be a military advance into Afghanistan, although, "the danger to our interests undoubtedly lies rather in a

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[215] "Afghanistan-Notes by the Chief of the Air Staff", 10 March 1927, AIR 8/89.

[216] "Soviet Activities in Central and Eastern Asia--Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War", 15 March 1927, CID 782-B, CAB 4/16.

gradual infiltration of Bolshevik ideas and influence into the country".[217] The Far Eastern Department now expressed doubt about the ultimate success of Soviet intrigues in China, commenting that "a China under the Russian thumb is not an ideal the Bolsheviks are likely to realise". But, the danger to the British Empire was more in the short term. The Russians hoped that "British trade and, more importantly still, British prestige in Asia, will have been dealt an irreparable blow. If we can be forced to a humiliating surrender, by Chinese nationalism, Indian nationalism will profit by example".[218]

All the IO, IGS and WO memoranda were presented to a meeting of the CID in mid-March 1927, at which the question of British interest in Afghan integrity was the sole topic on the agenda.[219] After a lengthy discussion, it became apparent that significant differences remained between the views of the CIGS and the India Office on the one hand and the opinions of the IGS and the Indian government on the other hand. As a result, Baldwin suggested that the question be considered in detail by a sub-committee, based on terms of reference which Birkenhead had proposed earlier.[220] Chaired by Birkenhead, and counting among its members Churchill, Chamberlain, Salisbury, Claud Jacob and the CIGS, the Defence of India sub-committee met several days later to consider, once again, this long-standing Imperial Defence problem.[221] The committee sat through a lengthy series of meetings and dissected in great detail all the issues surrounding the defence of India and Afghanistan. A final report, however, was not submitted to the CID until January 1928. The report was very much a victory for the views of the CIGS and the IO, for it reaffirmed the conclusions of Lord Morley's committee in 1907:

> by our own plain interest our obligations to guard the independence and integrity of Afghanistan are unimpaired, and that the deliberate crossing of the Oxus or the occupation of Herat by Russia

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[217] C.M. Palairet minute, 18 March 1927, FO 371/12555/N /97

[218] K.R. Johnstone minute, 2 April 1927, Ibid.

[219] 223 Mtg CID, 17 March 1927, CAB 2/5. The remainder of this paragraph is based on this meeting.

[220] "Afghanistan", 4 March 1927, CID 149-D, CAB 6/5. The terms of reference covered such topics as the necessity for maintaining the integrity of Afghanistan, the Russian threat to Afghanistan and India and the defence of Afghanistan and India from a Russian attack.

[221] "Defence of India Sub-Committee--Composition and Terms of Reference", 18 March 1927, DI-1, CAB 16/83.

would be the violation of a frontier which we are bound to defend.[222]

The committee, though, did not feel that there was any imminent danger of a Russian attack on Afghanistan. Nevertheless, it directed the CIGS and the Chief of the Air Staff to develop further their departmental plans for war with Russia in Afghanistan, and the COS were tasked with preparing plans for operations against Russia in theatres other than Afghanistan. When this report came before the CID in early 1928, its conclusions were warmly accepted.[223]

Over the next two years, the COS refined its war plans against the Soviet Union. These were based on a General Staff appreciation that was presented to the Defence of India committee in the spring of 1927.[224] The General Staff envisaged that, should Russia invade Afghanistan, its main line of advance would be in the south, where the terrain was flatter and easier. At the same time, a force of about 20,000 soldiers would rapidly try to seize the Afghan capital, Kabul, deep in the middle of the Hindu Kush mountain range. The British riposte would be to hold the line of the Hindu Kush mountains in the east and to go on the offensive in the west as soon as possible in order to eject the Russian army completely from Afghanistan. The plan included the use of large, armoured and mechanized formations on the plains of western Afghanistan. The General Staff warned, however, that to force a Russian withdrawal from Afghanistan would probably involve the commitment of the full resources of the Empire and that success might be achieved only after a long and costly war. It also warned that current deficiencies in the three services and the Indian army prevented the plan from being executed. An exercise run by the Imperial Defence College (IDC) in the autumn of 1928 further highlighted the difficulties in fighting a war with the Soviet Union to a successful conclusion.[225] Assuming that Europe remained neutral in an Anglo-Soviet war over Afghanistan, Britain would enjoy naval and technological superiority, while the Soviet Union would enjoy its traditional advantages of manpower and space. The latter, however, would be hampered by technical limitations

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[222] "Defence of India--First Report of Sub-Committee", 19 Dec 1927, DI-29, CAB 16/83.

[223] 232 Mtg CID, 26 Jan 1928, CAB 2/5.

[224] "Appreciation of the Military Situation in the Event of War with Russia in Central Asia", 25 March 1927, DI 3, CAB 16/83; "Appreciation of the Military Situation in the Event of War with Russia in Central Asia, Parts II and III", 21 April 1927, DI 3a, CAB 16/83.

[225] "Imperial Defence College. Exercise No. 7–Russia", October 1928, CAB 53/15.

in its equipment, weaknesses in its manufacturing base and a perceived unstable government. Yet, the IWC foresaw that Britain would have difficulty in exploiting its advantages for, apart from imposing a blockade, and from conducting peripheral operations in the Baltic and amphibious feints elsewhere, Britain had no way of dealing the Soviet Union a decisive blow.

Nevertheless, by late 1928 the war plan against the Soviet Union was refined further and presented to a new meeting of the Defence of India committee.[226] Under the plan, if the Russians attacked Afghanistan, troops and aircraft from India would immediately be despatched over the frontier to act as a covering force at Kandahar in the west and to protect Kabul. Over the next several months, a new railhead would be stretched to Kandahar to support operations in the west, while new troops were mobilized in Britain. By the start of the fifth month of the campaign, one armoured brigade, 3 divisions and support troops were to be mobilized and sent from Britain while, starting in the seventh month of hostilities, another 7 divisions would be embarked for the theatre of operations. The principal British build up would be in the south, at Kandahar, from where the main British attack would develop. The armoured brigade would lead British forces across the Helmand river towards what was believed would be the main Russian base at Herat. Once this was captured, the Russians gradually would be forced out of Afghanistan. This plan was approved by the Defence of India committee in the spring of 1929, and it became the basis of British Army mobilization plans.[227]

By the time these plans were being drawn up, however, the Russian menace, which had loomed so large as a threat to Imperial Defence when the Defence of India committee had begun its deliberations, had diminished. This was due to a confluence of domestic and international actions in the spring of 1927. First, in April, Chiang Kai-shek openly broke with the communist elements in the KMT, viciously purging his party of its communists. By the summer, Borodin and the other Soviet advisors had been sent back to Moscow. This action eased the British fear that Bolshevism had been masquerading as Chinese nationalism. Not only did this strengthen the pursuit of a moderate policy in China, but it removed one of the greatest factors contributing to the anxiety which British

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[226] "Part I of Plan of Operations in the Event of War with Russia in Afghanistan", September 1928, DI-36, CAB 16/84.

[227] DI 14th Mtg, 14 Feb 1929, CAB 16/84; "Second Report of Sub-Committee", 10 April 1929, DI-38, CAB 16/84.

policymakers had felt about the spread of communism throughout the Empire. The second, and paradoxical, reason for the diminution of the Russian threat was that in May the British government finally broke off relations with the Soviet Union. This occurred after the police raid on the Soviet trading organization, Arcos, had produced documents which tended to implicate the Soviet Union in supporting revolutionary organizations in Britain. The details of the Arcos raid and the decision to break off relations have been dealt with elsewhere.[228] What is important to note is that with the breach, the anti-Soviet clamour of backbench Conservative MPs died out. This clamour had done much to raise the temperature in Anglo-Soviet relations and to convey the imminence of the Soviet menace. The breach, in effect, took the wind out of the sails of this group. Lastly, the Defence of India committee itself showed that any direct Soviet military threat to Afghanistan was not imminent.

Thus, by 1928, the red menace to the Empire, which at times from 1925 onwards had appeared so real, so dangerous and so all-pervasive, died out. That summer Chamberlain reported that, while Russia remained a potential danger, its army was not capable of serious offensive operations and that its leadership was preoccupied with internal matters.[229] The diminution of the Soviet threat was highlighted by the deliberations of another CID sub-committee, the Persian Gulf sub-committee, which was formed in 1928 to examine British policy in the Gulf.[230] The prevention of any Russian encroachment toward the Persian Gulf had always been a key element in Imperial Defence planning. Prior to the First World War, the Persian Gulf's importance had been in that it protected the westward Indian flank. After the war, while this remained the case, its importance increased for several other reasons. First, Britain now possessed a mandate over Iraq, which bordered on the Gulf. Second, the South Persian oilfields provided an important source of oil for the Royal Navy. Last, the shores of the Gulf were an important link in the Imperial air route to India.[231] Although the committee concluded that the "Russian danger remains in

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[228] Andrew, "British Intelligence", 957-964; Harriette Flory, "The Arcos Raid and the Rupture of Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1927", JCH, 12(1977), 707-723.

[229] 236 Mtg CID, 5 July 1928, CAB 2/5.

[230] "Composition and Terms of Reference", 25 June 1928, PG-1, CAB 16/94.

[231] "An Appreciation of the Strategical Situation in the Persian Gulf by the Indian General Staff', 1 Nov 1928, PG-1, CAB 16/94; "Oil Interests in the Persian Gulf-Memorandum by the Board of Trade", 28 June 1928, PG-7, CAB 16/94; Statement by Hugh Trenchard at PG 5 Mtg, 24 Oct 1928, CAB 16/94.

an aggravated form", the prevention of Russian encroachment animated neither the majority of the report nor of its discussions.[232] In a separate report, the COS had decided that "Russia...does not possess, and, indeed, is unlikely in the near future to possess, either aircraft or the organisation required to translate this threat into action.[233] In reality, the committee was primarily concerned with readjusting British policy in the Gulf as a result of the rise of Persian nationalism, the consolidation of Ibn Saud's kingdom on the Arabian peninsula and the changing relationship with the Trucial kingdoms along the coast of the Persian Gulf.[234]

In the 1920s there was no consensus on the extent of the Soviet threat or on the appropriate response. On the one extreme, Lord Milne argued for an apocalyptic vision of Soviet intentions that were motivated by one objective, namely "the overthrow of British interests in the Far and Middle East with the ultimate object of undermining our supremacy in India".[235] This view had antecedents dating well back to nineteenth century concerns of Tsarist expansion in Central Asia. However, in retrospect it can be seen that Milne was wide of the mark. While the Soviet leadership disliked Great Britain and took advantage of every opportunity to sow dissent in Britain and in the Empire, there was little real threat to the Empire. Furthermore, no matter how many lengthy memoranda were produced on measures to deal with the Soviet threat, the reality was that Britain could do little to affect Soviet policy. However, what is instructive about the debate around the Soviet threat is the light that it throws on Britain's determination to defend the Empire in the 1920s. In contradistinction to writers on British decline in the twentieth century, there was no lack of will in the 1920s to maintain Britain's position in the world. In particular, when Britain's key interests and prestige were perceived to be threatened in China in 1927, the British Cabinet responded resolutely by sending a division to Shanghai, this despite the misgivings voiced by the Foreign Office.

The Soviet threat to India, if it had proved serious, would have had significant implications for defence spending. Indeed, the army saw the opportunity it presented to justify expenditure on mechanization and other

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[232] "The Persian Gulf-Interim Report of a Sub-Committee", 29 Oct 1928, CID 169-D, CAB 6/5.

[233] "Report by the Chiefs of Staff Committee", 11 Oct 1928, COS 179, CAB 53/16.

[234] For more on the Persian Gulf sub-committee see, Uriel Dann, "British Persian Gulf Concepts in the Light of Emerging Nationalism in the Late 1920s", in idem., ed., The Great Powers in the Middle East, 1919-1939, (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), 50-68.

[235] Milne minute, 5 March 1927, WO 32/5916.

projects. In reality, though, the Soviet threat was not military in nature, as the FO well appreciated. Furthermore, the response to the Hankow crisis proved to be well within the capabilities of the Imperial Defence system to respond. As a result, discussion of the Red menace rarely seriously affected discussion of the fundamentals of expenditure on Imperial Defence and it certainly did not lead to an increase in army estimates, for instance. This would not be the case for the next major issues to emerge on the horizon. Beginning in 1927 British policymakers became preoccupied with two new Imperial Defence problems: naval disarmament and Anglo-American relations. These would remain front and centre for the next three years and would present fundamental challenges to the underpinnings of British naval power.

Chapter 3: Imperial Defence at Sea: Anglo-American Relations and Naval Disarmament, 1927-1930

The crisis in China and the despatch of the Shanghai Defence Force highlighted the advantages which the Imperial Defence system bestowed: the ability to project power and the ability to defend British interests across the globe. The ships of the China Station, the gunboats on the Yangtse, the cruiser squadron in the South China Sea and the merchant ships convoying British troops to the Far East underscored that the navy was the key to Imperial Defence. However, in the 1920s, the desire for disarmament was widespread, and the navy, with its expensive building programmes and high maintenance costs, was a logical target for those who believed in the pursuit of peace through disarmament.[236] The Navy's expenses also caught the eye of the Treasury and the Cabinet, both of which desired to channel money into social services without increasing taxation. The Treasury, in particular, hoped to use the disarmament discussions to further its own aim of reigning in defence expenditure. The RN's cause was hurt further because the Treasury did not share the navy's concern over Japanese policy. As a result, the RN found itself constantly having to defend the rationale behind its capital programmes. The pursuit of naval disarmament and Treasury policy threatened to scupper the RN's attempts to re-orient itself in order to be able to fight a Far Eastern war. Consequently, beginning with the Coolidge Naval Conference in 1927, and lasting until the end of the London Naval Conference of 1930, the naval disarmament question was an important component of British thinking about Imperial Defence.[237] However, the size of the Royal Navy was judged relative

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[236] For the development of British disarmament policy in these years and for its relation to domestic opinion see: D. Richardson, The Evolution of British Disarmament Policy in the 1920s, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); B.J.C. McKercher, "The Politics of Naval Arms Limitation in Britain in the 1920s", DS, 4, 3(1993), 35-59; Gregory C. Kennedy, "Britain's Policy-Making Elite, the Naval Disarmament Puzzle, and Public Opinion, 1927-1932", Albion, 26, 4(1994), 623-643; Cecelia Lynch, "A Matter of Controversy: The Peace Movement and British Arms Policy in the Interwar Period", in B.J.C. McKercher, ed., Arms Limitation and Disarmament: Restraints on War, 1899-1939, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 61-82; Philip Towle, "British Security and Disarmament Policy in Europe in the 1920s", in R. Ahmann, A.M. Birke and M. Howard, eds., The Quest for Stability: Problems of West European Security 1918-1957, (London: OUP, 1993), 127-153; The most recent work on British disarmament policy is Carolyn J. Kitching, Britain and the Problem of International Disarmament, 1919-1934, (London: Routledge, 1999).

[237] Many historians have criticized the inter-war naval conferences for restricting the Royal Navy unduly and thereby undermining Britain's power. Paul Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery, (London: 1976); Correlli Barnett, The Collapse of British Power, (London: Eyre, Methuen, 1972), A. Marder, Old Friends, New Enemies. A more recent critic of the London Naval Conference of 1930 has been John Ferris. "'It is Our Business in the Navy to Command the Seas': The Last Decade of British Maritime Supremacy, 1919-1929", in Greg Kennedy and Keith Neilson, eds., Far Flung Lines: Studies in Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman, (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 124-170. Other historians see the period from 1927 to 1930 and, especially, the London Naval Conference, as the point where the United States inevitably displaced Great Britain as the world's

to the navies of the other major powers, in particular the USN and the IJN. The United States was anxious to achieve naval parity in cruisers with Britain for reasons of prestige. At the same time, Japan was certain to build in response to any increased American construction. So, both of these navies hoped to use the concept of naval disarmament in order to strengthen their own relative naval positions. Any discussion of naval disarmament was thus linked to the issue of Anglo-American and Anglo-Japanese relations. Moreover, these three factors were, in turn, linked to the balance of power in the Far East. As a result, between 1927 and 1930, Imperial Defence, naval disarmament and Anglo-American relations were firmly interlocked.[238]

The point at which all these issues intersected was the question of the relative size of the cruiser fleets of all the major naval powers. For the RN, cruisers were the workhorses of Imperial Defence because they carried out a variety of critical roles. In wartime they were an integral part of the Main Fleet, they patrolled the vast trade routes of the empire and they hunted down hostile commerce raiders. In peacetime, cruisers showed the White Ensign around the globe, and they protected British interests from the West Indies to China. As the British Naval Attaché in Washington assured Esme Howard, the British Ambassador to the United States, cruisers spent a great

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pre-eminent naval power. Examples of this argument are: Raymond G. O'Connor, Force and Diplomacy, (Coral Gables, FL: 1972); Michael Vlahos, The Blue Sword: The Naval War College and the American Mission, 1919-1941, (Newport, RI: 1980); and Christopher Hall, Britain, America and Arms Control, 1921-37, (London: MacMillan, 1987). For revisionist accounts of the London Naval Conference see, Gregory C. Kennedy, "The 1930 London Naval Conference and Anglo-American Maritime Strength, 1927-1930", in B.J.C. McKercher, Arms Limitation and Disarmament, 218-48; Orest Babij, "The Second Labour Government and British Maritime Security, 1929-1931", DS, 6, 3(1995), 645-671. Other historians have viewed the rivalry generated by the naval conferences as a difficult, if not regrettable phase, in the relations between two powers who generally had a great deal in common with each other. Norman Gibbs, "The Naval Conferences of the Interwar Years: A Study in Anglo-American Relations", NWCR, 30, 1(1977), 50-63.

[238] For a general view of the nature of the Anglo-American relationship in the 1920s see: D.C. Watt, Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain's Place, 1900-1975, (Cambridge: CUP, 1984); Erik Goldstein, "The British Official Mind and the United States, 1919-42", in T.G. Otte and Constantine A. Pagedas, eds, Personalities, War and Diplomacy: Essays in International History, (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 66-80. Recent literature has emphasized the competitive and, at times antagonistic, relationship between the two powers in the 1920s. B.J.C McKercher, Transition of Powre: Britain's Loss of Global Pre-eminence to the United States, 1930-1945, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), particularly the prologue; Frank Costigliola, "Anglo-American Financial Rivalry in the 1920s", JEconH, 37(1977), 911-34; Roberta Allbert Dayer, "Anglo-American Monetary Policy and Rivalry in Europe and the Far East, 1919-1931", in B.J.C. McKercher, ed., Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s: The Struggle for Supremacy, (London: MacMillan, 1991), 158-186; B.J.C. McKercher, "Wealth, Power, and the New International Order: Britain and the American Challenge in the 1920s", DH, 12(1988), 411-441; idem., "'The Deep and Latent Distrust': The British Official Mind and the United States, 1919-1939", in idem., ed., Anglo-American Relations, 209-238; idem., "No Eternal Friends or Enemies: British Defence Policy and the Problem of the United States, 1919-1939", CJH., 28(1993), 257-293.

deal of their time "pottering avout [sic] among the Cannibal Islands and putting a longing for law and order into the bosom of the Shanghai Bolshies".[239] By the mid-1920s, maintaining a large fleet of suitable cruisers had become difficult. The government was reluctant to spend the large sums required for new construction. The RN was confronted by a unique problem resulting from the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-22. The Treaty had fixed the maximum cruiser size at 10,000 tons, armed with 8-inch guns, a ship size which the RN found unsuitable. It was too large for what it was required to do, and, by far, too expensive. In 1922 no such ships had existed but both Japan and the United States soon began to build up to this size and, because the other powers had begun to construct these ships, the RN felt compelled to keep up.[240] The RN now wanted a cap on the construction of these vessels and to establish a relative balance in the numbers of large cruisers in the fleets of the major naval powers. Because of the potential requirement to protect the Far East, the RN could not allow the Japanese force of 8-inch cruisers to grow unchecked. The RN needed to maintain a 5:3 ratio over Japan and to answer the Japanese Furutaka class ships.[241]

Throughout these years, the RN continued to pursue its goals of, first, securing a steady, long-term building programme and, second, preventing any naval disarmament conference from damaging Britain's naval position. Ironically, though, beginning in 1926, the Navy began to realize that it might be able to turn the prevalent pacific desire for disarmament to its advantage. If a new naval conference could agree to limit the future size of capital ships and the number of large 10,000 tons cruisers, this would then simplify the RN's construction plans and assure that foreign construction did not undermine the RN's relative strength. Consequently, the Admiralty began to support naval disarmament as one aspect of its overall policy. At the Coolidge Naval Conference of 1927, the Navy failed to achieve its aims as the conference broke down over the cruiser question. This led to a period of

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[239] E. Howard to A. Chamberlain, 13 July 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/261.

[240] This was a case of an international disarmament agreement driving naval construction in a new direction. The Americans and the Japanese, in particular, liked these new ships. Ernest Andrade, Jr., "Arms Limitation Agreements and the Evolution of Weaponry: The Case of the "Treaty Cruiser", in Daniel Masterson, ed., Naval History: The Sixth Symposium of the US Naval Academy, (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1987), 179-190. In 1928, an Admiralty Tactical Section review of cruiser design concluded that, "the 10,000 ton cruiser is not what she is because she is the best ship for cruiser duties. She is of this size because by political agreement a certain high limit was reached and everyone builds up to it in order to meet a naval requirement". "The Evolution of the Cruiser-A Monograph by Commander King-Hall", 15 December 1928, ADM 1/8724/93.

[241] Egerton minute, 18 August 1927, ADM 1/8711/142.

strained Anglo-American relations which ended at the highly successful London Naval Conference (LNC) of 1930. In between the two conferences, the Navy fought off very determined efforts on the part of Churchill and the Treasury to scale back any naval construction and reduce the overall size of the naval estimates. Yet, all these different issues were animated by one common concern: Imperial Defence. This was inevitable, as the navy was the keystone service in the Imperial Defence architecture, and so any discussion of naval policy was, by default, a discussion of Imperial Defence policy. This concept was not lost on the statesmen of the day, but, rather lay as an unspoken assumption behind every debate and every argument. The Navy argued for its programmes based on its interpretation of the requirements necessary to fulfill its Imperial Defence commitments. The Treasury attacked the Admiralty's programmes because it believed that, in the peaceful atmosphere of the late 1920s, Imperial Defence would not be damaged by further naval cutbacks. However, when it appeared at the Coolidge Conference that the Americans wanted to place limits on the RN's ability to carry out its Imperial Defence roles, Churchill, and the majority of the Cabinet, preferred to let the conference fail rather than acquiesce. The LNC was successful because a compromise was found between the Navy's Imperial Defence needs and the foreign policy goals of the Labour government. Thus, Imperial Defence is the key to understanding the foreign and naval policies of these years.

This period of intense interest in naval disarmament and Anglo-American relations began on February 10, 1927 when the United States invited Britain, and the four other major signatories of the Washington Conference, to a new conference to discuss a further limitation of naval armaments.[242] The invitation was the result of the impatience of the American President, Calvin Coolidge, with the slow pace of the discussions within the Preparatory Commission of the League of Nations, which had been meeting since the previous May in an attempt to prepare a draft Disarmament Convention for the consideration of a general disarmament conference.[243] However, by the fall of 1926, negotiations in the technical sub-committees of the Preparatory Commission had become bogged down, especially over the issue of the limitation of land armaments. Coolidge hoped that a separate naval

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[242] J.D. Gregory Minute, 10 Feb 1927, DBFP, Series 1a, v.3, p.565.

[243] Richard W. Fanning, "The Coolidge Conference of 1927: Disarmament in Disarray", in McKercher, ed, Arms Limitation, 112. The classic work on the Coolidge Naval Conference is David Carlton, "Great Britain and the Coolidge Naval Disarmament Conference of 1927", PSQ, 83, 4(1968), 573-598.

agreement might break the deadlock in the disarmament negotiations and thereby speed up the adoption of an overall convention.[244]

The American invitation was initially discussed within the FO. While acknowledging that the proposal to summon a naval conference in Geneva appeared to mark an important American concession to the League, FO officials immediately surmised that the cruiser question would likely become a focal issue. Officials realized that the Americans would likely place great pressure on Britain to reduce her cruiser numbers, but doubted whether this would be acceptable to the Admiralty.[245] Chamberlain, however, pointed out that, if the American proposals for limitation were unacceptable, then Britain would be free to propose "an alternative line of advance".[246] A few days later, the Cabinet agreed to accept the invitation.[247] However, the development of the British negotiating position for what rapidly became known as the Coolidge Naval Conference was left almost entirely to the Admiralty, with practically no further involvement from the FO. There were several reasons for this. First, the FO was already overwhelmed. As seen above, the continuing crisis in China occupied a great deal of the FO's time, as did the issue of the ever-worsening relations with the Soviet Union. Added to this, a new crisis was brewing in Egypt.[248] As a result, there was little time left over for detailed planning for the Coolidge Conference. In addition, those at the FO charged with disarmament policy were already preoccupied with preparing a British draft convention which was to be submitted to the Preparatory Commission in March. Last, the Admiralty had already been working on new arms limitation proposals.

The naval staff had been considering the problem of future naval limitation since 1924, although at first

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[244] B.J.C. McKercher, "Of Horns and Teeth: The Preparatory Commission and the World Disarmament Conference, 1926-1934", in idem., Arms Limitation and Disarmament, 178.

[245] Alexander Cadogan [Assistant to the British Delegate to the League of Nations] minute, 11 Feb 1927, DBFP, Series 1a, v.3, pp. 566-568; Ronald Campbell [Senior Clerk, Western and League of Nations Department, FO] minute, 12 Feb 1927, DBFP, Series 1a, v.3, pp. 568-571.

[246] Austen Chamberlain minute, 14 Feb 1927, DBFP, Series 1a, v.3, p. 571.

[247] Cabinet 10(27), 16 Feb 1927, CAB 23/54.

[248] The controversy arose over differences between the views of Lord Lloyd, the British High Commissioner in Egypt, and Tyrrell, and the views of Chamberlain over an Egyptian proposal to increase the size of its army. Grayson, Austen Chamberlain, 217-218. This controversy, along with the Arcos Raid, absorbed a good deal of Chamberlain's attention in the spring of 1927. The Foreign Secretary also took a brief holiday at this time.

with little enthusiasm.[249] However, with the start of the Preparatory Commission, naval planners became somewhat more willing to consider a degree of further limitation, including a limitation on the size and armament of cruisers.[250] In the fall of 1926, the Admiralty's approach to the problem of disarmament again shifted. Instead of resisting any and all ideas regarding limitation, Admiralty planners began to examine how best the Royal Navy could harness any future conference to buttress Britain's naval power.

The main impetus behind this change of tack was a financial one. The inability of the Admiralty to persuade the Baldwin government to adopt a comprehensive ten-year building programme and annual Treasury assaults on the naval estimates convinced many planners that funding for new construction would be even harder to come by in the future:

> It is becoming more evident every day that the...Admiralty will find it increasingly difficult in the future to persuade the government to meet naval requirements, if the new men-of-war of the next decade have to be built to designs similar to those of the ships now under construction. With, for example, Battleships each costing over £7 million and cruisers each costing over £2 million and taking into account the maintenance charges for these expensive ships we shall soon reach naval estimates of about £80 million.[251]

It was understood that it was unrealistic to expect such a high level of expenditure. The problem really centred on the years from 1930 until 1939, for several different factors combined in these years to place a real strain on naval spending. First, the naval holiday in respect to capital ship construction agreed to at the Washington Naval Conference was due to run out in 1931and new battleship construction could begin that year. Second, compounding this problem, was the fact that in the same decade all of the war-built cruisers would have to be replaced, at additional cost.[252] As a result, as a Plans Division memorandum stated, "...our material interests coincide with those

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[249] See the discussions in ADM 1/8683/131; "Limitation of Naval Armaments", nd. circa 1925, ADM 1/27402.

[250] Minutes by Rear Admiral Frederic Dreyer [Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (ACNS)], 14 April 1926, Vice Admiral Frederick Field [Deputy Chief of Naval Staff (DCNS)], 15 April 1926, Rear Admiral Ernle Chatfield [Third Sea Lord and Controller], 27 April 1926, ADM 1/27402; "Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Report of Sub-Committee", 28 April 1926, CID 682-B, CAB 4/14.

[251] "Classification and Limitation of Warships", 21 Dec 1926, ADM 1/8699/118.

[252] "Limitation of Armaments and British Naval Estimates, 1930-1939", 29 Nov 1926, ADM 1/27402.

of an abstract nature [that is, disarmament]".[253] Now, naval planners began to talk of using a possible disarmament conference to limit the size of battleships and cruisers and to extend the life of other ships. This, it was hoped, would decrease the cost of future naval construction, thereby making the ensuing programme more palatable.[254]

The Admiralty Board discussed this issue in late January 1927. Overall, the Sea Lords expressed their disappointment in the discussions at Geneva, and suggested that, as an alternative, Britain might put forward naval disarmament proposals which would lead to a separate naval agreement.[255] The Admiralty, they argued, should take the lead in formulating any proposals which had as their aim the limitation of expenditure. Otherwise:

> the Board eventually may be forced either to accept a policy incompatible with the security of the Empire, or to bear the odium of refusing to accept proposals made by other Countries, and so lose the benefit to be derived by taking the initiative.[256]

As it stood at the beginning of 1927, the naval construction programme for the 1930s would cost approximately £24 million. Together with the annual maintenance costs of the navy, the total annual estimates would run to £79 million. The Sea Lords, however, rejected the idea of reducing this amount by means of cutting back any further on the numbers of important ships. Specifically, they deprecated both any cut in the number of battleships below the Washington figure of 15 and any cut to their desired cruiser level of 70 ships.[257] Instead, they suggested that the life of battleships could easily be extended to 26 years, thereby reducing the building programme in most years by fifty percent. To reduce the cost of battleships further, they estimated that an adequate future capital ship could be reduced in size from 35,000 tons to around 28,000 tons and carry 13.5-inch guns. Cruisers, however, were a more difficult problem, as these varied widely in displacement and gun calibre. The Sea Lords recommended

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[253] "The Limitation of Armaments and the British Programme of New Construction", 15 Nov 1926, ADM 1/27402.

[254] Field Minute, 9 Nov 1926, ADM 1/8705/151; "Classification and Limitation of Warships", 21 Dec 1926, ADM 1/8699/118; "Limitation of Armaments and British Naval Estimates, 1930-1939", 29 Nov 1926, ADM 1/27402; Dreyer Minute, 14 Dec 1926, ADM 1/27402.

[255] "Limitation of Armaments", 24 Jan 1927, ADM 167/76.

[256] Ibid.

[257] At the time, the Royal Navy did not possess 70 cruisers. This figure was derived by estimating that the navy required 25 cruisers for fleet work and 45 for trade protection. For some of the calculations used to arrive at the ideal number of 70 see: "Ten Year Building Programme", 6 March 1925, ADM 1/8685/152.

extending the Washington capital ship ratio of 5:5:3 to the large, 10,000 ton cruisers carrying 8-inch guns. Any cruisers built to replace these should be in the range of 7,500 tons and carry 6-inch guns.[258] In addition the Sea Lords suggested limits on the displacement and armament on destroyers and submarines.

The Admiralty Board accepted these proposals, and noted that "if the conference were summoned by this country, not only would our naval prestige be enhanced but the initiative would also pass into our hands".[259] William Bridgeman, the First Lord of the Admiralty, agreed to find a way to pass this suggestion on to the Prime Minister. The First Lord did so at the start of February, and the PM, in turn, passed these recommendations on to Churchill and Chamberlain.[260] However, the American invitation overtook this proposal, and, obviously, the idea of a British-inspired conference went no further. But, these preparations meant that the Admiralty was well placed to set the British position for the Coolidge Conference.

Indeed, the Naval Staff's proposals for the Geneva Conference, presented to the CID in April 1927, were almost identical to those handed to the Board in January.[261] Again, there was a recognition of the "urgent necessity for reducing the future cost of naval defence". It was proposed to extend the life of capital ships, while reducing the displacement and gun calibre of any future replacements. At the same time, the naval staff agreed to reduce the number of British destroyers to 144 and to place maximum limits on displacement and gun size in this class of ship. In addition, they agreed that Britain could accept a limit of 60 submarines and should try to induce other powers to go down to an even lower number. The most difficult issue, once again, was that of cruisers. The naval staff differentiated between two types of cruisers: those that had to work with the main fleet and those whose task it was to patrol the lengthy lines of sea communication throughout the Empire. Using a formula based on the tonnage of shipping at sea multiplied by the length of trade routes, the naval staff calculated that Britain required 45 cruisers for trade defence, the United States 22 and Japan six. For work with the fleet, it was estimated that 5

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[258] As early as July 1925, the naval staff had concluded that a very good cruiser could be built in this size range. Dreyer Minute, 14 April 1926, ADM 1/27402.

[259] Admiralty Board Minutes, 27 Jan 1927, ADM 167/75.

[260] Tadashi Kuramatsu, "The Geneva Naval Conference of 1927: The British Preparation for the Conference, December 1926 to June 1927", JSS, 19, 1(1996), 106.

[261] "Further Limitation of Naval Armaments", 14 April 1927, CID 808-B, CAB 4/16.

cruisers were required for every 3 capital ships. This resulted in Britain and the United States each possessing 25 cruisers for fleet work and Japan only 15. Thus, in total numbers, the Admiralty believed that Britain required 70 cruisers, the United States 47 and Japan only 21. In reality, even the naval staff admitted that "other Powers may advance special political and/or strategical reasons for varying these assessments" and that some compromises might have to be made. However, they emphasized that the RN's needs "for the protection of trade are absolute and not relative, and that for this reason no reduction on the 45 for this purpose can be accepted".

Within these figures, nevertheless, there was still the problem of dealing with the larger, so-called Washington standard cruisers of 10,000 tons displacement and mounting 8-inch guns. The naval staff concluded that "these cruisers would be pre-eminently suitable for working with the battle fleets". As a result, the Washington capital ship ratio could be extended to cover these ships as well, and this would give Britain and the United States the right to build 15 of these vessels each and Japan the right to build nine. Coincidentally, Britain already had 14 of these larger cruisers built or building. Overall, these proposals were an attempt by the Admiralty to reduce the costs of future construction, for, as Dreyer's replacement as ACNS, Rear-Admiral Dudley Pound, wrote:

> unless something is done to reduce the estimates they will automatically in a few years reach a total which it does not seem within the bounds of possibility that we should be able to screw out of any Government.[262]

They also represented what the Navy believed was the best solution to the difficulties which confronted its Imperial Defence commitments. Nevertheless, these proposals did mask the fact that the navy was not just pursuing a modernization programme for its cruiser fleet, but that this also amounted to an expansion programme as, at the time, the navy did not possess 70 cruisers.

In May the Admiralty's proposals for the Coolidge conference were brought before the CID.[263] Lord Beatty, the First Sea Lord (FSL),and Chief of Naval Staff (CNS), explained that the Admiralty's position was that they would prefer not to set a limit on the number of cruisers Britain could possess. However, in the case of the larger, 10,000 ton cruisers, the Admiralty was willing to accept a numerical limitation based on the 5:5:3 capital ship ratio agreed to at Washington. Although he preferred to see no limits placed on the smaller cruiser, Beatty

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[262] Dudley Pound letter to Sir Roger Keyes [CinC Mediterranean Fleet], 17 June 1927, in Paul G. Halpern, The Keyes Papers, v.II: 1919-1938, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980), 221.

[263] 227 Mtg CID, 20 May 1927, CAB 2/5.

recognized that this might not be acceptable to the other powers. If this was the case, then the Admiralty would "state the number required"; in other words, they would press for a total of 70 cruisers. Austen Chamberlain warned that the Americans might not accept a lower limit in cruisers than Britain. While they might state that there was "no probability" that they would build up to their limit, "he did not think it would be safe to rely on any such statement". Nevertheless, the CID recommended the adoption of the Admiralty's proposals as the basis of the British negotiating position at the upcoming conference and this was approved by the Cabinet five days later.[264] At the time, however, the preparations for Geneva were overshadowed by the Arcos raid and the subsequent rupture of Anglo-Soviet relations.

As the start of the conference approached, there were no preliminary conversations between Britain and the United States or Japan. This resulted from an early decision made by the Admiralty and had a significant effect on the course of the Coolidge conference. When they had placed their original proposals before the Admiralty Board in January, the Sea Lords had stressed that:

> it is essential to note that any leakage in regard to the proposals which this country is ready to put forward will result in the advantage to be gained from taking the initiative being entirely lost to this country.[265]

This condition reflected the strong memories which Beatty and the other Sea Lords maintained of Charles Evans Hughes' opening speech at the Washington Naval Conference. At that time, it appeared that the Americans, by keeping their disarmament proposals secret and then announcing them in a dramatic flourish, had gained a tremendous advantage in the negotiations.[266] Now, the Admirals hoped, the British might be able to duplicate this feat:

> the United States scored tremendously at Washington by withholding her proposals for a Naval Holiday till the first public session. The idea caught the imagination of the world, and made it difficult for any Power to oppose it. There is not so much credit to be expected this time, but what there may be we should endeavour to obtain.[267]

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[264] Cabinet 34(27), 25 May 1927, CAB 23/55.

[265] Forward to "Limitation of Armaments", 24 Jan 1927, ADM 167/76.

[266] Roskill, v.1, 310-312; Thomas H. Buckley, "The Icarus Factor: the American Pursuit of Myth in Naval Arms Control, 1921-36", DS, 4, 3(1993), 131.

[267] Lord Beatty Minute, 13 April 1927, ADM 1/8715/188.

After discussing the matter with the FO's J.D. Gregory, and finding him in agreement, Bridgeman agreed with Beatty that the proposals should remain secret.[268] As a result, each of the three powers arrived in Geneva with little inkling of one another's proposals, and this ultimately proved detrimental to the success of the conference.

So, too, did the fact that, even before departing for Geneva, schisms had already emerged among the British delegation as a result of the Preparatory Commission meetings that April. The British delegation to the Coolidge conference was headed by two Cabinet Ministers, Bridgeman, representing the navy, and Lord Robert Cecil, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the minister responsible for disarmament issues in the Baldwin government. They were supported by various FO officials and naval advisors, including Frederick Field, the DCNS. Cecil, however, was a committed League man and he had grown angry with with what he perceived as the navy's lukewarm support for the proceedings at the Preparatory Commission:

> The First Lord of the Admiralty has adopted an attitude of what may be called "malevolent neutrality" towards the whole of our proceedings here...This attitude perhaps will not surprise you, in view of the continual pretensions of the Admiralty to run their own policy irrespective of what has been adopted by the Cabinet.[269]

Cecil's outburst, however, was too much for Chamberlain who asked Lord Salisbury, Cecil's brother and a Cabinet Minister, to try to calm him down.[270] Salisbury defended his brother and gave his own, frank opinion of dealing with the Admiralty, "they are splendid people, but their notion of an argument closely resembles that of an order from the quarter-deck".[271] Nevertheless, he wrote a placatory letter to Cecil. He agreed with Cecil that the Admiralty could be infuriating, and it was obvious to him that the Admiralty did not want the Preparatory Commission to succeed. But, he added, this did not mean that they were necessarily against disarmament, as they appeared to want the Coolidge conference to achieve notable results.[272] Salisbury was correct. The Admiralty's aim

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[268] Bridgeman minute, 21 April 1927, ADM 1 8715/188; Gregory minute, 21 April 1927, FO 371/12666/W3670/61/98.

[269] Cecil to Chamberlain, 12 April 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260. See also Cecil to Salisbury, 12 April 1927, Cecil Papers, Add.Mss.51086.

[270] Chamberlain to Salisbury, 14 April 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260.

[271] Salisbury to Chamberlain, 15 April 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260.

[272] Salisbury to Cecil, 16 April 1927, Cecil Papers, Add.Mss.51086.

since the winter had been to pry any naval discussions away from the Preparatory Conference and into a separate forum.[273] This, obviously, conflicted with Cecil's own desire to see the League-sponsored Preparatory Commission succeed in its wider effort at comprehensive disarmament. The result was a divided delegation departing for Geneva.

The British, American and Japanese delegates convened in Geneva on June 20, 1927. Very quickly difficulties emerged over the British proposals. The British plan was not well received by the American delegates, and Bridgeman complained that the American press immediately began to see "all sorts of Machiavellian devices" for maintaining British naval superiority.[274] In his mind, the vociferous press campaign against the British proposals was largely inspired by the American delegation. Cecil blamed this reaction on the fact that no preliminary consultations had taken place and that the British proposals had been shrouded in "profound secrecy". Thus, when the American delegation saw the British plan "which is very much superior" to the American one, "they had no recourse except to pretend that it conceals some dark and deadly design against American security".[275]

The American delegation gave the British capital ship proposals a frosty reception. They were unwilling to discuss in the absence of France and Italy what they viewed as a modification to the Washington Treaty.[276] The cruiser issue, however, quickly became the central question dividing the British and American delegations. The Americans had come to the conference hoping to force the British to acknowledge parity in cruisers. They hoped to do so within an overall cruiser tonnage figure of 300,000 tons, but were willing to go up to 400,000 tons should the British desire a larger amount.[277] As well, the Americans wanted to use the bulk of their tonnage to create a force of 25 10,000 ton, 8-inch gun cruisers. These proposals were unacceptable to the Royal Navy for technical reasons. First, to maintain parity in larger cruiser, the RN would be forced to build far more of these ships than was

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[273] Kuramatsu, "British Preparations", 106.

[274] Bridgeman Diary, June-August 1927, Philip Williamson, ed., The Modernisation of Conservative Politics: The Diaries and Letters of William Bridgeman, 1904-1935. (London: Historians' Press, 1988), 207.

[275] Cecil to Tyrrell, 24 June 1927, Cecil Papers, Add.Mss.51079.

[276] Mr. London [Consul, Geneva] to A. Chamberlain, 22 June 1927, DBFP, Series 1a, v.III, 611-612.

[277] Fanning, "Coolidge Conference", 114.

desirable, given their immense cost. Second, under a limited tonnage of 400,000 tons the navy would have only 150,000 tons left with which to build 45 smaller cruisers. This was not enough tonnage to maintain the high number of 70 cruisers which it felt were necessary to protect the Empire's sea routes. The Admiralty claim for seventy cruisers, though, served only to anger the Americans, whose chief delegate, Admiral Hilary P. Jones, felt that the demand was exorbitant.[278] Thus, the conference rapidly broke down into two camps as the Americans and the British eyed each other suspiciously over the cruiser issue.

On the political front, the issue of whether or not to acknowledge cruiser parity electrified the Admiralty and the Cabinet. All along the Admiralty and the Cabinet had been willing to accept Anglo-American parity in large cruisers, as long as Britain was free to build as many smaller cruisers as it required. However, the Americans refused to recognise a formal distinction between large and small cruisers, and called for overall parity. It was this issue which ultimately led to the breakdown of the conference. Those historians who have examined British conduct during the conference often attribute the British unwillingness to compromise on this point to the combination of Beatty's and Churchill's actions, although they might disagree on the latter's motivations.[279] Thus, an image has emerged of a British Cabinet driven by these two men to reject any attempt at compromise with the American delegation.[280]

This, however, is not an altogether accurate portrayal of the attitudes of the Baldwin Cabinet, nor does it give enough credit to ministers other than Churchill for the hardline stance taken against the American demands

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[278] William F. Trimble, "Admiral Hilary P. Jones and the 1927 Geneva Naval Conference", MA, 43(1979), 2.

[279] Richardson, Evolution , 139; McKercher, "Politics of Naval Arms Limitation", 48; idem, The Second Baldwin Government and the United States, 1924-1929: Attitudes and Diplomacy, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 74; Lately, Tadashi Kuramatsu has rightly taken issue with McKercher's charaterizations of Churchill, but Kuramatsu, too, sees Churchill as central to the hardline British stance. Tadashi Kuramatsu, "Viscount Cecil, Winston Churhcill and the Geneva Naval Conference of 1927: *si vis pacem para pacem* versus *si vis pacem para bellum*", in T.G. Otte and Constantine A. Pagedas, eds. Personalities, War and Diplomacy: Essays in International History, (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 105-126. An exception is Stephen Roskill, who concludes that "the fundamental cause of the failure of the conference undoubtedly lay in the differing strategic requirements of Britain and America in cruiser types and tonnage". Stephen Roskill, Naval Policy Between the Wars, I: The Period of Anglo-American Antagonism, 1919-1929, (London: Collins, 1968), 514.

[280] In part, this view has been inspired by Cecil's memoirs, which place much of the blame for failure on Churchill's shoulders; Lord Robert Cecil, A Great Experiment, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1941). A more recent exposition of this interpretation can be found in Philips Payson O'Brien, British and American Naval Power: Politics and Policy, 1900-1936, (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998), 193-194.

at Geneva over cruiser parity. Much of the reason for the failure of the Cabinet to agree on any one line can be attributed to the differing attitudes amongst ministers as to how best to defend the Empire at the same time as meeting the American challenge. Certainly Churchill's position on the cruiser issue was the most complex of anyone in the Cabinet, and deserves to be discussed at length; however, numerous other ministers also displayed severe misgivings over formally admitting to Anglo-American parity in cruisers. In addition to this, those who most strongly opposed the American claim, such as Churchill and Beatty, did so for different reasons. As a result, finding agreement on an alternate compromise proved too difficult.

After the negative American reaction to the British proposals, Bridgeman found himself under pressure to make some conciliatory statement. On June 29 he told a group of American correspondents that Britain had "no desire whatever to question the American claim to parity in all respects".[281] Privately, however, the First Lord was angered by what he felt was an American attempt to gain parity "cheap" by forcing Britain "to give up numbers we require for security".[282] Concurrently, but separately, the Cabinet had also considered the parity question, at the instigation of Lord Balfour. Fearing that the conference might break up over this question, Balfour argued that a public announcement should be made stating that it was not the government's policy to oppose parity. After a long discussion, the Cabinet agreed not to accept the principle of parity but to make an announcement based on wording drafted by Balfour, stating that, "while we mean to build cruisers up to our needs, we lay down no conditions limiting cruisers to a smaller number".[283] Neither of these statements was intended to be a formal admission of Anglo-American cruiser parity. In fact, the only minister who came out unreservedly in favour of admitting parity was, not surprisingly, Cecil.[284] However, in the United States the British statements were interpreted as an admission of parity. As a result, the issue did not go away, as British ministers had hoped. Instead, they were forced to accept the inclusion of a formal admission of parity in any potential treaty agreed to at Geneva.

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[281] Mr. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, 30 June 1927, DBFP, Series 1a, v.III, note 4, p. 629.

[282] Bridgeman Diary, June-August 1927, in Williamson, Modernization of Conservative Politics, p. 207.

[283] Cabinet 37(27), 29 June 1927, CAB 23/55.

[284] Cecil to Chamberlain, 2 July 1927, Cecil Papers, Add.Mss.51079.

Churchill, however, continued to oppose any agreement which might tie Britain to parity.[285] He agreed with Balfour that Britain could not limit the United States cruiser programme, but he did not want to enshrine any wording that might "give them the right to find fault with us at every step". Nor, from previous remarks, did he want that the United States should be seen as dictating to Great Britain.[286] The Chancellor was not overly concerned that this attitude might lead to a breakdown in the conference even if this led to a new and increased cruiser building programme. Britain, he argued, had a distinct lead in cruisers, and could afford to allow the United States to launch into a new programme.[287] Churchill believed that the previous British cruiser programmes had angered the United States and led to a furore over cruisers in that country.[288] As a result, if the conference failed, the best course Britain could adopt would be to delay her own construction as this would undermine the American desire to build. Eventually, the prohibitive cost of cruiser construction, coupled with the absence of any provocation, would lead to a reaction in the United States against building.[289] Nor was Churchill concerned with the fact that a large American construction programme might result in a new Japanese cruiser building programme. At the time, Churchill did not view Japan as a threat.[290] Indeed, he accused the Admiralty of creating a "fictitious Anglo-Japanese war scare" in order to pressure the MacDonald and Baldwin governments into approving large cruiser programmes.[291] Churchill was fond of reminiscing about the days of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, and he suggested that a large American building programme might draw Japan and Britain closer together, a possibility

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[285] "The Naval Conference", 29 June 1927, CP 189(27), CAB 24/187.

[286] Churchill to Bridgeman, 22 Dec 1926, in Gilbert, Churchill, 899-902.

[287] LNA(27), 1 Mtg, 15 July 1927, CAB 27/350.

[288] Churchill, uncirculated memorandum, 26 July 1927, T 161/295/S.34442/2.

[289] 228 Mtg CID, 7 July 1927, CAB 2/5.

[290] This had not always been the case. Churchill's views on Japan, and most things, tended to change along with the portfolios which he held. A good summary of the variety of opinions Churchill held of Japan can be found in Robert O'Neill, "Churchill, Japan and Britain: Security in the Pacific, 1904-1942", in Robert Blake and William Roger Louis, eds., Churchill, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 275-289.

[291] Churchill, uncirculated memorandum, 25 June 1927, T 161/295/S.34442/1.

which he viewed with favour.[292] As a result, Churchill felt no qualms about taking a hard line against the American desire for overall cruiser parity.

At the same time, however, Churchill did not fully support the Admiralty's position at Geneva, either. The Chancellor was adamantly opposed to the Admiralty's contention that they required a total of 70 cruisers.[293] His main concern was not to tie Britain's hands to parity in regards to small cruisers but at the same time not to bind the Treasury to any agreement which might help justify the Admiralty's construction programmes. In fact, Churchill and the Admiralty approached the conference with opposite motivations. Churchill hoped to use the conference to delay British cruiser construction, while the Admiralty hoped to use the conference to justify its cruiser construction plans. Though united by their joint opposition to the concept of parity or any agreement that would formally limit British small cruisers, the two groups were separated by their overall aims for the entire conference.

Other members of the Cabinet also expressed doubts about the proceedings at Geneva and their arguments spoke to Imperial Defence concerns. In the CID, Amery spoke up against placing any limits on small cruisers.[294] For his part Birkenhead argued that "the moment has quite definitely come when we must stand up" to the Americans.[295] He offered that Britain should accept parity in the 10,000 tons class of cruisers, and it should admit the "theoretical parity claim of the United States" in light cruisers. Most importantly, he cautioned that "we must resolutely refuse to tie our hands". Should the United States build light cruisers "upon a scale which challenges the arteries of this Empire we must respond without examining our financial position". However, it was the elder statesman, Balfour, who emerged as the most eloquent spokesman for denying any formal recognition of parity in small cruisers. He had drafted the statement which the Cabinet had issued on June 29 which attempted to accept the American right to parity without actually formally endorsing their right to possess that parity.[296] A day later

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[292] 228 Mtg CID, 7 July 1927, CAB 2/5.

[293] Churchill, uncirculated memorandum, 25 June 1927, T 161/295/S.34442/1; 228 Mtg, CID, 7 July 1927, CAB 2/5; LNA(27) 3 Mtg, 19 July 1927, CAB 27/350.

[294] 229 Mtg CID, 14 July 1927, CAB 2/5.

[295] "Naval Conference", 21 July 1927, CP-210(27), CAB 24/188.

[296] Cabinet 37(27), 29 June 1927, CAB 23/55.

Balfour explained his rationale to the Cabinet Secretary, Maurice Hankey:

> ...the proper course now is....to begin by saying 1) that we are not going to make British superiority in any form of naval armament an essential part of our policy, 2) that we must maintain our right to build the number of small cruisers which our special position requires, 3) that we are going to publicly explain the grounds for our action, 4) that we hope America will do the same.[297]

Later, at a meeting of the Cabinet committee on the naval conference, Balfour summarized the essence of the British objection to the American claim for parity:

> We did not in our hearts think that we could prevent the Americans building to parity if they insisted, but we were not willing to embody the doctrine in a Treaty.[298]

By the middle of July, as it became obvious that reaching an agreement was becoming increasingly unlikely, the Cabinet decided to recall Bridgeman and Cecil to London for consultation.[299] Before leaving Geneva, though, the British delegation had agreed on a compromise formula with the Japanese delegation, as a possible method of breaking the Anglo-American deadlock.[300] The Anglo-Japanese agreement, however, was unacceptable to the Americans, and upon their return to London, Bridgeman and Cecil found that it was not popular there either. Beatty, especially, was set against it.[301] After much acrimonious discussion, the Cabinet committee recommended that the British delegates return to Geneva and propose that the conference ratify the agreements already reached dealing with ships other than cruisers. With regard to the latter, they should accept that no detailed agreement could be reached and that it should be left for a future conference. But, the British delegates also were to propose that the conference agree to divide cruisers into two classes; that 10,000 tons cruisers be limited to a ratio of 12:12:8 for Britain, the US and Japan respectively and that their lives be extended to 20 years. Small cruisers would be restricted to 6,000 tons and 6-inch guns. After further, strained discussion, the Cabinet accepted this

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[297] Balfour to Hankey, Balfour Papers, 30 June 1927, Add.Mss.49704.

[298] LNA (27) 1 Mtg, 15 July 1927, CAB 27/355.

[299] Cabinet 41(27), 20 July 1927, CAB 23/55.

[300] Fanning, "Coolidge Conference", 117.

[301] "Note on the Present Position of the Geneva Conference", 21 July 1927, CP-211(27), CAB 24/188.

recommendation as the basis of any new British proposals at the conference.[302]

Once Cecil and Bridgeman arrived back in Geneva, they found that the new British line was unacceptable to the Americans. Although several potential compromises were mooted, they were rejected by Beatty and, later, by his successor Sir Charles Madden.[303] Churchill suggested that a way out of the imbroglio might be to declare a cruiser building holiday until 1931, a proposal which certainly appealed to the Treasury's estimate-cutting desires. This suggestion was stubbornly resisted by Beatty because of the RN's need to modernize, re-equip and expand its cruiser fleet.[304] Ultimately, the Cabinet was unwilling to ignore naval advice, and was hesitant to reach any agreement which might formally limit the RN's ability to carry out its Imperial Defence duties. When, at the beginning of August, it became clear that no compromise was possible at the conference, British ministers let the meetings break down.[305]

At the same time as the Cabinet decided that nothing useful would result from the Coolidge Naval Conference, it also agreed that the whole issue of British cruiser construction would have to investigated in the coming months. The naval needs of Imperial Defence had to be reconsidered. In August, the Cabinet agreed to set up a Cabinet committee to look into the question.[306] The issue at stake was how many cruisers should be laid down in each of the years 1927, 1928 and 1929, given all that had transpired at the Coolidge conference. The discussion on this question continued until just before Christmas, and, in large measure, few new arguments were advanced. As so often before, the enquiry ranged the Treasury against the Admiralty, and the remainder of the Cabinet were asked to choose between their competing visions of the requirements for new naval construction.

The Admiralty continued to maintain that a minimum of 3 cruisers a year had to be laid down.[307] In fact,

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[302] Cabinet 43(27), 22 July 1927, CAB 23/55.

[303] Cabinet 46(27), 29 July 1927, CAB 23/55.

[304] LNA(27), 6 Mtg, 25 July 1927, CAB 27/350.

[305] Cabinet 48(27), 4 Aug 1927, CAB 23/55.

[306] Cabinet 48(27), 4 Aug 1927 and Cabinet 49(27), 25 Aug 1927, CAB 23/55.

[307] Egerton minute, 18 Aug 1927, ADM 1/8711/142.

its ideal annual programme consisted of 3 cruisers, 9 destroyers and 6 submarines.[308] Apart from the reasons already mentioned, there were several other critical considerations that underpinned the Admiralty's construction policy. The naval staff still anticipated that maintaining a cruiser construction programme during the 1930s, when capital ship replacement was due to begin, would prove problematic. As a result, it wanted to build as many cruisers as possible before then.[309] There was also an important industrial imperative behind the Admiralty's proposals.[310] A steady 8-inch gun ship programme was important in order to maintain industrial capacity for larger gun mountings, armour and big shells.[311] Skilled dockyard workers were already being discharged, and, if the construction programme were curtailed even further, even more tradesmen might lose their jobs.[312]

The Admiralty's proposals were technically sensible when viewed over the long term. They were based on an ideal cruiser strength of 70 ships and were designed both to reach this number by the mid-1930s and then to prevent any undue shortfall in the years thereafter.[313] This represented the navy's interpretation of what were the minimal requirements to carry out its Imperial Defence duties. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the failure of the Coolidge Naval Conference, they were politically unpalatable. The Treasury exploited this to the fullest possible extent, because it saw the navy's building plans not as a sensible replacement programme, but as a construction programme which would result not only in an increase in the number of British cruisers but also in an immense increase in the tonnage, gunpower and crew complements of the fleet.[314] There was no need for any such increase, since the Coolidge Naval Conference, according to one official, had "exploded" the idea of the Japanese menace.

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[308] Field minute, 4 Oct 1927, ADM 116/2606.

[309] Pound minute, 2 Sept 1927, ADM 116/3440.

[310] The navy placed great importance on maintaining the industrial infrastructure necessary to support a modern fleet and to allow for rapid expansion in wartime. G.A.H. Gordon, British Seapower and Procurement between the Wars: A Reappraisal of Rearmament, (London: MacMillan, 1988); Ferris, "'It is Our Business in the Navy to Command the Seas", 124-170.

[311] Chatfield minute to Field, 7 Oct 1927, ADM 116/3440.

[312] Madden memorandum for the First Lord, 24 Oct 1927, ADM 116/3440.

[313] "Construction Programme", Admiralty memorandum, 24 October 1927, ADM 116/3440.

[314] "Material for Study of the Future Programme of Naval Construction", W.R. Fraser [Treasury Official) memorandum, August 1927, T 161/281/S.32700/1.

As a result, this meant that the navy's destroyer programme, in addition to the cruiser programme, could be scaled back.[315] Initially, in fact, Churchill believed that the cruiser programme could be dramatically modified and no cruisers laid down in either 1927 or 1928.[316] In effect, he proposed a unilateral cruiser construction moratorium.

These conflicting viewpoints were discussed in the Naval Programme Committee which met in early November under the chairmanship of Lord Birkenhead. Here, Churchill reiterated his belief that there was no danger in not laying down any ships in 1927 or 1928. But, he was willing to compromise. In previous correspondence, the Admiralty and the Treasury had come to an agreement over the 1927 building programme in which the Admiralty had agreed to drop two cruisers from that year's building programme and this had received Cabinet approval.[317] However, much depended on perceptions of the potential threat posed by Japan in the Far East. At the committee's second meeting, Chamberlain presented the FO's sanguine view. Never, he said, was "Japan in recent times more pacifist".[318] The country had still not recovered from the great Tokyo earthquake of 1923 and would probably not spend much on armaments in the near future. The industrialization of the country was changing its nature, and "the industrial democracy of the present time is not at all likely to embark on an Imperialistic and aggressive foreign policy".[319] That said, he did caution the committee that Japan had vital interests in Manchuria and would use every means to defend these. After the Foreign Secretary's presentation, the Chancellor launched on another attack on the Admiralty's programme and the need for 70 cruisers.[320] He made it clear that the

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[315] W.R. Fraser minute, 11 Oct 1927, T 161/281/S.32700/1.

[316] P.J.Grigg memorandum, 19 Oct 1927, T 161/281/S.32700/1.

[317] NP(27) 1 Mtg, 10 Nov 1927, CAB 27/355. The correspondence between Churchill and Bridgeman regarding the 1927 building programme can be found in T 161/281/S.32700/1. Cabinet 55(27), 11 Nov 1927, CAB 23/55. They also agreed that the cruiser should be of the 'B' class. In order to save money, the Admiralty had created 2 classes of 8-inch gun cruisers: a 10,000 ton ship with 8x8-inch guns known as an 'A' class ship and a 8,500 ton ship with 6x8-inch guns known as a 'B' class ship.

[318] NP(27), 2 Mtg, 18 Nov 1927, CAB 27/355.

[319] This process was aided by the fact that Japanese foreign policy had recently become more friendly towards Britain. Hosoya Chihiro, "Tanaka Diplomacy and Its Pro-British Orientation, 1927-29", in T.G. Fraser and Peter Lowe, eds. Conflict and Amity in East Asia: Essays in Honour of Ian Nish. (London: MacMillan, 1992), 16-29.

[320] It is important to note that, while the FO agreed with Churchill that Japan was not an immediate threat, it did not share his optimistic view of the possibility of a closer Anglo-Japanese accord. J. Tilley [British Ambassador to Japan] despatch, 28 June 1927, P. Nichols minute, 2 Aug 1927, G. Mounsey minute, 5 Aug 1927, all FO

Treasury was willing to sanction only 1 ship in 1927, 1 in 1928 and 2 in 1929, for a total of 4 ships; two fewer than what the Admiralty was willing to accept. He also showed tremendous optimism about Britain's naval industry's ability to build ships rapidly, should the need arise:

> We are at present in the very good position, the unique position, in this country of being able to build much faster and on a larger scale than other Powers, so that we can, in fact, at any time set on foot a programme which is necessary to meet a forthcoming period of danger three years later...[321]

Here, he was repeating a topic which he had discussed at the previous meeting. According to Churchill, it made no sense to build ships when they were not needed. By accumulating a stock of cruisers at this point, he argued, the Admiralty were only ensuring that the effective life of the cruisers was cut short by the number of years they were built before they were required.[322] The rapidly-changing technology of the period meant that these cruisers would become obsolescent even more quickly than usual. The Chancellor was very much captivated by what he called Lord Fisher's maxim: "Build late, build fast, each one better than the last".[323] However, Churchill also presented an astute diplomatic argument against the navy's building programme. If anything would "soothe down the American attitude", if anything would remove some of the pressure from the Big Navy lobby in Washington and allow the President to pursue a "sane" policy, it would be a reduction in British construction. A large British programme at this time would serve only to provide more ammunition for the Big Navy lobby in the US.

After another meeting in November, the committee met on the first of December without Churchill or Bridgeman present, so that they could discuss the issues in a more temperate climate. It quickly became apparent that Churchill's vehemence had been convincing. Birkenhead led off by stating that he believed that Churchill had proved his case for the three years, 1927, 1928 and 1929 and had been convinced that building cruisers before they

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371/12524/F6510/2779/23. Victor Wellesley minuted on this despatch that the fundamental obstacle in Anglo-Japanese relations was the fact that "You cannot base a policy of co-operation on diversity of interests". V. Wellesley minute, 5 Aug 1927, Ibid. Wellesley minute, 10 March 1928, FO 371/13165/F1123/7/10; Frank Ashton-Gwatkin minute, 8 Aug 1928 and Wellesley minute, 8 Aug 1928 both FO 371/13170/F4168/7/10. For British policy towards Japan in general in this period see: B.J.C. McKercher, "A Sane and Sensible Diplomacy: Austen Chamberlain, Japan, and the Naval Balance of Power in the Pacific Ocean, 1924-29", CJH, 21 (1986), 187-213.

[321] NP(27), 2 Mtg, 18 Nov 1927, CAB 27/355.

[322] NP(27) 1 Mtg, 10 Nov 1927, CAB 27/355.

[323] Ibid.

were actually required was "wasteful and uneconomic expenditure in money".[324] Balfour made it clear that his sympathies were with the Chancellor and not with the First Lord. He described the whole naval building situation as "absurd", with Britain building against Japan, Japan building against the United States and the United States building against Britain. Balfour agreed with Chamberlain's assertion that a war with Japan or the United States was improbable, and, besides, he added, in any war with Japan, American sympathies would be with Britain. A long-term programme, such as the one contemplated by the Admiralty was, in his mind, "a fundamentally unsound argument" which was more appropriate for a previous century than for the 1920s, when new innovations were rapidly making previous ships obsolete. Thus, he wanted the abandonment of any long-term programme, which tended to produce "an illogical and indefensible situation". Salisbury and Neville Chamberlain, the Minister of Health, agreed with much of Balfour's logic, but differed with him over the issue of a long-term building programme. Chamberlain, especially, was worried that, in the absence of a steady British programme, skilled British dockyard workers would drift off. If the US began a large construction programme, then many of these skilled workers might migrate there and would not return. The result would be that "our boasted supremacy would have vanished for good".

The committee decided to present its compromise solution to the Cabinet in mid-December.[325] Despite Churchill's strong arguments and the broad support for his position, the committee's recommendations were favourable for the Admiralty.[326] Although in committee they had expressed their frustration with the entire building controversy, in the end ministers found it difficult to scale back the Admiralty's plans too far. Consequently, the committee recommended the construction of 1 B cruiser in 1927-28, 2 B cruisers in 1928-29 and 1 A and 2 B cruisers in 1929. Thus, the Admiralty secured support in committee for a three-year building programme of 6 ships, whereas initially the Treasury had wanted no construction at all for the first two years and had then reluctantly compromised on four ships. In spite of the fact that the Admiralty had secured a fair measure of success in the committee, Bridgeman submitted a rather sour memorandum to the Cabinet, reluctantly agreeing to accept the

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[324] NP(27), 4 Mtg, 1 Dec 1927, CAB 27/355.

[325] NP(27), 5 Mtg, 12 Dec 1927, CAB 27/355.

[326] "Report on Cruisers", 14 Dec 1927, CP-305(27), CAB 24/190.

reduction of one cruiser in the 1928 building programme.[327] The Cabinet agreed to accept the Naval Programme Committee's report, except that it gave the Chancellor the opportunity to reopen the question of the 1929 building programme in the future should the international situation remain peaceful. At the same time, the Cabinet also agreed that, given the large British lead over the Americans in cruiser numbers, "for the next few years we could afford to ignore their programme, and that for the moment there was no prospect of a Naval Agreement" with the United States.[328]

This debate had not yet been settled when the Treasury and the Admiralty embarked on a new dispute over the 1928 naval estimates. As early as October 1927, Treasury officials had indicated a desire to reduce the overall level of Admiralty spending in 1928.[329] At the end of that month, Churchill had brought up the issue of the service estimates at a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on National Expenditure. He stated that his advisors anticipated an overall government deficit of approximately £15 million in the fiscal year 1928-29, and that, while "he did not take so gloomy a view", he still agreed that "it was imperative that substantial reductions of expenditure must be effected".[330] He went on to outline, once again, his objection to any cruiser construction in 1928, stating that it would provide a saving of £2 million in 1928 and a further £5-6 million in 1929.[331] When the Naval Programme Committee failed to agree to his building moratorium, these savings disappeared. In December, Churchill warned the Cabinet again that there would be a significant revenue shortfall which would necessitate cuts to all departments, for raising taxes was out of the question, as an election had to be called by 1929.[332] Out of a total shortfall now estimated at £11 million, the Admiralty was asked to find £2 million in savings, the largest cut to any one department.[333]

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[327] "Naval Programme", 20 Dec 1927, CP-325(27), CAB 24/190.

[328] Cabinet 64(27), 22 Dec 1927, CAB 23/55.

[329] RVN Hopkins memorandum to Churchill, 14 Oct 1927, T 161/281/S.32700/1.

[330] NE 23 Mtg, 26 Oct 1927, CAB 27/304.

[331] Ibid.

[332] Cabinet 62(27), 15 Dec 1927, CAB 23/55.

[333] "Reduction of Expenditure in 1928", 19 Dec 1927, CP-323(27), CAB 24/190.

When Bridgeman wrote to Churchill two days later, outlining the naval estimates for 1928, he ignored the Chancellor's request. In fact, the navy estimate was £330,000 higher than the £58 million (net) which had been voted in 1927. The 1928 figure included 330,000 tons of oil for the oil fuel reserve, an increase over the 100,000 tons which had been accumulated the year before.[334] In addition, there were two significant new charges. The first was for replacing the wartime stocks of cordite, whose ten-year shelf-life was about to expire and which, for safety reasons, needed to be taken out of service. The second charge was for an Admiralty programme to add Mark M pom-pom anti-aircraft guns to its major surface units in order to provide protection against close range air attack. The naval staff proposed to spread both these programmes over four years, beginning in 1928.[335] Although, once again, the Admiralty's proposals made sense from a purely technical standpoint, they were thoroughly bad politics for they merely angered the Treasury and reinforced its preconception that the navy wasted a great deal of money:

> the Navy, unlike the army, has money to spare on its estimates. Its habits run to unstinted lavishness whether on questions of the organisation of dockyards and factories, the economical use of man power, or the standard of reserves.[336]

Immediately, Treasury officials began to consider how to pare down the Admiralty estimates to £56 million.[337] In a reply to the First Lord in mid-January, Churchill suggested that:

> ...in making your present proposals you have not taken full account of the favourable political situation, especially as regards Japan, now existing or of the decision of the Government that no great war need be anticipated for at least ten years.[338]

While he threatened to take the issue to a Cabinet committee if the navy did not prove more accommodating, privately Churchill was willing to compromise at any time, as he admitted, "I am worried about the Navy in view of the Yankee menace".[339]

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[334] Bridgeman to Churchill, 21 Dec 1927, T 161/285/S.33101/3.

[335] "Naval Estimates 1928-Report by Finance Committee", 14 Dec 1927, ADM 167/76.

[336] W.R.Fraser [Supply Department, Treasury] minute, 21 Dec 1927, T 161/285/S.33101/3.

[337] W.R. Fraser minute, 29 Dec 1927, A. Waterfield [Supply Department, Treasury] minute, 6 Jan 1928, T 161/285/S.33101/3.

[338] Churchill to Bridgeman, 16 Jan 1928, ADM 167/76.

[339] Churchill minute, 15 Jan 1928, T 161/285/S.33101/3.

The Admiralty, however, would not budge. Bridgeman's reply to Churchill's letter contained only small savings on the previous figures.[340] This served only to anger the Chancellor, who complained to the Prime Minister that the navy gave less value for money than the other two services and that they could afford to be so cavalier as they were "accustomed to carrying all before them by threats of resignation".[341] In the interim, the question of the accumulation of the oil fuel reserve was placed before the Naval Programme Committee. Before the Committee, Churchill did not question the need for an oil fuel reserve but he did question the amount of fuel which was required for the reserve and the rate at which it was to be accumulated.[342] He discounted the need for 7 million tons of oil fuel, which the Admiralty had estimated was the amount required for the first year of a major war. He pointed out, quite rightly, that this figure was based on the requirements in case of a war with Japan, and once again he rejected this possibility. He claimed that the "great Japanese war bogey" was an idea that had been started by Beatty in 1920 as a way to provide "the necessary stimulus" to naval estimates. On this point, Churchill was relentless, adding that the idea that Japan would attack the British Empire throughout the Far East and the Indian Ocean was, in his opinion, "utter nonsense". Thus, Churchill proposed not to add to the oil fuel reserve that year and to reconsider the question every year. The Committee, however, compromised, and recommended that only 100,000 tons of oil fuel be accumulated that year, the same amount as in 1927, and this figure was accepted by the Cabinet.[343] The cut in the oil fuel reserve allowed the naval estimates to be lowered further, but this was still not enough for the Chancellor, a point he brought before the Cabinet.[344] In the end, Churchill was not able to reduce the naval estimates the full amount which he had desired, as the Cabinet finally agreed to approve a figure of £57.3 million.[345]

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[340] Bridgeman to Churchill, 21 Jan 1927, Ibid.

[341] Churchill to Baldwin, 29 Jan 1928, Baldwin Papers [Cambridge University Library] D.1.2.

[342] NP(27), 6 Mtg, 2 Feb 1928, CAB 27/355.

[343] "Report on Naval Oil Fuel Reserves", 25 Feb 1928, CID 858-B, CAB 4/17; Cabinet 11(28), 22 Feb 1928, CAB 23/57.

[344] "Reduction of Expenditure in 1928", 16 Feb 1928, CP-50(28), CAB 24/192.

[345] Cabinet 9(28), 17 Feb 1928, CAB 23/57; Upcott minute, 18 Feb 1928, T 161/285/S.33101/4.

This was a Pyrrhic victory for the Admiralty. In the first place, Treasury officials had become irritated by what they described as the navy's "stubborn unhelpfulness".[346] More significantly, however, during the discussions between the Admiralty and the Treasury, it had emerged that the two departments based their planning on two different interpretations of the CID's 1925 decision on the probability of war with Japan. In that year, a previous Cabinet committee had been investigating the cruiser building programme, and had asked the CID to provide it with guidance as to the likelihood of war with Japan. The CID had concluded that "in existing circumstances aggressive action against the British Empire on the part of Japan within the next ten years is not a contingency seriously to be apprehended".[347]

The navy had interpreted this to mean that they had to be prepared for war against Japan in 1935, whereas the Treasury saw the decision as rolling over every year. Thus, for the Treasury, each new year brought with it a new ten year period.[348] As well, it became obvious that the reason the Admiralty desired to replace cordite and introduce the Mark M pom-pom in four-year programmes was that they wanted to finish these programmes before capital ship replacement was due to start in 1931. Treasury officials rejected this as being incompatible with their interpretation of the 1925 decision on the probability of war.[349] Churchill and his officials now sought to force the Admiralty to abide by the Treasury's interpretation of the 1925 decision, and, further, to make all the services subject to it. In agreeing to the Navy's 1928 estimates, Churchill warned Bridgeman that he intended to bring the issue before the Cabinet or a Cabinet committee by the summer.[350]

On March 13 Churchill sent an official Treasury letter to the Admiralty setting out his views in detail. Once again he made it clear that:

> by adapting policy more closely to the government's general policy as regards preparation for a Great War, and by contenting themselves with a lesser degree of activity during the present period of calm in international relations, the Board of Admiralty should be able to make

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[346] Upcott minute, 17 Feb 1928, T 161/285/S.33101/4.

[347] 198 Mtg CID, 30 March 1925; 199 Mtg CID, 2 April 1925, both CAB 2/4.

[348] Fraser memorandum to A. Waterfield, 8 Feb 1928, T 161/285/S.33101/3.

[349] Upcott memorandum, 30 Jan 1928, T 161/285/S.33101/3.

[350] Churchill to Bridgeman, 20 Feb 1928, T 161/285/S.33101/4.

> substantial reductions in Navy Votes by a general reduction of reserve standards and by spreading commitments over a longer period.[351]

In June he brought this question before the Cabinet which agreed that the CID should reconsider the "general assumptions which should now govern our preparations for war".[352] What Churchill now wanted was that:

> it should now be laid down as a standing assumption that at any given date there will be no major war for ten years from that date; and that this should rule unless or until, on the initiative of the Foreign Office or one of the Fighting Services or otherwise, it is decided to alter it.[353]

When this issue was debated in the CID in early July, Balfour expressed some scepticism that anyone could state "that from one moment war was an impossibility for the next ten years".[354] However, it was the Foreign Secretary's overview of world conditions which held the key to the debate, and the picture he painted was highly peaceful. Chamberlain dismissed a war with France as "inconceivable", and pointed out that neither Germany nor Italy was in a position to declare war. He did not completely discount the possibility of a war with the United States, which he thought could arise if the US decided to assert her neutral rights in the case of a British application of belligerent rights in a war with a third party. However, Chamberlain added, "he could not imagine that any British Government would be mad enough to create such a position". America, he felt, also constituted a deterrent to Japan, and though "he could not say that Japan would never become a menace to the Empire, but Japan did not constitute such a menace now".

The only point of disquietude in the international situation remained Russia. However, although that country had recently been strengthening its army, he still did not believe that it was capable of major offensive operations. Chamberalain did not anticipate that the Russian leadership would start any foreign quarrels, as they were preoccupied with internal matters.[355] Thus, while Russia remained a danger, he did not conclude that the

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[351] Official Treasury letter, 13 March 1928, T 161/285/S.33101/1.

[352] Cabinet 34(28), 22 June 1928, CAB 23/58.

[353] "The Basis of Navy Estimates", 15 June 1928, CID 891-B, CAB 4/17.

[354] 236 Mtg CID, 5 July 1928, CAB 2/5.

[355] The WO, however, continued to take a much less sanguine view of Russian external policy and the threat which it posed to Central Asia. "Soviet Activities in Central Asia-Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War", 16 June 1928, CID 888-B, CAB 4/17.

danger was immediate nor that it could not be avoided. Overall, Chamberlain summed up the international situation by stating:

> if it were not for the present condition of Russia and the uncertainty as to future Soviet policy, he would be without any grave doubts that we could reckon on no war of any magnitude occurring during the next 10 years.

Given the peaceful international outlook in 1928, therefore, the committee had little difficulty in recommending that "for the purpose of framing the Estimates of the Fighting Services, that at any given date there will be no major war for ten years". Nevertheless, the CID was careful to enter a caveat that this formula had to be reconsidered no later than June of each year. In the end, it was the Admiralty's obstinance over the 1928 estimates that led the Treasury to finally win Cabinet acceptance for a ten year rule that moved forward each year and applied to all three services. The new rule gave the Treasury yet another method of applying pressure on the services to reduce their overall costs. Shortly after the revolving ten year rule came into effect, worsening Anglo-American relations led to fears of a new naval race and, consequently, brought the question of naval expenditure to the fore once again.

Although the general international situation was peaceful, there remained numerous crises that the British government had to confront. The most important, in the aftermath of the failure at Geneva, was the question of its relations with the United States. When, in February 1927, Coolidge had issued his invitation to a new naval conference, the issue had been considered as simply one of disarmament, and at the time it was not linked to Anglo-American relations. However, the collapse of the Coolidge conference over the issue of cruiser parity between the two Atlantic powers joined the two issues. As a result, in the months following the conference, Anglo-American relations worsened.[356] The debacle at Geneva added grist to the mill of those in America who desired to build a large navy. Thus, in the fall of 1927, a large anti-British and pro-navy press campaign built up in the United States, cooling the trans-Atlantic relationship. In the fall of 1928 relations worsened still further when the FO's clumsy handling of the Anglo-French compromise over disarmament at the Preparatory Commission angered the Americans.[357] The nadir in the Anglo-American relationship was reached in November of that year, after President

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[356] B.J.C. McKercher, "From Enmity to Cooperation: The Second Baldwin Government and the Improvement of Anglo-American Relations, November 1928-June 1929", Albion, 24, 1(1992), 65-74.

[357] For the Anglo-French compromise see: David Carlton, "The Anglo-French Compromise on Arms Limitation, 1928", JBS, 8(1969), 141-62.

Coolidge's Armistice Day speech. In this very undiplomatic address, the outgoing President argued for American naval supremacy over Britain.[358] At the same time, a new cruiser construction bill was before Congress. This bill called for a 3-year, 15-cruiser construction programme. When added to the 8 ships already building or projected, the adoption of this programme would have given the USN a powerful 23-ship force of 8 inch gun, 10,000 ton cruisers, thereby surpassing the RN in this class of vessel. Already, in the fall of 1927, the FO had begun to consider how best to resolve those Anglo-American differences which had arisen at Geneva. This began a two-year British struggle, spanning two governments, to find a common basis for agreement with the Americans that would both prevent a naval construction race between the two powers and ameliorate their strained relationship while not sacrificing Imperial Defence requirements. This British quest culminated in the Anglo-American conversations of the summer and autumn of 1929, whose success paved the way for the London Naval Conference of 1930. At the heart of the British position was the need to reconcile the imperatives of Imperial Defence, in this case represented by the navy and its cruiser programme, with the American desire for the appearance of parity.

In its first post-Geneva analysis, the FO concluded that at the heart of the problem between the two powers was the issue of belligerent rights, or, expressed another way, freedom of the seas.[359] Historically, the exercise of maritime belligerent rights by the RN in wartime was an integral part of Imperial Defence.[360] Belligerent rights allowed the RN to stop and search neutral vessels for contraband in wartime. As such, belligerent rights were central to the RN's ability to enforce a blockade, which in itself had been a key part of Britain's war fighting strategy for centuries. This was one pillar of Britain's strength: on the one hand possessing the ability to move troops around the globe and to draw upon the vast resources of the empire while on the other hand denying any adversary the ability to do the same.

Since before the War of 1812, however, the United States had espoused the doctrine of the freedom of the seas, whereby it claimed the right to trade with whomever it wished in wartime while it was a neutral. The two

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[358] The text of the speech can be found in FO 371/12812/A7733/45, 12 Nov 1928.

[359] Barry D. Hunt, "British Policy on the Issue of Belligerent and Neutral Rights, 1919-1939" in Craig L. Symonds, ed. New Aspects of Naval History. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1981), 284.

[360] The theoretical underpinnings of British blockade policy can be found in Julian S. Corbett, Some Principles of Maritime Strategy, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1988).

views were incompatible, and the tension generated by this issue was fresh on the minds of policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic, as twice in recent memory this question had strained Anglo-American relations. During the First World War Britain had imposed a tight blockade of Germany, and, prior to the American entry into the war in 1917, the search of American cargoes had led to an angry reaction in the US.[361] One result of this, however, had been for the American President, Woodrow Wilson, to include "freedom of the seas" as one of his Fourteen Points. Before accepting these points as a basis for armistice terms, the British had made clear their reservation on the "freedom of the seas".[362] Shortly thereafter, British negotiators were able to prevent the inclusion of any reference to "freedom of the seas" in the peace treaty with Germany, but only at a cost to Anglo-American relations.[363] Despite these setbacks, and the fact that in 1917-18 the USN had helped to enforce the blockade of Germany, the American navy, and its supporters in Congress, never abandoned their ideological support for the doctrine of the freedom of the seas and their opposition to Britain's policy of wartime blockade.

After the Coolidge Conference, the British Ambassador in Washington, Esme Howard, wrote to Chamberlain outlining his belief that it was precisely this issue which had underpinned the American strategy at Geneva.[364] The Foreign Secretary was impressed by Howard's letters, but he had already been thinking along the same lines, and he outlined his views in a long memorandum to his PUS, Tyrrell.[365] Summarizing the American negotiating position at Geneva, Chamberlain complained that:

> The United States entered the recent conference with a plan of naval limitation rather hastily put together, proceeding from no principle (unless "parity" be dignified with that name), and based on no clear strategic view of America's policy or needs.[366]

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[361] Hunt, "British Policy", 280.

[362] David R. Woodward, Trial by Friendship: Anglo-American Relations, 1917-1918, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1993), 214-218.

[363] Roskill, Naval Policy, v.1, 81-83; Hunt, "British Policy", 281.

[364] E. Howard to W. Tyrrell, 15 Sept 1927 and E. Howard to W. Tyrrell, 22 Sept 1927 both appendices to CP-258(27), 26 Oct 1927, CAB 24/189.

[365] Chamberlain memorandum to Tyrrell, 16 Oct 1927 and "Belligerent Rights at Sea and the Relations Between the United States and Great Britain", 26 Oct 1927, both in CP-258(27), CAB 24/189.

[366] Ibid.

Only once the discussions had begun at the conference did the American delegation begin to realize that the true rationale behind their case was:

> that whilst "parity", when interpreted to mean equality of numbers or tonnage, might be necessary to satisfy national pride, but had no basis in strategic necessity, our small cruisers were the instruments of our blockade policy and not, as we claimed, a purely defensive force.[367]

As a result, he concluded, blockade was "at the root of our difference with the United States over naval limitation". The United States would never again "submit to such a blockade as we enforced in the Great War".[368] Therefore, the Foreign Secretary believed that the solution to this problem was to conclude an agreement with the Americans "upon the disputed points of international law". A successful belligerent rights agreement, Chamberlain postulated, would remove the underlying tension between the two countries and allow them to conclude a naval agreement. Chamberlain did, however, realize that the question of belligerent rights was an emotional one, so when the issue came before the Cabinet he asked that a CID sub-committee be set up to define British policy.[369] The resultant Belligerent Rights Sub-Committee did not begin meeting until the new year, and its discussions were marked by a vigorous debate between the FO on the one hand and the Admiralty, supported by Maurice Hankey, the Cabinet Secretary, on the other, who opposed any agreement which would limit the exercise of maritime belligerent rights.[370] The final reports of this committee, however, were not presented to the Cabinet until the winter of 1929.

In the interim, the strong American reaction to the Anglo-French compromise led the FO to reconsider its policy towards finding an agreement with the US. This reconsideration was undertaken at a time when Chamberlain, who had fallen ill, was away from the FO in the fall of 1928 and Lord Cushendon had taken his place. Robert Craigie, the head of the FO's American Department, now believed that there might be some chance of coming to a naval agreement with the US. First, he seized on a statement in Coolidge's Armistice Day speech

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[367] Ibid.

[368] Chamberlain admitted that Lord Cushendon, Cecil's replacement as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Esme Howard, Baldwin, and FO officials had also all come to fairly much the same conclusion, all independently of one another. Lord Cushendon to Chamberlain, 4 Nov 1927 and reply, 7 Nov 1927, both Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/261.

[369] Cabinet 57(27), 23 Nov 1927, CAB 23/55.

[370] The proceedings of this CID sub-committee are discussed at length in B.J.C McKercher, "Belligerent Rights in 1927-1929: Foreign Policy versus Naval Policy in the Second Baldwin Government", HJ, 29, 4(1986), 963-974.

wherein the President had stated "We want limitation of armaments for the welfare of humanity". Craigie interpreted this to mean that "the door is moreover definitely left open to further naval limitation".[371] Second, the head of the American department did not trust Herbert Hoover, the Republican President-elect, whom he described as "notoriously difficult to deal with" and likely to adopt a "resolutely 'nationalistic' attitude" upon taking office.[372] Thus, Craigie did not discount the possibility of entering into some naval negotiations with the US in the last four months of Coolidge's administration. At this point, however, Craigie was not just arguing in favour of placing naval negotiations ahead of belligerent rights. He, as well as the FO generally, appears to have become disenchanted with the interminable discussions in the Belligerent Rights sub-committee, and had begun to believe that the government was in reality following a policy of drift in Anglo-American relations. This, the FO concluded, was dangerous, and to counter it Craigie wrote a long memorandum outlining the importance of good Anglo-American relations to Britain and the Empire.

In a covering memorandum, Cushendon, pointed out that all the problems in Anglo-American relations brought up by Craigie were already the subject of separate sub-committees.[373] However, he emphasized that, so far, there had not been "much progress towards a satisfactory solution". By inference, this was a subtle criticism of Chamberlain, who had insisted on the lengthy examination by the Belligerent Rights sub-committee. In his memorandum, Craigie highlighted the importance that friendly relations with the United States had for Imperial Defence. He characterized America as:

> a phenomenon for which there is no parallel in our modern history--a State twenty-five times as large, five times as wealthy, three times as populous, twice as ambitious, almost invulnerable, and at least our equal in prosperity, vital energy, technical equipment and industrial science.

By contrast, Britain was a country which was still "staggering from the effects of the superhuman effort made during the war", was very much in debt and suffered from high domestic unemployment. Relations between the two states, he argued, were more all-encompassing than with any other country, but, this also meant there were numerous sources of friction. As a result, "Anglo-American relations have a natural tendency to deteriorate unless

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[371] Craigie minute, 12 Nov 1928, FO 371/12812/A7733/39/45.

[372] Craigie minute, 13 Nov 1928, FO 371/12812/A7895/39/45. Wellesley supported this view. Wellesley minute, 28 Nov 1928, FO 371/12813/A8248/39/45.

[373] "Anglo-American Relations", 14 Nov 1928, CP-344(28), CAB 24/198.

they are watched and tended...". Britain was at a critical juncture, unless active steps were taken to ameliorate relations with America, the relationship would grow cooler and this would not be in Britain's interests. Bad Anglo-American relations tended to:

> create an enthusiasm in America for the "biggest navy in the world", which would commit us either to an impotent confession that our naval supremacy has gone for ever or to an era of competition ruinous to our finances.

A strained Anglo-American relationship also tended to weaken the ties between Britain and the Dominions. America was the only great power which actually bordered a part of the Empire, namely Canada. For this reason, good relations with the US were a "matter of life and death" for that Dominion. At the same time, most of the remainder of the Empire bordered on the Pacific, and, Craigie prophesised, Pacific problems would become more and more important in world affairs. The Dominions, he argued, would not support a policy of "estrangement" with the US.

Domestic opinion on this issue tended to run similar to that in the Dominions, according to Craigie. In the realm of foreign policy, "a deterioration in our relations with the United States always gives an excellent stick with which to belabour the Government of the day". When it came to European affairs, the Head of the American Department believed that strong Anglo-American ties increased British prestige and influence on the continent. This was realized by the European powers who were always trying to drive a wedge between the English-speaking powers. Lastly, in all the fields of finance, commerce and trade, good Anglo-American relations were essential for long-term British prosperity. Thus, he concluded that the maintenance of good Anglo-American relations was of "paramount importance".

In the absence of the Foreign Secretary, however, Baldwin was unwilling to allow discussion of this topic and postponed it.[374] Nevertheless, Craigie's memorandum elicited a strong response from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Churchill was the strongest supporter of a policy of "jogging along quietly on our path".[375] Confident of Britain's naval superiority, he felt no undue alarm at the projected American naval building programme. What did concern him, though, was to avoid any immediate naval discussions with the US, as he was worried that any

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[374] Cabinet 52(28), 21 Nov 1928, CAB 23/59.

[375] "Anglo-American Relations", 19 Nov 1928, CP-358(28), CAB 24/199. Churchill's sanguine view of American building also supported his desire, for financial reasons, to cut Admiralty expenditure.

agreement might divide the Conservative party on the eve of a general election. Furthermore, he was willing to give Hoover a chance, given that Coolidge would soon "sink back into the obscurity from which only accident extracted him". Thus, he argued, Britain should wait until after both Hoover's inauguration and the British general election before launching into any new naval discussions.

Chamberlain, upon returning to work in early December, disagreed with his departmental experts. He remained convinced that belligerent rights were the key to solving Anglo-American differences. As he was about to leave for a League Council meeting in Lugano, he asked that all discussion of this topic be deferred until the new year.[376] Consequently, it was not until February that the issue was once again discussed in Cabinet, by which time the Belligerent Rights Sub-Committee had finally presented its first report on arbitration.[377] Now it became clear to Chamberlain that the whole issue of belligerent rights and arbitration was going to remain fractious. As a result, the consensus within the Cabinet was to keep the whole issue of Anglo-American relations open before the general election.[378]

However, by March, events on both sides of the Atlantic began to turn attention away from belligerent rights and back towards the prospect of a naval agreement. In London, Chamberlain changed his mind, and stated that belligerent rights were no longer the key to solving the difficulties in Anglo-American relations; rather he preferred to approach the question through arbitration.[379] In Washington, there were indications that Hoover, inaugurated as President that month, first wanted to deal with naval disarmament, rather than with belligerent rights or arbitration.[380] As a result, in an attempt to set a basis for future decision making, Craigie sat down to write a retrospective on the FO's views on finding an Anglo-American accord during the last year of Coolidge's presidency. He argued that naval disarmament was the "most urgent" question in Anglo-American relations and should be dealt

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[376] Cabinet 55(28), 7 Dec 1928, CAB 23/59.

[377] Cabinet 6(29), 13 Feb 1929, CAB 23/60; Cabinet 7(29), 15 Feb 1929, CAB 23/60; Cabinet 8(29), 20 Feb 1929, CAB 23/60.

[378] Cabinet 8(29), 20 Feb 1929, CAB 23/60.

[379] Chamberlain to Esme Howard, 5 Feb 1929, Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/263.

[380] Thompson minute, 23 March 1929, FO 371/13520/A2272/30/45.

with first. Belligerent rights and arbitration were only "symptoms of the real disease, which is naval rivalry".[381] Once again he cautioned against any delay in trying to reach a settlement on this issue, for "The very thing that we want to avert-a definite American naval supremacy-may become inevitable if opportunities are allowed to slip". He stressed that if it were too late to start negotiations right away, then they should begin immediately after the general election.

In April, Hoover sent a second signal that he intended actively to seek out a naval agreement with Britain. At a meeting of the Preparatory Commission in Geneva, Hugh Gibson, the chief American representative, presented a gift to the British delegation in the form of a proposal that parity between the RN and the USN in cruisers could be achieved through the application of a "yardstick". According to this proposal, a mathematical parity could be achieved by having a certain number of smaller cruisers be considered equal to one large cruiser. The formula for the yardstick was to be based on such factors as gun size, tonnage, cruising radius, and so on. Although the Americans did not have a final copy of the yardstick with them, they promised to divulge it in the near future.

This idea was not new. In January, Chamberlain, intrigued by a speech given by Allen Dulles before the Institute of International Affairs at which the American had suggested that there might be a basis for a naval agreement at a ratio of two 6-inch gun ships for one 8-inch gun ship, had written to Bridgeman about it.[382] At the time the idea did not appeal to the Admiralty, which felt that it was not really possible to equate the two types of ship, and, as a result, this idea went no further.[383] Later, in March Craigie proposed a similar concept, suggesting that the Americans might accept equating three, or perhaps even four, small cruisers to one large one.[384] But, when it was resurrected in April by the Americans, the so-called "yardstick" proposal changed the entire complexion of Anglo-American relations. It represented both a compromise on the part of the Americans and a solution to the fundamental obstacle to reaching a naval agreement between the two powers; an obstacle which had appeared

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[381] Craigie minute, 26 March 1929, and Craigie memorandum, 18 March 1929, FO 371/13520/A2245/30/45.

[382] Chamberlain to Bridgeman, 16 Jan 1929, Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/263.

[383] Bridgeman to Chamberlain enclosing Naval Staff memorandum, 31 Jan 1929, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 55/49.

[384] Craigie minute, 26 March 1929, FO 371/13520/A 2245/30/45.

insurmountable since the Coolidge naval conference had broken down over the issue of the number of British small cruisers. This new opening by the Americans shelved further discussion of belligerent rights questions. Writing from Geneva, Cushendon reported that both American delegates were in favour of deciding the naval question first.[385] Baldwin, with the upcoming election in mind, postponed any Cabinet discussion of the Belligerent Rights sub-committee's two reports.[386] The Admiralty, which had always opposed any agreement on belligerent rights, now hoped that all talk of this topic would be "ancient history".[387] Chamberlain, too, now hoped that, with a naval agreement, the issue of belligerent rights would recede into the background.[388] He envisaged that, after the election, the first step would be to enter into confidential and preliminary discussions with the US on the nature of the yardstick.[389] Chamberlain did not feel that there would be much difficulty reaching agreement on this point. Only after this had been settled would the question of a new arbitration treaty be broached.

Thus, by the time of the 1929 General Election, there was a heightened sense of optimism among British policymakers that a settlement of Anglo-American differences, based on the yardstick proposal, could be found. As Bridgeman exclaimed, "The prospect seems to me almost too good to be true...".[390] The principal reason for this optimism was Hoover's desire to reach an agreement with Britain and his consequent willingness to compromise.[391] There was little change in British policy, for the Baldwin government had been trying for nearly two years to find a vehicle with which to improve Anglo-American relations. The yardstick proposal was just such

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[385] Cushendon to Chamberlain, 20 April 1929, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/263.

[386] McKercher, "Belligerent Rights", 974.

[387] Bridgeman to Chamberlain, 9 May 1929, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/263.

[388] Chamberlain to Bridgeman, 10 May 1929, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/263.

[389] Chamberlain to Balfour, 10 May 1929, Balfour Papers, Add.Mss. 49736, v.2.

[390] Bridgeman to Chamberlain, 13 May 1929, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/263.

[391] For the broader context of Hoover's relationship with the USN see, Greg Kennedy, "Depression and Security: Aspects Influencing the United States Navy during the Hoover Adminstration", DS, 6, 2(1995), 342-372.

a vehicle.[392] But, before any progress could be made in this direction, a general election had to be fought.

Baldwin and the Conservatives, however, lost the election.[393] Instead, James Ramsay MacDonald became Prime Minister for a second time as the leader of a minority Labour government. Now it was up to MacDonald to follow up the diplomatic opening which had occurred prior to the election. The new Prime Minister was a firm believer in the importance of good Anglo-American relations. While Leader of the Opposition, he had argued for a conference to settle naval and other differences between Britain and America.[394] He had also traveled to the United States and maintained an interest in Chamberlain's conduct of Anglo-American relations. Moreover, MacDonald strongly supported the pursuit of further disarmament, and, in writing Labour's 1929 election manifesto, he had pledged the party to that goal.[395] The pursuit of a naval accord with the United States, therefore, married two of MacDonald's key foreign policy aims: furthering disarmament and improving Anglo-American relations. Any dramatic diplomatic success in this area also had the potential to translate into political success at the next General Election.[396] Thus, although he appointed his party rival, Arthur Henderson, as Foreign Secretary, MacDonald was determined to maintain control over both Anglo-American relations and naval policy.[397] As a

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[392] McKercher asserts that the Belligerent Rights sub-committee provided a blueprint which was used by the Baldwin government and later "unblushingly" by MacDonald to solve the problems in Anglo-American relations. idem., "From Enmity to Cooperation", 85-87; Second Baldwin, 194; Transition, 33. This view is not supported by the evidence. After Gibson's yardstick proposal, the whole issue of belligerent rights was quietly dropped by both sides who now actively searched for a naval agreement. The sub-committee's two reports were shelved and never acted on. In a memorandum in early June, Robert Craigie admitted that the issue of belligerent rights had been pursued "not on account of any technical considerations" but because at one time it had seemed a way of improving the political atmosphere to allow a naval conference to take place. By June, however, thanks to Hoover's desire for a naval agreement, the entire situation had changed and there was no purpose in looking for an agreement on belligerent rights. Craigie memorandum, 10 June 1929, FO 371/13520/A 3798/30/45. Interestingly, in another piece, McKercher contradicts himself by admitting that the "blue-print was never used" and that MacDonald "jettisoned the sub-committee's recommendations and struck out in a new direction". idem, "Belligerent Rights", 974.

[393] For an examination of the campaign, see: Philip Williamson, "'Safety First': Baldwin, the Conservative Party and the 1929 General Election", HJ, 25, 2(1982), 385-409.

[394] J. Ramsay MacDonald, "America and England", The Nation, 128 (1929), 126-27.

[395] The Labour Party, Labour and the Nation, 2nd ed., (London: The Labour Party, 1928), 41-45.

[396] David Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977), 499-500.

[397] David Carlton, MacDonald versus Henderson: The Foreign Policy of the Second Labour Government, (London: MacMillan, 1970), 15-26, passim.

result, he became the central figure in the pursuit of an Anglo-American naval accord.

Unlike many of his party colleagues, though, MacDonald's pursuit of disarmament combined a measure of idealism tempered with a good dose of pragmatism. While his overall aim was to promote and secure world peace, he allowed for some flexibility in reaching this goal. MacDonald realized that world peace or complete disarmament could not be achieved in one step, and so he was willing to negotiate limited agreements as long as they moved disarmament in the right direction. He had an appreciation that the imperatives of Imperial Defence meant that Britian could not disarm unilaterally and that British political and diplomatic power had to be buttressed by some military force.[398] MacDonald was also keenly aware that there was a great deal of suspicion of Labour as a government. Above all, he wanted to prove that Labour was a responsible governing party, and thus he had to avoid a naval agreement with the Americans which undermined Britain's maritime security. So, while he held to his passion for disarmament, MacDonald was willing to compromise with the navy in order to maintain the vital aspects of Imperial Defence.

In early June 1929, General Charles Dawes arrived in London as the new American Ambassador. He and MacDonald quickly established a good rapport and a close working relationship, and they immediately launched into detailed negotiations, which lasted until September.[399] With the decision made to begin Anglo-American naval negotiations based on a "yardstick", it was now important to develop detailed British proposals. Unlike the period before the Coolidge Conference, both the FO and the Admiralty were involved in advising MacDonald. His principal FO advisor throughout the negotiations was Robert Craigie. One the naval side, Albert Alexander, the First Lord of the Admiralty, and Sir Charles Madden, the First Sea Lord, were the principal advisors. In addition to them, Captain Roger Bellairs, the Director of the Plans Division within the Naval Staff, became a very influential

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[398] As an indication of this sort of realism, in 1924, during his first tenure as Prime Minister, MacDonald had been converted by Special Branch and the British intelligence services to the widespread nature of the Soviet and communist threat to the Empire. Trevor Barnes, "Special Branch and the First Labour Government", HJ, 22, 4(1979), 941-951; N.D. Siederer, "The Campbell Case", JCH, 9, 2(1974), 143-62; Neilson, "'Pursued by a Bear'", 192-93.

[399] While Dawes conducted the negotiations in London, he periodically received highly detailed instructions from the State Department. The Government Code and Cipher School (GCCS) was able to intercept and read all the American diplomatic traffic flowing back and forth across the Atlantic. However, it often took one to two weeks to decode the messages, and thus this advantage was of only limited utility in the negotiations. See the flimsies in HW 12/120 and 121.

and central figure in the negotiations. It was this small group of individuals who formed the team supporting MacDonald's conversations with Dawes, and he relied very heavily on their advice.

The Admiralty approached these negotiations with very much the same aims that it had held at the Coolidge conference. The needs of Imperial Defence remained paramount. Once again, there was a desire to limit the number of American large cruisers, while concurrently maintaining British freedom to build small cruisers. The Navy still desired a steady, building programme of at least 3 cruisers a year in order to avoid a batch obsolescence of its cruiser fleet in the mid-1930s. Again, the naval staff felt the best way in which to achieve this was to argue for a fleet of 70 cruisers. At the end of June, Madden presented the Admiralty's proposals before a meeting of the Fighting Services' Committee (FSC), Labour's successor to the Naval Programme Committee.[400]

Nevertheless, attitudes among the Admiralty staff had begun to change. Beatty, when FSL, had pursued Admiralty interests vigorously and tenaciously, and had not been above threatening resignation if he did not get his way.[401] By 1927, however, these tactics had begun to be counterproductive, as Baldwin's ministers had grown tired of Beatty's intransigence. The Admiralty's tactics at the time led Salisbury to remark to Chamberlain:

> in coming to an arrangement one must be prepared to give something, the skill consisting in giving relatively unimportant details in order to maintain vital principles. The Air Office are quite prepared to play that game, but the Admiralty in this business at Geneva have been as stiff as a poker and, as far as explaining their reasons is concerned, almost as unintelligent.[402]

Upon succeeding Beatty as FSL in 1928, Madden continued to play politics in the same manner as his predecessor. The application of these tactics to the 1928 estimates debate ultimately led to the extension of the ten year rule in the summer of 1928, to the navy's detriment.[403]

Yet, Madden learned from this setback. He realized that, given the current peaceful international situation,

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[400] "Statement by Sir Charles Madden", 25 June 1929, FS(29), 1 Mtg, CAB 27/407. Some background documents for this statement were: "Summary of Admiralty Policy", 31 May 1929, ADM 167/80; "Naval Limitation and Disarmament", Admiralty Memorandum, 25 June 1929, CP-180(29), CAB 24/204.

[401] Bryan M. Ranft, "Admiral David Earl Beatty (1919-1927)", in Malcolm Murfett, ed., The First Sea Lords: From Fisher to Mountbatten, (Westport, Conn.: 1995), 127-140.

[402] Salisbury to Chamberlain, 15 April 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260.

[403] Orest Babij, "The Royal Navy and the Defence of the British Empire, 1928-1934", in Neilson and Kennedy, eds., Far Flung Lines, 174-75.

Beatty's vociferous and alarmist tactics would no longer work.[404] Instead, Madden understood that they had to be replaced by more subtle arguments and that the Admiralty would have to decide on its priority programmes and be willing to compromise in order to save these. Roger Backhouse, Chatfield's successor as Controller, summed up the new attitude when he argued that Admiralty policy had to be guided by the consideration of "what is actually possible of accomplishment with the resources available".[405] Madden himself, unlike Chatfield, for instance, also believed that small cruisers, even as low as 6,000 tons, could effectively be utilized in Imperial Defence. These also had the advantage of being much less expensive to construct and maintain than the large ships. Throughout 1928, and into 1929, there was an extensive debate within the naval staff over the relative merits of different small cruiser designs.[406]

Concurrently, the naval staff examined whether the underlying basis which drove Admiralty planning and its fleet strength, the possibility of á war with Japan in the Far East, was still relevant in the peaceful environment of the late 1920s. This study was pushed by the DCNS, Vice-Admiral William Fisher, who pointedly observed in April 1928 that "*Far Eastern* war plans appear to be becoming less attractive to the Cabinet".[407] Despite this, Fisher did not demur when, later that year, the Plans Division reaffirmed that the basis of naval estimates should remain a war in the Far East for the purpose of calculating personnel, material and stores requirements. However, he did suggest that it might soon become "more convenient and politic" to follow a more general formula.[408] He suggested a formula along the following lines:

1. The maintenance of the one power standard in those types of ships which have been fixed by

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[404] For this Madden has been castigated by both his contemporaries and historians. See, for instance, Richmond to Keyes, 22 Nov 1940, in Keyes Papers, v.3. More recently there have been several attempts to defend his reputation: Nicholas Tracy, "Admiral Sir Charles E. Madden (1927-1930) and Admiral Sir Frederick L. Field (1930-1933)"in Murfett, First Sea Lords, 141-156; Babij, "The Royal Navy and the Defence of the British Empire".

[405] R. Backhouse minute, 13 Nov 1928, ADM 116/3629.

[406] "Cruisers for the Protection of Trade Routes", nd, sometime 1928; Pound [ACNS] minute, 14 April 1928 and Madden minute, 8 May 1928; "The Uses of the Small Cruiser", 19 Oct 1928 all ADM 1/8765/313; "Cruiser Policy-Investigation by the Staff College, Greenwich", 15 March 1928, ADM 116/2607; "Six Inch Gun Cruiser", 25 August 1928, ADM 116/2607.

[407] W.W. Fisher minute, 17 April 1928, ADM 116/2607.

[408] "The Basis of Naval Estimates", 15 Oct 1928 and W. Fisher minute, 7 Nov 1928, ADM 116/3629.

> international agreement.
> 2. The maintenance of all other types of ships at such strength as will ensure the protection of the sea communications of the Empire...
> 3. The provision of all requisites necessary to give the Main Fleet sufficient mobility on arrival in the area of hostilities wherever that may be.[409]

Madden believed that Fisher's idea had merit and that his policy was the "correct one", but he did not feel that it was one which the navy could pursue at that time.[410] It was left up to the Admiralty PUS, Oswyn Murray, to elaborate on the objections to changing the basis for naval planning. A Far Eastern conflict, he explained:

> is probably the most difficult war we may have be called upon to engage in, and that if we take this as the basis we are likely to be reasonably prepared for an "ordinary emergency".[411]

In the interim, after Fisher's initial observation in March, Madden had asked the Plans Division to examine British cruiser requirements in case of a war either with France or the United States. This investigation concluded that, in a war with France, 70 cruisers would be the minimum required, while in a war with the United States, the RN would require 75 cruisers.[412] However, neither of these cases could realistically be used to defend Admiralty programmes. Thus, for the Admiralty there was little alternative to planning for a war in the Far East. Fisher's more general formula made a great deal of intellectual sense, but, as Madden no doubt surmised, it would leave the door wide open for the Treasury to attack the Admiralty's estimates piecemeal.[413] As late as 1929, therefore, the navy still lacked an acceptable political justification for its building programmes. The Anglo-American negotiations in the summer of 1929, however, appeared to offer an opportunity to find a more realistic basis for the naval construction programme. Altogether, then, in the year since the debate over the 1928 estimates, the Admiralty had conducted a significant reconsideration of its views on Imperial Defence, driven by technological,

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[409] W. Fisher minute, 7 Nov 1928, ADM 116/3629.

[410] Madden minute, 16 Nov 1928, ADM 116/3629.

[411] O. Murray, minute, 18 Nov 1928, ADM 116/3629.

[412] "Cruiser Requirements-France and America (Preliminary Notes Only)", 11 June 1928, ADM 116/2607. This was as close as the Admiralty came to preparing a war plan against the United States, which shows that war with that country was never truly seriously considered by the RN. For a slightly different view see: Christopher M. Bell, "Thinking the Unthinkable: British and American Strategies for an Anglo-American War, 1918-1931", IHR, 19, 4(1997), 789-808.

[413] In the autumn of 1928, Warren Fisher, the Permanent Secretary at the Treasury, minuted that the time was right for "a drastic cut in naval expenditure". Warren Fisher minute, 21 Nov 1928, T 161/292/S.34216.

political and economic imperatives. In the end, the Navy did not change its basic assumptions about Imperial Defence, nor its aims, but it did learn that, to survive, it would have to be more diplomatic and accommodating. Its tactics, but not its goals, had to change.

The first test of the Navy's increasing political astuteness emerged early in the 1929 Anglo-American negotiations, as the FO took issue with the Admiralty's insistence on 70 cruisers as a minimum British requirement. Craigie believed that, if the yardstick was used as mechanism for conceding parity in cruisers to the Americans, then this would let the steam out of the lobby pressuring the US government to increase naval construction. In all probability, the US would not even build up to its treaty quota. Even if it did, Craigie was not unduly concerned, for he estimated that the RN would remain superior to the USN because of the former's world-wide string of bases and its general efficiency, marksmanship and discipline.[414] He feared that another British claim for seventy cruisers would bring Hoover's political opponents to the fore and reduce the chances of reaching any agreement.[415] Besides, he added, the RN possessed only 53 cruisers, and, so, entering a conference for the limitation of armaments with a claim for 70 would be "thoroughly bad tactics".[416] In his view Britain should ask for 60 cruisers, 18 of which would be 10,000 ton 8-inch gun cruisers. The US could have 33 cruisers, 23 of which would be of the large type.[417]

MacDonald, though, also was not happy with the Admiralty's claim for seventy cruisers, and, while having lunch with Alexander in early July, he asked the First Lord how low the Admiralty would be willing to reduce this figure in order to reach agreement with the US.[418] Madden's response to this enquiry showed that he realized that

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[414] Craigie minutes, 18 March 1929, FO 371/13520/A2245/30/45.

[415] Craigie minutes, 1 July 1929 and 7 July 1929, FO 371/13521/A4323/30/45. His views received broad support in the FO. See Wellesley minute, 10 July 1929 and R. Campbell [Head, Western Department] minute, 9 July 1929, both Ibid.

[416] Craigie minute, 7 July 1929, FO 371/13521/A4323/30/45.

[417] Craigie minute, 7 July 1929, FO 371/13521/A4323/30/45. Craigie's proposal was based on existing and projected numbers. In Britain, he estimated that there were 63 cruisers built, building and authorized while three current cruisers would become obsolete by the time the programme was completed. His figures for the US included the 10 Omaha class cruisers which had already been built and the 23 large cruisers that were built, building or projected under the programme announced after the Coolidge Naval Conference. His proposals, therefore, amounted merely to stopping construction at current projected levels.

[418] Sir Robert Vansittart [Private Secretary to MacDonald] to Alexander, 3 July 1929, A.V. Alexander Papers [Churchill College Archives Centre] AVAR 5/2.

it would be impossible for the RN to press for 70 cruisers. The Admiralty now dropped this figure, and, instead, its policy began to focus solely on two points: minimizing the number of large cruisers in the USN and maximizing the number of small cruisers in the RN. Thus, Madden wrote that the RN was willing to hold at 15 large cruisers by dropping the 3 cruisers projected under the 1928 and 1929 building programmes. In return he asked for 45 smaller cruisers for a total of 60 British cruisers. The USN, he hoped, would be held to 18 cruisers.[419]

MacDonald accepted these figures as an interim solution, and communicated them to Dawes on July 29. However, privately, he believed that he could induce the Admiralty to reduce its cruiser figures further.[420] He warned Alexander that he believed the RN could make do with 50 cruisers.[421] But, at the beginning of August, the Americans rejected the British proposal, and repeated their insistence for 23 large cruisers for the USN.[422] The American response provided MacDonald with the opportunity to press for further reductions in the Admiralty's figures; however, the belligerent tone in the American reply angered him. As a result, he postponed a planned trip to his beloved Lossiemouth cottage in Scotland in order to consult with both the FO and the Admiralty.[423] Now Craigie advised the Prime Minister that "in the last resort", the Admiralty might be willing to accept only 50 cruisers, as long as they were relatively modern.[424] The 50 cruisers would be divided as follows: 15 large and 35 smaller ships. He postulated that the Admiralty might accept this formula as long as the Americans were held to 20 large and 10 small cruisers. MacDonald agreed with Craigie, but he had already received a similar proposal from the Admiralty.[425]

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[419] "Note by the First Sea Lord", 5 July 1929, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/267.

[420] "General Agreement as to Cruisers-Memorandum by Mr MacDonald, 29 July 1929, DBFP, Series II, v.1, pp 32-3; MacDonald Diary entry, 29 July 1929, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/1753; MacDonald letter to Dawes, 30 July 1929, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/267.

[421] MacDonald letter to Alexander, 30 July 1929, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/267.

[422] Dawes letter to MacDonald, 1 Aug 1929, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/267.

[423] MacDonald diary entry, 31 July 1929, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/1753.

[424] Craigie minute, 3 Aug 1929, FO 371/A5134/30/45. For some reason MacDonald did not return this file to the FO. It cannot be found in the FO volumes, but, instead, is in the MacDonald Papers, PRO/30/69/267.

[425] MacDonald minute, 6 Aug 1929, FO 371/A5134/30/45 in PRO 30/69/267.

This had resulted from the Admiralty's own reconsideration. Ever since the American rejection of its first set of proposals, the Plans Division, under Bellairs, had begun working on a new set of naval proposals, which better reflected the new realities. Reluctantly, the Admiralty accepted what it termed a "peace requirement" of only 50 cruisers, but it stressed that this acceptance was only for the purpose of reaching an agreement and did not signify that the Admiralty had dropped its wartime requirements for Imperial Defence. Instead, the Admiralty retained the right to claim a "war requirement" of 70 cruisers.[426] In return for making this concession, however, Madden demanded that two conditions be incorporated into any naval treaty. Both these conditions were based on Britain's Imperial Defence needs.

First, he wanted a steady building programme of 3 cruisers per year for the next four years to replace the war-built "C" class cruisers. He reminded the PM that, without this building programme, either Britain's cruiser fleet would diminish to a dangerous level, or else the RN would have to embark on a very expensive, bulk replacement programme after 1936.[427] Second, Madden demanded that the USN be limited to 18 of the 10,000 ton, 8-inch gun cruisers.[428] Again, as at Geneva, the main reason behind limiting the number of large American cruisers was the Admiralty's concern over the size and strength of the IJN. In large cruisers, the IJN measured itself against the USN, and British sources indicated that the Japanese would ask for a 70% ratio in this class of ship at any upcoming conference.[429] If the American numbers were not reduced, therefore, this would give the IJN parity with the RN in large cruisers, and this was not acceptable to the Admiralty. The RN also had to consider the French and Italian navies, which affected Britain's position in the Mediterranean. Both countries were building the large class

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[426] Plans Division memoranda, 1 Aug 1929, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/267; Memorandum by the First Sea Lord, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/267.

[427] Alexander to MacDonald, 20 Aug 1929, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/267.

[428] "Admiralty Observations on American Notes of 19 Aug 1929", 29 Aug 1929 and "Plans Division Memorandum for Prime Minister", 9 Sept 1929, both MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/267.

[429] Ronald Lindsay, [replaced Tyrrell as PUS] minute, 25 July 1929, FO 371/13522/A5096/30/45. At the start of August, Alexander showed MacDonald "certain sources of information" that indicated that the Japanese would ask for a 70% ratio. "First Lord Memorandum for the Prime Minister", 20 Aug 1929, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/267. These "certain sources of information" can be found in the intercepted flimsies in HW 12/121.

of cruiser.[430]

During the month of August, MacDonald slowly accepted these conditions, and used them as the basis of his next round of negotiations with Dawes. The Admiralty's case was aided by the fact that the FO agreed that Britain could not safely reduce its cruiser numbers below fifty unless France, Italy and Japan were also willing to accept further reductions.[431] In writing to Dawes, MacDonald explained that, while there was a "tremendous tide of public opinion" in favour of further disarmament in Britain, this would change if "our friendship with the United States had left us exposed to any mischief makers in the rest of the world".[432] He explained that if Japan built up to a figure determined by a large US cruiser fleet, then Britain would have to build more to stay ahead.[433]

At first, though, these explanations had little effect on the Americans. In late August, Craigie reported that the Americans were surprised at the British opposition to a high level of American large cruisers.[434] As the Americans had never presented any real yardstick during the negotiations, and as the British were willing to accept 15 large cruisers for themselves, the true difficulty in the negotiations now became the number of large American cruisers. Initially the FO, unlike the Admiralty, was willing to compromise on a figure of 20 or even 21 large American cruisers.[435] As it became more and more apparent that the Japanese were indeed going to demand a 70% ratio with the USN, the FO fell in with the Admiralty's argument that the Americans were going to have to be held to 18 large cruisers.[436]

Thus, over the month of August and into early September, an agreement emerged between the Admiralty, the FO and the Prime Minister, which formed the basis of MacDonald's negotiations with Dawes and strongly

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[430] "Notes by First Sea Lord", 5 July 1929, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/267.

[431] Alexander to MacDonald, 23 July 1929 and Craigie minute, 3 Aug 1929, FO 371/A5134/30/45, both MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/267; Craigie minute, 24 July 1929, FO 371/13522/A5096/30/45.

[432] MacDonald to Dawes, 1 Aug 1929, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/267.

[433] DBFP, Series II, v.1, pp 36-39.

[434] Craigie memorandum, 26 Aug 1929, FO 371/13523/A5646/30/45.

[435] Craigie, R.H. Campbell and Lindsay minutes, 3 Aug 1929, FO 371/A5134/30/45, PRO 30/69/267; and Lindsay memorandum, 19 Aug 1929, FO 371/13522/A5476/30/45.

[436] A.W.A. Leeper minute, 5 Sept 1929, FO 371/13523/A5874/30/45.

reflected the Admiralty's desiderata.[437] Working within an aggregate figure of 50 cruisers and a total tonnage of 339,000, the British cruiser fleet would be composed of 15 relatively-new 10,000 ton 8-inch gun ships and 21 older, six-inch gun ships. As well, during the period of the agreement, 14 new, six-inch gun cruisers would be built as older ships were scrapped.[438] The USN would be restricted to 18 large cruisers, plus a few of the smaller class.[439]

Nevertheless, MacDonald remained uneasy about the 14 ship replacement programme, in part because he feared that it would prove unacceptable to the Americans and in part because it was expensive and would be seen as not being "nearly bold enough" from the point of view of disarmament.[440] He suspected that, under the guise of reduction, the Admiralty was actually increasing the fighting efficiency of its cruiser force. He therefore asked Alexander to have the naval staff see if some of the new cruisers to be built could be smaller than the 6,500 tons they were currently scheduled to be. The Americans had also pressed for a higher number of large cruisers for themselves, and wanted to reduce the total British cruiser tonnage by limiting the replacement programme.[441] In the face of this pressure, Madden and Alexander mounted a vociferous defence of the Admiralty's position.[442] Although no final agreement had yet been reached, in October MacDonald traveled to the United States on a highly-

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[437] The argument has been made elsewhere that the FO provided the key advice to MacDonald and that "the diplomats rather than the sailors had the ear of the prime minister". B.J.C. McKercher, Esme Howard: A Diplomatic Biography, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 344; idem., Transition, 36-37. This is clearly not the case, as any perusal of MacDonald's private papers will show the voluminous advice tendered by Madden, Alexander and the Director of Plans, Captain Roger Bellairs. In fact, the naval advisors had as much influence as the FO on general questions in the negotiations while, in regards to technical details, they were clearly the experts and were treated as such. This was helped by the fact that they were able to establish a good working relationship with Craigie. Another historian points to the key role MacDonald played in the negotiations and asserts that both the FO and Admiralty were supplanted by him. Kitching, Britain and the Problem of International Disarmament, 125. This is overstating the case.

[438] Admiralty memorandum, 29 Aug 1929, PRO 30/69/267; MacDonald to Dawes, 30 Aug 1929, DBFP, Series II, v.1, 61-63.

[439] MacDonald to Dawes, 9 Sept 1929, DBFP, Series II, v.1, 69-71.

[440] MacDonald to Alexander, 17 Sept 1929, Alexander Papers, AVAR 5/2.

[441] Dawes to MacDonald, 4 Sept 1929, DBFP, Series II, v1, pp 68-69; Dawes to MacDonald, 12 Sept 1929, DBFP, Series II, v1, pp 74-77; Hoover to MacDonald, 17 Sept 1929, DBFP, Series II v1, 87-92.

[442] Alexander to MacDonald, 18 Sept 1929, Alexander Papers, AVAR 5/2; "Admiralty Statement on Cruiser Question", 19 Sept 1929, "Memorandum by Naval Staff", 21 Sept 1929, Alexander to MacDonald, 21 Sept 1929, all PRO 30/69/267.

publicized visit whose intent was to showcase the improvement in Anglo-American relations. The trip was a tremendous success. Before departing for the US, the MacDonald-Dawes talks had progressed to such an extent that invitations were sent out to the other three major naval powers, Japan, France and Italy, to a new naval conference which would begin early in 1930 in London. After MacDonald's return from North America, however, the final British proposals still had to be worked out and approved by the Cabinet.

In December, the FO and the Admiralty submitted a long, joint report on the British proposals for the London Naval Conference (LNC) to a sub-committee of the Cabinet.[443] After two meetings, the committee approved the general proposals outlined within the draft.[444] The British entered the London Naval Conference once again proposing the limitation of future battleship construction to 25,000 ton ships with 12-inch guns. The life of capital ships would be extended to 26 years, and, under a new replacement table, no more than one ship would be laid down a year. The maximum tonnage for the British Empire and the US would be set at 375,000 tons each. The British also proposed the abolition of the submarine and further limitations on destroyers and aircraft carriers.

The central aspect of the proposals, however, was the cruiser problem, and, in this document, Craigie and Bellairs summed up the results of the Anglo-American negotiations to that point. MacDonald had informed the Americans, unofficially, that the RN was willing to accept a total tonnage of 339,000 tons of cruisers. This figure would be composed of 15 8-inch gun ships, 14 new 6-inch guns ships, which would be built during the course of the agreement, and 21 older 6-inch gun cruisers. For themselves, the Americans desired a total of 315,000 tons composed of 21 8-inch gun ships, 10 Omaha class ships and 5 6,900 ton 6-inch ships. The British, nevertheless, continued to desire to reduce the American figure of 8-inch gun ships to 18 and to limit the total American tonnage to 300,000. Limiting the number of heavy American cruisers, though, was more critical than limiting the total American tonnage. MacDonald pointed out to the Admiralty that to achieve the first aim might require a

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[443] "London Naval Conference 1930--Memorandum Respecting Proposals to be Submitted by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom to the Conference", Dec 1930, LNC (E)7, CAB 29/117. This memorandum was prepared by Bellairs in the Admiralty and Craigie in the FO on instructions from the PM. At the time, no one in the Admiralty, other than Bellairs, had seen the memorandum. Craigie minute, 5 Dec 1929, FO 371/13527/A3808/30/45.

[444] LNC (29) 5 Mtg, 9 Jan 1930, CAB 29/117.

compromise on the second.[445]

These differences between the American and British positions were left to be resolved at the LNC. In the London Naval Treaty (LNT), signed in April 1930, the Admiralty achieved two of its principal objectives. The USN was limited to 18 large cruisers and a 14 ship, 91,000 ton British replacement programme was written into the treaty.[446] To arrive at these figures, the Admiralty was forced to allow the Americans a higher overall cruiser tonnage: 323,500 tons. There was no agreement on the abolition of the submarine, and Britain accepted parity in destroyers and submarines with the US. Once again, the Americans refused to agree to any limitations on capital ships, and Britain reluctantly agreed to an American call for an extension of the battleship building holiday until 1936.

Despite this, the LNC was a success for the Royal Navy, for it achieved two long term aims: an equilibrium in the large cruiser class was found and the government recognized a steady cruiser building programme. For the FO and the Labour government the conference was also a great success as it appeared to cement the improvement in Anglo-American relations which had begun the previous year. As well, the conference seemed to open the door for further, all-round disarmament at a later date. For a long time, historians have made much of the fact that, at the LNC, Britain agreed to reduce its overall cruiser numbers from 70 to 50, and have viewed this as a sign of a diminution in British naval strength. Two things need to be mentioned about this assertion. First, the navy only accepted the lower figure as a temporary measure in order to secure an agreement with the Americans. It never abandoned the principle that the RN required at least 70 cruisers for Imperial Defence. Second, this was a paper reduction for, in 1930, the RN did not possess 70 cruisers. In return for this paper concession, however, the RN received treaty approval for a substantive, 14 ship building programme, which it had desired for years. Thus, it is hard to see how this one part of the treaty "weakened" Britain's strength in cruisers, as one recent commentator has suggested.[447] A more serious accusation against the LNT is that, by extending the

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[445] LNC (29) 5 Mtg, 9 Jan 1930, CAB 29/117.

[446] "International Treaty for the Limitation and Reduction of Naval Armaments, April 22, 1930", Cmd.3556, London: HMSO, 1930.

[447] Clare M. Scammell, "The Royal Navy and the Strategic Origins of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935", JSS, 20, 2(1997), 97. This view is echoed by a recent article which concluded that the LNT "hampered" the RN's strength in cruisers. Ferris, "Last Decade of British Maritime Supremacy", 157. Another, older work,

battleship building holiday to 1936, it gutted Britain's strength in capital ships.[448] This point has to be viewed against the fact that, as early as the mid-1920s the RN had anticipated that it would have difficulty getting approval for new capital ship construction after 1930. In fact, given the difficult economic times after the LNC it is doubtful that a British government of any political colour would have embarked on a battleship building spree.[449] To measure the success of the LNC accurately, one must examine the challenges that arose to its provisions in the years immediately after the conference. For, although the conference appeared a success, whether or not it would endure depended on how long the assumptions which underlay the agreement would remain valid. The RN still had to seek Cabinet approval for the Treaty building programme in the face of a hostile Treasury and the future of disarmament was linked to the maintenance of a stable and prosperous world order. The naval agreement could be upset if, for instance, Franco-Italian rivalry led to a naval arms race in the Mediterranean. Even more importantly, however, the treaty was dependent on Japan remaining benign in the Far East.

The long accepted view has been that the pursuit of naval disarmament weakened the Royal Navy and reduced Britain's position in the world, a view summed up by one historian, who saw the naval conferences as "providing the means for Britain to surrender gracefully the naval superiority that in 1914 she had gone to war, at an inestimable cost to preserve".[450] In the first half of the 1920s, the Royal Navy certainly believed that the disarmament conferences were a threat to its ambitious programme to reorient its strategic posture. The RN's concerns had especially resonance in a post-war period where not everyone was convinced by the potential

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argued that the Labour government "abandoned" the British position on seventy cruisers. While strictly correct, the implication of this comment is misplaced as it ignores the details of the treaty. Kennedy, Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery, 278.

[448] Ferris, "Last Decade of British Maritime Supremacy", 156.

[449] Having said this, perhaps the most valid criticism of the LNT is that, by extending the battleship building holiday, it undermined the industrial base of Britain's maritime power. Without orders for new battleships there was a contraction in the amount of plant for building armour plating, guns and heavy gun mounts, and many skilled tradesmen were lost. For the problems at this time in maintaining the industrial infrastructure to build capital ships see Gordon, British Seapower and Procurement. The Admiralty was aware of these problems. Shortly after the end of the LNC specialist armament firms began to express their concerns over the maintenance of plant for capital ship construction. R. Backhouse [Controller] minute, 9 May 1930, ADM 116/3747. Backhouse calculated that, due to the small number of gun pits where large calibre gun turrets could be built, it would be difficult to build a capital ship in under 3 years.. R. Backhouse minute, 23 April 1931, ADM 116/3747.

[450] Hall, Britain, America and Arms Control.

Japanese threat, and hence the need to build up Far Eastern defences. However, after the debacle of the Geneva Naval Conference, a new FSL changed the RN's tactics and used the naval conferences to the navy's advantage. British politicians and diplomats, while eager to secure a naval disarmament treaty for both diplomatic and financial reasons, held back when they believed that the Empire's vital interests were threatened. This is an important part of the explanation for the failure of the Geneva Disarmament Conference. Moreover, naval disarmament had to be carefully managed in order to ensure that issue did not damage Anglo-American or Anglo-Japanese relations. While most diplomats and politicians recognized that a renewed Anglo-Japanese Alliance was not practical politics, for both strategic and nostalgic reasons they understood the importance of keeping Japan onside. They also implicitly understood that good Anglo-American relations had become a key diplomatic and economic component of Imperial Defence. Naval disarmament by itself did not hamstring Imperial Defence. In the end, financial factors played a far greater role as the growing world-wide depression would demonstrate over the next several years.

Chapter 4: Depression, Disarmament and Defence, 1930-1932

The spring of 1930 was marked by renewed optimism in Britain about the course of international affairs. Within the first four months of the year the contentious questions of the occupation of Germany, reparations, Anglo-American relations and naval disarmament appeared to be settled.[451] With these problems out of the way, and with the Soviet threat relatively dormant, it seemed that real progress towards general disarmament and, through it, peace could finally be made.[452] There were no imminent threats to Imperial Defence. At the beginning of 1930, FO officials concluded that the risk of war breaking out was very remote indeed.[453] These feelings culminated in the start of the League-sponsored Disarmament Conference in Geneva in February 1932. Meanwhile, as politicians in Britain focused their attention on furthering disarmament, the service departments turned their attention almost exclusively to internal Imperial Defence concerns and to some of the most obvious gaps in the Imperial Defence system. Their attempts to bring these issues to light, however, were marred by bitter fights between the RAF and the older services over how Imperial Defence should be carried out. The Treasury was eager to take advantage of this lull to make significant cuts to Imperial Defence. However, the optimism that marked the spring of 1930 gradually faded as the world-wide depression took hold. In Britain, policymakers became preoccupied with the domestic economic situation, and, as a result of the financial strain, service estimates were cut back even further. The relatively quiet period that had followed the collapse of the Soviet threat to the Empire was shattered when, in September 1931, the Japanese army attacked in Manchuria. This was a first-class international crisis and a first class crisis in Imperial Defence. As a result of this Japanese action, British defence planners began to address the question of how to rebuild the Imperial Defence system in a time of severe financial stringency. This debate would not be rapidly resolved, and by the end of 1932, only a modest start was made.

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[451] For the Young Plan and the First and Second Hague Conferences see Bruce Kent, The Spoils of War: The Politics, Economics and Diplomacy of Reparations, 1918-1932, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

[452] In the fall of 1929 the Second Labour Government fulfilled its election pledge to re-establish relations with the Soviet Union. Carlton, MacDonald versus Henderson, 147-157; Donald N. Lammers, "The Second Labour Government and the Restoration of Relations with Soviet Russia (1929)", BIHR, 37(1964), 60-72. For more on the context of Labour's relations with the Soviet Union see Andrew Williams, "The Labour Party's Attitude to the Soviet Union, 1927-1935: An Overview with Specific Reference to Unemployment Policies and Peace", JCH, 22, (1987), 71-90.

[453] Thompson minute, 9 May 1930; Craigie minute, 8 May 1930; O'Malley minute, 8 May 1930; Orde minute, 8 May 1930; Lord Monteagle minute, 8 May 1930, all FO 371/14265/A3180/1/45.

Before any of these questions were raised, however, there remained some unfinished business from the LNC. The Admiralty was reasonably pleased with the results even though it had not achieved all of its desiderata. Instead of a modified replacement schedule for smaller, cheaper capital ships, the construction holiday had been extended until 1936. In addition, neither France nor Italy had signed those parts of the LNT dealing with cruisers, destroyers and submarines due to their inability to resolve the question of naval parity between them. The standoff between Paris and Rome had repercussions. If their rivalry led to a Mediterranean naval race, then Britain would be forced to respond, thereby negating the naval balance struck between the USN, the RN and the IJN at the conference. Despite this, the Director of Plans at the Admiralty, Roger Bellairs, wrote to Lord Beatty, defending the provisions of the treaty, saying that it gave precisely the same rate of cruiser construction as the Conservative government had sanctioned in 1925, except that now the RN was not forced to build the 8-inch gun, 10,000 ton cruisers.[454] This had been the navy's most important objective, but it had also achieved its secondary objective, as the Treaty incorporated a 14 cruiser replacement programme for the RN. This was crucial, because, for the first time, the Navy was able to divorce its construction programme from its plans for war in the Far East; plans which, in 1930, were considered increasingly dubious by politicians skeptical of a Japanese threat. Now, fulfilling the terms of the LNT became the rationale behind the Admiralty's cruiser building programme, and Bellairs believed that this placed the Admiralty "in a strong position vis à vis the Cabinet".[455] However, before any of these 14 ships could be laid down, the Treasury and the Cabinet still had to approve their funding.

Getting such approval was not an easy task for two reasons. First, most Labour Ministers were suspicious of the defence services, and were reluctant to embark on any expensive programmes. Second, the Treasury now sought to re-impose its will over naval expenditure. When the Labour government had entered office, Treasury officials had advised the new Chancellor, Philip Snowden, that the best hope for immediate and large-scale savings in defence would be achieved by concentrating cuts on the naval estimates and the naval construction programme.[456]

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[454] Bellairs to Beatty, 6 May 1930, Beatty Papers, [National Maritime Museum Greenwich] BTY 13/2.

[455] Bellairs to Beatty, 2 May 1930, Beatty Papers, BTY 13/2. Bellairs was not the only member of the Admiralty Staff to defend the provisions of the LNT. See W.W. Fisher to Dudley Pound, 13 May 1930 and W.W. Fisher to Pound, 24 June 1930, both Pound Papers [Churchill College Archives Centre], DUP 3/4.

[456] Upcott memorandum, "Defence Estimates", 10 June 1929, T 161/297/S.34610.

Snowden had been unable to make any progress on this point, however, because that summer and fall the Treasury lost all control over naval policy as MacDonald pursued his Anglo-American negotiations without any significant Treasury input. In a final attempt to reassert Treasury control before the start of the LNC, Snowden had intervened in the FSC, and in the Cabinet, in January 1930, to try to force Britain to advocate even larger reductions at the LNC. He had failed because both MacDonald and Alexander had been unwilling to upset the delicate balance which had been reached with the Americans the previous summer.[457] Now, after the conclusion of the LNT, the Treasury was determined to reassert its authority over naval policy and naval spending. This opportunity arose barely two weeks after the end of the conference, when the Admiralty Board presented a four-year building programme designed to meet the requirements of the LNT. It called for the annual construction of three cruisers and one flotilla of destroyers, plus sloops and other minor ships in the years between 1930 and 1933.[458] Australia, the Admiralty hoped, would build one cruiser, but, if it did not, then Britain would have to build it. When taken with the one cruiser approved in the 1929 building programme, the new schedule would provide the full 14 ship complement authorized by the LNT.[459] Snowden, however, opposed the scale of this programme, and he suggested that both the number of ships, and their size, be scaled back.[460] At this point, Snowden and Alexander met privately, with no naval advisors present, and worked out a compromise solution based on the Treasury's desires. Instead of building 14 cruisers averaging 6,500 tons, Britain would build 10 cruisers, three of which would be smaller, roughly 3,000 ton ships. In addition, only three and a half, not four, flotillas of destroyers would be built.[461]

When he saw these proposals, Madden was furious, and, breaking with the First Lord, he made it clear

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[457] Babij, "The Second Labour Government and British Maritime Security", 656-659.

[458] "Naval Construction Programme", 9 May 1930, FS (29) 26, CAB 27/407. A flotilla of destroyers was composed of 8 regular ships and 1 destroyer leader.

[459] It is important to note that the LNT referred only to construction that would be completed before 31 Dec 1936. In practice this meant that more ships could be laid down in 1934 and 1935 because it was not anticipated that they would be completed before the end of 1936.

[460] FS (29) 10 Mtg, 22 May 1930, CAB 27/407.

[461] "Naval Construction Programme", 27 May 1930, FS (29) 30, CAB 27/407.

that they would undermine Imperial Defence. He considered that he had already proven that such small cruisers were not required. More importantly, however, Madden felt that the new proposals constituted a "grave breach of faith with the Sea Lords", alluding to the fact that he believed the Admiralty had been promised a certain replacement programme in return for agreeing to the reduction from 70 to 50 cruisers.[462] The FSL also pointed out that Britain had to be careful, given the unresolved situation between France and Italy following the conference.[463] The reaction from all the members of the Admiralty Board was so strong that Alexander felt obliged to submit a separate memorandum by Madden to the FSC outlining the Board's objections.[464]

The Prime Minister was sympathetic to the Admiralty's concerns over the building programme, although he reminded the First Lord that, in actual fact, he had never explicitly promised any building programme.[465] The Admiralty also received confidential support for its building proposals from the FO. Early in May, Craigie wrote to MacDonald arguing that the replacement programme embodied in the LNT had to be carried out. The navy, Craigie stated, was willing to come out strongly in support of the LNT, but, this enthusiasm would disappear if the Treasury was allowed to think "that they know more about the minimum strength necessary for our naval defence than do the British Delegates to the Naval Conference and the Naval Staff of the Admiralty!".[466] MacDonald was willing to entertain these arguments because he had already become concerned that other powers, especially France, doubted that Britain possessed the financial ability to build up to the strength allowed in the LNT. As he later admitted to Lord Robert Cecil, the government had to be "very careful not to allow our peace determination to be interpreted by unfriendly people to mean that we have got flabby and useless".[467] There were also domestic imperatives behind the Prime Minister's thinking. First, he wanted to avoid large-scale dockyard layoffs. Second,

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[462] "New Construction Programme, 1930", 26 May 1930; Admiralty Board Mtg, 27 May 1930, both ADM 167/81.

[463] Madden had already told the First Lord that Britain should build up to the LNT fleet "at whatever financial inconvenience it entails". Madden minute, 20 May 1930, ADM 116/3629.

[464] "Naval Construction Programme For the Years 1930-1933", 27 May 1930, FS (29) 30, CAB 27/407.

[465] MacDonald to Alexander, 2 June 1930, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/676.

[466] Craigie private minute to MacDonald, 9 May 1930, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/483.

[467] MacDonald to Cecil, 13 Aug 1930, MacDonald Papers, PRO30/69/676.

he assessed that if the Admiralty came out in favour of the treaty this would likely disarm many outside critics of the governments naval policy, such as Lord Beatty. As a result, he interceded on behalf of the Admiralty at a meeting of the FSC in early June.[468] His intercession was a key factor in convincing the FSC to abandon the Snowden-Alexander compromise and to accept the Admiralty's full building programme for 1930.[469] A decision on the building programmes for 1931 and afterwards was deferred until the autumn.

In mid-December 1930, the Admiralty Board presented its building programme for 1931 to the FSC. It was composed of two large and one small (5,000 ton) cruisers, along with a flotilla of destroyers, four sloops and other, smaller vessels.[470] As before, securing the funding for this programme proved difficult. Over the preceding six months the fiscal situation had deteriorated to the extent that, by the beginning of 1931, Snowden was predicting a budget deficit of at least £50 million and perhaps as high as £70 million.[471] To the Prime Minister, Snowden emphasized the political dimension of this shortfall, "If one thing more than any other is expected from a Labour Government it is a reduction in this class of expenditure".[472] Consequently, the Chancellor felt that he had no choice but to impose further spending cuts on all government departments. Snowden admitted that, in the short term at least, defence cuts would not provide a large measure of relief, but he suggested that "a sort of Geddes committee of outsiders" should be organized to examine the defence services altogether with an eye to significant cuts in the future. [473]

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[468] FS (29) 11 Mtg, 3 June 1930, CAB 27/407. The LNC had left MacDonald disappointed and annoyed with the French, whom he had found unreasonable during the negotiations. Just after the end of the conference, he confided to his diary that he had been disturbed by the "discovery of the genuine war mentality of France" at the conference. MacDonald diary entry, 23 April 1930, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/1753.

[469] FS (29) 11 Mtg, 3 June 1930, CAB 27/407. Madden to MacDonald, 16 June 1930 and MacDonald reply, 17 June 1930, MacDonald Papers, PRO/30/69/676 are also instructive in this respect. It is significant to note that the DCNS, Fisher, in describing the debate over the 1930 estimates, stated that, without the LNT, "we would not have got half". Fisher to Pound, 24 June 1930, Pound Papers, DUP 3/4.

[470] Admiralty Board Mtg, 30 Oct 1930, ADM 167/81; "Naval Construction Programme 1931", 17 Dec 1930, FS (29) 39, CAB 27/407.

[471] "The Financial Situation", 7 Jan 1931, CP-3(31), CAB 24/219.

[472] Snowden to MacDonald, 9 Sept 1930, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/676.

[473] Ibid.

This coincided with the views of his own senior officials who had begun to grow concerned that, due to the pressure of the naval construction programme, and the constant additions to the Home Defence Air Force (HDAF), defence spending would inevitably go up from 1932 onwards.[474] Total service expenditure in 1930 had been £110,850,000. In 1931 this was forecast to drop to £109,500,000 but, starting in 1932, spending would begin to increase steadily, and, if no changes were made, by 1933 the total estimates would reach £113,500,000.[475] Treasury officials began to consider what broad changes in policy could arrest this trend.[476] They realized that only small economies could be achieved in the 1931 estimates, but, to reduce the growth of future expenditure, they again debated the merits of calling for a widespread investigation and reorganization of Imperial Defence.[477] A junior member of the Supply Department of the Treasury outlined the form such a radical change might take.[478] For the RN, its construction programme would be scaled back and its general level of readiness would be lowered. The RAF would have to be content not to add any further squadrons to the HDAF until after the proposed Disarmament Conference in 1932. The most far-reaching changes, however, would affect the army.[479] It would be stripped of its ability to mobilize four divisions rapidly in case of war, and, instead, its state of readiness should be "brought more closely into relation with the conception of the Army as primarily a mobile police force, equipped for guerrilla warfare in semi-civilized countries". All three services would be barred from improving their

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[474] The Treasury had already realized that, even if no new squadrons were added to the HDAF, air estimates would have to increase because the current air force possessed too many "skeleton" squadrons which lacked the requisite reserves of aircraft, engines and spare parts. This was, moreover, becoming an issue of safety. Waterfield minute, 29 Jan 1930, T 161/299/S.35170 and Waterfield minute, 7 June 1929, T 161/297/S.34610.

[475] A. Waterfield memorandum, 1 Jan 1931, T 161/486/S.34610/31.

[476] A. Waterfield memorandum, 1 Jan 1931 and Upcott minute, 8 Jan 1931, both T 161/486/S.34610/31; Waterfield minute and Upcott minute, 20 Nov 1930, both T 161/534/S.35170/31; Waterfield minute, 5 Jan 1931, Upcott minute 12 Jan 1931, Snowden minute 17 Jan 1931, all T 161/492/S.36130.

[477] Snowden suggested such a course as early as September 1930. Snowden to MacDonald, 9 Sept 1930, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/676.

[478] A. Waterfield memorandum, 1 Jan 1931, T 161/486/S.34610/31.

[479] Treasury officials had already mooted the idea of asking for a Cabinet committee to look into the size and role of the army in an effort to effect significant cuts to that service. Waterfield minute, 23 Jan 1930 and Upcott minute 24 Jan 1930, both T 161/299/S.35164; Fraser minute, 5 Dec 1929, T 161/534/S.35241. Unless the army's commitments could be scaled back, large cuts were not possible. Fisher minute, 14 June 1929, T 161/297/S.34610.

weaponry with newer models.

Senior Treasury officials, however, were only partially receptive to this proposal, and their responses highlighted their own prejudices about Imperial Defence. Warren Fisher, the Permanent Secretary of the Treasury, was leery of any deep cuts to the RAF. In his own mind, he fretted over whether Britain's current weakness in the air could lead to her being coerced by a more powerful neighbour:

> The character and effect of air attack considered in conjunction with the tremendous numerical discrepance between ourselves and the strongest air force within striking distance of this country, give much food for thought.[480]

Of course, Fisher's concern was directed towards the French whom he distrusted. He was convinced that, "If the French have overwhelming superiority in the Air, they would not hesitate to coerce us if it suited their purpose".[481] At a more practical level, Fisher felt that Churchill's previous cuts to the RAF had left the air force without the necessary reserves of aircraft and engines.[482] As a result of his own bias toward the HDAF, and his belief in the deterrent value of aerial bombing, he refrained from advocating any significant changes to the RAF.[483] Both he and R.V.N Hopkins also doubted whether any real savings could be found in the Army estimates. Hopkins did not feel that it was time for a general review of the size and organization of the army "while India is in the melting pot".[484] Fisher, too, believed that the current size of the army left it "no more than sufficient to cope", although he

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[480] Ibid.

[481] W. Fisher minute, 13 Sept 1929, T 161/296/S.34561. See also his minutes 10 Jan 1931, T 161/486/S.34610/31 and 24 Nov 1930, T 161/534/S.35170/31.

[482] Fisher also believed that the 52 squadron HDAF was a "reasonable" goal. Fisher minute, 14 June 1929, T 161/297/S.34610.

[483] Later, Fisher would express his belief that, in comparison with the other major powers, Britain was "unduly weak in the air". Fisher minute, 19 Dec 1932, T 161/588/S.37406.

[484] R.V.N. Hopkins minute, 9 Jan 1931, T 161/486/S.34610/31. Indian, and imperial, politics at this time were dominated by the issue of constitutional change in India which was accompanied by a periodic, but widespread civil disobedience campaign led by Gandhi and his Congress Party. For an overview see Philip Williamson, National Crisis and National Government: British Politics, the Economy and Empire, 1926-1932, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 84-81 and 165-191.

did suggest that the real issue was whether the army should be divested of some of its responsibilities.[485] Thus, at the beginning of the 1931, there was no call for a general enquiry into defence spending as a whole as the Treasury itself was uncertain as to how far it could reasonably cut defence expenditure. However, Treasury officials did anticipate that, sometime in 1931, there would have to be some investigation of the services in order to prepare for the 1932 Disarmament Conference, and they hoped to be able to use this to reevaluate Britain's Imperial Defence commitments with an eye to greatly reducing defence spending.[486] In the interim, Snowden announced that the first policy change he desired was to reduce the 1931 naval construction programme by 1 cruiser, two destroyers and two sloops in order to bring it into line with the amended programme which the FSC had rejected back in June.[487]

The Admiralty, however, was not willing to budge on this issue, and, consequently, the question was debated at two meetings of the FSC in January 1931.[488] Although Snowden pressed hard for cuts to the construction programme, Alexander mounted a vigorous defence. The First Lord pointed out that the Admiralty budget had already been cut severely, that the building programme was based on the compromise reached with the Prime Minister during the MacDonald-Dawes conversations and that, in light of conditions in Europe, particularly the tensions between France and Italy, Britain would have to build these cruisers sooner or later.[489] The Cabinet now sensed that a perception was growing among European countries that Britain was weak. As a result, Alexander received support from an unexpected quarter, namely Tom Shaw, the Secretary of State for War. He was concerned that some continental powers believed that "Great Britain could not afford the fleet she required". Such notions, he said, had to be dispelled. But, it was the Prime Minister who came out decisively in support of the Admiralty

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[485] W. Fisher minute, 10 Jan 1931, T 161/486/S.34610/31. He had made a similar comment several years before. Fisher minute, 14 June 1929, T 161/297/S.34610. Fisher also believed that the WO did a much better job of honestly cooperating with the Treasury to find savings in its estimates. Fisher minute, 23 Dec 1931, T 161/529/S.33101/02/5. Both the Air Ministry and the WO measured up better in this respect, in his eyes, than did the Admiralty.

[486] Waterfield memorandum, 4 Feb 1931 and Upcott minute 4 Feb 1931, both T 161/489/S.35164/31.

[487] "Naval Construction Programme 1931", 23 Jan 1931, FS (29) 42, CAB 27/407.

[488] "Memorandum by the First Lord of the Admiralty on Some Further Aspects of the Naval Construction Programme 1931", 19 Jan 1931, CP-29(31), CAB 24/219, Annex 2.

[489] FS (29) 14 Mtg, 26 Jan 1931, CAB 27/407.

case. MacDonald was already anxious over the international situation. Privately, he had asked, "Are we not weakening ourselves too much and other nations playing with us?".[490] He also maintained his belief that "actual disarmament could not go beyond what could be gotten by international agreement".[491] Now, MacDonald told the FSC that the European situation was deteriorating and that there was a feeling on the continent that Britain was "down and out". He agreed with his First Lord that the naval construction programme had already been cut to the bone, and he reminded the Chancellor of the undertaking that he (MacDonald) had given the Admiralty the year before. The Prime Minister remained mindful of his commitment to disarmament, but he feared that Britain's bargaining power at the upcoming Disarmament Conference would be weakened if it did not build these cruisers. Further discussion of this topic, however, was put off to another meeting because the Foreign Secretary was absent.

Three days later, the FSC reconvened, with Arthur Henderson present.[492] The Foreign Secretary proceeded to take issue with the Prime Minister's gloomy description of European affairs. He did not believe that a militarist spirit was growing on the continent, and he spoke hopefully about the work of the League of Nations. Except for Snowden, the remainder of the FSC was unconvinced by the Foreign Secretary's performance. Shaw once again vocally supported the Prime Minister and the Admiralty by stating that the road to disarmament lay through a firm attitude and that to show signs of "bankruptcy...was unlikely to aid us in our arguments for reason with France and Italy". In the end, concern over Britain's perceived strength and determination was decisive, and the committee accepted without any modifications the building programme proposed by the Admiralty.[493]

While it had been mindful of the perception of British power in making its decision on the building programme, the FSC also had supported the Admiralty's building programme because of fears that if Britain stepped back from its treaty approved building programme it would lose influence over the stalled Franco-Italian naval negotiations. These had been in progress since the summer of 1930, and had resulted from the fact that neither country had signed Part III of the LNT dealing with cruisers, destroyers and submarines. The problem centred

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[490] MacDonald Diary entry, 11 Jan 1931, MacDonald Paper, PRO 30/69/1753.

[491] 251 Mtg CID, 28 Nov 1930, CAB 2/5.

[492] FS (29) 15 Mtg, 29 Jan 1931, CAB 27/407.

[493] "Naval Construction Programme 1931", 2 Feb 1931, FS (29) 43, CAB 27/407.

around the Italian claim for parity with France in these classes of ships and the French unwillingness to concede this parity. Although, no solution to this deadlock was found at the LNC, both countries agreed to talk after the conference.[494] While, on the surface, this appeared to be solely a European problem, at its heart, it had potentially serious ramifications for Imperial Defence. Franco-Italian rivalry could lead to a Mediterranean naval race in which the two powers could upset the tenuous cruiser balance established at London, which in turn might ignite an renewed Anglo-American or American- Japanese naval race. So, at the end of June 1930, MacDonald wrote to Vansittart and asked what could be done about the Franco-Italian naval situation, for he considered it an urgent problem which affected the shipbuilding programmes of all the major naval powers.[495] By the end of July, however, the two countries appeared ready to begin bilateral negotiations, but this worried the Prime Minister, who feared that France was moving "again deliberately to dominate European armament policy".[496] He was concerned lest the two Mediterranean powers reach an agreement that set their own building limits so high that Britain would be forced to enact the escalator clauses of the LNT.[497] Not only would this shatter the cruiser balance established in the LNT, but it would also destroy MacDonald's accomplishment at London and his hopes for further disarmament. Thus, the Prime Minister was keen to see Britain, and, by extension, himself, involved in the upcoming negotiations.[498]

The FO shared the Prime Minister's concerns. Both Vansittart and Craigie made it clear that direct British involvement was crucial, otherwise, "there is real danger of the strategical position being modified to our

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[494] Carlton, MacDonald versus Henderson, 133.

[495] MacDonald to Vansittart, 27 June 1930, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/676.

[496] MacDonald to Selby, 20 July 1930, FO 371/14270/A 5086/1/45.

[497] The escalator clause was Article 21 of the LNT. It permitted a country to increase its cruiser construction should its national security be threatened by the new construction of any non-signatory of Part III of the LNT. "International Treaty for the Limitation and Reduction of Naval Armament", 22 April 1930, Cmd. 3556.

[498] Carlton, MacDonald versus Henderson, makes the claim that once the LNC was over MacDonald lost interest in the naval negotiations, giving Henderson a free hand in the ensuing Franco-Italian discussions. This is not the case. Both Vansittart and Craigie continually kept MacDonald informed of the progress of the negotiations and every Admiralty commentary on the proposals was also given to MacDonald. MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/480 are instructive in this respect.

disadvantage".[499] Initially, however, the French opposed any British involvement and so when talks commenced between the French Foreign Minister, Massigli, and the Italian Foreign Minister, Rosso, in mid-August in Paris, they were bilateral. Although they were not officially involved in the negotiations, the British were kept well informed of their progress and content, and the Admiralty kept MacDonald well briefed on the ramifications of each proposal as it was presented by either side.[500]

The Rosso-Massigli talks, however, dragged on inconclusively into the late autumn and as more time went by, the FO had to consider the broader implications. By October, the FO had become convinced that Italy was not negotiating in good faith. In the FO's opinion this was because the Italians were trying to keep their hands free until they could better judge whether there was any possibility of a Franco-German rapprochement. In part, the FO also believed that Italy might be trying to use the "German danger" to force more French concessions.[501] At this point, the FO gave serious thought to the possibility of concluding a four power naval pact with France and excluding Italy, even if this did drive Italy closer to Germany.[502] The consequences of such an action did not appear that serious for Italy already appeared to be an unreliable state:

> She [Italy] will try and intrigue with Germany, but that she is doing already; she will try and precipitate the whole question of Treaty revision, but that she is doing already; she will try and stir up trouble in Central Europe and the Balkans by intrigues of every kind, but that she is doing already.[503]

As attitudes in both Rome and Paris appeared to harden, the FO looked at the potential ramifications of a Franco-Italian naval race. Once again, the FO concluded that this would most probably lead to increased British construction under the LNT's escalator clause and that this, in turn, would "place a great strain on Anglo-American

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[499] Craigie minute, 5 Aug 1930, FO 371/14271/A5302/1/45; Vansittart minute, 8 Aug 1930, FO 371/14271/A5392/1/45.

[500] Most of the Admiralty commentary can be found in MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/480, ADM 116/2777 and ADM 16/3624.

[501] R. Graham [British Ambassador to Italy] telegram, 9 Oct 1930; G.H. Thompson minute, 10 Oct 1930; O. Sargent minute, 10 Oct 1930; C. Howard-Smith minute, 10 Oct 1930; V. Wellesley minute, 10 Oct 1930, all FO 371/14272/A6551/1/45.

[502] Craigie minute, 30 Oct 1930, O. Sargent minute, 31 Oct 1930, Vansittart minute, 31 Oct 1930 and MacDonald minute, 1 Nov 1930, all FO 371/14273/A7012/1/45.

[503] O. Sargent minute, 31 Oct 1930, FO 371/14274/A7012/1/45.

relations".[504] Wellesley agreed, pointing out that Britain might be faced with having to make a choice between offending the French and Italian governments or risking jeopardizing good Anglo-American relations. In his view, the choice for Britain was clear:

> I can hardly conceive of any greater misfortune than the undoing of all the good work which...has been accomplished in improving Anglo-American relations. It is the corner-stone of the whole of our foreign policy and I therefore have no hesitation in urging as strongly as possible that all other considerations should be subordinated to the main idea of keeping those relations intact.[505]

In late November, the French made clear their anxiety over new German naval construction, and they demanded either additional tonnage to compensate for this or additional security guarantees from Britain.[506] MacDonald, however, resisted the idea of any security guarantees to France, whether bilateral or wrapped up in a broader Mediterranean Pact, fearing that Germany might interpret them as "as hostile act".[507]

By the beginning of December 1930, the inability of France and Italy to come to an agreement on their own presented the British with an opportunity to become actively engaged in the negotiations. In the middle of the month, Craigie was sent to both Rome and Paris in an attempt to break the deadlock. After visiting both capitals, he came away with a potential compromise, although he anticipated that the French reply to it would be "unsatisfactory from our point of view".[508] This proved to be an accurate forecast. Later, in February, Craigie undertook another visit to Paris. This time he made some progress, as a result of which, near the end of the month, Alexander and Henderson travelled to both capitals in an attempt to find a final solution.[509] The main problem in the negotiations now was that the Admiralty believed that French tonnage figures were set too high, thereby

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[504] Craigie minute, 17 Oct 1930, FO 371/14272/A6708/1/45.

[505] Wellesley minute, 17 Oct 1930, FO 371/14272/A6708/1/45.

[506] Craigie to Vansittart, 29 Nov 1930; G.H. Thompson and C. Howard Smith minutes, 2 Dec 1930; Vansittart minute 4 Dec 1930, FO 371/14274/A 7815G/1/45

[507] MacDonald minute, 10 Dec 1930, PRO 30/69/480.

[508] Craigie Memorandum, 1 Jan 1931, FO 371/15113/A 21/21/45; Carlton, MacDonald versus Henderson, 139.

[509] "Naval Disarmament", 20 Feb 1931, CP-54(31), CAB 24/220.

jeopardizing the RN's position relative to the continental powers.[510] In fact, by this time British opinion had swung, and now the blame for the lack of progress in the Franco-Italian talks was placed squarely on the shoulders of France.[511] During the visit to Paris, however, Henderson was more willing to compromise on the French figures than Craigie had been, and the final result was a Bases of Agreement drawn up between France and Italy on March 1.[512] This did not end the Franco-Italian naval problem. Shortly after the publication of the Bases of Agreement, it became clear that the French placed a different interpretation on it than did either Britain or Italy. The result of this interpretation would have been to allow the French additional building in 1934, 1935 and 1936.[513] This interpretation was unacceptable to both Britain and Italy, and, although Henderson attempted to find a new compromise throughout April, this proved impossible. In large measure this was due not only to the attitude of the French government but also to the fact that the Admiralty was not willing to accept any more British concessions on the March 1 Bases of Agreement.[514]

In May, Henderson informed the Cabinet that the negotiations were deadlocked, but that he hoped to make further progress at an upcoming League meeting in Geneva.[515] In the end, however, no further negotiations took place during the Labour mandate. Although the Franco-Italian negotiations proved fruitless in the end, they remain important not just because they highlighted the critical link between European policy and Imperial Defence, but, because they also showed the highly interconnected nature of naval disarmament and naval power. Britain's primary concern was that a Franco-Italian naval race could upset the balance in the London Naval Conference thereby undermining Anglo-American relations and, possibly, lead to another naval race in the Pacific. In addition, perhaps the most serious result of the whole Franco-Italian naval debâcle was that it caused a further split in

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[510] Frederick Field [Field replaced Madden as FSL in the summer of 1930] to A.V. Alexander, 22 Feb 1931, ADM 116/3624.

[511] Vansittart to Tyrrell, 26 Jan 1931, PRO 30/69/480; Vansittart to Tyrrell, 31 Jan 1931, FO 371/15114/A776/21/45.

[512] CP-64(31), nd., CAB 24/220.

[513] Craigie Memorandum, 22 March 1931, FO 371/15117/A1968/21/45.

[514] Alexander, Field and Craigie meeting, 11 May 1931, ADM 116/3624.

[515] Cabinet 27(31), 6 May 1931, CAB 23/67.

relations between Britain and France, relations which had never been close in the 1920s.[516] Vansittart already had anticipated, and feared, such an outcome, which, he believed, would have negative repercussions on Britain's overall European policy and might even be "a psychological moment".[517] Distrust of Britain's Channel neighbour increased not just in the FO but especially in the mind of the Prime Minister, who, at this time, could remark that he was "compelled to suspect that France is cheating us".[518]

The timing of the collapse of these negotiations was unfortunate as it occurred just as preparations were beginning for the World Disarmament Conference in 1932. In fact, discussions of disarmament began to dominate British defence and foreign policy making in 1931. The impetus for this was that, in January 1931 the League Council had, at long last, set February 2, 1932 as the opening date for the much-anticipated World Disarmament Conference.[519] To prepare for the conference, the Labour government established two committees. The first was a Cabinet sub-committee chaired by the Foreign Secretary and composed of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the

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[516] Interestingly, the ramifications of these naval disarmament discussions on Anglo-French military and diplomatic relations have been little explored by historians. For recent examples of this oversight see Martin S. Alexander and William J. Philpott, "The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Cooperation, 1928-1939", INS, 13, 1(1998), 53-84; and P.M.H. Bell, France and Britain, 1900-1940: Entente and Estrangement, (London: Longman, 1996).

[517] Vansittart to Tyrrell [now British Ambassador to France], 31 Jan 1931, FO 371/15114/A776/21/45.

[518] MacDonald minute, 30 Jan 1931, PRO 30/69/284.

[519] McKercher, "Of Horns and Teeth", 181. Very little has been written on the World Disarmament Conference, even though it played a large role in policymaking in the early 1930s. J. Wheeler-Bennett, The Pipe Dream of Peace, (New York: Morrow, 1935); Rolland A. Chaput, Disarmament in British Foreign Policy, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1935); A.C. Temperley, The Whispering Gallery of Europe, (London: Collins, 1938). There is a little bit on the Disarmament Conference in Henry R. Winkler, "Arthur Henderson", in Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, eds., The Diplomats, 1919-1939, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953). Following this, nothing appeared on the subject for a quarter century until Philip Noel-Baker, The First World Disarmament Conference, 1932-33, (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1979). Over the past decade there has been a renewed interest in the subject. David J. Whittaker, Fighter for Peace: Philip Noel-Baker, 1889-1982, (York: Sessions, 1989); McKercher, "Of Horns and Teeth"; and, most recently: Dick Richardson and Carolyn Kitching, "Britain and the World Disarmament Conference", in Peter Catterall and C.J. Morris, eds., Britain and the Threat to Stability in Europe, 1918-45, (London: Leicester University Press, 1993); Dick Richardson, "The Geneva Disarmament Conference, 1932-34", in Dick Richardson and Glyn Stone, eds., Decisions and Diplomacy: Essays in Twentieth Century International History, (London: Routledge, 1995); Kitching, Britain and the Problem of International Disarmament; Philip S. Meilinger, "Clipping the Bomber's Wings: The Geneva Disarmament Conference and the Royal Air Force, 1932-1934", WIH, 6, 3(1999), 306-330.

Dominions Secretary, the First Lord and the Secretaries of State for War and Air.[520] The other was a sub-committee of the CID composed of senior members of all three political parties and was created in an attempt to establish wide support for the eventual British negotiating position at the Disarmament Conference.[521] With the collapse of the Labour government in the summer of 1931, these committees went into abeyance, and a new Cabinet committee was established in December 1931 by the National Government to make the final preparations.[522] These preparations absorbed an increasingly large amount of the time of the three services planning staffs, and tended to focus attention on European affairs.

Nevertheless, the COS were still able to keep their eyes clearly on Imperial Defence issues. Events over the previous years, such as the LNT, the final settlement of the reparations question through the Young Plan and the evacuation of the Rhineland appeared to indicate that conditions in Europe were more settled. The situation in the remainder of the world, as the COS pointed out in their 1930 Annual Review, was not so peaceful. The civil war continued in China, there were upheavals in Palestine and Afghanistan and communal troubles in India affected the defence of the North-West frontier. As a result, the COS concluded that these events had tended "more and more to shift at present the centre of gravity of the defence problems of this country towards the East".[523] This opinion was also based, in part, on the War Office's belief that the peace of Europe was most likely to be disturbed by Germany but that, for the time being, Germany was not in a position to do so. This did not mean that Germany was ignored. A revival of German military power was the most obvious threat to European security, and the WO had been keeping a close watch on the Reichswehr and its mobilization potential. It was obvious to WO intelligence that Germany was breaking many of the strictures of the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of

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[520] See DPC(31), CAB 27/448.

[521] This committee began meeting in March 1931. 1 Mtg DC(P), 18 March 1931, CAB 16/102.

[522] CDC series, CAB 27/476.

[523] "A Review of Imperial Defence, 1930, by the Chiefs of Staff Committee", 29 July 1930, CID 1009-B, CAB 4/20.

Versailles.[524] The Reichswehr, for instance, was being organized and trained as a cadre for wartime expansion, and a great deal of thought was being given to wartime industrial mobilization.[525] Although Germany was not building up large stocks of weapons, it was focusing instead on developing new, experimental types.[526] In case of full mobilization, the WO estimated that Germany could put 3.7 million trained and semi-trained soldiers into the field. This, however, did not unduly alarm the WO, for the German Army did not possess enough heavy artillery, anti-aircraft artillery, tanks and aircraft to equip such a force. Without such heavy weapons, the German army was not an offensive threat, and Milne concluded that "the present Reichsheer is not a menace to the peace of Europe".[527] That said, the WO did believe that, over the long term, the Germans would attempt to build up an army which would allow them to overturn the Treaty of Versailles. One intelligence estimate concluded that Germany could be in a position to menace the European order by 1937.[528]

The COS also continued to highlight the shortcomings in Imperial Defence because years of cutbacks had prevented the adoption of any new modernization programmes. In fact, the Labour government had made several important decisions that had severe consequences for Imperial Defence. First, shortly after the 1929 election, the new government fulfilled one of its election pledges by suspending the construction of the Singapore naval base which was to have been the linchpin of British defences in the Far East.[529] This decision was welcomed by the Warren Fisher and the Treasury who had labeled the base a "crazy project".[530] Second, even though the navy

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[524] A description of the various subterfuges which Germany used to circumvent the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles can be found in: Barton Whaley, "Covert Rearmament in Germany, 1919-1939: Deception and Misperception", JSS, 5, 2(1982), 3-39.

[525] "The Military Situation in Germany, June 1929", 28 June 1929, WO 190/68.

[526] Ibid.

[527] "The Military Situation in Germany, January 1930", 11 Feb 1930, CID 979-B, CAB 4/19; "The Military Situation in Germany", 6 Dec 1928, CID 926-B, CAB 4/18. Also instructive are the comments on German mobilization potential in WO 106/5418.

[528] "Germany's War Potentiality", 23 Jan 1929, WO 190/58.

[529] Cabinet 45(29), 6 Nov 1929, CAB 23/62.

[530] Warren Fisher to Philip Snowden, 14 June 1929, T 161/297/S.34610. Fisher doubted that Japan would ever attack Britain single-handed, especially if the United States supported Britain. Fisher minute, 12 May 1930, T161/800/S.18917/7. Work on the base continued, however, at a much slower pace. Outright cancellation would

secured the naval construction programmes that it desired, it had been forced to take a substantial cut in its estimates for 1930.[531] As a result of this cut, the RN had to defer any accumulation of its oil fuel reserve and had to reduce its level of stores and war reserves. This meant that the navy had to defer programmes to equip its overseas bases with modern local defences, including torpedo nets, mines and searchlights. In effect, the navy was drawing down its overall level of readiness in order to maintain its annual construction programmes. Third, late in 1929, in an effort to prevent any actual cuts to the size of the projected 52 squadron HDAF, the Secretary of State for Air, Lord Thomson, asked that its completion be pushed back from 1935 until 1938.[532] The Cabinet agreed to this proposal, but the Chancellor reserved his right to bring up in the future both the completion date for the HDAF and its size.[533]

All of these cuts affected the strength and operational capability of each of the three services. However, the overall Imperial Defence infrastructure was also in need of repair and upgrading. In particular, the COS drew attention to the overseas ports and bases which they described as "very much weaker than in pre-war days".[534] The COS concluded that the "renovation of our coast defences is overdue" because "unless the integrity of our sea routes can be secured by providing strong and self-supporting defended naval bases for the Navy, the communications of the Empire cannot be ensured". This warning had been prompted by the CIGS, who had

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have involved the government in heavy penalties to the contractors and it probably would have had to refund the large contributions it had received from the Dominions and colonies.

[531] "Naval Construction Programme 1929", 31 Dec 1929, FS (29) 22, CAB 27/407; FS (29) 8 Mtg, 23 Dec 1929, CAB 27/407. Snowden originally had asked for a cut of £5 million. Upcott minute, 23 Dec 1929 and P.J. Grigg minute, 13 Dec 1929, T 172/1693.

[532] "Proposal to Postpone the Completion of the Royal Air Force Scheme of Expansion for Home Defence until 1938", 5 Dec 1929, CP 355(29), CAB 24/207. Thomson to MacDonald, 25 July 1929, T 161/296/S.34561. There was a split in the Treasury over the question of the HDAF. Those members of the Supply Department responsible for defence estimates supported the idea of trying to force the RAF to scale back the HDAF either by postponement or by a new Cabinet enquiry into its role and size. Waterfield minute, 9 July 1929, Upcott minute 30 July 1929 and Fisher minute, 13 Sept 1929, all T 161/296/S.34561.

[533] Cabinet 52(29), 11 Dec 1929, CAB 23/62. One Treasury official let his true thoughts of Admiralty policy show when he stated, as an aside, "One shudders to think what would be the size of the RAF at present if the Board of Admiralty were responsible for air policy and could point to the figures of other Powers...". A. Waterfield minute, 9 Dec 1929, T 161/299/S.35183.

[534] "A Review of Imperial Defence, 1930, by the Chiefs of Staff Committee", 29 July 1930, CID 1009-B, CAB 4/20.

pointed out that the defences at the overseas ports had not been modernized for 30 years and were in serious need of an overhaul. Anti-aircraft defences at most ports were practically non-existent and the naval guns were obsolescent.[535] The counter-bombardment guns, for instance, only had a range of 19,700 yards while modern 8 inch naval guns could fire from over 29,000 yards out. In this state, gun defences were not an adequate deterrent to offshore bombardment or raids.

The COS had known for some time that the defences of the overseas ports needed to be updated. However, the extent of the problem had become apparent in 1928, when the navy had conducted realistic trials at Malta and Portsmouth. For the first time the navy had used a radio-controlled, decommissioned capital ship, the HMS *Centurion*, as a target ship. This had provided much more realistic practice for the artillery than towed targets, and had demonstrated that there were numerous problems other than just the inadequate range of the shore guns.[536] The mountings for the coast defence guns were manually controlled, which meant that their rate of fire was one-quarter that of modern naval guns. The fire-control system was obsolete and useless at the ranges at which the guns would have to operate. Furthermore, in terms of tactics, the trials showed that bulls-eye shooting with one gun was ineffective at long range and had to be replaced by salvo firing and that close co-ordination with aerial observers was an absolute necessity. There was also a need to improve the guns themselves and the ammunition in use. Lastly, there were few permanent coast gun crews, and the trials showed the need for training and constant drilling.[537]

In the 1930 Annual Review, however, the COS were realistic, and recognized that there was no hope of finding the money to update all the imperial ports. Consequently, and because of the government's decision the previous autumn to suspend work on Singapore, they focused on pressing for the renovation of the key ports and

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[535] "Coast Fortress Defence", 25 June 1930, COS 239, CAB 53/21.

[536] This summary is based on the 1928 and 1929 trials. "Coast Defence-Summary of Reports on Trials Held at Malta and Portsmouth in 1928", 3 Jan 1929, COS 182, CAB 53/17; "Interim Report of Special Committee on Coast Defence Requirements", 10 Oct 1929, COS 201, CAB 43/17; 76 Mtg COS, 14 Jan 1929, CAB 53/3; 78 Mtg COS, 11 June 1929, CAB 53/3; "Bombardment Trials at Malta and Portsmouth", an appendix to the 78 Mtg COS. See the full reports in WO 33/1201.

[537] This was difficult to do, however, because the defences at most ports were not manned. In fact, the WO estimated that to bring the defences at overseas ports to full strength would necessitate denuding the Expeditionary Force of a great deal of its artillery. See "Defended Ports Abroad: Arrangements for Adjustment of Personnel on Mobilization", WO 32/2358.

bases of Hong Kong, Malta and Gibraltar. While the COS acknowledged that no start should be made on the main defences of these ports until some decisions had been reached on whether guns or aircraft should be the basis of the defence, they urged that the improvement and installation of secondary armament and anti-aircraft defences should begin.[538] The latter was particularly important, as none of the major ports had adequate anti-aircraft defences, and some, like Malta, were well within range of potential enemy aircraft. However, as there was no apparent urgency to these recommendations, both the CID and the Cabinet only took note of the report.[539]

The COS's attempts to bring the poor state of coast defences to light were hampered by their own internal squabbling over the nature of the defences themselves.[540] For years, they had been involved in a so-called "air versus guns" controversy over whether aircraft or artillery should be the primary defence for overseas bases. The debate was fueled by the expensive need to build brand-new defences at the Singapore base and stoked by the fact that a decision on this issue could have broader ramifications for service budgets and the role of the RAF in Imperial Defence. When the 1928 bombardment trials were first brought up in the COS in January 1929, Trenchard immediately suggested that the results showed that there was a need to re-investigate the role of aircraft in coast defence.[541] This led Milne to remark that "if he had thought that these trials would be seized on and their results used in connection with the "Air v. Guns" controversy, he would never have allowed them to take place with untried instruments and inferior personnel".[542] At the time, Trenchard did not press his point, but he waited until the occasion of his retirement from the RAF later that year to mount another challenge to the older services.

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[538] The Treasury did not dispute the COS views on coast defences on strategic grounds, but instead emphasized the weak financial situation. A. Waterfield and G. Upcott minutes, 25 Sept 1930, R.V.N.H. Hopkins Papers, T 175/48.

[539] 250 Mtg CID, 29 Sept 1930, CAB 2/5; Cabinet 59(30), 9 Oct 1930, CAB 23/65.

[540] In January 1931, the COS once again revisited the issue of coast defence. This time, however, they were able to agree that the JPC should prepare emergency plans for the defence of Singapore in case the Far Eastern situation deteriorated in the next year to eighteen months. They also instructed the Joint Overseas and Home Defence Committee to prepare emergency defence schemes for the other ports and to make a list of what agreed upon permanent defences could begin at all bases. 97 Mtg COS, 26 Jan 1931 and 98 Mtg COS, 9 March 1931, CAB 53/3; "Aircraft and Coast Defence-Report by the COS", 11 March 1931, CID 1041-B, CAB 4/21.

[541] 76 Mtg COS, 14 Jan 1929, CAB 53/3.

[542] Ibid.

In late November, he presented his vision of the future of Imperial Defence to the Cabinet.[543] Air substitution, which had begun as an experiment in Iraq, he declared, had proven itself. Now it was time to expand this concept:

> the new and improved form of control which air power provides should be used as the means of effecting considerable economies in defence expenditure and reduction in armaments, and of keeping order without having to maintain large mobile forces and from time to time to embark on long-drawn military operations.

He proposed that the Cabinet appoint a committee to examine the further substitution of air power over the next decade in the following areas: the imposition of air control along the North West frontier of India, the Sudan, British East Africa, the West African colonies; the substitution of air patrols for naval patrols in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf; and, the exclusive use of air power for coast defence.[544] These were far-reaching proposals that would seriously affect both the army and the navy. Trenchard, however, gambled that the new Labour government, with its predisposition towards cutting defence expenditure, and its ideological support for disarmament, would look upon his scheme favourably.[545] The CAS also believed that he would have the support of the Treasury in furthering the cause of substitution. In this he was correct. As one Treasury official minuted, "the Air Ministry policy of 'substitution' is largely also the Treasury policy".[546] Not surprisingly, both the WO and the Admiralty raised

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[543] "The Fuller Employment of Air Power in Imperial Defence", Nov 1929, CP-332(29), CAB 24/207.

[544] The British garrison in the Sudan, for instance, consisted of two battalions of British infantry. Air substitution had been experimented with in the Sudan over the previous eighteen months by deploying one air squadron without withdrawing the infantry battalions. In the summer of 1929, the Air Ministry had pressed for a decision on air substitution in the Sudan, but the Cabinet had not been willing to make any final decisions until relations with Egypt were settled. 243 Mtg CID, 27 June 1929 and 244 Mtg CID, 25 July 1929, CAB 2/5.

[545] In order to gather support for Trenchard's proposals, Lord Thomson, the Secretary of State for Air, sent Snowden an advance copy of the memorandum. Thomson letter to Snowden, 27 Nov 1929, T 161/534/S.35241. Thomson also sent an advance copy of the memorandum to the Prime Minister and he specifically asked MacDonald that the committee should not be a sub-committee of the Cabinet but that it should be composed of outside experts. Thomson to MacDonald, 27 Nov 1929, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/245.

[546] W.R. Fraser minute, 5 Dec 1929, T 161/534/S.35241. Waterfield argued that substitution was the one area on which "the hope for future economies largely depends", and Hopkins agreed. Waterfield and Hopkins minutes, 24 July 1929, T 161/800/S.18917/6; Waterfield minute, 31 Jan 1930, T 161/299/S.35170. That said, the Treasury was also growing annoyed because in its view substitution was not always practiced. For instance, when the RAF had taken over the defence of Aden, the battalion station there had merely been moved to another base instead of being disbanded. Thus, in fact, substitution had turned out to mean "additions". Fraser minute, 22 Jan 1930, T 161/299/S.35164; Upcott minute, 11 Dec 1929, T 161/534/S.35241.

numerous objections to the scheme as both realized it opened the door for the Treasury. Both suggested that the committee be delayed until after the LNC and that when it met its terms of reference should be expanded to include the question of the existence of a separate air force.[547] Because of the naval conference, Trenchard's paper was not discussed at the Cabinet until March 1930. By this time, both sides had had time to lobby the Prime Minister. Christopher Bullock, the Air Ministry PUS, forwarded a list of eminent outsiders who could become members of any prospective enquiry.[548] Maurice Hankey, the Cabinet Secretary, on the other hand, wrote to Macdonald arguing that any such enquiry would "do nothing but harm" and that only "a great deal of ill-feeling will be created".[549] He suggested that, instead of an outside enquiry, each of Trenchard's proposals should be looked at piecemeal by the relevant committees of the CID. The Cabinet decided to let the Prime Minister decide on the terms of reference for the committee.[550] His decision was handed down a month later. In order to prevent a whole-scale fight among the services, MacDonald watered down Trenchard's proposals even further, only charging the Standing Committee of the Defence of India Committee to examine the possibilities of "the extended use of aircraft in substitution for other arms in Indian Defence".[551] This action, in effect, buried the whole question. Even though an enquiry was set up, it was postponed, and its deliberations were superceded by events. However, the persistent bickering among the services over the primacy of either the aircraft or the gun in coast defence, hurt the COS's attempts to bring the sad state of port defences to the government's attention and prevented their being able to make a united stand against further cuts to Imperial Defence.

These became inevitable as the Labour government faced an unprecedented financial crisis in the summer of 1931. As a result of the world-wide depression, unemployment had continued to rise throughout 1931, as did

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[547] "Air Power in Imperial Defence: Fuller Employment of: Note by Mr. T. Shaw", 7 Dec 1929 CP-356(29) and "Fuller Employment of Air Power in Imperial Defence", 20 Dec 1929, CP-369(29), CAB 24/207.

[548] C. Bullock to P.J. Grigg, 3 March 1930, T 161/534/S.35241; Bullock minute, "Notes on Substitution", 21 Feb 1930, Christopher Bullock Papers [Imperial War Museum], IWM 66/318/5. Bullock also privately lobbied the professional advisors in the Treasury, telling one "for once in this our interests and yours coincide...". Bullock to Waterfield, 21 Dec 1929, T 161/201/S.18017/014.

[549] Hankey to MacDonald, 3 March 1930, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/245.

[550] Cabinet 13(30), 5 March 1930, CAB 23/63.

[551] "The Employment of Air Power in Imperial Defence", 24 April 1930, CP-131(30), CAB 24/211.

the budget deficit, while the pound sterling had fallen precipitously. The solution to stabilising sterling appeared to lie in cutting back government expenditure to reduce the deficit. However, in August the Labour government collapsed due to its inability to agree on a series of spending cuts. MacDonald led a rump of his Labour party into a coalition, National government with Baldwin's Conservatives and the Liberals under Sir John Simon. Arthur Henderson took the majority of the Labour MPs across the floor to the Opposition benches.[552] The new, National government imposed severe cuts on all departments, including the defence services and then went to the polls in November where it won a large majority. The repercussions for Imperial Defence of this new government were several. First, it imposed large cuts on the defence services. Second, because of its coalition structure, the Cabinet was weak and divided. Although the Conservatives could have governed on their own, they believed that it was important to maintain a coalition government in order to stabilize sterling. As a result, consensus had to be reached on difficult questions in order to keep the various parties in the government. Third, as the government was born in the midst of a financial crisis, it remained acutely aware, even preoccupied, with the state of the British economy. Consequently, it was only with the greatest reluctance that the Cabinet would sanction increased defence expenditure. However, although it had been created to deal with the economic crisis, Imperial Defence quickly became a major concern for the National government, for, just as it assumed office, a new crisis erupted in the Far East.

The Far East had been relatively quiet since Chiang Kai-shek had consolidated power in China in 1928. In September 1931, however, the Japanese army's actions in Manchuria brought the region back to the centre of the international arena and the state of Imperial Defences in that region became the focal point for defence discussion within Britain. The crisis began in the early morning hours of September 19, 1931, when elements of the Japanese Kwantung Army seized the Manchurian city of Mukden and began to extend their control throughout Manchuria.[553] This action was allegedly in response to a Chinese plot to blow up a section of Japanese controlled

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[552] On the crisis see Williamson, National Crisis; Robert Skidelsky, Politicians and the Slump: The Labour Government of 1929-1931, (London: MacMillan, 1967); Stuart Ball, "The Conservative Party and the Formation of the National Government: August 1931", HJ, 29, 1(1986), 159-182; Andrew Thorpe, "Arthur Henderson and the British Political Crisis of 1931", HJ, 31, 1(1988), 117-139.

[553] The seminal work on the Manchurian Incident is Christopher Thorne, The Limits of Foreign Policy: The West, the League and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1931-1933, (New York: Capricorn Books, 1972). James William Morley, Japan Erupts: The London Naval Conference and the Manchurian Incident, 1928-1932, (New York:

railway.[554] Before long, Manchuria was under effective Japanese control and a major international diplomatic crisis developed when China protested this action to the League of Nations. Several months later, while this issue was still being dealt with, another incident blew up, one which had even more serious repercussions for Imperial Defence. On the evening of 28 January 1932, Japanese forces stationed in the International Settlement in Shanghai launched an attack on elements of the Chinese Nineteenth Route Army in the neighbouring Chinese quarter of Chapei. Tension in the city had been building since an incident in which a Chinese mob had attacked five Japanese citizens on January 18.[555] The Japanese marines, however, suffered initial setbacks, reinforcements began to arrive and soon there was wide scale fighting between the two sides.

The appropriateness of any British response to the Japanese actions in Manchuria and Shanghai and, hence, the speed with which Imperial Defences might need to be resuscitated, depended in large measure on estimates of what Japan was likely to do next. Would the Japanese be content to consolidate their position in Manchuria or would they continue to expand on the Asian mainland? If the latter, would Japanese attention turn southward towards China proper and edge closer to British interests, or, would the Kwantung Army continue to push north toward the Soviet Union, potentially precipitating another Russo-Japanese war? In the immediate aftermath of the Manchurian coup, the FO tended to believe that the incident could be contained and there was little perception of a broader threat to Imperial interests in the Far East. There was little discussion of a possible Japanese move further into China as Japan appeared to be having enough difficulties in pacifying Manchuria. As a result, the FO concluded that Japan would likely be preoccupied for some time in consolidating its position in

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Columbia University Press, 1984), addresses the issues from the Japanese perspective.

[554] On the motivations of the plotters in the Kwantung Army see, James Weland, "Misguided Intelligence: Japanese Intelligence Officers in the Manchurian Incident, September 1931", JMilH, 58(1994), 445-60. British intelligence sources revealed that the "incident" had been deliberately staged by the Japanese. Antony Best, "Constructing an Image: British Intelligence and Whitehall's Perception of Japan, 1931-1939", INS, 11, 3(1996), 405.

[555] Brenan telegram, 29 Jan 1932, FO 371/16142/F 601/1/10; Christian Henriot, Shanghai, 1927-1937: Municipal Power, Locality, and Modernization, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 83-87. For the British government's response see Christopher Thorne, "The Shanghai Crisis of 1932: The Basis of British Policy", AHR, 75, 6(1970), 1616-1639.

Manchuria.[556] Because of this, it was also less likely to advance further to the north and thus less likely to come into conflict with the Soviet Union. FO officials also suspected that the incident had been staged by the Japanese and that it was likely that they had given the Soviets forewarning of their intended action.

> The Soviet government must have suspected that something was going to happen though they may have been taken by surprise by the actual incident of September 18/19. The more are beliefs [sic] that recent events were premeditated by the Japanese the more likely it is that the latter sounded the Soviets beforehand and gave assurances as to the extent of their intended action.[557]

It was possible that Japan might have been given a free hand in teaching the Chinese a lesson provided that the Chinese Eastern Railway and Outer Mongolia were left alone.[558] This view was supported by secret intelligence, which indicated that the Soviet Union had been aware that the Japanese were planning some sort of incident in Manchuria.[559] Because of this apparent collusion, the FO was convinced that Soviet actions after the Manchurian incident would remain purely defensive. William Strang, the British chargé d'affaires in Moscow, reported his impression that the Soviet leadership probably regarded the situation in the Far East with some satisfaction for the Chinese were being taught a lesson while, at the same time, the Japanese were held to a certain moderation by world opinion.[560] The FO concurred, and viewed Soviet policy in the crisis as realistic: the Soviet Union, in the FO's opinion, would not do anything unless its powers in Manchuria were directly threatened.[561] Later, Strang began to receive reports that the Red Army was transferring troops to the Far East and that the Soviet government, apparently fearing a Japanese-sponsored uprising in Outer Mongolia, was taking a harder line with Japan. Nevertheless, he continued to feel that the Soviet Union would remain on the defensive for "the last thing they want

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[556] MacKillop minute, 16 Jan 1932, FO 371/16141/F332/1/10.

[557] Charles minute, 6 Oct 1931, FO 371/15490/F5383/1391/10. Sir Francis Lindley [Ambassador to Japan] despatch, 17 Sep 1931, FO 371/15492/F5636/1391/10; MacKillop minute, 28 Sep 1931.

[558] Charles minute, 21 Oct 1931, FO 371/15493/F5852/1391/10.

[559] Special Far Eastern Intelligence Summary no. 118, 30 Oct 1931, WO 106/5558.

[560] Strang despatch, 26 Sept 1931, FO 371/15489/F5167/1391/10.

[561] MacKillop minute, 30 Sept 1931, FO 371/15490/F5259/1391/10; MacKillop minute, 25 Sept 1931, FO 15489/F5122/1391/10.

is a war on their frontier at a point where their interests are threatened".[562] Significantly, the Tokyo Embassy felt that the two countries were kept in check by a "wholesale dread" of falling foul of the other.[563]

British appreciations of Soviet economic and industrial strength also backed up the assessment that it would likely remain on the defensive in the Far East and go to some length to avoid becoming embroiled in a conflict with Japan. Since 1929 neither the FO nor, to a lesser extent, the WO had viewed the Soviet Union as a military threat. Both economically and industrially the country was unprepared for war on "anything more than a 'tin pot' scale".[564] Moreover, by the summer of 1931, the British Ambassador in Moscow, Sir Edmond Ovey, linked the domestic needs of the Soviet Union with the pursuit of a peaceful external policy. The needs of the First Five Year plan, the focus on industrialization and, later, collectivization pointed to a less provocative orientation in Soviet foreign policy.[565] But, there was still concern, especially in the WO, that the military character of the Five Year Plan would improve Soviet military capability, but it was felt that this was many years in the future.[566] Altogether, these factors led British decision-makers to conclude that the Japanese advance in Manchuria had run its course and that further military actions were far off.

This outlook was shattered by the Shanghai Crisis in January 1932 which proved that Japan was willing to take strong action elsewhere in China in order to protect its interests. The Japanese assault on Shanghai came as a far greater shock to both the FO and to the defence services, for, unlike Manchuria, Shanghai was well within what the British considered their informal sphere of influence in China. The Japanese assault on the city struck fundamentally at British power and raised far more questions about defences in the Far East than had the Manchurian Crisis several months before. It also raised short term questions about Japan's ability to control its military and long term concerns over Japan's ultimate intentions in the Far East.

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[562] Strang despatch, 13 Oct 1931, FO 371/15493/F5852/1391/10.

[563] "Japan-Annual Report, 1931", FO 371/16247/F734/734/23.

[564] C.H. Bateman minute, 16 Feb 1931, FO 371/15614/N1117/596/38.

[565] "Soviet Union-Annual Report, 1930", 10 March 1931, FO 371/15619/N1831/1831/38; Ovey despatch, 9 June 1931, FO 371/156112/N4210/393/38.

[566] "Note by the CIGS in Answer to Sir Austen Chamberlain's Question on the Military Character of the Soviet Five Year Plan", 5 May 1931, Most Secret Annex to 3 Mtg, DC(P), 7 May 1931, CAB 16/102; "Industrial Mobilization for War in the USSR", 16 July 1931, CID 1057-B, CAB 4/21.

Concern over the short term ramifications of the incident was fed by the British Ambassador to Japan, Sir Francis Lindley. Encapsulating the mood in Japan at the time, Lindley wrote back to say that he felt he was living in a "lunatic asylum".[567] Initially, he reported that one "false step" could lead Japan to take action that would make a general war "inevitable".[568] Within the FO, the greatest fear was that precipitate international action against Japan might provoke Japan into further attacks. Almost immediately after the original incident there had been both international and domestic calls for some sort of condemnation of Japanese behaviour. China brought the issue before the League of Nations, while the American Secretary of State, Henry Stimson, approached the British for a joint note condemning Japanese actions.[569] At home, supporters of the League of Nations also pressed the government for strong action. Lord Robert Cecil wrote to the Foreign Secretary suggesting that the matter should be referred to the League Council. If Japan was found guilty of being an aggressor then the League should demand it withdraw its troops. If it did not, the first step would be a withdrawal of Ambassadors from Tokyo and then an economic boycott of Japan.[570] As a last resort, he added, Japan could be excluded from the League.

The FO deprecated any strong condemnation or action against Japan given the exposed state of British defences in the region and the wider, imperial ramifications of any Japan reaction to sanctions by the League or individual countries. There was also concern that the Japanese military was out of control in China and no longer listening to any restraining words from the Gaimusho.[571] Referring to Cecil's comments, Vansittart felt that they were "fraught with danger". Britain, he conceded, was not prepared for any Japanese response. Britain would only be in a position to "see our trade and influence in the Far East obliterated and lose both Hong Kong and Shanghai without possibility of defence–as well as our ships and troops in the Far East".[572] The FO was equally leery of

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[567] Lindley telegram, 5 Feb 1932, FO 371/16146/F953/1/10.

[568] Lindley telegram, 4 Feb 1932, FO 371/16146/F894/1/10.

[569] R. Lindsay [British Ambassador to the United States] telegram, 25 Jan 1932, FO 371/16142/F490/1/10.

[570] Cecil letter to Simon, 2 Feb 1932, FO 371/16145/F895/1/10.

[571] Wellesley minute, 1 Feb 1932, FO 371/16148/F1263/1/10.

[572] Vansittart minute, 4 Feb 1932, FO 371/16145/F895/1/10.

joining the United States in a strong condemnation of Japan.[573] Japan, it was felt, would not be "defected from her purposes in China by notes" and, moreover, the note proposed by Stimson "might sting her into going further than she otherwise would".[574] As for League action, Vansittart felt that Britain should continue its policy of keeping that body from "going off the deep end".[575] As for the long-term implications, the Shanghai crisis left the FO notably pessimistic. Sir John Pratt summed up the issue:

> in the end Japan can only be checked by force. Ultimately we will be faced with the alternatives of going to war with Japan or retiring from the Far East. A retirement from the Far East might be the prelude to a retirement from India.[576]

Vansittart agreed. If Japan continued unchecked, he added, then Britain's "position and vast interests in the Far East will never recover. This may well spread to the Middle East".[577] Thus, throughout the period after the Shanghai incident, the FO advocated a moderate policy of gentle remonstrance towards Japan while concurrently restraining the League and the United States from any stronger condemnation lest it worsen the situation.

While the FO preached a cautious diplomatic strategy, the CID and COS considered both the short and the long term defence aspects of the problem. The Shanghai incident immediately raised fears that a similar Japanese coup de main might be delivered elsewhere in the Far East. British defences had to be repaired and it seemed like an ideal opportunity for the services to press for an increase in defence spending. Indeed at the start of February, the COS began to press for the cancellation of the ten year rule and for the amelioration of Imperial Defences in the Far East. At first they agreed to submit their annual review to the Cabinet earlier than usual and, in it, to push for an abolition of the "ten year rule".[578] This was a long term solution. To deal with the immediate problem of protecting British interests in the Far East in the event of another Japanese action, the COS established a new sub-committee, composed of the Deputy Chiefs of Staff of the three services. Its first tasks were to prepare

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[573] Orde, Wellesley and Vansittart minutes, 10 Feb 1932, FO 371/16147/F1156/1/10.

[574] Vansittart telegram to Simon, 11 Feb 1932, FO 371/16147/F1156/1/10.

[575] Vansittart minute, 10 Feb 1932, FO 371/16147/F1156/1/10.

[576] "The Shanghai Situation, February 1", 1 Feb 1932, FO 371/F1263/1/10.

[577] Vansittart minute, 1 Feb 1932, FO 371/F1263/1/10.

[578] 101 Mtg COS, 4 Feb 1932, CAB 53/4.

a "broad appreciation of the situation which would arise in the Far East in the event of Japan suddenly becoming hostile" and to suggest what immediate measures could be taken to improve the defences of Hong Kong and Singapore.[579] Almost concurrently, during a Cabinet discussion of the 1932 naval construction programme, the effects of the ten year rule on the services and, specifically, on defences in the Far East was brought up. As a result, the Cabinet agreed that the COS should also report on the exposed state of Imperial Defences at Singapore, Hong Kong and Trincomali.[580]

Since the ten year rule had been placed on a revolving footing in 1928, the wisdom of it had been questioned several times. Immediately after the 1930 LNC, the Admiralty had written a private note to the FO asking whether, in the light of the Franco-Italian animosity at the conference, the "no major war for 10 years" decision was still valid.[581] After serious discussion within the FO, however, Vansittart had written back to say that, although there were some "disturbing" signs, there was "no present cause for real apprehension".[582] Later that year, Hankey approached Vansittart on the same topic. Hankey was concerned that events on the continent, especially in Germany, were causing a serious enough situation that, by maintaining the ten year assumption, Britain was "living in a fool's paradise".[583] He wanted to make an attempt to have the rule cancelled. The PUS admitted that, while the FO had not endorsed the ten year assumption that year, they had not denied its validity either. He told Hankey that he viewed the European situation "not with anxiety but with some misgiving", and he asked that they postpone asking for any reconsideration of the rule until the New Year, when Vansittart hoped to have amassed

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[579] Ibid.

[580] Cabinet 12(32), 10 Feb 1932, CAB 23/70; "Naval Construction Programme, 1931", 5 Feb 1932, CP-64(32), CAB 24/228.

[581] O. Murray letter to Vansittart, 6 May 1930, ADM 116/3629.

[582] Vansittart to O. Murray, 15 May 1930, FO 371/14265/A3180/1/45. Madden, however, was not as sanguine, minuting, "our government's assumption of a 10 years period of peace rests I think on slender foundations and I submit we should build to the 3 Power Treaty fleet at whatever financial inconvenience it entails". Madden minute, 20 May 1930, ADM 116/3629.

[583] "Notes of a Conversation with Sir Robert Vansittart", 21 Nov 1930, CAB 21/372.

more information on the European situation.[584] But, it was the COS who, for obvious reasons, most opposed the ten year assumption. At a meeting in May 1931 they all spoke out against it, and Sir John Salmond, the new CAS, even went as far as to say that "so long as this rule existed it was a definite menace".[585] Again, however, they decided to delay bringing the issue forward.

These efforts had been based on concerns over the situation in Europe. Now, attention was on the Far East. The COS's Annual Review for 1932 was ready in only three weeks.[586] In it, the COS stressed first that Imperial Defence priorities had to be based on the situation in the Far East:

> The general *malaise* in Europe, sufficiently serious in itself, has for the time being been overshadowed by this menacing situation in the Far East, which sheds a sinister light on the basis of our existing arrangements for Imperial Defence.

The COS anticipated that this "anxious situation" in the Far East would continue "for a long time to come". To counter the instability in the region, however, Britain possessed only light naval, military and air forces, along with a few, poorly-defended bases. As a result, "The whole of our territory in the Far East, as well as the coastline of India and the Dominions and our vast trade and shipping, lies open to attack.". What particularly concerned the COS was the speed and unexpectedness of the Japanese action at Shanghai, where her preparations and intentions had been concealed successfully despite the international scrutiny of Japanese actions since the Manchurian incident. The COS estimated that:

> If Japan were ever to prepare for operations of wider scope it must be assumed that these preparations would be concealed with equal care and her blows delivered with equal suddenness, in order to gain the maximum advantage at the outset.

This placed an additional burden on Imperial Defences in the Far East, as, presumably, there would not be enough time to try to improve them if an acute crisis occurred. Thus, the COS concluded that "it would be the height of folly to perpetuate our present defenceless state". In the end, they presented two main recommendations. First, the ten year rule should be cancelled. Second, a start should be made on rectifying defensive weaknesses, including

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[584] Ibid. Later, in his memoirs, Vansittart would claim that he had tried to convince MacDonald to cancel the rule but was foiled by the weakness of the minority Labour government in the face of the rule's "Conservative supporters, the pacifism of Arthur Henderson and his whole Left Wing". Lord Vansittart, The Mist Procession, (London: Hutchinson, 1958), 385.

[585] 100 Mtg COS, 19 May 1931, CAB 53/3.

[586] "Annual Review for 1932 by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee", 23 Feb 1932, CID 1082-B, CAB 4/21.

the defence of bases and that first priority should be for the Far East. They concluded their report on a dark note: "Recent events in the Far East are ominous. We cannot ignore the Writing on the Wall".

In the interim, before the Annual Review was presented to the CID, the Deputy Chiefs of Staff of the three services met to look at the immediate detailed problems associated with Far Eastern defence and they presented their report to the COS in late February.[587] After considering various possible courses of action in the event of war with Japan, the DCOS presented a series of recommendations for improving defences in the Far East, based in large measure on the work of the JPC.[588] Of the defended ports in the region, the DCOS placed first priority on Singapore, which would be of "supreme importance in a war with Japan"; second in priority was Hong Kong and last, Trincomali. In each case, they outlined measures which could be taken immediately, within four months and within a year to make these ports defensible against a surprise Japanese attack. The DCOS concluded by offering a political opinion:

> ...we venture to emphasise that our present political difficulties in dealing with the Sino-Japanese problem at the present juncture arise very largely from the insecurity of our naval bases at Hong Kong and Singapore. The ten-year rule and the coast defence controversy are both responsible for this situation, and it would appear to be for consideration whether immediate steps should not be taken to increase the security of both these fortresses and of Trincomali *before a crisis actually occurs*, in order that the situation may then be less serious than that disclosed in the present Report.[589]

After receiving the DCOS report, the COS quickly forwarded it to the CID, asking for that body to approve in principle

its main recommendations. The COS, however, added one caveat, reminding the CID that the measures indicated within the report, would not, by themselves, make the Far Eastern bases secure and that "The urgent need for providing protection on an adequate scale in peace time will still remain".[590]

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[587] 1 Mtg DCOS, 8 Feb 1932, CAB 54/1; "Report by the Deputies to the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee on the Situation in the Far East", DCOS-1, 22 Feb 1932, CAB 54/3.

[588] "Defence of Trincomali", 1 March 1932, COS-295(JP), CAB 53/22; "Defence of Singapore", 12 March 1932, COS-296(JP), CAB 53/22.

[589] "Report by the Deputies to the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee on the Situation in the Far East", DCOS-1, 22 Feb 1932, CAB 54/3.

[590] 102 Mtg COS, 29 Feb 1932, CAB 53/4; "The Situation in the Far East", 3 March 1932, CID 1084-B, CAB 4/21.

However, no immediate action was taken on the DCOS's recommendations for the Far Eastern ports. When their report was brought before the CID, it was pointed out that the question of the defences of the Far Eastern ports was already before the Coast Defence committee.[591] MacDonald, therefore, suggested, and the CID agreed, that the DCOS's recommendations for the Far Eastern ports should be considered only after the Coast Defence committee had submitted its report. On the other hand, the CID accepted the COS's major recommendations in their Annual Review that the ten year rule should be cancelled and that a start should be made on defensive commitments in the Far East.[592] Before being discussed by the Cabinet, both reports were considered within the Treasury, where officials raised objections to their premises. Many of the measures within the DCOS report had been written at the time of the greatest tension after the Shanghai crisis, and, since then, the situation had eased somewhat. For this reason, and the fact that the gun versus air dispute over coast defences had yet to be settled, Treasury officials were very cautious about the DCOS's recommendations.[593] As for the Annual Review, while the Treasury did not challenge the COS's assertion that Britain was not able to resist Japanese aggression in the Far East, it emphasized the precariousness of Britain's financial and economic positions:

> The fact is that in present circumstances we are no more in a position financially and economically to engage in a major war in the Far East than we are militarily...the position and future of this country depend on the recovery and maintenance of sound finances and a healthy trading position.[594]

Thus, from the Treasury's perspective, the economic and financial risks to Britain remained greater than any current military risks. As a result, any increases in defence expenditure would have to wait until the country's financial situation improved. When the Cabinet finally discussed all these reports towards the end of March 1932, it, in turn, referred them to the Ministerial Disarmament Committee. But, in doing so, the Cabinet agreed that the Ministerial Committee "could assume the abandonment of the assumption governing the Estimates of the Defence Services

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[591] 255 Mtg CID, 22 March 1932, CAB 2/5.

[592] Ibid.

[593] Treasury minute, 12 March 1932, Hopkins Papers, T 175/48.

[594] "Note by the Treasury on the Annual Review for 1932 by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee", 11 March 1932, CID 1087-B, CAB 4/21.

during the last few years, that at any given date there will be no major war for ten years".[595] However, several factors combined to remove the political urgency behind any increase in defence spending on Far Eastern defences. First, tensions in China had eased over the previous weeks and the Japanese military threat in the region no longer seemed so immediate. As a result, the Treasury's cautionary note assumed greater significance. Second, there was a subtle shift in the FO's appreciation of Japanese behaviour. By the end of February the FO no longer tended to see Japan as running amok. Instead, the unexpectedly strong Chinese resistance in Shanghai led to the conclusion that Japan may have become embroiled in a conflict it could not easily win.[596] This would hold Japanese actions in check. Third, the Disarmament Conference had just opened at the beginning of February. A significant increase in defence spending in Britain would have undermined British efforts to secure a convention in Geneva and would have angered British supporters of the conference. Consequently, the Cabinet warned that the end of the ten year rule "must not be taken to justify an expanding expenditure by the Defence Services without regard to the very serious financial and economic situation that still obtains".

Only in June 1932 was action taken on the recommendations of both the COS and DCOS committees. This stemmed from the fact that in late May the Coast Defence committee submitted its final report on whether the bomber or the gun should be the principal defensive weapon at Britain's defended ports.[597] The committee rejected the concept of the substitution of aircraft for medium and heavy gun defences, and instead opted for "co-operation...based on existing principles". While not accepting the Air Staff's thesis that aircraft alone could provide adequate defences, the Coast Defence committee concluded that, at all the more important ports, such as Singapore, aircraft were "essential" for spotting, anti-aircraft work and for attacking the enemy's ships. More specifically, the committee recommended that the first stage of the Singapore defences, including the construction of three 15-inch guns, should proceed and that the re-arming of other ports with guns up to 9.2-inches should begin as financial conditions allowed. Importantly, the committee made an attempt to end the coastal defence controversy by stressing that "the general questions dealt with in this Report should not be reopened prematurely". When this issue

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[595] Cabinet 19(32), 23 March 1932, CAB 23/70.

[596] Pratt memorandum, 21 February 1932 and Vansittart minute, 24 Feb 1932, FO 371/16150/F1547/1/10.

[597] "Coast Defence", 24 May 1932, CD-20, CAB 16/105.

came before the CID at its next meeting, Baldwin, who had chaired the Coast Defence committee, stressed that their recommendations for the security of Singapore had been based on the potential of the Japanese threat, for "the whole security of the Empire in the Far East might well depend on the safety of Singapore".[598] To him, it was "obvious that if the Japanese ever 'ran amok' we would, in present circumstances, be helpless, and they would be in a position to capture Hong Kong and Singapore without difficulty". Both Lord Hailsham, the Secretary of State for War, and Bolton Eyres-Monsell, the First Lord of the Admiralty, jumped at this opening to support the construction of the 15-inch guns at Singapore. In the end, all of the Coast Defence committee's recommendations were approved by the CID.

While the CID's approval for the construction of the first three 15-inch guns at Singapore marked an important step forward for the amelioration of Imperial Defences in the Far East, many other essential components of the Imperial Defence system remained in a problematic state. Estimates remained lower than they had been for years and there was little immediate prospect of a large-scale increase. Nevertheless, by the middle of 1932 each of the defence services had begun to catalogue its deficiencies in the hope of presenting a stronger position before the Cabinet and Treasury. But, as tensions in the Far East eased in the latter half of 1932, the impetus for quick and decisive action faded. However, the rise of a threat closer to home in 1933 would re-invigorate the debate surrounding Imperial Defence and would give rise to serious questions over the priorities for defence expenditure.

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[598] 256 Mtg CID, 9 June 1932, CAB 2/5. The CID's recommendations were formally approved by the Cabinet in October after some further lobbying by the defence services. "The Singapore Base", 3 Oct 1932, CP-327(32), CAB 24/233; "Singapore Naval Base", 11 July 1932, CP-252(32), CAB 24/232; Cabinet 50(32), 11 Oct 1932, CAB 23/72.

Chapter 5: 1933-1934: Distant Threats, Near Threats, or Both?

At the beginning of 1933, the situation in the Far East continued to pre-occupy British policymakers. However, during the year, events closer to home began to shift attention increasingly toward European affairs. Hitler's rise to power in Germany, the threatened collapse of the Disarmament Conference and the increasing probability of German rearmament regardless of the results of Geneva all contributed to this process. It became apparent that Britain was now confronted with two potential threats to Imperial Defence: Germany in Europe and Japan in the Far East. This led the COS to push for the overall rectification of the deficiencies in Britain's Imperial defences which had become apparent over the preceding years. The result was the establishment of the Defence Requirements Sub-Committee in November 1933. This committee completed its work early in 1934 and its report attempted both to balance between competing Imperial Defence interests and to allow Britain to confront two potential enemies in widely disparate theatres of war.

The debate over Imperial Defence in 1933-1934 was held against a backdrop of strategic uncertainty. British policy-makers could see that the international situation was deteriorating and that the assumption of a lengthy period of peace that had underlined British policy over the previous years was no longer tenable. Initially, at least, there was some reluctance to accept this fact and there was hope that by engineering an acceptable solution at the Disarmament Conference the ultimate effects of the deteriorating situation could be avoided. As the year went on, however, it became apparent to all British policymakers that, no matter what international agreements might be reached, there would have to be some measure of British rearmament. But, by this time Britain was confronted by a hitherto unique situation in that there were two first-class threats to the Empire on opposite sides of the globe. The ramifications for Imperial Defence were enormous. A vigorous debate ensued over which threat, the German or Japanese, was the most immediate. On this there was no consensus. This problem was compounded by the defence services themselves, who continued to fight over their relative position in the rearmament hierarchy. As a result of this strategic uncertainty, and the lack of strategic leadership, debate over the diplomatic and military responses to the new situation dragged on well into 1934.

The DRC report has been widely studied by historians but most of their conclusions have overlooked,

first, the backdrop of strategic uncertainty against which it was written and, second, the priorities it set in practice.[599] Many have argued that it was a direct response to Hitler's rise to power and that its recommendations laid out the basis of British rearmament against Germany.[600] Most also attribute the origins of rearmament to the DRC. Neither of these statements is entirely correct as the true situation was much more complex. As will be shown, the DRC report was the culmination of a long period of examination by the three defence services that had originally started as a result of the Manchurian Incident. It outlined a plan for alleviating pent up deficiencies in each of the services based on programmes that had been mooted since the mid-1920s. It was, as any committee-produced report will be, a compromise document, but one that focused on Imperial Defence in the Far East.

Nineteen thirty-three began, however, with another crisis in the Far East that, once again, led British policy-makers to try to determine Japan's true intentions and to devise both diplomatic and military responses. As before, there were no concrete answers. The problem started when, a few days into the New Year, Japanese and Chinese forces clashed along the border between Japanese-controlled Manchuria and the Chinese province of Jehol.[601] At the end of February, Japanese and Manchukuo forces launched a three-pronged offensive into Jehol, which, in just over a week, succeeded in overcoming Chinese resistance and occupying the province.[602] This Japanese offensive occurred at the same time as Japan's prior actions in Manchuria were being debated in Geneva. British policy since the start of the Manchurian crisis had been to use the League of Nations to try to defuse the

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[599] Most histories of the 1930s include some mention of the DRC. Of the more important is N.H. Gibbs, Grand Strategy v.1 Rearmament Policy, (London:HMSO), 1976. One of the most recent accounts is B.J.C. McKercher, "From Disarmament to Rearmament: British Civil-Military Relations and Policy-Making, 1933-1934", DSt, 1, 1(2001), 21-48.

[600] This has probably occurred because historians have focused on the DRC's expression that Germany was "the ultimate potential enemy against whom our 'long range' defence policy must be directed" and have paid only passing notice to the details of its recommendations: Michael Howard, The Continental Commitment, (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1972); Wesley K. Wark, The Ultimate Enemy: British Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Gaines Post Jr., "Mad Dogs and Englishmen: British Rearmament, Deterrence and Appeasement, 1934-1935", AFS, 14, 3(1988), 329-357; Charles Morrisey and M.A. Ramsay, "'Giving a Lead in the Right Direction': Sir Robert Vansittart and the Defence Requirements Sub-Committee", DS, 6, 1(1995), 39-60.

[601] Ingram telegram, 3 Jan 1933, FO 371/17052/F65/18/10.

[602] Alexander Cadogan Diary, 12 Jan 1933, [Churchill College Archives Centre, Cambridge] ACAD 1/1; Lampson telegram, 27 Feb 1933; R. Allen minute, 28 Feb 1933, FO 371/17054/F1325/18/10; Lampson telegram, 7 March 1933, FO 371/F1575/18/10.

issue while trying to find a settlement that did not offend Japanese sensibilities. The Lytton Commission had been a key compromise between those that had advocated strong League action against Japan and those were concerned about the ramifications of a League censure against Japan. It had traveled to the Far East to investigate the Manchurian Incident and its contentious report was now ready for publication. At the beginning of February, Sir John Simon, the Liberal Foreign Secretary, reported to the Cabinet that other League-sponsored efforts at conciliation between China and Japan had failed, and, as a result, the League probably would have to publish the Lytton report.[603] By the end of the month, it became obvious that the report would be published, and the Foreign Secretary voiced his concerns over what implications that this might have for British policy.[604] As the report was critical of Japanese actions, it was likely that when it was published there would be pressure on the British government to take some public action against Japan. Simon made it clear to the Cabinet that he believed that there could be no resort to economic sanctions against Japan, although he conceded that there would be pressure within Britain for an arms embargo. He also reported that it was likely that, should the Lytton report be adopted, Japan would probably leave the League.

Within the FO, such a Japanese reaction had been anticipated since mid-January, and there had been some discussion as to the possible ramifications.[605] Pratt, speaking for the Far Eastern Department, had argued that a Japanese withdrawal would weaken the League and damage the Disarmament Conference. As a result of such action, the "prospects in the Far East could hardly be gloomier" and there might be the possibility of further Japanese actions in Peking, Tientsin and Shanghai whose consequences would be severe:

> The damage to British interests and British prestige and the danger to British life and property involved in all this hardly needs any emphasizing....the Far Eastern Department have been anxious to go to the extreme limit in order if possible to effect conciliation under the auspices of the League. In doing so we run a very great danger of offending and antagonizing China. When conciliation breaks down and we have to join in a League condemnation of Japan we shall run an equally serious danger of offending and antagonizing Japan. Unfortunately it is much easier to state the dangers....than to advise how to avoid them.[606]

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[603] Cabinet 7(33), 8 Feb 1933, CAB 23/75.

[604] "The Far East and Geneva", 18 Feb 1933, CP-42(33), CAB 24/238.

[605] Alexander Cadogan Diary, 13 Jan 1933, ACAD 1/1.

[606] Pratt minute, 5 Jan 1933, FO 371/17073/F74/33/10.

Vansittart, however, was more sanguine for he did not fear the immediate consequences of a Japanese withdrawal from the League. In his mind, Japan was already a "wholly unfit member of the League" and had "made a monkey" of that institution.[607] As a result, as long as Britain did not provoke Japan and as long as Japan was not thrown out of the League, there was not much to fear. Further, the PUS continued to believe that Japan was held in check by a fear of Russia. In any event, there was a consensus in the FO that it would be far better for British interests if Japan were to leave the League than if she were to be expelled.[608]

This discussion became academic when the findings of the Lytton Commission came before the League Assembly on February 24. After a short debate, it was accepted, with only the Japanese delegation voting to oppose the motion.[609] Japan's reaction to the adoption of the Lytton report was swift. That same day, its delegation withdrew from Geneva, and, a month later, on March 27, the Japanese government informed the League of Nations that it intended to withdraw completely from that organization.[610] The British Cabinet's response to the adoption of the Lytton report was mixed. It opposed the adoption of any economic or other sanctions against Japan, but it was willing to consider an arms embargo.[611] In the end, however, the Japanese withdrawal from the League left Britain with no definite policy towards the Far East. The government's inability to find a diplomatic solution to the Far Eastern problem increased attention on the military sphere. However, even here, there were still tight limits on how many resources the National Government was willing to devote to building up British defences in the region.

Appropriately, it was the navy that began to apply the most pressure on the government. Internally, it had

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[607] Vansittart minute, 1 Jan 1933, FO 371/17073/F74/33/10.

[608] Pratt minute, 12 Jan 1933; Orde minute 12 Jan 1933, Cadogan minute, 13 Jan 1933, FO 371/17074/F 392/33/10.

[609] Thorne, Limits of Foreign Policy, 337-38.

[610] Ibid., 330.

[611] Cabinet 10(33), 22 Feb 1933, CAB 23/75. After the Shanghai crisis, the ATB had reported that it could not ensvisage a scenario in which League-wide sanctions against Japan would be effective. On the other hand, it concluded that British trade and commerce would suffer at the expense of other states who might not abide by the sanctions. Also, the imposition of sanctions might drive Japan into declaring war. "Economic Sanctions Against Japan", 2 March 1932, CID 1083-B, CAB 4/21.

already considered this problem several times over the preceding years. The first such look was the Fleet Committee, convened in late 1931 by the then First Sea Lord, Sir Frederick Field, and composed of all the Sea Lords. Its task was to examine naval policy in the light of the financial limitations imposed by the sterling crisis of the previous summer. Given the reduced naval estimates, there was not enough money to fund the annual construction programme, to purchase reserves and to support maintenance costs at the current level. The Fleet committee, therefore, was charged with finding savings in the latter category in order to fund the first two priorities.[612] To achieve this aim, the committee decided to place more ships in reserve, to reduce ships' complements and to position more ships at home, rather than in foreign ports. The bulk of these measures fell on the Atlantic and Mediterranean Fleets. Distant stations such as the China, East Indies, Africa and America and West Indies stations were relatively unaffected, because the Fleet committee recognized their importance in upholding national and imperial prestige.

After completing this stage of its work, the Fleet committee went on to examine the status of the navy's construction policy and its reserves of war material. In the committee's opinion, thanks to the steady programme pursued since the LNC, the navy's position in cruisers, destroyers and submarines was stabilizing. The capital ship situation, however, was far from satisfactory, and the committee voiced a strong opinion that the replacement of the capital ship fleet could not be delayed past 1937. In regards to war material, the committee noted the lack of serious war reserves, and recommended that this should be repaired by means of a steady programme. However, the Fleet committee's emphasis on maintaining the annual construction programme at the expense of the fleet's mobility, maintenance expenditure and the defences of imperial bases, was clear. But, within a year, Japanese aggression in Manchuria and the Shanghai crisis had led the Admiralty to reconsider its ability to provide for its Imperial Defence commitments in the Far East.

These Japanese actions disclosed the Royal Navy's inability to respond quickly to a crisis in the Far East. Both incidents had developed rapidly, thereby invalidating the earlier planning assumption that a slow build up of tension in the Far East would give Britain time to improve its defences in that region.[613] Although, as a result of

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[612] "Fleet Committee-First Report", 7 Dec 1931, ADM 116/2860.

[613] Babij, "The Royal Navy and the Defence of the British Empire", 180.

the Shanghai crisis, the Cabinet had agreed no longer to abide by the ten year rule, it had set out no new planning guidelines. So, the Deputy Chief of Naval Staff (DCNS), Vice-Admiral Sir Frederick Dreyer, had begun his own investigation.[614] According to Dreyer, the main effect of the ten year rule had been to weaken the navy's reserves of ammunition, torpedoes, mines, fuel and stores and to scale back the provision of armed merchant cruisers, auxiliary cruisers, minesweepers, anti-submarine defences and the local seaward defences of ports.[615] To overcome these deficiencies, Dreyer recommended that £5 million should be added to the naval estimates immediately, with later increases bringing the total to £12 million. This would make the estimates average £59 million per year over a ten-year period. His report was accepted by Field, but redrafted before it was presented to the Admiralty Board in early December 1932.[616] The final report sketched out a programme for alleviating the Admiralty's worst deficiencies in armament and supply stores, oil fuel, local base defence measures and for modernizing its capital ships, all at a projected cost of £28,377,500 over a ten-year programme lasting until 1942.[617] The memorandum also laid out a concurrent naval construction programme at an additional cost of £64,900,000.

This was a more conservative figure than that which Dreyer had proposed, but, when it came before the Admiralty Board, the Sea Lords balked at even this amount. They had to consider the additional amount to ask for in the 1933 estimates in order to begin the rebuilding process, and, in the end, the Sea Lords shied away from any large figure which might frighten the Cabinet. Instead, they agreed to ask for an increase of £318,000 over and above the amount necessary to bring the estimates up to the level existing before the emergency cuts of 1931.[618] This extra money was for rebuilding war stocks and for adding to the oil fuel reserve, and it was far less than the £2,213,110 per year which Field's memorandum had forecast would be needed in order to complete the

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[614] Admiral Sir Frederick Dreyer, The Sea Heritage, (London: Musuem Press, 1955), 297-98.

[615] "Memorandum by the Sea Lords on the Condition of the Navy and its Reserves", 3 Nov 1932, Chatfield Papers [National Maritime Museum, Greenwich] CHT 3/1.

[616] "Review of the Present Condition of the Navy and General Remarks on Future Policy", 14 Nov 1932, ADM 167/87; Admiralty Board Mtg, 7 Dec 1932, ADM 167/85.

[617] The priority for the build up of naval stores was set out in a separate memorandum: "Provision of Reserves of Naval Stores-Priority", Plans Division Memorandum, 17 Nov 1932, ADM 116/3434.

[618] B. Eyres-Monsell to N. Chamberlain, 14 Dec 1932, ADM 167/87. The actual total increase over the 1932 estimates was £3,670,220.

programme by 1942. The estimates, however, would not be finalized until the new year and before this Field retired as FSL and was replaced by Sir Ernle Chatfield.

The new FSL was determined to make up ground in the provision of the navy's stores and reserves, but in trying to do so he faced two major obstacles.[619] First, although it had improved slightly since 1931, the financial situation in Britain remained bleak. As a result, there was a continued reluctance on the part of the government to increase expenditure, especially in the military sphere. Second, although the Far Eastern situation had deteriorated remarkably during the previous 18 months, the direct threats to British interests remained nebulous and did not appear imminent. Hence, there was little to prod politicians to build up Imperial Defences in the Far East. More immediately, however, Chatfield was confronted by a challenge from the Treasury which refused to accept that any money should be added to the 1933 estimates for building up naval stores and oil reserves.

The Treasury attitude was predicated on the fact that it already faced significant increases in the estimates of all three services. The total 1932/33 estimates had been artificially low at £104,364,300 due to the emergency cuts in expenditure that had occurred in the fall of 1931 as a result of the financial crisis.[620] This meant that pent-up needs were everywhere. Now, for instance, the Army asked for a £1.5 million increase, which was almost entirely earmarked for restoring the annual summer training camps for the Territorial Army (TA) and for resuming normal training in the Regular Army.[621] The Treasury found that it could not oppose this cut, especially as Warren Fisher viewed the War Office as "a model of efficient co-operation".[622] The RAF asked for no increase in its estimates, however, which remained unchanged at £17.4 million.[623] The Treasury had anticipated an increase in estimates for the RN of £3 million in order to make up for the emergency cuts the previous year.[624] However, the Admiralty

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[619] Chatfield was an energetic and tough leader who also set out to improve morale in the navy and to wrest control of the Fleet Air Arm from the RAF. Eric J. Grove, "Admiral Sir (later Baron) Ernle Chatfield (1933-1938)", in Malcolm Murfett, ed., The First Sea Lords, 157-171. This article, however, tends to hagiography.

[620] "Defence Expenditure 1933", 28 Dec 1932, Treasury Memorandum, na., T 161/580/S.35171/33.

[621] Lord Hailsham to N. Chamberlain, 13 Dec 1932, T 161/580/S.35164/33.

[622] Fisher minute, 4 Jan 1933; E.J. Strohmenger minute, 3 Jan 1933, T 161/580/S.35170/33.

[623] N. Chamberlain to Lord Londonderry, 10 Jan 1933, T 161/580/S.35170/33.

[624] E.J. Strohmenger minute, 3 Jan 1933, T 161/580/S.35171/33.

Board now asked for an increase of £3.67 million..[625]

Once again the navy and the Treasury clashed over the navy's desire to improve its logistical and support structures in order to avoid becoming a hollow shell. The Treasury, however, felt that, even though the ten-year rule had been cancelled the year before, "it is a very long step from this decision to the immediate building up of war reserves in a year of extreme financial pressure".[626] The navy's case was hurt further because Fisher still regarded the service, in contrast to the army, as "an example of arrogant inefficiency".[627] Consequently, in early January, Chamberlain wrote back to the First Lord refusing to sanction any of the additional expenditure for building up reserves or for the FAA.[628] In response, Chatfield met with the other Sea Lords, and, together, they asked the First Lord to bring the issue before the Cabinet, stressing that their immediate priorities were for defensive equipment and war reserves, oil fuel storage, new flights for the FAA and oil fuel.[629]

In order to support the navy's tough stand on the 1933 estimates, Chatfield had Field's previous memorandum re-examined. This second report laid out, once again, the chief naval weaknesses, foremost of which was the poor strategic position in the Far East due to the neglect of the navy's defended bases, the paucity of anti-submarine warfare equipment, the inadequate oil fuel reserve, the shortage of equipment for the defence of the merchant fleet and, finally, the general lack of stores for ships in reserve and for minesweeping. Despite these vast deficiencies, this second examination concluded that they could be made good for slightly less than before: only £22,580,000.[630] The issue was brought before the Cabinet in February, when Bolton Eyres-Monsell asked the Cabinet to sanction the Admiralty's proposed increases in order to begin remedying its deficiencies in the Far

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[625] Admiralty Board Mtg, 7 Dec 1932, ADM 167/85; Bolton Eyres-Monsell to N. Chamberlain, 14 Dec 1932, T 161/580/S.35171/33.

[626] R. Ferguson minute, 21 Dec 1932, T 161/580/S.35171/33.

[627] W. Fisher minute, 4, Jan 1933, T 161/580/S.35170/33.

[628] N. Chamberlain to B. Eyres-Monsell, 10 Jan 1933, T 161/580/S.35171/33.

[629] E. Chatfield to B. Eyres-Monsell, 16 Jan 1933, ADM 167/89.

[630] "Notes on Navy Estimates for 1933", Plans Division, 14 Feb 1933, ADM 116/3434.

East.[631] He also suggested that a new time formula should be found to replace the ten-year rule as a planning guideline.[632] The Chancellor, Neville Chamberlain, however, continued to insist that he regarded "the financial risk greater than the war risk", and he continued to oppose the additional £464,000 for the navy.[633] The Prime Minister, although he agreed with Monsell that a timetable would be useful for planning purposes, felt that, given the current state of international affairs, it would be difficult to decide on any assumption. Overall, the Cabinet agreed with the Treasury's cautious approach towards increasing spending, and denied the navy's request for additional expenditure. However, the Cabinet did approve, without comment, the navy's 1933 building programme of 4 cruisers, 1 flotilla of destroyers, 3 submarines and other, smaller ships.[634]

Nevertheless, Chatfield remained undaunted in his quest to improve both Imperial defences in the Far East and the overall readiness of the RN. At the end of February 1933, he brought the issue back before the COS sub-committee. The immediate pretext for this was a secret intelligence report that the Admiralty had received detailing a Japanese plan to attack Singapore with a force of at least divisional strength. The report stated that such a force had been ready to embark at the time of the Shanghai crisis the previous winter and was possibly ready to do so again.[635] Although there was some scepticism about the veracity of the intelligence and over Chatfield's reasons for bringing the matter up, the report highlighted some of the navy's operational concerns in the Far East. Chatfield reminded the COS that in 1928 the naval war orders for the China station had been amended so that the priority for naval forces in the Far East was the protection of Hong Kong.[636] This had been done at a time when the navy had felt that the Singapore defences would soon be completed. In the interim, the severe cutbacks had meant that,

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[631] "Navy Estimates for 1933", 8 Feb 1933, CP-25(33), CAB 24/237.

[632] Cabinet 9(33), 15 Feb 1933, CAB 23/75. MacDonald, however, was not enthusiastic about the size of the building programme. MacDonald to N. Chamberlain, 5 Jan 1933, Neville Chamberlain Papers [University of Birmingham Library] NC 7/11/26.

[633] Cabinet 9(33), 15 Feb 1933, CAB 23/75.

[634] Cabinet 1(33), 19 Jan 1933, CAB 23/75.

[635] "The Far Eastern Situation", 25 Feb 1933, attached as an appendix to the minutes of the 107 COS Mtg, 28 Feb 1933, CAB 53/4.

[636] 107 Mtg COS, 28 Feb 1933, CAB 53/4.

in 1933, the defences were far from complete. As a result, Chatfield admitted, Singapore was open to a surprise attack. To prevent this, he desired to change the China station war orders so that its priority would be the defence of Singapore. However, if this were to be done, then Hong Kong would be left completely vulnerable. This statement evoked a lengthy discussion among the COS about the possibility of defending Hong Kong and the political ramifications of leaving it defenceless.[637] At this time, none of the COS was willing to accept the consequences of a defenceless Hong Kong, and they were all concerned about the state of the Singapore defences. In the end, the COS agreed to produce a new report on the situation in the Far East and to detail immediate measures which could be taken to remedy the problems at Singapore.

After further discussion among the COS,[638] this report was finally submitted to the CID at the end of March 1933.[639] The report was unambiguous in its tone. The "present strategical situation in the Far East", it declared, "is fundamentally unsound". Further, the report repeated an earlier warning that:

> The weakness of our present position invites attack... if strained relations should occur with Japan, she can, without warning, inflict crushing blows on us from which we should with difficulty recover.[640]

The COS recommended that extra money be provided so that the permanent gun defences of Singapore could be completed in three and half years instead of five; that the construction of the naval seaward defences should also be hastened; that a second aerodrome should be built for the RAF; and that an armament and mining depot be erected to store ammunition for the army and navy. In addition to pointing to the need for the permanent works, the report outlined that the navy had already ordered the dispatch of a 15-inch gun monitor and a minelayer to Singapore as an interim step, and it recommended that another RAF squadron from the Home establishment should be sent out. As far as Hong Kong was concerned, the COS once again emphasized their desire to withdraw the two

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[637] The defence of Hong Kong remained a contentious issue throughout the inter-war period, right up to its capture in World War Two. See: Christopher Bell, "'Our Most Exposed Outpost': Hong Kong and British Far Eastern Strategy, 1921-1941", JMH, 60, 1(1996), 61-88; Galen Roger Perras, "'Our Position in the Far East Would be Stronger Without This Unsatisfactory Commitment': Britain and the Reinforcement of Hong Kong, 1941", CJH, (1995), 231-259.

[638] 108 Mtg COS, 27 March 1933, CAB 53/4.

[639] "The Situation in the Far East", 31 March 1933, CID 1103-B, CAB 4/22.

[640] Ibid.

army battalions currently in Shanghai and to concentrate them in the colony.

When this report appeared before the CID at the beginning of April, there was relatively little opposition to its main recommendations, although senior Treasury officials disagreed with the COS's fears of a possible Japanese move against British interests:

> the fact that the Japanese adventure in the south, namely at Shanghai, resulted in a severe snub, it can hardly be said that there is a present "emergency" threatening British interests or that the Japanese, who obviously have plenty of pre-occupations in the north, have their hands free for a new adventure against British interests...[641]

Nevertheless, the Treasury appeared to find nothing "alarming" in the substance of the recommendations, except that it continued to oppose any expenditure on a second aerodrome. The FO, however, did object to the withdrawal of both battalions from Shanghai, although it had no difficulty with the proposals for Singapore.[642] The result was a compromise. The CID agreed to recommend that the completion of the Singapore defences should be brought forward to 1936, that an RAF squadron be moved from the Home establishment to Singapore and that only one battalion be withdrawn from Shanghai to Hong Kong.[643] A week later the Cabinet approved the CID's recommendations, and, after a further appeal from the Air Ministry, also agreed to the construction of a second aerodrome.[644]

These discussions highlighted the fact that, although the Japanese withdrawal from the League of Nations appeared ominous, British policymakers had not shown undue alarm at the consequences. This can largely be attributed to their perceptions of Japanese intentions and the imminence of any Japanese threat. Vansittart, for one, did not believe that there was the "faintest" possibility of Britain going to war with Japan.[645] Although the image of Japan generated by the Tokyo Embassy portrayed a country that was growing increasingly militaristic, the

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[641] R. Grieve minute, 5 April 1933, Hopkins Papers, T 175/48.

[642] A. Scott and C. Orde minutes, 6 April 1933, FO 371/17079/F2168/33/10.

[643] 258 Mtg CID, 6 April 1933, CAB 2/5.

[644] Cabinet 27(33), 12 April 1933, CAB 23/75; "The Situation in the Far East", 10 April 1933, CP 102(33), CAB 24/240.

[645] Vansittart minute, 27 March 1933, FO 371/17079/F1936/33/10.

Embassy believed that the army continued to be obsessed with the Soviet threat, not with Great Britain.[646] Moreover, the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) had been embarrassed by the difficulty that it had experienced in fighting the Chinese at Shanghai the previous year. This had exposed the fact that the IJA was neither trained nor equipped to fight a modern war.[647] It was, consequently, undergoing a major re-equipment and re-organization, which meant that, for the moment, it was in no position to launch further aggression.[648] As well, as far as war with the Soviet Union was concerned, the army had yet fully to consolidate its control over Manchuria and to extend the network of strategic railways to make them capable of supporting operations in northern Manchuria.[649] In addition, in an influential memorandum which Lindley wrote while in England on leave, he argued that Japanese ambitions, for the moment, did not extend beyond Manchuria.[650] Thus, while the FO remained cautious about the long-term prospects in the Far East, particularly over the potential for a Russo-Japanese war, or for Anglo-Japanese tension over their respective interests in China, in the short term, the situation appeared to have stabilized. Thus, the COS and, in particular, the navy were stymied by the lack of consensus over the extent of the Japanese threat.

By the spring of 1933, however, the European situation began to give British policymakers cause for concern and began to complicate the strategic picture. In essence, European problems centred around Germany and the Disarmament Conference. Since it had convened in February 1932, the Disarmament Conference had been beset by the fundamental problem that Germany wanted to use it to attain what it called "equality of rights", either

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[646] Lindley despatch, 9 Dec 1932 and P. Broad minute, 13 Jan 1933, FO 371/17152/F154/154/23. This despatch was sent to the Prime Minister. "Japan-Annual Report for 1932", 31 Jan 1933, FO 371/17158/F694/694/23; Military Attaché Report, "Memorandum Respecting the Production of Munitions in Japan", 28 Dec 1932, FO 371/17149/F747/11/23.

[647] Military Attaché [Col. E.A.H. James] report on the 1933-1934 Japanese Army Estimates, 1 Dec 1932, FO 371/17149/F13/11/23; Military Attaché report, "Reorganisation of the Japanese Army", 6 Jan 1933, FO 371/17149/F762/11/23; "Annual Report, 1932, on the Imperial Japanese Army", 4 Feb 1933, FO 371/17149/F1653/11/23.

[648] Colonel James and his colleagues in WO Intelligence believed that the Japanese would work very hard to change and improve their army and that it would show noticeable results in a few short years. For a general picture of British assessments of the IJA see John Ferris, "'Worthy of Some Better Enemy?': The British Estimate of the Imperial Japanese Army 1919-1941, and the Fall of Singapore", CJH, 28(1993), 223-256.

[649] Gascoigne despatch, 17 July 1933, FO 371/17151/F5532/116/23.

[650] "The Policy of Japan", 20 May 1933, CP-145(33), CAB 24/241.

by being allowed to rearm somewhat, by having other powers disarm, or, by some combination of the two.[651] The French, though, were unwilling to allow any "equality of rights" unless they were given additional security guarantees and the only country that could provide any such guarantees was Britain. But, even before the start of the conference, the British Cabinet had decided that it would not agree to any guarantees "over and above Locarno under which, in conceivable circumstances, British forces might be engaged in a war on the continent of Europe".[652] The result was a deadlock at Geneva.

In response to their inability to secure "equality of rights", the German delegation withdrew from the conference in July 1932. The British were determined to bring Germany back to the conference through a formula in which the principle of equality of rights would be granted, but its practical application would be subject to a multi-year, graduated programme.[653] As a result of British pressure, on December 11, 1932 a five-power declaration was issued accepting the German demand for equality of rights and this brought the Germans grudgingly back into the conference.[654] To give practical expression to their concept of "equality of rights" and in order to provide something concrete to be discussed, the principal British delegate to the conference, Anthony Eden, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, and Alexander Cadogan, of the FO's League of Nations Department, prepared a draft Disarmament Convention.[655] This plan was presented to the conference in mid-March 1933 by the Prime Minister in an atmosphere filled with a widespread expectation that the Disarmament Conference would fail.[656] It was hoped that the British draft convention could keep the conference going. Largely as a result of the British initiative the conference did keep meeting through the spring and summer of 1933, but little

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[651] Richardson and Kitching, "Britain and the World Disarmament Conference", 42-43.

[652] Cabinet 91(31), 15 Dec 1931, CAB 23/69.

[653] Cabinet 49(32), 30 Sept 1932, CAB 23/72.

[654] Richardson and Kitching, 43.

[655] Alexander Cadogan Diary, 12 Jan 1933, ACAD 1/1; Richardson and Kitching, 43-44; "Draft Disarmament Convention", 16 March 1933, CP-74(33), CAB 24/239.

[656] Vansittart minute, 26 Feb 1933, Vansittart Papers [Churchill College Archives Centre, Cambridge] VNST 2/2; MacDonald to Andrew Mellon, 8 March 1933, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/679; "The Disarmament Conference", 12 Jan 1933, CP-3(33), CAB 24/237; Alexander Cadogan Diary, 13 Jan 1933, ACAD 1/1; MacDonald to Baldwin, 12 March 1933, Baldwin Papers, F.2.121.

progress was made. In May, Eden reported back "we are not doing well here. The Germans are proving extremely unhelpful."[657]

Fears about the future of the European situation were compounded when Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933. Within a month, MacDonald was writing about the "development of brutal dictatorship in Germany".[658] The foreign policy implications of Hitler's rise to power, however, took a little more time to digest, but by the spring and summer it was becoming clear that the new regime in Germany would be much more difficult to deal with and would not be content with second-class status in Europe. Simon began to grow concerned that Germany might manoeuvre the other powers into conceding her a measure of rearmament.[659] Vansittart summed up the ominous implications of the new Germany, "I think we should also all be agreed that if future peace depended on the present heart of Germany and nothing else, the outlook would be black".[660]

These events led the FO to place emphasis on the threat to British interests in Europe.[661] Over the previous two years, the political and economic situation in the world had "seriously deteriorated", while the prestige of the League of Nations was at the lowest point ever, in large part due to its inability to find effective measures to solve the Manchurian crisis. Germany, under the leadership of Hitler's "completely crude and unbalanced administration", confronted the world with "a people intended to be permanently under arms and inspired with an intensified militarism and the vicious old glorification of force". The new regime in Germany, the memorandum continued, was all the more dangerous as it combined the fanaticism of Soviet Russia with "an infinitely greater efficiency". The FO warned that:

> Nothing short of a complete change of heart will serve, and, short of such a conversion, it is idle

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[657] Eden to Simon, 1 May 1933, Simon Papers [Bodleian Library, Oxford], Box 76.

[658] MacDonald Diary, 28 Feb 1933, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/1753. This was in response to the burning of the Reichstag.

[659] Simon to Baldwin, 12 May 1933, Baldwin Papers, F.2.121.

[660] Vansittart minute, 28 May 1933, Vansittart Papers, VNST 2/5.

[661] "Memorandum on the Foreign Policy of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom", 19 May 1933, CID 1112-B, CAB 4/22. The remainder of this paragraph is based on this memorandum.

> to suppose that these unleashed energies will find a sufficient outlet in Jew-baiting, book-burning and keeping Liberals behind barbed wire...no cordial relations with such a Germany are possible.[662]

As a result, the FO concluded that British policy should be to cultivate friendly relations with the United States, Italy and France and, as part of this, to try to bring the latter two countries closer together.

In June, the COS discussed this memorandum as they began preparing their Annual Review of Imperial Defence. The implications for Imperial Defence of a resurgent and militaristic Germany were enormous. Chatfield had to admit that, while the Far East had stabilised somewhat, the European situation had deteriorated.[663] The consensus among the COS was that, regardless of what transpired at the Disarmament Conference, Germany would re-arm and would begin to make trouble in five to ten years time. They also agreed that neither the British Army nor the RAF was prepared to meet any European commitments. The HDAF still had not been completed, and the army did not possess an Expeditionary Force capable of conducting operations on the European continent. If British forces were to be able to meet a long-term German threat, then they would have to start re-arming immediately. Chatfield, however, steered the meeting away from a discussion of solely European problems and towards an agreement to use the annual review in a more general way to point out the inability of each service to meet three broad commitments: the Far East, Locarno, and the Defence of India Plan. In large measure, this effort by the CNS was due to the fact that Chatfield was concerned lest the FO review focus everyone's attention too much on Germany. As his DCNS, Charles Little, admitted in a private Admiralty minute, while the FO had "inclined the finger towards Europe again", it was not desirable to draw too much attention to this, as "it would seriously affect estimates".[664]

Despite the apparent urgency, the final version of the annual review was not approved by the COS until October. There were two reasons for this. First, the annual holiday period in August interrupted work on the paper. Second, the CIGS, Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd, was concerned that the document might appear too "alarmist" and, consequently, that the CID might feel that the services were "asking for the moon" and would thus

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[662] Ibid.

[663] 111 Mtg COS, 20 June 1933, CAB 53/4.

[664] C. Little minute, 2 Aug 1933, ADM 116/3629.

be disinclined to do anything based on the paper.[665] This resulted in lengthy discussion among the COS, and, after considerable redrafting, the report was ready only in mid-October.[666] In it, the COS pointed out that Britain was now confronted with two threats to the Empire. The Far East remained a "potential danger zone", although, for the moment, tensions appeared to have relaxed due to the signing of a truce between China and Japan.[667] In Europe, the chief danger now was Germany, which had already begun to rearm, and, regardless of the outcome of the Disarmament Conference, would continue to rearm, either openly or covertly. The COS elaborated generally on the deficiencies with which the three services were confronted, but, unwilling to alarm the Cabinet, refrained from making specific proposals. In their view, neither Germany nor Japan appeared to pose an immediate threat. But, the COS also took the long-term view, reminding the Cabinet that "if we are to be ready for the grave emergencies referred to above, a steady increase in certain of our Estimates over a number of years is essential". Although, they did not ask for any immediate, additional funding they did lay out priorities for any possible expenditure. The first priority was the defence of British possessions and interests in the Far East, the second was any European commitments and last came the defence of India against Soviet aggression.

In its cautious tone, the Annual Review reflected Montgomery-Massingberd's fears of alarming the Cabinet with large spending requests. Its Imperial Defence priorities, however, were based on the Admiralty's criteria, and the COS did ask the CID to state whether it agreed with their appreciation and to give further guidance. But, the COS Annual Review did not come before the CID until November. The delay was due in part to momentous events which were occurring in Geneva. On October 14, the Germans announced their withdrawal both from the Disarmament Conference and from the League of Nations. Shortly thereafter, in an effort to split France and Britain, and to disguise German rearmament, Hitler put forward a new set of proposals. The German dictator now demanded a 200,000 man army in five years and a 300,000 man army in eight years, based on a one-year period

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[665] Montgomery-Massingberd to Hankey, 15 Aug 1933, CAB 21/369.

[666] 114 Mtg COS, 12 Oct 1933, CAB 53/4.

[667] "Annual Review (1933) by the Chiefs of Staff Committee", 12 Oct 1933, CID 1113-B, CAB 4/22.

of service.[668] These actions meant that British European policy, which for the past two years had been based on the Disarmament Conference, had to change. MacDonald confided in his diary that "the outlook is ominous", and he castigated Hitler who "talks smooth words of peace but his actions and mentality make for war".[669] Nevertheless, British policy in reaction to events at Geneva emerged only gradually during the remainder of 1933.

Eventually, Britain adopted a dual response. The first aspect of its policy was to take seriously Hitler's demands for a 300,000 man army. The FO's initial reaction to Hitler's offer had been to view it as neither "unreasonable" nor "unfair".[670] A meeting of key Ministers and officials agreed that it was too soon to give up on the Disarmament Conference and that they should see if it could be kept going.[671] By the end of November, the Cabinet Disarmament Committee had come to the conclusion that, regardless of what happened at Geneva, Germany would rearm. The real question before the Cabinet was whether this would be controlled or uncontrolled rearmament.[672] The Cabinet now hoped to find a basis for limiting and controlling German rearmament through a new Disarmament Convention based on a modified version of Hitler's proposals. The second aspect of Britain's response was to consider the need to improve Britain's defences, and this conditioned the Ministerial response to the COS's Annual Report. Thus, the long delay in presenting the report to the CID undoubtedly helped the services, for, although the COS review had been prompted in large measure by the deteriorating situation in the Far East, CID and Cabinet discussion of it was conducted in an atmosphere charged by the apparent imminence of German rearmament.[673] Before being considered by the CID and the Cabinet, however, the review was examined at length

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[668] E. Phipps [British Ambassador to Germany] telegram, 24 Oct 1933, FO 371/17369/W12113/40/98; E. Phipps teleg ram, 24 Oct 1933, FO 371/17369/W12147/40/98; Edward W. Bennet, German Rearmament and the West, 1932-1933, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 485-92.

[669] MacDonald Diary, 15 Oct 1933, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/1753/4.

[670] G. Mounsey minute, 25 Oct 1933 and V. Wellesley minute, 25 Oct 1933, FO 371/17369/W12113/40/98.

[671] Minutes of a Meeting of Ministers held at 10 Downing Street, 19 Oct 1933, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/533.

[672] 20 Mtg, DC(M)(32), 27 Nov 1933, CAB 27/505.

[673] In early October, Hankey, Fisher and Vansittart sent a report to the Prime Minister in which they stressed that "The next step in the German programme is re-armament" and that, as far as Japan was concerned, "In the event of another great war in Europe there is no knowing where her ambitions might stop". Among the question which they asked the Prime Minister was "is the Cabinet prepared to face the necessary corollary, namely, an

by the FO.

Despite the fears engendered by Germany's withdrawal from both the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations, the FO remained concerned over the situation in the Far East. In a series of minutes commenting on the COS Annual Review, the heads of all the important geographic departments within the Foreign Office enunciated their own views on the world situation and on the possible threats to Imperial Defence. The first to comment, and thus to set the tone for the remainder of the minutes, was Allen Leeper, the head of the Western Department. Leeper agreed with the COS that the Far East should rank first in priority and, as a result, that the Singapore Base had to be completed and the navy's cruiser fleet increased.[674] In considering possible combinations of powers against Britain, Leeper felt that a war against Russia at the same time as a war against Japan was "improbable". The only other power Japan might align with was Germany "based on a common antagonism to the League of Nations system". However, Leeper believed that the possibility of any menace to Britain from Germany was remote as long as Britain was in alliance with France, and he emphasised the need for Britain to maintain a close friendship with her cross-Channel neighbour. Orme Sargent, an Assistant-Under Secretary of State and former head of the Central Department, agreed with Leeper, and also warned of the danger of a German-Japanese combination in roughly five years time.[675] The head of the American Department, Robert Craigie, called the review a "lucid and moderately worded" document and also generally agreed with its conclusions.[676] In fact, the majority of the opinion within the FO agreed with the COS's Far Eastern priorities.[677] Orde felt that it was "probably true that at present war with Japan is more likely than with any other power", although he did not see any great immediate risk of such a war. Nevertheless, he believed that the COS were correct

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increase in expenditure on Imperial Defence...". Vansittart, Hankey, Fisher, note to the Prime Minister, 4 Oct 1933, PRO 30/69/483.

[674] A.W.A. Leeper minute, 26 Oct 1933, FO 371/17338/W11987/11987/50.

[675] O. Sargent minute, 8 Nov 1933. Ibid.

[676] R. Craigie minute, 2 Nov 1933. Ibid.

[677] G. Mounsey [Assistant Under-Secretary of State] minute, 6 Nov 1933; L. Oliphant [Assistant Under-Secretary of State] minute, 8 Nov 1933; C. Orde [Head, Far Eastern Department] minute, 27 Oct 1933; O. O'Malley [Head, Southern Department] minute, 6 Nov 1933, all FO 371/17338/W11987/11987/50.

> to put the need of an adequate force for use in the Far East and the development of the Singapore base in the front rank of our requirements. If we are not prepared to fight Japan successfully we should expose ourselves to an attack which would result in the loss not merely of Hong Kong but of our whole position, investments and trade in China.[678]

Only two important voices dissented from this view, those of Victor Wellesly and Vansittart. Wellesley, now the Deputy Under-Secretary of State, disagreed with the COS' priorities, as he reasoned that Japan would become a threat only if Britain were militarily engaged elsewhere. Japan was, he argued, an economic threat to the Empire, but this threat could not be countered by armies or navies.[679] Vansittart's views closely mirrored those of Wellesley:

> I do not however agree with the order of priority drawn up by the Chiefs of Staff, which the majority of these minutes appear to endorse...It seems to be generally agreed that Japan is unlikely to attack us unless we are engaged elsewhere. Very well then. That puts "elsewhere" first. And elsewhere is Europe and Germany.[680]

The PUS remained confident that Japan would not start a war with Britain as long as Tokyo was experiencing strained relations with Russia, and he saw no sign of relations between those two powers improving in the immediate future. Nevertheless, Vansittart conceded that it was important to finish the Singapore Base, and he urged the Far Eastern Department to speed up its review of the situation in the Far East.

These minutes are also revealing, for other reasons, as they highlight two other contentious aspects of British diplomacy. First, while Lancelot Oliphant still regarded the Soviet Union as "our avowed enemy", and Maurice Peterson, the head of the Egyptian Department, argued that "we are once again confronted with a Russo-German menace even though it may not be as yet a joint menace", this was now a minority opinion.[681] Laurence Collier, the head of the Northern Department, and hence the most important voice on Soviet affairs, suggested that Britain might find itself, sometime in the future, allied with the Soviet Union against a common enemy.[682] Russia,

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[678] Orde minute, 27 Oct 1933, FO 371/17338/W 11987/11987/50.

[679] V. Wellesley minute, 8 Nov 1933. Ibid.

[680] Vansittart minute, 30 Nov 1933. Ibid.

[681] L. Oliphant minute, 8 Nov 1933 and M. Peterson minute, 30 Oct 1933, FO 371/17338/W11987/11987/50. Both in the FO and the WO there had been those who had been suspicious of the Soviet Union as a result of its close military collaboration with Germany, especially in the late 1920s. On this collaboration see, Hans W. Gatzke, "Russo-German Military Collaboration During the Weimar Republic", AHR, LXIII, 3(1958), 565-597; also John Erickson, The Soviet High Command: A Military-Political History, 1918-1941. (London: MacMillan, 1962).

[682] L. Collier minute, 2 Nov 1933, FO 371/17338/W 11987/11987/50.

in his opinion, was "bitterly opposed" to Japanese ambitions and regarded "Hitlerite Germany as their greatest foe in Europe". He admitted that this sea-change in attitude toward the Soviet Union might "seem strange" to the CID, but in support of his position he invoked Lord Palmerston's famous dictum that Britain had "no eternal friends nor eternal enemies. Our interests only are eternal". Second, these minutes show that the emotive issue of the end of the Anglo-Japanese alliance had not disappeared entirely, but that it remained as a backdrop to any discussion of Britain's position in the Far East. The question was raised by Peterson, who felt that the best way in which diplomacy could aid the service departments would be to:

> free them from the necessity of having to regard Japan as a potentially hostile Power with all the cramping limitations which that necessity entails upon our position and influence in Europe.[683]

Thus, he believed that the stage was set for a renewal "of our special relations with Japan" as a move to solve Britain's Far Eastern dilemma. However, only Owen O'Malley, now the head of the Southern Department, tended to agree that accommodation with Japan had to be sought.[684] Others, such as Orde, Craigie and Collier, strongly disagreed with Peterson, as they pointed out that any renewal of the Anglo-Japanese alliance in actual fact would have a detrimental effect on British interests in the Far East.[685] Craigie was severe:

> As regards the risk of war with Japan, I find it difficult to agree with Mr. Peterson that this could best be dealt with by a renewal of the Anglo-Japanese alliance... such a development would place the seal of success on Japanese militarism, whereas our objective should surely be to try by all means to persuade the Japanese people that militarism and extreme nationalism does not pay. Secondly, a revival of the Alliance would put an end once and for all to such cooperation and friendship with the U.S. as we have been able to foster in recent years. So strong would be the reaction of feeling in the U.S. that it would no longer be possible to lay down with the same certainty that war with the U.S. is unthinkable. We should merely be substituting an immeasurable risk for a measurable one.[686]

Thus, the senior members of the FO once again insisted that anything approaching a renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was not possible. This conclusion, however, was not universally shared, as became apparent when the COS review was brought before the CID in November.

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[683] M. Peterson minute, 30 Oct 1933. Ibid.

[684] O. O'Malley minute, 6 Nov 1933. Ibid.

[685] Orde minute, 1 Nov 1933. Ibid.

[686] Craigie minute, 2 Nov 1933. Ibid.

At this meeting, discussion quickly turned to the COS's conclusion that the Far East should have top priority for new expenditure.[687] Neville Chamberlain, although he did not explicitly disagree with the priorities set out by the COS, indicated that he would prefer not to lay down any "cut-and-dried" order of priority. He outlined two reasons for this. First, in a fluid international environment, Chamberlain did not feel it was safe to set out hard priorities. Second, he hoped that the Imperial Defence situation in the Far East could be "simplified" by improving relations with Japan. In his mind, breaking the Anglo-Japanese alliance had been a mistake, and he had already stated his belief that Britain had received "no adequate compensation" for this action.[688] Now, he wanted some effort to be spent to place relations between the two countries on a better footing, thereby improving Britain's position in the Far East and allowing the region to be placed lower in priority. Chamberlain was hopeful of an improvement in Anglo-Japanese relations, because he believed that Japan's principal ambitions were in China, where they did not directly threaten Britain, and he was convinced that the Soviet Union was effectively restraining Japanese action. In these opinions, Chamberlain was influenced, first, by the long-standing Treasury belief that Japan was not a threat and, second, by reports being sent back from Tokyo by the ambassador, F.O. Lindley.

Simon, however, disagreed with Chamberlain's appreciation. He pointed out that the Annual Review had been examined by the various departments within the FO who had come to a similar conclusion as the COS. Anglo-Japanese relations, he felt, were not "bad at all", for the Japanese were behaving "extremely correctly". He warned the committee, though, that there was a definite limit to how much closer Anglo-Japanese relations could become, and this limit was governed by two factors: first, by the fact that the Japanese had an objective, which was to become a great power in Asia and, second, by the fact that Britain had to maintain the sympathy of the United States. Simon also stated his concern that, if Germany were ready for war within five years, she might try to ally herself with Japan, which he viewed as a "very alarming prospect".

As discussion continued, Ramsay MacDonald suggested that the CID resolve that service expenditure should be governed by the priorities set out in the COS report. At this point, however, the CIGS, Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd, interjected to point out that the army also wished to have more detailed guidance on

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[687] 261 Mtg CID, 9 Nov 1933, CAB 2/6.

[688] Cabinet 57(33), 26 Oct 1933, CAB 23/77.

its priorities, which he outlined as: the Expeditionary Force, bases in the Far East, naval bases in the Mediterranean, home coast defences and the air defence of London. This led the Prime Minister to remark that some method for co-ordinating service expenditure had to be found, one that did not include just the COS. Now, Lord Hailsham, the Secretary of State for War, suggested that each service's requirements should be examined by a Cabinet Committee which would pare them down to what was possible. Chamberlain added that, before being examined by a Cabinet committee, the proposals should be thrashed out in a committee composed of the COS, Maurice Hankey, and representatives from the Treasury and the FO. In the end the CID agreed with Chamberlain's proposal, and it resolved that, for the present, expenditure should be governed by the priorities set out in the COS report and that there should be no expenditure on measures which provided exclusively against attack from the United States, France or Italy.

In this meeting, an important battle line was drawn between the Treasury, on the one hand, and the FO and the Navy, on the other. The Treasury was now willing to ease the purse strings and to allow some increases in defence expenditure.[689] However, it still wanted strict limits on any increases, but, more importantly, it desired a greater say over how the money was to be spent and, consequently, over Imperial Defence strategy.[690] In fact, in a private Treasury minute, Warren Fisher had outlined his own reasons for the creation of a new body to consider defence policy:

> I think the principles on which Imperial Defence are based should be reexamined by a strong official and ad hoc committee constituted by expanding the COS to include Treasury and Foreign Office representation.[691]

This would become a critical debate over the ensuing 18 months. Chamberlain's views on Anglo-Japanese

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[689] Privately, Treasury officials anticipated, and were prepared to accept, an increase in defence spending for the next several years. The total estimates for 1933 had been £109 million and the Treasury hoped that, over the next two years, total expenditure would not go above £118 million for the three services. R. Grieve Memorandum, nd. (circa Jan 1934), T. 161/620/35164/34.

[690] Fisher believed the Treasury should be able to provide independent advice on policy issues instead of just narrowly focussing on financial matters. G.C. Peden, "Sir Warren Fisher and British Rearmament Against Germany", HJ, XCIV(1979), 29-47. As head of the civil service, perhaps Fisher's greatest contribution was to implement wide-ranging reforms and to further professionalisation within it. For some of his broader accomplishments see: Eunan O'Halpin, Head of the Civil Service: A Study of Sir Warren Fisher, (London: Routledge, 1989), particularly chapter 2; John R. Greenaway, "Warren Fisher and the Transformation of the British Treasury, 1919-1939", JBS, 23, 2(1984), 125-142.

[691] W. Fisher minute, 6 Nov 1933, T 161/621/S.35170/34.

relations, which emphasized diplomatic reconciliation as a way of avoiding military and naval expenditure in the Far East, would become a dominant feature of Imperial Defence discussions. Because of his opinions, he would clash with the navy, the COS and with the Far Eastern Department of the Foreign Office, which doubted that a meaningful Anglo-Japanese agreement could be forged. Even if one was found, the Far Eastern Department still felt that money would have to be spent to improve Britain's defensive position in the Far East. This, however, was for the future. In the interim, the Cabinet approved the CID's recommendations, thereby creating the Defence Requirements Sub-Committee (DRC) as a sub-committee of the CID.[692]

This committee met for the first time on November 14. Hankey was selected as Chairman, and he, in turn, suggested that the priorities as set out in the COS report, which had been accepted by the Cabinet, were not "absolute" and should not be taken too literally.[693] Warren Fisher took advantage of this statement to argue that the committee first had to determine the "principal quarter from which the danger might arise", indicating, in a veiled form, that he did not accept fully the priorities as laid out in the COS report. Hankey, however, preempted any further discussion in this direction by pointing out that any debate of likely foreign menaces should await Vansittart, who was away at the time. In the interim, and so as not to waste too much time, he suggested that the services begin putting together information on their deficiencies.

When the COS spoke up, however, it became clear that each one already had some concept of what he desired. Chatfield, speaking for the RN, advised the committee that the navy's chief deficiency was not in the area of its ships but rather in the shortage of the oil reserve, oil storage and items such as mines, torpedoes and ammunition, all of which had been run down in the previous years. Most naval deficiencies were general, and, thus, if the fleet was re-equipped for general purposes, it would be able to fight anywhere. As for the army, Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd outlined that what it required was not an expansion of its Expeditionary Force but, rather, both to speed up its ability to mobilize and to update its equipment. In addition, it was necessary to improve the coastal defences of both Singapore and the ports east of Suez, and, as a last priority, to take care of the anti-aircraft defences of London. Edward Ellington, the Chief of the Air Staff, took issue with this last point.

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[692] Cabinet 62(33), 15 Nov 1933, CAB 23/77.

[693] 1st Mtg, DRC, 14 Nov 1933, CAB 16/109.

The anti-aircraft defences of London would be required in any war against Germany, and he believed that the WO had placed this item too low in priority. As for the RAF, what it desired, as a minimum, was the completion of the 52 squadron HDAF. Out of this, he stated, 30 squadrons could be made available for use in the Empire.

At this point, the committee turned to discuss the time frame for any programme that they might recommend. Fisher felt that the 5 year planning period which had been given to the Principal Supply Officers Committee (PSOC) was a sound figure. In early October, the PSOC had asked for planning guidance to facilitate its work on industrial mobilization, and the COS had replied by giving the PSOC a time frame of 5 years in which to have industrial mobilization preparations complete.[694] This period itself was based on WO intelligence estimates of the time it would take Germany to rearm.[695] There was no dispute over this time frame, as it was also the period suggested in the 1933 COS annual review.

Thus, by the end of the first DRC meeting, although it was becoming apparent that there would be some differences over what were the potential threats facing Britain, agreement had been reached on some basic points. First, the committee agreed that each service would provide a list, initially, of its general deficiencies and, then, of more specific requirements. Second, the programme for meeting these deficiencies would be based on a five-year time frame in which expenditure would begin slowly and increase each year and would remain separate from the regular budget estimates. Third, the financial and political ramifications of these proposals would be discussed later, only after it had been determined what were the real needs of the three defence services. The estimates of these needs were not created on the spot. Even before the DRC had met, and over the preceding years, each service had developed a relatively detailed picture of its own deficiencies. These estimates formed the basis of each services' desiderata before the DRC, and thus it is important to examine them in some detail.

The army was responsible for four main functions: to provide an expeditionary force for a major war, to provide imperial garrisons overseas (including the British Army in India), to provide the coastal defences for

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[694] 114 Mtg, COS, 12 Oct 1933, CAB 53/4; "Basis on Which Supply Preparations are to be Framed", 2 Feb 1933, COS 303, CAB 53/23.

[695] "The War Menace in Western and Central Europe, October 1933", 11 Nov 1933, WO 190/230. The WO based the figure of 5 years on intelligence it received from the French IIème Bureau. Much of the WO's intelligence on Germany was received from the IIème Bureau. On French intelligence and the rise of Hitler see Peter Jackson, "French Intelligence and Hitler's Rise to Power", HJ, 41, 3(1998), 795-824.

defended ports and to provide for the anti-aircraft defences of Great Britain. Obviously, ever since the end of the Great War, the main priority for the army had been to provide overseas garrisons. The coastal defence problem has been dealt with elsewhere. The army's other two responsibilities were now among its foremost concerns. The army's mobilization plans were based on the Defence of India Plan, which assumed a war with Russia in Afghanistan, and which had been approved by the CID in 1929.[696] Given the nature of a war in Afghanistan, the plan assumed a slow, six-month mobilization on the part of the British army. However, in 1931, Milne admitted that "the Expeditionary Force cannot be mobilized even for the present gradual rate of despatch".[697] There were shortages of proper vehicles, tanks, support equipment and personnel. According to the Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Herbert Creedy, the readiness of the army for mobilization was "incomparably below the standard of 1914".[698] Lord Hailsham, when he saw this mobilization report, could only comment that he had read it with "grave concern", but he admitted that "Nothing but the extreme gravity of our present financial situation could justify our acquiescence in this situation".[699] Several months later, the War Office prepared another report on the mobilization position of the army, and, once again, it pointed to serious deficiencies, as a result of which, "the Expeditionary Force cannot be mobilized, even at the delayed rate of despatch".[700] This time, however, army planners estimated the cost of making good the Expeditionary Force's deficiencies in vehicles, stores and personnel at £15,266,889.[701] This figure, however, was just to make the Expeditionary Force able to meet the slow rate of despatch for a war in Afghanistan. Milne pointed out that:

> our Army is not at present fully equipped for modern war on the continent of Europe. The primary role of the British Army today is to provide for the policing of the Empire; a role which

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[696] 242 Mtg CID, 2 May 1929, CAB 2/5; "War with Russia in Afghanistan: Plan of Operations, Part I", 10 April 1929, DI-38, CAB 16/84.

[697] Milne minute, 18 Nov 1931, WO 32/3502.

[698] "Note on Army Estimates for 1931 and 1932", 25 Nov 1931, T 161/533/S.35164/32.

[699] Lord Hailsham minute, 2 March 1932, WO 32/3502.

[700] Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd [Adjutant-General] minute, 22 Sept 1932, WO 32/3501.

[701] Milne minute, 17 Oct 1932, WO 32/3501. This figure was broken down roughly into £10 million for capital expenditure and an extra £600,000 a year for personnel. "The Implications for the British Army of an International Guarantee Pact", 29 Sept 1932, WO 32/3452.

> demands a comparatively large number of infantry...If, however, the British Army is to be prepared for immediate intervention in a European War a considerable measure of re-equipment with modern, up-to-date weapons will be required. The proportion of artillery and armoured units to infantry would need to be substantially increased.[702]

This would entail even greater expenditure on the Expeditionary Force. Creedy admitted that, given the expenses required for Singapore and other coastal defences, there was little likelihood of receiving any money to improve the army's ability to mobilize.[703] Furthermore, the army was confronted with a need to spend a great deal of money on new barracks for its soldiers, for as the PUS sadly explained, many were "living under conditions which would not be tolerated in civil life".[704]

By the following year, however, there was general dissatisfaction in the War Office with the state of its mobilization arrangements. The new Adjutant-General, Cecil Romer, complained that the army was "living in an atmosphere of make-believe in regard to mobilization".[705] He suggested that a change of policy was required. In his view, the army should opt for a smaller Expeditionary Force, capable of a quicker rate of despatch. Both the Master General of Ordnance and the Quartermaster-General concurred in Romer's appreciation. Montgomery-Massingberd, now the CIGS, agreed with Romer, and sketched out his own plan for improving mobilization arrangements over the next five years. In his mind, the army should aim to be able to mobilize 4 regular divisions, 1 tank brigade and a cavalry division of 2 cavalry brigades within one month of the outbreak of war. This force would be followed by 4 TA divisions and a cavalry brigade in 4-6 months, 4 TA divisions and a cavalry brigade in 6-8 months and 4 TA divisions in 8-10 months. Each of the TA divisions would possess one tank battalion.[706] The initial force for despatch was comparable to the BEF of 1914, but, this plan assumed the despatch of another 12 divisions and 3 cavalry brigades within a year of the outbreak of war. The CIGS warned the Secretary of State for War, however, that the cost of preparing this type of Expeditionary Force would be over and above all other

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[702] "The Implications for the British Army of an International Guarantee Pact", 29 Sept 1932, WO 32/3452.

[703] Creedy minute, 2 Nov 1932, WO 32/3501.

[704] "Note on Army Estimates for 1931 and 1932", 25 Nov 1931, T 161/533/S.35164/32.

[705] Cecil Romer minute, 25 Sept 1933, WO 32/3500.

[706] Ibid.

claims on army resources:

> the serious deficiencies in our mobilization assets are in addition to the very grave deficiencies which exist in the defences of our important naval bases, both at home and on the sea communications to the East, on the latter of which the Admiralty might rightly continue to lay very great stress, and whose inadequacy in view of the situation vis a vis Japan, becomes more and more apparent as they are examined in detail. To this must be added the serious situation of our ever decreasing reserves of ammunition of all descriptions, both for the Expeditionary Force and for coast defence, as a result of the deterioration of our war stocks. Finally there is the shortage both of personnel and material of the anti-aircraft defences of London for which we have at present made little provision.[707]

The formation of the DRC thus came at an opportune moment for the WO, for the latter was in the process of reconsidering its entire mobilization arrangements, but was unsure how the position could be improved through normal estimates. Thus, while the WO departments continued to investigate the position in detail, a new set of proposals was drawn up for presentation to the DRC.

In his presentation to the DRC, the CIGS separated the army's major deficiencies into three groupings: the Field Force, defended ports and the air defence of Great Britain.[708] As for the Field Force, Montgomery-Massingberd considered it essential that Britain should be able to send to the continent a contingent of 1 cavalry division, 4 infantry divisions, two air defence brigades, one tank brigade, an RAF contingent of 19 squadrons along with GHQ, corps and lines of communication troops. The actual cost of making this first contingent deployable within one month of the start of a war was estimated at around £17.68 million, while another £1.25 million was required to meet the immediate needs of the TA. This latter expenditure, however, would not bring the TA up to a level where it would be able to supply follow-on forces to the Continent. The cost of doing this, Montgomery-Massingberd admitted, was "beyond our means" and probably would have to wait until "the likelihood of our participation in a European conflict becomes more imminent". The net annual cost of meeting this programme over a five year period was estimated at £4,413,000.

The next item of expenditure was for the backbone of Imperial Defence: the system of defended ports along the Empire's lines of communications. The WO paper subdivided these into three categories: first, ports east of Suez, second, ports along the Mediterranean and Cape routes and, third, home ports. Those ports east of Suez

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[707] Montgomery-Massingberd minute, 16 Nov 1933, WO 32/3500.

[708] "Statement by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff", 9 Jan 1934, DRC-7, CAB 16/109.

were to receive the first priority and the largest amount of money, £5,105,000, which would enable the Singapore defences to be completed in three years and urgent work at Hong Kong and Trincomali to be started. Just over £2 million was destined for ports along the Mediterranean and Cape routes in order to bring them up to a fighting state and to provide for some air defence measures. In the case of these ports, however, the time line was much slower, as the WO contemplated spreading the work out over ten years. Home ports were last in priority, and here the WO proposed a 40-year programme of approximately £100,000 per year. The WO recognized that, if the European situation deteriorated, then the Home port defences would have to be speeded up, but "possibly by that time the Far East ports will be reasonably secure". Altogether, the estimated cost of the coast defence improvements was £11,515,000.

The proposals for the Air Defence of Great Britain (ADGB) were based on two premises: that the German air force would be a threat only when it had achieved at least parity with France and that, due to diversions elsewhere, Germany would be able to concentrate only 25% of her air strength against Great Britain. As a result, the WO estimated that ADGB would cost £1,730,000 spread out over 8 years, but with the bulk of the expenditure in the first five years. This brought the cost of placing "the defences of the Empire on a sound basis as far as the Army is concerned" at £37.8 million, an annual instalment of £6.208 million for the first five years. The army's proposals were an attempt to find a compromise which would allow it to fulfill its commitments in the separate contingencies of a war in Europe or a war in the Far East. While the bulk of the expenditure was on the Field Force, whose primary role would be to intervene in a European war, this was only because its deficiencies were so great. In other areas, there was a decided priority towards providing for Britain's Far Eastern defences before improving the situation closer to the home islands. In any event, the army hoped to be able to provide, in essence, for an adequate deterrent both in the Far East and in Europe, thereby meeting all its existing Imperial Defence commitments.

As mentioned already, the RN had already been conducting its own internal investigations and, at the beginning of October 1933, Chatfield ordered yet another refinement of the naval deficiencies list.[709] The FSL now proposed a policy whereby reserves for the fleet would be built up year by year, beginning in 1934. Barring any

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[709] "Completion of War Reserves and Equipment", 2 Oct 1933, ADM 116/3434.

new Cabinet ruling, he envisaged that the navy should aim to complete the minimum elements of this programme by 1942 at the latest.[710] However, the decision at the first DRC meeting to base planning on a five-year time frame forced a change in Chatfield's directions to the naval staff. This delayed the preparation of a new estimate of the navy's deficiencies, but it was submitted to the DRC just before Christmas.[711] The proposals did not include new construction, which the Admiralty intended to keep separate from the deficiencies that it submitted to the DRC. The proposed 1934 building programme was also sent to the Cabinet just before Christmas.[712]

The RAF, as well, had been considering how to make up its deficiencies and to restart the stalled HDAF programme. In May 1933, the Air Ministry's War Supply Committee submitted a report on the ability of the RAF to mobilize the 20 squadrons slated to support the Expeditionary Force.[713] Under the mobilization plan, the RAF was expected to provide 6 squadrons within 7 to 14 days of mobilization, 5 squadrons six weeks later, another 5 squadrons four months after mobilization and a final contingent of 4 squadrons after 6 months. The committee's report, however, showed that the air force did not possess the reserves in airframes, engines and parts to sustain this force after mobilization. The first contingent, for instance, could deploy with the necessary reserves only if stocks at home were depleted. Consequently, further monthly replenishment would be affected, and the second contingent could not be sent with anything more than its initial equipment. The committee concluded that the RAF's deficiency meant that it would be "impossible to implement our Expeditionary Force commitments". In total, the committee's recommendations to improve the RAF's mobilization basis cost £257,800.

The RAF was also concerned with completing the much-delayed 52 squadron HDAF. No new squadrons had been added to the HDAF since 1931 because of the financial crisis and, later, due to the armaments truce agreed to at the Disarmament Conference. In July 1933, the Secretary of State for Air, Lord Londonderry, reported

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[710] Minutes of a Mtg of the Sea Lords, 13 Oct 1933 and 23 Oct 1933, ADM 116/3434.

[711] DRC-6, 20 Dec 1933, CAB 16/109.

[712] The building programme included 4 cruisers (3 of the Minotaur class, 9,000 tons and 6-inch guns and 1 of the Arethusa class, 5,200 tons with 6-inch guns), 1 flotilla of destroyers, 3 submarines, 1 aircraft carrier, 5 sloops and 8 smaller ships. "Programme of New Construction for 1934", 21 Dec 1933, CP-311(33), CAB 24/245.

[713] "Report by the War Supply Committee on the Provision of Equipment for the Air Contingents of the Expeditionary Force", 29 May 1933, AIR 9/60.

to the Air Council that, as the armaments truce had run out in March, he considered that the previous government's decision to complete the HDAF by 1938 still stood.[714] In order to carry out this policy, two squadrons would have to be formed per year, beginning in 1934. The Air Council agreed to bring this issue before the Cabinet in the autumn. Accordingly, in October, Londonderry penned a memorandum for the Cabinet, proposing that two new home defence squadrons should be formed in 1934 and that two squadrons which currently existed only on paper should be brought up to full strength.[715] In addition, he asked for the formation of one additional flying boat squadron. To spread out the cost of the programme, Londonderry suggested an extension of the completion date of the HDAF from 1938 until 1940.

When this proposal went before Cabinet in early November, the Treasury offered no opposition.[716] However, Lord Hailsham, the Secretary of State for War, alluding to the army's own internal appreciations of its mobilization potential, stated that he, too, would ask the Chancellor for an increase in his estimates to cover the deficiencies which had resulted "from the long application of the Ten Years Rule". As a result, the Cabinet held back from approving the Air Ministry's proposals to complete the HDAF until all three services could submit comprehensive statements of their requirements. A week later, however, the Cabinet agreed to establish the DRC, and further discussion was delayed until after the DRC report was submitted.

At the same time as Londonderry placed the RAF's modest proposals for the completion of the HDAF scheme by 1940 before the Cabinet, the Air Staff began to consider the potential for a much larger expansion of the air force. In early October, the Deputy Chief of Air Staff (DCAS), R. Ludlow-Hewitt, penned a minute to Edward Ellington, the CAS, in which he discussed the costs of increasing the first line strength of the RAF to 1,660 aircraft at home and abroad, which would give the RAF parity with the French air force.[717] This programme, which

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[714] Air Council Minutes, 149 Mtg, 21 July 1933, AIR 6/15.

[715] "The Future of the Home Defence Scheme and the Royal Air Force Programme for 1934", 24 Oct 1933, CP-245(33), CAB 24/243.

[716] Cabinet 61(33), 8 Nov 1933, CAB 23/77; W. Fisher minute, 6 Nov 1933, T 161/621/S.35170/34. In this Fisher overruled junior members of the Treasury who did not regard the expansion of the HDAF as an "urgent defence requirement". R. Grieve minute, 3 Nov 1933, Ibid.

[717] R. Ludlow-Hewitt minute, 1 Oct 1933, AIR 9/8. This minute was marked "Not Sent in Keep for Future Use".

Ludlow-Hewitt estimated would take over a decade to accomplish, would have raised Air Estimates from a current level of £17,426,000 to £25,131,000 per year. In the initial stages of the programme, however, the increase would be only around £1 million. While the DCAS believed that it was not "expedient or desirable" to propose any such expansion at the present time, he hoped that, by privately circulating these figures to the Cabinet and Treasury, the RAF's scheme to complete the HDAF by 1940 would receive less opposition. As well, he hoped to compare these costs favourably with the anticipated Admiralty demand for money to expand and recondition the battle fleet. Wisely, however, the CAS decided not to push the DCAS' suggestion at this point. Instead, the Air Ministry's proposals to the DRC reflected its desire to complete the HDAF scheme by 1940, to speed up the process of the mobilization of the RAF under the Defence of India plan and to provide for overseas units at the major Far Eastern ports such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Ceylon, Penang and Aden.[718] Under the Air Ministry's forecast, annual estimates would increase from £17,426,000 in 1933/34 to £20,400,000 in 1940/41, but would then drop to a normal maintenance level of £19,930,000 the following year. The plan called for the creation of 11 squadrons at home to complete the HDAF scheme, as well as 9 squadrons overseas at the major Far Eastern bases and 20 squadrons for the FAA.

However, when the DRC began its next substantive discussion in early December, not all the departmental appreciations were ready, so, instead, Hankey steered the committee toward discussing what effect the current international situation had on the priority list that had been established by the COS the previous summer.[719] This was the FO's territory. Vansittart led off by referring to the FO minutes on the COS review. The vast majority of opinion within the FO, he admitted, had agreed with the priorities as set out in that report. He, however, disagreed for:

> The order of priorities which put Japan first pre-supposed that Japan would attack us after we had got into difficulties elsewhere. "Elsewhere" therefore came first, not second; and elsewhere could only mean Europe, and Europe could only mean Germany.

Moreover, Vansittart remained convinced that the difficulties between Russia and Japan were serious enough that Japan would not strike out in any other direction, especially as he believed the Japanese themselves were interested

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[718] "Air Ministry Forecast", 20 Nov 1933, DRC-3, CAB 16/109.

[719] 3 Mtg DRC, 4 Dec 1933, CAB 16/109.

in pushing towards Vladivostock.[720] Thus, his continued belief in the gravity of Russo-Japanese tensions led him to downplay the extent of any immediate Japanese threat to British interests.[721]

Germany, on the other hand, he felt, was "playing the old game and waiting her time", and would be ready to attack eastward into Poland by the end of 1935 or early in 1936. Thus, he pushed for a change in the order of priority to give Germany first place. That said, Vansittart was convinced that Singapore had to be completed and consequently, should remain the priority for the next three years. Warren Fisher agreed with Vansittart that the "fundamental danger" would come from Germany, and he also agreed that Singapore had to be finished because "Japan should realise that we are not a country to be played with". There was also support from the army. The CIGS concurred that it was vital to finish Singapore quickly because "if that were done, then Japan would hesitate to attack us if we were involved in European trouble". Unlike Vansittart, Montgomery-Massingberd's opinion was that any German menace in Europe would not mature until at least 1938 and that, during the intervening time, emphasis should be placed on consolidating the British position in the Far East.[722]

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[720] Throughout 1933, the FO had continued to receive reports from Tokyo of continued Soviet-Japanese friction and of rumours of a possible Japanese attack on the Soviet Maritime Provinces. Lindley despatch, 6 April 1933, FO 371/17151/F3037/116/23; Gascoigne despatch, 17 July 1933, FO 371/17151/F5532/116/23; Snow despatch, 13 Oct 1933, FO 371/17152/F7301/116/23. The WO, when asked for its opinion, stated that it was unlikely that Japan would launch any attack on Russia for several years as she needed to improve her railway communications in Manchuria before embarking on such an enterprise. LCol Miles [MI2c] to W.R. Connor-Green, 2 Nov 1933, FO 371/17151/F6925/116/23 and "A Review of the Far Eastern Situation", 31 Dec 1933, WO 106/5396; Orde minute, 28 Nov 1933, FO 371/17152/F7301/116/23. This was generally accepted by the FO. Randall minute, 25 Nov 1933, FO 371/17152/F7317/116/23. Nevertheless, Wellesley still felt that the Russian threat preoccupied Japanese policymakers. Wellesley minute, 29 Nov 1933, FO 371/17152/F7301/116/23.

[721] There was also a belief in the FO that when Japan was politically isolated she would turn to her old friend, Britain. Wellesley minute, 5 Feb 1934, FO 371/18184/F591/591/23. Vansittart agreed with this assessment, adding, "We shall have to make the most of this tendency during the next years, when trouble will be gathering in Europe". Vansittart minute, 6 Feb 1934, Ibid.

[722] Montgomery-Massingberd's outlook on the German problem was influenced by WO intelligence estimates which, in the fall of 1933, were relatively sanguine about the potential threat posed by Germany. While military intelligence believed that Germany could quickly mobilize a large number of trained and semi-trained soldiers, the lack of tanks, heavy artillery and other necessary equipment for a modern army meant that the Germany army would probably be on the defensive in any war against France or Poland. The WO predicted that Germany's aim would be forcibly to re-take the Polish corridor, but estimated that it would not be ready to undertake this for five to six years. "Notes on Our Appreciation of German Expansion on Mobilization and Strategical Plans in Case of War", 21 April 1932, WO 190/146; "MI3 Note on the CIGS's Military Appreciation of the World Situation of October 1932-CP-362(32)", 15 May 1933, WO 190/199; "Appreciation of the Minimum Force Which Germany Would Require to Undertake a War Against Poland and at the Same Time Resist French Intervention", 30 Oct 1933, WO 190/222; "The War Menace in Western and Central Europe, October 1933", 11 Nov 1933, WO 190/230; "Estimate of the Possibilities of German Expansion in 1933", 10 Nov 1933, WO 190/227.

As the meeting continued, a consensus emerged that the first stage of the Singapore defences had to be completed by 1936. However, after that, opinion tended to favour placing priority on measures against Germany and then Japan. Chatfield tried to argue that, because it was difficult to predict events in five years time, Germany and Japan should share equal priority as all in the committee were agreed that the defence of India could take last priority. The fundamental difference between Chatfield's views and those of the other members of the committee was over the nature of Imperial Defence in the Far East. Both Vansittart and Fisher entertained a very narrow view of the role of Singapore in British Far Eastern strategy. In their minds, the base was an end in itself, both as a showcase of the British determination to remain in the Far East and as the main element to be used in deterring Japan from moving against British interests in the region. For Chatfield and the navy, however, this was not enough. Quite correctly, the naval advisors understood that the base, by itself, was no deterrent. Instead, the navy was attempting to rectify the situation at all its principal bases in the Far East, to rebuild the fleet and to amass the logistical infrastructure to enable it to engage in operations beyond Singapore and thus to fulfill its ultimate plans against Japan. Thus, at this point in the DRC proceedings, differences had begun to emerge not only over the relative priority to be given to the German and Japanese threats, but also over the exact nature of the response to each threat.

Further deliberations in the committee were delayed until January.[723] In the interim, Warren Fisher presented his own thoughts on the problems facing the DRC in a lengthy memorandum that he had circulated to the committee members.[724] Fisher placed the risk of war into three classes. First there was the Far Eastern commitment, where he

> envisage[d] an ultimate policy of accommodation and friendship with Japan and an immediate and provisional policy of 'showing a tooth' for the purpose of recovering the which we have sacrificed in our post-War period of subservience to the U.S.A.

The second commitment related to Germany, which the Treasury PUS identified "as the ultimate potential enemy against whom our 'long view' defence policy would have to be directed". He also identified a third commitment, which none of the service papers had really touched on. This he saw as a "general requirement for the garrison and

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[723] Sir Henry Pownall Diary, 18 Dec 1933, in Brian Bond, ed., Chief of Staff: The Diaries of Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall, v.1, 1933-1940, (London: Leo Cooper, 1972), 29.

[724] "Note by Sir Warren Fisher", 12 Jan 1934, DRC-9, CAB 16/109.

patrol purposes of Imperial Defence in peace, and a common factor for any sort of war", which was important because "efficiently carried out our patrol and garrison work forms an excellent deterrent to the ambitions of any potential enemy". The remainder of this rambling memorandum came to no specific conclusions, but Fisher did take issue with some of the recommendations in the service papers. He was critical of the Air Staff's proposals for air units at the Far Eastern bases. In his mind, Singapore could continue to be garrisoned by units seconded from the HDAF, while Aden did not require any and it was undesirable to expand the "outpost commitment" at Hong Kong. Fisher accepted most of the Admiralty's proposals, except for the extent of the oil fuel reserve and the speed with which the navy wanted to modernize its capital ship fleet.[725] As for the Field Force, Fisher made no specific recommendations, but he strongly hinted that an Expeditionary Force could be found among the home and imperial garrisons. When it came to coast defence, Fisher's thoughts were clear:

> Taken together these bases constitute the framework within which the whole machinery of our defence operates both in peace and war, and their fixed defences are in themselves a strong deterrent to potential enemies.

His only problem with the service's proposals in regard to coast defences was that the army had given ports along the Mediterranean and Cape routes higher priority than the ports at home, a difference of view that again indicated his preference for measures that were oriented against Germany.

Although Fisher recognized the importance of maintaining the Empire's lines of communications in any war, his real focus was on European affairs and, especially, on the threat posed by Germany. His thinking came out more clearly in a second memorandum that he circulated to the committee at the end of January.[726] Britain, he stated, could not fight simultaneously two first-class wars in widely disparate parts of the globe. He then proceeded to make clear his preference for avoiding such a dangerous situation. It was "imperative" to get back to "something like our former relations with Japan", and, to do this, Britain had to change Japan's opinion that it was "(a) materially defenceless and (b) morally spineless sycophants of the U.S.A.". In his view, the completion of the Singapore Base would achieve the first objective. To achieve the second objective, Britain would have to "get clear" of its "entangling" agreements with the USA. Thus, "if we emancipate ourselves from thraldom to the

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[725] At another time, Fisher suggested that a "non-official committee of enquiry", under the CID, be appointed to look into the capital ship question. Fisher to Hankey, 26 Jan 1934, CAB 21/434.

[726] "Note by Sir Warren Fisher", 29 Jan 1934, DRC-12, CAB 16/109.

USA...and thus free ourselves to establish durable relations with Japan, we can concentrate on the paramount danger at our very threshold". In any event, Fisher did not trust the United States, believing that its sole aim at the naval conferences has been to cause a break between Britain and Japan and that, in a European war, the Americans might only hinder a British blockade of Germany.

Fisher's strong and vocal disapproval of Britain's relations with the United States became a contentious issue within the DRC, although, in enunciating his views on the subject, he was in a minority of one. When, at the seventh meeting of the DRC, Fisher spoke up about the dangers of the American attitude towards British blockade policy, his views received a very negative reception, as a result of which he suggested to Hankey that maybe he should "fade off" the committee.[727] He soon returned to the charge, though. As the DRC was considering its draft report in late February, Fisher insisted a section be added to the report referring to his view that "the worst of our deficiencies is our entanglement with the USA".[728] Hankey, however, was able to convince Fisher to withdraw his insistence on this addendum and to have it replaced by a more moderately worded section written by Vansittart, and advised the Treasury Permanent Secretary that "I think we should be asking for a snub by raising this question".[729] While Fisher's extreme views on Anglo-American relations were rejected by the DRC and caused a rift between him and Vansittart, the two men did retain a similar opinion as to the primacy of the German threat and, as well, of the need for larger air forces than those asked for in the COS's papers.[730]

Nevertheless, the DRC report, as it was finally submitted to the CID, was a compromise document, but

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[727] 7 Mtg DRC, 25 Jan 1934, CAB 16/109; Fisher to Hankey, 26 Jan 1934, CAB 21/434.

[728] Fisher to Hankey, 17 Feb 1934, CAB 21/434.

[729] Hankey to Fisher, 17 Feb 1934; Hankey to Fisher, 20 Feb 1934; Fisher to Hankey, 20 Feb 1934; Vansittart to Hankey, 20 Feb 1934, all CAB 21/434. Privately, Hankey was less diplomatic, telling one of his assistant secretaries that Fisher was “rather mad”. Pownall Diary, 15 Feb 1934, in Bond, Chief of Staff, 36.

[730] Vansittart was also somewhat fed up with the Americans, but he kept any expression of his views within the FO. At the end of 1933 he had minuted that "the U.S.A. will always disappoint us". As for future policy in the Far East, he felt that "we ought, during the coming quinquennium, to be more preoccupied in keeping Japan as friendly as possible, than in endeavouring to better our existing relations with the USA, which are as good as that unreliable country will or can allow them to be". Vansittart minute, 15 Dec 1933, FO 371/16612/A9235/252/45.

one which reflected in large measure Imperial Defence concerns.[731] The political preamble to the report was written by Hankey to please the disparate views of all the committee members. It began by stating that, since the time when the CID had discussed the COS Annual Review for 1933, "the trend of events has been rather in the direction of accentuating the dangers of the European situation". This resulted from the inability of France and Germany to agree on disarmament terms and from Germany's intention to rearm. This process was accentuated by the fact that Russo-Japanese relations had deteriorated in the Far East, and it now appeared that Japan desired to improve her relations with other powers in order to balance against the Russian threat. The DRC greeted this idea warmly, stressing that "advantage should be taken of any opportunity to improve our relations with Japan", but it also cautioned that "Japan is more likely...to respect and listen to a Power that can defend its interests than to one that is defenceless". Continuing, the report outlined the Imperial Defence position in the Far East:

> we cannot overlook the danger created by our total inability to defend our interests in the Far East. Japan is fully armed, both in a material and moral sense. This is not our position. At the moment we are almost defenceless in the Far East.

By contrast, Germany was "not yet fully armed", and the committee felt that Britain had time, "though not too much time", to make defensive preparations. It was against this background that the committee made its overall recommendation, based heavily on the formula which Fisher had recommended earlier:

> In these circumstances we have divided the risk of war into three classes. The Far Eastern Commitment, as to which we envisage an ultimate policy of accommodation and friendship with Japan, and an immediate and provisional policy of "showing a tooth" for the purpose of recovering the standing we have sacrificed of recent years. Secondly, we take Germany as the ultimate potential enemy against whom our "long range" defence policy must be directed. And, thirdly, the defence of India--the largest of our "Empire" commitments.

However, it is in the details of the expenditure recommended within the DRC report, that the Imperial nature of its recommendations truly becomes apparent. Overall, the cost of the deficiency programme proposed in the report amounted to £82,380,980.[732] The largest single expenditure was for the army Expeditionary Force which cost £25,680,000. This would allow Britain to place in the field, after one month, a force composed of one cavalry division, four infantry divisions, two air defence brigades, one tank brigade along with headquarters and

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[731] "Defence Requirements Sub-Committee--Report", 28 Feb 1934, DRC-14, CAB 16/109. The following section is based on the report.

[732] This included an estimated £10,148,980 in additional maintenance costs during the first five years and expenditure on some items that would not be completed in five years.

line of communications troops. This did not, though, include additional money for modernizing the Territorial Army. In addition, the army was given money to improve the air defences of Great Britain and to modernize coast defences, of which £7,745,000 was to be spent on ports along the Mediterranean and Cape routes and at ports east of Suez.

For the RAF, the committee recommended the completion of the HDAF of 52 squadrons, but it also recommended £4,040,000 for the Fleet Air Arm and for the air requirements of all the ports east of Suez, including Singapore and Hong Kong.[733] This represented a total addition of 40 squadrons to the RAF's strength, only ten of which were slated for the HDAF. At Vansittart's insistence, however, the committee added a caveat that a further 25 squadrons might be needed in the future.[734] The naval deficiency programme recommended by the DRC totaled over £29 million, which included money for the FAA, for Singapore, for making up stores and ammunition deficiencies, for oil fuel and for increasing the personnel of the fleet. The navy's programme, however, had always been predicated on meeting its requirement to be able to fight a war in the Far East. Thus, £41,381,000 of the DRC's total programme recommendations, or roughly 50 per cent, was dedicated towards buttressing Imperial Defences in the Far East.[735] Significantly, this figure did not include any money for two key Admiralty programmes: the expansion of the FAA and new construction. In order to catch up to the Japanese in naval aviation, the Admiralty desired to spend £5,590,000 over the next five years. As for new naval construction, the DRC report did not specify a programme, but it did warn that costs under this heading were bound to increase from £10,718,000 in 1934 to an annual average of £13,400,000 in the years thereafter.

Overall, the DRC's proposals were a balanced approach to Britain's Imperial Defence problems. They met each of the service's principal requirements, and were intended to provide Britain with a set of modern, defended

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[733] The details of the air requirements for the Far Eastern ports were decided by the three Chiefs of Staff separately. For instance, they agreed that Singapore required 2 land plane squadrons and 2 flying boat squadrons on a permanent basis while a third flying boat squadron would be sent out in an emergency. 116 Mtg COS, 24 Jan 1934, CAB 53/4; "Air Requirements for the Defence of Singapore–Report by the COS", 9 March 1934, COS 327(Revise), CAB 53/23.

[734] 12 Mtg DRC, 26 Feb 1934, CAB 16/109; Malcolm Smith, British Air Strategy Between the Wars, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 130.

[735] This total is arrived at by adding together army, navy and air force expenditure allotted for defences in the Far East, including the RAF portion of the FAA.

ports along which a rejuvenated, better-manned and better-supplied navy could move to meet any external threats. Nearer to home, Britain would be able to provide an Expeditionary Force for the continent while the British Isles were protected by new coast defences, an air defence network and a completed HDAF. None of the recommendations within the DRC report was entirely new, for each merely amounted to the completion of programmes which each of the services had developed over the years. The DRC proposals were not an expansion programme, nor were they the beginning of rearmament against Germany. Instead, they basically amounted to a completion of the network of defended ports in the Far East and to the acceleration and completion of the long-standing mobilization plans of the three services. This fact has been criticized by those historians who believe that the DRC should have laid out priorities and pointed defence expenditure at one particular threat. There are two objections to this argument. First, at this time there were few indicators of how the situation in Europe or in the Far East would develop. Those indicators that had appeared were often confusing and contradictory. Thus, it was very difficult to make an informed choice between threats. Second, the details of the report clearly show a desire to focus resources initially on preparations for war with Japan. Thus, there was in fact a priority in the report, one that was based on an appreciation that the German threat would take five or more years to develop while Japan already presented a menace in the Far East. However, Ministers had made it clear from the beginning that the DRC's proposals would be examined and, undoubtedly, modified by the Cabinet. Just how this ministerial examination ultimately would affect Imperial Defence depended on external events and on the internal dynamics of the British Cabinet over the next several months.

Chapter 6: Chamberlain, Strategic Uncertainty and the Air Threat

All the Imperial Defence policy discussions of the previous two years culminated in the spring of 1934. The Cabinet recognized that it could no longer prevaricate and had to make significant decisions with long-term implications for Britain's foreign and defence policy. The most important question was what to do with the DRC's report and recommendations, which were submitted at the end of February. This involved deciding whether to accept the committee's priorities and the exact nature of its defence expenditure. More immediately, the Cabinet had to decide whether to continue to try to make something out of the Disarmament Conference or to accept its demise. Some members of the Cabinet hoped that even a small success in Geneva could pre-empt the looming rearmament. As a result, the late winter and spring of 1934 was a period of rapid change and great strategic flux. Ministers found that they could barely keep up with the latest series of events. Ideas about what to do next abounded. There were no easy answers to any of the questions facing the Cabinet and no consensus. Differences emerged within the Cabinet and between the Cabinet and the COS. The latter still hoped to secure approval for the build up of deterrent forces. As time went on, this clashed with the Cabinet's desire to make a significant statement on defence. Consequently, debate dragged on into the summer. The longer the debate continued, the more one minister, Neville Chamberlain, became impatient and more desirous of imposing his own vision of Imperial Defence and his own priorities on the Cabinet. Ultimately, he succeeded, and his success changed fundamentally the balance in the Imperial Defence system.

Before considering the fate of the DRC report it is important to take a step back and consider the broader picture which, at this time, involved the fate of the Disarmament Conference. Ever since the German withdrawal from the conference in October 1933, the British had been debating the conference's future and the possibility of bringing Germany back in and securing an agreement. Ministers were inclined to use Hitler's proposal for limited German rearmament based on a 300,000 man army as a basis for further negotiation, as they now accepted that the real question now was whether there would be controlled or uncontrolled German rearmament.[736] However, they were skeptical of the sincerity and practicability of Hitler's proposals, and referred them to the DRC for detailed study. The DRC concluded that these proposals amounted to "a substantial instalment of the complete rearmament

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[736] 20 Mtg DC(M), 23 Nov 1933, CAB 27/505. Hankey to Phipps, 24 Nov 1933, Hankey Papers [Churchill College Archives Centre] HNKY 5/5.

of Germany", but that they would leave her unable to undertake a two-front war.[737] This army would be strong enough to allow Germany to pursue a rectification of her eastern frontier at the expense of Poland and Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, the DRC recommended that these proposals, "formidable as they are", were preferable to immediate and unrestricted German rearmament. Thus, there was a powerful reason for trying to continue with the conference.

But, while there was general agreement that controlled German rearmament was preferable to uncontrolled rearmament, there was no clear vision of what new disarmament policy to adopt. New disarmament proposals were drafted within the FO, but, among Ministers, there was a reluctance to put them forward.[738] There was also an appreciation that much depended on the French attitude toward the German proposals and a realization that Britain would have to cooperate with France in drafting a reply to the Germans. Again, there was no consensus as to how far Anglo-French co-operation should extend. On the one side, Lord Tyrrell, the British Ambassador to Paris, urged close cooperation with France in order to prevent the French from launching a new race in armaments in response to German provocation, while, within the FO, Leeper advocated an open understanding with France in order to prevent German rearmament.[739] Even among FO officials, though, there was scepticism as to how far public opinion in Britain would allow Anglo-French cooperation to proceed, while most Ministers were wary of any appearance of Anglo-French collusion.[740] On the other hand, some ministers were willing to countenance closer ties with the French, especially on defence issues. Neville Chamberlain, for instance, foreshadowing some of his later views, stated:

> he felt a discussion on armaments particularly would be very useful. He had in mind that in each country there might be a certain duplication of arms and that if we worked together and the question of a combined operation should ever arise, then we could each perhaps arrange our

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[737] 2 Mtg DRC, 27 Nov 1933, CAB 16/109; "German Disarmament Proposals-Report", 29 Nov 1933, CAB 16/109.

[738] 21 Mtg DC(M), 30 Nov 1933, CAB 27/505; Orme Sargent to Phipps, 16 Nov 1933, Sargent Papers, FO 800/275.

[739] Tyrrell telegram, 3 Nov 1933, and Leeper minute, 6 Nov 1933 both FO 371/17370/W 12569/40/98.

[740] Sargent minute, 9 Nov 1933, Ibid. For instance, the Ministerial Disarmament Committee rejected the idea of sharing intelligence information on German rearmament with the French. 20 Mtg DC(M), 23 Nov 1933, CAB 27/505.

armaments in the most economic way so that they would be complementary.[741]

In December, a Cabinet committee came to several conclusions on the future of the disarmament conference.[742] It discounted the use of force to prevent German rearmament and concluded that any practicable disarmament convention would have to be based on the premise of limited German rearmament, but without any corresponding increase in French armaments. The Cabinet hoped that such an agreement could also be broadened to include the wider political issues between France and Germany and eventually could include other European countries. In an attempt to move the conference in this direction, the ministerial disarmament committee agreed that a new British disarmament manifesto should be published early in the new year.[743] This was dutifully prepared by Simon at the end of January 1934, while copies were sent to Berlin, Paris and Rome.[744] The response to these proposals was not enthusiastic, as France and Germany each raised four serious objections. Eden was sent on a tour of the major European capitals to try and keep the process moving, but he failed to resolve the deadlock between France and Germany. By early March 1934, the Cabinet began to deal with the fact that the Disarmament Conference was all but dead.

In a final effort to keep hope the conference alive, and thereby avoid large-scale rearmament, Simon prepared a memorandum arguing in favour of changes to the British manifesto that might meet the French and German objections.[745] The only way out of the impasse, in his view, was to meet more fully French demands for increased security. The Cabinet, however, put off any decision on Simon's memorandum until they received a more comprehensive reply from the French.[746] This reply was received a few days later and it made it clear to the Cabinet that the Disarmament Conference was at an impasse: the French would not agree to the minimum German demands;

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[741] 21 Mtg DC(M), 30 Nov 1933, CAB 27/505.

[742] 22 Mtg DC(M), 6 Dec 1933, CAB 27/505.

[743] 24 Mtg DC(M), 15 Dec 1933, CAB 27/505.

[744] "Disarmament", 30 Jan 1934, CP-10(34), CAB 24/247; Cabinet 2(34), 24 Jan 1934 and Cabinet 3(34), 31 Jan 1934, both CAB 23/78.

[745] "Consequences of a Breakdown of the Disarmament Conference", 9 March 1934, CP-68(34), CAB 24/248.

[746] Cabinet 9(34), 14 March 1934, CAB 23/78.

meanwhile the Germans would not lower their demands.[747] The only possible solution appeared to be some sort of British guarantee, whose exact nature had yet to be determined. Forcibly stopping German rearmament already had been ruled out, and the ATB had concluded that economic sanctions would not prevent rearmament.[748] In mid-April, the French government addressed another reply to Britain, once again reiterating their opposition to any German rearmament and demanding more security commitments from Britain. As a result, the FO now concluded that the Disarmament Conference was "virtually dead" and the Cabinet committee on disarmament agreed.[749]

The problem for the British government was that the Disarmament Conference had been at the centre of its European and foreign policy for the previous two years, and now there was nothing immediately apparent to replace it. Some were in favour of trying to continue the conference, either out of ideological commitment or out of a fear of pacifist public opinion. Although a full disarmament convention was now unachievable, a few, like Baldwin, felt that a separate agreement on the abolition of bombing from the air might be possible.[750] FO officials privately came to the conclusion that half measures were no longer possible:

> Deplorable, therefore, as the prospect is of an unlimited race in armaments, that prospect is on the whole less dangerous than a long drawn out continuation of the present uncertainties for it would at least leave HMG free to bring up their armaments to the level of security...[751]

Consequently, in their opinion, there were only two alternatives before the government: an unlimited race in armaments or "a convention involving far-reaching guarantees of execution matched by military assistance regionally arranged...".[752] It was generally recognized, however, that any British European guarantees would have to include American acquiescence. Even if America could be induced to agree to such a guarantee, there was

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[747] Cabinet 11(34), 22 March 1934, CAB 23/78.

[748] "Economic Pressure on Germany", 30 Oct 1933, CID 1118-B, CAB 4/22; "Economic Pressure on Germany-Possible Action by the League", 25 Jan 1934, CID 1128-B, CAB 4/22.

[749] A.W.A. Leeper minute, 2 May 1934, FO 371/18524/W 4153/1/98; 40 Mtg DC(M), 1 May 1934, CAB 27/506.

[750] Cabinet 20(34), 9 May 1934, CAB 23/78.

[751] Record of a Meeting between Mr. Eden, Lord Stanhope, Mr. Sargent, Mr. Leeper and Mr. Wigram, 30 April 1934, FO 371/18524/W 4214/1/98.

[752] Ibid.

scepticism in the FO as to whether that country would ever actually honour its obligations.[753] Implicit in all this was the fact that, no matter which option the government chose, it would involve some level of British rearmament. The demise of the Disarmament Conference, therefore, brought the DRC report to the fore.

As the Disarmament Conference was in its death throes, the DRC report was presented to the Cabinet on March 7. At this first meeting, several ministers indicated that they had important questions to raise in regard to the report so the Prime Minister decided to postpone discussion to a later meeting.[754] Already, the previous day, MacDonald had received his first ministerial comment, when William Ormsby-Gore, the First Commissioner of Works, had written suggesting that the British public would be willing to support increased spending only on the navy and on the air defence of Great Britain.[755] He also wondered about the Japanese position in the world, given that a naval conference was due in 1935 and that:

> The bare possibility of war between Japan and Russia, presents us with a horrible dilemma, unless such a conflict ends inconclusively. A victorious Japan would be much strengthened. A beaten Japan would leave all China at the mercy of the Soviet.

After the first meeting, both Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for India and Lord Sankey, the Lord Chancellor, weighed in. Both wanted to know more about British policy towards Japan, the extent of any British commitments on the continent and the conditions under which an expeditionary force might be sent to the continent.[756] The Postmaster-General, Kingsley Wood, also asked about the "possibility or otherwise of a closer association or alliance with America".[757] However, the most important comments came from Neville Chamberlain, who indicated that he intended to question the DRC's recommendations on relations with Japan and the United States and its recommendations in regard to the rebuilding of the Expeditionary Force.[758]

He brought out his views forcefully at the next Cabinet meeting on March 14. By this time, MacDonald

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[753] Craigie and Mounsey minutes, 4 May 1934, Vansittart minute, 5 May 1934, FO 371/18524/W 4214/1/98.

[754] Cabinet 8(34), 7 March 1934, CAB 23/78.

[755] Ormsby Gore letter to MacDonald, 6 March 1934, PREM 1/175.

[756] Hoare letter to MacDonald, 7 March 1934; Sankey letter to MacDonald, 8 March 1934, both PREM 1/175.

[757] Kingsley Wood, letter to MacDonald, 8 March 1934, PREM 1/175.

[758] N. Chamberlain, letter to MacDonald, 8 March 1934, PREM 1/175.

had circulated a compendium of questions to the Cabinet, and, at this meeting, they began to look at the first important questions, which dealt with relations with Japan and the situation in the Far East.[759] The result was that the initial discussion of the DRC report actually focused on what could be done to improve Anglo-Japanese relations. Simon led off by stating that the FO concurred with the DRC that good relations with Japan were desirable, although there was, in his opinion, "no opportunity for anything spectacular in this direction". However, he foresaw two potential areas of Anglo-Japanese friction. First, was the threat of Japanese trade competition and, second, was the American desire to present a joint Anglo-American front resisting Japanese claims for parity at the 1935 Naval Conference. As for Japanese influence in China, Simon sympathized with the idea that "if Japan was to expand such expansion was preferable on the Continent of Asia rather than southward".

When he spoke, Chamberlain showed that, unlike Simon, he did believe that there was a possibility of achieving something more spectacular in improving Anglo-Japanese relations. In his view, it was in Britain's interests to ensure that Japan did not remain isolated. Some form of bilateral understanding, he felt, would help to placate Japanese hurt feelings over the termination of the Anglo-Japanese alliance.[760] Therefore, Chamberlain suggested that Britain pursue a pact of non-aggression with Japan, one which might include Japanese assurances over their attitude toward China, although he did not elaborate on the latter point.[761] Interestingly, Eyres-Monsell, "strongly supported" Chamberlain's idea, and he added, with a touch of peculiar logic, that the United States actually might welcome an Anglo-Japanese non-aggression pact because it would show the Americans that Britain could exert influence over Japan. Despite the fact that Chamberlain was making a foray into the arena of foreign policy, Simon did not object. In fact, he felt that a non-aggression pact might be of some "advantage" to Britain. The Prime Minister, however, poured cold water on the entire idea. While he agreed that something had to be done to improve relations with Japan, he also wanted to avoid any early action that might imperil the potential success

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[759] "Report of the Defence Requirements Committee--Subjects for Cabinet Consideration", 12 March 1934, CP-70(34), CAB 24/248; Cabinet 9(34), 14 March 1934, CAB 23/78. The remainder of this paragraph is based on this Cabinet meeting.

[760] Although Chamberlain believed that there was a threat from Japan he also believed it could be obviated by "wary and skillful diplomacy". N. Chamberlain minute, 15 Jan 1934, T 161/624/S.36130/34.

[761] In the Treasury, at least, this idea was not new. In 1929 one member had suggested a non-aggression pact with Japan as a method by which to stop expenditure on the Singapore base. "The Singapore Base" [memorandum by A. Waterfield], 11 July 1929, T 161/800/S.18917/6.

of the 1935 naval conference. Consequently, he told the Cabinet that "the more quietly we could improve our relations with Japan the better" for the present. In the end, the Cabinet agreed only to have Simon prepare another paper on how relations with Japan could be improved.

The future of Anglo-Japanese relations, as a result, formed a central feature of any discussion of the DRC's recommendations for the improvement of Far Eastern defences. It is thus important to digress for a moment to examine the opinions of the Treasury, FO and the Admiralty on this question. Each department's approach towards Far Eastern policy was based on its estimates of the nature and extent of the threat to British interests in the region, and, therefore, its willingness to countenance significant new expenditure on Imperial Defence in the Far East. There was a consensus in the British government on the broad policy of trying to improve Anglo-Japanese relations. However, there was significant disagreement over what this actually meant and how much Britain should risk alienating the United States in the pursuit of Japan. Further, there was a fundamental difference of opinion over the purpose of improving Anglo-Japanese relations.[762]

On the one hand, Chamberlain and the Treasury viewed closer Anglo-Japanese relations as a substitute for Imperial Defence expenditure in the Far East. Over the previous six years, and through three Chancellors of the Exchequer, the Treasury had never viewed Japan as a serious threat to British interests in the Far East. Anxious to keep control over defence expenditure, the Treasury wanted to focus spending on what it viewed as the more immediate threat, Germany. As Chamberlain stated, the conclusion of a non-aggression pact between Japan and Britain "might have a beneficial effect on our relations which would enable us to concentrate on the serious situation that was developing nearer home".[763] To achieve an agreement, the Chancellor was willing to come to an arrangement with Japan over trade in China, and if this left America "in the cold", Chamberlain believed that might be unavoidable.[764] The Treasury's position was developed further by Warren Fisher in a memorandum to

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[762] This subject has been re-examined recently in: Greg Kennedy, Anglo-American Strategic Relations and the Far East, 1933-1939: Imperial Crossroads, (London: Frank Cass, 2002).

[763] Cabinet 9(34), 14 March 1934, CAB 23/78.

[764] 1 Mtg, NCM (35), 16 April 1934, CAB 29/147.

the Cabinet committee making preparations for the 1935 naval conference.[765] Here he repeated, and elaborated, views which he had already brought before the DRC at the start of the year. Fisher reiterated that Britain could not successfully fight both Japan and Germany simultaneously. Therefore, it had to concentrate its resources against one enemy, namely Germany. To do this, Britain had to ensure that it would not become embroiled in a war with Japan, and he proposed a two-stage process to ensure this. First, according to Fisher, Britain had to disentangle itself from the United States, because "the American 'yard arm' may well get us into trouble, but will assuredly never come to our rescue". Doing so would allow Britain to be able to complete the second step, which was to come to a close and long-lasting agreement with Japan. A completed Singapore, he felt, would prevent any serious Japanese threat to British Far Eastern trade routes or to India or Australasia. Moreover, Fisher believed that Japan was held in check by a fear of Russia and would not attack the British Empire "until or unless" Britain was embroiled in a first-class war in Europe.[766] As for the navy's war plans against Japan, Fisher was unequivocal in his ridicule:

> That, at a distance of 10,000 miles, we can down the Japanese is a chimera compared with which *Alice in Wonderland* is a serious essay; that we should wish to down Japan seems to me to be worse than Don Quixote in his most idiotic moods towards a windmill...[767]

Fisher's strongly-held views, particularly on Anglo-American relations, were not widely shared outside of the Treasury. In the FO, Craigie observed, with less professional understatement than usual, that the memorandum was based on "many arguments which appear to be based on a misconception of the actual facts".[768] Understandably, this memorandum also elicited a rather strong riposte from Chatfield that highlighted the fundamental differences between the Treasury and the RN over the strategic underpinning of Imperial Defence.[769] The FSL began by pointing out that Fisher's ideas amounted to "handing over the security of a large part of the

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[765] "The Naval Conference, 1935", 23 April 1934, NCM (35) 3, CAB 29/148. This memorandum was also circulated to the Ministerial Disarmament Committee (DCM).

[766] W. Fisher minute, 12 Jan 1934, T 161/624/S.36130/34.

[767] "The Naval Conference, 1935", 23 April 1934, NCM (35) 3, CAB 29/148.

[768] Craigie minute, 18 May 1934, FO 371/17597/A 4114/1938/45.

[769] "The Naval Conference, 1935-Memorandum by the Chief of the Naval Staff", 18 May 1934, NCM (35) 10, CAB 29/148.

British Commonwealth to the goodwill of Japan". Singapore alone would not provide security for Britain's Far Eastern Empire and the current debate over the DRC's proposals was misplaced. The completion of its defences would only mean that the naval base was no longer vulnerable to a Japanese *coup de main*, and was not in itself a deterrent. The true deterrent was the British Main Fleet and its ability to move to the Far East in case of an emergency. Chatfield reminded Fisher that the basis of Admiralty strategy in the Far East was a fleet in being:

> The security of the Empire East of Suez..., and our whole Imperial prestige, are entirely dependent on our readiness to send a sufficient Fleet to Singapore; and the danger that this operation would be carried out is a definite deterrent to Japan from aggrandizing herself at our expense.

Chatfield also pointed out that the RN could not completely ignore the United States, as American naval construction directly influenced Japanese naval programmes. He ended his memorandum by reminding Fisher of the diplomatic importance of the navy:

> there is better prospect of a satisfactory political agreement if we have sufficient "military" strength to make our friendship worth having and to exercise an effective deterrent should there be a change of heart. Unless good political arrangements for peace are supported by a Navy of the minimum strength for defence there can be no permanent security.

On one point, at least, Chatfield and Fisher agreed, and that was that Britain had to maintain friendly relations with Japan and even possibly come to terms with that nation. The important difference was that Fisher saw an agreement with Japan as a substitute for Imperial Defence in the Far East, while Chatfield had quite the opposite view, namely that "our first policy must be to strengthen the Navy and our bases in the Far East so that we can come to terms with Japan and thus be ready to throw our full weight in Europe if it is required".[770] Japan would consider an agreement with Britain only if she respected Britain. Germany, in Chatfield's opinion, was in no position to go to war at the moment as it was still "relatively unarmed". Being a methodical people, and because "they cannot afford to have a second failure", the Germans would wait until they were well prepared before launching a European war. This, he estimated, would take at least five years, and so, according to Chatfield, Britain had a breathing space in which to show that it was a power "to be reckoned with, both in Europe and in the East".

In the Far East, as well, Britain was blessed with a period of peace as, Chatfield believed, Japan was preoccupied

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[770] Chatfield to Dreyer, 2 Feb 1934, Chatfield Papers, CHT 4/4.

with Russia and would not risk a two-front war. She would wait until Britain was preoccupied elsewhere.[771] Thus, there was an opportunity to rebuild Imperial Defences, and, as he pointed out to Warren Fisher, rebuilding all three services was necessary if Britain and the Empire were to survive:

> Whatever we may be able to do with our army or Air Force in preventing our own country from being invaded or attacked, it will never reduce our Naval responsibilities of maintaining our Empire, sea communications and Mercantile Marine, on which our wealth finally depends under our existing system of national economics.[772]

The FO, for its part, rejected any suggestion of a closer understanding between Japan and Great Britain. Victor Wellesley reminded everyone that "the Anglo-Japanese alliance was abrogated for several very good reasons".[773] This is not to say that the FO rejected the idea of trying to improve relations with Japan, but it recognized that there was a limit to this possibility.[774] Any meaningful agreement with Japan would have to involve a deal over their respective interests in China and there were strong moral and geo-strategic objections to such a course of action. Morally, any "comprehensive" cooperation with Japan in China would involve Britain in "actions which public opinion in this country would not countenance".[775] Any significant quid pro quos , from a geo-strategic perspective, also would work against British interests over the long term:

> I particularly welcome the implicit condemnation of the idea that we could buy security for ourselves by acquiescing in Japanese control of China or a Japanese attack on Russia. I regard that as a dangerous fallacy, comparable with the idea that we should divert German attention away from ourselves by encouraging the Germans to swallow Austria or the Baltic States. In either case the "aggressive" power, having increased its strength, would in the long run become an even greater danger than it is now.[776]

With the idea of a major agreement rejected, the FO mooted the possibility of improving relations through an

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[771] Ibid.

[772] Chatfield to Warren Fisher, 4 June 1934, Chatfield Papers, CHT 3/1.

[773] Wellesley minute, 9 Feb 1934, FO 371/18184/F 677/591/23. This view was not universally shared. Francis Lindley, the Ambassador to Japan, believed that Britain could get on closer terms with Japan. Lindley telegram, 27 Dec 1933, FO 371/18184/F 677/591/23. This was rejected in London as containing almost an element of "utopian exageration". C.W. Orde minute, 8 Feb 1934, FO 371/18184/F 677/591/23.

[774] Vansittart minute, 21 June 1934, FO 371/18099/F 3508/107/10.

[775] "Memorandum Respecting Anglo-Japanese Relations and the Question of Naval Parity", 28 May 1934, NCM (35) 8, CAB 29/148.

[776] L. Collier minute, 20 April 1934, FO 371/18184/F 2109/591/23.

agreement over the Japanese-mandated Pacific islands, but this was not universally popular in the office and it was realized that the Japanese might not find this much of an inducement.[777]

With close cooperation with Japan ruled out, there remained the possibility of approaching the United States in the hope of working with that country in the Far East in order to create a counterpoise to Japan. This idea also was dismissed because of concerns that America would not back up its vocal condemnation of Japanese action and "having induced others to engage with her in a common policy, she is not unlikely to drop out and leave her associates to pursue it alone".[778] Instead, by the winter of 1934, the FO had begun to promote a so-called "no-bloc" policy toward the Far East.[779] In effect, this meant that the FO advocated avoiding siding with any one power in the Far East:

> Real intimacy with Japan in China was never really possible owing to our divergent interests and policies and recent Japanese action has made it quite impossible...While cultivating friendly relations all round we can only, as it seems to me, maintain a somewhat detached attitude towards the policies of either Japan or the USA in the Far East.[780]

Vansittart elaborated on this a little more in a letter to Herbert Creedy, the PUS at the WO:

> It would be inadvisable to tie our Far Eastern policy to either Japan or the United States, since the former have fundamental aims to which we cannot give support, while the latter are an entirely uncertain factor.[781]

The pursuit of the no-bloc policy was in part dependent on Britain maintaining sufficient strength in the Far East to maintain the respect of both China and Japan. Thus, the amelioration of Britain's imperial defence problems in the Far East was essential to the pursuit of its foreign policy goals:

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[777] C. Orde minute, 17 April 1934, Wellesley minute, 21 April 1934, Vansittart minute, 24 April 1934, all FO 371/18184/F 2109/591/23.

[778] "Memorandum on British Policy in the Far East", [memorandum by J.T. Pratt], 1 Dec 1933, in "Situation in the Far East", 1933-34", 15 March 1934, CP-77(34), CAB 16/111. This was a series of comprehensive FO memoranda on the Far Eastern situation which had been in preparation since the summer of 1933. They were distributed to the DRC, DCM and the Cabinet. Hereafter they will be referred to as "Situation in the Far East". See also the minute by Craigie, 6 July 1934, FO 371/18186/F 2996/652/23.

[779] The best examination of the no-bloc policy is in Greg Kennedy, "1935: A Snapshot of British Imperial Defence in the Far East", in Neilson and Kennedy, eds., Far Flung Lines, 190-215; Kennedy, Imperial Crossroads.

[780] Orde minute, 8 Feb 1934, FO371/18184/F 677/591/23.

[781] Vansittart to Creedy, 12 March 1934, WO 32/2538.

> It may indeed be said that, in proportion as we strengthen our position against Japan, our interests in China will stand to gain, and, from this point of view, the completion of the Singapore Base and the maintenance of an adequate naval force in the Far East will be to the good.[782]

But, while the FO understood that defences in the Far East had to be repaired to a certain extent, its appreciation of the Japanese threat militated against the pursuit of broader rearmament in the region. Although the FO viewed Japan as a competitor, and a threat to British interests, it saw the threat as mainly commercial, as Japan cut into British markets in China and elsewhere in the world.[783] While avoiding alienating Japan, the FO believed that Britain had to stand up to that country and insist on maintaining its trading rights in China and around the world.[784] The FO's experts on the Far East, however, did not fear any direct military threat to the Empire from Japan:

> in view of her very serious military preoccupations nearer home, the danger that Japan will embark on wild-cat military adventures further afield hardly seems to be one that needs to be seriously guarded against. The struggle in these regions will be on the economic plane...[785]

There were two reasons for this. Foremost, was the fact that FO officials still believed that Japan was held in check by her commitments in Manchuria and, more importantly, by the threat posed by the Soviet Union on the Japanese flank.[786] Importantly, Vansittart was a strong believer in the beneficial effects of Russo-Japanese tension:

> What will suit us best in the Far East is that there should be no war between Japan and Russia (but that their reciprocal antipathies should disenable both of them from doing actual harm to our interests, which are peace and the absence of any one-sided predominance). If war were to break out–and we now think it improbable, in any predictable future at least–we should be best served

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[782] "Memorandum respecting our Relations with Japan", in "Situation in the Far East".

[783] See the memorandum by the Board of Trade "Japanese Trade Competition", 20 March 1934, CP-81(34), CAB 16/111.

[784] "Memorandum on British Policy in the Far East", in "Situation in the Far East".

[785] Ibid.

[786] Ibid., "Memorandum Respecting Manchukuo" [memorandum by W.R. Connor-Green], 21 Nov 1933, in "Situation in the Far East". While the possibility of an immediate Russo-Japanese war appeared to have receded by this point, tension between the two countries remained and many FO officials believed that an eventual war would occur. Military Attaché report, 26 Dec 1933, and Wellesley minute, 7 Feb 1934, FO 371/18176/F 639/316/23; Lord Chilston despatch, 30 Jan 1934 and A.W.G. Randall minute, 5 Feb 1934, FO 371/18185/F 673/652/23; R. Allen minute, 23 Feb 1934, FO 371/F 964/373/23.

by a draw, which is also the most likely result.[787]

There were two further reasons why FO officials believed that Japan would not move against British interests in the near future. First, in the fall of 1933, the United States had established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.[788] This seeming rapprochement between two strong opponents of Japan's policy, it was felt, would act as a restraint on Japanese expansionist tendencies.[789] Second, the more Japan feared becoming isolated in the region, the more likely she would be to make friendly approaches to Britain:

> The one great hold we have over the Japanese is their fear of political isolation and when they come to look for substitutes, when we are out of favour, they invariably in the end come back to their first love for with all our faults we still remain infinitely preferable to any other nation.[790]

In the winter of 1934 the FO began to detect what it believed were fresh attempts by the Japanese to develop friendlier relations with Britain.[791] It hoped to be able to develop these as far as was possible.

Thus, in the first five months of 1934, there was a consensus among the professional advisors to the government that, in the short-term, Japan was not an immediate military threat to the Empire. Where their views diverged was over how to prevent Japan from becoming a serious threat to British interests over the long term. An

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[787] Vansittart minute, 25 May 1934, FO 371/18147/F 2899/2899/10. He also believed that Russo-Japanese tension would give Britain "breathing room" to finish the Singapore Base. Vansittart minute, 27 Feb 1934, FO 371/18180/F 964/373/23. He also asked his officials to prepare a study on what result of a Russo-Japanese war would be most favourable to British interests. Vansittart minute, 13 Jan 1934, FO 371/18297/N 140/2/38. The reply, written by A.W.G. Randall of the Far Eastern Department was that Britain, and Europe as a whole could afford to "regard the Russo-Japanese tension without great concern, if not...with the cynical reflection that such tension may even be serving the interests of their diplomacy". He concluded that Britain had more to fear from a Japanese defeat than a Soviet loss. "Memorandum on Russo-Japanese Tension", 9 Feb 1934, FO 371/18176/F 823/316/23. Collier disagreed with Randall, pointing out that Japan was a greater threat to British interests, while Ralph Wigram made the observation that any diminution in Russian strength as a result of a defeat in the Far East would weaken its ability to act as a counterweight to Germany in Europe. Collier minute, 16 Feb 1934 and Wigram minute 19 Feb 1934, both Ibid. Vansittart tended to agree with Randall, but he believed that British interests were best served if there was "tension but no blows for as long as possible". Vansittart minute, 22 Feb 1934, Ibid.

[788] Lindsay despatch, 18 Nov 1933, FO 371/17263/N 8275/1149/38.

[789] Snow despatch, 26 Oct 1933, FO 371/17263/N 7726/1149/38; "Memorandum on British Policy in the Far East" in "Situation in the Far East"; Lindley despatch, 26 Dec 1933, FO 371/18176/F 639/316/23.

[790] Wellesley minute, 5 Feb 1934, FO 371/18184/F 591/591/23.

[791] Snow despatch, 22 Dec 1933 and R. Allen minute, 1 Feb 1934, both FO 371/18184/F 591/591/23; Wellesley minute, 23 Feb 1934, FO 371/18187/F 959/720/23; Lindley despatch, 1 March 1934, R. Allen minute, A.W.G. Randall minute, 28 Feb 1934, Wellesley minute, 3 April 1934 and Vansittart minute, 4 April 1934, all FO 371/18181/F 1761/373/23.

opportunity existed to try to improve Anglo-Japanese relations, although only the Treasury believed in the practicability or desirability of coming anywhere close to renewing the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. However, different deductions were drawn as to what this meant for Imperial Defence expenditure. The FO view was that only a limited build up of defences at British bases and ports in the Far East was necessary. Chatfield and the Admiralty concluded that the relaxation of tensions with Japan presented an opportunity to strengthen the navy overall, including the defence infrastructure in the Far East, and thereby improve Britain's ability to send a fleet to Singapore and points further north. This, it was assumed, would enhance Britain's diplomatic position and promote an eventual understanding with Japan. Most others, in particular the Treasury, while they accepted the need to build up the Singapore base, desired closer relations with Japan in order to avoid spending large sums of money in the Far East and thus be able to focus on defence measures closer to home.

After nearly two months of inconclusive debate in the Cabinet, the DRC report was passed on to the Ministerial Disarmament committee in late April.[792] The DCM first discussed it only on May 3. As both the Prime Minister and the Lord President were away at a meeting of the Committee of Privileges, the Foreign Secretary chaired the meeting, but it was Chamberlain who dominated the proceedings. Almost immediately, he turned the discussion to the issue of Anglo-Japanese relations. Once again, the Chancellor repeated the Treasury's view that Britain could not fight both Germany and Japan at the same time and that, therefore, "we should get on friendly terms with Japan so as to be free to use all our resources against Germany". Although British defences in the Far East were weak, Japan did not appear to have any aggressive designs, and this, in his mind, only strengthened the argument for seeking closer ties with Japan. Cabinet opinion continued to be split on this issue. Simon felt that nothing "concrete" could be done to improve Anglo-Japanese relations, nor any "decisive gestures" made, while Eyres-Monsell and Hankey reiterated previous Admiralty and COS warnings that Japan was the "more immediate risk".[793] Lord Halifax, at this time the President of the Board of Education, and Anthony Eden both were skeptical of Chamberlain's ideas on closer relations with Japan. However, J.H. Thomas, the Dominions Secretary, and

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[792] 41 Mtg DC(M) 32, 3 May 1934, CAB 27/507.

[793] As one FO official admitted, there was "nothing drastic in the policy suggested", referring to the policy of the 'no bloc'. "Memorandum Respecting our Relations With Japan", in "Situation in the Far East". The problem, from the point of view of the FO, was that drastic action was exactly what some ministers, particularly Chamberlain, wanted.

Ormsby-Gore, supported the Treasury view. This debate proved inconclusive, and the committee moved on to discuss the details of the report.[794]

During this latter discussion, the other principal elements of Chamberlain's strategic thinking emerged. First, he stated that "a case had been made out on its merits" for the deterrent value of the Far Eastern bases such as Singapore and Trincomali. However, he warned that if "we could not afford to do it altogether, then an order of priority must be decided". Second, Chamberlain emerged as vehemently opposed to any idea of an Expeditionary Force for the continent. He viewed expenditure on the Expeditionary Force as support for a new commitment not the rectification an existing deficiency. Given the fortifications along the French and Belgian borders, the Chancellor asked, why was a British Expeditionary Force required? Based on the experience of the Great War, he added, the majority of British resources should be put into the navy and the air force, and the army maintained only so that it could be used for Imperial Defence. Hailsham, the Secretary of State for War, defended the need for an Expeditionary Force to assist in the defence of the Low Countries, and pointed out that the French defensive system stopped at the Belgian frontier and did not extend north of it. If the Germans were able to invade Holland and Belgium, then they would be able to bomb Britain and might even "make this country untenable". Simon, however, brought up an important point. If Germany proved a menace in Europe, did it necessarily follow that Britain had to send an Expeditionary Force to the continent? He believed that no actual policy for this had been set by the Cabinet. It had become clear that there was significant disagreement in Cabinet over how best Britain could contribute to the defence of western Europe. In the end, the committee agreed to continue discussion at the next meeting and, in the interim, to ask the COS for more detailed technical advice on the need for an expeditionary force.

The next day, the Ministerial committee continued with its discussion of the DRC report, even though it had not yet received a report from the COS. Although they began by once again discussing provision for the Expeditionary Force, attention turned to RAF requirements.[795] At this point, the Secretary of State for Air, Lord

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[794] The idea of the non-aggression pact did not disappear. In September 1934 Chamberlain brought it back to the centre of the debate over Far Eastern policy. Ann Trotter, "Tentative Steps for an Anglo-Japanese Rapprochement in 1934", MAS, 8, 1(1974), 59-83.

[795] 42 Mtg, DC(M) (32), 4 May 1934, CAB 16/110.

Londonderry, proposed a significant departure from the DRC programme for the RAF. The DRC had recommended a five-year, forty-squadron expansion of the RAF, including the FAA, but had done no more than suggest that a further 25 squadrons might be needed. Now, Londonderry proposed a 10-year programme which would increase the RAF by the full 65 squadrons. If this plan were approved, it would amount to an expansion programme for the RAF.[796] Nevertheless, the idea received relatively favourable attention, and, as a result, the committee asked Londonderry to prepare a cost schedule for a 65-squadron RAF expansion programme.

Although, the Air Ministry had officially signed up to the DRC figures, privately it had already been considering how to go beyond the forty squadrons mentioned in the report. At the end of February, as the DRC report was about to be signed, the Chief of the Air Staff, Edward Ellington, had caused a minor furore in a letter he had written to Hankey in which he stated that the RAF might, at some point, have to ask for more squadrons than outlined in the report.[797] This letter, according to Vansittart, threatened to throw the whole DRC report into the "melting pot", and so, to prevent any difficulties, Hankey was able to convince Ellington not to press the issue and to settle for having his letter circulated as a committee paper.[798] After the DRC report was presented to the Cabinet, however, the Air Ministry staff gave thought to how, through a variety of subterfuges, it might be able to raise the number of HDAF squadrons well above 52.[799] By May, though, the Air Staff espoused much greater ambitions, as it began to sense that the Cabinet was looking for a more dramatic shift in defence policy than what had been proposed in the DRC. As a result, "the present moment would therefore seem favourable for the presentation...of the Air Ministry's views on our future national strategy".[800] According to the Air Staff, the defensive had become dominant in land warfare, whereas the air weapon gave the "maximum value for offence and to bring pressure to

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[796] When the issue of 65 versus 40 squadrons had first been discussed in the DRC, Ellington had opposed the higher figure in part because he saw it as going beyond the DRC's mandate of examining the Empire's "worst deficiencies". 12 Mtg DRC, 26 Feb 1934, CAB 16/109.

[797] Ellington to Hankey, 28 Feb 1934, DRC 21, CAB 16/109.

[798] Vansittart to Hankey, 1 March 1934; Hankey to Ellington, 28 Feb 1934; Hankey to Vansittart, 6 March 1934; Vansittart to Hankey, 6 March 1934, all CAB 21/434.

[799] "Note on Implementing DRC Proposals", circa March 1934, AIR 9/8.

[800] "Notes on COS 334--DRC Report-Points Referred to the Chiefs of Staff", 5 May 1934, AIR 9/15.

bear on the enemy". Ignoring the Far East, the Air Staff focused on the German threat and brought out the long-held theoretical belief that:

> our National strategy vis-vis Germany should be based on an offensive in the air: and that we must carefully avoid being drawn into participation in land war are [sic] with vast armies on a continental scale, and that our land forces, if their employment is necessary, must be restricted to that sphere for which they are best adapted-namely the defensive.[801]

Thus, the Air Staff came out strongly in favour of making the RAF, and its strategic bomber force, the principal deterrent to the German threat to western Europe.

This placed the Air Ministry squarely at odds with the War Office over which service should have primacy in checking Germany. This was based, in part, on the different estimates of German strategy prepared by both services. Montgomery-Massingberd stated that the WO had concluded that the Germans were planning to use aircraft in close cooperation with their ground forces and that strategic bombing was "undesirable until success on land had been assured".[802] The role of an Expeditionary Force in countering such a German land campaign would be to "try and turn the scale and to attack on the German flank and so try to prevent their reaching the sea coast".[803] Ellington, on the other hand, argued that, due to the strength of French fortifications along their eastern frontier, the Germans believed that it was not possible to achieve a significant advance on land. Therefore, in the Air Staff's

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[801] Ibid.

[802] 125 Mtg COS, 4 May 1934, CAB 53/4. Montgomery-Massingberd's views were based on WO intelligence estimates of German doctrine. The WO believed that the Germans did not accept the idea of a separate air strategy, but rather believed in close cooperation between the two arms and that air targets would be selected for their importance to the land effort. See Harris, "Rise of German Mechanized Forces", 398-401. Recent literature supports the WO view of the Luftwaffe's role. One writer has pointed out that the primary doctrinal missions of the Luftwaffe were to achieve air superiority and to conduct an interdiction campaign against the enemy armies in the field. Secondary missions were to conduct close air support and interdiction near the front line. References to strategic attacks in Luftwaffe doctrine were very vague. James S. Corum, "The Luftwaffe's Army Support Doctrine, 1918-1941", JMilH, 59(1995), 53-76. This is supported by the fact that in the first four years of German air rearmament, less than 10 per cent of the aircraft built were bombers and many of these were dive bombers designed for close interdiction and close air support roles. R. J. Overy, "German Air Strength 1933-1939: A Note", HJ, 27, 2(1984), 465-471. In the beginning, the majority of German aircraft that were built were trainers, a logical step.

[803] Montgomery-Massingberd was a francophile who believed in a British role on the continent of Europe and who was convinced that German aggression had to be countered by deploying significant British ground forces to the continent to fight in conjunction with the French. In this he was in the minority. J.P. Harris, Men, Ideas and Tanks: British Military Thought and Armoured Forces, 1903-1939, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 242-243; J.P. Harris, "The British General Staff and the Coming of War, 1933-9", BIHR, LIX, 140(1986), 196-211.

estimate, the Germans would attempt to circumvent French fortifications by resorting to an air offensive.[804]

This COS meeting exposed the fundamental differences between the Air Staff and WO views. Montgomery-Massingberd was skeptical of the Air Staff's claims for the decisive effect of air power in a future war, stating that "it was very necessary that a proper balance should be struck in regard to the potentialities of air warfare which was, perhaps, tending to become exaggerated". Chatfield, through his intense questioning of Ellington in this meeting, also showed that he was not convinced of the Air Staff's case. Further, unlike the Air Staff, Montgomery-Massingberd did not view the French eastern defences as an impermeable barrier. Rather, he estimated that they existed in order to free up French troops to conduct a defensive against an anticipated German offensive in the north:

> it was correct to assume that the French fortifications were sufficiently strong to liberate a large French force for the defence of the Low Countries. He understood from the French themselves that they hoped the fortresses would prevent Germany from overrunning them at the outset, and that these fortresses ought to hold out for six weeks or two months. If Germany did start to attack through the fortresses, then of course the French would stiffen up the defences, but it was generally accepted that Germany strategy would be the same as in the last war, and therefore the French wanted the southern part of their frontier secured in order to release forces to fight Germany in Belgium.[805]

The BEF, in such circumstances, he felt, "might turn the scale". As far as preventing an air attack on Britain, the CIGS was convinced that the most effective measures would be to prevent the Low Countries from being overrun by Germany. This would keep the Germans from establishing air bases close to the United Kingdom.

At this point, it must be kept in mind that, although the WO and Air Ministry clashed over their doctrinal differences, the Air Staff remained relatively restrained in its desire for expansion. This was due to the fact that its senior leadership was concerned lest overly rapid expansion leave the RAF with an inefficient force that did not possess enough reserves of aircraft and engines. It was also based on their initial appreciations of the rate at which the Germans would expand their air force. In March 1934, the French *Deuxième Bureau* passed intelligence on to the Air Staff indicating that Germany intended to construct one air division (bomber heavy) of 500 first line

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[804] 125 Mtg COS, 4 May 1934, CAB 53/4. This was backed by Air Staff intelligence estimates which showed that the Germans were focusing on building up their bomber force. The Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, Ludlow-Hewitt, estimated that by 1935 the Germans would build up 30 bomber squadrons but only 6 fighter squadrons. "Estimate of the Development of the German Air Force", 22 May 1934, AIR 9/69.

[805] 125 Mtg COS, 4 May 1934, CAB 53/4.

aircraft and that they intended ultimately to build three or four air divisions.[806] Both Ellington and his DCAS, Edgar Ludlow-Hewitt, doubted that the Germans would be able to expand their air force that quickly. As the CAS informed the DCM, "assuming they aim at a reasonable degree of efficiency", the German air force would be 410 first line aircraft by 1935, 820 aircraft by 1939, 1230 aircraft by 1942 and 1640 aircraft by 1945.[807] While they still remained somewhat restrained, the Air Staff had sensed correctly that both political and popular opinion was beginning to move in a direction that would benefit the RAF.

Indeed, the Cabinet was becoming more and more preoccupied with what they perceived as a grave threat from an emerging German air force. The figures on the German air force which the Air Ministry had met with relative equanimity were greeted by Ministers with far more concern. As one observer noted, "Generally, the opinion is sympathetic to very big air expansion".[808] An alarmist IIC report which declared that the capacity of the German aircraft industry had increased by 50 percent and that the Germans could now produce over 500 airframes per month only helped to generate greater fears.[809] The threat of aerial bombing had weighed heavily on the minds of the National Government for some time, and it had long supported various proposals for the abolition of aerial bombing.[810] Ministers were reacting to what they believed to be a popular obsession with, and fear of, the effects of aerial bombing. This fear was based on a conception that, in the future, wars would be fought by large fleets of bombers and would involve near apocalyptic levels of destruction.[811] The popular fears that so concerned ministers were later matter-of-factly captured by Rebecca West when she wrote that "in the next war we women

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[806] Wesley K. Wark, "British Intelligence on the German Air Force and Aircraft Industry, 1933-1939", HJ, 25, 3(1982), 631; idem, The Ultimate Enemy, 38-39.

[807] "Air Defence Requirements for Defence of Great Britain in Relation to German Air Developments", DC(M)(32) 115, 29 May 1934, CAB 16/111.

[808] Pownall Diary, 3 May 1934, in Bond, ed., Chief of Staff, 42.

[809] "German Industrial Measures for Rearmament and for Aircraft Production", 22 March 1934, CID 1134-B, CAB 4/22.

[810] For more on aerial disarmament see Meilinger. "Clipping the Bomber's Wings", although the author for some reason ends his discussion in October 1933.

[811] For a look at the perceptions of the air threat see Uri Bialer, "Elite Opinion and defence policy: air power advocacy and British rearmament during the 1930s", BJIS, 6(1980), 32-51; idem., The Shadow of the Bomber: The Fear of Air Attack and British Politics, 1932-1939, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1980).

would have scarcely any need of bereavement since air raids unprecedented by declaration of war would send us and our loved ones to the next world in the breachless unity of scrambled eggs".[812] Concern over popular opinion on this issue was not confined solely to Cabinet Ministers. It was shared by influential senior officials, among them Vansittart, who wrote "I think the Germans at present contemplate an extensive use of bombing civilian populations, and the use of gas with the bombing".[813] He continued to bombard the Cabinet with reminders of the German threat.[814] He also made it clear that he had never agreed with the priorities for defence expenditure as they had been set out by the DRC.[815] By mid-May, Vansittart considered that even the higher, 65-squadron expansion over ten-years, as mooted by the DRC, was inadequate.[816] This was based on his own appreciation and the fact that he did not trust what he considered to be an overly-conservative Air Staff.[817] Instead, he pressed the ministerial committee for a significant increase in RAF strength.[818]

But, before considering this, the DCM first dealt with the COS's replies to its questionnaire. It was now clear that attention had shifted to European affairs and, more specifically, to the air force. In their answer the COS papered over their strategic and doctrinal differences and fell back on the principles of the DRC report.[819] The COS argued that a war with Germany did not imply that a new Expeditionary Force would be used exactly as the BEF had been in 1914. Instead "we should be free to use it when and where it can...most effectively influence the issue". Nevertheless, in a coalition war, they pointed out, "refusal on our part to provide direct assistance will inevitably be interpreted by our Allies as equivalent to abandoning them to their fate". Moreover, even though any

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[812] Rebecca West, Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia, (London: Penguin Books, 1940), 2.

[813] Vansittart minute, 29 March 1934, FO 371/18523/W 3467/1/98.

[814] "The Future of Germany", 9 April 1934, CP 104(34), CAB 16/111.

[815] Vansittart minute, 6 Feb 1934, FO 371/18184/F 591/591/23; Vansittart minute, 4 April 1934, FO 371/18181/F 1761/373/23.

[816] Vansittart to Simon, 14 May 1934, CAB 21/388.

[817] Vansittart minute, 19 June 1934, FO 371/17712/C 3511/31/18.

[818] "Minute by Sir R. Vansittart", 7 June 1934, DC(M)(32) 117, CAB 16/111.

[819] "Note by the Chiefs of Staff", 8 May 1934, DC(M) (32) 109, CAB 16/111.

contemplated Expeditionary Force was small by continental standards:

> It is not so much the size of the forces we can send as the moral effect which their arrival would have...and the knowledge that behind those forces is the whole might of the British Empire ready and determined to wage war with all its available resources in defence of the independence of the peoples whose frontiers we have guaranteed.

This was the same rationale that British governments had invoked for sending troops to fight on the continent of Europe since the Seven Years War.[820] However, the COS also stated that any such force had to be capable of being despatched rapidly. Nor could it be created in a short space of time. If it might be needed in five years, then it was necessary to begin amassing the necessary material and manpower reserves immediately. Although there were alternatives to sending an Expeditionary Force, such as the use of the RAF and blockade, neither of these was a satisfactory guarantee. Allies could not be certain that aircraft would not be diverted from their defence to the defence of Britain itself, should it come under air attack. Blockade, while it was valuable and "may in the end be decisive", was a long-term weapon, without immediate effect. Besides, up to this point, the priority for German rearmament had been expanding the 7 Reichswehr divisions to 21 divisions on mobilization. Only recently had German air rearmament been pursued with "vigour". As to what purpose this air force would be used, the COS admitted that they could not agree on whether it would concentrate on army support or whether it would develop a strategic bombing capability.

The COS also argued that it was very important to keep Germany from occupying the Low Countries. In the past, this had been a British strategic aim in order to prevent an enemy from establishing sea bases so close to the United Kingdom. Now, with the advent of air power, according to the COS, this strategic aim was more important than ever. By denying Germany air bases in the Low Countries, any German air offensive would have to start 300-350 kilometres further away and would thus be far less effective. The best way to achieve this would be to despatch an Expeditionary Force to cooperate in the defence of Belgium. This was easily accepted, but how to carry it out was contentious. The ministerial committee agreed on the importance of maintaining the independence of the Low Countries, but could not agree on whether an Expeditionary Force was necessary to assist

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[820] This theme is well explored in David French, The British Way in Warfare, 1688-2000, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

in their defence.[821] Chamberlain, for instance, felt that, even if the Germans occupied Belgium, RAF bombing of German bases there could prevent the development of any German air offensive against Britain. Thus, an Expeditionary Force might not be required. Of course, he neglected to point out that this plan did involve abandoning Belgium to her fate. Taking their cue from Chamberlain, the committee sent his idea back to the COS for further comment. In the meantime, Chamberlain continued to voice his opposition to the Expeditionary Force, stating that he felt that it did not need to mobilize as quickly as the COS desired, for "he was not satisfied that it would be a necessary concomitant of the war against Germany that we must immediately despatch an Expeditionary Force".

The Chancellor now moved to take greater personal charge of the committee's discussions. "Generally speaking", he said, "a case had been made out for the spending of a considerable sum of money but it was not quite clear as to the actual lines on which this money would be laid out". Therefore, he proposed that he should take time and prepare a new five-year table of expenditure that would set priorities, as "he thought he knew generally enough of what was in their minds as to any modifications of the DRC report". This would give the committee something definite to discuss. What this proposal meant, actually, was a discarding of the DRC report in favour of a strategic appreciation which would be drafted by Chamberlain and which would then supercede the DRC's recommendations.[822] This proposal was in keeping with Neville Chamberlain's character. For long he had viewed himself as the strong man in the National Government, something he later admitted to his sister, "It amuses me to find a new policy for each of my colleagues in turn...".[823] By the spring of 1934, Chamberlain had become dissatisfied with the long-running discussions on rearmament and had set himself the task of steering them in his desired direction:

> In my office the amount of work you have to do largely depends on what you make for yourself. Unhappily it is part of my nature that I cannot contemplate any problem without trying to find a solution for it. And so I have practically taken charge of the defence requirements of the country. Thanks to the exigencies of the committee of privileges the PM and SB [Stanley

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[821] 44 Mtg DC(M), 10 May 1934, CAB 16/110.

[822] This also derailed Hankey's efforts to draft a DCM report which accepted the majority of the DRC's recommendations, although with an increase in RAF expansion. DC(M)(32) 116, 6 June 1934, CAB 16/111.

[823] N. Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 30 Oct 1932, Neville Chamberlain Papers [University of Birmingham Library] NC 18/1/865.

> Baldwin] have for some time been precluded from "guiding" our deliberations. In their absence Simon has been in the chair, but I have taken the leading part and now at the committees' request I am getting out a modified plan "in the light of our discussion".[824]

While Chamberlain privately began work on his new proposals, the ministerial committee continued to meet. In mid-May, the committee received another report from the COS in reply to questions raised at the previous DCM meeting.[825] Once again, the COS affirmed that the occupation and prevention of a German invasion of the Low Countries would be "the most effective means of mitigating the severity of German air attack on London". This again implied that Britain required an Expeditionary Force to assist in the defence of Belgium. The COS report was enough to convince Simon, but Chamberlain remained stubbornly opposed to the Expeditionary Force and the ministerial committee once again reached no conclusion.[826] Instead, attention turned to Londonderry's estimate of the cost of a 65 squadron RAF expansion over ten years.[827] But, Chamberlain was unhappy with the go-slow approach in this paper, and insisted that the Air Ministry prepare a new paper which would outline, given no financial limits, what the Air Staff would require to provide security against Germany. The Air Staff's reply to this was drafted by Ludlow-Hewitt. He proposed that, given the anticipated rate of German expansion, the RAF should aim at a Home Defence force of 75 squadrons, consisting of 600 bombers and 300 fighters, by 1939.[828] If Germany continued to expand beyond 1939, then the RAF would also have to expand to 100 squadrons by 1944. This formed the basis of Ellington's reply to Chamberlain.[829] The CAS proposed three alternatives, although his preferred one was to build a 100 squadron Home Defence force by 1944 in addition to the FAA and Far Eastern requirements. This scheme could be compressed into five years if the latter requirements were deferred until after 1939.

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[824] N. Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 12 May 1934, Neville Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/870.

[825] "Replies to Questions From the Ministerial Committee on Disarmament May 10, 1934", 14 May 1934, DC(M)(32) 111, CAB 16/111.

[826] 45 Mtg DCM, 15 May 1934, CAB 16/110.

[827] DC(M)(32) 110, 11 May 1934, CAB 16/111.

[828] Ludlow-Hewitt minute, 22 May 1934, AIR 9/69.

[829] "Air Defence Requirements for Defence of Great Britain in Relation to German Air Developments", DC(M)(32) 115, 29 May 1934, CAB 16/111.

This forecast, however, was not discussed in the committee before Chamberlain's new proposals were ready at the end of June. The latter marked a dramatic departure from the DRC's recommendations, although they were the logical culmination of the ideas on defence Chamberlain had expressed over the previous several months.[830] The ministerial committee, he declared, had to "face the facts courageously and realize the impossibility of simultaneous preparation against war with Germany and war with Japan". A choice had to be made, and that choice was to prepare for war against Germany instead of Japan. The greatest danger from Germany was attack from the air and, therefore:

> Our best defence would be the existence of a deterrent force so powerful as to render success in attack too doubtful to be worth while. I submit that this is most likely to be attained by the establishment of an Air Force *based in this country* of a size and efficiency calculated to inspire respect in the mind of a possible enemy.

To build such a deterrent force, Chamberlain proposed a five-year plan to create 38 new RAF squadrons at home, making a total of 80 HDAF squadrons instead of the 52 anticipated in the DRC report and the 75 squadrons deemed necessary by the Air Staff. Much was based on cost. The overall expenses associated with the DRC recommendations, which Chamberlain calculated at an additional £19.5 million (including the naval construction programme) per year over and above the 1933 total service estimates, were too high. The DRC proposals, in fact, were "impossible to carry out". So, funding for the expanded RAF home defence programme had to come at the expense of Imperial Defence generally and the navy and army specifically. Chamberlain's plan, unlike the DRC, included no provision for new FAA squadrons, nor for any squadrons at Far Eastern bases, except for three at Singapore. This latter base would have to be completed "if only out of good faith to the Dominions", but it would be little more than a base for submarines and light craft. Any idea of sending the fleet to the Far East would have to be postponed. By doing this, the naval shipbuilding programme could be reduced, and the total allotment for naval deficiencies would be cut by £8 million over five years. The lack of any aircraft for the FAA, he believed,

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[830] "Note by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the Report of the Defence Requirements Committee", 20 June 1934, DC(M)(32) 120, CAB 25/511. Chamberlain anticipated that his ideas would not be welcomed in certain quarters. . N. Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 17 June 1934, Neville Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/875. In the preparation of this paper, Chamberlain leaned heavily on two senior Treasury advisors, Strohmenger and Hopkins, neither of whom had any real experience of Imperial Defence issues, according to Hankey. Hankey to Vansittart, 31 May 1934, CAB 21/388. Montgomery-Massingberd also believed that "the Treasury is partly at any rate at the back of the strategical part of the memorandum". Montgomery-Massingberd to Hankey, 21 June 1934, CAB 21/388.

was not a problem, as he understood that "trained aircraft stationed at home can be transferred at will without further training to the Fleet Air Arm". As for the army, Chamberlain discounted any idea that Germany would be ready for war within 5 years. Therefore, in his mind, expenditure on the army could be reduced from £40 million, as recommended by the DRC, to an arbitrary £19.1 million. Under Chamberlain's plan, the total additional expenditure over five years dropped to £59.3 million, or £11.9 million per year.

These proposals were completely politically-driven, as Chamberlain freely admitted in this memorandum. The DRC recommendations, he stated, "appear hardly likely to command immediate popular support". The large amount slated for the Expeditionary Force might "give rise to most alarmist ideas of future intentions or commitments", while RAF proposals for home defence "in which public interest is strongest" only contemplated completing a programme begun in 1923. As for the navy, much of its expenditure on items such as oil reserves, storage tanks, ammunition, stores and seaward defences "presents an easy target for attack, but offers considerable difficulty in detailed explanation". Thus, his proposals were designed to meet a perceived public desire for a dramatic statement on air defence, at the expense of Imperial Defence and the logistical base required to field modern fighting forces. In all respects, his plan was "shop window dressing".

Understandably, the navy was furious with Chamberlain's memorandum. In assessing his proposals, the Admiralty Plans Division commented:

> There appears to be danger of overlooking the more permanent elements in the problem of Imperial Defence and of failing to recognize, as the DRC recognized, that there exists a general requirement to enable the defence services to fulfil their functions in the general scheme of Imperial Defence.[831]

Privately, Chatfield fumed that "the Chancellor has invented an entirely new Imperial Defence policy...not based on the solid reasoning that has determined our Imperial policy in the past, but upon the question, what is the cheapest way in which we can 'keep face' with the world?".[832] More importantly, however, he pointed out the true dangers to the navy of Chamberlain's proposals:

> Consequently we have had to dress our "public window" by paying for new construction, which is the <u>apparent</u> strength of the navy, with the money which should have been used for equipping

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[831] Plans Division memorandum, "DC(M)(32) 120-General Comments", 20 June 1934, ADM 116/3436.

[832] Chatfield to Eyres-Monsell, 21 June 1934, ADM 116/3436.

the Fleet, the hidden strength of the navy.[833]

The proposals embodied in Chamberlain's memorandum served only to perpetuate this problem. The navy was not the only service to be taken aback at Chamberlain's ideas, as the army General Staff also produced a highly critical paper.[834] In their opinion, the Chancellor's ideas amounted to no less than "placing our possessions, our Dominions and our great trade interests in Eastern waters at the mercy of Japan". Without an adequate fleet, the General Staff pointed out, Singapore would provide no defence "of any sort" to Britain's Far Eastern interests. If Chamberlain's proposals were accepted then the future for the British Empire was ominous: "Under such conditions war with Japan must result in the downfall of this Empire with far more certainty than could result from any attack which Germany could make on these Islands". In addition, the Chancellor's cuts to the DRC's allocation for the Expeditionary Force would, in the opinion of the General Staff, make it "impossible for us to take an effective part in denying the Low Countries to the Germans".

Bolton Eyres-Monsell took up the navy's objections at the first ministerial meeting held to discuss Chamberlain's plan. The First Lord stated quite clearly that they meant an abandonment of the one-power standard.[835] But, he was not alone in his objections, as many others in the Cabinet were not pleased with the implications for the Far East inherent in the proposals put forward by Chamberlain. The battle lines were drawn. Thomas quickly pointed out that significantly reduced expenditure on defence in the Far East would create difficulties with the Dominions. MacDonald and Baldwin also expressed both scepticism about the assumptions behind the plan and concern over its ramifications. The Prime Minister doubted that it was possible to draw as hard and fast a distinction between the Far East and Germany as Chamberlain had done, while Baldwin, like Thomas, was concerned about the effect the plan would have on Australia and New Zealand. Both MacDonald and Baldwin stated that they were more concerned with Japanese actions than they were with the German menace. Hailsham, setting aside the army aspects of Chamberlain proposals, accused the Chancellor of being prepared to abandon the British Empire in the Far East. Eden warned that if Britain remained weak in the Far East then Japan might decide

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[833] Chatfield to Eyres-Monsell, 27 July 1934, ADM 116/3436.

[834] "General Staff Note on DC(M) (32) 120", 21 June 1934, CAB 21/388.

[835] 50 Mtg DC(M), 25 June 1934, CAB 27/507.

not to attack an increasingly well-defended Russia and go instead for the relatively undefended British Empire.[836] The government might have to educate public opinion on this issue, he added. Although Chamberlain sprang to the defence of his proposals, claiming that they did not mean an abandonment of the empire in the Far East, he was clearly on the defensive. He had overplayed his hand and gone too far. It was obvious that his plan, in particular his naval proposals, was not acceptable to the cabinet committee, which rated the Japanese threat more highly than did the Chancellor and which was concerned that the Dominions might come to believe, as Simon stated, that "the old country was going down hill".[837]

The first meeting had exposed so many differences that discussion was held over for second one.[838] This time, Runciman began by outlining his support for the navy's case. Abroad, he argued, Britain was perceived to be weak, and any cancellation or postponement of the naval programme would only exacerbate this problem and create new ones. For example, at the 1935 naval conference, Britain had to be strong. The DRC report could not be ignored. At this point Chamberlain began to muddy the waters somewhat by claiming that no matter what they decided, it would not affect the relative naval strength in the Far East until after 1939. By implication, then, any idea of increasing expenditure on the navy to provide a deterrent to Japan in the short-term would not work. Discussion of the naval proposals did not go far, though, before Hailsham began to explain his manifold objections to Chamberlain's cuts to expenditure on the army. An air force operating from Britain, according to Hailsham, would not be a strong deterrent, while the army, in its current state, was not fit to fight. Sending it into battle would lead to a massacre. The Chancellor's allocation of just under £20 million was far too little. After deducting expenditure for anti-aircraft defences at home, the Singapore defences, and coast defence in general, there was very little left to upgrade the Expeditionary Force. Chamberlain defended his proposals for the army by arguing that he did not claim that the army did not require any additional equipment but merely that he had to make an arbitrary

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[836] In the FO, Eden commented "It would be fatal to British interests to ignore the paramount claims of the Far East, interpreted in terms of British naval power and a defensible Singapore". Eden minute, 29 June 1934, FO 371/18099/F 3508/107/10.

[837] Only Sam Hoare, the Secretary of State for India, who had been the Secretary of State for Air in the second Baldwin government, supported Chamberlain's outright priority for the air force. Pownall Diary, 25 June 1934, in Bond, ed., Chief of Staff, pp. 46-47.

[838] 51 Mtg DC(M), 26 June 1934, CAB 27/507.

cut. All he had done was to stretch out the time over which army deficiencies would be made good. This, he admitted, had been done solely for reasons of finance and internal politics. In his mind, the army was not a deterrent. Rather, it was a force to be used if deterrence failed.

Significantly, no one spoke up in support of the Expeditionary Force, and discussion turned to the air programme, instead.[839] Even the Air Ministry was hesitant about some of Chamberlain's ideas. Londonderry pointed out that an air force built along the lines suggested by Chamberlain would not last long in war, as it would lack sufficient reserves of aircraft and aircraft engines. To equip an 80-squadron HDAF with the necessary reserves would require an additional £10 million in expenditure above Chamberlain's suggested £18.8 million. Chamberlain stuck to his figures for the services, as he was not willing to spend additional money, and in his mind what was important was to have a large number of squadrons up front in order to provide the deterrent effect. By the end of the meeting, it became clear that a new split had emerged over the depth of air force rearmament, and, as a result, Baldwin offered to consult privately with the Chancellor in the hope of finding a basis for further discussions.

Baldwin presented his views a week later.[840] The air question had to be dealt with first, Baldwin stated, because the government had promised the House of Commons a statement on the air force before the House rose for the August recess. Regardless of what was decided about the air programme, he added, they would have to be careful not to make Japan feel that Britain was withdrawing from the Far East. To help facilitate this, he suggested that no statement on the army or navy programmes should be made before the recess and that perhaps this could wait until the discussion of the 1935 estimates. The entire committee agreed to look at the air proposals first, but neither Hailsham nor Eyres-Monsell was willing to delay consideration of his services' programmes until the autumn. The debate over the size of the air programme, nevertheless, proved intractable. Chamberlain was unwilling to devote more money to the RAF; Londonderry warned the committee that an even greater increase in the HDAF might be required, and Eyres-Monsell demanded that an expert committee examine Chamberlain's contention that HDAF aircraft could be transferred to the FAA at will. Predictably, as the committee settled into an apparent impasse, Baldwin proposed that a small sub-committee be set up under his chairmanship to look over

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[839] One observer, although biased towards the army, remarked, "the Army case not such a strong one as the Navy". Pownall Diary, 26 June 1934, in Bond, ed., Chief of Staff, 47.

[840] 52 Mtg DC(M), 2 July 1934, CAB16/110.

the air aspect of Chamberlain's proposals,.

After three meetings, this sub-committee presented its report to the ministerial committee.[841] It concluded that aircraft and personnel were not interchangeable between the FAA and the HDAF. This decision removed one of the principal justifications for Chamberlain's plan, and it also meant that some squadrons would have to be found for the FAA. Stepping somewhat outside its original terms of reference, though, this sub-committee proposed a new, and compromise, expansion programme for the RAF. Over the next five years, 40.5 squadrons would be added, 33 of which would be for the HDAF. Of the remaining squadrons, the committee recommended the allocation of three and a half for the FAA, one for Singapore and one for Hong Kong. This solution redressed the unbalanced nature of Chamberlain's proposals, but only slightly, as it still meant a massive reallocation of resources away from the FAA and Far Eastern defences towards the HDAF. For instance, by giving the FAA only three and a half squadrons, the navy's new aircraft carrier, authorized earlier that year, would only be equipped with half the aircraft (36) that it was designed to carry. To address the Air Ministry's concerns, Baldwin's plan called for the HDAF expansion to 75 squadrons to take place in two stages, over eight years. In stage one, the front-line strength would be brought up over the first five years. The reserves for this force would then be purchased in stage two, over the next three years.

Neither Eyres-Monsell nor Chamberlain was entirely happy with these recommendations.[842] The First Lord pointed out the obvious fact that the FAA still came up 16.5 squadrons short of the figure first proposed by the DRC, while Chamberlain remained convinced that HDAF aircraft could be transferred to the FAA at will, and he wanted this to be tried out. Nevertheless, the remainder of the committee jumped at this apparent compromise, and agreed to recommend its proposals to the Cabinet as the basis for air expansion. As the Cabinet was anxious to announce the RAF programme in Parliament before the summer recess, it considered the Baldwin report before it saw the full DCM report.[843] Despite some minor concerns expressed by the First Lord, the Cabinet accepted Baldwin's air expansion plan of 40.5 squadrons, costing no more than £20 million over five years.

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[841] "Sub-Committee on the Allocation of Air Forces-Report", 11 July 1934, DC(M)(32) 123, CAB 16/111.

[842] 53 Mtg DC(M), 12 July 1934, CAB16/110.

[843] "Interim Report by the Ministerial Committee on Disarmament Dealing with Air Defence", 16 July 1934, CP-193(34), CAB 24/250. Cabinet 29(34), 18 July 1934, CAB 23/79.

With the air expansion programme out of the way, decisions still had to be made on the army and navy proposals. Almost a week after making the final decision on the air programme, the DCM met to consider the army expansion scheme.[844] Hailsham, once again, defended the need for an Expeditionary Force, based on the British interest in maintaining the integrity and independence of Belgium, and he repeated that, after spending money on air defences and coast defences, very little would be left to make up the deficiencies in the Expeditionary Force. As a compromise, Hailsham proposed that the committee should agree to the original DRC figure, but spread it out over a longer time period than five years. The committee, however, was unmoved by the Secretary of State's appeal, and Chamberlain feared public alarm if the government announced too high a figure of expenditure for the army. Instead, the DCM agreed to allocate £20 million for army deficiencies and to allow the CIGS to propose how it should be spent. This plan was ready before the end of the month.[845] Expenditure was divided between the Expeditionary Force, coast defence and the ADGB. The largest casualty was the Territorial Army, which received only £200,000 over four years. The effect of these proposals was to try to allow the army to field within one month what the DRC had termed the "Regular Expeditionary Force", composed of one cavalry division, four infantry divisions, two air defence brigades, one tank brigade along with corps and lines of communication troops. Due to the reduction from the DRC programme, the Territorial Army would be unable to provide a base for an expansion of this initial commitment. Even the Regular Expeditionary Force would, under this plan, still be short £9.5 million in equipment and £4.5 million in ammunition reserves after 1939. Nevertheless, this plan was approved by the DCM at its next meeting, almost as an afterthought.[846] Now, only the naval programme remained to be decided. Unhappy with Chamberlain's proposal to spend only £13 million on naval deficiencies and to cut back on the construction programme, Eyres-Monsell sent up his own memorandum to the committee.[847] In it, he pointed out that, after examining Chamberlain's figures for naval construction, the Admiralty had concluded that the amount allocated for 1935 and 1936 would not be enough to allow any new ships to be started in 1935. As the naval

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[844] 54 Mtg DC(M), 17 July 1934, CAB 16/110..

[845] "Army Requirements", 23 July 1934, DC(M)(32) 127, CAB 16/111.

[846] 55 Mtg DC(M), 24 July 1934, CAB 27/505; Pownall Diary, 24 July 1934, in Bond, ed., Chief of Staff, 48.

[847] "Naval Defence Requirements", 18 July 1934, DC(M)(32) 125, CAB 27/511.

construction question was bound to become a difficult issue, the First Lord suggested that no multi-year building programme should be set out at that time but that naval building should be dealt with through the normal estimates process each year.[848] As well, Eyres-Monsell now attempted to bargain for an additional £4.3 million for naval deficiencies, over the £13 million which Chamberlain had proposed.[849] The latter, however, now took umbrage at the allegation that he had altered the basis of Imperial Defence and that his cuts meant an abandonment of the one-power standard. This, the Chancellor felt, was overstating the case. Chamberlain defended his decision to abandon the construction of new capital ships based on the financial position and his perception of the threats world-wide. Britain could not afford to prepare for war against both Japan and Germany, he reiterated, and since Germany was the greater threat, but had a very small navy, no new capital ships were required. Eyres-Monsell was unable to agree with this last statement. Germany was not the greater menace, he replied. In fact, because Russia had increased her defences in the Far East so significantly, the likelihood that Japan would strike at areas where British interests predominated, instead of north, as they had previously believed, had increased. Eden agreed with Eyres-Monsell that Japan was the greater menace at the moment, as did Baldwin, who labeled her as being in a "mad dog" mood. Once again, as the committee began to arrive at a deadlock on this issue, it was Baldwin who found a compromise. He took up the First Lord's suggestion that the naval construction programme should not be part of the DCM's plan, but rather should be arranged in the normal way. Now, Baldwin extended this idea to include the naval deficiency programme, to which the committee readily agreed.

As the air programme was already out of the way, the final DCM report became somewhat anticlimactic. The Cabinet saw it on July 31, at which point Eyres-Monsell took issue with Baldwin's compromise, for, as he stated, he had never intended for naval deficiencies to be dealt with in the same manner as the naval construction programme.[850] The navy could not wait until January for a final decision on its deficiency programme; instead he wanted to discuss the issue with the Chancellor and come to a final decision by the end of October. Given that the

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[848] This idea had actually first been mooted by Chatfield when he saw that the navy would not get the ideal programme it desired. Instead, he now decided to focus on increasing the 1935 estimates by £4 million. Chatfield to W.W. Fisher, 2 Aug 1934, Chatfield Papers, CHT 4/5.

[849] 55 Mtg DC(M), 24 July 1934, CAB 27/507.

[850] Cabinet 31(34), 31 July 1934, CAB 23/79.

navy had been discussed less than the other services, Baldwin felt that this was a fair proposal and Chamberlain agreed to it. After a few other minor amendments, the final DCM report was approved by the Cabinet.

The DCM report remains one of the more significant defence documents of the inter-war period because it, in essence, reoriented the Imperial Defence priorities of the DRC report, and thereby set the blueprint for British rearmament in the 1930s. In its preamble, the DCM report paid lip service to Imperial Defence and claimed that it reaffirmed the defence priorities as set out by the Cabinet in November 1933.[851] However, in its specific recommendations and in its spending allocation, the DCM report clearly reflected the Eurocentric and air power biases of its principal author, Neville Chamberlain. The army and the RAF each received £20 million. For the RAF, this entailed a switch in priorities from overseas to home defence. For the army, there was a no less significant change, for although money was included for the completion of the Singapore defences, for some work at other ports and for the completion of the first stage of the ADGB, the DCM halved the DRC's proposed expenditure on the Expeditionary Force. However, the DCM had come to the conclusion that Britain had to be capable of some form of intervention on the continent of Europe, especially in the Low Countries, and that this was in keeping with British tradition. However, the committee, feeling that "public opinion here...will be very reluctant to undertake any kind of military commitment on the Continent of Europe", tried to minimize the size of any forces sent to the continent. Hence, its support only for the minimum scheme for the Expeditionary Force. This decision alone would have serious negative consequences for British diplomacy later in the 1930s.

With the adoption of the DCM report, the basis of Imperial Defence was changed, as the priority now was the defence of the metropole and the concept that the defence of Great Britain was a problem essentially interlinked with the defence of the Empire was weakened. Throughout much of the debate in the spring of 1934 the COS kept falling back on the priorities embodied in the DRC report. But, in the end, this strategic vision lost to the views of Fisher, Vansittart and Chamberlain. Of the three, however, Chamberlain was the key. Fisher and Vansittart, as powerful civil servants worked hard to advise the government of their views in their professional capacities, but it was Chamberlain who was able to dominate the Cabinet and impose his version of the country's defence priorities on the government. The question must be asked, however, was Chamberlain (and by extension Fisher and

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[851] "Defence Requirements Report", 31 July 1934, CP-205(34), CAB 24/250.

Vanstittart) correct in his strategic appreciation that Britain could not afford to fight two enemies and had to focus its resources on the German threat and, more specifically, on the air threat?

One of the longest running, and most contentious, debates in British history is over Chamberlain's influence over British rearmament in the 1930s.[852] During the past twenty years there has been a revisionist attempt to salvage some of Chamberlain's battered reputation.[853] As part of this process, many historians have examined his actions in 1933-34 and have come to the conclusion that his views were, as one has concluded, "pragmatic" and that while it was not perfect "it was the more creditable for being achieved in the face of powerful opposition from vested interests, still harking back to an age when Britannia ruled the waves, reluctant to accept the reality of her inevitable retreat from power".[854] Most of this debate, however, has been carried on in a Eurocentric fashion, almost ignoring the imperial and, in particular, Far Eastern, aspects of the problem in 1934. As a result, these works tend to miss the fact that Chamberlain's strategic ideas were based on several fundamentally flawed assumptions.[855] In the European arena, his decision to devote most money to the strategic air deterrent, at the expense of the army and its expeditionary force presupposed that the Germans would interpret the British bomber

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[852] William Rock, Neville Chamerlain,(New York: 1969); Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain, (London: MacMillan, 1947); K. Middlemas, Diplomacy of Illusion: The British Government and Germany, 1937-39, (London: 1972); K. Middlemas and John Barnes, Baldwin, (London: 1969); J.P.D. Dunbabin, "British Rearmament in the 1930s: A Chronology and Review", HJ, 18, 3(1975), 587-609; David J. Wrench, "The Influence of Neville Chamberlain on Foreign and Defence Policy, 1932-1935", JRUSI, 125, 1(1980), 49-57.

[853] Most of this has centred around the financial and industrial problems associated with rearmament and has attempted to minimize the influence of the Treasury in retarding rearmament. Peden, "Warren Fisher and British Rearmament Against Germany"; G.S. Peden, The Treasury and British Rearmament, (Edinburgh, 1979); Gill Bennett, "British Policy in the Far East 1933-1936: Treasury and Foreign Office", MAS, 26, 3(1992), 545-568. An exception to this trend is R.A.C. Parker, Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War, (London: MacMillan, 1993), although it does not deal in any detail with Chamberlain and the DCM.

[854] Peter Bell, Chamberlain, Germany and Japan, 1933-4, (London: MacMillan, 1996), 177-78.

[855] Recently, however, Chamberlain has come in for significant criticism from historians for his sometimes amateurish and dictatorial approach to policy-making. Greg Kennedy, "'Rat in Power': Neville Chamberlain and the Creation of British Foreign Policy, 1931-39", in T.G. Otte, ed., The Makers of British Foreign Policy: From Pitt to Thatcher, (London: Palgrave, 2002); William C. Mills, "Sir Joseph Ball, Adrian Dingli, and Neville Chamberlain's 'Secret Channel' to Italy, 1937-1940", IHR, 24, 2(2002), 278-317.

force as a deterrent force. They did not and the great deterrent became no deterrent at all.[856] Moreover, his insistence on providing as many squadrons up front, as cheaply as possible, meant that the deterrence force he created was not a sufficient war-fighting force. Furthermore, without an adequate army, Britain found its ability to influence European affairs limited

His assumptions about the Far East, however, were the most deeply flawed and, hence, the most dangerous. Chamberlain believed that an agreement with Japan could solve Britain's defence dilemma in the Far East and thereby give it the ability to focus its resources at home. This view exposed the fact that Chamberlain did not really understand why the Anglo-Japanese alliance had been concluded in the first place. It had been signed at a time when both Britain and Japan had a common interest in checking Russian expansion. It was never intended to protect the British Empire from Japan itself, but, in effect, that is what his proposals entailed. Nor did the Chancellor consider what ramifications an Anglo-Japanese rapprochement would have on Britain's relations with the United States and on the overall European situation. Any agreement between Britain and Japan, concluded before the 1935 naval conference, would have angered the Americans and almost certainly torpedoed any hopes for the success of that conference. In the Far East, closer Anglo-Japanese relations might have helped turn Japanese attention toward the Soviet Union and away from British interests. But, this would have forced the Soviet Union to focus its attention on its Far Eastern provinces and thereby lowered its value as a counterweight to Germany in Europe. Furthermore, he did not consider, unlike the FO, what Britain had to offer Japan. The scope was limited, as the FO had pointed out, and concessions in China, which was what Japan really desired, were not a viable option.

Chamberlain assumed that Britain could not afford to fight two great powers simultaneously in widely separate parts of the world. The alternative strategic policy enunciated by Chatfield and the DRC agreed with this assumption, but it differed in the means of preventing a two-front war. It called first for deterring Japan and only then for a realignment of resources against Germany. This was a viable and credible option very much in line with the British tradition of Imperial Defence. This alternative strategy would have provided the Empire with a flexible, balanced and in-depth approach to defence, which would have been capable of being adapted to threats as they

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[856] For criticisms of the concept of air power deterrence prior to the Second World War see R.J. Overy, "Air Power and the Origins of Deterrence Theory before 1939", JSS, 15, 1(1992), 73-101; Jeffrey L. Hughes, "The Origins of World War II in Europe: British Deterrence Failure and German Expansionism", JIH, 18, 4(1988), 851-891.

changed over the decade. It is difficult not to come to the conclusion that, by abandoning the DRC report in favour of Chamberlain's strategic vision, a great opportunity was lost. Chamberlain's desire to limit Britain's liabilities drove his strategic policy. But, a great power can limit its liabilities only at a cost and only so far, as he would discover in September 1939. Unfortunately, the cost of Chamberlain's Eurocentric approach would be the loss of the Britain's Far Eastern empire in 1941-42.

Conclusion

After the final, post-war European settlement at Locarno, the possibility of a continental threat to Great Britain diminished. Outside of Europe, this was not the case and the immediate post-Locarno period saw a recrudescence of concern over the Russian, now Soviet, threat to the Empire. There were genuine fears of communist subversion throughout the Empire and concerns that such stealthy expansion would bring the Soviet threat nearer to India. In China, the close link between the communist and nationalist movements prior to Chian Kai-shek's purges led many British policy-makers to consider this another theatre of Soviet expansion by proxy. However, when confronted with a direct challenge after the Hankow incident, the Baldwin government responded in a resolute, yet restrained, fashion by sending a division of troops to defend the International Settlement at Shanghai. This action was a classic example of the use of the Imperial Defence system to protect British interests. Elsewhere, the Urta Tagai incident eventually led to another examination of the problems surrounding the defence of India. However, this renewal of the Great Game did not last for long as, by 1928, even this threat had receded as a serious concern.

As a result, the Imperial Defence problems of the mid to late 1920s were reminiscent of those of the late-Victorian period, although there were some important differences. The League of Nations had been established after the war to try to regulate international relations and, coincident with this, there was a strong movement for disarmament. But, as in late-Victorian times, there were no major, external threats to the Empire. Nevertheless, during this period of calm, debate over Imperial Defence did not stop. After the First World War, the United States had grown to be a major power with large naval aspirations. Balancing between the American desire to reach naval parity with Britain while maintaining the Royal Navy's position in respect to other powers such as Japan was a difficult challenge for British policy-makers. Further complicating this was the need to appease domestic and international calls for further disarmament. This challenge was met in 1930 by the conclusion of the highly successful London Naval Conference. The discussion of naval disarmament highlighted the fact that sea communications continued to be the arteries of Empire and their protection remained the first role of Imperial Defence. For this reason, the Royal Navy remained the pre-eminent defence service, even though the army and the new RAF had a large call on finances as well. The

maintenance of Britain's relative naval strength, of her defended ports and of the new, aerial links of the Empire were the dominant topics of Imperial Defence debate in these years; debates which were held against a backdrop of disarmament discussions, economic depression and declining service estimates.

By 1933, the Imperial Defence system was under tremendous strain. It was still capable of meeting the day-to-day defence needs of the Empire, particularly in quelling internal unrest, but the Manchurian Crisis of 1931 and the Shanghai Crisis of 1932 exposed the fact that the system was not prepared to meet a first-class, modern enemy. The mobilization schemes of the three services could not be rapidly implemented, and each service lacked a large amount of modern armament. The 1932 Shanghai Crisis, in particular, demonstrated that, in the future, there might be very little time after the onset of a crisis to upgrade Imperial Defences. In this new environment, the defence services had to be able to respond immediately should a threat arise. Consequently, the COS took the lead in demanding additional money both to improve the defensive network in the Far East and, over the long term, to speed up their ability to mobilize. However, the lingering effects of the financial crisis of 1931 left the government reluctant to commit itself to a significant increase in defence spending. It still hoped to use the World Disarmament Conference actually to reduce defence expenditure. As it became clear that the Disarmament Conference would collapse, and that Germany would rearm regardless of what transpired at Geneva, the British government was confronted with the unpleasant possibility of facing two serious threats at opposite ends of the globe.

The COS's solution to this problem, embodied in the DRC report, was to improve Imperial Defences generally and to provide Britain with air, land and sea forces able to meet a modern enemy quickly and that possessed the reserves necessary to continue the fight until industrial production could increase to meet the needs of war. This, they hoped, would provide an overall level of deterrence. More specifically, by initially allocating the bulk of expenditure on improving defensive measures in the Far East, they hoped to demonstrate to Japan that Britain intended to maintain her position in that area. The COS hoped that once this became clear to the Japanese then some kind of agreement might follow in the Far East that would allow Britain to focus on the German threat, which they estimated would take five years to mature. The DRC report was also an effective compromise between the need to expand British forces and the COS's concern that, due to rapid

technological change, quick and large-scale expansion would saddle the services with obsolete equipment.

When presented with the DRC report, the Cabinet found itself unable to arrive at a decision. Ministers recognized that some level of rearmament was necessary, but they still wanted to limit it as much as possible. Moreover, they were unable to decide whether or not the DRC course was the right one. Their indecision was compounded by the lack of direction from the Foreign Secretary. As a Liberal, Simon was in a weak position in Cabinet. He further weakened his standing by being unable to provide any recommendation to the Cabinet as to what course it should take. Rather, he tended to present the Cabinet with numerous options, and left it to the other Ministers to decide which one was preferable. Simon's prevarication left a vacuum and Neville Chamberlain took advantage of this to present his ideas on defence and foreign policy. His original vision of near complete withdrawal from the Far East was too radical, even for the National government, but he was able to impose the essence of his views on the Cabinet. DRC expenditure was cut and was reoriented toward providing an air deterrent to Germany. All other measures were secondary. This decision set the foundation for British rearmament. As for the Far East, the British position would be secured by an agreement with Japan. By the London Naval Conference of 1935, however, Chamberlain's policy of accommodation with Japan had failed.

Historians have tended to agree with Chamberlain's emphasis on the need to address the German threat, if not with his decision to focus on air rearmament. The DRC report has been castigated for not setting any defence priorities and for presenting the Cabinet with little more than a shopping list for each service. This is to misunderstand the basis of the DRC report, which actually presented a global vision of Britain's defence requirements, not a Eurocentric one, such as did Chamberlain. The COS desired a balanced and in depth approach to improving Imperial Defences. It is true that this approach was built around programmes that each service had mooted since the early 1920s. But, in aggregate, these programmes provided balanced defence forces, something which Chamberlain's programme did not. The COS also understood that without adequate defences in the Far East, Britain's diplomatic position vis à vis Japan would remain weak. This was the opposite of what Chamberlain and the Treasury believed. In their opinion, Japan was held in check by her fear of Russia, and an agreement with Japan would avoid the necessity of large outlays for Imperial Defence.

This was tantamount to the piglets asking the wolf to look after their house. Some historians have criticized the COS input into the DRC process for lacking strategic vision.[857] In fact, it was the Treasury that lacked any strategic flexibility. Throughout the period covered in this thesis, the Treasury maintained a consistent attitude that war with Japan was unlikely and that Britain could avoid it by coming to a new agreement with Japan that would amount to a renewal of the Anglo-Japanese alliance. The Treasury maintained this view even after circumstances in the Far East had radically changed after 1931 and it was based on a fundamental misreading of the purpose behind the original alliance. The decision to reorient defence against Germany was based not just on Chamberlain's and the Treasury's perception of the Japanese threat, but also in response to their belief that there was a public clamour in Britain 'to do something' significant in the air. Here, instead of leading and educating public opinion, the Cabinet succumbed to their perceptions of public opinion.

The DRC report was in line with traditional thinking about Imperial Defence, thinking which stressed the inter-connected nature of Britain's defence problem; that is, that the defence of the Mother Country was closely tied to the defence of the Empire and, especially, to her sea communications. Chamberlain rejected this by arguing that Britain could no longer afford to defend her Empire, and yet he then proceeded to convince the government to spend even larger amounts than the DRC had envisaged on a fruitless pursuit of aerial deterrence. If the DRC report had been accepted, would it have prevented the catastrophes that befell the British Empire? This is a speculative question, and can be answered only speculatively. Acceptance of the DRC report would, however, had given the British government a great deal more flexibility in meeting the crises of the 1930s. During the debates over naval disarmament, the RN had always argued that British naval strength was not relative to that of other powers but that there was an absolute measure of strength required to defend the Empire. Chamberlain's approach to air rearmament rejected this argument, for it tied British air strength primarily to the strength of the *Luftwaffe*, which meant that British policy became reactive and burdened by its reliance on, sometimes wildly inaccurate, estimates of German air strength.

The DRC approach to improving Imperial Defence was based on a much clearer understanding of the seriousness of the Japanese threat to the Empire than that possessed by Chamberlain and the Treasury. One of

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[857] In particular, Wark, Ultimate Enemy.

the underlying forces in Imperial Defence policy after 1919 had been the Royal Navy's desire to reorient the system to allow Britain to respond to a first-class rival on the periphery of the Empire, namely Japan. Over the centuries Britain had shown itself capable of handling continental threats through a combination of alliances and by calling on the resources of the Empire. Dealing with a first-class enemy on the periphery of Empire was a very different matter altogether. Previously, only Russia had posed a threat so far removed from the metropole and this had been met through the expediency of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Although this threat re-emerged in the mid-1920s, it quickly dissipated before Britain was confronted with difficult decisions. It was recognized that the United States was an obvious potential ally but there were serious reservations among British policy-makers over its reliability. As a result, after the end of the Anglo-Japanese alliance Britain had to be capable of protecting her interests in the Far East with her own resources. From this came the navy's plan for moving the fleet to Singapore, which was an ambitious and expensive project involving a very serious reorientation and reallocation of resources for an Imperial Defence system originally developed to support Britain in a European war. In the peaceful climate of the 1920s, these plans for building up the defence infrastructure in the Far East, and for developing concomitant programmes such as the oil fuel reserve and cruiser construction were never fully developed. Even the keystone project in this Imperial Defence architecture, the Singapore naval base, was continually delayed and its scope was scaled back.

Given the generally peaceful climate of the mid-1920s and the need for social spending at home, this is understandable. The cutbacks of 1930-31 can also be understood for, if the government felt it necessary to cut unemployment insurance, then surely the defence services could not hope to escape a severe reduction. It is thus difficult to fault these periods for causing Britain's defence dilemma in the late 1930s. The heart of the problem lies in the decisions made in 1933-34 to focus rearmament on the physically near, yet temporally distant, German threat. These decisions were made by a government panicked by perceived German aerial rearmament and lacking in Imperial vision. There were no men with an imperial outlook such as Balfour, Lansdowne or even Churchill and Austen Chamberlain. Instead, the Cabinet accepted Neville Chamberlain's 'little Englander' ideas and Imperial Defence became continental defence.

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