

**Imperial Defense and the 'Ultimate Potential Enemy': British Foreign
Policy and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement,
1930-1935**

By

Geoffrey R. Hamm
B.A.(Honors) Simon Fraser University 2000

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts
In the Department of History

© Geoff Hamm 2003
Simon Fraser University
October 2003

All rights reserved. This work may not be
reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy
or other means, without permission of the author.

APPROVAL

Name: Geoff Hamm
Degree: Master of Arts
Title of Thesis: Imperial Defense and the 'Ultimate Potential Enemy': The Anglo-German Naval Agreement and British Foreign Policy, 1930-1935.

Examining Committee:

Chair: Dr. Derryl MacLean
Associate Professor

Dr. Martin Kitchen
Senior Supervisor
Professor Emeritus

Dr. Richard K. Debo
Supervisor
Professor Emeritus

Dr. John Stubbs
Supervisor
Associate Professor

Dr. George Egerton
External Examiner
Professor
History
University of British Columbia

Date Approved: October 1, 2003

PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENCE

I hereby grant to Simon Fraser University the right to lend my thesis, project or extended essay (the title of which is shown below) to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for multiple copying of this work for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or the Dean of Graduate Studies. It is understood that copying or publication of this work for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis/Project/Extended Essays:

Imperial Defense and the 'Ultimate Potential Enemy': The Anglo-German Naval Agreement and British Foreign Policy, 1930-1935

Author:

(Signature)

Geoffrey R. Hamm

Oct 14/03

(Date Signed)

Abstract

The 1935 Anglo-German Naval Agreement has been given short shrift by historians of European diplomacy. Most are quick to label it a fine example of appeasement in the Munich tradition before moving on. Yet such superficial treatment does not do justice to the importance of the agreement. Indeed, Hitler himself declared the signing of the agreement one of the happiest days of his life.

Close scrutiny reveals that the motivations behind the agreement concerned themselves more with maintenance of existing global ratios of naval tonnage, in an effort to protect Britain's sprawling imperial possessions, than with throwing a mad dog a bone hoping that would forestall war. It was an effort to preserve the naval ratios created at Washington and reaffirmed at London in 1930 by bringing Germany into the European sphere of naval limitation in order to equip the Admiralty to meet the Japanese threat. Although the report of the Defence Requirements Sub-Committee in 1934 designated Germany as Britain's 'ultimate potential enemy', towards whom defense preparations should be made, the agreement was intended to strengthen Britain's attempt to perpetuate the inferior Japanese naval ratio at the upcoming second London Naval Conference slated for 1935. By securing general agreement on naval limitation among the principal European powers, Britain hoped to present Japan with a strong diplomatic front capable of coercing the Japanese to abandon their claims to naval parity.

Although the principal bureaus concerned with defense, the Admiralty, Treasury and Foreign Office, all recognized the importance of containing the Japanese, their proposals for doing so differed widely. In the naval agreement all three diverging opinions converge together, unanimously supporting its conclusion, though each for different reasons. This thesis demonstrates that in the realm of domestic politics, as well as that of foreign policy, the Anglo-German Naval Agreement holds a greater significance than previous historians have allotted it. That the diplomatic front sought by Whitehall, and the second London Naval Conference, failed should not prevent a clearer

understanding of the incentives which led Great Britain to conclude an agreement with the depraved reprobates of Nazi Germany.

Dedication

I recognise that the strains of graduate school have often made me a difficult person to live with. My family bore this burden with great patience, offering in return only unconditional love and support. The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without their sacrifices, and I dedicate this to them.

Acknowledgements

There is no more appropriate description of my time in the graduate programme at Simon Fraser University than the old adage 'no man is an island.' I am acutely aware of the debt I owe to so many I have encountered in my time here, and as the completion of this thesis brings to a close my time as a graduate student the list of those who deserve recognition is long.

Martin Kitchen has been a constant source of inspiration and encouragement. It has been a privilege and a pleasure to work under his supervision. Graduate school would have been 'Kind of Blue' without him.

John Stubbs has consistently gone above and beyond the call of duty on my behalf. The diligence with which he applies himself to his teaching and supervision is admirable. I am grateful for all of his efforts.

Richard Debo introduced me to diplomatic history in an undergraduate class many years ago. I have been captivated by it ever since. His encouragement and good humour often gave me a lift on days when the weight of the thesis on my shoulders was greater than the sum of its pages.

The administrative staff of the History Department has been of invaluable assistance with everything from last minute changes to the thesis defence, to getting my classrooms changed, to letting me into my office when I had locked myself out.

Scott Mackenzie and the staff at Interlibrary Loans procured valuable reels of Cabinet microfilm for my research.

Ian Dyck, Paul Dutton and Hilmar Pabel have graciously put up with a cheeky TA. They were a pleasure to work for; I could not have wished for a better apprenticeship.

John Craig has always been particularly generous with his time, and immensely entertaining. His tireless work ethic continues to motivate me.

The completion of this thesis and the graduate programme would not have been possible without the good humour and support of many colleagues and friends, both on the hill and off. I count myself lucky to list you all as such, and you have my deepest thanks.

Glenn Graham, Jeff Beglaw, Sean Kelly, Dan Hogan and Sim Paravantes are fellow 'vulgar empiricists'; I keep good company.

Karen Routledge, Amanda Parker and my favourite 'Brie and Chablis' socialist Andrea Gill have all been my Trivial Pursuit partners. It has been an honour to lose so often to such worthy opponents.

Lauren Faulkner and Ursula Gurney continue to raise the bar of academic achievement. One day I hope to measure up.

The Grand Duchess Kristina Sophie of Oldenburg, Trevor Smith and Beth Dixon have so often been there for a good chuckle or a hearty laugh when I needed it most.

Greg Kozak has been a good friend with a mischievous sense of humour. The appearances of Kenneth Clark and Monty Python anonymously on my office door serve as a reminder of that.

Darren Williamson has been a great source of Christian encouragement and a blessing in so many ways.

Dino Rossi, John Munro and Joshua Dougherty made History 814 a great deal of fun for me; I enjoyed enormously the many opportunities we had for intense and friendly debate on a wide variety of subjects both within the classroom and without.

Tammy McCurry, Larissa Horne, Alisa Webb and Elizabeth Byrne have been wonderful friends. I could not imagine what graduate school would have been like without them.

It has been a privilege to know Amanda Hall, Andrew Leung, Jessica Fransen, Caitlin Inkster, Liberty Erickson, Michal Ruhr, Jaclyn Arduini, Kathrin Brockmann, Alicia Richards and Jenn Keefe. They helped make my experience as a TA that much more enjoyable.

Parminder and the staff at Renaissance Coffee brightened so many mornings with a cheerful smile and a splendid cup of coffee.

Andrea Turkington helped me tread water on many days when I thought I was going to drown. She was always a welcome respite from the pressures of studying.

Heather Watkins was always available when I needed a listening ear to vent or complain to. I did much of both; her patience has been unfailing.

Bryce Yakiwchuk encouraged and supported me every step of the way. His joy and enthusiasm are contagious, and a remarkable example.

Ramon Klose extended his gracious hospitality to me on many evenings when I needed to forget about the thesis for a while.

The members of my Monday night Bible study have been stalwart in their friendship and their prayers. I covet them both.

My sincerest thanks to you all; I am deeply in your debt.

Table of Contents

TITLE PAGE.....	i
APPROVAL PAGE.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE: 1930-1932.....	8
THE LONDON NAVAL CONFERENCE AND THE ONE-POWER STANDARD.....	8
CRISIS IN THE FAR EAST: MANCHURIA AND SHANGHAI	17
THE TEN-YEAR RULE.....	21
THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.....	27
THE NAVAL BALANCE OF POWER	30
THE GENEVA DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE	37
CHAPTER TWO: 1933.....	45
CHATFIELD.....	45
JAPAN AND THE FAR EAST.....	47
GERMANY.....	53
THE DETERIORATING INTERNATIONAL SITUATION.....	60
POLICY DEBATES AND THE DRC.....	63
CHAPTER THREE: 1934.....	70
THE DC(M) AND THE DRC REPORT	70
ANGLO-JAPANESE RELATIONS.....	77
THE NAVAL QUESTION.....	85
THE DETERIORATING NAVAL AND INTERNATIONAL SITUATION	98
CHAPTER FOUR: 1935.....	103
JANUARY TO MARCH.....	103
MARCH TO JUNE.....	106
EPILOGUE	118
CONCLUSION.....	124
BIBLIOGRAPHY	132
PRIMARY SOURCES.....	132
<i>Unpublished Sources</i>	132
<i>Published Sources</i>	132
SECONDARY SOURCES.....	134
<i>Books</i>	134
<i>Articles</i>	141

Introduction

In 1933 Sir Eric Phipps, the British ambassador in Berlin, discussed with Hitler the question of German rearmament and in particular the rebuilding of the German fleet. Hitler informed Phipps that Germany would ultimately seek a fleet that would have 35% of the Royal Navy's tonnage. In his subsequent report of the conversation to the Foreign Office in London Phipps, whose despatches are often described as containing more wit than warning declared Hitler's ratio to be 'prodigiously greedy' saying he had shut his ears and pretended not to hear.¹ Two years later the signing of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement condoned the construction of the German surface fleet to the 35% figure that had so appalled the British ambassador. This apparent reversal was not due to Britain's policy of appeasement, poor judgement, or the uncompromising nature of German negotiations; it was an attempt by Great Britain to maintain the margin of naval superiority over their most likely enemy as had been established by the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty.

The immediate threat in 1935 was not Germany but Japan. Japanese aggression in Asia posed a real and very serious threat to British interests there, and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement must be seen in the context of Britain's Imperial Defence policy. More specifically, Britain's inability to achieve a diplomatic solution to the Japanese problem made the possibility of a bilateral agreement with Germany far more attractive. Such a treaty made the prospect of sending a fleet to the Far East far more palatable in the knowledge that security had been attained in home waters.

History has not been kind to the Anglo-German Naval Agreement. For many years it lay largely neglected in historical scholarship, often receiving only passing mention in monographs and articles. There is to date only one full-length book in

¹ Sir E. Phipps (Berlin) to Mr. Sargent, 13 December 1934. *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Ser. 2, Vol. 12 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office), 323-324. (Henceforth abbreviated *DBFP*) This was not the first time Phipps had heard of Hitler's wish, but it is the ambassador's most colourful record of it.

English on the subject, Éva Haraszti's *Treaty-breakers or "Realpolitiker"?* The standard treatment of the agreement has been found in Stephen Roskill's *Naval Policy Between the Wars*; an ambitious but excellent book whose only drawback is perhaps that it is now somewhat out of date. To be fair, the agreement is a short episode in European history, and it would be presumptuous to claim that it was a momentous piece of diplomacy alongside Rapallo or Locarno in importance. However that is not to say that the agreement was insignificant, and it deserves closer scrutiny than it has been given. Past treatments of the accord have given it mostly passing mention in a longer discourse on the decline of British seapower. Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, for example, mentions the agreement on one page in his chapter on the inter-war period entitled 'The Years of Decay'.²

Historians who have given the agreement a longer look than that have often labelled it a mistake, or else a shining example of appeasement in the best Munich tradition. Corelli Barnett writes of the agreement negotiations that they were not negotiations at all, that there was no question of discussing the matter but only of Ribbentrop demanding that Great Britain recognise Hitler's decision on the 35% ratio.³

When the British haplessly squirmed in an effort to contest this piece of dictation and yet still save the conference, Ribbentrop simply repeated again and again his demand: England was to give 'a clear and formal recognition of the decision taken by Herr Hitler in laying down a 35:100 ratio between the two countries'.... Yet Simon, on behalf of England, caved in and accepted it.... This abject surrender was the culmination of all the defeats the British had sustained at German hands between March and June 1935. It marked the consummation of a complete German moral ascendancy over the British, already disastrous in its results, but even more fateful for the future.⁴

Barnett rightly describes this as a preposterously arrogant demand but it does not necessarily follow that the agreement amounted to a failure of British policy, or a policy

² Éva H. Haraszti, *Treaty-breakers or "Realpolitiker"?* *The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June 1935*. (Boppard am Rhein: H. Boldt, 1974), Stephen Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars, Vol. 2: The Period of Reluctant Rearmament, 1930-1939*. (London: Collins, 1976) and Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*. (New York: Scribner, 1976).

³ Corelli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*. (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), 407.

⁴ *Ibid*, 407.

of appeasement. His analysis fails to take into account the Imperial aspect of British strategic policy and the Japanese threat, and that the arrogance of Ribbentrop's negotiating tactics had more to do with Ribbentrop himself than with any failure of British policy.

G.A.H. Gordon claims that with 'the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June 1935, the Admiralty was clearly leading Whitehall in appeasement.'⁵ Paul Haggie suggests that the agreement is one of the greatest mistakes of British diplomacy in the inter-war years, and Keith Neilson concurs with Peter Bell's assessment that Neville Chamberlain's time as Chancellor of the Exchequer represented an early manifestation of Appeasement.⁶ Roskill, for his part, describes the agreement thus:

But it is now plain that they [the British] were in fact rushed into an agreement with somewhat unseemly haste, since at the very first meeting Ribbentrop took an extremely intransigent line, insisting that the British must 'recognise the 35% ratio as fixed and unalterable' if the conversations were to proceed.⁷

And the eminent historian D.C. Watt, while presenting a more balanced view of the negotiations in an earlier time than many have done since, likewise considers the agreement to have been of rather dubious value. He writes 'If the agreement's effects in the diplomatic field were disastrous, it is arguable whether it was even a success from the strategic point of view.'⁸ Watt concludes his article with a damning indictment of the agreement and of the British policy makers who authored it:

The conclusion of the agreement is a sad comment on the order of priorities held by the Conservative government, on the admiralty's assessment of the weakness and needs of British sea power, on the failure

⁵ G.A.H. Gordon, 'The British Navy, 1918-1945', in Keith Neilson and Elizabeth Jane Errington eds., *Navies and Global Defence: Theories and Strategy*. (Westport: Praeger, 1995), 166.

⁶ Paul Haggie, *Britannia at Bay: The Defence of the British Empire against Japan, 1931-1941*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 77, Keith Neilson, 'The Defence Requirements Sub-Committee, British Strategic Foreign Policy, Neville Chamberlain and the Path to Appeasement', *English Historical Review*, 118, 477 (June 2003), 681 and Peter Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan, 1933-1934*. (Houndmills: MacMillan, 1996).

⁷ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 303.

⁸ D.C. Watt, 'The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935: An Interim Judgement', *Journal of Modern History*, 28, 2 (1956), 171.

and eclipse of the foreign office, and on the resulting lack of thought given to diplomatic considerations in the decade before the war.⁹

In recent years a younger generation of historians has been more cautious in their treatment of the accord, refusing to so quickly dismiss the agreement as a British failure. Re-examinations of British strategic foreign policy have led to a better understanding of the agreement in the context of a proactive policy aimed at preserving Britain's place in the world, rather than a desperate, flailing grasp at a shadow of former greatness. Of this new generation, perhaps the most perceptive judgement on the agreement comes from Joseph Maiolo in his book *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany*. The 35% figure was, Maiolo explains, the largest tonnage level the Admiralty calculated that they could allow for any European fleet. They rightly figured that Germany would seek to expand to that level by 1942. The Admiralty's knowledge of German construction, as chapter three of this thesis shows, was fairly accurate. Thus the decision to accept Hitler's offer of a German fleet 35% the size of the Royal Navy was an attempt by the Naval Staff to achieve its long-term strategic programme.¹⁰ Christopher Bell, Clare Scammell, and Reynolds Salerno are also part of the renaissance in this scholarship on British strategic foreign policy, though the latter, in this instance, lends perhaps too much weight to the role of Italy.¹¹

The entire period of the early and middle 1930s has benefited from a flood of new scholarship. However much of the new scholarship is compartmentalised, preventing a thorough understanding of the Imperial vision in British foreign policy from about 1930 to 1937. Maiolo's focus is on the relationship between the Royal Navy and Hitler's

⁹ *Ibid*, 174.

¹⁰ Joseph A. Maiolo, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939: A Study in Appeasement and the Origins of the Second World War*. (London: MacMillan, 1998), 31. See also his article 'The Admiralty and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 18 June, 1935', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 10, 1 (March 1999), 87-126.

¹¹ Christopher Bell, *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy Between the Wars*. (Houndmills: MacMillan, 2000); Clare M. Scammell, 'The Royal Navy and the Strategic Origins of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 20, 2 (June 1997), 92-118; Reynolds M. Salerno, 'Multilateral Strategy and Diplomacy: The Anglo-German Naval Agreement and the Mediterranean Crisis, 1935-1936', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 17, 2 (June 1994), 39-78 and his new book *Vital Crossroads: Mediterranean Origins of the Second World War, 1935-1940*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

Germany; Salerno's is on the Mediterranean. Christopher Bell offers an engaging analysis of naval policy in the inter-war period, but his focus is on the navy, not the broader contours of policy. Michael Roi has written a very good study of British foreign policy, but his principal subject is the Permanent Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, Sir Robert Vansittart. Gaines Post Jr. authored an important book on Cabinet policy making, but his primary focus is on the relationship between domestic politics and the formulation of foreign policy, and Keith Neilson has recently published a very good study of British strategic foreign policy, though I do not agree with some of his conclusions.¹² All of these studies are very good, and one can hardly fault their authors for their choice of subjects, but there remains something of a gap in the literature. The Anglo-German Naval Agreement sits at the centre of a web of factors that encompass domestic politics, interdepartmental quarrels, naval policy, foreign policy and geopolitics. In particular, the role of the Japanese has been underplayed in the existing literature, to the detriment of our understanding. This thesis pays more attention to Britain as an Imperial power, not simply a European one, in the interwar period, stressing the relationship between events in the Far East and in Europe. By emphasising the British preoccupation with the global balance of naval power, their attempt to maintain the balance by treaty and to use a bilateral agreement with Germany to this end, this thesis makes an important contribution to the existing literature on British foreign policy. It is by no means the definitive or final word on the subject, and it can in no wise hope to fill all the gaps; I hope it will be a step in that direction.

If the classification of the naval agreement as part of the appeasement policy is to be challenged, it would be best to explain exactly what is meant by appeasement, for the word is slippery and frequent use has rendered its meaning unclear. Appeasement is most often thought of in terms of the Munich tradition: guilty men, lacking in moral fibre, offering Hitler whatever he wanted in the vain hope that their actions would preserve the

¹² Michael L. Roi, *Alternative to Appeasement: Sir Robert Vansittart and Alliance Diplomacy, 1934-1937*. (Westport: Praeger, 1997); Gaines Post Jr., *Dilemmas of Appeasement: British Deterrence and Defence, 1934-1937*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) and Neilson, *Op cit*. Neilson's treatment of Neville Chamberlain and the Defence Requirements Sub-committee is particularly good, though at the end of the article he arrives at the somewhat surprising conclusion, given his argument throughout, that the Anglo-German Naval Agreement was part of the Munich tradition of appeasement.

tenuous peace of Europe and avert war; they acted out of fear. Winston Churchill famously described an appeaser as one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last. But the word has more than meaning than that with which the Munich tradition has endowed it. In the 1920s, and indeed in earlier times, appeasement was a policy by which Britain sought to remove enemies and strategic threats by shrewd diplomacy not frightened concessions. One may therefore rightly say that the Anglo-German Naval Agreement was part of a policy of appeasement, if by that one means that it was an attempt by Whitehall to remove the German threat to the Empire through diplomacy. It was not a concession granted to Hitler out of fear. At no time did the Royal Navy fear a resurgent German fleet, nor did they fear German U-boats, though they would come to. This thesis demonstrates that the agreement was concluded because it fitted British strategic calculations, and because it was part of a longer term policy dating back at least as far as the 1922 Washington Naval Conference, aimed at maintaining Britain's pre-eminent position in the world in the wake of the Great War.

Chapter one begins in 1930 with the London Naval Conference. The conference marks a departure point for the rest of the decade. The London Conference sought to extend the limits agreed upon in 1922, but the path to agreement was a rocky one, and the resulting London Naval Treaty openly revealed the dissatisfactions of the lesser naval powers. As the decade wore on and the number of strategic threats that Britain had to juggle increased, the Treaty served as the reference point for the grievances of the lesser Powers. 1930 was the last, relatively crisis free year, before the Second World War. In 1931 violence erupted in Manchuria, in 1932 at Shanghai. Efforts at disarmament proved vain, and Japan, which had served as the basis for many of the Admiralty's strategic calculations in the 1920s, emerged as the most likely enemy the British Empire would have to face.

Chapter two concentrates on 1933 as the year when Hitler came to power and Anglo-Japanese relations continued to deteriorate. Failed attempts to reintegrate Germany into the international community, and come to some arrangement with Japan in the Far East led policy makers in London to create the Defence Requirements Committee,

a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence. Its task was to evaluate the various strategic threats facing Britain and formulate a comprehensive policy to deal with them.

The committee's report and the ramifications of it throughout 1934 are the subject of chapter three. Neville Chamberlain's rejection of its conclusions led to the attempted implementation of an agreement with Japan in order to meet the German threat closer to home; this was essentially a reversal of the committee's conclusions. Throughout 1934 attempts to solve the Far Eastern crisis through a *rapprochement* in Anglo-Japanese relations ultimately came to nought. All the while the naval situation worsened. As the date for the next naval conference loomed, lesser naval powers grew adamant that they would not accept the type of treaty limitations they had in 1930. Faced with a failure to achieve *rapprochement* with Japan and the ever increasing threat of a naval race among European powers, the decision was taken at the end of 1934 to abandon Chamberlain's policy and return to the suggestions proffered by the DRC report.

1935, the final chapter, focuses closely on the reasons behind the decision to sign the naval agreement with Germany, ending shortly before the explosion of the Abyssinian Crisis, which wrecked the strategic calculations upon which the DRC report and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement had been based. 1935 offers a logical place to end the thesis, as it marks in some ways the end of an era. The Anglo-German Naval Agreement may be the last act of appeasement in the positive sense of the word, before fear overshadowed shrewd calculation as the basis for so many foreign policy decisions.

Chapter One: 1930-1932

The London Naval Conference and the One-Power Standard

The path of diplomacy that ultimately led to the signing of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement began at the 1930 London Naval Conference. The Conference was supposed to further the work of naval limitation and disarmament begun at Washington in 1922, and continued without success at Geneva in 1927. At London, and subsequently throughout the 1930s, British policy was faced with a paradox: the belief that an arms race in the years before 1914 had led to the Great War had led subsequent British governments into a policy of arms reduction; the commitments of guarding and maintaining an empire that spanned the globe on the other hand, required a certain measure of naval strength to safeguard British trade and security interests against the hostility of another power. The Washington Treaty had resolved this problem by guaranteeing Britain a One-Power Standard against Japan, its only possible naval opponent.

The old Two-Power Standard was first used in the nineteenth century to describe a British fleet capable of engaging the second and third most powerful fleets in the world, at that time France and Russia, in battle simultaneously. The One-Power Standard was a fleet superior to the next largest naval power with a thin margin to act as a deterrent to a third power. This was the fleet that had been created by treaty in 1922. Naval standards can be misleading however, and the tonnage ratios established at Washington and in particular the 5:5:3 capital ship ratio for Great Britain, the United States and Japan do not suffice to describe British seapower during the 1920s.¹ In May 1929, the Deputy Chief

¹ Christopher Bell provides an excellent discussion of how naval standards have changed and been interpreted by the Admiralty and by politicians in Chapter 1 of his book *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy Between the Wars*. (Houndmills: MacMillan, 2000).

of Naval Staff (DCNS) Admiral W.W. Fisher circulated a comprehensive 'Summary of Admiralty Policy' in which he described the current One-Power Standard as the maintenance of 'such strength as will ensure adequate security for British territory, together with freedom of sea passage to and from all parts of the Empire.'² Fisher reasoned that since war with America was not a consideration, and Japan was the next largest naval power, 'War in the Far East must form the general basis on which preparations are made.'³ In this vein, Fisher emphasised the importance of completing the naval base at Singapore on the 'truncated scheme' adopted by the Cabinet in 1926, and the stockpiling of oil reserves and other war materials.⁴ The Admiralty's view of the One-Power Standard against Japan meant more than just ships; it was a whole scheme of naval defence that included ships, bases, stores and supplies and manpower.

The base at Singapore was a vital component of naval security in the Far East, ranking with Suez and the Cape of Good Hope as one of the lynchpins of the British Empire; if it fell to a hostile power, communications between Great Britain and Australasia would be severed, and the Royal Navy left without a base of operations in the Far East.⁵ Britain possessed no dockyards for capital ships east of Malta, making the development of Singapore essential to the operations and mobility of any fleet sent to the Far East. A Cabinet Memorandum circulated in May 1930 noted a lack of oil along the eastern route, adding that there were not enough oil tankers in the world to take the main

² Stephen Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars, Vol. 2: The Period of Reluctant Rearmament, 1930-1939*. (London: Collins, 1976), 21.

³ *Ibid*, 22.

⁴ Christopher Bell, *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy*, 20. The Singapore scheme was first proposed by the Admiralty in 1921, though the first funds were not voted on until 1923 under the 1923-1924 naval estimates. The initial cost of the base, fortifications and supply reserves for an eastern fleet was estimated to be approximately £25.5 million. Work on the base was halted by the Labour government in 1924, and resumed again in a reduced capacity (the 'truncated scheme') by the Conservatives in 1926. In 1929 Labour again sought to curtail spending on Singapore, but by that time it would have been more expensive to cancel building and engineering contracts than to allow work to proceed. Work continued slowly throughout the 1930s. The dockyards opened in 1938, but the base was never finished and construction was still underway on the eve of war in 1940-1941. See James Neidpath, *The Singapore Naval Base and the Defence of Britain's Eastern Empire, 1919-1941*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), especially Chapter 5, 'The Progress of the Singapore Scheme, 1924-1930' for a good discussion of the costs of construction. W. David McIntyre, *The Rise and Fall of the Singapore Naval Base, 1919-1942*. (London: MacMillan, 1979) contains a good description of the actual construction process and the logistical aspects of the base.

⁵ William Roger Louis, *British Strategy in the Far East, 1919-1939*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 209.

fleet to the Far East and allow it to operate independent of substantial local reserves.⁶ This combination of ships, bases and materiel was the One-Power Standard created at Washington in 1922, and upon which British seapower was based on the eve of the first London Naval Conference. The aim of the Conference, from the British perspective, was to negotiate further limitation and disarmament by extending the Washington ratios to smaller vessels without significantly altering the world balance of seapower.

The Conference opened in January 1930 to a rocky beginning, and while the intricacies of the negotiations need not be recounted, the results of the Conference are worth noting. Japanese claims for a large increase in the size of the navy allotted them by treaty at Washington nearly forced the breakdown of negotiations. The Japanese delegation insisted on being granted 70% of the American and British tonnage in heavy cruisers and auxiliary vessels, and a weighty increase in submarine tonnage that would replace the old 5:5:3 ratios established at Washington.⁷ The London Conference was salvaged by a compromise: it granted Japan 69.75% of the American overall tonnage, 60.02% of the heavy cruiser tonnage, and established submarine parity among the big three naval powers at 52,700 tons.⁸ The moratorium on capital ship construction, now renewed until the end of 1936, left the 5:5:3 ratio unaltered in that regard, and maintained a similar ratio in the cruiser category. This had the effect of maintaining the Washington balance on capital ships while conceding to Japan a 10:10:7 ratio in practice.⁹ This willingness on the part of Great Britain to allow Japan some increase in the size of her fleet suggests that the One-Power Standard was flexible. Clearly some increase in Japanese naval strength was acceptable without it posing a serious threat to the position of British seapower.

The Admiralty's problem with the One-Power Standard was that it had been imposed by treaty with little consideration for the navy's strategic requirements. As long

⁶ *Ibid*, 209.

⁷ Ian Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy 1869-1942: Kasumigaseki to Miyakezaka*. (London: Routledge, 1977), 168 and Roskill *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 50.

⁸ Nish, 169.

⁹ Ian Nish, 'Tsumeo Matsudaira, Diplomat and Courier' in Ian Nish ed., *Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits*. (Folkestone: Japan Library, 1994), 208.

as Britain's naval strength was regulated in this fashion, the Admiralty was unable to press for a replacement of the One-Power Standard, even if it ceased to bear any relation to the navy's actual needs.¹⁰ To maintain Britain's maritime position, the One-Power Standard was in constant need of review, negotiation and tweaking to make sure it fitted the current international situation. Any negotiation of the Standard's flexibility had to be carried out within the parameters of the Washington system, and the questions of the flexibility of the One-Power Standard, ('How flexible was it?' and 'What form should this flexibility take?') were a source of acrimonious debate between the Treasury, the Admiralty and the Foreign Office, all of whom viewed the Standard through different lenses. A letter from Sir Philip Snowden, Chancellor of the Exchequer, in early 1930 that discussed the Treasury's view on the London Conference is telling in this regard. Snowden said that the Foreign Office was concerned not with the size or number of ships agreed upon by the principal naval powers, but only that there should be agreement. The Admiralty, he noted, was willing to accept limitation on numbers and sizes of ships; only the Treasury sought reduction.¹¹ Sometimes the various government departments found common ground; the Admiralty had been pleased with the line taken by Prime Minister J. Ramsay MacDonald, and by the Americans, that Japan must not be allowed to accede to a 70% ratio in capital ships and cruisers.¹² However the apparently arbitrary decision to reduce the number of cruisers in the Royal Navy from the 70 recommended by the Admiralty to 50 was a bitter pill to swallow.

The Cabinet had approved proposed cuts by the Fighting Services Committee to the Admiralty's 1929-1930 construction programme. In order to decrease spending on the navy and further the process of disarmament begun during the previous decade, the Cabinet had decided to decrease the number of cruisers desired by the Admiralty from 70 to 50, as well as eliminating several smaller vessels from the programme. The Cabinet hoped that this would encourage a ripple effect amongst other Conference participants, and that they would follow Britain's example and voluntarily pursue disarmament in good faith. The Treasury admitted that their proposals for fleet reduction and limited

¹⁰ Bell, *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy*, 25.

¹¹ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 54.

¹² *Ibid*, 51.

ship replacement constituted a risk to British security, but held fast to their claim that it was a risk that should be taken as a means to encouraging other powers at the Conference to disarm as well.¹³ Security in an emergency, the Treasury confessed, depended in the last resort upon British naval superiority; however Great Britain was no longer in a position to spend as much money on the navy as they had at other times.¹⁴ The Cabinet agreed to the Treasury's proposals, their hand forced by the imminence of the London Naval Conference. The Admiralty's building programme outlined in the 1929-1930 programme would have amounted to a substantial increase in naval expenditure over the next several years.¹⁵ Although the programme was well within the limits established by the Washington Treaty, such an increase in armaments spending would be disastrous for the upcoming Naval Conference. The government could not enter into negotiations for the limitation and reduction of naval weapons having just approved a net increase in naval spending. Notwithstanding vehement protests from the Naval Staff, A.V. Alexander the First Lord of the Admiralty claimed in the House of Commons that the cuts maintained an adequate provision for all of Britain's naval requirements.¹⁶

As a gesture of political goodwill to the other participants, and in spite of warnings by the Chief of Naval Staff (CNS), Admiral of the Fleet Sir Charles Madden, that the action would imperil national and Imperial security, the Navy estimates were therefore cut by 20 cruisers and numerous smaller ships.¹⁷ A note on a Cabinet memorandum from December 1929, initialled 'JRM' states: 'It is only fair to the Sea Lords of the Admiralty that we should place on record, for the information of the Cabinet, that they are not satisfied that this programme provides the minimum amount of naval construction essential for national security.'¹⁸ A subsequent memorandum concerning British proposals for the London Conference notes that 50 cruisers was well below the number estimated by the Admiralty to meet the navy's full requirements. The Admiralty claimed that the figure was only acceptable for the purposes of the Conference

¹³ Norman Gibbs, *Grand Strategy, Volume 1: Rearmament Policy*. (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1976), 30.

¹⁴ CP 12 (30), Memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, 16 December 1929, CAB 24/209.

¹⁵ Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, 29.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 30.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 30.

in view of the prevailing tranquillity of the international situation.¹⁹ The Treasury, the Naval Staff maintained, admitted that security depended in the last resort upon British seapower, but the Admiralty was unable to see where the Treasury had taken any consideration of this; Treasury proposals for fleet reduction appeared to be purely academic. By contrast, the 70 cruiser figure had been arrived at by repeated investigations which were laid before successive governments and Imperial Conferences. It was based on the necessity of defending vital sea communications around the world, though without considering the United States as a possible enemy.

On what basis the Cabinet decided that 50 cruisers would be sufficient for all of Britain's maritime needs remains unclear. The Admiralty set forth a long and detailed analysis of the number of cruisers required for the various tasks assigned to the Royal Navy, citing the relative strategic needs of Great Britain compared to the other naval powers as a means of gauging the size of fleet necessary for defence of the Empire.²⁰ America, the Admiralty noted, did not depend upon its navy for security. France did, but not nearly so much as did Great Britain. Italy also depended upon seapower for her security, but Italy's geographic position meant that the navy could not guarantee security. Japan relied upon seapower much the same as Britain, but lacked an extensive empire and was geographically remote from any possible enemy.²¹ The acceptance of the 50 cruiser programme was palatable to the Admiralty only for a limited time,²² provided the international situation was stable and that new construction to replace over-age ships was carried out.

¹⁸ December 1929, Note attached to Memorandum by the Fighting Services Committee, CAB 24/209.

¹⁹ CP 19 (29), Memorandum by the First Lord of the Admiralty, January 1930, CAB 24/209.

²⁰ CP 19 (29), Memorandum by the First Lord of the Admiralty, January 1930, CAB 24/209.

This stands in contrast with the claim made by Phillips Payson O'Brien that the 70 cruiser fleet bore no relation to other powers' fleets but was rather a bargaining ploy used by the Admiralty to pressure politicians. Christopher Bell's discussion of Naval Power Standards admits that this was sometimes the case. O'Brien's claim does not appear to be supported by the evidence; the Memorandum by First Lord Alexander provides a detailed assessment of the Royal Navy's cruiser requirements set out by the Admiralty Board. For O'Brien's position see Phillips Payson O'Brien, *British and American Naval Power: Politics and Policy, 1900-1936*. (Westport: Praeger, 1998), 186.

²¹ CP 19 (29), Memorandum by the First Lord of the Admiralty, January 1930, CAB 24/209.

²² I.e. for the duration of the London Treaty, which was only to last until 1936, at which time a new conference would be convened to reassess the situation. Fear that the Cabinet should deem 50 cruisers sufficient enough to constitute a new Naval Standard led the Admiralty to be especially forceful on this point.

The consideration of the international situation adds another dimension to interpretations of the One-Power Standard: the foreign policies of other nations. On this, too, the Admiralty and the Treasury disagreed. The Naval Staff, Corelli Barnett writes, were uncharitable enough to doubt the goodness and trustworthiness of other nations, especially of Japan.²³ This was a doubt the Naval Staff had repeatedly unsuccessfully attempted to convey to the government:

The growth of peaceful aspirations in Europe and America and its translation into practical politics may possibly fail to produce the anticipated reform on the Asiatic mind at a different stage of civilisation, guided by a different code, inspired by different ideals.²⁴

The reduction of the cruiser total was only acceptable to the Admiralty 'if the European situation was so improved as to give reasonable security for ten or twelve years, with a chance of further improvement.'²⁵ While the Admiralty might reluctantly accept the figure of 50 cruisers as a bare minimum force in time of peace, they were unconvinced that the relatively placid international situation would remain so. For them a reduction of the fleet based on financial considerations, and upon the goodwill of another power was tantamount to sacrificing Britain's delicate One-Power Standard. Christopher Bell describes the results of the London Naval Conference as the biggest blow to the navy in the inter-war period: the Labour government prolonged the moratorium on capital ship construction, due to resume under the Washington Treaty in 1931, until 1936, severely reduced the size of the Royal Navy's cruiser fleet and agreed to scrap many older capital ships in advance of the deadline established at Washington.²⁶ In spite of the Admiralty's objections, the London Naval Conference re-interpreted the One-Power Standard through

²³ Corelli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*. (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), 289.

²⁴ Memorandum by the Naval Staff on the Singapore Base, July 1929. Quoted in Barnett, *British Power*, 289.

²⁵ Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, 29.

²⁶ Bell, *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy*, 25.

the lens of finance rather than Britain's actual security needs.²⁷ The decision was as much a political one as anything else; Labour had come to power on a platform of disarmament, and MacDonald was anxious to effect some improvement in Anglo-American relations after the failed Geneva conference on naval limitation in 1927, where relations between the two states were sorely strained by the issue of cruiser reduction.

The running battle between the Navy and the Treasury over the measure of British seapower at the London Conference was being mirrored simultaneously in Japan, where a moderate government was increasingly coming under attack from the Naval Staff for being an accomplice to perpetuating what were perceived as the inequalities of the Washington Treaty system. Tsuneo Matsudaira, the Japanese ambassador in London, pressed his claim for an increase in the Washington ratio on the basis of the length of Japanese coastline to be defended, the difficulties of importing food and raw material, and the large number of his countrymen living in China who needed protection. The British delegation pointed out that all of these conditions applied to Great Britain as well, and they were still willing to disarm further. The Japanese delegation was informed that since Great Britain and America were both making sacrifices to reduce weapons Japan should follow suit. Japanese obstinacy had the potential to upset the whole balance of naval limitation, and prove a stumbling block to Anglo-American co-operation on the naval question.²⁸ That the treaty was accepted in Japan was largely a result of the efforts of the Japanese Foreign Minister, Baron Shidehara, under whose guidance Japan's policy of co-operation with the west was termed 'Shidehara diplomacy'.

Though the Japanese government ultimately ratified the treaty, the opposition it aroused was a source of no small concern to the Foreign Office in London. The

²⁷ In a private letter to Norman Gibbs, former CNS Lord Chatfield described the government's actions at the Conference: "The Labour First Lord [of the Admiralty], Alexander, overruled the Admiralty Sea Lords and the First Sea Lord resigned a little later from ill health. The Prime Minister did not act on the Sea Lords' advice but, at a night conference, when the Sea Lords were not invited, a political decision to give way to the USA and Japan was made by the Prime Minister." Quoted in Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, 29 fn, no date given.

²⁸ January 1930, Memorandum concerning proposals for the London Naval Conference, CAB 24/209.

compromise created a conflict in Japan between the navy and the civilian administration, and also sowed dissension in the Naval High Command.²⁹ The Japanese Naval General Staff claimed it could not accept the London Treaty because it left an inadequate tonnage of auxiliary ships for the needs of their own imperial defence.³⁰ In Tokyo the British embassy reported that opinion in Japanese naval circles was very strongly against the Treaty, and against Shidehara's policy of compromise with the west. Furthermore, the Japanese CNS, Admiral Kani Kato, had availed himself of the privilege, inherent in his position, of holding a private audience with the Emperor in order to present his views on the treaty.³¹ Kato refused to discuss the conversation in public, however his views on the treaty were well known.

More disconcerting to the Foreign Office than Admiral Kato's remonstrance was the apparent translation of aversion to the Treaty into action. Rumours that motivation for an attempted assassination of Prime Minister Hamaguchi in November 1930 may have been provided by extreme dissatisfaction with the London Naval Treaty were certainly a source of concern to the British embassy in Tokyo.³² Indeed, rhetoric by Japanese politicians and in the press gave sufficient cause for British anxiety. A speech by Shidehara to the Diet in April emphasised the temporary nature of the London Treaty, claiming that Japan was free to make whatever claims she felt necessary at the next naval conference.³³ Sir John Tilley, the British ambassador in Tokyo, reported that much of the press coverage of the Treaty seemed meant to ensure the public that Japan had not abandoned her claim to increase the Washington ratio to 70% that of the western powers. Acceptance of a compromise in 1930 did not preclude Japan from reasserting the 70%

²⁹ Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy*, 169.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 171.

³¹ Sir J. Tilley (Tokyo) to Mr. A. Henderson, 6 May 1930. Kenneth Bourne and D. Cameron Watt eds. *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*. Part II: From the First to the Second World War, Series E, Asia: 1914-1939, Vol. 10, Japan, January 1930-December 1931. Ed. Ann Trotter. (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1991), 29. (Confidential Print series henceforth abbreviated *Confidential Print*).

³² Mr. Snow (Tokyo) to Mr. A. Henderson, 19 November 1930. *Confidential Print*, Ser. E, Vol. 10, 69.

³³ Text of Shidehara's speech to the Diet given on 25 April, sent by Tilley to Henderson, 28 April 1930. *Confidential Print*, Ser. E, Vol. 10, 25.

claim at the next Conference.³⁴ In London Wakatsuki, the Japanese delegate, echoed these sentiments to the other delegates at the Conference.³⁵

From the point of view therefore of both the Admiralty and the Foreign Office, the London Naval Conference had been less than successful. The Admiralty, believing the One-Power Standard to have been significantly undermined, thought the outcome an unmitigated disaster, while the Foreign Office had good reason to be concerned with Japan's assertion that she would renew her claims to revise the naval ratios at the next London Naval Conference, scheduled for 1935. Japan's apparent determination not to be bound by existing treaty limits beyond 1936 meant that a better, longer-lasting solution to the question of naval weapons had to be found in the meantime not only with Japan, but also with France and Italy, both of whom had expressed their displeasure with the Washington system. The possibility of a new arms race was now less remote than it had been, exacerbated by the Conference and by events in Manchuria the following year.

Crisis in the Far East: Manchuria and Shanghai

The coming of the crisis in the Far East, first with the Mukden incident in Manchuria in September 1931, followed by the Shanghai incident in February the next year added a critical new dimension to British foreign policy and the question of British seapower. The London Naval Conference had brought to the surface a belligerent group within the Imperial Japanese Navy who had shown their strength despite being outmanoeuvred in the short term over the naval ratio. The events in the Far East now gave the Japanese navy an additional reason to push for an increase in the size of the fleet, in view of the hostility, or the perceived hostility, of other naval powers.

By the early 1930s both the Japanese army and the navy were inclined to challenge the budgetary restraints they had accepted in the 1920s, and were no longer

³⁴ Sir J. Tilley (Tokyo) to Mr. A. Henderson, 11 April 1930. *Confidential Print*, Ser. E, Vol. 10, 21-22.

³⁵ Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy*, 170.

willing to accept the foreign policy dictates of a civilian government.³⁶ This confirmed for many in London the sentiment that Japan represented a serious threat to British interests in the Far East. Even so, however, initial reactions to the Mukden incident were cautious, even benevolent toward Japan. There was some feeling that Japan was justified in her deeds and that Great Britain and Japan were struggling in common against the threats posed to their interests in China by Chinese nationalism and the Soviet Union.³⁷ Though opinion was somewhat divided in Britain over the gravity of the Mukden incident, a change of opinion occurred following the Shanghai crisis in February 1932. The brutality of Japanese tactics there shocked western sensibilities.³⁸ Shanghai was also the centre of British trade and investment in China; approximately 2/3 of British financial interests in the country were concentrated there, to a value of about £150 million, and there were some 4,000 British nationals living in the area.³⁹ In the event that hostilities broke out with Japan, the task of defending British trade and commerce in the Far East would fall to the Royal Navy. Thus, in the wake of the Far Eastern crisis, the Admiralty was afraid that if Japan established bases on the Asian mainland they could operate against the British outpost at Hong Kong and perhaps also against Britain's maritime supply lines or even threaten the naval base at Singapore.⁴⁰

The fear of Japanese aggression was not a chimera; British intelligence indicated that Japan was more than capable of attacking British outposts in Asia. There was also a significant discrepancy between what the Japanese delegate to the League of Nations was saying in Geneva about his country's foreign policy, and what British intelligence revealed about its true intentions. A telegram intercepted from the Japanese Foreign Office in November 1931 indicated that there was more to Japan's activity in Manchuria than Matsuoka, Japan's delegate to the League, asserted publicly. The telegram read

³⁶ *Ibid*, 172.

³⁷ Hosoya Chihiro, 'Britain and the United States in Japan's view of the international system, 1919-1937' in Ian Nish ed., *Anglo-Japanese Alienation, 1919-1952*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1982), 16.

³⁸ Paul Haggie, 'The Royal Navy and the Far Eastern Problem, 1931-1941', *The Army Quarterly and Defense Journal*, 106, 4 (October 1976), 404.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 404 and Christopher Thorne, 'The Shanghai Crisis of 1932: The Basis of British Policy', *The American Historical Review*, 75, 6 (1970), 1616.

⁴⁰ Bell, *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy*, 78.

In the event of the present situation becoming protracted he [Shidehara] favoured a policy of gradual and peaceful penetration in North Manchuria, coupled with the unobtrusive consolidation of Japan's position in South Manchuria; while keeping in mind the treaties relating to the Open Door in China.⁴¹

In contrast with the statements being made to the League, the telegram indicated a deliberate intention to expand and not merely the protection of Japanese interests on the Asian mainland.⁴² Military intelligence reports added to fears of Japanese bellicosity, and underlined the weak strategic position occupied by Great Britain in the region.

In October 1931 Admiral W.H. Kelly, Commander in Chief (CC) of the China Squadron, reported on a combined exercise of the Japanese army and navy in which the 'attackers' carried out a successful night landing on Singapore Island. The 'defenders' relied on aircraft reconnaissance to warn them of the 'enemy' approach but were unsuccessful in spotting any of the flotilla. Kelly concluded in his report that 'the present situation at Singapore from the point of view of defence can only be described as deplorable.'⁴³ All of Singapore's fixed defences were obsolete: the five old 9.2-inch and the six 6-inch guns were antiquated, and the eight 3-inch anti-aircraft guns were equally inadequate. The RAF had only six flying boats and eight older torpedo bombers stationed there and no fighter aircraft. Kelly's report echoed the Chiefs of Staff (COS) Annual Review of 1930 which emphasised both the importance of Singapore to the scheme of imperial defence, and the weakness of the position. The COS review had declared that 'The security of Australia and New Zealand and of our whole Eastern Possessions rests in the last resort on an adequate naval base at Singapore.' It further noted that none of the 9.2-inch ammunition at defended ports abroad was of any use against modern warships, and that much of the 6-inch ammunition required modernisation.⁴⁴ 'It can therefore be said,' Kelly concluded, 'that in so far as Naval interests are concerned, there are no defences.' His report also noted that air defences

⁴¹ Quoted in Antony Best, 'Constructing an Image: British Intelligence and Whitehall's Perception of Japan, 1931-1939', *Intelligence and National Security*, 11, 3 (July 1996), 406.

⁴² *Ibid*, 406.

⁴³ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 148.

⁴⁴ CP 327 (30), Chiefs of Staff Subcommittee Annual Review, July 1930, CAB 24/215.

which were unsupported by fixed defences would never suffice for the defence of the base, at least in part because the weather, especially during monsoon season, was unsuitable for flying.⁴⁵ The Mukden and Shanghai crises thus exposed the dangerously fragile state of the One-Power Standard, made so by the London Naval Conference and the poor state of the defences at Singapore.

Admiral Kelly's report was not the only warning of the danger of Japan's military capabilities. At about the same time as Kelly was reporting on the danger to Singapore, the US Navy Department received a report of a Japanese fleet exercise which had taken place in 1930. The exercise had obviously been designed to test the capacity of the United States to defend the Philippines, the 'attackers' having been just as successful against Manila as they had been in the Singapore exercise. The umpires adjudicating the exercise decided that the 'defending fleet' was 'completely destroyed'.⁴⁶ It is unclear whether or not the Naval Staff at the Admiralty had access to this information, but the report underscores the very real threat existing in the Far East in the early 1930s. The British army had only a handful of soldiers in the region, certainly not enough to protect British interests in Asia, so any conflict with Japan would be principally naval in character. To protect imperial interests in China and the Far East, the Admiralty's war plan called for the dispatch of the main battle fleet to Singapore. The ability of a fleet to meet the enemy in eastern waters and operate in good fighting condition was of the utmost importance, and depended in no small part on the foreign policy and defence decisions made in Whitehall. That the Imperial Japanese Navy should have carried out exercises simulating attacks on British and American possessions in the Far East was not necessarily alarming of itself. In order to maintain a high level of preparedness for war – the function of all armed services in peacetime – it was logical that such exercises be carried out against Japan's only potential maritime foes. However the attitude of the Japanese delegation to the London Naval Conference, the appearance of a belligerent cadre of officers in the Japanese Navy and the crises in Manchuria and Shanghai had created a state of high tension in Anglo-Japanese relations. Exercises carried out against

⁴⁵ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 148-149.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 149.

such specific targets as Manila and Singapore during a period of such tension, which highlighted British weakness in the Far East, lent credence to the perception that British possessions in the region were in peril of the Japanese threat.

What made the crisis in the Far East particularly unnerving was the speed with which it had developed. On 7 February 1932, without prior warning, an expeditionary force of one Japanese army division disembarked at the mouth of the Yangtze River. The secrecy of the operation was not due to the inability of British intelligence to read Japanese codes, but because the Japanese had maintained complete radio silence during the operation, something they would do with greater effect in 1941. The Shanghai incident demonstrated that Japan had the capability to undertake large-scale amphibious operations without giving their adversaries any indication of activity in advance.⁴⁷ Lack of a prolonged period of acute tension before the outbreak of hostilities dispelled the notion, prevalent in Whitehall, that there would be ample time to prepare British defences in Asia in the event that a conflict with Japan seemed probable.⁴⁸ A build-up period to a crisis was necessary to remedy the fleet's ill preparedness for action and to improve the defensive fortifications at Singapore. The mobility of a fleet sent to the Far East was hampered by shortages everywhere: personnel, torpedoes, depth charges, aircraft and fuel oil were all essential to the readiness of a Far Eastern fleet for battle, and in none of these areas were adequate stores arranged.⁴⁹ However Britain's weak position in the Far East was not, however, simply the result of Treasury cuts to the Navy budget. It was due largely to a flaw inherent in defence planning, dating from the early 1920s: the Ten-Year Rule.

⁴⁷ Best, 'Constructing an Image', 407.

⁴⁸ 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, 1996), 180.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 180 and CP 327 (30), Annual Review by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-committee for 1930, July 1930, CAB 24/215. The Review noted with alarm the shortage of fuel oil stores at Singapore, claiming that less than 1/3 of the annual required amount had been stockpiled in 1928 and 1929.

The Ten-Year Rule

The Ten-Year Rule had shaped the fundamental assumptions of British strategic and defence planning since the end of the Great War. Simply stated, it required the various branches of the armed services to base their war plans and budget estimates on the assumption that Great Britain would not be involved in a war with another major power for at least 10 years. Originally instituted in 1919, it was automatically renewed on a year by year basis and then a day by day basis, from the late 1920s onwards. The Rule was intended to keep defence budgets low as part of the policy of disarmament. Tension in the Far East now brought questions of the validity and practicality of the Ten-Year Rule to the fore at the Cabinet. In February 1932 the First Lord of the Admiralty, Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell, presented a damning indictment of the effect the Rule had had on Britain's position in the Far East. He noted with alarm the serious deficiency in every kind of material needed to allow the navy to carry out its duties in an emergency. This, he claimed, was the result of the Ten-Year Rule being interpreted not in a way that would allow war provisions to be stored over ten years, but so that provision need hardly have begun until 'the time comes when the principle is falsified by events.' The First Lord declared that:

The inevitable result of the policy is to be seen in the Far East at the present moment, where it would be absolutely impossible for us to retain our hold on Hong Kong if, as a result of present events, our position there should be challenged, while Singapore and Trincomali could be reduced and the Naval supplies, fuel and facilities there destroyed before our Fleet could reach them, thus not only barring its further progress to the East, but probably necessitating its withdrawal so far to the Westward as to leave India uncovered.⁵⁰

The COS Annual Review for 1932 echoed these concerns, stating plainly that Britain's present weaknesses was the direct result of the Ten-Year Rule.⁵¹ Among the recommendations the Review made were the cancellation of the Rule, and immediate

⁵⁰ CP 64 (32), Memorandum by the First Lord of the Admiralty, 5 February 1932, CAB 24/228.

⁵¹ CP 104 (32), Annual Review by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee for 1932, 23 February 1932, CAB 24/229.

provision for the defensive commitments of Britain's overseas bases, with priority being given to the Far East. The Review noted that the current order of priority for the installation of defences at ports abroad was Hong Kong, Trincomali, Malta and Gibraltar, but recommended that the order be changed to give Singapore preference over the others.⁵² In forwarding these recommendations to the Cabinet, the COS underscored the importance of the Far Eastern situation by urging the Cabinet not to delay decision on these measures until the results of the impending General Conference on Disarmament were known.⁵³ That the Cabinet should be exhorted by the COS to spend money to rectify Britain's greatest defence deficiencies on the eve of the convening of a new disarmament conference speaks to the intensity of concern over Japanese aggression, and to the vulnerability of Britain's position in the Far East. Given the difficulty with which negotiations had proceeded at the London Naval Conference, the COS were in effect urging the government to take an almost untenable position: to be seen to be increasing armaments spending while simultaneously advocating a greater level of disarmament. Such a position would present the British delegation to the Conference at Geneva with enormous difficulties to overcome; the COS were not unaware of this, yet so great was Britain's inability to defend its Far Eastern empire that they were compelled to recommend this risk to the Cabinet.

Calls for the revocation of the Ten-Year Rule brought about a new round of inter-departmental fighting over British defence policy. Contemporary statesmen believed that in battling the depression they were clawing their way back from the brink of catastrophe, and that the overwhelming and immediate economic issue must take precedence over events on the other side of the world. A letter written by Ramsay MacDonald to Stanley Baldwin, near the end of 1931, testifies to the ever-present strain which the general economic crisis placed on the Cabinet: 'We have all been so distracted by day to day troubles that we have never had a chance of surveying a whole situation and hammering

⁵² CP 104 (32), Enclosure: Report by the Deputies to the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee on the situation in the Far East, Annual Review by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee for 1932, 23 February 1932, CAB 24/229.

⁵³ CP 104 (32), Annual Review by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee for 1932, 23 February 1932, CAB 24/229.

out a policy...but have had to live from agitation to agitation.⁵⁴ Certainly Neville Chamberlain, by now Chancellor of the Exchequer, held fast to his conviction that increasing defence spending, aside from being politically foolish on the eve of a disarmament conference, was fiscally impossible:

The fact is that in the 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.... What has to be considered, therefore, is one set of risks balanced against the other, and the Treasury submits that at the present time financial risks are greater than any other we can estimate.⁵⁵

Chamberlain did not dispute the issue of Britain's position in the Far East; what he did dispute was the country's ability to finance military preparations or operations in the Far East in the midst of the economic crisis.

Despite stiff Treasury opposition the COS continued to press their case. The 1932 Annual Review had been accelerated to accommodate the international situation.⁵⁶ Normally the Review was presented to the Cabinet in June or July, but events at Mukden and Shanghai had made necessary an immediate appraisal of Britain's geo-strategic posture in the Far East. The Review noted that all of the assumptions behind the Ten-Year Rule had been invalidated by recent events. The supposition that any serious crisis would be preceded by a period of warning ample enough to allow for the correction of any deficiencies in the scheme of imperial defence had proved ill-founded.⁵⁷ The Mukden incident had come out of the blue, and the Shanghai crisis had come with very little warning. Furthermore, Britain's position in the Far East was so weak that even an extended warning period would prove insufficient to remedy the problems of defence. Proper fortification of ports in the Far East would take years to accomplish; Hong Kong and Singapore had become so weak as to make tempting targets for an aggressive power in Asia.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Quoted in Thorne, 'The Shanghai Crisis', 1618.

⁵⁵ Quoted in *Ibid*, 1619.

⁵⁶ McIntyre, *The Rise and Fall of the Singapore Naval Base*, 106.

⁵⁷ CP 104 (32), Annual Review by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee for 1932, 23 February 1932, CAB 24/229.

⁵⁸ CP 104 (32), Annual Review by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee for 1932, 23 February 1932, CAB 24/229.

Opposition to the Rule was not solely the domain of the COS. The highly influential secretary to the Cabinet and the Committee of Imperial Defence, Sir Maurice Hankey, had been pressing for its cancellation since the Manchurian crisis, and urging that the deficiencies in Great Britain's fighting services be remedied as soon as possible.⁵⁹ At a meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) in late March 1932, Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald backed the COS recommendation to cancel the Ten-Year Rule. He was supported by Eyres-Monsell and by Lord Hailsham, Secretary for War, by the Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon, and the Permanent Undersecretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Robert Vansittart. The Committee supported all of the recommendations in the COS Review: the revocation of the Ten-Year Rule, that provision for the defence of overseas bases be undertaken, giving priority to the Far East, and that the Cabinet should not delay its decision until the results of the General Disarmament Conference were known.⁶⁰ The events in the Far East were ominous, the Committee claimed, and must not be ignored.

In June Stanley Baldwin, Lord President of the Council and Chair of the Coast Defence Sub-Committee added his voice to those pressing for the cancellation of the Ten-Year Rule. He noted that owing to the present circumstances in the Far East, and the Shanghai crisis, if Japan ever 'ran amok' Great Britain would be helpless. Hong Kong and Singapore would be taken very easily, and, unless Singapore was strengthened, Malta would be the nearest defended base of importance on the route to the Far East. The Coast Defence Sub-Committee recommended completing the first stage of work on Singapore, subject to financial considerations. Baldwin pointed out that the whole security of the Empire in the Far East might depend on the safety of Singapore, and that the decision reached at the 1930 Imperial Conference to postpone work on the defences until 1935 had been based on the Ten-Year Rule; a new decision had become necessary. The Treasury was forced to cede ground in the face of overwhelming pressure to abolish the Ten-Year Rule. Sir Warren Fisher, Permanent Undersecretary at the Treasury and head of the civil

⁵⁹ Stephen Roskill, *Hankey, Man of Secrets, Volume 3: 1931-1963*. (London: Collins, 1974), 27.

⁶⁰ CID 255th Mtg, 22 March 1932, CAB 2/5.

service, said in reply that it was the view of the Treasury that obviously these ports were defenceless, and if it was necessary to have these ports then they must be defended. He did not think the Treasury could say any more than that. The CID recommended to the Cabinet that the first stage of the defences at Singapore, including three 15-inch guns, should be completed.⁶¹ However the CID was merely an advisory body, without any real authority to make decisions or act on its own recommendations. Real decision making capability lay with the Cabinet.

The Cabinet did revoke the Ten-Year Rule, but the manner in which it did so is extremely telling about the nature of policy debates and decision making at that level of government. The decision to cancel the rule only gave the service heads the right to plan, not to spend. The armed services could only ignore the rule in theory; in practice the decision did not justify immediate increases in spending and that issue was placed on hold in light of the upcoming Disarmament Conference at Geneva. At the Cabinet level, the opinion of the Chancellor of the Exchequer counted for more in matters of defence than that of the three service chiefs combined.⁶² The Ten-Year Rule, the Treasury claimed, was no more than a working hypothesis designed to relieve the COS of the responsibility of preparing for contingencies which the government believed to be remote or beyond the financial capacity of the country to provide against. By claiming that the rule was no more than a hypothesis for planning purposes, the Treasury essentially persuaded the Cabinet to allow it to maintain effective control over policy even though the rule had been rescinded. Nothing had actually changed. Even though the Treasury recognised the weakness of Britain's position in the Far East, and despite the repeal of the Ten-Year Rule, no action was being taken to remedy the situation.

The repeal of the rule did bring one significant change to British naval policy, due, as Eyres-Monsell said, 'to the ominous character of recent events in the Far East.' British naval planning shifted from a traditional, numerical policy to one that was task

⁶¹ CID 256th Mtg, 9 June 1932, CAB 2/5.

⁶² Robert Paul Shay Jr, *British Rearmament in the Thirties: Politics and Profits*. (Princeton: University Press), 24.

oriented.⁶³ As far as the Admiralty was concerned, the size and shape of the Royal Navy was henceforth to be determined not by treaty figures and ratios, but by the specific tasks required of it. However this shift occurred only at the level of planning. The existence of the Washington and London Treaties, and the World Disarmament Conference convened at Geneva in 1932, meant that the fleet could not be built according to real strategic needs. The moratorium on capital ship construction instituted at Washington and continued at London still existed, and the cruiser fleet was still capped at 50, not the 70 desired by the Admiralty. These problems constituted a serious handicap to the One-Power Standard. Moreover, the very existence of the Washington and London Treaties created a numerical fleet not an objective oriented one, and ensured that it was perpetuated until the expiration of the agreements. Even if the treaty constraints had been lifted, the Treasury's financial orthodoxy would still have made them reluctant to increase defence spending. The repeal of the Ten-Year Rule did not mean that the Admiralty was allowed to build an objective oriented fleet, only that it was allowed to plan one on paper.

The League of Nations

Those who were opposed to increasing defence spending to deal with the Japanese threat hoped that Britain might escape the Far Eastern crisis unscathed by upholding the League of Nations and working the diplomatic channels that ran through Geneva, rather than acting unilaterally to deter Japan. This proved an ineffective course of action, despite Britain's best and most determined efforts to achieve a solution to the crisis under the League's umbrella. The inability of the League to deter an aggressor was demonstrated not simply by Japanese action in Manchuria and at Shanghai, but by the close proximity of these events to the opening of the General Conference on Disarmament, scheduled to convene at Geneva in the spring of 1932.⁶⁴ This produced a division amongst policy makers, separating those who still maintained faith in the League from those who were convinced that Japan could only be checked by force.

⁶³ O'Brien, *British and American Naval Policy*, 225.

From the beginning of the crisis Sir Francis Lindley, the ambassador to Tokyo writing in early 1932, held the eerily prophetic view that the

Japanese cannot be turned out of Manchuria without a world war, which it is our first duty to prevent; and that in these circumstances we must trust to the Japanese people gradually realising that they cannot with advantage to themselves pursue a policy of aggression in China in the face of the passive hostility of the rest of the world.⁶⁵

However, both parties understood the need to tread carefully over the issue, and avoid provoking Japan into further action. A message from the British ambassador in Tokyo dated 4 February 1932, warned London that an incautious step might cause Japan to take some action that would render war inevitable. He also warned that Japan was capable of replying to action under Article XVI of the League Covenant by reprisals or acts of war against the Powers.⁶⁶ This was the course of action being urged upon the government by supporters of the League at home; a course which might well end in a resort to force by Japan, where the heaviest burden in such a war would fall to Great Britain.

Among the League's detractors was Sir Maurice Hankey, who shared Lindley's opinion that the application of sanctions under Article XVI would fall mainly on Britain's shoulders, embroiling her in a conflict for which she was not equipped.⁶⁷ Sir John Simon, the Foreign Secretary, and much of the Cabinet also held an aversion to sanctions; Simon in particular persisted in his efforts to resolve the Far Eastern crisis through the less confrontational machinery of the League. In any case, there was not much popular support for the idea of sanctions. Given that neither the United States nor the Soviet Union could be counted on to participate in them, the prospect of imposing an economic embargo on Japan seemed an exercise in futility. Sir Robert Vansittart, Permanent Undersecretary at the Foreign Office, summed the issue up by saying 'We cannot contemplate, in any circumstances, the severance of economic and diplomatic relations unless we are also eventually prepared for war.' War, Vansittart continued, would mean

⁶⁴ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 144.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, 77-78.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 77. Article XVI of the Covenant endorsed the application of sanctions to an aggressor nation, and held the possibility of armed intervention by other members of the League to resolve the crisis.

⁶⁷ Roskill, *Hankey*, Vol. 3, 27.

‘our trade and influence in the Far East obliterated and ... both Hong Kong and Singapore [lost] without the possibility of defence.’⁶⁸ This was Britain’s dilemma: unilateral action was hardly a possibility in light of the weakness of Hong Kong and Singapore, but economic sanctions imposed by the League were impractical and likely to lead to war besides.

The impotence of the League was further exacerbated by the publication of the Lytton Report in October 1932. A year earlier a League commission headed by Lord Lytton had been sent to the Far East to investigate Japan’s activity in Manchuria. Though Simon commented that the report’s authors had tried to refute the interpretation that Japan was in violation of the League Covenant, he admitted that it was a tricky position to maintain: ‘Nonetheless, the League organs which are considering the matter will find it very difficult not to pronounce what amounts to a condemnation of Japan.’ Matsuoka, the Japanese delegate to the League, had publicly announced that if, after considering the Lytton Report, the League arrived at conclusions which conflicted with Japan’s sense of dignity, Japan would leave the League.⁶⁹ Simon believed Matsuoka was bluffing, but warned the Cabinet to tread cautiously even so. He reported again from Geneva in November 1932 that Matsuoka had represented to him ‘the extreme gravity of the situation...if the League attempted to thwart Japan in any way.’⁷⁰ The Foreign Secretary recognised the significance of the Manchurian question for British foreign and defence policy: ‘...I am more and more impressed with the feeling that the Manchurian Question is going to give us, both at Geneva and at home, a great deal of trouble before it is disposed of.’⁷¹ He was correct in his assessment. The Lytton Report led to Japan’s giving notice of her intention to leave the League in March 1933.⁷² Anxious to preserve any hope of achieving a diplomatic solution to the current crisis, Great Britain went to great pains to work out through private manoeuvrings and official committees some sort

⁶⁸ Quoted in Christopher Thorne, *The Limits of Foreign Policy: The West, the League and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1931-1933*. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1972), 241. Vansittart’s minute on a Foreign Office Memorandum by Sir J. Pratt is dated 1 February 1932.

⁶⁹ CP 404 (32), Memorandum on the Lytton Report, Japan and the League, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 19 November 1932, CAB 24/235.

⁷⁰ Roskill, *Hankey*, Vol. 3, 65.

⁷¹ CP 431 (32), Memorandum concerning Discussions on Manchuria at Geneva, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 11 December 1932, CAB 24/235.

of compromise with Japan. 'We really can't do more than we have done,' Simon claimed 'to conciliate Japan.'⁷³

The dilemma over League sanctions had been solved at a stroke by Japan's exit from Geneva. The question of what course to take over the crisis in the Far East now had to be asked anew, and the list of possible answers was small. The most obvious choice would have been for Britain to intervene unilaterally against Japan, but that raised again the questions of whether the consequences would be worth the price, and of the ability of Great Britain to do so.⁷⁴ Moreover, Britain was unwilling to act without some guarantee of American support, and none was forthcoming; the Americans preferred to remain in isolation. The answer to the first question thus provided the answer to the second. While Shanghai contained the greater portion of British investment in China, the country's economic stake in China amounted to only 6% of Britain's overseas trade, and 1.5% of Britain's total trade. This relatively small amount was not worth the risks that a conflict with Japan would entail. As Corelli Barnett caustically notes:

The Government's dilemma over Japan and China remained. The facts of relative power and of British interest called for a deal with Japan which would avert her hostility and if possible concentrate her ambitions on Manchuria rather than further afield. A realistic stroke of policy like this, however, was hardly such as would occur to politicians like MacDonald, Baldwin or Simon; it was in any case ruled out not only by the prevailing climate of public opinion, but also by British adherence to the Covenant of the League of Nations. Such adherence demanded on the contrary a display of knight-errantry. Yet at the same time it was essential, in view of British strategic weakness, that this knight-errantry should not actually go so far as an attempt at the rescue of the maiden in distress, because this might dangerously annoy the dragon.⁷⁵

The Naval Balance of Power

The weakening of the One-Power Standard had emasculated Great Britain's ability to act over the Far Eastern situation. Once it became clear that action under the

⁷² Roskill, *Hankey*, Vol. 3, 54.

⁷³ Quoted in Ian Nish, 'Japan in Britain's view of the international system, 1919-1937', in Nish ed., *Anglo-Japanese Alienation*, 42.

⁷⁴ Barnett, *Collapse of British Power*, 300.

League Covenant was neither practical nor possible, the consequences of Chamberlain's frugality and the blind confidence in the Ten-Year Rule became abundantly clear. Britain was incapable of unilaterally deterring an aggressor who specifically threatened British possessions and interests. Fleet reductions and the lack of proper defences at overseas bases forced upon Britain the decision of inaction. Diplomatic remonstrations, which achieved little, were the only realistic course that Britain could pursue. However Britain's course of action in the Far East was simultaneously complicated by the appearance of new difficulties over the questions of arms limitation and disarmament in Europe.

The One-Power Standard created at Washington depended for its survival and success in no small part upon the compliance, or at least the naval atrophy, of the other European powers. It did not include Germany, and required Italy and France to maintain the 5:1.75 ratios allotted them by treaty. Inasmuch as the Standard came under attack from Japan at the London Naval Conference, France and Italy also sought to modify the Standard in their favour. The attitude with which the two European powers approached the Conference and the nature of their proposals were a source of deep concern to His Majesty's Government. Italy had nominated two Admirals as delegates to the Conference (Japan had nominated one Admiral as a full delegate), in contravention of an agreement between Ramsay MacDonald and the American President, Herbert Hoover, which sought to keep the Conference's deliberations out of the hands of naval experts.⁷⁶ This seemingly minor point of order merely foreshadowed the greater difficulties that the Conference would present for the European balance of naval power.

At Washington, France and Italy had agreed to a 5:1.75:1.75 tonnage ratio with respect to the Royal Navy. Britain was prepared to allow some increase in capital ship tonnage over the limits set at Washington, perhaps as high as a 5:2:2 ratio, but the question of smaller and auxiliary vessels, especially cruisers, proved to be the more problematic issue. A Cabinet paper on British proposals for the upcoming conference

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 303.

⁷⁶ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 52.

noted that France had consistently claimed that although she would accept capital ship parity with Italy, she would not do so in any other category of ships. The same paper indicated Italy's refusal to accept less than parity with France in all classes of vessels.⁷⁷ Thus the problems for the European balance which arose at London were of a slightly different character than the problems concerning the Far East. Japan sought to improve her naval position relative to Great Britain; France and Italy were principally concerned to gain an advantage in naval ratios over each other.

The issue was largely a question of prestige. The Cabinet took notice of the fact that Italy had no actual plans to construct a navy equal in size to that of France, but merely wanted to be granted equality on paper. France had always possessed a larger navy than Italy and was reluctant to continue to accept parity. In assessing the validity of each party's claim, and considering what Britain's response to them should be, the Cabinet admitted that France had the more legitimate grievance. France's strategic responsibilities were greater than Italy's; the French needed to keep sea communications with their colonies open, guard their Atlantic and Channel ports, and keep one eye on Germany.⁷⁸ Italy was a Mediterranean power, but lacked a sizeable colonial empire. Furthermore, France had coastlines on three bodies of water, while Italy had only a Mediterranean coast. Neither France nor Italy was prepared to concede an edge in tonnage to the other power, making attempts at limitation and reduction extremely difficult, and especially so on the issue of submarines.

Britain had hoped that the London Naval Conference would abolish the use of submarines altogether. Mindful of the effective use the Kaiser had made of his U-boats during the Great War, the Royal Navy was keen to see an international agreement prohibiting their use, or at least severely limiting them in size and thus capability. The submarine, the Admiralty believed, was an unfair leveller amongst the world's naval powers. Smaller nations that lacked the resources to build great surface fleets could

⁷⁷ CP 5 (30), Memorandum Concerning British Proposals for the Upcoming London Naval Conference 1930, CAB 24/209.

⁷⁸ CP 5 (30), Memorandum Concerning British Proposals for the Upcoming London Naval Conference 1930, CAB 24/209.

compete with the major naval powers by constructing large fleets of submarines at a significantly lesser cost. Germany had ably demonstrated this during the First World War when the U-boat campaign had almost succeeded in bringing Great Britain to her knees. Although Italy had a relatively small and outdated surface fleet, and had built submarines during the post-war decade, the Italian delegation to London had declared itself in principle ready to go along with Great Britain and the United States if an agreement to abolish them were achieved.⁷⁹ The proposal to abolish submarines foundered on opposition from the French and Japanese delegations; France refused to agree to their prohibition for precisely the reason that the Admiralty wanted them done away with: the submarine was the great equaliser of the lesser navies. The French also obstructed progress on limiting the size and armament of submarines and despite attempts at conciliation by the British delegation, the Conference nearly broke down over the French proposals.

The ambitious scope of France's programmes revealed at the Conference – Paris seemed little interested in either reduction or limitation – was of no small concern to Ramsay MacDonald, who feared that if all the French demands were met it would inevitably lead to large building programmes by the other European powers.⁸⁰ Indeed, MacDonald's apprehensions were confirmed when Tardieu, the French Premier, announced that the construction of 'pocket battleships' by Germany would necessitate his country building new capital ships in reply. This was exactly the kind of situation that the London Conference was intended to prevent: a new naval race similar to the one that Britain and Germany had engaged in prior to 1914. If France began to lay down keels for new capital ships in response to German construction, Italy would soon attempt to match the French, or trump them, in quantity and quality, and Britain would be forced to undertake an enormously expensive new construction programme of her own or risk losing her pre-eminent maritime position. These concerns were not hollow. In November 1931 a memorandum by the Chiefs of Staff observed that France '...has been building up a modern fleet [of submarines] at a rate which appears quite unnecessary, and

⁷⁹ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 29.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 61.

which will, if continued, shortly constitute such a potential threat to the British Commonwealth as to necessitate counter-measures.’⁸¹

Although French and Italian hostility threatened to impair the naval balance of power in Europe, and the Japanese were menacing the balance in the Far East, there was a ray of hope for the prospect of naval limitation: Germany. In view of the difficulties that came to light at the London Naval Conference, the Admiralty, in a note sent to the Foreign Office in July 1931, praised German ‘forbearance’ in not building their fleet up to the limits allowed under the Treaty of Versailles or replacing older ships at the rate permitted.⁸² It seems ironic that Germany was being praised for demonstrating restraint at the same time as France was claiming that German construction necessitated an increase in her own building programme, and yet this thought was echoed in Great Britain by many who felt that France was pursuing a most unreasonable course of action.

The first of Germany’s so-called ‘pocket-battleships’, the *Deutschland*, had been laid down in 1929 and launched with fanfare in 1931.⁸³ At 10,000 tons displacement it was a relatively small ship, being perhaps less than a third the size of many of the battleships possessed by the Royal Navy. What was particularly disconcerting about the *Deutschland* was its principal armament of 11-inch guns, which was disproportionately heavy for the size of the ship. The characteristics of this creative new ship design made the vessel of little use for fleet action, but ideal for commerce raiding, its small size making it quite fast. Three of these ships were built, the *Admiral Graf Spee* and the *Admiral Scheer* being launched in 1933 and 1934 respectively. Their innovative design gave considerably more worry to France than to Britain in the early part of the 1930s; the Royal Navy was still too big for the German fleet to mount any serious threat.

As a consequence of the construction of the *Deutschlands*, France laid down the

⁸¹ CP 213 (31), Memorandum by the Chiefs of Staff Subcommittee Concerning the French Memorandum, 4 November 1931, CAB 24/223.

⁸² Roskill, *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 68-69.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 27. *Deutschland* was also the name given to this class of ships, following the custom of naming each new class after the first new ship of that class. The same was true of the *Dunkerque*.

keel for the first of her new *Dunkerque* class ships in 1932. The *Dunkerque* displaced 26,500 tons and mounted eight 13-inch guns as its principal armament.⁸⁴ Its sister ship, the *Strasbourg*, was laid down in 1934. Though the vessels were not built until well after construction on the *Deutschlands* had commenced, France's intention to build ships to counter the new German vessels was made plain as early as December 1930. A letter from Vansittart to Sir Horace Rumbold, the ambassador in Berlin, related that the French reluctance to disarm was due at least in part to Germany's construction of 'pocket battleships'.⁸⁵ In January 1931 a memorandum by Sir Robert Craigie, the Foreign Office naval expert, indicated that the French planned to use their existing balance of tonnage under the Washington Treaty to build a number of capital ships as a rejoinder to the German ships.⁸⁶ Both *Dunkerques* were expressly stated to be replies to the construction of the *Deutschlands*, vindicating British fears that French behaviour at the London Conference signalled a new naval race in Europe.

The situation would be compounded with the completion of Italy's fleet modernisation programme. In 1929 the Undersecretary of State for the Navy in Italy announced that the entire Italian fleet would be replaced by late 1932 or early 1933. Much of the new construction, still within the parameters of the Washington Treaty, was underway before the London Conference was convened, with the rest projected to be laid down by the end of 1930.⁸⁷ Italian claims for parity with France, and France's determined effort to maintain a margin of superiority over Italy, combined with her response to Germany's new programme were certain to present new challenges to the One-Power Standard in Europe. At the same time Japan was working to undermine the British position in the Far East. Events appeared to be conspiring against British attempts at limitation and disarmament to bring about the least desirable of all possible scenarios.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 28.

⁸⁵ Sir R. Vansittart to Sir H. Rumbold (Berlin), 20 December 1930. *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Ser. 2, Vol. 1 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office), 543-544. (Henceforth abbreviated *DBFP*).

⁸⁶ Memorandum by Sir Robert Craigie, 1 January 1931. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 1, 432.

⁸⁷ CP 314 (30), Memorandum on the Export of Warships and War Material, First Lord of the Admiralty, 22 September 1930, CAB 24/215.

Vansittart understood that the key to European disarmament lay along the Franco-German axis. If Germany could be relieved of some of the harsher terms of the Versailles Treaty, rehabilitated and dealt with as an equal rather than a defeated pariah, then perhaps France could be brought around to a more moderate position on the disarmament question. In this connection, Vansittart suggested that there should be one standard of naval limitation throughout the world, not one for the Washington powers and another for Germany. It was well known that Germany would press for *Gleichberechtigung* – equality of armaments – with the Western powers at the upcoming World Disarmament Conference in Geneva, and Vansittart broached the possibility of abrogating the naval clauses of Versailles in order to bring Germany into the Washington and London system. The inducements of such a policy to Germany were obvious: removal of some of the Versailles constraints and the basis for the equality she so desperately craved. Vansittart believed there was also a strong incentive for France to agree to such a move. As he pointed out ‘She [France] is always squealing about *Deutschlands*, and, as has already been pointed out, Germany has been driven into *Deutschlands* by the Treaty of Versailles.’⁸⁸ By this Vansittart meant that the innovative German construction had been forced upon her by the restrictions imposed in 1919.⁸⁹ Forbidden from possessing ships of the size and style allowed other nations, Germany sought new ways to meet what she believed were her maritime needs.

Though Vansittart’s desire to rehabilitate Germany was shared by many in Whitehall, others remained cautious. The construction of the *Deutschlands* raised eyebrows at the Admiralty, and there was on the whole a feeling of apprehension from the armed services toward the prospect of granting Germany equality of armaments. Sir George Milne, Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), summarised his appreciation of the military situation in Germany at a meeting of the CID in May 1930. While Germany was outwardly observing the terms of Versailles, Milne noted that military leaders were employing secret means to evade the restrictions on personnel and training,

⁸⁸ CP 4 (32), Memorandum on the British Position in Relation to European Policy, Sir Robert Vansittart, 11 January 1932, CAB 24/227.

⁸⁹ Article 190 of the Treaty of Versailles prevented Germany from building heavy ships over 10,000 tons and cruisers over 6,000 tons.

as well as the use of forbidden weapons and the provision of illegal war material.⁹⁰ At about the same time the COS circulated a comprehensive study of Imperial Defence Policy as part of their 1930 Annual Review. In it they took note of the ‘re-establishment of Germany as a world power’ and the *Anschluss* as likely future developments to be treated cautiously.⁹¹ Nevertheless, attempts to rehabilitate Germany through the medium of the Geneva Conference in order to bring about a diplomatic solution to the new European crisis continued. A multilateral agreement on arms limitation and reduction which included Germany was a far more preferable scenario to the alternative: a new arms race in which Britain would be forced to keep up or else concede her Great Power status.

The Geneva Disarmament Conference

Over the course of negotiations at the Geneva Conference during 1932, Sir Maurice Hankey added his voice to those who warned of a resurgent Germany. His diary entry for 3 October 1932 described a conversation he had had the previous week with Vansittart and Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon. He informed them that he was much disquieted with the European situation and felt that they were headed straight for war.⁹² Hankey expressed his concern that Germany had been working to overthrow the Treaty of Versailles since its completion; so far they had got rid of the Military Control Commissioners, ended the Rhineland occupation, settled the reparation question and now sought a revision of the Polish question and Germany’s eastern boundaries in general. Germany, he claimed, believed that no boundary rectification could be achieved without force, or the threat of it. Hence, they must first turn their attention to overturning the military clauses of the Treaty, which they did at Geneva by demanding either the disarmament of the other European powers to their level, or else the rearming of Germany to the level of everyone else. Hankey wrote that Germany was positively ‘screaming’ under Article VIII of the League Covenant that the other powers disarm to their level, a claim, he noted, for which the Germans had no legal and very little moral

⁹⁰ CID 248th Mtg, 29 May 1930, CAB 2/5.

⁹¹ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 77.

⁹² Roskill, *Hankey*, Vol. 3, 59.

justification.⁹³ While Hankey does not seem to have been opposed to granting Germany equality of armaments in principle, he was worried by German military activity that contravened the terms of Versailles. It was, he believed, a sign of new German aggression that risked plunging the rest of Europe into war. His diary entry for 23 October 1932 records his suggestion that Vansittart tell the Germans that they cannot expect to be granted *Gleichberechtigung* until they become less aggressive. Hankey suggested that Great Britain could offer to recognise German equality in principle, but that the Germans must be made to understand that some years must elapse before equality could be achieved.⁹⁴ To grant Germany equality of right to rearm at a stroke might aggravate the nascent arms race that Britain was trying so hard to suppress.

In the face of German demands for *Gleichberechtigung* progress at Geneva had been sluggish. Sir John Simon reported as early as May 1932 that the Conference was proceeding slowly with little hope of any significant achievement in the near future.⁹⁵ The Conference suffered another blow in July when Nadolny, the German representative, denounced the proposed compromise resolution on disarmament as failing to adequately take account of the equality principle.⁹⁶ Simon's efforts to placate all parties were damaged further by Italy's last minute objections to the proposal; this was especially disturbing as the Italian delegation had collaborated very closely in framing the resolution and had agreed to it point by point.⁹⁷ The Italian spokesman publicly claimed that Italy was entirely dissatisfied with the progress made at the Conference and with the contents of Simon's proposed resolution. With efforts at multilateral disarmament stalled at Geneva, the first tentative efforts at a bilateral Anglo-German agreement on the disarmament question were made. Though the Geneva Conference aimed at general armaments reduction and limitation, Britain was naturally concerned most with the naval aspect of disarmament. Thus, London sought to keep naval issues away from the Geneva Conference, believing that they were best settled by the Washington Powers apart from

⁹³ *Ibid*, 59.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 61.

⁹⁵ CP 164 (32), Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 26 May 1932, CAB 24/230.

⁹⁶ CP 270 (32), Report on the Disarmament Conference at Geneva, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 28 July 1932, CAB 24/232.

the arena of world disarmament. Vansittart and Hankey already proposed bringing Germany into the Washington and London system as a means of dealing with the naval crisis in Europe; bilateral disarmament talks had the potential to overcome some of the obstacles blocking progress at Geneva.

In this context Baron von Rheinbaben, the chief naval advisor to the German delegation at Geneva, met with Sir Herbert Samuel in July to discuss the issue of naval disarmament. Rheinbaben expressed Germany's ultimate desire to be free of the Versailles restrictions, however if the Disarmament Conference failed to achieve a general measure of world disarmament, Germany would be obliged to ask for a reconsideration of the Versailles limitations. Rheinbaben urged the Conference to take into consideration the principle of equality of right. He claimed that if Germany were given the right of equality, financial considerations would compel her to proceed only with a modest programme of naval rearmament.⁹⁸ His proposals were made cautiously, with the suggestion that they could prove useful if the British and German governments decided to pursue the naval question further. The sincerity of Rheinbaben's proposition must be called into question. He made German co-operation conditional upon the success of the Disarmament Conference, at a time when progress at Geneva seemed unlikely and Germany was actively delaying it. Shortly after this conversation took place at the beginning of August, Germany declared her intention to withdraw from the Conference. It seems unlikely that the decision to leave Geneva was made hastily. Although Simon desperately wanted to accommodate the Germans, the fact that Rheinbaben's proposals were never pursued from the British side may suggest the degree to which their sincerity was believed.

Germany's threat to leave the Conference if a satisfactory solution to the equality principle were not reached added a new urgency to the disarmament process. Since the key to disarmament lay along the Franco-German axis, the absence of Germany raised

⁹⁷ CP 270 (32), Report on the Disarmament Conference at Geneva, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 28 July 1932, CAB 24/232.

⁹⁸ CP 282 (32), Record of the Conversation Which Took Place Between the Home Secretary and Baron von Rheinbaben, 5 August 1932, CAB 24/232.

the very real possibility of the Conference's failure. Simon reported to the Cabinet that Germany had essentially presented the Conference with an ultimatum: if the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles were not modified by international agreement, Germany would undertake to modify the Treaty alone. Strict maintenance of the Treaty, he declared, was no longer practicable.⁹⁹ The real issue was not weapons, Simon claimed, but status. If Germany were granted equality of armaments she would pose no serious threat to the European situation; she would likely not build up her armaments in any significant way, as it would be financially unfeasible. Any German rearmament would then be carried out in the context of an international agreement binding upon all parties to the Conference. Simon believed that the real solution would be to agree to a general abolition of all the weapons prohibited Germany under Versailles. That would settle the equality principle and the issue of disarmament at a single stroke.¹⁰⁰

This suggestion keenly illustrates Simon's naïve idealism. Such a proposal, if it were carried through, would seriously undermine the One-Power Standard, which it must be remembered was calculated by the Admiralty to be the absolute minimum sized fleet that could meet Britain's imperial commitments. To limit the Royal Navy to 144,000 tons, and refuse it capital ships over 10,000 tons would place British seapower at the mercy of the United States, who was not a member of the Disarmament Conference. The limitation would also leave British imperial possessions vulnerable to attack by Soviet Russia, who did not at that time possess a noteworthy fleet, but who would have been able to build a fleet of 144,000 tons fairly quickly thanks to industrial advances made under Stalin's five-year plans.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ CP 305 (32), Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 15 September 1932, CAB 24/233.

¹⁰⁰ CP 305 (32), Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 15 September 1932, CAB 24/233.

¹⁰¹ The Soviet navy had been largely neglected during the 1920s and the first five-year plan. It was not until 1935, and the second five-year plan, that Stalin began to pay more attention to the Red Navy, and the idea of a Soviet fleet built around heavy capital ships began to take root, although nothing of substance was built for some years yet. Under the second five-year plan there was a large increase in the construction of shipyards and shipbuilding infrastructure. See Jürgen Rohwer and Mikhail S. Monakov, *Stalin's Ocean-Going Fleet: Soviet Naval Strategy and Shipbuilding Programmes, 1922-1953*. (London: Frank Cass, 2001).

Where Simon was correct was in his assessment of the implications of German departure from the Conference. Germany's departure from Geneva without being granted equality of status would result in her rearming without restriction or limitation.¹⁰² Simon echoed Hankey's fears of what German rearmament would mean for the European situation. Germany, he wrote, had already freed herself from several of the Versailles obligations. The Rhineland had been evacuated ahead of schedule, she had been admitted to the League of Nations with a Council Seat and the reparations question had been settled. The Polish frontier was likely to be the next issue, and the Foreign Secretary despaired that force was the only possible solution to that question.¹⁰³ A memorandum on the proceedings at Geneva from Simon to the Cabinet in October 1932 is illustrative of the new urgency that German threats to leave had produced. For the first time Simon referred to the impasse at Geneva as a disarmament *crisis* [italics mine]. The failure of the Conference, he wrote despondently, would probably bring about a war between Germany and Poland, and ruin the prospect of economic recovery in Europe. Crisis might be averted, he believed, if the limitations of Versailles could be superseded by a new Disarmament Convention, whereby everyone would disarm to Germany's level.¹⁰⁴ This would create new problems for Britain's One-Power Standard. The Washington and London Treaty system, upon which the Standard was based, had not included Germany and the re-emergence of Germany as a European naval power outside of existing treaty structures would add an unpleasant new dimension to Britain's naval requirements.

Throughout 1932 at the Disarmament Conference, Great Britain often showed more sympathy with Germany than with France. Many people in Britain, Sir John Simon among them, saw France, not Germany as the main obstacle to a disarmament agreement and security. To those who felt that Germany's claim for equality of status was not

¹⁰² CP 323 (32), Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 27 September 1932, CAB 24/233.

¹⁰³ CP 326 (32), Memorandum on Disarmament, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 29 September 1932, CAB 24/233.

¹⁰⁴ CP 347 (32), Memorandum on the Disarmament Crisis, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 17 October 1932, CAB 24/233.

unreasonable, France was an irritating obstacle.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, the Conference plodded on throughout 1932, producing no achievement of substance; the problem of disarmament and security still remained. By the end of 1932, the various attempts at naval disarmament in Europe and the Far East had failed. Indeed, the very goal of disarmament seemed to some to be the wrong way of trying to achieve security. The COS Annual Review for 1930 briefly addressed the paradox of security and disarmament. While highlighting the ill-preparedness of Great Britain's armed services for war, the COS took note of the Foreign Office observation that the 'more the nations of Europe become convinced of our readiness to fulfil our guarantee, the less likelihood there will be that we shall be called upon to do so.'¹⁰⁶

The international situation had been deteriorating, efforts to renew the Washington Treaty had resulted in a marginal increase in Japan's naval ratio, and neither France nor Italy had signed the whole of the London Treaty. Moreover Japan was extremely dissatisfied with the naval ratio allotted her, and had announced that she would not be bound by those same ratios beyond the life of the London Naval Treaty. Hostilities in Manchuria and political assassinations in Japan raised fears in Britain of Japanese attempts to overthrow the London Treaty by force, and of the possibility of war in the Far East. In Europe, Germany was pressing forward intention to rearm, and innovative naval construction had prompted an incipient naval race among the three main continental powers: France, Italy and Germany. Attempts to find a diplomatic solution to the disarmament question at the Geneva Conference made little progress and the prospect of a general agreement on disarmament being achieved in the near future was very much in doubt. Germany's threat to leave the Conference endangered its existence and Simon's naïve but sincere suggestions for mass disarmament were fantasy at best. Hanging over all of this like storm clouds were the consistent reminders that British seapower was inadequate to the task set before it of defending the Empire, and the Treasury's reluctance to increase defence spending.

¹⁰⁵ Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, 83.

¹⁰⁶ CP 327 (30), Chiefs of Staff Sub-committee Annual Review, 7 October 1930, CAB 24/215.

A memorandum by the First Sea Lord in April 1931 brought to the attention of the Cabinet the fact that since the Washington Treaty was signed Italy, France, Japan and the United States had all increased their naval expenditure.¹⁰⁷ Great Britain was the only naval power to have actually decreased naval expenditure. The memorandum expressed what became the Admiralty's mantra: that Great Britain had accepted a naval strength that was below what was required to keep sea communications open in the event of a war. In an effort to convince the Cabinet of the importance of maintaining Britain's sea communications, the Admiralty pointed out that during the Great War the naval blockade of Germany was effective chiefly because of the protracted nature of the conflict. Had Britain's merchant fleet been 'banished from the oceans', the country could not have maintained the war effort for four months. The One-Power Standard, the Admiralty alleged, was not only insufficient for Britain's Imperial needs, but had also fallen into a state of disrepair so that the whole basis of British seapower was under threat not just from other naval powers, but also from neglect. 'It can, in fact, be said, that there are not adequately defended ports in the British Commonwealth, and that this weakness extends to anti-aircraft defences as well as to defence against sea-borne attack.'¹⁰⁸

Hankey's diary expressed a similar sentiment in a March 1932 entry. 'Disarmament was undoubtedly one of the causes' of British prestige having trailed off in recent years, especially in French and Belgian eyes.¹⁰⁹ But 'the real trouble', Hankey wrote, was not so much disarmament 'in its broad lines as our failure to render efficient what was left.'¹¹⁰ He was enormously critical of the Treasury, maintaining that the government had allowed the Empire's defences to become inefficient for lack of provision of less than one per cent of the money spent on 'so called works of reconstruction', by which he meant that the imbalance between social and defence spending was entirely out of proportion to the country's needs.¹¹¹ Disarmament efforts

¹⁰⁷ CP 100 (31), Appreciation of the General Naval Situation in 1931, First Sea Lord, 14 April 1931, CAB 24/220.

¹⁰⁸ CP 100 (31), Appreciation of the General Naval Situation in 1931, First Sea Lord, 14 April 1931, CAB 24/220. CP 100 (31), Appreciation of the General Naval Situation in 1931, First Sea Lord, 14 April 1931, CAB 24/220.

¹⁰⁹ Roskill, *Hankey*, Vol. 3, 40.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 40.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 40.

had presented Britain with a grave situation. In the face of a deteriorating international situation, British seapower was no longer up to the task of defending British interests. Wholesale rearmament was not an option to be seriously considered; a solution was to be found through a careful policy of diplomacy and tentative rearmament.

Chapter Two: 1933

Chatfield

1933 brought no relief to policy makers in London. Each succeeding year since the London Naval Conference had brought a crisis in the Far East, first in Manchuria, then at Shanghai, the cumulative effect of which had been to emphasise the precarious state of the British Empire in Asia. As the new year opened however, two men entered the political stage who were to influence the existing international situation in very different, but very important, ways. The first of these is the more obvious; on 30 January 1933 Adolph Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. His aggressive and militaristic foreign policy was to start Europe irreversibly down the path to the Second World War.

The second actor to make his entrance on stage was the lesser known Admiral Sir Alfred M. Ernle Chatfield, appointed to the post of First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff in January. Chatfield had served as Admiral Beatty's flag captain at Jutland in 1916, and then as a technical adviser at the Washington Naval Conference. From 1922-1932 he held various key Admiralty posts and commanded both the Atlantic and Mediterranean fleets before being appointed First Sea Lord in 1933. He was widely regarded by contemporaries as intelligent and highly capable, and considered one of the finest officers in the Royal Navy.¹ Though small in stature, the influence he would come to have over British strategic and defence policy was enormous. He alone of the three service heads was able to stand his ground in the policy debates at Whitehall; his ideas dominated British defence thinking among the armed services throughout the 1930s.

There were two keys to Chatfield's thinking: he believed that without the Empire Great Britain would be a second rate power, and that without the fleet, the Empire would be lost.² If Britain were to lose her Empire, Chatfield claimed, she would 'carry as much

¹ Arthur J. Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies: The Royal Navy and the Imperial Japanese Navy: Strategic Illusions, 1936-1941*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 30-31.

² Joseph A. Maiolo, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany. 1933-1939: A Study in Appeasement and the Origins of the Second World War* (London: MacMillan, 1998), 13.

weight in the councils of the world as Italy or Spain.’³ His ambition was to restore the fleet to a position equal to the task of defending the Empire, and create an unchallengeable Two-Power Standard over Japan and the second largest European naval power by the mid-1940s. Chatfield recognised that naval power must be cultivated over extended periods of time, and that because the life of warships was measured in decades the naval *status quo* carried its own momentum.⁴ In the face of a stringent Treasury and an atrophied shipbuilding industry the new First Sea Lord sought to use naval treaties, blamed by many for the decline of British naval hegemony, to favourably adjust the international naval balance.⁵

Chatfield had before him a task of Herculean proportions. A memorandum by the Chiefs of Staff in February officially reported what most in London already understood, and what the Navy had been warning since the London Naval Conference: war in the Far East would expose the entirety of Britain’s territory, trade, shipping and the Dominions to enemy attack.⁶ Though the information contained in the report was not entirely new, it had now gone beyond the realm of mere warning and entered that of policy and planning. The Geneva Disarmament Conference had made little headway throughout 1932, and although Japan remained at the Conference during this time, the Japanese delegate himself admitted that he held out no real hope that the Conference would accomplish its goals, and was only reserving his country’s position at the table.⁷ Thus the unpromising situation in the Far East looked set to remain so. Chatfield and policy makers from the other services, the Foreign Office and the Treasury were now compelled to formulate a strategic foreign policy that would either diffuse the tension east of Suez, or else secure the Imperial position there. Added to this was the wearisome task of achieving some measure of European disarmament that included Germany’s nascent programme of rearmament. To navigate the country out of these predicaments would require an astute combination of strategy and diplomacy.

³ Maiolo, ‘The Admiralty and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 18 June, 1935’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 10, 1 (March 1999), 91.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵ Maiolo, *Royal Navy*, 15.

⁶ Paul Haggie, ‘The Royal Navy and the Far Eastern Problem, 1931-1941’, *The Army Quarterly and Defence Journal*, 106, 4 (October 1976), 406.

Japan and the Far East

In January 1933 renewed aggression in the northern province of Jehol resulted in the addition of that province to Japan's Manchurian territory, and the extension of Japanese authority over the whole of the disputed territory by the end of the month.⁸ Whereas there had been a good deal of benevolent feeling towards Japan over the Mukden crisis of 1931 which had evaporated over Shanghai in 1932, renewed aggression in Jehol, combined with a secret intelligence report of a Japanese plan to attack Singapore, raised alarm in Britain over Japan's pan-Asiatic mission.⁹ A memorandum from the Department of Naval Intelligence (DNI) in May 1933 stressed the Japanese aim of becoming the dominant first class Power in Asia and the Pacific. Japan, the memorandum concluded, was proceeding on the principle that the ends justified the means; if Tokyo considered that creating friction in colonial possessions would be useful to that end, she would not hesitate to do so.¹⁰ A DNI minute on a Foreign Office memorandum on Japanese activity in the South Seas, dated September 1933, read:

It is important to be fully alive to the reality of the Japanese pan-Asiatic movement and try to follow its workings. It is much bigger than the mere chipping off of bits of China, and is probably the principal means by which Japan hopes to become the leading Empire in the East.¹¹

Japan's Imperial mission was disturbing on a number of counts. Japanese expansion on the Asian mainland was incompatible with British colonial and financial interests there, threatening as it did the 'open door' policy in China. Expansion throughout the Pacific challenged the position of the Royal Navy and the security of the Singapore base. Aggression in Manchuria and northern China also created friction between Japan and the Soviet Union, fuelling fears in Europe of another Russo-Japanese War, with the victor emerging from the conflict in a stronger position to dispute Britain's Imperial presence

⁷ *Ibid*, 406.

⁸ Stephen Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets, Vol. 3: 1931-1963*. (London: Collins, 1974), 72.

⁹ Orest Babij, 'The Royal Navy and the Defence of the British Empire, 1928-1934' in Greg Kennedy and Keith Neilson eds. *Far Flung Lines: Essays on Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald MacKenzie Schurman*. (London: Frank Cass, 1996), 182.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 42.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 43.

on the Asian mainland. Remonstrations to Japan through the League of Nations exacerbated, rather than pacified, the situation.

The League's acceptance of the Lytton Report, in February 1933, which largely condemned Japanese action in China, led Tokyo to announce its intent to withdraw from the League.¹² This was a tremendous blow to Sir John Simon, who strongly believed in the principles of the League. Though he hoped that the threat was an empty one, he was forced to admit that Anglo-Japanese relations were deteriorating and with them, the prospect of Japan's inclusion in any agreement reached at the Geneva Conference. He wrote in February that if Japan's withdrawal from the League were to be accompanied by a withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference, then 'the prospects of disarmament are definitely worsened, especially on the naval side.'¹³ In an effort to stall Japan's exit from Geneva, and contain her Imperial designs, London resorted to exerting economic pressure on Tokyo in the form of embargoes and trade restrictions.

The Lytton Report's acceptance by the League led Britain, in an effort to avoid appearing anti-Japanese, to place an embargo on the sale of arms to both China and Japan. This particular embargo was short lived, as other countries quickly profited handsomely from the vacuum created by Britain's moral stance, but further attempts at economic restraint soon followed.¹⁴ In April the British government abrogated the Anglo-Japanese commercial treaty for the West African colonies; that same month the government of India announced the cancellation of its 1911 commerce treaty with Japan.¹⁵ The 'drastic tariff action' in West Africa and the repudiation of the Indian treaty in particular raised great indignation in Tokyo, where the action was seen as a move in

¹² Hosoya Chihiro, 'Britain and the United States in Japan's view of the international system, 1919-1937' in Ian Nish ed., *Anglo-Japanese Alienation, 1919-1952*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1982), 17.

¹³ CP 42 (33), Memorandum on the Far East and Geneva, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 18 February 1933, CAB 24/238.

¹⁴ Antony Best, 'The Road to Anglo-Japanese Confrontation, 1931-1941', in Ian Nish and Yoichi Kibata eds., *Anglo-Japanese Relations 1600-2000, Vol. 2: The Political-Diplomatic Dimension, 1931-2000*. (Houndmills: MacMillan, 2000), 29. The embargo was installed in February and was repealed the following month. For more on this see Roskill, *Hankey*, Vol. 3, 72.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 29 and Nish, 'Japan in Britain's View of the International System', in Nish ed., *Anglo-Japanese Alienation*, 42.

the direction of official economic sanctions being imposed by the League of Nations.¹⁶ In fact it was not. British policy makers had rejected the application of sanctions over earlier Japanese transgressions on several counts. It was unlikely that League members would unanimously approve the application of sanctions and Great Britain was not strong enough to apply such a policy effectively without the participation of other powers. Furthermore, such an act was likely to lead to war. Indeed Hankey wrote in his diary on 4 March 1933, that Britain had been warned several times by Tokyo that sanctions would lead to war and for

war, thanks to the domination of the pacifists, we are totally unprepared....So the result of an embargo against Japan, whether by the League or ourselves, would precipitate a war in which we should be worsted, and which would open the whole of the European possessions and trade in the Far East to Japanese depredations.¹⁷

Nevertheless, perception is often more important than reality, and there was a common feeling in the Japanese Diet that Britain was taking the first steps toward the application of League sanctions. Despite reassurances from the Foreign Office that Britain was not 'anti-Japanese' and still desired good relations with Tokyo, the Japanese maintained that trade relations could not be kept separate from political relations, claiming: 'The present conflict of interests is not a mere dispute between manufacturers; it is a symptom of the struggle between two nations, both of which depend for their existence on their foreign trade.'¹⁸

Clearly any economic measures taken by Great Britain aimed at containing Japan or otherwise, were going to be perceived by Tokyo as an act of hostility. How far Japan was willing to run the risk of war with the British Empire was a matter of great dispute; men like Hankey and Chatfield stressed the Japanese danger in order to push for an accelerated pace of rearmament, especially with regard to the navy. Others in Whitehall doubted that Japan would attack Britain as long as tensions with the Soviet Union remained high, for fear that Moscow would seize the opportunity to expand at her

¹⁶ William Roger Louis, *British Strategy in the Far East, 1919-1939*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 220.

¹⁷ Roskill, *Hankey*, Vol. 3, 73.

¹⁸ Louis, *British Strategy in the Far East*, 220.

expense. Sir Charles Orde, head of the Foreign Office's Far Eastern Department, dismissed the idea that Japan feared Soviet Russia: 'I find it difficult to believe that Japan in the flush of her success in Manchuria is not confident of her ability to keep Russia at bay.'¹⁹ Although in reality Japan was unlikely to provoke the war for which Britain was manifestly unready, the perception existed that she might.

Attempts by the Foreign Office to improve relations with Japan were complicated by foreign policy considerations elsewhere. A pro-Japanese foreign policy could alienate American public opinion, jeopardising future access to the munitions factories and money markets that had proved so valuable in the Great War.²⁰ The Foreign Office also needed to account for the effect such a policy would have on the Soviet Union and the delicate balance of power on the Asian mainland. An improvement in Anglo-Japanese relations might encourage Tokyo, confident of British support, to take its war of nerves with Russia to the next level, forcing Stalin to seek closer ties with France or Germany, and thus deepening instead of alleviating the tense European situation. Furthermore, any deal with Japan was likely to alienate Chinese opinion, possibly leading to a boycott of British goods and negating any concessions gained from Japan.²¹ This last scenario was possibly the most benign of the three. As William Roger Louis writes 'Though the myth of the China market lingered on, by 1933 only 2 per cent of the world's trade went there, and China's purchases from Britain were less than half of India's.' In 1933 China was sixteenth on the list of British customers, with only 5.9% of Great Britain's total foreign investment holdings located there.²² However there were other, perhaps more pressing, issues outstanding between Britain and Japan, which prevented any serious improvement of relations.

¹⁹ Minute by Sir Charles Orde, February 1935, Quoted in Simon Bourette-Knowles, "'The Global Micawber": Sir Robert Vansittart, the Treasury and the Global Balance of Power, 1933-1935', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 6, 1 (March 1995), 110.

²⁰ Best, 'Road to Anglo-Japanese Confrontation', in Nish and Kibata eds., *Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1600-2000*, Vol. 2, 33.

²¹ *Ibid*, 33.

²² William Roger Louis, 'The Road to Singapore: British Imperialism in the Far East, 1932-42', in Mommsen, Wolfgang and Lothar Kettenacker eds., *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement*. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983), 357.

It was known from open sources that the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) was undergoing an extensive programme of modernisation and expansion, including refits on all nine of its capital ships and an increase in the size of the naval air arm. Little else was known about the programme, and concrete intelligence on the IJN was difficult to come by, since neither the naval attaché in Tokyo, nor the CC China Squadron were allowed to visit any modernised ships from 1933 to 1937. Rumours of expanded slipways and dockyards suggested that Japan's new ships would displace approximately 50,000 tons, though there was no firm intelligence about either their displacement or their armament.²³ Further intelligence indicated an acceleration of the Imperial Japanese Navy's cruiser and destroyer programme and a budgetary increase of 80% in the naval estimates for 1933-1934.²⁴ Reports from the Industrial Intelligence Committee (IIC) in March 1933 demonstrated that Japan was arranging for secret shipments of materials directly related to arms production; a 'most secret' source revealed that a ship was shortly to leave Antwerp for Japan carrying one and a half tons of pure vanadium, a metallic element used for strengthening steel.²⁵ The implication was that the metal was to be used in upgrading existing ships, or possibly in the construction of new vessels. Either scenario represented a challenge to the Royal Navy in the Pacific. In November 1934 the IIC reported that Japan was importing unregistered cargoes of toluol, a compound used in explosives, from Norway.²⁶ Here again was an indication that Japan's aggressive ambitions had not yet been satiated; intelligence analysts were convinced the toluol was destined to become military ordnance. Such reports fuelled speculation that Japan was preparing for military and naval operations on a larger scale than had hitherto been seen; all three services warned that the inadequacy of intelligence gathering and the likelihood that any Japanese expeditionary force would maintain radio silence meant that no guarantee could be given of adequate preparations being made against a Japanese attack.²⁷

²³ Antony Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia, 1914-1941*. (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 118.

²⁴ Clare M. Scammell, 'The Royal Navy and the Strategic Origins of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935' *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 20, 2 (June 1997), 100.

²⁵ Antony Best, 'Constructing an Image: British Intelligence and Whitehall's Perception of Japan, 1931-1939', *Intelligence and National Security*, 11, 3 (July 1996), 411.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 411.

²⁷ Best, *Japanese Challenge*, 122.

The naval question was beginning to appear insoluble. Japan had increased the scope and speed of her construction programme, and ongoing talks on naval ratios, aimed at laying the groundwork for the forthcoming second London Naval Conference, were progressing more slowly than the Geneva Disarmament Conference. In the fall of 1933 Sir Robert Craigie, the Foreign Office naval expert, minuted dejectedly of his meeting with the Japanese ambassador that 'I detected a greater rigidity in the attitude of the Japanese ambassador than I have done in earlier conversations extending now over a number of years.'²⁸

By the end of the year prominent opinion at both the Foreign Office and the Admiralty was convinced of the severe and imminent nature of the Japanese threat, much more so than twelve months earlier. In the Foreign Office Annual Review for 1933 Sir Charles Orde wrote

And while I am not disposed to think that there is a great risk of such a war [with Japan], if we are not first embroiled elsewhere, I think we shall always have to reckon with the serious possibility of a Japanese attack, unless we are fully prepared to meet it, if we are at any time engaged in war or seriously threatened with it with another important power.²⁹

The intractability of Japan is demonstrated by the events of 1933. Tokyo was unwilling to accept criticism over her activities in Asia and the Pacific; diplomatic attempts to achieve a solution to the Far Eastern situation both bilaterally and at Geneva had thus far come to nought, and economic measures meant to curb aggressive Japanese expansion threatened war. In the Far East, Great Britain was left with little alternative but to pursue deterrence, *détente* at best, while simultaneously attempting a cautious programme of rearmament in the face of an expanded Japanese naval programme. Japan had given notice of her intention to leave the League of Nations; discussions aimed at coming to an understanding on naval ratios were stalled and the bits of intelligence that

²⁸ Haggie, *Britannia At Bay*, 43.

²⁹ Quoted in Keith Neilson, 'The Defence Requirements Sub-Committee, British Strategic Foreign Policy, Neville Chamberlain and the Path to Appeasement', *The English Historical Review*, 118, 477 (June 2003), 662.

filtered through to Whitehall seemed only to confirm the perception of Japan as an Imperialist power seeking domination of the Asian mainland and the Pacific.

Germany

The granting of *Gleichberechtigung* to Germany at the end of 1932 represented the first step in revising the restrictions placed upon her by the Treaty of Versailles. However the granting of equality of rights to Germany presented a new series of challenges for the European situation, one of which was the question of the size and form of the new German fleet. German rearmament had been greeted cautiously in London; many in Whitehall recognised that Versailles could no longer be enforced and that the Treaty was impractical, but the rise of Hitler's *Reich* added a caveat to the recognition of Germany as an equal in the international system. Sir Robert Vansittart, who had been an earlier advocate for Germany on the issue of *Gleichberechtigung* and would become one of Hitler's most virulent critics, warned of the disconcerting direction German foreign policy appeared to be taking under the Nazi regime. In a memorandum to the Cabinet written in May 1933 he warned of the potential of German aggression and Hitler's desire to redraw the borders of Germany established in 1919 by force, alleging that Germany would like to attack Poland at the earliest opportunity. In the past, he wrote, Germany had got much sympathy over the issue of disarmament; Germany had now begun to rearm and nobody believed that the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles were any longer being kept in good faith. Individual instances of treaty violation were not of great concern, he claimed, but the cumulative effect was considerable. 'There is', Vansittart wrote, 'a mad dog abroad once more, and we must resolutely combine either to ensure its destruction or at least its confinement until the disease has run its course.'³⁰ The Permanent Undersecretary's comment was prescient; but since the destruction of the 'mad dog' was neither desirable, feasible, nor even deemed necessary in 1933, confinement was to be the order of the day, preferably by including Germany in the machinery of international arms limitation agreements.

³⁰ CP 129 (33), Memorandum by the Permanent Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 7 May 1933, CAB 24/241.

The question of how best to approach Germany over the issue of rearmament was a sensitive but important one. Germany had been at the Geneva Disarmament Conference since its commencement, but as the likelihood of the conference achieving anything significant faded London began to pursue disarmament by other avenues. Simon, noting that the British voting public would not tolerate the outright rejection of the disarmament clauses of Versailles, suggested that perhaps Britain should use Mussolini as a go-between, to try and obtain from Berlin some assurance that rearmament would be pursued slowly and scrupulously. Vansittart, for his part, thought it best that Britain approach Germany directly, fearing that Italy would be too lenient and France too harsh. The French government, he was certain, would likely divulge too much information to the French press, which had the potential to complicate the situation unnecessarily.³¹ The 'resolute combination' advocated by Vansittart in his earlier memorandum was, even at this stage, proving difficult to achieve. Relations with France were often tense, and many in London felt that her constant demands for security were unreasonable and unnecessary. Mussolini was considerably more reasonable, but somewhat unpredictable, and his association with Hitler aroused some concern at the Foreign Office.

Inter alia considerations aside, the task of formulating a concrete policy towards German rearmament was made notably more difficult by the apparent inconsistencies of Nazi foreign policy. In an article published in May, Foreign Minister Constantin von Neurath announced that Germany would pursue her own course of rearmament, regardless of whatever resolutions might be produced at Geneva.³² Less than a week later, Hitler made an unexpectedly conciliatory declaration of policy.³³ The 'Hugenberg Memorandum' at the World Economic Conference in London followed this in June, where the German Economic Minister claimed Germany's right to overseas colonies and *Lebensraum* in Eastern Europe, to be taken by force if necessary. Hitler used the incident as an excuse to fire Hugenberg. If this inconsistency and apparent indecisiveness was a

³¹ CP 184 (33), Memorandum on German Disregard of Part V of the Treaty of Versailles, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 14 July 1933, CAB 24/242.

³² Stephen Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars, Vol. 2: The Period of Reluctant Rearmament, 1930-1939*. (London: Collins, 1976), 155.

ploy by Hitler to sow discord among the other European powers and keep them guessing at Germany's real intentions, it was certainly working well enough throughout the first half of 1933.

Apprehensions about the course of German rearmament appeared validated by a conversation between Commander Belben of the Royal Navy and Admiral von Freyberg, the German naval representative to the Geneva Conference, concerning the Draft Convention on Disarmament presented by Great Britain to the Conference that spring. Freyberg claimed that the part of the convention dealing with naval weapons took insufficient account of the equality principle: the convention allowed for Italy to build one capital ship but maintained the moratorium imposed in 1930 on the other European maritime powers. Belben's reply, that the proposal aimed at maintaining the equal rights between France and Italy established at Washington, failed to convince Freyberg of the usefulness of the convention. Freyberg retorted that Italy had a navy already, and they were allowed to build new ships whereas Germany, a weaker power, was not given similar privileges.³⁴ Rear Admiral Bellairs, the British naval expert at Geneva, also reported a conversation he had with Freyberg and Baron von Rheinbaben in which the two German delegates outlined their objections to the Draft Convention. While Italy was allowed to lay down one 26,500 ton, 13-inch gun ship as a reply to the *Dunkerque*, the convention restricted submarine construction of non-Washington Treaty powers to the replacement of overage tonnage, and prohibited capital ship construction until 1937. Freyberg and Rheinbaben complained that the restrictions placed on naval construction under the Draft Convention would not even allow Germany to build up to the tonnage allotted them under the Treaty of Versailles; they claimed for Germany the right to build one capital ship in reply to the Italian ship and the *Dunkerque*. Bellairs noted the effect that new German ship construction would have on the naval situation in Europe:

For Germany to lay down a ship of the *Dunkerque* class would completely destroy the balance we were attempting. It would mean that France and

³³ *Ibid*, 155.

³⁴ Conversation between Commander Belben and Admiral von Freyberg, Geneva, 23 March 1933. *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Ser. 2, Vol. 5 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office), 116-117.

Italy would require further construction and would not result in the final position of Germany being more favourable relative to the other Powers.³⁵

Bellairs' comments are indicative of the broader attitude of British policy makers toward the issue of a new German navy. The objection to Germany's construction of a capital ship came not on the grounds that it would make Germany a menace to the Royal Navy, as it had in the years preceding 1914, but that it would upset the delicate balance of European naval power. The One-Power Standard that had been created at Washington and modified at London called for superiority over Japan and deterrence against the next strongest European Power. That precarious balance was already being threatened by Japanese aggression and naval construction; adding a new component to the European dimension of the balance that would provoke increased construction on the part of Italy and France would be certain to further undermine Britain's position.

This view was buttressed by the reaction of London to the German naval programme throughout the rest of 1933. Sir Eric Phipps reported to Sir John Simon in November 1933 that Germany had not really infringed the Versailles Treaty in the realm of naval construction, and that up to that point Hitler had not interfered with the general policy of the navy. Phipps noted that the naval programme was continuing along lines set out in 1931 and, although the 1936-1937 ships would possibly be brought forward to 1934-1935, this was not of any great concern. Despite earlier conversations at Geneva and concerns over Hitler's foreign policy, the threat posed by German rearmament, at least in the naval sphere, appeared inconsequential. The feeling was supported by additional reports from Berlin by both Phipps and Captain Andrew Muirhead-Gould, the British naval attaché. The German officers Muirhead-Gould had spoken with were all moderates; the German navy would like to have some submarines and planes, but there was no intention of building them for the present.³⁶ In December Phipps reported a conversation he had with Hitler, who claimed that Germany would never again build a fleet to challenge Great Britain as Tirpitz had done.³⁷ This was precisely what the British government wanted to hear; clearly the Chancellor could see reason in a way that the

³⁵ Memorandum by Rear Admiral Bellairs, 29 April 1933. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 5, 176-179.

³⁶ Sir E. Phipps (Berlin) to Sir J. Simon, 21 November 1933. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 6, 86-87.

Kaiser never had. Germany's declaration of peace toward the Royal Navy removed one dimension of the problem of German rearmament. If the new German fleet was not to present a challenge to Britain's maritime position, there would be no need to dramatically increase naval expenditure. A modest German navy would be much easier to integrate into existing treaty structures; it would also be easier to convince the other European powers, particularly France, to accept something that Great Britain did not perceive as a threat.

Assurances from Hitler that Germany wanted only a modest fleet seemed plausible. The Chancellor told Phipps that threats to Germany's security came from Poland, France and Czechoslovakia, not from Great Britain. The kinds of weapons Germany needed, Hitler claimed, were dictated by the security threats posed by these countries.³⁷ The actions of the German government seemed to confirm Hitler's claims. Phipps informed the Foreign Office in April 1934 that German defence expenditures for the coming year had risen across the board, including a 50 million *Reichsmark* increase for the navy. His report added that army and airforce budgets had risen by 174 million and 131 million *Reichsmarks* respectively. Phipps suggested that the increase in expenditure intimated a plan to speed up naval construction,³⁸ something that had already been anticipated by earlier conversations with various German officials. When questioned about the increase, von Neurath attempted to allay British concerns by explaining that the increase was to replace overage cruisers, not to add anything to the treaty-limited fleet.³⁹ Irrespective of the purpose for which the money was to be used, the small increase in the naval budget relative to the increases for the army and air forces offered evidence that Hitler's renunciation of a great navy could be taken at face value and was consistent with his perceived threats to German security.

The problems that remained over the issue of German naval rearmament were twofold: concern over its form, and the effect that it would have on the European balance

³⁷ Sir E. Phipps (Berlin) to Sir J. Simon, 5 December 1933. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 6, 149-150.

³⁸ Sir E. Phipps (Berlin) to Sir J. Simon, 5 December 1933. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 6, 149-150.

³⁹ Sir E. Phipps (Berlin) to Sir J. Simon, 4 April 1934. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 6, 595-599.

⁴⁰ Sir E. Phipps (Berlin) to Sir J. Simon, 9 April 1934. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 6, 613.

of naval power. Germany had been granted equality of rights the previous December, but that recognition had signalled the rebirth of a German fleet without determining its size and shape.⁴¹ The creative construction of Germany's 'pocket-battleships' had raised concerns in Britain about qualitative uniformity, and Chatfield was opposed to advancing technology to preserve maritime superiority in the same way that Admiral 'Jackie' Fisher had done during his tenure as First Sea Lord in the years leading up to the Great War. He would have rather that all naval powers constructed ships of similar design, Britain could achieve superiority through superior ship construction and well trained personnel. In any case, such technology was expensive to develop, and the Treasury would not allocate money for such luxuries.⁴² Sir John Simon made the astute observation in a memorandum on the Disarmament Conference that Germany had been brought back to the bargaining table by the granting of *Gleichberechtigung*; if the Conference were to break down at this point, Germany would claim a moral right to rearm without regard for international treaties.⁴³ Simon's warning underscored the importance of integrating Germany into the existing naval treaty system before she could undertake a programme of unrestricted rearmament.

In November 1930 a six year building plan had been tabled in the Reichstag for the construction of eight 'pocket-battleships'; six were to be available for service and two for reserve, in consonance with the restrictions set in place by the Treaty of Versailles.⁴⁴ In October 1933 Germany began construction of the fourth ship of the *Deutschland* class, in accordance with treaty regulations and the 1930 building programme, although it would later be revealed that the ship exceeded its announced 10,000 tons by a considerable margin. Both France and Italy responded with new construction.⁴⁵ This was the other, greater, danger of German rearmament. If France and Italy expanded their building programmes in response to the construction of 'pocket-battleships', what would be their reaction to unrestricted German rearmament, or a German *Dunkerque* class ship? The potential for an explosive building race among the European powers was made

⁴¹ Maiolo, *Royal Navy*, 21.

⁴² Maiolo, 'The Admiralty', 94.

⁴³ CP 3 (33), Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 12 January 1933, CAB 24/237.

⁴⁴ Maiolo, 'The Admiralty', 99.

greatly more alarming by the problems confronting Britain in the Far East. Part III of the London Naval Treaty, which France and Italy were not signatories to, contained an ‘escalator clause’ which permitted either of Britain, Japan or the United States to build above the limits established in the agreement if ship construction by an outside power threatened their national security interests. Although Britain would be within her treaty rights to increase construction as a result of naval building by the continental powers, so too would Japan and the United States. An increase in the Royal Navy was certain to provoke increases by those naval powers, necessitating further response by Great Britain.

More worrisome still was the frightening prospect of a German-Japanese alliance, which would present a concerted challenge to the One-Power Standard from two quarters simultaneously. Rumours in diplomatic circles alleged that the prelude to a German-Japanese alliance would be marked by Germany’s imminent recognition of Manchukuo. There was more fiction to this than fact; Nazi Germany was not prepared to abandon her interests in China, and still worked to maintain a policy of neutrality towards Far Eastern affairs.⁴⁶ Nazi racial ideology was often a source of friction between the two countries and German talk of ‘non-Aryans’ was distressing to Japan, reminiscent as it was of the Kaiser’s ‘Yellow peril’ warnings a generation earlier.⁴⁷ There was more anxiety among British policy makers over potential German-Japanese collaboration than over an actual alliance, and the issue became a recurring theme in defence and foreign policy discussions until the latter half of 1935 when the Abyssinian Crisis uncovered a third potential enemy.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 100.

⁴⁶ John P. Fox, *Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis, 1931-1938: A Study in Diplomacy and Ideology*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 33.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 84. Germany was occasionally required to conduct damage control with Japan over Nazi racial policy. Hitler aggravated Japanese sensibilities in January 1936 during a speech in Munich, when he claimed that only the white race was capable of colonisation. A German press directive in February 1935 instructed that “the Yellow Peril must no longer be made out as a picture of horror, for Germany’s attitude toward other races leaves completely open the question of the worth of other races – especially when these races must not, for political reasons, be offended.”

The Deteriorating International Situation

As 1933 drew to a close it was clear to all in Britain that the international situation had changed to its detriment. In the Far East renewed Japanese aggression and attempts to contain it had now led to her withdrawal from the League of Nations. In Europe Hitler's foreign policy was a source of great consternation, and fears about the effect of German rearming on the precarious balance of power on the continent abounded. Through all of this the Geneva Disarmament Conference plodded on. It was apparent to all but the most optimistic of participants by the middle of the year that the conference was doomed to failure. Sir John Simon was glum about its prospects for success as early as February, noting that its breakdown raised the ugly spectre of several possible European conflicts, none of which, he was sure, would remain localised.⁴⁸ In March 1933 the British delegation attempted to revive the conference by introducing a draft convention on disarmament, which they hoped would successfully conclude, or at the very least positively advance, the work of the conference. The convention, presented by Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, included all the proposals from earlier discussions that stood the best chance of being accepted.⁴⁹ While the various individual components of the convention might have been agreeable, their sum total was not. M. Paul-Boncour, the French Foreign Minister, declared that France's search for security was not met by MacDonald's convention,⁵⁰ and the Germans were dissatisfied with the naval aspects of it. However the whole convention foundered on a lack of agreement over technical matters.⁵¹ A memorandum by Allen Leeper, head of the Foreign Office Western and League of Nations Departments, in late May 1933 noted that 'Recent events at Geneva go

⁴⁸ CP 52 (33), Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, February 1933, CAB 24/239. Simon believed that the breakdown of the Disarmament Conference would make possible a Franco-German war, which would require Britain to honour her Locarno commitments; a Franco-Italian war, which would drastically alter the strategic situation in the Mediterranean; a German-Polish war, which might involve France and thus Britain; and an Italo-Yugoslavian war, which would not involve British interests directly but was nevertheless undesirable.

⁴⁹ Carolyn J. Kitching, *Britain and the Problem of International Disarmament, 1919-1934*. (London: Routledge, 1999), 158.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 158.

⁵¹ Neilson, 'The Defence Requirements Sub-Committee', 660.

far, I think, to justify the most extreme pessimism in regard to the prospects of a Disarmament Convention emerging.⁵² In early June, with the British proposal having only been accepted as the basis for further discussion, the conference adjourned until the fall. In October, citing inadequate recognition of the equality principle as their justification, Germany left the conference. This was shortly followed by notice of her resignation from the League of Nations. The conference trudged on until it was formally adjourned in June of 1934, having accomplished nothing. All that it achieved was the revelation of the extent of the gulf between British desires for disarmament and French insistence on security, buying Germany almost two whole years to conduct its rearmament policy unopposed by any united front from the Western powers.⁵³

At the same time as Britain was attempting to solve the disarmament impasse in Europe, diplomats were working to conciliate Japan and diffuse the Far Eastern crisis. Efforts to keep Japan involved with the League of Nations stemmed from Britain's belief that Japan was a power whose ambition was more likely to be checked if she stayed within the world community of powers than if she were alienated from them.⁵⁴ This view was erroneous, as recent events had shown; yet it persisted. Japan's membership in the League of Nations had done nothing to deter her from pursuing an expansionist policy in Asia, or increasing military spending. Once Japan left the League economic efforts to pressure her into changing her policy failed as well.

Japan's aggressive designs on the Asian mainland concerned the Soviet Union as much as Great Britain and the threat of a new Russo-Japanese war troubled Whitehall still further. Vansittart was convinced that Russo-Japanese antagonism was of vital significance to Britain's Imperial security in the Far East. Complicating attempts to conciliate Japan, the Foreign Office predicted that any Anglo-Japanese *rapprochement* would lead to war between Soviet Russia and Japan, weakening the Soviet Union and eliminating them as a counterpoise to Germany; alternatively, a Japanese victory might lead Stalin to seek *rapprochement* with Germany, presenting a dangerous new hazard to

⁵² Memorandum by Mr. A.W.A. Leeper, 29 May 1933. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 5, 282-285.

⁵³ Kitching, *International Disarmament*, 172.

⁵⁴ Nish, 'Japan in Britain's View of the International System', in Nish ed., *Anglo-Japanese Alienation*, 43.

the peace of Europe.⁵⁵ Vansittart told the CID that he believed Russia would, for the time being, prevent Japan from undertaking any hostile action against the British Empire. He thought the Russians unlikely to seek trouble, citing their recently negotiated network of non-aggression pacts as evidence of Stalin's desire for peace. Japan, he calculated, would hesitate to act against Britain while the Soviet Union was free to act against her.⁵⁶ Vansittart, normally a shrewd diplomat, may have misunderstood the nature of Soviet foreign policy at this juncture. The Soviet Union had done nothing during the Manchurian and Shanghai crises, when Japan could most plausibly have been seen as a threat. The non-aggression pacts probably had more to do with Hitler's threats of a *Drang nach Osten* and Foreign Commissar Litvinov's pro-western foreign policy than with any real concern for events in the Far East. Nevertheless, by late 1933 British policy-makers were beginning to recognise the truly global extent of the challenge to British power. The Far Eastern crisis and European disarmament woes were not separate entities, they were disturbances to the global balance of power and, as such, required that Britain formulate a global policy aimed at preserving its position among the Great Powers. A Foreign Office memorandum emphasised the importance of this, claiming that

The economic and political situation of the world has for a variety of causes seriously deteriorated, and that the course of events has not only brought to general notice the unsound basis on which international relations rest, but also confronted the world with the unescapable dilemma of finding an urgent solution for the most serious of these questions or of witnessing the further and perhaps rapid deterioration of the situation.⁵⁷

It was in this context that the Defence Requirements Committee (DRC) was created as a sub-committee of the CID in the fall of 1933. The committee comprised six members: Chatfield, CIGS Sir Archibald Montgomery Massingberd, Chief of Air Staff (CAS) Sir Edward Ellington, Vansittart, Sir Warren Fisher, and Hankey, who also acted as chair; its task was to assess and rank the threats facing Great Britain, and create a strategic and financial programme that would remedy Britain's worst defence

⁵⁵ Bourette-Knowles, 'The Global Micawber', 93.

⁵⁶ Brian McKercher, 'The Last Old Diplomat: Sir Robert Vansittart and the Verities of British Foreign Policy, 1903-1930', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 6, 1 (March 1995), 30.

⁵⁷ CP 264 (33), Quoted as part of the Annual COS Review for October 1933, 1933 CAB 24/244.

deficiencies. The composition of the committee, containing as it did the country's three senior civil servants and three service chiefs, is indicative of its importance.

Policy Debates and the DRC

To better construct a policy of Imperial defence the DRC was forced to evaluate and prioritise the various threats facing British power. In this vein, the first piece of evidence presented for their consideration was the Annual COS Review for 1933, the first since the abrogation of the Ten-Year Rule. The Review was actually presented to the CID; however, since its principal authors were also members of the DRC, the debate over it could not help but spill over into that arena as well. The COS proposed that defence expenditure be allotted in the first instance to the protection of possessions and interests in the Far East, then European commitments, and finally to the defence of India against Soviet aggression. In the CID Neville Chamberlain, Chancellor of the Exchequer, questioned the order of priority established by the COS, desiring to place Germany at the head of Britain's list of problems. Chamberlain declared that the abrogation of the old Anglo-Japanese alliance had been in error, and that it had subsequently poisoned relations between the two states. In response to this challenge to traditional views Simon noted that the Foreign Office agreed with the COS Review, adding that Anglo-Japanese relations appeared to have calmed for the moment, but that in trying to develop closer relations with Japan it had to be remembered that Japanese conduct was governed by the objective of making herself a great power in Asia. Furthermore the original reasons for the Anglo-Japanese alliance no longer existed; the United States was now a Far Eastern power and their sympathy for Britain's position was of paramount importance.⁵⁸ The great fear of the Foreign Office, Simon continued, was a situation that might arise five years down the road, if Germany sought an ally in Japan. Anglo-Japanese relations were not critically dangerous for the moment, but Simon also prophesied great difficulties in trying to improve relations with Japan, in part because of the complications it would raise with China, the Soviet Union and the United States. He possessed a profound mistrust of the Japanese:

⁵⁸ CID 261st Mtg, 9 November 1933, CAB 2/6.

One always had a feeling, in dealing with Eastern peoples, that they were wearing a mask, behind which they might be conducting a policy of their own. It was always difficult to know what was going on inside the anthill.⁵⁹

MacDonald concurred with Simon, suggesting that if Japan was concerned to consolidate her position in China for the present, in five years she might be in a position to look towards Great Britain. That meant that Britain ought to be in a position to face Japan and that meant completing the fortifications at Singapore. MacDonald remarked that Japan would clearly press for naval parity at the 1935 naval conference and Stanley Bruce, High Commissioner for Australia, said he felt that until the Singapore base was completed there was nothing to prevent Japan from gaining mastery of the Pacific if she chose.⁶⁰ If Japan pushed for naval parity, the importance of Singapore as a base of operations for a battle fleet sent to the Far East, and the ability of the fleet to meet the new Japanese threat, increased exponentially. Bruce, for his part, was concerned that if Japan became the dominant naval power in the region Australia would become vulnerable to attack if war broke out in the Far East. In light of the deteriorating naval situation, the 1935 naval conference came to serve as the reference point for naval policy; it was hoped that a more comprehensive and more long lasting settlement of the naval balance of power could be achieved then. All decisions on naval policy taken in the interim were subject to the accomplishments of the naval conference.

Though the COS Review nominated the Far East as the first defence priority, they were acutely aware of the potential threat posed by German rearmament. The review stated ‘...we should like to put on record our opinion that Germany is not only starting to rearm, but that she will continue this process until within a few years hence she will again have to be reckoned as a formidable military power.’⁶¹ The Review claimed that the risks of the existing German navy were negligible, but that if the needs of the Far East were taken into consideration the situation became dangerous. If war broke out in the Far East, the Royal Navy would need to send 12 capital ships, 46 cruisers and 5 aircraft carriers to

⁵⁹ CID 261st Mtg, 9 November 1933, CAB 2/6.

⁶⁰ CID 261st Mtg, 9 November 1933, CAB 2/6.

⁶¹ Quoted in Corelli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*. (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), 344.

Singapore. Under existing treaty limitations that would leave 3 capital ships and 4 cruisers for the defence of home waters. Such a small fleet was unacceptable and the review declared a Home fleet equal to Germany in capital ships, cruisers and aircraft carriers as the absolute minimum acceptable force.⁶²

The debate over the two front danger was carried over into the DRC meetings, which began in November. The COS Review's ordering of defence priorities reflected Britain's strong naval tradition, as well as the strength of Chatfield and his imperial focus over his army and air force counterparts. During the DRC debates Chatfield, supported by Hankey, whose key role as secretary to the Cabinet and the CID rendered him a potent ally, spearheaded the initiative to retain the COS priorities against the Euro-centric policies of Vansittart and Fisher.

The argument over defence priorities was a heated one. Hankey maintained that while Germany was the more likely to provoke a conflict, her ability to do so was minimal for the next five years. While the danger from Japan might be secondary, it was also the more imminent. The weakness of Britain's Far Eastern position made a tempting opportunity for an expansionist power like Japan.⁶³ Vansittart sympathised with Hankey and Chatfield, but argued that the most logical course of action to prevent conflict with Japan was to tie up loose ends in Europe:

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.⁶⁴

The debate over priority was also a debate over defence doctrine. Vansittart and Fisher recognised the emerging importance of air power and, guided by Stanley Baldwin's famous maxim that 'the bomber will always get through', subscribed to a

⁶² CP 264 (33), Annual COS Review for 1933, October 1933, CAB 24/244.

⁶³ Peter Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan, 1933-1934*. (Houndmills: MacMillan, 1996), 36-37.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Charles Morrissey and M.A. Ramsay, "'Giving a Lead in the Right Direction": Sir Robert Vansittart and the Defence Requirements Sub-Committee', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 6, 1 (March 1995), 46.

mistaken belief that air deterrence was the best way to contain the German threat.⁶⁵ For Fisher, as Permanent Undersecretary at the Treasury, the debate was also about finance. Air power could be acquired much more cheaply than seapower. As if the DRC needed any further reminders about the state of the country's finances and the mood of public opinion towards rearmament, the East Fulham by-election, held a few weeks prior to the first meeting of the DRC, saw an enormous Conservative majority swept away and replaced by a solid Labour one.⁶⁶ The Labour victory, coming as it did on a platform of disarmament and reduced military spending in favour of social programmes, was a strong signal that public opinion was not yet in favour of rearmament. This sentiment was grasped most keenly by the ministerial counterparts of the committee's civilian members.

Fisher, who viewed Imperial defence through the lens of economy, advocated a return to the old Anglo-Japanese alliance. This would obviate the need for defence spending in the Far East, freeing up funding for the RAF.⁶⁷ Vansittart was determined to resist Fisher's ideas about the Far East, dismissing any thoughts of resurrecting the old Anglo-Japanese alliance as being 'quite outside the realm of practical politics.' The conflict between Fisher and Vansittart was symptomatic of the much broader difference of opinion between the Treasury and the Foreign Office over how Britain should respond to the deteriorating international situation after 1933. Vansittart believed in maintaining the global balance of power to check German and Japanese ambitions, while the Treasury based its policy chiefly on financial considerations, giving little thought to the question of how a new Anglo-Japanese alliance would affect the balance of power in the Far East, let alone in Europe.⁶⁸ Part of the difference came from Fisher's personal antipathy towards the United States. Vansittart also expressed frustration at America's refusal to adopt a consistent Far Eastern policy, but recognised the importance of maintaining them as friends, if not allies.

⁶⁵ This is dealt with at some length in Neilson, 'The DRC'.

⁶⁶ G.A.H. Gordon, *British Seapower and Procurement Between the Wars: A Reappraisal of Rearmament*. (London: MacMillan, 1988), 123.

⁶⁷ Bourette-Knowles, 'The Global Micawber', 96.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 98.

The debate on defence priorities continued on throughout the winter of 1933-1934. The final report of the DRC was completed in February, and forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration and decision. It reversed the order of priorities listed in the COS Annual Review, citing Germany as the 'ultimate potential enemy' against whom defence preparations should be made. The report proposed that it would be desirable to conclude a *rapprochement* with Japan, but recognised that Japan still represented the more immediate threat. To this end advocated a policy of deterrence in the Far East by 'showing a tooth' to encourage good Japanese behaviour.⁶⁹ The report proposed the modernisation of the battlefleet and the completion of the fixed defences at Singapore by 1938.⁷⁰ It also argued for increases to the army and air force. All of this came with a £71,322,000 price tag, plus an extra £20 million for new naval construction.⁷¹

The DRC conclusions represented a compromise. Certainly all parties on the DRC desired a warming of relations with Japan. The Treasury, keen to limit defence spending, saw a diplomatic solution to the Far Eastern situation as decreasing the amount of money required to remedy the shortcomings of the armed services. Vansittart, for his part, also hoped for a *rapprochement* with Japan but doubted its possibility.⁷² Given the ill preparedness of the navy for war, an improvement in Anglo-Japanese relations would please the Admiralty, although they were bitterly opposed to the report's conclusion that the German threat should take precedence. Germany, they argued, was not yet a serious concern, whereas the events in the Far East since 1931 had demonstrated the very clear and present danger represented by Japan. Moreover, if a conflict erupted with Germany, Britain would likely face the threat with allies, whereas a conflict with Japan would be fought alone.⁷³ All the more reason, they argued, to orient defence policy around the

⁶⁹ CP 64 (34), Committee of Imperial Defence, Defence Requirements Sub-Committee Report, February 1934, CAB 24/247. See also Greg Kennedy, '1935: A Snapshot of British Imperial Defence in the Far East', in Kennedy and Neilson eds., *Far Flung Lines*, 204.

⁷⁰ CP 64 (34), Committee of Imperial Defence, Defence Requirements Sub-Committee Report, February 1934, CAB 24/247. See also Robert Paul Shay, *British Rearmament in the Thirties: Politics and Profits*. (Princeton: University Press, 1977), 33. The report recommended just under £4.5 million for the completion of the works and machinery at the Singapore base.

⁷¹ CP 64 (34), Committee of Imperial Defence, Defence Requirements Sub-Committee Report, February 1934, CAB 24/247.

⁷² Gaines Post Jr., *Dilemmas of Appeasement: British Deterrence and Defence, 1934-1937*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 34.

⁷³ Haggie, 'The Royal Navy and the Far Eastern Problem', 407.

Japanese peril. An improvement of Anglo-Japanese relations would buy the necessary time for the Admiralty to modernise the fleet and complete construction of the Singapore base.

Britain's period of drifting from crisis to crisis without a clearly formulated policy had come to an end. In February 1934 the DRC report was forwarded to the Cabinet, which in turn passed it on to the Ministerial Committee on Disarmament (DC(M)) for further debate and decision. Although the DRC report ranked Germany as Britain's ultimate defence concern Chatfield had good reason to be pleased with its conclusions; the report essentially upheld the CNS' assumptions on the defence of the Empire. Capital ship construction was still banned under the naval treaties of 1922 and 1930, but the fleet's older ships were to be modernised and nearly every requirement for which the Admiralty had been pressing over the last ten years – defence of overseas bases, building up of oil and materiel reserves – had been recommended by the report.⁷⁴ In just over three months Hankey got the DRC to submit a report upon which unanimous agreement had been reached, which in his capacity as Cabinet Secretary, he pressed the Cabinet to implement. It was the deliberations of the Ministerial Committee on Disarmament (DC(M)) whose protracted and tedious deliberations were responsible for the delay in turning the DRC recommendations into policy.⁷⁵

The two issues that had been the most contentious in the DRC meetings, British policy toward Japan and the distribution of defence spending, now found themselves at the forefront of the DC(M) deliberations. The committee's endorsement of the DRC assertion of 'the paramount importance of the Navy as the shield of the whole Empire and of its vital communications' would prove to be little more than empty lip service.⁷⁶ Chamberlain's statement that 'to put it bluntly...we are presented with proposals impossible to carry out' proved a more accurate summary of the DC(M) deliberations.⁷⁷ There was a general agreement that something must be done about Germany, especially

⁷⁴ Roskill, *Hankey*, Vol. 3, 104.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 110.

⁷⁶ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 171.

⁷⁷ CP 205 (34), Memorandum on Defence Requirements, Ministerial Committee on Disarmament, 31 July 1934, CAB 24/250.

in the air, and that accommodation with Japan was a sensible goal.⁷⁸ The leading proponent of both of these was Neville Chamberlain and, behind the scenes, Sir Warren Fisher, who dominated the DC(M) deliberations as they dragged out over several months in the spring and summer of 1934. 1934 was to mark a pivotal year in the foreign and defence policy of inter-war Britain. The challenges to British power that had emerged since 1930 and crystallised throughout 1933 would solidify over the course of the next twelve months, and the importance of a firm and coherent policy to address these challenges would become all the more important.

⁷⁸ P. Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan*, 83.

Chapter Three: 1934

The DC(M) and the DRC Report

The underlying premise of the DRC's conclusion recommending an accommodation with Japan while simultaneously improving deficiencies in defence in the Far East was that 'Japan is more likely, however, to respect and listen to a Power that can defend its interests than to one that is defenceless.' A British show of strength would encourage improved relations with Japan by encouraging respect and demonstrating that Great Britain was still a world power, not simply a country with pretensions to be one. However the report only advocated an improvement in relations, not a formal agreement of any kind: 'We cannot over-state the importance we attach to getting back, not to an alliance (since that would not be practical politics), but at least to our old terms of cordiality and mutual respect with Japan.'¹

Fisher and Chamberlain took this recommendation one step further by proposing that British policy in the Far East work towards a non-aggression pact with Japan. They argued this was a logical conclusion to the DRC's decision to nominate Germany as the chief threat to British security. By stressing the severity of the German threat, the two hoped to convince their colleagues of the necessity of accommodating Japan farther than the DRC report suggested. A memorandum by Fisher from April 1934 illustrates the degree to which German rearmament had come to dominate strategic thinking in London, and at the Treasury in particular:

Given the consistency of the attitude of these Teutonic tribes, who century after century have been inspired by the philosophy of brute force, we should be more than usually stupid if we assumed that the sweet reasonableness of the Treaty of Versailles had converted them to the tenets of the Sermon on the Mount; and if we want to survive we had better think most carefully how so to economise our resources as to meet the danger at its maximum point.²

¹ CP 64 (34), Committee of Imperial Defence, Defence Requirements Sub-Committee Report, February 1934, CAB 24/247.

² G.C. Peden, 'Sir Warren Fisher and British Rearmament against Germany', *The English Historical Review*, 94, 370 (January 1979), 33.

According to Treasury thinking, economising resources meant boosting funding to the RAF, and meeting the danger at its maximum point meant building up an air force sufficiently large enough to deter German aggression. A non-aggression pact with Japan would, at a stroke, eliminate the problem of Britain's weakened position in the Far East, and free up almost all of the country's defence spending for the European theatre. This fitted nicely with the Treasury's strategic calculations: that German air rearmament posed the most serious threat, that the naval issue was of secondary importance and that a large expeditionary force should *not* be created in order to avoid the guarantee of a continental commitment.

In this vein Chamberlain sought to modify the financial programme of defence spending put forward by the DRC. His primary aim was to cut money to the navy in favour of spending more money on the RAF. By emphasising the minimal threat posed by the German navy Chamberlain tried to impress upon his ministerial colleagues 'that the danger to this country from Germany lies in attacks by air', therefore the first priority in redressing the poor state of the country's defences should be 'a large increase in the Air Force concentrated at home.'³ The Chancellor urged the committee to accept 'the impossibility of simultaneous preparation against war with Germany and war with Japan.' Although he advocated the completion of the Singapore base, if only to keep faith with the Dominions, Chamberlain felt that 'we must postpone the idea of sending out to it a fleet of capital ships capable of containing the Japanese fleet or meeting it in battle.'⁴ This was to be the situation in the Far East if his policy of a non-aggression pact were pursued; the strategy of 'Main fleet to Singapore' which had dominated Admiralty thinking since the 1920s was to be disposed of in favour of a political solution to the defence crisis in the Pacific that would provide a cheaper alternative to the DRC solution.

Having set forth his theories on Imperial Defence, the Chancellor of the Exchequer next took his pen to the programme of defence spending outlined by the DRC.

³ Roskill, *Hankey*, Vol. 3, 111.

⁴ *Ibid*, 111.

In accordance with his suggestions for an agreement with Japan and increased funding to the RAF, he sought to cut funding to the army by 50% and eliminate new ship construction from the annual naval estimates. That would save the Treasury £8 million per year as well as the £20 million supplement recommended by the DRC for new ship construction. The result would be £69.3 million, spread over five years, to correct the deficiencies highlighted by the DRC instead of the £97.3 million (including the £20 million supplement) originally put forth in the report.⁵ The Chancellor's counsel was drastic, and he came under heavy criticism from his Cabinet colleagues for it. Ceasing ship construction and ignoring the Far Eastern situation was no solution to the problem of Imperial Defence. Impractical as his ideas may have been, however, there was a clear reasoning behind them. Chamberlain believed that a political agreement with Japan would provide an adequate solution to the problems in the Far East and the Japanese naval question. He was not like Fisher in that he did not see a pro-Japanese policy and a rejection of American friendship as a desirable end in itself; Chamberlain saw the non-aggression pact as a necessary evil, though he shared some of his colleague's impatience with Washington.⁶ Fisher, by contrast, was possessed of a strong antipathy toward the Americans and thought deliberately abandoning close relations with Washington in favour of a strong, pro-Japanese policy in the Far East would better serve the country.⁷ Many in Whitehall shared Chamberlain's preoccupation with the German threat, and supported his general preference for air deterrence, but they were less than willing unequivocally to endorse his suggestion that shipbuilding should cease and the navy deprived of so much funding. Hankey went so far as to suggest that Fisher's ideas were due to 'some mysterious nerve disorder' which had made him 'rather mad.'⁸

Chamberlain's attempts to revise the DRC report represented an effort by the Treasury to create and conduct their own foreign and defence policy based on a combination of their interpretation of the international situation and the country's

⁵ Shay, *British Rearmament in the Thirties*, 39.

⁶ P. Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan*, 101.

⁷ Post, *Dilemmas of Appeasement*, 34.

⁸ Peden, 'Fisher and Rearmament', 38.

finances. Warren Fisher's efforts on the DRC were part of this, but the most serious Treasury challenges to the authority and jurisdiction of other government departments came outside of that theatre. Because the Treasury was the final authority on budgets from other government departments, Fisher and Chamberlain imagined themselves as experts of sorts on a variety of issues. Treasury rejection or approval of a department's budget was essentially determined by whether or not the Treasury's policy on something was compatible with that particular department's own policy. Chamberlain and Fisher sought to revise the DRC proposals for defence spending because the policy being pursued by the Foreign Office was significantly divergent from the policy the Treasury believed the Foreign Office should pursue. The Foreign Office policy of 'showing a tooth' to deter Japan, and working for closer relations with Washington, was outside the purview of the Treasury's view of the international situation. As a result, the most significant budget dispute of the mid-1930s was between the Treasury and the Admiralty. Since Germany was not possessed of a battlefleet, the Admiralty's best hope for funding lay in stressing the Japanese danger. The Treasury's best hope of reducing defence expenditure lay in reducing the danger in the Far East by political means.⁹

Chatfield and his colleagues were not opposed to an *entente* with Japan, but, like the Foreign Office, were not convinced that one was feasible. An understanding might alleviate military problems, but as long as the military party remained dominant in Japan Chatfield believed that an understanding would simply be a 'band-aid' solution.¹⁰ More importantly, Chatfield was unwilling to allow Fisher and Chamberlain to proceed with their policy on the assumption that a Far Eastern battlefleet could be dispensed with. Whatever might be done to prevent air attacks against the British Isles, Chatfield argued, would be in vain if Japan were left unchecked to interrupt British trade routes. The security of the British Empire, the CNS claimed time and time again, could not be left to the goodwill of another power. Chatfield had history on his side. The importance of shipping to the British war effort in the Great War was still a relatively fresh memory, and the Admiralty made frequent reference to it. Britain's ability to conduct an air war

⁹ *Ibid*, 38.

¹⁰ Christopher Bell, *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy*, 110.

against a continental foe was dependent upon her industry and population being supplied by ocean-going shipping. To promote air defence to such a great degree of neglect of the navy was to Chatfield's mind, and those like Hankey who supported him, complete folly.

In March 1934 Chatfield prepared a paper to refute many of the Treasury's suggestions that funding to the navy be seriously reduced. His paper, unsurprisingly, labelled the Far East as Britain's first defence priority, claiming that Britain needed to be able to send to Singapore 'a force of sufficient strength to ensure security for the Empire and its essential interests' while simultaneously being able to keep enough ships in European and Atlantic waters to give security against the next strongest European power.¹¹ On this Vansittart and Sir Robert Craigie at the Foreign Office concurred. Implicit in the paper was the understanding that the next strongest European power would in due course be Germany. This was Chatfield's goal, which he sought to achieve by treaty at the next London Naval Conference. Though Germany's fleet was not yet large enough to constitute a threat to the Royal Navy, it was generally assumed that France would not be an enemy and could thus be written out of the equation. That had, in fact, been one of the premises upon which the DRC was instructed to carry out its mandate. By establishing a Two-Power Standard by treaty that included both Germany and Japan, Chatfield was attempting to guarantee funding for the navy. If it were not possible to integrate Germany into the naval treaty system at the next conference, or if Japan pressed her claim to naval parity, the Royal Navy would be guaranteed funding to build a fleet large enough to undertake the task at hand.

Fisher and Chamberlain were persuaded neither by Chatfield's emphasis on the importance of Britain's sea trade nor his efforts to attain a new naval standard. In the DC(M) Chamberlain continued to push his policy of abandoning the 'Main fleet to Singapore' strategy, ceasing naval construction for the immediate future and pursuing a formal non-aggression pact with Japan. The enormously critical outcry from his colleagues suggests that history's view of Chamberlain as being largely ignorant of foreign affairs had support even in his lifetime. Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald

¹¹ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 286.

favoured the Admiralty's programme for shipbuilding because the ships could be used for home defence or sent to the Far East as need arose. Sir Walter Runciman, President of the Board of Trade, was concerned about the security of British investments in the Empire if naval construction was abandoned and Lord Hailsham, Secretary of State for War, claimed that it would put India unnecessarily at risk.¹² Responding to Chamberlain's proposal for a non-aggression pact with Japan, Simon cautioned that desirable though such a pact might be, Japan's ambition to become a great Asian Power was a perpetual threat to British interests there.¹³ This was to become the focal point of the dispute between the Treasury and the Foreign Office: that Japanese and British interests in the Far East, and particularly in China, which Japan sought to make her exclusive sphere of influence, were incompatible.

Simon's criticism of Chamberlain's suggestions was more subdued than those of some of his colleagues. First Lord of the Admiralty Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell claimed that no new construction was tantamount to abandoning the Empire, a course of action 'which was not even advocated by the communists in this country.'¹⁴ The Deputy Chief of Naval Staff claimed that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had rearranged the DRC's priorities 'not, I think, on account of the real state of world affairs, but in the order in which uninformed public opinion has casually placed them.'¹⁵ Chatfield accused Chamberlain of inventing

an entirely new Imperial Defence policy, a somewhat bold step, as the new policy is 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?¹⁶

Hankey wrote that Chamberlain had 'unsound strategic doctrines about the Navy' and one of his secretaries described Chamberlain's views on strategy and defence as 'strangely obtuse'.¹⁷ Air Marshal Sir John Slessor of the RAF commented acerbically on Chamberlain's proposals that the government seemed less concerned with setting the

¹² Shay, *British Rearmament in the Thirties*, 28.

¹³ *Ibid*, 40.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 40.

¹⁵ Christopher Bell, *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy*, 102.

¹⁶ Quoted in *Ibid*, 102.

national defences in order than with having enough money to pay an indemnity to a victorious enemy after the war had been lost.¹⁸ Sir Edward Harding, Permanent Undersecretary at the Dominion Office, wrote in a letter to Hankey in June 1934 that Chamberlain was being influenced by ‘ill informed public opinion in regard to the position in the Far East.’ Just because the population had been ‘stirred up by the penny papers to think that we are being menaced by Germany’, Harding wrote, there was no reason

why we should pander to what we know to be a fallacy at the present time and probably for some years to come, and entirely ignore the whole weight of expert opinion which realises full well that the Achilles Heel of the British Empire is the Far East.¹⁹

Vansittart stressed his belief that an alliance with Japan was highly impractical saying that to ‘give up hope of the defence of our Far Eastern possessions’ was, to his mind, ‘a policy of despair and defeatism.’ He ‘did not believe that the country was in so rotten a condition that they [the Treasury] would not face up to realities.’²⁰ Clearly the tradition of British seapower ran deep.

The accusations against Chamberlain and Fisher may not have been entirely fair. Neither was in favour of abandoning the Empire, nor did they seek to reduce the navy’s funding out of some ill will or malice; they firmly believed that the best way to maintain the strength of the Empire was by maintaining the strength of British sterling through financial orthodoxy. Chamberlain sincerely believed that friendship with Japan could save the Empire, that such an agreement was not only desirable but also possible, and that the threat from the Far East had been exaggerated. Fear of air attack from Germany and memories of the horrors of trench warfare from 1914-1918, combined with his view of finance as the fourth arm of defence, drove his strategic thinking, and all of his proposed amendments to the DRC report followed from this. However the opposition of his Cabinet colleagues to his suggestions reveals that though many of them shared his fear of

¹⁷ Post, *Dilemmas of Appeasement*, 38.

¹⁸ Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of Two World Wars*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 111.

¹⁹ P. Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan*, 124-125.

²⁰ Shay, *British Rearmament in the Thirties*, 40.

air attack, they appreciated one critical thing which he did not: the security of the British Empire could not be entrusted to the goodwill of another power. Britain must possess the ability to defend her possessions if called upon to do so, and the navy was the means by which this was chiefly to be done. Cutting the Admiralty's funding and depriving them of ships was contrary to hundreds of years of British Imperial tradition. Although Chamberlain had an illustrious family history in foreign affairs, his own talents were better suited to other pursuits.

The Treasury, and Chamberlain in particular, carried enormous influence in matters of policy because of their control of the nation's purse strings; nevertheless the Cabinet ultimately abandoned his utopian views on foreign policy. Regardless of the sincerity with which his ideas were proposed, there were pragmatic reasons for their rejection. The concern of the Foreign Office and the Admiralty with a formal agreement between Britain and Japan stemmed from their understanding that the naval issue and a political agreement were inextricably linked. An alliance or non-aggression pact might prompt Japan to pursue territorial ambitions elsewhere, or to increase the size of her fleet. An increase in the size of the Imperial Japanese Navy would surely induce the Americans to begin an aggressive construction programme to match. In order to maintain her position in the world, Britain would then be forced to embark on her own extensive building programme which would precipitate precisely the kind of arms race the Washington system was designed to avoid.

Anglo-Japanese Relations

By early 1934 tensions between Great Britain and Japan had begun to dissipate. Japanese statesmen stressed their desire to re-establish cordial relations with Britain, and often reminisced about the golden days of the Anglo-Japanese alliance.²¹ This development was widely welcomed in London, cautiously in some circles but most enthusiastically at the Treasury, as a step toward the fulfilment of the DRC's recommendations and the solution of Britain's defence problems. The move towards

²¹ Bourette-Knowles, 'The Global Micawber', 101.

warmer relations was welcomed all the more in light of the unpromising way that 1933 had closed. In September 1933 Hirota Koki had been appointed Japanese foreign minister. His accession to the post portended ill in London, on account of his earlier association with an ultra-nationalist political group. However a personal, informal, message of goodwill from Sir John Simon appeared to augur well for the future of Anglo-Japanese relations, and Hirota's reply made clever reference to the 'disastrous blunder' of the abrogation of the old alliance, and spoke of the need to 'act in the spirit' of that agreement. Hirota was able to convey an impression to the Western powers of Japan's pacific intentions, while simultaneously insisting on Japan's position and expectations. His apparent moderation and easy manner made him a popular figure in the west, and in 1934 things looked promising for a *rapprochement*.²² Sir Francis Lindley, ambassador to Japan, communicated evidence of this in March 1934 when he reported the content of a speech made by Hirota in the Japanese Diet:

In regard to the Singapore naval base, I wish to point out that although Japan and Great Britain are not allies at the present time, they are still respecting the spirit of the Anglo-Japanese alliance and working on the basis of mutual understanding to maintain friendly and peaceful relations. This fact makes it unnecessary for Japan to entertain any sort of suspicion about Singapore base.²³

Lindley's telegram was reason for optimism that Hirota's appointment would bode well for the peace of the Far East. The Foreign Office, however, continued to favour a cautious approach toward Anglo-Japanese relations. There was little desire in London for a non-aggression pact, still less for an alliance.

A memorandum on Imperial Defence by Simon from March 1934 demonstrates that the concerns over close Anglo-Japanese relations that had existed in 1933 had become all the more pressing. The Americans, Simon wrote, would interpret a non-aggression pact with Japan as the first step towards a renewal of the old Anglo-Japanese

²² Anne Trotter, 'Tentative Steps for an Anglo-Japanese Rapprochement in 1934', *Modern Asian Studies*, 8, 1 (1974), 62.

²³ Sir Francis Lindley (Tokyo) to Sir John Simon, 14 March 1934 in Kenneth Bourne and D. Cameron Watt eds. *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*. Part II: From the First to the Second World War, Series E, Asia: 1914-1939, Vol. 13, Japan, January

alliance. The United States would argue, quite correctly Simon believed, that the 1928 Kellogg Pact would make such a non-aggression pact unnecessary. The question would then arise ‘What would be the purpose of an agreement with Japan?’ Such an agreement, Simon concluded, could only be political – to raise the status of Japan, America’s principal antagonist. With naval negotiations on the renewal or replacement of the 1930 London Treaty on the horizon, such a pact would be a clumsy piece of diplomacy indeed, though the Foreign Secretary admitted that such an agreement might become a possibility in the course of discussions. Speculating on the probability that such a pact could realistically be concluded if it were desirable to do so, Simon observed that Japan had recently refused the offer of a non-aggression pact from the Soviet Union, and might be reluctant to sign one with Great Britain as it would appear embarrassing. The Foreign Secretary further warned that an agreement, if concluded, might become a ‘flash in the pan’; the impending deadlock over naval ratios would prove extremely awkward, as the pact was unlikely to prevent Japan from claiming naval parity with the United States and Great Britain. On the other hand, Simon reasoned, the prospect of a non-aggression pact might be used to extract concessions from the Japanese during the naval talks.²⁴ The attempt to marry a non-aggression pact with naval concessions represents a middle ground between the policies of the Treasury and the Admiralty, and Simon continued to toy with the idea throughout the spring and summer of 1934.

There was considerable and emphatic opposition to the idea of a pact with Japan from Simon’s subordinates in the Foreign Office. Sir John Pratt, an adviser with the Far Eastern Department, had expressed as early as 1932 that sentiment, not wisdom, advocated a return to the old Anglo-Japanese alliance, and warning of the implications such a move would have for the Empire:

If Japan continues unchecked the British will have to retire altogether from the Far East. If it is decided that we must check Japan certain preliminary measure could be adopted – such as the rupture of diplomatic and economic relations – but in the end Japan can only be checked by force. Ultimately we will be faced with the alternatives of going to war

– December 1934. Ed. Anne Trotter. (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1991), 111. (Henceforth abbreviated *Confidential Print*).

²⁴ Memorandum by Sir John Simon, 16 March 1934. *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Ser.2, Vol. 20 (London: HMSO), 192. (Henceforth abbreviated *DBFP*).

with Japan or retiring from the Far East. A retirement from the Far East might be the prelude to a retirement from India.²⁵

As part of an effort to improve Anglo-Japanese relations, a mission was sent to Japan and Manchuria in the spring of 1934 by the Federation of British Industries (FBI) to scout financial grounds for a *rapprochement* by investigating ways in which Anglo-Japanese trade could be improved.²⁶ The mission coincided with a wave of pro-British feeling in Japanese official circles, prompting a warning from Sir George Sansom, Commercial Counsellor to the British embassy in Tokyo. In a letter to the Department of Overseas Trade, Sansom speculated on the apparently spontaneous enthusiasm, saying that while the FBI mission had sparked all kinds of ‘nonsensical’ rumours about new warmth in Anglo-Japanese relations, it had all been fabricated by the Japanese. Sansom was suspicious of the motive behind these rumours, suggesting they were provoked by Japanese fears of diplomatic isolation. An agreement, he wrote, would be a first class political blunder. Britain would not get anything from Japan that they would be unable to get by regular negotiations, and once they were committed to an agreement they would get nothing at all from Japan. Japanese ambition was colossal, if not unbounded, the Commercial Counsellor warned. Although he claimed to be in favour of Anglo-Japanese friendship, he believed that London would get more out of Japan if they kept her guessing, rather than by relieving her anxieties.²⁷

This current of opinion was not new in the Foreign Office. Their consistent line throughout the DRC and DC(M) debates was that while improved relations with Japan were desirable, a formal treaty would only complicate Britain’s position unnecessarily. Sir Victor Wellesley of the Far Eastern Department had expressed similar sentiments to Sansom’s six months earlier:

²⁵ Memorandum by Sir J. Pratt, 1 February 1932. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 9, 281.

²⁶ Greg Kennedy, ‘1935: A Snapshot’, in Kennedy and Neilson eds., *Far Flung Lines*, 193.

²⁷ Letter from Mr. Sansom (Tokyo) to Sir E. Crowe (Department of Overseas Trade), 12 October 1934. *DBFP*, Ser. 2., Vol. 20, 319-321.

The Anglo-Japanese Alliance was abrogated for several very good reasons. In the first place it had outlived its usefulness and had degenerated into a sort of umbrella under which the Japanese perpetuated every kind of iniquity in China which was bringing us into bad odour with the Chinese. Secondly the renewal of the Alliance would have greatly endangered our relations not only with America, which were at the time considered, and I think still are, of paramount importance, but with Canada also. But for the disappearance of the Alliance there would have been no Washington Naval Agreement in 1922.²⁸

The abrogation of the old alliance had thus saved Britain from being drawn into a building competition with the United States in the immediate aftermath of the Great War. The United States would not have entered into a naval limitation agreement with the Anglo-Japanese alliance still in place, and the whole system of arms limitation, a mainstay of British policy since the war, would likely have been doomed in its infancy. Wellesley's comments, and Sansom's, highlighted the importance of America to British Far Eastern policy at this time. While many in the Foreign Office, most notably Vansittart, expressed frustration at America's unwillingness to involve herself in Far Eastern affairs, they held out hope that time, and perhaps another naval conference, would bring about an improvement in the Anglo-American relationship. Sansom's and Wellesley's comments emphasise the difference in outlook between the Treasury on the one hand and the Foreign Office and the Admiralty on the other. Whereas the Treasury tended to compartmentalise Britain's defence problems regionally, the Foreign Office and the Admiralty understood the defence of the Empire as part of the global balance of power that of necessity took into account the United States and the Soviet Union.

The importance of the Soviet Union for British policy in the Far East also must not be underestimated. Fears of a new Russo-Japanese war had never been far from the minds of British policy makers in 1933, and continued to be present throughout 1934. Suspicion that Japanese overtures of friendship were no more than a screen to garner support against Russia was common, and supported by reports from abroad. A telegram from Simon to the ambassador in Peking in January related a conversation he had

²⁸ Minute by Wellesley dated 9 February 1934, quoted in William Roger Louis, 'The Road to Singapore', in Mommsen and Kettner eds., *The Fascist Challenge*, 359.

recently held with the Chinese ambassador in London. The Chinese ambassador told Simon that he had spoken with the Chinese and American ambassadors in Moscow, both of whom reported that the Kremlin feared hostilities with Japan in the spring. Russia would not start anything, but was apprehensive of being attacked.²⁹ A note from Lindley to Simon the day after Christmas, 1933, described a conversation between Col James, the British military attaché in Japan, and Col Homma, former Japanese military attaché in London, recently retired, which offered support to those who feared war between the Soviet Union and Japan. During the conversation Homma expressed a number of sentiments disturbing to the Foreign Office, including his belief that war with the Soviet Union was inevitable. James reported to Lindley that Homma's views on Russia were widely held throughout the Japanese army high command, which carried a considerable amount of influence on foreign policy matters. Homma went on to say that in 1936, when the London Naval Treaty expired, Japan would demand naval parity. If she were unable to obtain it through negotiations, a new building race would result.³⁰ Lindley wrote to Simon two weeks later that if Japan felt war with Russia was coming, then the possibility of a German-Japanese *rapprochement* existed. Good relations between Japan and Nazi Germany might immobilise Soviet forces in Europe that could otherwise be sent to the Far East.³¹ The imminence of such a war was perhaps felt less keenly in London, nevertheless Russo-Japanese tensions and their effect on the balance of power were a source of no small concern at the Foreign Office.³² Neville Chamberlain's cavalier attitude towards an agreement with Japan took no account of the complexities of balance of power politics. It was not as simple a matter as he believed to conclude a non-aggression pact or an alliance with Japan. The ripple effects of such a policy could do far more damage to the problem of Imperial Defence than would be gained by securing the Far East against Japanese aggression, especially if that policy were to alienate a country

²⁹ Sir John Simon to Mr. Ingram (Peking), 15 January 1934. *Confidential Print*, Ser. E, Vol. 13, 9.

³⁰ Sir Francis Lindley (Tokyo) to Sir John Simon, 26 December 1933. *Confidential Print*, Ser. E, Vol. 13, 27-28.

³¹ Sir Francis Lindley (Tokyo) to Sir John Simon, 9 January 1934. *Confidential Print*, Ser. E, Vol. 13, 32.

³² A Foreign Office Memorandum on Russo-Japanese relations by A.W.G. Randall, dated 9 February 1934, said that even though tensions were high, a Russo-Japanese war was unlikely to occur for the next year or two. "It certainly constitutes, however, a distinct possibility of the remoter future." *Confidential Print*, Ser. E, Vol. 13, 80.

as powerful as the United States, or one with such a tremendous capacity to alter the European balance of power, like the Soviet Union.

By the middle of 1934 momentum in Britain for a pact had waned, but new impetus was given to consideration of a non-aggression pact in July when Hirota suggested to Sir Robert Clive, the newly arrived British ambassador in Tokyo, that Japan would be willing to sign non-aggression pacts with Britain and the United States.³³ Clive replied this was the first he had heard of anything like that, and hardly thought such an agreement necessary because of the generally amicable state of Anglo-Japanese relations. Simon instructed Clive to probe Hirota further to discover what precisely the Japanese had in mind, though the matter was not raised again between the two men until late summer. The offer of a pact was certainly suspicious since they had already rejected the one offered by Russia, and offered one to the United States, which had been rejected in turn. Simon was very keen to find out what price Japan would be willing to pay for such a pact, given the problems it would raise for Britain elsewhere.³⁴ Hirota made it clear that at the next London Naval Conference Japan intended to press for naval parity with the United States. America, he claimed, did not need a fleet to guard its borders in the same way that Britain and Japan did; theirs was a luxury fleet. In the event that naval talks broke down, a pact would ensure that there was no rupture of relations with Britain. Clive's report to the Foreign Office of further conversations on the matter revealed little; Hirota's comments were consistently vague, prompting the ambassador to suggest to Simon that Hirota himself did not really know what he had in mind about an agreement.

The exchange, however, is extremely telling about the way diplomats in both countries viewed relations. As far as Britain was concerned, the entire relationship hinged on the naval question. If a non-aggression pact, or even an alliance, was no guarantee of the success of the next naval conference, then it was not worth the price Japan would ask, no matter how cheap. If, on the other hand, an agreement could provide some accommodation in naval matters that would see the existing ratios maintained, or

³³ Sir Robert Clive (Tokyo) to Sir John Simon, 3 July 1934. *Confidential Print*, Ser. E, Vol. 13, 222.

³⁴ Sir John Simon to Sir Robert Clive, 25 September 1934. *Confidential Print*, Ser. E, Vol. 13, 252-253.

offer Japan a small increase that would not greatly upset the One-Power Standard, then the matter was worth further consideration and exploration. For Hirota the value of a non-aggression pact lay chiefly in its ability to smooth over a possible failure of the upcoming naval talks, rather than in its ability to ensure their success.³⁵ Warnings as early as 1934 that Japan would press for naval parity with Britain and America ensured the failure of the second London Naval Conference long before talks began, but the British attitude towards an Anglo-Japanese *rapprochement* in 1934 indicates the primacy of place that the naval issue and the forthcoming discussions had attained in foreign policy and strategic thought.

The global balance of power and the vagaries of Hirota's suggestion were not the only obstacles to an Anglo-Japanese *rapprochement* in 1934. Japanese expansion on the Asian continent still remained an issue, though it was by this time less prominent than it had been in 1933. A statement by a member of the Japanese Foreign Ministry in April 1934 resurrected British anxieties over Japan's pan-Asian ambitions. The statement, known as the Amau Statement or the Amau Doctrine after its spokesman Eiji Amau, declared China to be Japan's rightful sphere of influence, condemning interference by other powers in Chinese affairs without Japanese consent.³⁶ It amounted to a Japanese version of the Monroe Doctrine, and was a direct rebuke to the 'open door' policy in China that had formed so much of the basis for Anglo-American involvement there since the nineteenth century. The statement cast serious doubts over Japanese protestations of pacifism and friendship and caused no small stir in Whitehall. Hirota was quick to promise Lindley that the statement was not representative of official policy at the Japanese Foreign Ministry. He claimed that it had been a rash response to questions posed Amau by journalists, and that it represented a personal opinion that had, unfortunately, been misinterpreted.³⁷ Baron Shidehara, the former Foreign Minister who had been very popular in western circles, expressed his own opinion that the statement was 'foolish' and Lindley reported that he had received assurances that the views of the

³⁵ Sir Robert Clive (Tokyo) to Sir John Simon, 29 September 1934. *Confidential Print*, Ser. E, Vol. 13, 252-253.

³⁶ Greg Kennedy, '1935: A Snapshot', in Kennedy and Neilson eds., *Far Flung Lines*, 193.

³⁷ Sir Francis Lindley (Tokyo) to Sir John Simon, 25 April 1934. *Confidential Print*, Ser. E, Vol. 13, 164.

Emperor were not so extreme.³⁸ Lindley attempted to be pragmatic and downplay the significance of the statement for Anglo-Japanese relations. Japan, he said, did have a special interest in China. It was unpleasant, but there was little Britain could do about it and London would simply have to try and reconcile it with British interests in China.

His colleagues in the Far Eastern Department were more pessimistic. The statement harmonised with the realities of Japanese policy in China since 1931, and Pratt claimed that it amounted to ‘the assertion of a special position – a sort of overlordship of the Far East.’³⁹ Sir Charles Orde, head of the Far Eastern Department, warned of the divergence between British and Japanese aims in China; Wellesley agreed, doubting the wisdom of close and open association with Japan. Vansittart, noting the wide public sympathy the statement gained in Japan, claimed it was a further lesson to those who thought real co-operation with Japan was possible, a pointed comment on the Treasury’s suggestions.⁴⁰ Hirota’s efforts at damage control were purely political. British intelligence had been reading Japanese diplomatic telegrams since 1919, and Japanese attempts to explain away the Amai statement as the impetuous remarks of a low ranking clerk were belied by intercepted telegrams to the Japanese ambassador in Peking which demonstrated that the declaration was an accurate reflection of Japanese intent.⁴¹ Ultimately the Amai statement served only to confirm British suspicions of Japanese perfidy. The issue, serious though it was, rated below the naval question in importance; though it showed Whitehall that Japanese declarations of friendship and overtures for political agreements were merely a cover for Japan’s imperialist ambitions.

The Naval Question

The final separation in Anglo-Japanese relations came in 1934 over the naval issue. It was this, more than the balance of power question or the Amai Doctrine, which provided the stumbling block for a *rapprochement*. The break came definitively at the

³⁸ P. Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan*, 84.

³⁹ Quoted in *Ibid*, 84.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 85.

end of the year, with Japan's official renunciation of the Washington system, but warning signs which pointed to the impasse over naval ratios were clearly evident as early as the fall of 1933. Despite these indicators, optimism persisted in London – most notably at the Treasury – that preliminary discussions for the next London Naval Conference would make significant progress toward a final resolution of the naval question.

In November 1933 Captain Vivian, the naval attaché in Tokyo, warned of a growing dissatisfaction with the *status quo* in Japanese naval circles when he reported a ruthless weeding out of the pro-treaty faction of the naval high command. If this trend continued, he predicted, it would not augur well for the Japanese attitude at the upcoming naval conference. Changes to the high command included the retirement of all five officers chiefly concerned with advising the Japanese government at the time of the 1930 treaty.⁴² Admiral Dreyer, CC China, added to this warning in May 1934 when he wrote that Japan would not accept a revision of the treaty ratios that gave them less than parity with the world's largest navy.⁴³ A new political regime in Japan under Prime Minister Admiral Okada held out little promise for progress on the issue. Clive, the ambassador to Japan, reported that Okada was very supportive of the 'big navy' group in Japan.⁴⁴ Okada appointed as his Minister of the Navy Admiral Osumi, a man widely regarded as likely to increase support for the 'big navy' faction headed by Admiral Kato Kanji, who had remonstrated to the Emperor over the 1930 treaty, and his close supporter Admiral Suetsugu, who had been nominated CC Combined Fleet earlier in the year.⁴⁵ Suetsugu was staunchly opposed to any limitation of the Imperial Japanese Navy by a treaty that gave them less than parity with Great Britain and America and Lindley had previously noted that he was highly unpopular in American naval circles. This followed on the heels of a significant increase in the naval budget for 1934-1935. In January Lindley had reported that the navy budget in Japan had increased every year since 1931, and that the

⁴¹ Best, 'Road to Anglo-Japanese Confrontation', in Nish and Kibata eds., *Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1600-2000*, 34.

⁴² Sir Francis Lindley (Tokyo) to Sir John Simon, 20 January 1934. *Confidential Print*, Ser. E, Vol. 13, 86-90.

⁴³ Paul Haggie, *Britannia at Bay: The Defence of the British Empire Against Japan, 1931-1941*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 69.

⁴⁴ Sir Robert Clive (Tokyo) to Sir John Simon, 5 July 1934. *Confidential Print*, Ser. E, Vol. 13, 229.

⁴⁵ Trotter, 'Tentative Steps', 70.

current budget proposal was more than twice as large as the 1931-1932 estimates. The budget increase could be accounted for by an unsettling expansion of the building programme, including large refits of capital ships and a very large increase in the fleet air arm.⁴⁶ Indeed, British fears of an aggressive new construction programme were entirely correct. Work began, carried out with the utmost secrecy, in 1934 on the two behemoths *Yamato* and *Musashi*, each of which displaced over 64,000 tons and mounted 18-inch guns; a third ship of that class became the monstrous aircraft carrier *Shinano*.⁴⁷ All three ships were launched in 1941-1942.

There were other signs of an impending impasse over the naval issue. The attempted assassination of Prime Minister Hamaguchi in 1930 had been followed in May 1932 by the successful assassination of Premier Inukai. At their trial, the assassins cited extreme dissatisfaction with the 1930 London Naval Treaty as one of their chief exculpations.⁴⁸ In May 1934 Admiral Heihirachi Togo, hero of the Battle of Tsushima and the 'Nelson of Japan' passed away. A moderate who was revered by many younger officers, Togo's opinions carried a great deal of weight with his junior colleagues. He had been on the active list of naval officers until the time of his death, indicating that he still exercised considerable influence over naval policy.⁴⁹ The removal of Togo's restraining power left one less check on the ambitions of the younger generation of 'big navy' officers. On 12 March the *Tomozuru*, a small torpedo boat, capsized on manoeuvres in rough water killing 94 people. The incident provoked popular outrage against the London Naval Treaty; if Japan had been able to build the ships she needed it would have been unnecessary to increase the power of the navy by constructing small vessels unfit for the open seas.⁵⁰ Misplaced though the anger may have been, the incident bears some resemblance to the political assassinations earlier in the decade; popular opinion in Japan was firmly against any treaty that would see Japanese naval strength

⁴⁶ Sir Francis Lindley (Tokyo) to Sir John Simon, 20 January 1934. *Confidential Print*, Ser. E, Vol. 13, 86-90.

⁴⁷ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 180.

⁴⁸ Haggie, *Britannia at Bay*, 69.

⁴⁹ Sir Robert Clive, Annual Report for 1934, 1 January 1935. *Confidential Print*, Ser. E, Vol. 13, 370.

⁵⁰ Sir Robert Clive, Annual Report for 1934, 1 January 1935. *Confidential Print*, Ser. E, Vol. 13, 371.

limited at anything less than parity with the United States and the British. Taken alone, the assassination of Premier Inukai, the death of Togo or the *Tomozuru* incident amounted to very little. Taken together, and placed in the context of a tense diplomatic relationship, British anxieties over naval ratios and forthcoming discussions portended ill for the future of naval limitation agreements.

Mindful of this, the British sought to alleviate Anglo-Japanese tension and propose a compromise solution that would allow the Japanese some measure of naval equality without upsetting the balance of power. Simon accepted that Japan would not agree to an inferior ratio imposed by treaty, but thought that the granting of equality of status might lead Japan to voluntarily limit her navy.⁵¹ Chamberlain railed against the United States as an obstacle to an Anglo-Japanese agreement on the naval question, claiming that, although the Americans advocated working together, they were really only concerned for their own interests, not Britain's. He described the Americans as a 'suspicious' people, adding that he understood some Japanese construction over and above the Washington ratio would be distasteful to them, but in the long run they could hardly fault Britain for following America's example in tending to her own interests. He suggested a gentleman's agreement between Britain and Japan, whereby the two powers would agree not to fight one another for 10 years, building freely subject to limitations they could agree upon from time to time. The Chancellor did not anticipate an increase in the Japanese ratio as a result of such an agreement.⁵² What Chamberlain failed to realise, despite repeated attempts by the Admiralty and the Foreign Office to make him understand, was that Japanese building above the Washington ratio would be even more distasteful to the British than it would be to the Americans. America at least had the weight of financial and industrial power behind its navy, while treaty limitations had led to an atrophy of the shipbuilding industry in the United Kingdom. Moreover Japanese building beyond the 5:5:3 ratio would upset the One-Power Standard, which was considered by the Admiralty barely sufficient to meet the needs of the Empire.

⁵¹ Trotter, 'Tentative Steps', 71.

⁵² Draft of a Memorandum by Mr. N. Chamberlain on the Naval Conference and relations with Japan, September 1934. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 13, 25-31.

Chamberlain's suggestion of a gentleman's agreement was entirely without basis in reality. His belief that the two powers could build freely subject to agreed upon limitations misunderstood the relationship between seapower and Imperial Defence. Japan would no longer accept limitations that maintained her inferior status, and Britain could not agree to anything that further undermined the One-Power Standard. The aims of the two powers were diametrically opposed, and no technical limitation or gentleman's agreement could alter that. The Chancellor failed to realise that the pressing points of the naval issue between Great Britain and Japan were not technical questions, like the size of cruisers, or the abolition of submarines, rather they were larger questions about the projection of seapower. Japan sought to attain a position that would allow her to project seapower throughout the Pacific; Britain sought to maintain a position that would allow her to project seapower globally without serious opposition. The belief that Japan would voluntarily build to the Washington ratio ignored this principle, and ignored the warnings from the Foreign Office and the Admiralty that Japan was determined to overthrow the Washington ratio at the earliest possible opportunity.

In October 1934 the Japanese delegation in London engaged in preliminary naval conference talks made a proposal for a 'common upper limit', threatening denunciation of the Washington and London treaties if this were not accepted.⁵³ The idea was that no navy should exceed a certain amount of tonnage, but that every power had the freedom to build up to that limit, and to build freely as needs or desires dictated.⁵⁴ In theory this meant that while the Japanese and British fleets would be equal in tonnage, they could be quite different in fighting capacity. One power might choose to build cruisers and submarines, while another might invest all of its tonnage in capital ships or aircraft carriers. Conventional ideas about seapower and the supremacy of the battleship meant that Japan was unlikely to build a balanced fleet once treaty restrictions on capital ship construction were lifted, and would probably assemble a fleet with a disproportionate number of capital ships. The common upper limit proposal was actually an opportunity for the

⁵³ CP 238 (34), Preliminary Japanese proposals for the 1935 Naval Conference, 30 October 1934, CAB24/251.

⁵⁴ Sir R. Clive (Tokyo) to Sir J. Simon, 29 October 1934. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, vol. 20, 29-30.

Japanese to surpass the British and Americans in naval strength, under the auspices of seeking mere equality. The proposal was, predictably, rejected.

A memorandum by Chatfield argued that if Britain had to accept a common upper limit agreement with Japan, she would certainly have to offer such an agreement to European powers, including Germany and the Soviet Union.⁵⁵ A common upper limit scenario would produce constant uncertainty and deprive Britain of her already tenuous Imperial security.⁵⁶ The proposals cemented the perception at the Admiralty of the Japanese as a 'warlike race' whose confidence and arrogance had grown because for 'centuries they have not had a thrashing.'⁵⁷ In November the British informed the Japanese delegation that their proposals were unacceptable, and made a counter proposal of their own which was rejected, and in early December the Japanese announced that they intended to abrogate the Washington Treaty early in 1935.⁵⁸ There was little doubt in the west as to where blame should lie for the collapse of the preliminary discussions. Norman Davis, the American naval expert, said, and Ramsay MacDonald agreed, that it would have been easier to continue the talks and perhaps reach an agreement if the Japanese delegation had said that public opinion made it necessary to gain modifications of the treaty. This, they claimed, would have been an entirely reasonable and understandable position; the western powers were not ignorant of the importance of public opinion, though in this instance they grossly misunderstood its role in Japanese politics. As things stood, Japan had showed up and decided to renounce the treaty without any serious preliminary discussion, giving their decision the appearance of being arbitrary and uncompromising. Simon still hoped to bring the Japanese back to the bargaining table, but was persuaded by his colleagues that it was impossible to construe the Japanese decision to abandon the Washington Treaty as anything but a desire to terminate the present discussions.⁵⁹ The Japanese had made up their minds to have a big

⁵⁵ Memorandum by the CNS, 30 October 1934. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 13, 77-79.

⁵⁶ CP 247 (34), Statement of the British position vis a vis the Japanese proposals, 7 November 1934, CAB 24/251.

⁵⁷ Phillips Payson O'Brien, *British and American Naval Power: Politics and Policy, 1900-1936*. (Westport: Praeger, 1998), 231.

⁵⁸ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 298.

⁵⁹ Notes on a meeting between American and British representatives regarding Japan's announcement of her intention to abrogate the Washington Treaty, 4 December 1934. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 13, 139-140.

navy; if they could not get one through diplomatic means, they would build one outside the constraints of an international agreement.

At the same time as the problems with Japan were manifesting themselves, concern began to grow in Whitehall over the foreign policy ambitions of Nazi Germany. In late 1933 Germany had left the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations, and Hitler's apparent intention of shaking off the chains of Versailles was disquieting.⁶⁰ Though most diplomats and policy makers in Britain felt a need for revision of the treaty in some form, they were anxious that it should be done through discussion, and with gradual moderation. Hitler would not unilaterally repudiate the treaty for another year, but by 1934 the prospect of Germany possessing a fleet of eight or nine battleships and various smaller vessels, built outside of international agreement, was unnerving, and all the more so when considered in conjunction with the deteriorating Far Eastern situation.⁶¹ The nascent state of German rearmament however allowed for a window of opportunity to try and integrate Germany into a new international system before unlimited rearmament made the legitimisation of such a programme worthless. Optimism over some sort of agreement was generated by Foreign Office and Admiralty reports, which informed London that there was no reason to believe that Germany was committing any notable infringements of the Versailles naval clauses.⁶² However the course of German naval policy was inconsistent. Actions and words did not always corroborate one another; it was difficult to know which carried more weight, and during 1934 assessments of the German threat oscillated between 'critical' and 'negligible'. What the Admiralty and the Foreign Office did understand was that Germany would very soon have to be considered in assessing British naval strength and in 1934 work began to this end.

A report from Sir Eric Phipps in Berlin on a conversation he had held with Admiral Raeder, the German CNS, related his assurances that Germany sought a navy to

⁶⁰ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 184.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 184.

⁶² Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on Germany's Illegal Rearmament and its Effect on British Policy, 21 March 1934. *Confidential Print*, Series F, Europe: 1914-1939, Vol. 45, Germany 1934, 85-91.

maintain peace in the Baltic and guard against Soviet aggression. Any further development of the German fleet, Raeder claimed, would take place entirely in agreement with British policy after the forthcoming naval conference, at which Germany would demand equality in the qualitative sense; they were not looking for numbers.⁶³ The British naval attaché in Berlin described a similar conversation with Raeder: Germany needed a fleet for Baltic security and even France acknowledged that. Germany was not interested in a building race with anyone. The Russian navy was far from obsolete. The German naval attaché in Moscow had recently visited Leningrad and his report was disquieting: Russia had begun to build; great improvements had been made; the Soviet navy would be a serious threat before long and Germany, too, needed to guard herself against Bolshevism.⁶⁴ These reassurances were commonplace throughout 1934 and 1935, and were eagerly swallowed by anxious Britons.

Such assurances seemed plausible enough. Increases in the German navy budget were minor when compared with those for the army and air force, and much of the increase was explained as pay raises and the modernisation of obsolescent ships. When Muirhead-Gould pressed for more information regarding German building programmes the replies he received appeared candid and forthright. In an interview with *Kapitän-zur-See* Densch, Raeder's COS, Muirhead-Gould asked whether or not a fourth *Deutschland* would be laid down. Densch replied that he did not know although a fourth and a fifth ship of that class were currently under consideration, with a decision expected by the end of June.⁶⁵ When asked if the *Deutschland* might become a standard design for the German navy, something that worried the Admiralty, Densch replied in the negative, admitting that it was a compromise to adjust Germany's security needs to the Versailles restrictions. If Germany were given a free hand she would probably build ships of 20,000-25,000 tons, though no plans were currently drawn up for that. Densch also offered information on Germany's submarine programme. As long as they were not prohibited by international treaty, Germany would construct a submarine fleet, though

⁶³ Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on Germany's Illegal Rearmament and its Effect on British Policy, 21 March 1934. *Confidential Print*, Ser. F, Vol. 45, 85-91.

⁶⁴ Captain Muirhead-Gould to Sir Eric Phipps, 9 April 1934. *Confidential Print*, Ser. F, Vol. 45, 115-116.

⁶⁵ Captain Muirhead-Gould to Sir Eric Phipps, 9 April 1934. *Confidential Print*, Ser. F, Vol. 45, 115-116.

should some international agreement on submarine restrictions be achieved Germany would willingly comply. It would, Densch predicted, take up to three years to build a fleet of submarines. Few officers were left who had seen service on U-boats from 1914-1918, and no personnel had been trained for submarine duty since the war.⁶⁶

Similar expressions of moderation were forthcoming from other quarters. In October Muirhead-Gould interviewed Admiral Groos, recently retired from the *Marineleitung*. Groos and Raeder were known to have had a falling out, which, it was suspected, had led to Groos' retirement. He was a fervent Nazi, who had held the post of *Chef des Marinekommandoamts*, and achieved some recognition as a theoretical strategist and tactician. Groos' relationship with Raeder led some to question whether or not his views were those of the German navy, but his comments on German naval policy were remarkably consistent with the German CNS'. He repeated Raeder's mantra that a Tirpitz-sized fleet was the wrong policy for Germany; Germany needed to protect her trade against France and Poland, and guard the Baltic from the red menace. This last aim, Groos suggested, might earn Germany the goodwill of the Western powers instead of their enmity. He echoed Densch's comments on the 'pocket-battleships', noting that the *Deutschland* was a very good ship but it was a compromise. The *Dunkerque* threatened German security, and the only defence was a ship of the same type and size. Germany, he thought, would like to build very slowly up to France's level. Groos was careful to stress that German intentions were peaceful; it was a question of equality.

When questioned more closely, however, cracks began to appear in the consistency of his assertions. He railed against France's suspicion of Germany, claiming that the advantage in tonnage was so great already that Germany would never catch up. Muirhead-Gould pressed Groos about his earlier contention that Germany needed parity with the French, and was met with the reply that the German had only meant parity in capital ships. Groos' desire was to ultimately have ships of 28,000-30,000 tons; he was of the firm opinion that France was deliberately understating the size of their ships.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Captain Muirhead-Gould to Sir Eric Phipps, 10 April 1934. *Confidential Print*, Ser. F, Vol. 45, 117.

⁶⁷ Captain Muirhead-Gould to Sir Eric Phipps, 18 October 1934. *Confidential Print*, Ser. F, Vol. 45, 352-355.

These last statements revealed an undercurrent of hostility towards France that gave cause for alarm. The spirit of naval competition with Britain may have died in 1918, but competition between Germany and France was almost as dangerous. A public declaration of Germany's desire to achieve parity with France would surely induce Paris to panic and immediately approve a new construction programme. That, in turn, would produce new construction in Italy, and possibly the Soviet Union. The naval balance in Europe would be destroyed, and Britain would have to embark on a very costly programme to maintain her advantage. Add to this the problems with Japan, the failure of the Disarmament Conference and the grim prospects for the next naval conference, and Whitehall faced the unhappy probability of a full-blown naval crisis.

Reassuring words were again proffered, this time from Hitler himself, who 'bitterly reproached' Britain for not listening to German proposals for a bilateral agreement over armaments. When Phipps replied that Britain sought a general agreement, not a bilateral one that would split Europe into two armed camps reminiscent of 1914, Hitler made the by now customary declaration of not wanting to build a navy as Tirpitz had done, claiming that 35% of the Royal Navy's tonnage was the most he would seek.⁶⁸ Phipps thought the figure most unreasonable, given that Germany had no colonies to protect.⁶⁹ The conversation with Hitler, and Phipps' response to the German leader's claim to 35% of the Royal Navy's tonnage shed significant light on the way in which the naval issue was viewed in Britain at this time. The desire for a general agreement on arms limitation, which included Germany and Japan, is suggestive of a broader, Imperial, vision, rather than simply a regional or bilateral one. If the Admiralty or the Foreign Office were earnestly worried about the threat posed by the German navy, then they would have been more open to a bilateral agreement in 1933 or 1934. The conversation with Groos, and significant progress in the growth of the German fleet, took place after the publication of the DRC report, which placed Germany at the head of Britain's list of defence priorities. With the committee's warning of the dangers posed by a rearmed Germany, one might expect to find more concern displayed over the state and

⁶⁸ Sir Eric Phipps (Berlin) to Sir John Simon, 28 November 1934. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 12, 267.

⁶⁹ Sir Eric Phipps (Berlin) to Mr. Sargent, 13 December 1934. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 12, 324.

progress of the new German navy, but the report had not changed anything; British policy makers continued to see Japan as the immediate threat, and the German navy was still far too small to pose a real danger. It was not a German navy that alarmed Britain as much as it was the effect that the course of its construction would have on the international naval balance.

Although the Germans appeared earnest in their attempts to assuage British anxieties, other considerations cast a shadow of suspicion on these professions of goodwill. The Admiralty appears to have been aware quite early on of Germany's plan to abandon the 'pocket-battleship' design in favour of more conventional ships. The drive for *Gleichberechtigung* suggested a desire to possess standard ships as defined by the naval treaties.⁷⁰ Germany could not properly be considered an equal partner in the international system unless she possessed the same kinds of armaments as other countries, and planned as early as 1932 to increase the size of the fourth and fifth *Deutschlands*, known as ships D and E, to approximately 15,000 – 18,000 tons. In November 1933 Chatfield had informed the DRC that the fourth *Deutschland* would probably displace 15,000-17,000 tons, only months before the keel was laid to accommodate 18,000. By late January 1934 Muirhead-Gould had reported that the diesel engines for D had not yet been ordered, suggesting a significant change in design. In July 1934 Raeder ordered work halted on ships D and E, and had their design changed again to displace over 31,000 tons, mounting a principal armament of nine 11-inch guns as replies to the *Dunkerque*. Muirhead-Gould reported the work slowdown speculating, quite rightly, that the ships were being redesigned in response to French building, and the Naval Intelligence Director informed the Foreign Office that ships D and E would probably 'attain very large proportions and constitute an effective answer to the *Dunkerque*.'⁷¹

Additional cause for concern came from an apparently growing relationship between the German and Japanese navies. Lindley reported this in January and February

⁷⁰ Maiolo, 'The Admiralty', 108.

⁷¹ Quoted in *Ibid*, 109.

1934 when he observed a new reluctance by the Japanese to give information to non-German attachés and service representatives. The Japanese General Staff had lately refused to give information to the French military attaché, while the Japanese military attaché in London had been making frequent trips to Berlin; furthermore recently placed secretaries at the Ministry of War and the Ministry of Marine only had German as their second language.⁷² A British report dated January 1934 recorded a boast by the German naval attaché that he expected the Japanese naval authorities to let him see everything ‘as there is a very close understanding between Japan and Germany now.’ Britain also learned that the Japanese naval attaché in Berlin was permitted to go to sea in German ships to witness torpedo and gunnery practice in early 1934.⁷³ The seemingly contradictory course of German naval policy made attempts to integrate it into the existing treaty system difficult, since the Admiralty and the Foreign Office were never certain of anything. Thus, throughout 1934, the British position on the German navy vacillated. On the one hand nobody wanted to see a large, modern German fleet suddenly appear in the North Sea, but, on the other hand, there was no solid proof that this was indeed going to be the case. Even though information and speculation relayed by intelligence sources and the British naval attaché proved remarkably accurate, there was little concrete evidence on which to formulate policy. The evidence suggesting a significant expansion of the German fleet only indicated a move toward standard-type ships, in other words a qualitative increase, not a quantitative one. Hitler’s repeated assurances of friendship and a popular feeling that France and not Germany was the unreasonable party blocking a disarmament agreement made policy makers in London more willing to believe that German naval demands would be moderate.

Other events, not directly related to the naval question, gave cause for belief in the sincerity of Hitler’s moderation. The achievement of the German-Polish non-aggression pact was one such. Phipps wrote in January 1934 that the conclusion of a pact between Germany and the neighbour with whom she had the most issues left the way open for further disarmament discussion. It offered hope that Germany would be willing to seek

⁷² P. Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan*, 42.

⁷³ John P. Fox, *Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis, 1931-1938: A Study in Diplomacy and Ideology*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 104.

treaty revision through negotiation, rather than unilaterally rejecting it. The pact, Phipps wrote, went some way toward removing the perception of Germany as the disturbing element in Europe.⁷⁴ The SA purge in June, troubling as it was for a host of reasons, showed British policy makers that Hitler supported the army first and foremost. His rants about the betrayal of the army in 1918, and the need to make Germany great once more, naturally fed into the country's militaristic tradition. Hitler himself had served in the army; he was an 'army man' in the same way that Franklin Roosevelt was a 'navy man'. Vansittart calculated, wrongly as it turned out, that the Röhm purge would favour the Junkers, who also backed the army over the upstart SA.⁷⁵ The traditional ruling elite would have little use for a German navy, and pour most of Germany's military spending into an army and air force. Ralph Wigram, head of the Foreign Office Central Department, warned Vansittart that if the Junkers increased their influence over Hitler as a result of the purge, they might favour a return to the Rapallo relationship with Russia. That would, in turn, weaken French attempts to conduct a *rapprochement* with the Soviets as a means of containing Germany.⁷⁶ This possibility led Vansittart to look more favourably on the Franco-Soviet talks, which were ongoing, but there was no serious consideration given to a return to the old Triple Entente. Britain still sought to keep itself free of continental entanglements, mindful of the predicament this had created for them in 1914.

Thus the problem of German rearmament remained. Whitehall was still uncertain what Hitler's real objectives on the naval issue were. Surely Germany would press for the right to be allowed to build the type of ships possessed by other maritime powers; this would necessitate the overturning of some of the clauses of Part V of the Treaty of Versailles, but there was a general feeling that the treaty had run its course and some modification of it was desirable.⁷⁷ In any case, the treaty could no longer be enforced. British policy makers held out faint hope that a revision of Versailles might precipitate

⁷⁴ Sir Eric Phipps (Berlin) to Sir John Simon, 27 January 1934. *Confidential Print*, Ser. F, Vol. 45, 21-22.

⁷⁵ Michael L. Roi, *Alternative to Appeasement: Sir Robert Vansittart and Alliance Diplomacy, 1934-1937*. (Wesport: Praeger, 1997), 42.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 43.

⁷⁷ CP 302 (34), Committee on German Rearmament Report, 18 December 1934, CAB 24/251.

Germany's return to the League, which would perhaps mollify French demands for security, but the extent and measure of German rearmament which could be condoned would have to be discussed with Paris before any action could be taken.⁷⁸ Attempts to achieve some sort of compact with Germany on the rearmament issue were consistently frustrated by the French. In the spring of 1934 Hitler offered to limit his army to 300,000 men, and limit a German air force to half the size of the French, but the offer was rejected out of hand by France in April, and the prospect of reaching some general agreement on the legalisation of German rearmament waned thereafter.⁷⁹ The inability of the French and British to come to an arrangement on the subject of German rearmament forced London to work towards formulating its own policy. Hope for the united front that Vansittart spoke of in 1933 still persisted, but the reality of French intransigence meant that an alternative had to be explored. Even if France could be persuaded to accept some measure of German rearmament, she would undoubtedly exact the maximum price for her compliance, including possibly a guarantee of military action.⁸⁰ Privately, the Admiralty felt that a German fleet possessing 50% of the Royal Navy's tonnage was the maximum they could accept; though they hoped for considerably less.⁸¹

The Deteriorating Naval and International Situation

Over the course of 1934 the naval rivalry between France and Italy had also begun to increase in its intensity. Neither power had been a signatory to the whole of the London Naval Treaty, and both had expressed considerable dissatisfaction with its terms, indicating that they would be unfavourably disposed to a maintenance of the present ratios beyond the life of the treaty. France began to agitate for a higher ratio in 1934, claiming that the need to defend her Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts plus her colonial

⁷⁸ CP 302 (34), Committee on German Rearmament Report, 18 December 1934, CAB 24/251. See also David Dutton, *Simon: A Political Biography of Sir John Simon*. (London: Aurum Press, 1992).

⁷⁹ Mr. Campbell (Paris) to Sir John Simon, 17 April 1934. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 6, 630-631. See also J.P. Dunbabin, 'British Rearmament in the 1930s: A Chronology and Review', *Historical Journal*, 18, 3 (1975), 589.

⁸⁰ P. Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan*, 77.

⁸¹ Emily O. Goldman, *Sunken Treaties: Naval Arms Control between the Wars*. (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 227.

Empire dictated a greater naval strength than she was allowed to possess by treaty.⁸² British fears of a new European building competition were confirmed in the summer of that year by a rash of new naval activity. On 30 June Germany launched the 'pocket-battleship' *Graf Spee*, the third ship of the *Deutschland* class. That same day France announced a new construction programme.⁸³ In 1934 Italy laid down two 35,000 ton, 15-inch gun ships as a reply to the *Dunkerque* and the next ship of that class, which Paris announced in June.⁸⁴ This prompted France to announce in August that two more ships of similar size to the Italian's would be laid down under the 1935-1936 programme.⁸⁵

The European naval situation was, at this point, approaching crisis proportions. France was unwilling to accept parity with the Italians; the Italians were unwilling to accept less than parity with the French. Both were dissatisfied with the current treaty system and were expected to push for higher ratios at the next conference. Germany was seeking to build standard-type capital ships, and naval intelligence suggested that she was on her way to doing so. Britain expected German naval planners to ultimately seek parity with France; Chatfield worried that an enlarged French fleet would serve as the standard to which the new German fleet aspired.⁸⁶ A larger French navy was obviously problematic for a variety of reasons, not least of which was its effect on other naval powers, and the Admiralty was adamant that even a friendly French navy would not remove the Royal Navy's strategic and security requirements.⁸⁷ This had been a feature of British naval policy throughout the 1920s and 1930s, which Chamberlain and the Treasury had failed to grasp. The safety and security of Britain's vital trade routes and sea communications could not be entrusted to another power. This was true of the Far East, and it was true of Europe. Delegating tasks or responsibilities to an ally was a dangerous gambit; an ally like France could become a liability if it were bested in a fight with Germany or Italy. The burden on the Royal Navy would be increased by having to

⁸² Roskill, *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 181.

⁸³ Goldman, *Sunken Treaties*, 227.

⁸⁴ Scammell, 'Strategic Origins', 104 and Roskill, *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 181.

⁸⁵ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 181.

⁸⁶ P. Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan*, 87.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 87.

assume not only the tasks assigned the French fleet, but tasks which might never have been the Royal Navy's to begin with. The British navy must see to its own security needs, the French navy to theirs. Chatfield was thus understandably reluctant to base his strategic calculations on allies.

Throughout 1934 the naval question had been secondary to Anglo-German relations. Stanley Baldwin's famous maxim that 'the bomber will always get through' and his statement that 'From an air point of view our frontiers had been moved from Dover to the Rhine', had created a preoccupation with German air rearmament that combined with Hitler's quest for *Lebensraum* to overshadow the naval issue.⁸⁸ In matters of naval policy Japan still posed the greatest and most immediate threat, and the vacillations in Hitler's naval policy had made it somewhat convenient to leave the issue on the back burner. In December a Cabinet committee on German rearmament decided that the European crisis must not be allowed to drift, and that Britain must work with France to gain some measure of control over German military build-up.⁸⁹ The Germans appeared to have also decided that the naval question must not be left unresolved and made overtures to the Foreign Office in November. As a result, the Central Department proposed to the DC(M) an Anglo-German exchange of views on naval questions.⁹⁰ These discussions were to be carried out concurrently with talks held with other naval powers as preliminaries for the upcoming London conference. In anticipation of the Anglo-French preliminary discussions, Captain King, Naval Plans Division Director, had concluded in June 1934 that a comparison between French and German maritime trade and geostrategic factors would make a German claim for parity with France difficult to resist. Indeed, it was commonly felt in London that French intransigence over the legalisation of German rearmament was a greater obstacle than German demands. One member of the Foreign Office wrote in November 1934:

If I reply that France will not agree to recognise or legalise the amount of rearmament that Germany has already carried through the press retort

⁸⁸ Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, *Baldwin: A Biography*. (London: MacMillan, 1969), 770-771.

⁸⁹ Maiolo, 'The Admiralty', 105.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 105.

immediately is, that in that case France and not Germany is the obstacle to the carrying through of a Disarmament Convention.⁹¹

The Admiralty and the Foreign Office were thus faced with a potentially volatile situation. Japan had ended preliminary discussions, and threatened to abrogate the Washington and London treaties in early 1935. France's construction of the *Dunkerque* had provoked a reply from Italy, and Germany was demanding to be allowed to do so as well. France was likely to refuse to accept the German claim for parity, though the Admiralty recognised that the claim was not unreasonable, and to allow Germany to begin building standard ships in reply to the *Dunkerque* was in some ways desirable. Franco-German tension threatened to touch off a new European building race at the same time as a stringent Treasury was attempting to cut the Admiralty's funding in favour of the RAF.

The comment directed at Sir Walter Runciman at a commercial conference in the summer of 1934 from an Italian delegate that 'You cannot expect us to attach so much weight to you now that you are a second rate naval Power' underscored the urgency of the general naval situation.⁹² Britain was not yet a second rate naval power, and was still eminently capable of sending the Italian fleet to the bottom of the sea, but the comment rankled. That Great Britain might become a second rate naval power was Chatfield's greatest fear, and the comment represented everything that he was fighting to prevent. The statement itself, coming as it did from the Italians, was worthless. However the remark highlighted the fact that, while not a second rate naval power, Britain no longer possessed the world's most dominant fleet. Britons in general and the Admiralty in particular were very self-conscious that their relative position in the global balance of seapower was not what it once was, and was in danger of slipping even further.

It was the depressing situation of the global balance of naval power that prompted Britain to seek a naval agreement of some kind that might lay the groundwork for some

⁹¹ N.H. Gibbs, *Grand Strategy, Volume I: Rearmament Policy*. (London: HMSO, 1976), 83.

⁹² P. Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan*, 136.

future multilateral agreement, either by aiding the success of the next London Naval Conference or by providing a basis from which to conclude multiple bilateral pacts if the conference failed. In late 1934 the CID had designated 1936 as a most critical year in the Far East, as Japan would have completed the modernisation of her capital ships and the expansion of her air force by that time.⁹³ British naval power in the Far East would still be in a precarious state at that time, and the Singapore garrison incomplete. Every effort should therefore be taken to avoid incidents that might lead Japan to take precipitate action at a time when she would be stronger than Great Britain than ever before.⁹⁴ This brought to mind Vansittart's prediction that Japan would only attack Britain in the event that a crisis elsewhere had already embroiled Britain's valuable defence resources. Since elsewhere could only mean Europe, and Europe could only mean Germany, it was imperative that a solution to the problem of Germany rearming as a pariah state outside of international treaty be found relatively quickly, and preferably before the next naval conference. The prospect was not an unhappy one. The British had received reassurances from Hitler himself that Germany's naval demands would be moderate, and the prospect of holding naval talks with a party who appeared to understand Britain's position and promised to be generally accommodating in the matter must certainly have held great appeal. The machinery for the Anglo-German Naval Agreement signed the following June was thus set in motion in late 1934 by the intolerable naval situation in both Europe and the Far East.

⁹³ CID 266th Mtg, 22 November 1934, CAB 2/6.

⁹⁴ CID 266th Mtg, 22 November 1934, CAB 2/6.

Chapter Four: 1935

January to March

By the middle of the 1930s the Admiralty faced a major strategic dilemma. Japan had effectively abandoned the existing system of naval limitation, France and Italy had begun to build capital ships again, and Germany was beginning to increase the size of her new vessels, the latter still outside the confines of international agreement. At home the Treasury was fighting hard to reduce the amount of money spent on the country's naval commitments, ignoring the Japanese threat in favour of building a large air force to deter German aggression. In short, the ability of Great Britain to defend her Imperial possessions was rapidly diminishing. If the new Two-Power Standard that Chatfield sought was ever to be reached and the security of the Empire preserved, then the Royal Navy must either rearm on a greater scale, or else the size of foreign navies had to be limited by treaty.¹ Since aggressive rearmament was not yet an option, the Admiralty and the Foreign Office, urged on by the Treasury, were compelled to secure the Empire by treaty. Their best hope for doing so was to be the upcoming London Naval Conference, scheduled to begin meeting in the fall of 1935.

Recent events, however, had indicated that a multilateral naval accord would be even more difficult to come by in 1935 than it had been in 1930. Japan had made it very clear that her delegation intended to push for parity with the leading naval powers; 47% of the government's annual expenditure now went to the fighting services, an indication that protestations of peaceful intent bore little relationship to the realities of Japanese policy. The navy had been built up to treaty limits, its capital ships modernised, the naval air service expanded and the fleet placed on war footing.² France and Italy were likely to seek a revision of their ratios relative to each other as well as to the other naval powers, and Germany seemed unsure of what her policy would be. The terrifying possibility also existed that if a general naval conference failed Germany and Japan might come together

¹ Clare M. Scammell, 'The Royal Navy and the Strategic Origins of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 20, 2 (June 1997), 105.

² *Ibid*, 108.

on the naval question.³ Signs of increasing co-operation between the two countries had appeared intermittently throughout 1934, and although the prospect for close co-operation was in reality unlikely, the belief of its potentiality was enough to create a sense of urgency about the need to include Germany in some form of naval limitation treaty. Sir John Simon expressed the feeling of many in Whitehall in a letter written to King George V, dated 14 January: 'The coming year is likely to be a vital year in the sense that if European improvement is not secured and some element of German reconciliation effected, the world may enter into a most dangerous future.'⁴

A report prepared by the Foreign Office and the three defence services in January on the strength of Germany's armed forces provided the starting point for British efforts to stop the drift of the European situation. The Admiralty claimed in the report that the 35% figure was not unacceptable, though they believed Germany might accept a lower ratio.⁵ In March Phipps wrote to Simon that Hitler was demanding parity with France in all categories of armaments.⁶ These demands, oscillating as they did between moderation and provocation, were disconcerting. The uncertainty of Germany's true intentions made the inclusion of Germany in some sort of treaty imperative, and since the next London Naval Conference was scheduled to be held that year, and naval armaments were the category of weapons Britain most urgently desired to limit, it followed logically that an accommodation should be sought with Germany to this effect.

Added impetus to seeking an agreement with Germany was fostered by the attitude of the French toward the upcoming conference. The Foreign Office and Defence Services' report indicated that France was keen to widen the scope of the conference to

³ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴ Quoted in David Dutton, *Simon: A Political Biography of Sir John Simon*. (London: Aurum Press, 1992), 193.

⁵ 'Report prepared by the Foreign Office and the three Defence Services on the Strength of the German Armed Forces, 25 January 1935.' *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Ser. 2, Vol. 12 (London: HMSO, 1972), 422-432. (Henceforth abbreviated *DBFP*). The report is also reprinted in Kenneth Bourne and D. Cameron Watt eds. *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*. Part II: From the First to the Second World War, Series F, Europe: 1914-1939, Vol. 46, Germany 1935. Ed. Jeremy Noakes. (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1991), 22-30 (Henceforth abbreviated *Confidential Print*) and also CP 253 (35), CAB 24/253.

⁶ Sir E. Phipps (Berlin) to Sir J. Simon, 16 March 1935. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 12, 648.

include important lesser naval powers.⁷ The addition of new parties to the conference would make the chance of concluding a general naval agreement even slimmer. France would likely enlist the help of various smaller nations to overturn the Washington ratios and, perhaps, block some agreement over the question of German rearmament. Paris had already refused the German disarmament proposals the previous spring, and popular feeling was frustrated with persistent French demands for security. As Paul Kennedy writes:

Most Britons found relations with France increasingly irksome, since its constant demands for security and its unwillingness to bury the hatchet with Germany blocked their own insular wish to see the new European order stabilised without requiring frequent interventions by London.⁸

The French position made it clear that Anglo-French naval discussions could not accomplish anything as long as Germany's position remained unknown.⁹ Since French demands for security were tied directly to Germany's programme of rearmament, anything agreed upon in preliminary discussions for the naval conference would have to be subject to the level of rearmament carried out by Germany. The first step toward an agreement at the naval conference would thus need to be consultation with Hitler. If Germany's position could be clearly defined and even moderated, then the prospect of French, and subsequently Italian, inclusion in a treaty was greatly improved. The path to naval limitation lay through Berlin.

There were other reasons for seeking a new naval agreement by opening bilateral discussions with Germany. Anglo-Japanese talks had ended the previous year with a proposal by Great Britain that would forego treaties and ratios, replacing them with a voluntary system where each power would unilaterally declare its construction programme for the years 1937-1942. Any modifications to the announced programme

⁷ 'Report prepared by the Foreign Office and the three Defence Services on the Strength of the German Armed Forces, 25 January 1935.' *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 12, 422-432. The report does not specify which of the 'lesser naval powers' France sought to include at the Conference.

⁸ Paul M. Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980*. (London: Fontana, 1981), 245.

⁹ Report prepared by the Foreign Office and the three Defence Services on the Strength of the German Armed Forces, 25 January 1935. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 12, 422-432.

would have to be given with a year's notice.¹⁰ Great Britain was awaiting a reply from Tokyo, and in the meantime began to pursue discussions with the other naval powers. In May the secretary of the Japanese Minister of Marine told the British naval attaché that in light of Germany's wish for naval expansion, it would be necessary for the European countries to come to an agreement first before the Japanese government would participate in a conference. The secretary also stressed the unwillingness of the Japanese to take part in a conference with anyone other than the original Washington signatories.¹¹ Since the principal threat to the Royal Navy came from Japan, not a European power, an agreement with Germany would have the advantage of laying the groundwork for a possible settlement of the Far Eastern naval question as well as facilitating a European pact. Britain hoped that by presenting Japan with a united European front some moderation of Tokyo's demands for naval parity and a common upper limit might be achieved at the London Naval Conference. German inclusion in a system of international naval limitation was desirable in its own right for the effect it would have on the German fleet. As 1935 progressed however it became clear that an agreement with Germany, though it may have been of a bilateral nature, would have farther-reaching effects than simply resolving the outstanding question of naval limitation between the two states.

March to June

From March to June events moved quickly toward the conclusion of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement. On 4 March the British government published its White Paper on defence. In light of the deterioration of the world situation and the breakdown of the Disarmament Conference at Geneva, the government informed the British public that it would spend money to upgrade the Empire's military deficiencies.¹² In the meantime the government intended to continue working towards international agreements on arms limitation and disarmament, but could no longer allow the national defences to remain unprepared for a crisis:

¹⁰ Memorandum by the Foreign Office and Admiralty on Questions of Naval Limitation, 30 March 1935. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 13, 181-187.

¹¹ Sir R. Clive (Tokyo) to Sir J. Simon, 3 May 1935. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 13, 226.

¹² Robert Paul Shay, *British Rearmament in the Thirties: Politics and Profits*. (Princeton: University Press, 1977), 48. The text of the White Paper can be found in CP 38 (35), CAB 24/253.

The National Government intends to pursue without intermission the national policy of peace by every practicable means and to take advantage of every opportunity, and to make opportunities to make peace more secure. But it can no longer close its eyes to the fact that adequate defences are still required for security and to enable the British Empire to play its full part in maintaining the peace of the world....His Majesty's Government have noted and welcomed the declarations of the leaders of Germany that they desire peace. They cannot, however, fail to recognise that not only the forces but the spirit in which the population, and especially the youth of the country, are being organised lend colour to, and substantiate, the general feeling of insecurity which has already been incontestably generated.¹³

On 9 March Hitler used the White Paper announcement, and its reference to German rearmament in violation of the Versailles treaty as a pretext to announce the existence of the *Luftwaffe*, whose numbers he greatly exaggerated for effect. A week later he announced the reintroduction of conscription.¹⁴

Both of these announcements came as a surprise to the international community; both were flagrant violations of the Treaty of Versailles, giving great cause for alarm at the state of German rearmament. The urgency of a naval agreement thus became all the more pressing. If German industry could build an enormous airforce in secret, and the German army swell exponentially in size at a moment's notice, what would come next? The answer policy makers in London most feared was a naval race. The White Paper announcement had given Hitler a nasty 'diplomatic cold' which led him to postpone Sir John Simon's scheduled visit to Berlin to the end of month, ostensibly for reasons of illness but in reality to show his displeasure with the British decision. In London the idea of cancelling the visit altogether was discussed, but Simon felt that protest should be lodged some other way.¹⁵ Cancelling the visit, he thought, would serve no useful purpose and ultimately do more harm than good by damaging chances for a naval agreement.

¹³ CP 38 (35), Statement Relating to Defence, 11 March 1935, CAB 24/253.

¹⁴ Shay, *British Rearmament in the Thirties*, 48.

¹⁵ CP 259 (35), Note by the Secretary for Foreign Affairs on the German Declaration of Rearmament, 17 March 1935, CAB 24/254.

Upon his arrival in Berlin Simon attempted to take issue with Hitler's desired ratio of 35% of the Royal Navy's tonnage in surface vessels. The Foreign Secretary informed Hitler that Britain was seeking an agreement that would replace Versailles and the existing naval treaties, and invited a German delegation to London for preliminary discussions; he also warned the Chancellor that the 35% ratio was too high, claiming it would incite France and Italy to increase their naval demands, and make any kind of agreement impossible. Hitler, however, made a persuasive case for the acceptance of his desired figure. The 35% ratio would not be for a limited time like the Washington and London ratios, he claimed, but forever. It would be a ratio established between Great Britain and Germany in perpetuity, irrespective of a naval conference or a third party. Germany, he averred, must not concede superiority to the French or Italian fleets; his *Reich* needed security of trade as much as either of those states. Hitler added almost as an afterthought that since it would take Germany years to achieve the 35% ratio, the pace of German shipbuilding should concern neither France nor Italy.¹⁶

There was much in Hitler's comments that appealed to Simon. The idea of a fixed ratio was an attractive one; renegotiating naval treaties every few years was frustrating because of the reluctance of the other powers to accept limitation or reduction. It also promised to arrest the drift of the European naval situation by fixing Germany's navy at a size acceptable to Britain and below that of France. Although Hitler's desired fleet was slightly larger than the 5:1.67 ratio given France under the Washington system in theory, in practice French tonnage was roughly 50% of the Royal Navy's.¹⁷ Due to their refusal to sign onto all of the provisions of the London Naval Treaty, France had been able to make up tonnage on the Royal Navy through the construction of smaller vessels, notably submarines. A German navy fixed at 35% would still cede tonnage superiority to France, in practice though not in theory, and might lead Paris to cease complaining about German rearmament. In any case, France could not possibly use a

¹⁶ CP 69 (35), 'Notes of Anglo-German Conversations, Held at the Chancellor's Palace, Berlin, on March 25 and 26 1935', 1935, CAB 24/254.

¹⁷ CP 79 (35), Memorandum on Questions for discussion at the Stresa Conference, April 1935, CAB 24/254. France and Italy had not been signatories to all of the 1930 London Treaty, meaning that they could build freely in smaller classes of ships like destroyers and submarines to make up tonnage on the larger naval powers.

German navy that would agree to give away a significant margin of tonnage to the French as an excuse to increase her naval demands. If a German fleet of a limited size could possibly moderate French naval demands, it might do the same for the Italians, thus averting the naval race among continental states.

The prospect of an agreement with Germany provided a point upon which the Admiralty, the Foreign Office and the Treasury could all agree, and the different policy threads each department had pursued earlier now began to converge upon a single point. The Admiralty saw in a naval agreement with Germany the chance to build to a Two-Power Standard against Japan.¹⁸ The agreement would give the Admiralty a fixed point of calculation for their requirements in the Far East; by setting a specific ratio for the German fleet, the Admiralty guaranteed the need for an increase in capital ship building and made an important step toward the achievement of a new Two-Power Standard.¹⁹ The Washington strategy stipulated a One-Power Standard with Japan and the next largest European power, France. The 35% ratio desired by Hitler was the largest ratio by another European power the Admiralty deemed acceptable to their own strategic programme. If the second European power in the Washington program possessed the largest fleet acceptable to the Admiralty which was larger than any ratio currently possessed by a European navy, it necessitated an increase in ship construction to maintain their Washington ratio with the Japanese. In other words, by allowing Germany to build a navy that exceeded the 5:1.67 ratio between Britain and continental navies established at Washington, the Admiralty would need to build new vessels in order to maintain the *status quo vis a vis* Japan.

The Foreign Office was inclined to believe Hitler's professions – at that time still genuine – of friendship and good faith towards Great Britain.²⁰ A naval agreement might relieve Germany of her status as a pariah state, rehabilitating her with the international

¹⁸ Wesley K. Wark, 'Baltic Myths and Submarine Bogeys: British Naval Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 6, 1 (January 1983), 64.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 70.

²⁰ Christopher Bell, *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy Between the Wars*. (Houndmills: MacMillan, 2000), 103.

community and perhaps even paving the way for a return to the League of Nations. Removing Germany from the diplomatic isolation the Stresa Front had placed her in would go a long way toward forestalling the war that many in Europe now felt was coming. The Treasury, for its part, saw in a naval agreement with Germany the chance to secure home waters, freeing up resources to send to the Far East, commensurate with the policy of 'showing a tooth' there.²¹ An agreement would obviate the need for a new naval standard, allowing more money to be spent on an air force. It was generally believed that a naval pact would be a precursor to an air pact, and that Hitler himself had made this suggestion to Simon during his visit to Berlin.²² If an agreement with Germany was to be the prelude to a more general arms limitation agreement, which would further reduce defence spending, so much the better. The meeting of three divergent policies on this single locus did not mean that the three departments now pursued a single policy in a fully co-ordinated fashion. Each department still pursued its own goals, seeking to use this common ground to advance its aims. The Admiralty hoped it would serve as a springboard to build to a Two-Power Standard; the Foreign Office wanted an agreement with Germany in place of a failed agreement with Japan. The Treasury sought to use an agreement to avoid extra construction and desired a deal with Germany to pave the way for a pact with Tokyo. All three departments agreed that the window of opportunity to conclude an agreement was a small one.

Phipps wrote to Simon in April that *The Times* had described Hitler's naval demands as 'not exorbitant', and while he would not consider the demands moderate, the ambassador thought them somewhat nebulous. Hitler's ratio of 35%, Phipps wrote, implied recognition of British naval superiority. At the same time, Germany refused to

²¹ Eunan O'Halpin, *Head of the Civil Service: A Study of Sir Warren Fisher*. (London: Routledge, 1989), 255.

²² Uri Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber: The Fear of Air Attack and British Politics, 1932-1939*. (London: Royal Historical Society, 1980), 88-89, P.W. Doerr, *British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*. (Manchester: University Press, 1998), 172 and Hines H. Hall III, 'The Foreign Policy-Making Process in Britain, 1934-1935, and the Origins of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement', *Historical Journal*, 19, 2 (June 1976), 493. This was an important issue never far from the fore in the period leading up to the conclusion of the naval pact. There seems to have been an expectation on both sides that talks for an air pact would begin almost immediately after the naval agreement had been finalised; Ribbentrop expressed as much to Vansittart the day after its conclusion and to Hoare on other occasions, although German sincerity is a matter of some debate. See the Memorandum by Sir R. Vansittart on an interview with Herr von Ribbentrop, 19 June 1935. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 13, 438-440.

recognise the superiority of the French and Italian fleets. If Hitler persisted in his claim to parity with the French he would have a navy with roughly 50% of the tonnage the Royal Navy had. If this were the demand put forth when Germany had only a short Baltic coastline, what would the claim be when or if Germany acquired colonies or mandates?²³ It was imperative that an agreement with Germany be concluded which would fix the German navy at the lowest possible ratio, before Hitler finally made up his mind as to what German naval policy should be.

There were other reasons for the desirability of a naval pact with Germany. A bilateral agreement that paved the way for further agreements would have the benefit of avoiding further British entanglement in French security problems. Reintegrating Germany into the international system, or concluding a multilateral air pact, would remove the danger of another war, and virtually eliminate any possibility of Britain being drawn into a continental war under the Treaty of Locarno, something London had anxiously been trying to achieve since the pact's conclusion. An agreement would also be presentable to the British voting public as a firm example of the government's commitment to peaceful negotiation and arms control. Simon, Chamberlain and Baldwin saw this as being of paramount importance, as critics of the government would rouse fierce opposition to any extension of British responsibilities on the continent.²⁴ Reports from Tokyo in April indicated that the Far Eastern situation had changed little since the previous year. Sir Robert Clive, the ambassador to Japan, reported pessimistically that among the younger naval officers the attitude of parity at the next conference or no agreement still prevailed. At several formal dinners given on the occasion of British ships visiting Japanese ports Clive spoke with several Japanese Admirals who remembered the old Anglo-Japanese Alliance with fondness, genuinely regretting its termination.²⁵ The younger generation, he noted sadly, did not remember the halcyon days of the alliance. They had been nurtured in an atmosphere of super-nationalism and were rapidly increasing their influence over Japanese naval policy. 'Japan', Clive had

²³ Sir E. Phipps (Berlin) to Sir J. Simon, 6 April 1935. *Confidential Print*, Ser. F, Vol. 46, 121-123.

²⁴ Hall, 'The Foreign Policy-Making Process', 488.

²⁵ Sir R. Clive (Tokyo) to Sir J. Simon, 25 April 1935. *Confidential Print*, Ser. E, Vol. 14, 163-164.

written earlier that February, 'unquestionably believes in her destiny, and that is to be, and to remain, the dominant Power in the East.'²⁶

With bilateral naval discussions between Germany and Britain in sight, it was decided to postpone the actual conversations because of the effect they would have on France and Italy on the eve of the Stresa Conference, a meeting between the three Powers to attempt to construct a united policy for dealing with German rearmament in violation of Versailles.²⁷ From the end of March until late May nothing further was done with Germany on the naval question, mostly due to the preparations for George V's jubilee celebration and the impending Cabinet shuffle which came in early June. Ostensibly, the Stresa Front dictated that no agreements with Germany would be made by any power without consulting the other two; however in practice this was never done. R.J.Q. Adams writes of the conference that

there was no real Stresa Front as there was no real agreement about how to co-operate in their mutual anxiety about the growth of German power.... The Stresa Front was impotent from the outset because the signatory powers pursued independently what they considered their legitimate security interests.²⁸

In May France signed a mutual-assistance treaty with the Soviet Union in an attempt to contain Germany. The treaty was hardly a surprise, as Franco-Soviet negotiations had been going on for some time, and while the Foreign Office saw in the pact the potential to keep the Soviet Union in the anti-Hitler front,²⁹ there was some bitterness that Paris had not kept London better informed of the progress of negotiations. In particular, the Foreign Office was upset that the alliance had been signed in advance of the conclusion of an Eastern mutual assistance pact, of which Britain was to be a part,

²⁶ Sir R. Clive (Tokyo) to Sir J. Simon, 3 February 1935. *Confidential Print*, Ser. E, Vol. 14, 5.

²⁷ Stephen Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars, Vol. 2: The Period of Reluctant Rearmament*. (London: Collins, 1976), 302.

²⁸ R.J.Q. Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-1939*. (Stanford: University Press, 1993), 21.

²⁹ B.J.C. McKercher, 'Old Diplomacy and New: The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1919-1939', in Michael Dockrill and B.J.C. McKercher eds., *Diplomacy and World Power: Studies in British Foreign Policy, 1890-1950*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1996), 112. See also Michael L. Roi, *Alternative to Appeasement: Sir Robert Vansittart and Alliance Diplomacy, 1934-1937*. (Westport: Praeger, 1997).

involving many of the smaller states created in 1919.³⁰ In the event the Franco-Soviet Alliance, like so many other agreements signed in the 1930s, never amounted to anything, but the perceived slight rankled at the Foreign Office and was at least partly responsible for Britain's refusal to collaborate closely with Paris during the naval negotiations with Germany. Sir Samuel Hoare, the newly appointed Foreign Secretary, responding to French criticisms that they had not been duly consulted on the matter of Anglo-German naval negotiations wrote:

In this connexion it is perhaps worth while contrasting the attitude adopted by the French Government towards their own bilateral agreement with the Soviet Government, and our bilateral agreement with Germany. When His Majesty's Government conclude a bilateral agreement with Germany, as their contribution towards those "agreements regarding armaments generally" recommended in the London Declaration, it is a cause of criticism. But when the French Government conclude a mutual guarantee treaty with the Soviet Government, as their contribution towards the "conclusion of pacts freely negotiated between all the interested parties in Eastern Europe," it is regarded as a matter for congratulation. It is to be observed, also, that when the French Government decided, not merely to negotiate but to bring their Russian Treaty into force in advance not only of the General Settlement, but of the so-called Eastern Pact to be concluded between all the parties concerned, they did so without requesting or awaiting the concern of His Majesty's Government.³¹

During the course of 1935 a potential new threat had arisen, that of Italy. It had been apparent since 1933 that Italy wanted to invade Abyssinia as part of Mussolini's grandiose scheme to resurrect the old Roman Empire. A border incident at Wal-Wal, between Abyssinia and Italian Somaliland, in December 1934 brought the threat of invasion closer.³² The matter had not been raised formally at Stresa, and the communiqué issued at the end of the Conference that referred to the necessity of keeping the peace in Europe led Mussolini to believe that the Western powers would turn a blind eye to his African ambitions.³³ His gamble was essentially correct. France and Britain, and the Soviet Union for that matter, could not risk alienating Mussolini and pushing him

³⁰ Memorandum by Sir Samuel Hoare Responding to French Criticisms of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, July 1935. *Confidential Print*, Ser. F, Vol. 46, 210-217.

³¹ Memorandum by Sir Samuel Hoare Responding to French Criticisms of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, July 1935. *Confidential Print*, Ser. F, Vol. 46, 212.

³² Corelli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*. (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), 350.

³³ Richard Overy and Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*. (London: Penguin, 1989), 186.

into the arms of Hitler. Britain was particularly anxious to avoid creating for herself a new enemy whose navy sat astride the principal maritime route to the Far East.

The Royal Navy was not afraid to meet the Italian fleet in combat, but worried that lucky hits or air strikes might mean a fleet bound for Singapore arrived with its tenuous margin of superiority over Japan decreased by one or more capital ships. To avoid that situation the Royal Navy would have to go around the Cape of Good Hope, adding 18 days and 3,000 miles to the passage of the fleet to Singapore.³⁴ The Mediterranean danger was small in reality. The Italians faced a similar problem in the 1930s that the Kaiser had in the Great War. As the strength of the fleet grew, so did their reluctance to risk it in battle. As the threat of war with the Royal Navy loomed larger in the fall of 1935, Italy became more defensive minded and more reluctant to move the battle fleet beyond the range of land based air cover. The Italian navy was overawed at the prospect of having to face the Royal Navy in battle. In the guarded language they used to address their German counterparts, the Italian Admiralty confessed their fear that 'even a numerically inferior English fleet would have many advantages, because of its experience and traditions, over an Italian fleet superior in numbers.'³⁵ However the risk was more than the British Admiralty was willing to take, and it seems unlikely that the Royal Navy knew the full extent of its psychological advantage over the Italians. Nevertheless, the threat of a hostile Italian fleet able to threaten Suez, Malta and Gibraltar was an added incentive to remove a potential European enemy from the equation by concluding an agreement with Germany.

Simon recognised that France and Italy were both likely to object to a bilateral Anglo-German agreement. The Foreign Secretary believed that rather than upsetting the peace of Europe, an agreement with Germany was vital to its preservation, and that Britain must play the 'honest broker' in keeping the peace. He saw an Anglo-German

³⁴ Paul Haggie, 'The Royal Navy and the Far Eastern Problem, 1931-1941', *Army Quarterly and Defence Journal*, 106, 4 (October 1976), 408.

³⁵ Brian R. Sullivan, 'A Fleet in Being: The Rise and Fall of Italian Seapower, 1861-1943', *International History Review*, 10, 1 (January 1988), 118-120. See also A.J. Marder, 'The Royal Navy and the Ethiopian Crisis of 1935-36', *The American Historical Review*, 75, 5 (June 1970), 1327-1356.

agreement not as a violation of the Stresa Front, but as the embodiment of its spirit – the containment of German rearmament – even though it was a violation of the letter of the Front:

There is little likelihood of coming to an agreement with France and Italy on the basis of anything which Hitler proposes, but then France and Italy are in an excited state, the latter more so than the former, and I do feel that it is up to us not only to try and keep a restraining hand on these two countries.... but also to place the situation firmly before them.³⁶

Hankey, who believed that Britain alone of the European powers was in a position to maintain the peace, shared Simon's opinion. The Cabinet Secretary was sceptical of Hitler's professions of peaceful intent, as was Vansittart who had read the unexpurgated version of *Mein Kampf* in German and remained wary of Hitler's foreign policy. In a letter to Vansittart in May, Hankey wrote that the correct policy for Britain to pursue was 'absolutely clear'; that whilst pressing on and increasing the pace of rearmament 'we should, in the most cordial and generous spirit, follow up Hitler's overtures.'³⁷ Hitler's overtures, as events were to show, were very reasonable. In the informal preliminary talks held at the beginning of June the German delegation supported qualitative limits and a 'building holiday' for cruisers at the next London Naval Conference, two ideas very close to Britain's own proposals. Hitler was determined, however, to achieve his 35% ratio by 1942.³⁸ At nearly every turn the Germans were proving themselves most accommodating in the matter of a naval agreement. Their agreeable manner must have seemed a refreshing change from Japanese intransigence and French paranoia. Although the 35% figure was still considered to be high, it would not upset the Admiralty's strategic calculations, and was eminently preferable to Hitler's claims to parity with France. There was, however, some concern in London over the rate at which Hitler intended to build his new fleet. Even though the final size of the German navy was acceptable, if they were to build to treaty level in a very short period of time it would undoubtedly raise fears in France and Italy and re-ignite a building race. But Hitler's

³⁶ Quoted in Reynolds M. Salerno, 'Multilateral Strategy and Diplomacy: The Anglo-German Naval Agreement and the Mediterranean Crisis, 1935-1936', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 17, 2 (June 1994), 50. The statement appears to have been made in early April 1935.

³⁷ Stephen Roskill, *Hankey, Man of Secrets, Vol. 3: 1931-1963*. (London: Collins, 1974), 168.

³⁸ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, Vol. 2, 303.

assertion that he would like to have his fleet by 1942 suggested that this would not be an issue.

In spite of the ease with which talks proceeded, Britain still approached the prospect of a bilateral agreement with a good deal of trepidation. The catalyst for the agreement came in late May, when Hitler declared in a speech to the *Reichstag* that he accepted British naval superiority and would not seek a fleet larger than the 35% figure. In the speech he described Germany's naval claims as final and binding: 'Germany had neither the intention, nor the necessity, nor the means to participate in any new naval rivalry.'³⁹ Chatfield urged the government to seize the opportunity the speech had presented. Hitler had made a public, voluntary recognition of British superiority.⁴⁰ Phipps telegraphed the Foreign Office advising them to accept Hitler's pledge; the Cabinet decided to initiate formal naval talks the next day. Now, no opportunity could be lost owing to French shortsightedness.⁴¹ Hitler could not continue to press for parity with France without appearing to have gone back on his word. Furthermore, a voluntary declaration such as this one meant that in the future there would be no need to enforce the treaty, no bitter legacy, and no *diktat* as had been the case in 1919. A German delegation was shortly dispatched to London and negotiations began in early June.

Sir Robert Craigie and DCNS Admiral Little secured from the German delegation the promise that third party building would not in any way alter the 35% ratio. This was of crucial importance. The Admiralty recognised that even a hollow threat by Hitler to strive for a higher percentage would upset their strategy for shaping the global balance of naval power in Britain's favour.⁴² The negotiations began with the German delegation, led by Hitler's ambassador at large, Joachim von Ribbentrop, announcing that the 35% ratio was fixed and unalterable; there was to be no discussion of revising it, or of

³⁹ D.C. Watt, 'The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935: An Interim Judgement', *Journal of Modern History*, 28, 2 (1956), 157.

⁴⁰ Lord Chafield, *It Might Happen Again, Volume 2: The Navy and Defence*. (London: William Heinemann, 1947), 73-74.

⁴¹ Joseph A. Maiolo, 'The Admiralty and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 18 June, 1935', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 6, 1 (March 1999), 115.

⁴² Joseph A. Maiolo, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939: A Study in Appeasement and the Origins of the Second World War*. (London: MacMillan, 1998), 35.

Germany accepting a lesser ratio. It was to be 35% or no agreement. This method of negotiation caused some consternation in London. Ribbentrop was perceived as rude and uncompromising, which indeed he was, and for a brief period it appeared that the negotiations would fall through at the eleventh hour. The agreement was salvaged by the recognition that this was Britain's best chance to maintain a favourable naval balance of power. The German government had considered their offer to be genuinely generous. If it were not acknowledged they would likely build beyond it. The Japanese modernisation programme had put Britain at a disadvantage; until mid-1939 they would only have 11 of their 15 capital ships available for service, which was not enough even for a margin over Japan alone. It was imperative that the German fleet be limited, and that its rate of construction be moderate. In the face of German and Japanese construction, even within Hitler's 35% ratio, the Royal Navy would have to increase its own building programme in order not to fall behind the capital ship strength of Germany and Japan combined. This scenario could not be avoided by simply refusing to recognise the German construction programme; the Naval Staff believed the surest way to ensure restraint on the part of Germany was to grant them every consideration in theory.⁴³

Though the British were appalled at Ribbentrop's method of negotiation, A.J.P. Taylor claims that they were secretly delighted at the course the discussions had taken. Both sides wanted an agreement and got it.⁴⁴ On 18 June 1935 Sir Samuel Hoare, the new Foreign Secretary, informed Ribbentrop that His Majesty's Government accepted the 35% ratio, regarding the deal as permanent, believing it would facilitate a general agreement on naval limitation world-wide.⁴⁵ The Anglo-German Naval Agreement was signed; it allowed the Germans to construct a fleet that would 35% of the Royal Navy's tonnage in surface ships and 45% of Britain's submarine tonnage with a provision for parity if Germany believed it necessary for her security requirements. German rearmament had been officially sanctioned and the Treaty of Versailles officially but unilaterally revised.

⁴³ Naval Staff Memorandum on the German Proposal for a 35 per cent Naval Ratio, 5 June 1935. *DBFP*, Ser. 2, Vol. 13, 368-371.

⁴⁴ A.J.P. Taylor, 'The Anglo-German Naval Agreements', *New Hungarian Quarterly*, 58, 16 (1975), 161.

⁴⁵ Sir Samuel Hoare to Ribbentrop, London, 18 June 1935. *Confidential Print*, Ser. F, Vol. 46, 181-183.

Epilogue

The opposition that Simon had predicted would come from other European states followed hard on the conclusion of the pact. The signature of the agreement, coming as it did on the 120th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo, prompted French cries of perfidious Albion.⁴⁶ The French ambassador saw Vansittart at the Foreign Office the following day to express his concern over the agreement, but French opposition had come even before the treaty was concluded. While the German delegation was in London during the course of negotiations, Simon had encouraged other naval powers to offer their observations on the agreement. The American and Japanese governments both responded favourably, but the French Premier Pierre Laval warned that the deal would provoke, rather than prevent, a naval arms race:

The French government must observe, above all, that the repercussions of the envisaged accord would not be limited to the naval armaments of Great Britain and Germany. We are obliged, therefore, to raise serious reservations about the eventual conclusion of this accord.⁴⁷

The Premier claimed the Stresa Front stipulated that no power conclude a bilateral agreement with Germany that constituted a revision of the Treaty of Versailles, adding that German construction would force France to expand her fleet regardless of the limitations of the Washington and London treaties.⁴⁸ The Stresa Front did not prevent any of the three Powers from concluding a bilateral agreement with Germany, and his announcement that France was prepared to build unilaterally without regard for treaty restrictions only served to confirm British statesmen in their opinion that France and not Germany was the real obstacle to multilateral arms limitation.

Vansittart's reply to the French ambassador was terse. No British government could have rejected a unilateral offer from Germany without alienating public opinion and weakening its internal position. Common sense dictated that it was prudent to tie

⁴⁶ Doerr, *British Foreign Policy*, 173.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Salerno, 'Multilateral Strategy and Diplomacy', 53.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 53.

Germany to a maximum level before Hitler's demands became extravagant. It could be argued, he continued, that Germany sought to drive a wedge between France and Britain, something Vansittart said his government had no intention of allowing to happen. The Permanent Undersecretary felt that things would have been much worse if an opportunity had presented itself and France could be seen as having blocked it; that would play directly into the hands of German propaganda.⁴⁹ A memorandum by Hoare contained further rebuttals to French objections. Regarding the criticism that France was given no opportunity to influence Britain's view in the matter, the Foreign Secretary replied that the offer was made only to Great Britain, independent of construction by a third power. Collaboration with France would thus have been a problem. Hoare further noted that in accepting the 35% ratio Hitler had overruled the German Naval Ministry, the *Marineleitung*, which had wanted a much higher figure. Britain needed to seize that opportunity. Finally, in response to the French claim that the pact violated the spirit of Anglo-French co-operation, Hoare retorted that co-operation did not give France any special rights of control over British policy. France had consistently ignored British naval interests, demonstrating a wish to refuse Britain the latitude to secure them. *That*, Hoare claimed, was in violation of the spirit of co-operation.⁵⁰

The Foreign Office was virtually unanimous in its rejection of French criticisms. C.J. Norton, Vansittart's private secretary, believed that the Franco-Soviet Pact and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement cancelled one another out.⁵¹ Vansittart added to his conversation with the French ambassador in early July when he said:

Our justification is a practical one. We are justified on every long view; and the longer the view the greater the justification. It was on these strictly practical grounds that I supported the proposal from the start. We are right *in substance* and that is what matters [*Italics original*].⁵²

⁴⁹ Sir S. Hoare to Sir G. Clerk (Paris), 19 June 1935. *Confidential Print*, Ser. F, Vol. 46, 183-184.

⁵⁰ Memorandum by Sir S. Hoare responding to French criticisms of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, July 1935. *Confidential Print*, Ser. F, Vol. 46, 210-217.

⁵¹ Nicholas Rostow, *Anglo-French Relations, 1934-1936*. (London: MacMillan, 1984), 178. See also Richard Davis, *Anglo-French Relations Before the Second World War: Appeasement and Crisis*. (London: Palgrave, 2001), 129.

⁵² Quoted in Michael L. Roi, *Alternative to Appeasement: Sir Robert Vansittart and Alliance Diplomacy, 1934-1937*. (Westport: Praeger, 1997), 81.

The Permanent Undersecretary's own words refute the avowal by Éva Haraszti, author of what appears to be the only book in English on the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, that Vansittart opposed the agreement.⁵³

French anger appears to have subsided fairly quickly. By 11 July the British naval attaché in Paris reported that the popular press reported responsible naval opinion as saying that a limited German fleet was preferable to an unlimited one.⁵⁴ In any case the Abyssinian Crisis, which began to rapidly deteriorate in the summer of 1935, soon became the most important issue between Britain and France and the naval agreement appears to have been lost in the shuffle as Europe faced a series of crises in rapid succession from 1935 until 1 September, 1939.

France was not the only quarter from which objections to the agreement were voiced. Other countries also expressed their concern, and the agreement faced a considerable amount of criticism at home. William Bullitt, the American ambassador in Moscow, reported that the Soviet Union was afraid that a new German fleet would cause Britain to withdraw units from the Mediterranean and make it impossible to send a fleet to Singapore. Moscow was thus afraid that the agreement would be tantamount to giving Japan a free hand in Asia, and that the new relationship with Berlin would weaken Anglo-French ties, weakening the anti-Hitler front and the policy of collective security.⁵⁵ The Kremlin also feared that Britain's apparent abandonment of the Far East meant that a secret Anglo-Japanese treaty had been signed.⁵⁶ This was probably more speculation than anything else. Britain had most certainly not abandoned the Far East; the treaty was to facilitate the deployment of a fleet to Singapore in the knowledge that home waters had been made more secure. Moreover there was no significant change in Soviet foreign policy either towards Britain or Japan in the wake of the agreement.

⁵³ Éva H. Haraszti, *Treaty-breakers or "Realpolitiker"?: The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June 1935*. (Boppard am Rhein: H. Boldt, 1974), 9.

⁵⁴ Paul Haggie. *Britannia at Bay: The Defence of the British Empire Against Japan, 1931-1941*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 81.

⁵⁵ Haraszti, *Treaty-breakers*, 149.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 149.

Those in Parliament who criticised the agreement did so on the grounds that it violated the Treaty of Versailles. Chatfield dismissed this criticism, arguing that since Germany had already repudiated the treaty and it could not be enforced in any event, there was no sense in worrying about that.⁵⁷ The criticism is somewhat disingenuous however. Unilateral repudiations aside, the revision of Versailles had been a long standing feature of international relations in Europe. Lloyd George had begun the process almost immediately when he allowed Germany to maintain a larger army than was permitted under treaty. Germany under Stresemann had worked tirelessly to ease the restrictions through negotiation, and even Locarno, by guaranteeing Germany's western border, carried with it the implicit assumption that the border in the east would someday be redrawn. Closer in time to the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, the granting of *Gleichberechtigung* to Germany in 1932 had signalled the beginning of the end of the Versailles restrictions on German rearmament. Other criticised the agreement on different grounds, such as Winston Churchill, who criticised the agreement in May 1935 on the basis that the tonnage granted Germany would be all new ships, whereas much of Britain's capital ship tonnage dated from his own time as First Lord of the Admiralty (1911-1915). Churchill advocated an acceleration of the pace of British rearmament.⁵⁸

The agreement also had its champions. Admiral Lord Beatty, former First Sea Lord and Admiral of the fleet, was outspoken in his support for the accord in the debate in the House of Lords. Lord Londonderry, Secretary of State for Air, declared that the treaty was a practical measure. Since Germany was already increasing the size of her navy beyond the limits established in 1919, it was better for Britain not to enter a competition but to circumscribe the effects of Germany's decision to rearm by concluding an agreement. Londonderry noted that an air pact had been discussed in 1933 and those numbers had long been surpassed; failure to seize the opportunity presented now might result in a naval race like the one which led up to the Great War.⁵⁹ An article that ran in *The Spectator* on 21 June offered this defence of the treaty:

⁵⁷ Chatfield, *The Navy and Defence*, Vol. 2, 75.

⁵⁸ Roskill, *Hankey*, Vol. 3, 170.

⁵⁹ Haraszti, *Treaty-breakers*, 122-123.

For what happened was that an opportunity was offered and was forthwith grasped. If it had not been it would in all likelihood never have been secured. We have had examples enough of what the disregard of German offers of armament limitation costs. Invariably the next offer forthcoming is at a higher level. Herr Hitler in his speech of May 21st openly declared his willingness to be satisfied with a navy not stronger than 35 per cent of the British. It was the French, after all, who rejected the German proposals of April 1934, which provided a *Reichswehr* of 200,000 men. As a result the German army today is well over 500,000. With that and other examples before their eyes British ministers would have been guilty of criminal negligence if they had not taken Herr Hitler at his word and tested his sincerity. They have done so and the result is eminently satisfactory.⁶⁰

Supporters of the agreement appeared vindicated when the British Chargé d'Affaires in Berlin reported that the new German building programme had recently appeared in the newspapers. It called for two ships of 26,000 tons each with a main armament of 14" guns. The Chargé noted that the two ships were slightly smaller than the *Dunkerque*, and not of a size that would constitute provocation to another country.⁶¹

Ultimately the German proposals in June 1935 were accepted because they were compatible with the Admiralty's plan to use armaments diplomacy to promote strategic conditions favourable to Great Britain.⁶² The agreement appeared to be a solution to the problem of the international naval balance of power. With the Far Eastern situation left to drift, the chance to limit the navy of the principal European enemy to a maximum level that was 15% lower than that of the next strongest European navy, which was France, an ally, seemed a deal too good to pass up, especially when it gave France permanent superiority over Germany.⁶³ Finally, the agreement encompassed many of the threads, pursued by various departments, which comprised the whole of British foreign policy: the desire to limit armaments spending for reasons of domestic politics, finance; the desire to

⁶⁰ Quoted in *Ibid*, 118-119.

⁶¹ Mr. B.C. Newton (Chargé d'Affaires Berlin) to Sir S. Hoare, 9 July 1935. *Confidential Print*, Ser. F, Vol. 46, 201. One of the ships for the 1935 programme announced as displacing 26,000 tons was the *Bismarck*. See Carl-Axel Gemzell, *Organisation, Conflict and Innovation: A Study of German Strategic Planning, 1888-1940*. (Stockholm: Esselte-Stadium, 1973).

⁶² Maiolo, 'The Admiralty and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement', 101.

⁶³ Haggie, 'The Far Eastern Problem', 408.

facilitate more general agreements on arms limitation and the need to balance strained and limited resources against Imperial commitments.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Sebastian Cox, 'British Military Planning and the Origins of the Second World War', in B.J.C. McKercher and Roch Legault eds., *Military Planning and the Origins of the Second World War in Europe*. (Westport: Praeger, 2001), 104.

Conclusion

What then can the historian seeking to understand interwar diplomacy in general, and British foreign policy in particular, say about the place occupied there by the Anglo-German Naval Agreement? Was it an early manifestation of appeasement, as some critics have claimed? Was there truly no benefit given Britain by the pact's conclusion? Were negotiators in London hoodwinked by Hitler's professions of good faith? Were they so eager for a deal – any kind of deal – that they rushed into an accord with Nazi Germany without stopping to consider the consequences? Or was the whole, by now perhaps somewhat tedious, episode something more nuanced and complex?

A letter from Chatfield to Fisher from June 1934 sheds some light on the issue:

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.¹

The signature of the agreement was fuelled by the general belief that the Royal Navy was, as it had always been, the first line of defence of the British Empire. The full importance of air power had not yet been recognised. Even Stanley Baldwin's claim that 'the Bomber will always get through' was vague and, in the final analysis, wrong; the bomber did not always get through. Though many British statesmen and policy makers feared the bomber, they could not bring themselves to abandon Britain's naval tradition; they could not envision a scenario other than that which had always been 'the British way in warfare.' British strategic thought was still dominated by the belief that the battleship was king.

Given that this is the framework within which British statesmen and senior advisers operated, the Anglo-German Naval Agreement comes to be seen as a much more logical piece of the puzzle that is British foreign policy. The treaty, and the 35% ratio,

was agreed to because it allowed the Royal Navy to send a 'Washington sized' fleet to the Far East, or to other parts of the Empire, if the need arose.² The 'Washington fleet' itself was something of a compromise: it was a recognition of the limitations placed on the navy by finance and politics, and was considered the smallest sized fleet able to successfully engage the Imperial Japanese Navy in battle. As the eminent naval historian Stephen Roskill, who appears elsewhere to be of two minds over the treaty, says: 'This was, in terms of strategy, perfectly reasonable; and of course no one knew at the time that Germany would cheat over the displacement of all her major warships, and denounce the agreement as soon as it suited her to do so.'³ The treaty was an integral piece of an elaborate armaments diplomacy, which sought to juggle financial and political constraints with available naval resources and the global balance of naval power.

The treaty, rather than condoning unrestricted German rearmament, actually placed upon it a series of constraints designed to direct the growth of the German fleet into a standard shape. Germany's drive for *Gleichberechtigung*, legitimised under the naval agreement, meant that Hitler would build a balanced fleet of capital ships supported by cruisers and flotilla vessels, not simply commerce raiding vessels like the *Deutschland* class 'pocket-battleships'.⁴ If Germany were to concentrate on the construction of hybrid vessels, the Admiralty would have had to alter the composition of its own fleet at considerable expense. By legitimising a 'standard' type German fleet, Germany could not challenge the Royal Navy as long as Britain retained a crushing superiority in heavy ships.⁵ The naval treaty essentially dictated, so the Admiralty believed in 1935, that a future duel between the British and German fleets would be fought on Britain's turf with Britain's choice of weapons.

¹ Michael L. Roi, *Alternative to Appeasement: Sir Robert Vansittart and Alliance Diplomacy, 1934-1937*. (Westport: Praeger, 1997), 40.

² Christopher Bell, *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy Between the Wars*. (Houndmills: MacMillan, 2000), 106.

³ Stephen Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets, Volume 3: 1931-1963*. (London: Collins, 1974), 171. See also his comments in his book *Naval Policy Between the Wars, Volume 2: The Period of Reluctant Rearmament, 1930-1939*. (London: Collins, 1976), 303.

⁴ Bell, *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy*, 106.

⁵ *Ibid*, 106.

The casual observer will no doubt draw attention to the fact that the naval duel that took place from 1939-1945 was not one of capital ships, like Jutland had been, but one heavily reliant upon submarines. However to locate this in the 1935 treaty is to view the problem of seapower in the inter-war period through the lens of the Second World War. The Admiralty was well aware of German U-boat construction before 1935; it was hardly surprising that Germany would build submarines given the failure of international conferences to outlaw them.⁶ A memorandum by the Naval Staff in June 1935 claimed that the desire for submarines was driven by *Gleichberechtigung*; that is, the Germans wanted them because the Treaty of Versailles forbade them from having any, not because they fit a particular naval strategy.⁷ The Admiralty was not ignorant of the lessons of the First World War. They firmly believed that by 1935 they had largely solved the problem of submarines; furthermore, German submarine tonnage was pegged to the Royal Navy's, and as long as the Royal Navy did not build a large submarine force, there was no reason to suppose that Germany would either.⁸ In any case, by 1939 Germany had only 57 U-boats, and a good many of those were unfit for use in the open seas.⁹ To locate the U-boat threat of the 1940s in 1935 is a hasty judgement.

Historians have criticised Great Britain for failing to correctly assess the rate at which the German shipbuilding industry could achieve the 35% figure. It was imperative for the maintenance of the existing balance of seapower that Germany build up to treaty levels slowly. Wesley Wark and Peter Bell both suggest that Britain was disadvantaged in the treaty negotiations by failing to carry out a systematic examination of the speed at which Germany could actually build a navy.¹⁰ This led London to be too eager to accept at face value Hitler's assurances that he would not want his full complement of tonnage

⁶ Joseph A. Maiolo, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939: A Study in Appeasement and the Origins of the Second World War*. (London: MacMillan, 1998), 30.

⁷ Éva H. Haraszti, *Treaty-breakers or "Realpolitiker"?: The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June 1935*. (Boppard am Rhein: H. Boldt, 1974), 183.

⁸ Stephen Pelz, *Race to Pearl Harbour: The Failure of the Second London Naval Conference and the Onset of World War II*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974). 153.

⁹ D.C. Watt, 'The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935: An Interim Judgement', *Journal of Modern History*, 28, 2 (1956), 175.

¹⁰ Wesley K. Wark, 'Baltic Myths and Submarine Bogeys: British Naval Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 6, 1 (January 1983), 70 and Peter Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan, 1933-1934*. (Houndmills: MacMillan, 1996), 50. Bell accuses Chatfield of being "shortsighted".

before 1942, allowing themselves to be deceived about the real size of Germany's biggest ships. However this criticism too is misplaced. Chapter three demonstrated that the Admiralty had a fairly accurate knowledge of the capacity of German shipbuilding and the actual displacement of Hitler's newest ships. As far as British policy makers were concerned it mattered less what Germany *could* do than what Hitler *would* do, and his repeated declarations of moderation suggested that he would not build up to 35% before 1942. Holger Herwig shows that the issue was a moot point. Even if Britain had no idea whatsoever about the ability of the German shipbuilding industry, Germany herself was incapable of building much faster than she did. Raeder's 'Plan Z', if it ever materialised, would have taken a decade to staff and longer to build the logistical support that a fleet including eight carriers and 30 heavy units would need.¹¹ A shortage of skilled labour, oil, steel, non-ferrous metals, yard space and dock facilities brought the German building programme on average 12 months behind schedule, and in some cases 22 months behind, by 1937. When in November of that year Hitler acquiesced to Raeder's demands for an increased steel allotment, German shipyards were unable to make use of the increased amount.¹²

The Admiralty saw in the agreement a chance to build to a Two-Power Standard to Japan. The 35% ratio given Germany was slightly higher in theory than the 5:1.67 ratio given France under the Washington and London treaties, though in practice France's tonnage amounted to nearly 50% of the Royal Navy's. If Germany had the largest amount of tonnage the Admiralty considered acceptable by a European power it necessitated an increase in construction to maintain the Washington ratio over Japan. The Admiralty sought increased construction on the basis of developments in Japan, but had to fight the Treasury, which failed to see the storm cloud building in the Far East, for the funding to pursue Chatfield's desired strategic programme. The Foreign Office, while working toward a *rapprochement* with Tokyo, recognised at the same time that Japanese imperial ambition and British interests in Asia were incompatible. Failed

¹¹ Holger Herwig, 'The Failure of German Seapower, 1914-1945: Mahan, Tirpitz and Raeder Reconsidered', *International History Review*, 10, 1 (February 1988), 88. D.C. Watt, 'An Interim Judgement', makes a similar argument but is less detailed than Herwig's article.

¹² *Ibid.*, 91.

efforts at a closer relationship with Japan in 1934 led diplomats to seek an agreement in Europe that would better allow them to implement the DRC policy of ‘showing a tooth’ in the Far East. Laurence Collier, head of the Foreign Office’s Northern Department, expressed the frustration Japan was causing Britain in October 1934:

Japan is the determined enemy of all European interests in China, including our own, and...an understanding with her to safeguard those interests is therefore impossible...unless we are prepared to sacrifice our whole position in the Far East, with effects which would not be confined to those regions – unless we are prepared to contemplate losing most of our trade with Asia as a whole, and holding all our Asiatic possessions on sufferance from Japan, we must take every possible step to keep Japan in check.¹³

Agreement with Japan would therefore upset nearly all of the principles upon which the defence of the Empire was based. Since accommodation with Japan could not be reached, the best way to free up resources to send to the Far East was to secure the European situation by treaty. Events in the Far East after 1935 showed the Foreign Office to have been right in their assessment of the situation: Japan wrecked the second London Naval Conference in 1935 and 1936, and in 1937 instigated war with China.

The Anglo-German Naval Agreement was endorsed by the Admiralty because it fitted their strategic programme based on the global balance of naval power, on a number of different levels. The Foreign Office supported its conclusion for similar reasons. The Foreign Office, and the Far Eastern Department in particular, understood that the relationship between naval strategy and diplomacy was a crucial one for imperial interests. Thus the Cabinet was receptive the influence of the Admiralty and the Foreign Office in this matter because it offered a relief from policy drift.¹⁴ The Foreign Office understood that an agreement with Japan would wreck the delicate balance of power that existed in the Far East and Europe by alienating other, powerful, states. Britain could not risk the damage that an Anglo-Japanese *rapprochement* would do to Anglo-American

¹³ Quoted in William Roger Louis, ‘The Road to Singapore: British Imperialism in the Far East, 1932-1942’, in Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Lothar Kettenacker eds., *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement*. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983), 358.

¹⁴ Greg Kennedy, ‘1935: A Snapshot of British Imperial Defence in the Far East’, in Greg Kennedy and Keith Neilson eds., *Far Flung Lines: Essays on Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald MacKenzie Schurman*. (London: Frank Cass, 1996), 203.

relations. After 1933 the course of British foreign policy concerned the US, exacerbating a latent undercurrent of Anglo-American tension. In 1934, when Britain was openly seeking *rapprochement* with Japan using preliminary naval talks as an excuse, President Roosevelt expressed his desire to end any chance of this:

Simon and a few other Tories must be constantly impressed with the simple fact that if Great Britain is even suspected of preferring to play with Japan to playing with us, I shall be compelled, in the interest of American security, to approach public sentiment in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa in a definite effort to make these Dominions understand clearly that their future security is linked with us in the United States.¹⁵

The negative repercussions an Anglo-Japanese pact would have on the Soviet Union and China were also important considerations in the Foreign Office's decision to abandon efforts at improved relations with Japan and turn toward Europe. In Europe, a pact with Germany was seen as a way of moderating armaments demands across the board. Reintegrating Germany into the international community, it was hoped, would stabilise and preserve the peace of Europe, especially as it appeared that peace was about to be threatened by Mussolini. It is also important to recognise that Britain was frustrated that France had blocked earlier efforts to come to an agreement with Germany, and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement was partially concluded out of annoyance at Paris, and partially out of the conviction that in serving British interests, French interests were being served as well.¹⁶ Ramsay MacDonald believed the German menace overstated, but thought France might provoke her to action; the European cauldron was boiling up, the Prime Minister claimed, and M. Barthou 'had just put a large bundle of faggots underneath it.'¹⁷

Finally, we must consider the role of the DRC and the Treasury under Neville Chamberlain in all of this. Although it ranked Germany as the long-range enemy against whom British defences must be prepared, the Defence Requirements Committee upheld

¹⁵ Quoted in B.J.C. McKercher, 'Our Most Dangerous Enemy': Great Britain Pre-eminent in the 1930s', *International History Review*, 13, 4 (November 1991), 781. The comment was made to Norman Davis, the American naval expert, in November 1934.

¹⁶ Maiolo, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany*, 37.

¹⁷ Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan*, 133.

the Admiralty's contention that Japan represented the greatest immediate threat to Imperial security. The DRC, as Keith Neilson rightly points out, was not a new departure in British strategic policy, but part of a tradition stretching back to the early 1920s.¹⁸ By refusing to approve the spending set forth in the DRC report, Chamberlain forced upon the government a different policy than that formulated by the committee; however his policy was wrong. History's judgement of Chamberlain as a man lacking in moral fibre may be flawed, but its characterisation of him as a man woefully ignorant of foreign affairs is not. This view of him existed even in his own time. David Lloyd George wrote in 1935

Mr. Neville Chamberlain is a man of rigid competency. Such men have their uses in conventional times or in conventional positions, and are indispensable for filling subordinate posts at all times. But they are lost in an emergency or in creative tasks at any time.¹⁹

Creating a foreign policy to balance Britain's Imperial commitments with a deteriorating international situation and limited military resources was certainly a task that required a good deal of creativity. David Dutton notes that Chamberlain was among the first British ministers to grasp the strategic dilemma of the German-Japanese problem and try to formulate a policy to cope with it.²⁰ However as Neilson points out Chamberlain was simply wrong. His view of Anglo-Japanese relations was based on the erroneous assumption that Tokyo was willing to accommodate British interests in Asia.²¹ The failure of Chamberlain's policy forced Whitehall to return to the advice of the Defence Requirements Committee, of which the Anglo-German Naval Agreement was a by-product. 'Showing a tooth' to Japan as a means of deterrence until the government could put the Empire's defences in order was not possible as long as the European situation was left to drift. Japan's determination to achieve naval parity with the leading naval powers was the most worrisome feature of Anglo-Japanese relations. The naval treaty halted the drift in Europe and provided what the Admiralty and Foreign Office hoped would be the

¹⁸ Keith Neilson, 'The Defence Requirements Sub-Committee, British Strategic Foreign Policy, Neville Chamberlain and the Path to Appeasement', *English Historical Review*, 118, 477 (June 2003), 678.

¹⁹ Quoted in David Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain*. (London: Arnold, 2001), 30.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 162.

²¹ Neilson, 'The Defence Requirements Sub-Committee', 681.

basis for a new general agreement on arms limitation, improved relations with Japan, and a greater role for Germany in the international system.

That the Anglo-German Naval Agreement failed to live up to expectations is not the fault of its authors. The summer following its conclusion the Abyssinian Crisis threatened to sabotage the peace of Europe and push Mussolini into Hitler's arms. The following year Hitler remilitarised the Rhineland, and the Spanish Civil War broke out. In 1937 war erupted in the Far East, and by 1938 Europe was lurching from one crisis to the next irretrievably down the road to war. There was no time to formulate a policy or strike a committee, and diplomacy, rather than providing a proactive answer to strategic dilemmas, was only a stopgap solution. Arms were needed. Europe was off to war again, and woe betide the nation unprepared to meet it.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Unpublished Sources

CAB 2 Committee of Imperial Defence. Minutes of Meetings.

CAB 24 Cabinet Memoranda.

Published Sources

Bourne, Kenneth and D. Cameron Watt eds. British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print. Part II: From the First to the Second World War, Series E, Asia: 1914-1939, Vol. 10, Japan, January 1930 – December 1931. Ed. Ann Trotter. Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1991.

_____. Vol. 11, Japan, January – December, 1934. Ed. Ann Trotter. Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1991.

_____. Vol. 13, Japan, January 1932 – June 1932. Ed. Ann Trotter. Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1991.

_____. Vol. 14, Japan, January 1935 – December 1935. Ed. Ann Trotter. Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1991.

_____. Vol. 15, Japan, January 1936 – April 1937. Ed. Ann Trotter. Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1991.

_____. Series F, Europe: 1914-1939, Vol. 3, Central Europe, July 1930-December 1933. Ed. Christopher Seton-Watson. Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1990.

_____. Vol. 41, Germany, 1930. Ed. Jeremy Noakes. Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1990.

_____. Vol. 43, Germany, 1932. Ed. Jeremy Noakes. Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1990.

_____. Vol. 44, Germany, 1933. Ed. Jeremy Noakes. Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1990.

_____. Vol. 45, Germany, 1934. Ed. Jeremy Noakes. Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1990.

_____. Vol. 46, Germany, 1935. Ed. Jeremy Noakes. Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1990.

_____. Vol. 47, Germany, 1936. Ed. Jeremy Noakes. Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1990.

Woodward, E.L. and Rohan Butler et al eds. Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939. Second Series, Vol. 1. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1947.

_____. Vol. 2. London: HMSO, 1947.

_____. Vol. 4. London: HMSO, 1950.

_____. Vol. 5. London: HMSO, 1956.

_____. Vol. 6. London: HMSO, 1957.

Butler, Rohan and J.P.T. Bury et al eds. Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939. Second Series, Vol. 8. London: HMSO, 1960.

Butler, Rohan and Douglas Dakin et al eds. Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939. Second Series, Vol. 9. London: HMSO, 1965.

Medlicott, W.N. and Douglas Dakin et al eds. Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939. Second Series, Vol. 10. London: HMSO, 1969.

_____. Vol. 11. London: HMSO, 1970.

_____. Vol. 12. London: HMSO, 1972.

_____. Vol. 13. London: HMSO, 1973.

_____. Vol. 14. London: HMSO, 1976.

_____. Vol. 20. London: HMSO, 1984.

Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945. Series C, Vol. 1. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1957.

_____. Vol. 2. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1957.

_____. Vol. 3. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1957.

_____. Vol. 4. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1957.

Secondary Sources

Books

Adams, R.J.Q. British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-1939. Stanford: University Press, 1993.

Bailey, Thomas Andrew and Paul B. Ryan. Hitler vs. Roosevelt: The Undeclared Naval War. New York: Free Press, 1979.

Barnett, Correlli. The Collapse of British Power. London: Eyre Methuen, 1972.

Bell, Christopher M. The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy between the Wars. Houndmills: MacMillan, 2000.

Bell, Peter. Chamberlain, Germany and Japan, 1933-1934. Houndmills: MacMillan, 1996.

Bell, P.M.H. The Origins of the Second World War in Europe. London: Longman, 1986.

Best, Antony. British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia, 1914-1941. Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002.

Bialer, Uri. The Shadow of the Bomber: The Fear of Air Attack and British Politics, 1932-1939. London: Royal Historical Society, 1980.

Bond, Brian. British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.

Bridges, Lord. The Treasury. London: Allen and Unwin, 1964.

Carr, E.H. International Relations Between the Two World Wars, 1919-1939. London: MacMillan, 1963.

Chatfield, Lord Alfred Ernle M. It Might Happen Again, Volume II: The Navy and Defence. London: William Heinemann, 1947.

Colvin, Ian. Vansittart in Office. London: Victor Gollancz, 1965.

Cowling, Maurice. The Impact of Hitler: British Politics and British Policies, 1933-1940, 1975.

- Dockrill, Michael and Brian McKercher eds. Diplomacy and world power: Studies in British foreign policy, 1890-1950. Cambridge: University Press, 1996.
- Doerr, P.W. British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939. Manchester: University Press, 1998.
- Dutton, David. Neville Chamberlain. London: Arnold, 2001.
- _____. Simon: A Political Biography of Sir John Simon. London: Aurum Press, 1992.
- Ehrman, John. Cabinet Government and War, 1890-1940. Cambridge: University Press, 1958.
- Endicott, Stephen L. Diplomacy and Enterprise: British China Policy, 1933-1937. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1975.
- Fanning, Richard W. Peace and Disarmament: Naval Rivalry and Arms Control, 1922-1933. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995.
- Feiling, Sir Keith. The Life of Neville Chamberlain. London: MacMillan, 1947.
- Ferris, John R. Men, Money and Diplomacy: The Evolution of British Strategic Policy, 1919-1926. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.
- Fox, John P. Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis, 1931-1938: A Study in Diplomacy and Ideology. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982.
- French, David. The British Way in Warfare, 1688-2000. London: Unwin Hyman, 1990.
- Gemzell, Carl-Axel. Organization, Conflict, and Innovation: A Study of German Strategic Planning, 1888-1940. Stockholm: Esselte Studium, 1973.
- Gibbs, N.H. Grand Strategy, Volume 1: Rearmament Policy. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1976.
- Gilbert, Martin ed. Britain and Germany Between the Wars. London: Longmans, 1964.
- Goldman, Emily O. Sunken Treaties: Naval Arms Control between the Wars. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.
- Gooch, John and Ian Beckett eds. Politicians and Defence: Studies in the Formulation of British Defence Policy, 1845-1970. Manchester: University Press, 1981.
- Gooch, John. The Prospect of War: Studies in British Defence Policy, 1847-1942. London: Frank Cass, 1981.

- Gordon, G.A.H. British Seapower and Procurement Between the Wars: A Reappraisal of Rearmament. London: MacMillan, 1988.
- Grenfell, Russell. Main Fleet to Singapore. London: Faber and Faber, 1951.
- Haggie, Paul. Britannia at Bay: The Defence of the British Empire against Japan, 1931-1941. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.
- Hamill, Ian. The Strategic Illusion: The Singapore Strategy and the Defence of Australia and New Zealand, 1919-1942. Kent Ridge: Singapore University Press, 1981.
- Harada, Baron Kumao. Fragile Victory: Prince Saionji and the 1930 London Treaty Issue. Trans. Thomas Francis Mayer-Oakes. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968.
- Haraszti, Éva H. Treaty-breakers or "Realpolitiker"? The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June 1935. Boppard am Rhein: H. Boldt, 1974.
- Hattendorf, John B. ed. Doing Naval History: Essays Toward Improvement. Newport: Naval War College Press, 1995.
- _____ and Malcolm H. Murfett eds. The Limitations of Military Power: Essays Presented to Professor Norman Gibbs, on his Eightieth Birthday. London: MacMillan, 1990.
- _____ and R.S. Jordan eds. Maritime Strategy and the Balance of Power: Britain and America in the Twentieth Century. New York: St. Martin's, 1989.
- Howard, Michael. The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of Two World Wars. London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1972.
- Jennings, Sir Ivor. Cabinet Government. 3rd ed. Cambridge: University Press, 1961.
- Jordan, Gerald ed. Naval Warfare in the Twentieth Century, 1900-1945: Essays in Honour of Arthur Marder. London: Croom Helm, 1977.
- Keegan, John. Battle at Sea: From Man of War to Submarine. London: Pimlico, 1988.
- Kennedy, Greg C. and Keith Neilson eds. Incidents and International Relations: People, Power and Personalities. Westport: Praeger, 2002.
- _____ eds. Far-Flung Lines: Essays on Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald MacKenzie Schurman. London: Frank Cass, 1996.

- Kennedy, Malcolm D. The Estrangement of Great Britain and Japan, 1917-1935. Berkley: University of California Press, 1969.
- Kennedy, Paul M. The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000. London: Fontana, 1989.
- _____. The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980. London: Fontana, 1981.
- _____. The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery. New York: Scribner, 1976.
- Kershaw, Ian. Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris. London: Allen Lane, 1998.
- Kitching, Carolyn J. Britain and the Problem of International Disarmament, 1919-1934. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Louis, William Roger. British Strategy in the Far East, 1919-1939. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.
- McKercher, B.J.C. and Roch Legault eds. Military Planning and the Origins of the Second World War in Europe. Westport: Praeger, 2001.
- McKercher, B.J.C. ed. Arms Limitation and disarmament: restraints on war, 1899-1939. Westport: Praeger, 1992.
- _____ and David J. Moss eds. Shadow and Substance in British Foreign Policy, 1895-1939. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1984.
- McIntyre, W. David. The Rise and Fall of the Singapore Naval Base, 1919-1942. London: MacMillan, 1979.
- Maiolo, Joseph A. The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939: A Study in Appeasement and the Origins of the Second World War. London: MacMillan, 1998.
- Marder, Arthur J. Old Friends, New Enemies: The Royal Navy and the Imperial Japanese Navy: Strategic Illusions, 1936-1941. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.
- _____. From the Dardanelles to Oran: Studies of the Royal Navy in War and Peace, 1915-1940. London: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Masterson, Daniel M. ed. Naval History: The Sixth Symposium of the U.S. Naval Academy. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1987.
- Middlemas, Keith. Diplomacy of Illusion: The British Government and Germany, 1937-1939. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972.

- _____ and John Barnes. Baldwin: A Biography. London: MacMillan, 1969.
- Mommsen, Wolfgang and Lothar Kettenacker eds. The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement. London: Allen and Unwin, 1983.
- Morely, James William ed. The China Quagmire; Japan's Expansion on the Asian Continent, 1933-1941. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- _____ ed. Japan Erupts: The London Naval Conference and the Manchurian Incident, 1928-1932. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- Moretz, Joseph. The Royal Navy and the Capital Ship in the Interwar Period: An Operational Perspective. London: Frank Cass, 2002.
- Murfett, Malcolm. Fool-Proof Relations: The Search for Anglo-American Naval Co-operation during the Chamberlain Years, 1937-1940. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1984.
- Naylor, John F. A Man and an Institution: Sir Maurice Hankey, the Cabinet Secretariat and the Custody of Cabinet Secrecy. Cambridge: University Press, 1984.
- Neidpath, J. The Singapore Naval Base and the Defence of Britain's Eastern Empire, 1919-1941. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.
- Neilson, Keith and Elizabeth Jane Errington eds. Navies and Global Defence: Theories and Strategy. Westport: Praeger, 1995.
- Nicolson, Nigel ed. Harold Nicolson: Diaries and Letters, 1930-1939. New York: Atheneum, 1966.
- Nish, Ian. Japanese Foreign Policy 1869-1942: Kasumigaseki to Miyakezaka. London: Routledge, 1977.
- _____ ed. Anglo-Japanese Alienation 1919-1952. Cambridge: University Press, 1982.
- _____ ed. Britain and Japan: biographical portraits. Folkestone: Japan Library, 1994.
- _____ and Yoichi Kibata eds. The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1600-2000 Volume II: The Political-Diplomatic Dimension, 1931-2000. Houndmills: MacMillan, 2000.
- O'Brien, Phillips Payson. British and American Naval Power: Politics and Policy, 1900-1936. Westport: Praeger, 1998.

- O'Halpin, Eunan. Head of the Civil Service: A Study of Sir Warren Fisher. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Overy, Richard and Andrew Wheatcroft. The Road to War. London: Penguin, 1999.
- Peden, G.C. British Rearmament and the Treasury, 1932-1939. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1979.
- Pelz, Stephen. Race to Pearl Harbour: The Failure of the Second London Naval Conference and the Onset of World War II. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974.
- Philbin, Tobias R. The Lure of Neptune: German-Soviet Naval Collaboration and Ambitions, 1919-1941. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994.
- Post, Gaines Jr. Dilemmas of Appeasement: British Deterrence and Defence, 1934-1937. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- Pratt, L.R. East of Malta, West of Suez: Britain's Mediterranean Crisis, 1936-1939. Cambridge: University Press, 1975.
- Price, Christopher. Britain, America and Rearmament in the 1930s: The Cost of Failure. London: Palgrave, 2001.
- Pritchard, R.J. Far Eastern Influences upon British Strategy Towards the Great Powers, 1937-1939. New York, 1987.
- Raeder, Erich. My Life. Henry W. Drexel trans. Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960.
- Ranf, Bryan ed. Technical Change and British Naval Policy, 1860-1939. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977.
- Rohwer, Jürgen and Mikhail S. Monakov. Stalin's Ocean-Going Fleet: Soviet Naval Strategy and Shipbuilding Programmes, 1922-1953. London: Frank Cass, 2001.
- Roi, Michael L. Alternative to Appeasement: Sir Robert Vansittart and Alliance Diplomacy, 1934-1937. Westport: Praeger, 1997.
- Roskill, Stephen. Naval Policy Between the Wars, Vol. 2: The Period of Reluctant Rearmament, 1930-1939. London: Collins, 1976.
- _____. Hankey, Man of Secrets, Volume 3: 1931-1963. London: Collins, 1974.
- Rostow, Nicholas. Anglo-French Relations, 1934-1936. London: MacMillan, 1984.

- Salerno, Reynolds M. Vital Crossroads: Mediterranean Origins of the Second World War, 1935-1940. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- Schofield, Brian. British Sea Power: Naval Policy in the Twentieth Century. London: Batsford, 1967.
- Shay, Robert Paul Jr. British Rearmament in the Thirties: Politics and Profits. Princeton: University Press, 1977.
- Taylor, A.J.P. From the Boer War to the Cold War: Essays on Twentieth-Century Europe. Edited with an Introduction by Chris Wrigley. London: Penguin, 1996.
- _____. English History, 1914-1945. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.
- _____. The Origins of the Second World War. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1961.
- Thomas, Charles S. The German Navy in the Nazi Era. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990.
- Thorne, Christopher. The Limits of Foreign Policy: The West, the League and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1931-1933. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1972.
- Vansittart, Lord Robert. The Mist Procession: The Autobiography of Lord Vansittart. London: Hutchinson, 1958.
- Wark, Wesley K. The Ultimate Enemy: British Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Watt, D.C. Personalities and Policies: Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century. London: Longman's, 1964.
- Wettern, Desmond. The Decline of British Seapower. London: Jane's, 1982.

Articles

- Agbi, S. Olu, "The Foreign Office and Yoshida's Bid for Rapprochement with Britain in 1936-1937: A Critical Reconsideration of the Anglo-Japanese Conversation", *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (March 1978), 173-179.
- Barclay, Glen St. John, "Singapore Strategy: The Role of the United States in Imperial Defence", *Military Affairs*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (April 1975), 54-59.
- Best, Antony, "Constructing an Image: British Intelligence and Whitehall's Perception of Japan, 1931-1939", *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (July 1996), 403-423.

- Best, Richard A., Jr., "The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935: An Aspect of Appeasement", *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (1981), 68-85.
- Bell, Christopher M., "'Our Most Exposed Outpost': Hong Kong and British Far Eastern Strategy, 1921-1941", *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (January 1996), 61-88.
- Bernotti, Romeo, "Italian Naval Policy Under Fascism", *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, Vol. 82, No. 7 (1956), 722-731.
- Bird, Keith, "The Origins and Role of German Naval History in the Inter-war Period", *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (1979), 42-58.
- Bourette-Knowles, Simon, "The Global Micawber: Sir Robert Vansittart, the Treasury and the Global Balance of Power, 1933-35", *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (March 1995), 91-121.
- Dunbabin, John, "British Rearmament in the 1930s: A Chronology and Review." *Historical Journal*, Vol. 18, No.3 (1975), 587-609.
- Ferris, John R., "'Indulged In All Too Little'?: Vansittart, Intelligence and Appeasement", *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (March 1995), 122-175.
- Goldman, Aaron L., "Sir Robert Vansittart's Search for Italian Cooperation against Hitler, 1933-1936", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 9, 3 (July 1974), 93-130.
- Gordon, G.A.H., "The Admiralty and Imperial Overstretch, 1902-1941", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1994), 63-85.
- Haggie, Paul, "The Royal Navy and the Far Eastern Problem, 1931-1941", *The Army Quarterly and Defence Journal*, Vol. 106, No. 4 (October 1976), 402-414.
- Hall, Hines H. III, "The Foreign Policy-Making Process in Britain, 1934-1935, and the Origins of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement", *Historical Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (June 1976), 477-499.
- Herwig, Holger, "The Failure of German Seapower, 1914-1945: Mahan, Tirpitz, and Raeder Reconsidered," *International History Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (February 1988), 68-105.
- McKercher, B.J.C., "The Last Old Diplomat: Sir Robert Vansittart and the Verities of British Foreign Policy, 1903-30", *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (March 1995), 1-38.

- _____, “No Eternal Friends or Enemies: British Defence Policy and the Problem of the United States, 1919-1939”, *Canadian Journal of History*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (August 1993), 257-293.
- _____, “‘Our Most Dangerous Enemy’: Great Britain Pre-eminent in the 1930s”, *The International History Review*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (November 1991), 751-783.
- Maiolo, Joseph A., “The Admiralty and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 18 June, 1935”, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (March 1999), 87-126.
- Marder, Arthur J., “The Royal Navy and the Ethiopian Crisis of 1935-36”, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 75, No. 5 (June 1970), 1327-1356.
- Martel, Gordon, “The Meaning of Power: Rethinking the Decline and Fall of Great Britain,” *International History Review*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (November 1991) 662-694.
- Morrisey, Charles and M.A. Ramsay, “‘Giving a Lead in the Right Direction’: Sir Robert Vansittart and the Defence Requirements Sub-Committee”, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (March 1995), 39-60.
- Murfett, Malcolm H., “Living in the Past: A Critical Re-examination of the Singapore Naval Strategy”, *War and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (May 1993), 73-103.
- Neilson, Keith, “The Defence Requirements Sub-Committee, British Strategic Foreign Policy, Neville Chamberlain and the Path to Appeasement”, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 118, No. 477 (June 2003), 651-684.
- Parker, R.A.C., “Economics, Rearmament and Foreign Policy: The United Kingdom before 1939 – A Preliminary Study”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 10, 4 (October 1975), 637-647.
- Peden, G.C., “The Burden of Imperial Defence and the Continental Commitment Reconsidered”, *The Historical Journal*, 72, 2 (June 1984), 405-423.
- _____, “Sir Warren Fisher and British Rearmament against Germany”, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 94, 370 (January 1979), 29-47.
- Perry, John Curtis, “Japan as a Naval Power” *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 21, No. 3-4 (1966), 304-322.
- Post, Gaines, Jr., “Mad Dogs and Englishmen: British Rearmament, Deterrence, and Appeasement, 1934-1935”, *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Spring 1988), 329-357.
- Quartararo, Rosaria, “Imperial Defence in the Mediterranean on the Eve of the Ethiopian Crisis (July-October 1935)”, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1977), 185-220.

- Roi, Michael L., "From the Stresa Front to the Triple Entente: Sir Robert Vansittart, the Abyssinian Crisis and the Containment of Germany", *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 1995, 6 (1), 61-90.
- Salerno, Reynolds M., "Multilateral Strategy and Diplomacy: The Anglo-German Naval Agreement and the Mediterranean Crisis, 1935-1936", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (June 1994), 39-78.
- Santoni, Alberto, "Italian Naval Policy from 1930-1941", *Revue Internationale D'Histoire Militaire*, Vol. 73 (1991), 87-99.
- Scammell, Clare M., "The Royal Navy and the Strategic Origins of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (June 1997), 92-118.
- Smith, Malcolm S., "Rearmament and Deterrence in Britain in the 1930s", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1978), 313-337.
- Sullivan, Brian R., "A Fleet in Being: The Rise and Fall of Italian Sea Power, 1861-1943", *International History Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (January 1988), 106-124.
- Taylor, A.J.P., "The Anglo-German Naval Agreements", *New Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 16 (1975), 160-161.
- Thorne, Christopher, "The Shanghai Crisis of 1932: The Basis of British Policy", *The American Historical Review*, 1970, 75 (6), 1616-1639.
- Trotter, Anne, "Tentative Steps for an Anglo-Japanese Rapprochement in 1934", *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1974), 59-83.
- Wark, Wesley K., "Baltic Myths and Submarine Bogeys: British Naval Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (January 1983), 60-81.
- Watt, D.C., "The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935: An Interim Judgement", *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (1956), 155-175.
- Whaley, Barton, "Covert Rearmament in Germany 1919-1939: Deception and Misperception," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1982), 3-39.