BRITISH NAVAL POLICY IN THE 1920s.

by

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Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In the

Department of History

Adelaide University

October 2000
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A thesis presented on British Naval Policy in the 1920s, concerning the economic, political and diplomatic problems encountered by Government and by the Admiralty Board in formulating a standard of strength for the Fleet, post World War I (WWI).

The thesis covers the closing months of WWI, the Versailles Peace Conference, the 1921 Imperial Conference, the Washington Naval Conference, the Admiralty/Treasury departmental struggle for control over project funding, British foreign policy in relation to collective security and disarmament under the League of Nations Convention and its effect on Admiralty policy in the period 1924-30.

Unpublished primary source material for the thesis was collected from the University of Adelaide, Barr Smith Library - Microfiche Documents and, during a two-month stay in London in 1997, from the Public Record Office, Kew Gardens, London (Papers of the Cabinet, the Admiralty and the Foreign Office) and from the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London (the Chatfield Papers).

Other source material includes published primary and secondary sources and Journal articles.
The thesis concludes that Government Naval Policy decisions in the 1920s had a direct bearing on the selection of appeasement as a diplomatic tool by British decision makers in the 1930s.
DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan or photocopying.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the completion of this thesis I am grateful to:

Professor Trevor Wilson for his meticulous and sympathetic supervision of its progress

Rosemary and Robert Black for their generous hospitality during my stay in London

My Parents for their unflagging encouragement and practical support.
Introduction

In 1938 British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain wrote, ‘Over and over again Canning lays it down that you should never menace unless you are in a position to carry out your threats’.\(^1\) It was a hard-headed affirmation of pragmatism in a long tradition of the pragmatism of British statesmen in diplomacy. It contained no refutation of menace *per se*. But for British statesmen of the 1930s, decisions in the previous decade had all but eliminated menace as a diplomatic option. Credibility and responsibility for national interest prohibited its use. Chamberlain’s statement was uttered at a time when the employment of appeasement had become a vital instrument in British diplomacy for almost a decade. For by the end of the 1920s naval power, Britain’s most important military arm, was insufficient to meet even the absolute minimum Admiralty requirement for national and imperial defence.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine British Naval Policy in the 1920s, and the resultant drastic reduction in the strength of the Fleet and its capacity to operate in national and in imperial waters.

Chapter 1 considers Royal Naval Staff proposals for Britain’s post WWI Fleet requirements against the background of tensions between the United States (US) and Britain over Naval Power and over the agenda of the two Powers for the peace settlement. The Chapter concludes with the failure of the two Powers to accomplish definitive closure of their differences concerning Naval Power.

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Against the background of Treasury resistance to Admiralty spending demands, Chapter 2 considers the hiatus in policy decisions in Britain created by the failure of the US Administration to respond to British attempts to resume the dialogue begun in the Versailles Peace Conference. The Chapter concludes with the decision of Prime Minister David Lloyd George to affirm the resumption of British Capital Ship construction in January 1921.

Chapter 3 discusses the exposure of the vulnerability of Britain’s Eastern Empire caused by the shift in the balance in sea-power. It concerns the Lloyd George Government’s desire to assure the Dominions of Britain’s commitment to their security, and the decision to do so by means of renewal of the Anglo/Japanese Alliance, and by modern capital ship construction and the development of modern naval base facilities at Singapore.

Chapter 4 concerns the Imperial Conference of 1921 and the presentation of the London government’s security resolutions with regard to the Asia-Pacific Region and of its favourable view of Canadian proposals for a Conference of the Pacific Powers. It discusses the efforts, on behalf of the Imperial Conferrees, of Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon to lay the groundwork for a convention of Powers with interests in the Far East, with the aim of settling political concerns in the region.

Chapter 5 discusses the collapse of the British concept of settlement of political concerns in the Asia-Pacific region as a necessary preliminary to any future regional naval limitation talks and its substitution by the desire of the US Administration to give priority of place to disarmament at a Naval Conference in Washington. It discusses Lloyd George’s moves to rebuild Britain’s negotiating position in the altered framework in order to make it plain British interest in disarmament was tied to such limitations as were consistent with the
security of the British Empire. The Chapter concludes that the Washington Naval Agreement met the Admiralty’s fundamental planning objectives to secure the region.

Chapter 6 concerns the inquiry of the Geddes Committee into Service spending under the aegis of the Treasury. It discusses the Admiralty’s objection to the Committee’s findings, and the subsequent intervention of a Cabinet Committee on Defence Estimates, chaired by Winston Churchill. The Chapter concludes that Government support for stringent economy was bounded by its acknowledgement of the vital importance of the Navy for national and imperial security.

Chapter 7 discusses the Admiralty’s encounters with Britain’s First Labour Government and its dealings on a double front with a government not only looking for economy in Service spending but also ideologically opposed to the whole system of Capitalist Imperialism and to the foreign relations traditions that combined to perpetuate it. It discusses the Admiralty’s struggle to preserve programmes in the face of Treasury pressure and against the foreign policy objective of Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald to promote international disarmament. The Chapter concludes that before the fall of the Labour Government, the Admiralty successfully defended its construction programme but had its Singapore Scheme cancelled. However it regarded the return of the Conservatives as hopeful for the reinstatement of the Scheme.

Chapter 8 discusses Naval Policy decisions in the period November 1924-August 1927 during Stanley Baldwin’s Second Government. It considers Cabinet scrutiny of the Admiralty Construction Programme that culminated in its confirmation at a level of ‘absolute need’ in a policy Paper in 1925. It discusses Treasury attempts to slow down the Admiralty’s planned rate of progress for completion of the policy. It considers the
Government support of the Admiralty position on naval reductions against the pressure for greater reductions on the part of League Members, and again of the US in the Geneva Naval Conference of 1927. The Chapter concludes the Government demonstrated that while it had an interest in arms limitation, it remained committed to the maintenance of Britain's preponderance of naval power.

Chapter 9 discusses the Baldwin Government's clarification and defence of its record on disarmament from the dual perspectives of economy and of national security and its pursuit of a continuing interest in the limitation of armaments through diplomatic channels as well as in the League. After the Conservative fall from government in June 1929, the Chapter concerns Ramsay MacDonald's personal conduct of Anglo/American conversations having as his object settlement of a basis of agreement for naval reductions preliminary to calling a new Naval Conference in London. The Chapter concludes that the London Naval Conference denied the tool of military preparedness to British diplomacy for a decade.
Chapter 1.

1918-1919 The American Challenge to British Naval Supremacy.

Towards the end of World War One, and when victory seemed assured, Royal Naval Staff began planning revisions of Britain’s post war fleet requirements. The background to this event was as follows. In 1889 parliament passed the Naval Defence Act establishing a power standard as a basis of naval policy. The Act required the maintenance of British sea-power at a standard equal to the combined strength of the next two largest navies in the world. At that time this ‘two-power’ standard referred to the navies of France and of Russia. In consequence, two successive five-year construction programmes provided the Royal Navy with a ‘homogenous battlefleet of high quality, backed by a large number of new cruisers.’ ¹

Twenty-two years after the Act the rise of Germany as a maritime power led the Admiralty to seek a revision of policy, whereby the old two-power standard was set aside in favour of a 60% superiority over the German Navy alone. The revision proved, in actuality, much more demanding to achieve than had any previous two-power standard.²

² Ibid, Document # 437
By the end of the Great War, Britain had amassed a vast battle-fleet that, once Germany was out of the reckoning, left the Royal Navy with what was effectively an all-power standard. It was a level of security patently in excess of Britain’s needs, with peace imminent and no enemy in view. Moreover, the Government very soon made it clear that naval retrenchment figured largely in its calculations for the peacetime economy.

It was in these circumstances that in the autumn of 1918, the Admiralty put forward draft proposals for post war fleet strength. Effectively, the proposals amounted to a return to the two-power standard. The proposals envisaged no new construction other than bringing to completion the new Capital Ship, ‘Hood’. They estimated that, of the forty-two Dreadnought battleships in service, twenty-four should be retained in full commission.  

The Dreadnoughts to be retained were the Royal Navy’s most heavily armed ships—twelve carried guns of 13.5-inch calibre and the remainder, including the ‘Hood’, carried 15-inch guns, a calibre higher than any other ships in commission anywhere in the world. Neither in numbers of Dreadnoughts in full commission nor in firepower did the proposals leave the Royal Navy outclassed, either by any other single power or by the two next largest naval powers in combination.
Improbable as their combination might be those two naval powers were the United States of America (US) and Japan. At that time, the US Navy (USN) had, in full commission, 16 Dreadnoughts and the Japanese Navy 9. None of those vessels carried guns of more than 14inch calibre. The French with 7 Dreadnoughts and Italy with 5 represented European naval strength.

Based on the prevailing naval balance in late 1918, the Admiralty advised the British government that large savings could be effected soon. Much, however, still depended upon the results of arms limitations negotiations at the peace settlement. In contrast with Britain’s programme for retrenchment, both the US and the Japanese approached the last months of the war with declared policies of continuing naval expansion. What concerned the Admiralty was that if all three naval powers carried out their separate naval programmes, then by 1925 not only would Britain have lost outright supremacy at sea, its navy would be inferior to those of the US and Japan in technical development.

(See Table 1)

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<th>Table 1. Estimated Capital Ship Strength from End 1919—1925:</th>
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<td><strong>1919 Ships in full commission:</strong></td>
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<td>16 in.</td>
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<td>Ships under construction:</td>
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3 Of the remaining 18 Dreadnoughts, 8 of the earliest construction would be de-listed (7 to be sold to ship breakers and 1 to be redirected to its original destination in the Chilean Navy) and 10 would be placed in commissioned reserve.
The Capital ships of all three navies carrying guns of lighter calibre than 13.5in are excluded from Table 1.

The Japanese had announced their policy in July 1918. Theirs was a programme of expansion, which centred on the construction of 16 new Capital Ships. Although they recognised the developing strength of the Japanese Navy, the British doubted that the Japanese had a purse deep enough to carry out all of their naval ambitions. America was another matter.

The US had two naval programmes in prospect. The first had been authorised by President Woodrow Wilson in 1916 as a direct response to the interference by the belligerents with neutral America’s maritime trade. Known as the 1916 Programme, there was nothing ambiguous about its intent. A sense of vulnerability had lent force to the view in the US that provision was required to strengthen America’s naval defence capacity. The programme called for the modernisation and enlargement of the USN for the defence of the security and trading interests of the US. As the centrepiece of a modern and balanced battle-fleet, it projected the completion of 16 new Capital ships over four years.

When the US entered the war priorities changed and the government suspended work on the 1916 Programme in favour of the construction of anti-submarine craft. The need then was to support the allied convoy system against the ravages of the German U-boat campaign. But, as the submarine threat receded, US attention turned again to possession
of a powerful battle-fleet. The Capital ship programme was resumed, with a new completion date of 1925.

At about the same time Britain’s focus was turning upon post war naval retrenchment and the 1916 Programme became a subject for discussion among British decision-makers. In the balance was the issue of naval supremacy. It was not the retention of naval supremacy that was in question. There was no intention in Britain of relinquishing that position. But, the depth of British Naval cuts was contingent upon how complete was the US intention to carry out its resumed programme, once hostilities ceased.

Soon after the cessation of hostilities President Wilson made an announcement on naval matters that contradicted utterly British hopes and expectations. Not only did Wilson support completion of the entire 1916 Programme, he endorsed also a proposal by US Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels for a second programme. The proposed second programme, the 1918 Programme, would be on the same scale as that of the 1916 Programme and begin immediately the latter was completed in 1925.

The British were both baffled and provoked by the Wilson announcement. What was not understood at the time was that Wilson was himself provoked into making the announcement out of concern for his personal concept of a peace settlement, as contained in his 14 Point plan. In particular, he was concerned about Point 2, regarding the maritime rights of neutral nations in times of war, described in Point 2 as the ‘Freedom of the Seas’. In the course of the Armistice negotiations (during October and
November of 1918) the British, although receptive to Wilson’s peace plan in general, had demonstrated their very strong opposition to Point 2 and its curbs on the practices of blockade. For the peace conference proper, therefore, Wilson decided to come prepared with the threat of a crippling naval race in order to force Britain’s hand on the matter of Point 2.

The 1918 Programme was, therefore, more in the nature of a diplomatic gambit than a genuine access of presidential belligerence and as such was always an expendable item for Wilson in the course of his international negotiations. Yet, however complete was the President’s success at the international conference table, it would still require America’s legislative body to set the nation’s seal upon it, so that the announcement of the 1918 Programme had a dual purpose. It issued a warning to Americans that if they failed to endorse Wilson’s scheme of mutual security under the League of Nations, the price of unilaterally guaranteeing what was at the very heart of US naval policy, Freedom of the Seas, would be very high indeed.

If the ‘1918 Programme’ was always readily expendable, the ‘1916 Programme’ was a different case. Congress had already ratified that Programme and Congressional authority would be required to alter it.

In contrast with Japan, America had enormous resources with which to back what in December 1918 appeared to be a deliberate tilt at the traditional basis of British and imperial security, its supremacy at sea. The Admiralty, therefore, cautioned the
government that the key strategic principle of maritime supremacy – even equality – would be lost, unless the US abandoned its programmes or Britain matched them with new construction of its own.

When the coalition powers came together for the peace settlement, British Naval delegates took the position that reasoned arguments on the basis of the minimum strength required by Britain for its security needs would demonstrate to the Americans that the logic of Britain’s claim to naval supremacy was irrefutable. Further, that the toughest possible diplomatic stance by Britain would demonstrate that, as a claim, it was also not negotiable. The Americans would thereupon drop their plans to expand their naval forces beyond anything other than, at the most, equality with those of Britain. 4

This strategy failed so disastrously that the whole of the Peace Conference was placed in jeopardy as the two most influential nations present threatened one another with a crippling naval race. Yet, in respect of their Foreign Policy ambitions and of their domestic political objectives, a conference collapse was untenable for the leaders of both nations. They understood that more could be done to establish and underpin a lasting world peace by their mutual support and more cost effectively than by competing for naval supremacy. In reality, what separated them on the issue of sea-power was less the question of naval supremacy than the question of its applications.
Wilson’s concern was with the interference by belligerents in the maritime trade of neutral nations. The issue of the Freedom of the Seas for neutrals was a critical issue in America and occupied second place in the President’s Fourteen Point League of Nations proposal. Traditionally, Britain applied its naval power to stop, search and even seize or sink neutral vessels in time of war. It was a strategy regarded by the British as vital to their war waging capacity and an obvious right of a belligerent to deny supplies to its enemies. With the complete support of its political leaders, the Admiralty dug in its heels on Point Two. Anglo-American cooperation on other Conference issues was confronted, thereby, with a major stumbling block until Wilson accepted a Lloyd George proposal that Point Two be deferred for further discussion when, and if, the League became a reality.

Of the Fourteen Points, only Point Four remained to be resolved between Britain and America. It concerned the reduction of arms to the minimum consistent with national safety. By April 1919, discussions between the naval delegates on the subject of their respective naval needs had developed into a circular and increasingly bitter argument. But, by then, Britain’s political leaders had been given reason to hope that once the League did become a reality, America would be prepared to concede Britain’s special dependence on sea-power and so the danger of naval competition would disappear. The naval experts were set aside, therefore, and replaced by Lord Robert Cecil, deputy to British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour, and Colonel E. M. House, President Wilson’s

close personal adviser. Both men were keenly in favour of Anglo-American cooperation and in April 1919 they agreed on an interim settlement. Cecil retreated from the demand for naval supremacy and accepted in principle Point Four in exchange for modifications in the US construction programmes. House agreed to the abandonment of the 1918 Programme. He gave no assurances on any modification to the 1916 Programme, to which Congress had already given legislative effect, but impressed upon Cecil that his Government was not in naval competition with Britain.

Since Point Four contained the means for both sides to uphold their positions on naval needs, the question of relative strengths joined the question of belligerent rights in remaining unresolved pending the outcomes of the Conference proper and the establishment of the League. In the meantime, and in the absence of any firm diplomatic agreement between Britain and the United States, the Admiralty still had before it the task of estimating Britain’s post-war security needs in terms of material and manpower.

In considering the above, this Chapter will review the development of tensions between the US and Britain over Naval Power and its applications during World War One and how they impacted upon negotiation of the Naval aspects of the Peace.

Prior to the entry of the US into the war, outrage over the continued interference with US merchantmen by the navies of the belligerents gathered a political momentum in the
US for the advocates of a substantial Naval programme which Wilson could not ignore.\(^5\)

To notify the European powers that the US (although neutral) would maintain its rights during the war and would demand consideration in any peace settlement, a programme was proposed in 1916 to create a United States Navy, which Wilson publicly declared ought to be 'incomparably the greatest in the World.'\(^6\) It was a statement of intent that went far beyond mere defensive precautions on the part of a neutral nation. It was a direct and eminently credible challenge for naval supremacy. It also carried portents of the ‘big stick’ diplomacy Wilson employed to assert his own agenda at the Peace Conference.

British attention in 1916 was totally absorbed by the war and little note was taken of Wilson’s announcement. The Royal Navy’s Capital Ships, on distant blockade, had effectively bottled up the German High Seas Fleet but the containment of U-Boat activity was another matter. The Germans were running a very effective counter blockade under their stepped up U-Boat campaign. U-Boats were sinking Merchantmen at three to four times allied capacity to replace them. The alternative to being starved into suing for an unsatisfactory peace was to protect the Merchant Fleets in a system of Convoy under Navy escort but a grave shortage of anti-submarine flotilla craft created a dilemma. The Germans were building U-Boats at almost twice the rate of their own losses yet the Admiralty was reluctant to divert flotilla craft from the Grand Fleet to convoy duty, for the great Capital Ships would themselves then become vulnerable to

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torpedo attack. When the US entered the war the Admiralty looked to the USN (as well as to the other Navies of the Allies) to make up the shortfall in flotilla craft. The response from the US to do so was far from immediate.

It had been with great reluctance Wilson had taken the US into the war and then it had been in defence of American interests and American lives. Wilson was prepared to cooperate with the Allies only insofar as was necessary to bring about a joint defeat of Germany. Thereafter, he had his own war aims.

In mid-May, the US government still had not made up its mind as to where its own naval priorities now lay. Work was proceeding on US Capital Ship construction. At the same time, the Admiralty was having difficulty in having contracts of its own accepted

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9 Anglo – American Naval Relations 1917-1919; op.cit. Document # 18
10 The Exercise of belligerent rights against American ships by German submarine warfare contrasted with British surface operations in that it entailed the sinking of vessels. The renewal of unrestricted submarine campaign by Germany in February 1917 had seen three United States merchantmen sunk without warning and with heavy casualties by U-Boats on 18 March 1917. (Anglo – American Naval Relations, 1917-1919, op. cit. p. 4)
11 Ibid; p.4.
12 On the 20 March 1917 in a meeting with his Cabinet it had been pointed out by his Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, that to persist in a neutral stance "would deprive the United States of any future influence on the outcome of the War". The President "wanted to exercise a predominant role in the peace settlement". Mary Klarerko with David F. Trask; Admiral William Shepherd Benson, First Chief of Naval Operations, U.S. Naval Institute Press, USA , 1987, p.57.
See also David F. Trask; Captains and Cabinets, Anglo-American Naval Relation, 1917-1918, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1972 for a US perspective on the period of co-belligerency.
at an American Yard that had accepted, and rapidly fulfilled, British contracts in the past.13

On 9 July 1917, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels advised the US Secretary of State Robert Lansing that the Navy Department had a policy ready 'in so far as it relates to the Allies.' The policy recognised the safeguarding of the Allies' lines of communication as the main role for the USN and expressed a willingness to 'send its minor forces ... in any numbers not incompatible with home needs, to any field of action deemed expedient by the joint Allied Admiralties.' On the other hand, the policy warned that 'while a successful termination of the present war must always be the first Allied aim and will probably result in diminished tensions throughout the world, the future position of the United States must in no way be jeopardised by any disintegration of our main Fighting Fleets.'14 The Navy Department was against any alteration in naval construction that would slow down the 1916 Programme. On the contrary, the Department favoured an acceleration of the Programme.15 To the British it had

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13 The Company, Bethlehem Steel Works, was having its difficulties with the United States Shipping Board. The Shipping Board, created on 7 September 1916 by an act of Congress, as a "promotional and regulatory body intended to support the American Merchant Marine" had "practically debarred [Bethlehem Steel] from accepting any contracts except for patrol craft submarines." The Chairman of Bethlehem Steel, Mr C.M. Schwab, was unwilling to confine his company to the limitations laid down by the Shipping Board. In June 1917, he was still declining to accept British contracts for patrol craft (sloops and minesweepers) "until the needs of the United States Government had been clearly defined." For, when the United States entered the war, Wilson had established a new body, the Emergency Fleet Corporation, with separate powers of its own. (In July 1917 the head of the Corporation, General G.W. Goethals, himself unable to cooperate with the Shipping Board, resigned. Schwab then held the position of Director General of the Corporation until 1918). Anglo-American Naval Relations 1917-1919, op. cit. Document # 21 (and Footnote 2). Documents # 23 # 377 also Klatcko, op.cit. p.181.


15 Ibid; Document # 375 and Klatcko, op.cit. p.72.
explained its reluctance as due to the risk that, when the current war was over, the US might find its Capital Ship strength weaker than it had intended *vis-a-vis* a virtually intact High Seas Fleet and the Imperial Japanese Navy.\(^{16}\)

As far as Wilson was concerned, however, he dismissed Japan as a serious threat to US security. By mid-July, he was also of the view that the war had shown Capital Ships to be of little value, while the outcome of the German submarine campaign would largely determine who would win the war.\(^ {17}\) By then too, the US Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral W.S. Benson, had also changed his view with respect to the 1916 Programme and was ready to support postponement of Capital Ship construction in order to give destroyers, submarines and merchant ships priority.

Benson successfully put that view at a meeting of the USN General Board on 21 July 1917.\(^ {18}\) Even then, another three weeks passed during which the President contemplated seeking a separate appropriation for the new destroyers, as an alternative to interrupting the 1916 Programme.\(^ {19}\) Finally, approval was given to slow down the 1916 Programme

\(^{16}\) Anglo-American Naval Relations 1917-1919, *op.cit.* Document # 382.

\(^{17}\) Ibid; p.481

\(^{18}\) Katchetko, *op.cit.* p.72.

\(^{19}\) The limitations of yard space and plant ruled this out as a real possibility. Normal progress on the 1916 Programme and an emergency programme of destroyer construction could not continue simultaneously. *Anglo-American Naval Relations, 1917-1919, op.cit.* Documents # 22 and # 380.
on 14 August 1917, by which time the USN had 266 destroyers on order.  

The displacement of the 1916 Programme was a contingency measure. In the spring of 1918, the Navy Department began to consider how soon it might be resumed and was advised by its London based division, the USN Planning Section, that 'Whenever the military situation in France reaches a decision, or when the need for shipping is no longer a controlling factor in the present war, the shipbuilding resources of the country should turn their efforts sharply to the Naval Programme.'  

By August 1918, both of those requirements seemed to have been answered although none could predict how or when hostilities would end. The success of the convoy system made it highly improbable that Germany would force the Allies to terms by severing their supply lines but so long as there was a shortage of anti-submarine craft, it remained a predominantly defensive tactic. The construction of German U-Boats continued to outstrip their destruction. In Britain the government had no interest in a

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20 Ibid; p.481.
21 Ibid; Document # 386.
22 Ibid; Document # 387.
23 Admiral W.S. Sims, Liaison Officer for the United States Navy in London, was able to advise the President that "there would appear no possibility of the enemy ever succeeding in destroying enough commerce to bring the Allies to terms". Ibid; Document # 228. During July 1918, the last German land offensive had been contained. The Allied counter-offensive made victory on land seem assured. Klatchko; op.cit. p.115.
24 Anglo-American Naval Relations, 1917-1919; op.cit. Document # 401 (appendix A) and Document # 408.
patched up peace but on the vigorous pursuit of an unconditional German surrender. The British focus was on victory in the land war and at sea on the destruction of German naval power. Thus, when Capital Ship construction resumed in America, British frustration at the slow rate of the American contribution to the war-effort turned to resentment and to suspicion of America's war aims and post-war intentions.

The First Lord of the Admiralty Sir Eric Geddes pursued an investigation that compared the naval contributions of Britain and the US to the war. On 2 August 1918, he concluded that the American government was drawing rather more on resources of the Royal Navy to support its war-effort than it had so far contributed. Yet, he found, while Naval construction was behind-hand in America, merchant shipping, which pre-war had amounted to a mere quarter of British tonnage, had expanded to a capacity close to that of Britain. Geddes proposed to the British War Cabinet that an agreement be reached between the two nations 'roughly on the Naval effort due from each' and the balance of the excess due to the Admiralty be made up to Britain in the form of an equivalent in American merchant tonnage. He warned the Cabinet 'unless some arrangement of this character is come to the position of Great Britain as carrier of the World is seriously threatened as well as her position as the premier shipbuilding country.'

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26 Ibid; Document # 388. In the first five months of 1918 only eleven warships and auxiliary vessels were completed in the United States, as against two hundred and three in Britain over the same period. The US completed only forty-four destroyers during the whole of its period as a co-belligerent. Ibid; p. 483 note 2. The United States merchant marine expanded greatly during the war. Carrying less than 10% of its country's water-borne Foreign Trade in 1914, by mid-1920 it carried almost 43% of that trade. Klatshko; op. cit. p.182.
On the grounds that questions of post-war commercial interest had already begun to sour relationships between the two governments, Arthur Balfour, the British Foreign Secretary, cautioned Geddes against linking military strategic issues and Britain's commercial shipping concerns when dealing with the US Government. He suggested, instead, that discussion be confined to the development of joint naval operations and of a joint naval programme, designed to eliminate unnecessary duplication of naval construction.27

Early in October 1918, Geddes led a naval mission to Washington. Discussions with the US Naval Department were conducted within the confines recommended by Balfour.28 The mission was a success in that it produced some specific agreements on construction and naval operations for the prosecution of the war in the coming year, but it was eclipsed in Washington by a flurry of diplomatic activity there, which coincided with Geddes' arrival.29

On 4 October 1918, Germany's newly appointed Chancellor, Prince Max of Baden,

27 In the same communication Balfour noted that Sims (who had supported the suggestion of compensation in United States merchant tonnage) had already received a rebuff from his superiors. By this time also, a British Trade Mission to Latin America led by Sir Maurice de Bunson had aroused anger and resentment in the United States, reaching to the highest level of government. Anglo-American Naval Relations, 1917-1919, op. cit. p.484 and Document # 486 also Klatchko, op.cit. p.116-117.

28 Ibid; Documents # 401, # 402 and # 403. Geddes' concerns about the growth of America's merchant marine did not, however, go unnoticed in Washington. In reporting the success of the mission to Sims in London, Assistant Chief of Naval Operations, Captain W.V. Pratt, observed that "one of the things Sir Eric was most interested in was our merchant shipping" Ibid, Document # 407.

29 Ibid; Document # 408.
applied to Wilson for an armistice and for peace talks, on the basis of the 14 Points
pronouncement made by the President on 8 January 1918.\textsuperscript{30} That Wilson began
negotiations with Germany without consulting the Allies has been well documented.
(As an Associated-Power the United States had reserved the right.) Lloyd George
nevertheless let it be known to the President that Britain would not be party to a bogus
peace. He expressed concern, also, about any settlement that might seek to deprive
Britain of a vital war-waging strategy-namely the exercise of belligerent rights, as it
might be contained in the second of the Fourteen Points.\textsuperscript{31}

At an interview on 13 October 1918, the President assured Geddes of his undiminished
commitment to the prosecution of the war, but on the issue of belligerent rights, he
expressed the view that ‘many nations, great and small, chafed under the feeling that
their sea-borne trade and maritime development proceeded only with the permission and
under the shadow of the British Navy.’ Indeed, Wilson claimed to believe that German
fear and jealousy (albeit unjust) of British Naval dominance had been the deepest root
cause of the war. Wilson went on to explain that in respect of access to the world’s sea-
lanes, he saw a clear need for the revision of international maritime law after the peace
– to an extent that remained to be seen. He said, however, that one of the ways in which


\textsuperscript{31} Klatshko; \textit{op. cit.} p.119 and F.O.371/3493, Letter Lloyd George to Geddes, 12 October 1918.
Britain's great Naval Power might prove less provocative in the future could be if it
were used in some way 'in conjunction with the League of Nations.'

With the possibility of a peace settlement on the basis of the Fourteen Points in the
wind, the Admiralty immediately prepared an inquiry of its own into the meaning and
effect of the demand for Freedom of the Seas as contained in Point Two. On 17 October
1918, it rejected any interpretation of Freedom of the Seas that denied to a belligerent
the right to cut the lines of communications and supply of its enemies. Britain had
chosen Naval Power as its strongest weapon because its survival depended upon it. Any
diminution in its strategic applications would merely enhance Military Power. Germany,
'whose industry is war,' stood to gain by the proposal.

By the last week of October, Wilson was satisfied that the German proposal for an
armistice was intended as a genuine preliminary to a peace. He dispatched a delegation,
under Colonel House, to take part in pre-armistice talks with the Allies and to promote
the Fourteen Points as the basis for a peace settlement. As Naval adviser, House took
with him Admiral Benson. It was Benson's second visit to Europe within a year. On

33 The inquiry also refuted that a supranational body could adequately represent British and Imperial
interests. The Empire had been built on the foundation of British Seapower and on no other foundation
34 Klatchko; op. cit. p.120 and Taylor; op.cit. p.240.
this second occasion he would take his place as the President’s chief naval spokesman in the Allied Naval Council (ANC).

The ANC, itself, had been in existence barely a year, when it convened in Paris to prepare the naval aspects of the Armistice and to consider the terms of a peace treaty. It owed its creation largely to a barrage of grievances from American civilian and naval sectors, suspicious of the Admiralty. The complaints continued throughout the summer and autumn of 1917, accusing the Admiralty of a lack of any coherent strategy, of a refusal to consider offensive operations, of a lack of consultation with and even of withholding information from its American associates.

The Admiralty made shift to answer those criticisms, which did gradually peter out after Vice-Admiral Mayo (Commander-in-Chief, US Atlantic Fleet) and Benson, on separate missions to Britain during 1917, satisfied themselves that they were indeed ill-founded.

During Benson’s mission, in a gesture of guarantee of continued open dealing, First Lord Geddes suggested that Rear-Admiral W. Sims (since March, America’s naval liaison officer in London) be made an honorary member of the Admiralty Board.

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36 Ibid; Document # 31.
37 Ibid; Documents # 30 and # 37.
38 Ibid; Documents # 36 and # 55.
39 Ibid; Document # 31, # 52, # 53 and # 61.
40 Ibid; Document # 73.
Benson referred the matter to Wilson who rejected the suggestion, but endorsed instead, at Benson’s urging, the establishment of the United States Navy’s own Planning Section in Sim’s Headquarters. According to Benson, officers to staff the Section should come to London ‘fully imbued with our national and naval policies and ideas’\(^{41}\) and would ‘attend daily meetings of the British Navy Council.’\(^{42}\) Finally, on 11 December, Geddes announced the creation of an Allied Naval Council in order to insure the closest touch and complete cooperation between the Allied Fleets.\(^{43}\)

With its composition of Ministers of Marine, as well as the Chiefs of Naval Staff of the nations represented, the ANC answered Wilson’s desire to balance American preparedness to cooperate militarily with the Allies and his determination to guard America’s political autonomy as an Associate Power. For Wilson had his own agenda for a peace settlement and a view of the German terms radically different from that of the Allies.

When Benson arrived in Paris at the end of October 1918, he immediately dispensed with the services of his Anglo-American Liaison Officer (Sims) whom he ordered back to London. Benson’s requirement was for an American National Policy perspective on the progress of pre-armistice preparations among the Allies to date. For his Naval

\(^{41}\) Ibid, Document # 77.

\(^{42}\) Ibid; Document # 78.

\(^{43}\) Ibid, Document # 79.
Advisory Staff in Paris, therefore, he drew upon the London Planning Section. In its advice, it contrasted significantly with the ideas of the Admiralty.

The Admiralty had prepared a document putting forward a case for the surrender of the High Seas Fleet, as an article of the terms of the Armistice.\textsuperscript{44} The document made it clear that, in the view of the Admiralty, ‘the armistice terms must be substantially the eventual peace terms.’ Combining security terms with war compensation, it pressed for the ‘surrender into Allied hands of every unit of the German Navy, to be substantially disposed of in accordance with the terms of the peace.’ What the British were after (as compensation) was to strip Germany of maritime power and, by its destruction, end all German capacity to interfere with Britain’s sea communications.\textsuperscript{45} The Planning Section advised Benson that Germany’s submarines alone had influenced the Allies’ land campaign during the latter years of the war. It took the view that ‘their surrender and internment for the period of the war would suffice as a guarantee that Germany would not benefit in a naval way by the Armistice, no matter how long it may be prolonged.’ It went on to point out that in respect of the President’s peace plan, the entire question of the disposition of the High Seas Fleet should be left to the Peace Conference. In the view of the Planning Section, the surrender of the High Seas Fleet would have the effect of making Britain’s naval dominance in Europe absolute. Such an effect, it claimed, would prejudice the President’s concepts of a peace settlement, in which no favour

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid; Document # 411.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
would be shown to the interests of any power and in which would be contained both a
revision of maritime law and an international arms limitation agreement.⁴⁶

According to Klatchko, Presidential instructions to House and Benson on 29 October
confirmed the views of the Planning Section, so that almost at once Benson found
himself at loggerheads with his British counterpart, First Sea Lord Wester Wemyss,
over the naval terms of the armistice and House, promoting the Wilson Peace Plan,
crashed with Lloyd George over the inclusion of Point Two in the Peace Agreement.
Although Lloyd George indicated a readiness to accept the Wilson peace plan generally,
he made an exception of Point Two. He was not prepared to relinquish the right of
blockade as a war-time strategy.

The resistance of the British Prime Minister on the issue provoked Wilson to provide
Benson with what Klatchko calls a ‘systemic statement.’⁴⁷ Its substance was that the
American President would have no part in any peace negotiations that did not include
“Freedom of the Seas” and the League of Nations. Lloyd George adjusted his position
to confirm acceptance of negotiation on the basis of Wilson’s peace plan as a whole, but
reserved complete freedom for Britain when Point Two came before the conference.
According to Klatchko, Wilson accepted the Lloyd George reservation but made the
point that agreement beforehand on Point Two would obviate any discussion of the

⁴⁶ Ibid.
⁴⁷ Klatchko: op.cit. p.123.
details with the Central Powers. For his part, there was no insistence upon an absolute abolition of blockade, but upon a revision of maritime law on the subject he did insist. Further, he gave House authority to do the insisting ‘at the right time and in the right way.’

On 3 November, House transmitted the President’s views to the European leaders and warned Lloyd George of the possibility of another naval race - this time between Britain and America - if agreement on Freedom of the Seas could not be reached. In response, Lloyd George reiterated his preparedness to discuss Freedom of the Seas at the conference but, as to the threat of a naval race, he in turn warned House that Britain would ‘spend its last guinea to keep a navy superior to that of the United States or any other power, and that no cabinet officer could continue in the government in England who took a different position.’

House and Lloyd George also discussed the disputed naval armistice terms. They agreed that no part of the High Seas Fleet required to be confiscated but that the whole should be interned until the details of disposition could be dealt with in the peace settlement. The documents show that the disputed ANC draft proposals were so amended by the

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
Supreme War Council. The Entente Powers thus concluded formal agreement on the naval terms of armistice. 50 But suspicion of each other’s naval and political objectives marked the relationship between the two nations as they approached the peace conference proper.51

In a memorandum to the War Cabinet on 7 November 1918, Geddes set down his conclusions based on his experience during his recent visit to the US and his observations of the attitude of the United States Naval Representatives in the ANC, during the pre-armistice talks. He expressed the view that President Wilson was ‘pursuing a “balance of power” theory’ in respect of sea-power in its application to World politics. He had become convinced that it was ‘the aim and purpose of the President to reduce comparatively the preponderance in sea-power of the British Empire

(a) By building in the United States at the present time.
(b) By allocation of the ships of which Germany is to be deprived at the Peace Conference; and
(c) By combining with other nations jealous of our sea power, which will, in combination, be the equivalent of, or greater than, the sea power of the British Empire. 52

50 Anglo-American Naval Relations, 1917-1919; op.cit. Document # 419.
51 Ibid; Document # 422.
52 Anglo-American Naval Relations 1917-1919, op.cit. document # 422.
Certainly, since mid-October, the London Planning Section had been advising Benson on the retention by Germany of a significant part of the High Seas Fleet. It perceived that, in the absence of a naval counterweight in Europe, the Royal Navy would have free reign as Britain’s tool for global dictatorship, including continued interference with American neutral and maritime rights and the impediment of American commercial development. On 7 November 1918, it produced a memorandum on the question of the Freedom of the Seas and noted that the actual rules of maritime warfare, which were accepted by the British Government, coincided in most respects with American practice but the liberality of interpretation of those rules, which a great navy permits to Great Britain, operates to the greater restriction of freedom of commerce. The British conception of Freedom of the Seas became, it said, ‘the freedom of the belligerent to adjust his maritime action to the necessities of military and naval situations.’ It advised that any changes in maritime law should be put forward for adoption in principle only ‘until such times as they have received the closest scrutiny by the International Jurists of the nations concerned.’

As long as Britain held the naval whiphand, Benson was doubtful of an outcome satisfactory to America on the issue of the Freedom of the Seas. Although agreement had been reached on the naval terms of the Armistice on 10 November 1918, he reported to Daniels his feeling that ‘an agreement had been entered into by some of the

53 Ibid; Documents # 410 and # 411.
54 Ibid; Document # 416.
other representatives as to the final disposition of the various vessels to be taken over.' Benson suspected a division of the spoils of war by which Britain stood to augment massively its already great naval power. 55 Ten days later, he was advocating to Daniels the use of 'big stick' diplomacy as a means of pushing through the President’s agenda in the conference. He recommended ‘decided evidence that we are going to build up our Navy as soon as possible’ with the qualification that this ‘should be done even if considered desirable to ease up later.’ 56 Daniels supported the view, which he would subsequently recommend to the President. 57

Acceptance of the Wilson peace plan by the Entente was by no means assured in late 1918, when it seemed that retribution was a primary objective of the French and British government. Before leaving for the Preliminary Conferences in Paris, Wilson decided to force the hand of the British to comply in his scheme. He endorsed a call by Daniels for congressional authority to complete the 1916 Programme, and for an additional three-year programme (the 1918 Programme) to begin on the completion of the First, in 1925. What he intended to posit, to Americans and Allies alike, was that the only alternative to his peace plan was United States military expansion. To Americans, he intended to suggest that the alternative to active support of the League was the creation of ‘Fortress America.’ To the Allies, in particular to Britain, he offered the option of

55 Ibid; Document # 417.
56 Ibid; Document # 426.
57 Ibid; Document # 437.
acceptance of his peace plan or of being overwhelmed by an American bid for outright naval supremacy.\textsuperscript{58}

It was with deep concern that Britain’s leaders contemplated the paradox of American policy which, on the one hand, spoke of disarmament and security within the League and, on the other, of creating a United States Navy second to none. The concept of a League of Nations had wide support among Britons but there were few prepared to go so far as to place national and imperial security in the hands of any supranational body. Superior sea-power underpinned Imperial Britain and the maintenance of Naval Supremacy was a non-negotiable icon of British policy. Even given that, in 1918, the realities of the decline in Britain’s economic power rendered the policy considerably less secure, no Briton could afford to be deemed responsible for its abandonment. Therefore, while very early in the peace settlement negotiations the British leadership, together with those of the other Entente powers, agreed to the adoption of a set of resolutions that authorised a League of Nations, crucial maritime issues remained to be settled. A key issue was that of the Freedom of the Seas, as contained in Point Two.

During the armistice talks, discussion of Point Two had been deferred until the conference proper. At the preliminary conference, Wilson and Lloyd George again compromised on the question of Point Two. Lloyd George agreed to the inclusion of Point Two, in principle, for settlement once the League became a reality. Although the

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid; Documents # 456, # 438 and Klatchko; \textit{op cit.} p.132-133.
treatment of neutral shipping had figured most prominently at America’s entry into the war. Wilson was prepared to shelve the question for the time being. But the reality was, until the League of Nations had matured into an effective global organisation, the British were not prepared to take risks with limitations on sea-power. British resistance obliged Wilson to make a tactical retreat. British and Commonwealth Statesmen had a vision of the League closer to his own than the other powers and had agreed to thirteen of the Fourteen Points. But, in America, Republicans and isolationists were coalescing in expressing concern over his conception of America’s new international role. Any delay over this one point would offer League opponents the opportunity to organise their resistance. He pinned his hopes on the formation of the League under which there were no neutrals and therefore Point Two would automatically be resolved.

Only Point Four now remained to be agreed between the British and American leaders. It concerned the reduction of arms to the minimum consistent with national safety. In principle, it was acceptable to the British government, which was as eager as any to cut arms spending, but again the naval delegates found it impossible to reach agreement.

Internal collapse in Germany had an influence upon deteriorating relations between the British and American naval advisers. It consigned the future of the High Seas Fleet as a possible weight in the naval balance to limbo. Further, Benson continued to harbour suspicions that the Allies planned a share-out, in which the British would be the

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59 Wilson was able to rationalise this compromise on the grounds that "under the League there would be no neutrals". Klatchko, op.cit. p.132.
principal beneficiaries. Rather than that any such division of the High Seas Fleet take place, he altered his view to adopt the position the British claimed as their preferred one - namely that the High Seas Fleet be destroyed. So that by February 1919, he was insisting on the destruction of the High Seas Fleet. At the same time, he seems to have dropped all notions of easing up later on US construction and, with the backing of the US Naval Planning Section, he argued the completion of America's building programmes as a necessity. Benson pressed Wilson and Navy Secretary Daniels strongly on the issue. He argued from the standpoint of the stability of the League, which would require 'at least two powers of equal naval strength,' and from the standpoint of America's national interest. On both counts, he represented Britain's naval supremacy as a serious threat. He argued, also, that the US was now clearly the most powerful nation and that 'professional logic demanded that her navy reflect that superiority.'

60 Ibid; p.139 and p.141.
61 The United States Navy's Planning Section had produced arguments during the war canvassing the possibilities of war between Britain and the US. It advocated that Britain, conscious of the growth of American power, would respond aggressively, possibly militarily, and probably aided by European allies, France and Italy and by Japan, against the challenge of the US to British hegemony. This hypothesis was based on "evidence of the lessons of history" that Britain had crushed all previous international rivals to attain and maintain her pre-eminent world position. Anglo-American Naval Relations,1917-1919; op.cit. Documents # 410, # 435.
62 Ibid; Document # 442.
63 Ibid; Documents # 417, # 429, # 446, # 447, # 448, # 450, # 455.
64 Klatchko; op.cit. p.158-160.
Despite the challenge to British naval supremacy contained in the proposed American naval building programmes, there had been confidence among the Admiralty representatives that, once minima were agreed, under Point Four the British Fleet would remain greater than any other. That confidence was based on Admiralty calculations concluding that, in safeguarding Britain’s lines of communications with her global Empire, the Royal Navy had greater security responsibilities than any other navy. But it was a confidence that was brought up short by the American naval experts, who, by similar calculations of distance of their own coastal and sea routes, made the same claim for the United States Navy.

By the spring of 1919, the British and American naval representatives became locked in a very bitter harangue over Point Four. On the British side, the American threat of creating a United States Navy ‘second-to-none’ provoked thought that hostility to Imperial Britain alone drove the policy. Admiralty speculation considered that the intent was to guarantee United States dominance within the League – which could impact enormously on Britain’s control of her Empire. Whatever lay behind US naval policy, no senior politician, no civil servant and certainly no Admiral concluded that British Naval supremacy was anything but vital to Britain’s independence and maritime

65 Relationships between Benson and Wemyss deteriorated to a point close to personal physical violence. Anglo-American Naval Relations, 1917-1919, op. cit. Document # 446.

66 The Admiralty also considered United States concern over the growing power of Japan lay behind their “big navy” policy and noted that “the belief in an eventual struggle with that country (Japan) is deeply rooted in the minds of many Americans”. Ibid; Document # 423 and ADM 137 Operational Record ADM 137/2709. Memorandum by the Admiralty Plans Division 11 November 1918.
Imperial security. Navy and Empire were intrinsically linked. The British leadership, who sought means of preventing it, took the prospect of vast American naval construction, therefore, very seriously indeed.

On 7 March 1919, Lloyd George met with House and the French Prime Minister Clemenceau. The three reached an agreement by which France would acquire a proportion of the High Seas Fleet but those shares which could be claimed by Britain and Japan would be sunk, in exchange for an ‘understanding’ that the US would not make a competition of Naval Power with Britain.

According to Klatcho, when Benson was informed of the agreement for the disposition of the High Seas Fleet, House withheld the ‘price’ - that is, the Anglo-American ‘understanding’ about new construction - from him. Benson’s response, therefore, continued to have as its basis, the need for a US building programme to achieve at least parity with British Naval Power. He opposed any distribution of the High Seas Fleet, preferring its destruction, and under a memorandum prepared for him by the Planning Staff on the issue, he advised Wilson that, on a pro rata basis, the difference between the American and British shares would massively increase American construction requirements to achieve parity. He opposed the House-Lloyd George-Clemenceau agreement. His concern, thereby, was to minimize Britain’s opportunities to tip the balance of Anglo-American naval parity. To deny Britain any chance of significantly

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67 Klatcho, op.cit. p.142-3.
augmenting its forces with those of other national navies, at some time, he recommended that all other navies remain small.\textsuperscript{68}

No clear agreement had been reached on the disposition of the High Seas Fleet by 25 March when, on his arrival in Paris, United States Navy Secretary Daniels made a public announcement that the United States had no interest in a share of the High Seas Fleet but that, if the European nations had, then ‘they could divide them as they see fit.’ In quick succession, Daniels was badgered first by Benson, wishing him to alter his view on the High Seas Fleet, on the basis of the advantage a European share-out might hand to Britain, and, on the following day, the 26 March, by Wemyss, seeking answers to the purpose and extent of the United States Naval programme.\textsuperscript{69}

Hardly surprisingly, Benson was enraged by the breach of etiquette contained in Wemyss’s direct approach to his political superior.\textsuperscript{70} In Wemyss’s defence, it seems likely that he was, at the time, unaware that Benson had been kept in the dark with respect to the House-Lloyd George ‘understanding’. It seemed to Wemyss that Benson was being not only stubborn, but was himself out of order in his dealings with the

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid; p.143.


\textsuperscript{70} Ibid; Document # 446.
British. (Wemyss was later to form the view that Benson had been used as a mere tool by his political superiors).

Following the angry confrontations between Wemyss and Benson, House met with Daniels and Benson to discuss the Naval terms. According to Klatchko, it was then that House, while agreeing in principle with Benson on the need for Anglo-American naval parity, revealed to Benson 'the President’s conception of the building programme primarily as a bargaining chip’ which could safely be discontinued, ‘provided Great Britain made certain concessions.’ 71

On the following morning (27 March 1919) Daniels and Benson met with Walter Long, First Lord of the Admiralty, who made it clear that he was acting under ‘the direction of his Prime Minister.’ Long explained that his government was prepared to risk all hazards to resist what appeared to be a challenge to Britain’s vital interest in maritime commerce and naval supremacy, unless something was done on the part of the Americans to put an end to the challenge. Benson, in turn, warned Long that such an attitude on the part of Britain would lead to war between the two nations. 72 On that note Long called upon the intervention of his Prime Minister.

Lloyd George took the offensive in a three-pronged attack. He resurrected the

71 Klatchko, op. cit. p.144.

possibility, previously rejected by Britain, of distributing the German Fleet according to war losses.\textsuperscript{73} This would have provided the Royal Navy with a crushing superiority of 3:1 in Capital Ships over the USN - inflating massively the building programmes required by the US to equal or exceed the Royal Navy. He hinted that Britain might oppose the inclusion in the League Covenant of the Monroe Doctrine. He questioned whether Britain would join the League at all.\textsuperscript{74} Secretary Daniels response of 'no League, no naval agreements', was a classic example of the exercise of power in diplomacy.

Britain and America were engaged in a circular argument. The continual bickering threatened to wreck the conference and further poison relations between the two nations. The Americans appeared to hold the high ground, and have the power to exclude Britain from the League, make their own League and European arrangements and/or engage and outbuild Britain in a naval race. Perhaps considerations of this sort, as well as the notion of Anglo-American unity, motivated British leaders such as Admiral Jellicoe, King George the Fifth, Lord Grey, Bonar Law to advocate appeasement of the Americans - that a policy of naval cooperation and diplomatic accommodation, rather than aggressive posturing and a building race, was the appropriate course.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid; Document # 490.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid; Document # 447

Advice received from Admiral Sir W. Grant, Royal Navy, in February 1919, on his return from his post as Commander-in-Chief North America – West Indies Station, reinforced the case for compromise diplomacy. Grant’s advice was that currently, with regard to Britain’s naval pre-eminence, the public mood in America was largely one of compliance. But that mood would change if sparked by a sense of rivalry. American public pressure would then compel a naval race.  

Evidence also accumulated that President Wilson’s political strength was becoming weaker, the Democratic Party suffering heavy election losses in November 1918. Leading American Republicans were combining to engineer the President’s undoing on the League of Nations issue. Former President and Republican elder statesman, Theodore Roosevelt, told the British that the American Senate would not support the 1918 programme and it had seemed to Grant that ‘the Republicans especially, who will shortly be in power, appeared prepared to back up the British point of view’ and accord Britain Naval Supremacy. The American Republicans were scaffolding a platform on tax cuts, anti-militarism and arms reduction from which to oust Wilson at the...

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76 Grant’s report gave the British pause to consider their own tactics and the probability of Wilson’s 1918 building programme actually being endorsed by Americans. He advised that predominantly sentiment in America was not anti-British and that there was a preparedness there to take a sympathetic view of the British standpoint on naval preponderance. He continued, however, that too much pugnacity in pressing the British case could tip the balance and release such a wave of American chauvinism as would compel the United States Government to carry through the largest naval programme, whether this had been its intention or not. Anglo-American Naval Relations, 1917-1919; op.cit. Document # 441 and ADM 116/ 1773. Memorandum by Admiral W.L. Grant for the War Cabinet, 25 February 1919.


78 Ibid; Document # 430.
approaching presidential election. A speedy resolution of League issues became
important to Wilson if, at home, he was not to be hoist by his own petard of his ‘big
Navy’ threat, while discretion now seemed the better part for the British. Speed and
discretion, therefore, combined to induce Daniels and Long to take the negotiations out
of the hands of the haranguing naval officers and place them in the hands of diplomats-
House representing the US and Lord Robert Cecil, deputy to Foreign Secretary Arthur
Balfour, representing Britain.

During April 1919, House and Cecil worked on a compromise. Cecil still sought to
preserve Britain’s special position in respect of naval supremacy. As a gesture of
goodwill, however, he suggested that Britain would wait until the League was
established before expecting American reciprocation by the abandoning or modifying of
its building programme.

An assurance on the 1918 Programme presented no problem for House – its purpose was
served – the British supported a Peace Conference on the basis of a League of Nations
Covenant. It had gone no further along the American legislative system than the
proposal stage. But he yielded nothing on the 1916 Programme. On completion, it
would be quantitively almost equal and qualitatively far superior to the peacetime Navy
the British government had expected to maintain. Lloyd George tried a new tack.
Through Cecil he offered to support the US position on the inclusion of the Monroe
Doctrine in the League Covenant in exchange for concessions on the 1916 Programme.
This had no result. House responded that the US would deal with the Monroe Doctrine
issue independently. As to the 1916 Programme, it was already in legislative effect and would be completed. On the other hand, House impressed upon Cecil that it was no part of his government’s intention to enter into a naval competition with Britain.\footnote{Klatchko; \textit{op.cit.} p.150-151.}

A basis for agreement was thus accepted which satisfied the political requirements of both governments. Essentially, the 1918 Programme had fulfilled Wilson’s purpose for it in Europe, even as its death rattle could be heard in the United States Senate. It had secured British commitment to the League. At the same time, after centuries of naval dominance, the British had tacitly accepted equality with another power upon the seas. In May 1919, Daniels reassured the British of United States friendship and, while remaining firm on America’s need for naval power, acknowledged Britain’s special dependence on sea-power. He intimated once more that, with the League established, the 1918 programme would not resurface. Both sides therefore had upheld their respective political positions on naval needs but also made clear their desire to maintain transatlantic friendship.\footnote{\textit{Anglo-American Naval Relations, 1917-1919; \textit{op.cit.} Documents \# 451, \# 452, \# 453, \# 454.}} Yet it was only a verbal truce that stood between the two sides and the rekindling of naval rivalry.

If moderates in the USN, such as Captain W.V. Pratt, underwrote the world’s future security in terms of British-American cooperation,\footnote{Ibid; Documents \# 407, \# 424 and \# 429.} Admiral Benson continued to be
representative of a body of thought, which persisted within and without the USN, that Britain was thoroughly untrustworthy and, by political chicanery, had had the better of the United States at the House-Cecil negotiations. There were Americans who chafed under the lost opportunity to balance sea-power in the North Sea by means of the German Navy, and the failure to establish Freedom of the Seas. Although the 1918 Programme had been more a Wilsonian political gambit than a genuine intent, many American Navalists attributed its loss to the British.

For its part, the Admiralty remained concerned at the scale of the 1916 Programme. What had originally been under consideration for post-war Royal Navy strength would see Britain become a second rate, if not, indeed (given also Japan’s naval programme) a third rate naval power in a very short space of years. At the Admiralty, it seemed clear that new naval construction could not now long be deferred. The need to resume construction and the need to preserve Britain’s naval industries, therefore, became a constant refrain from the Admiralty in the post-war years.

82 Ibid; Document # 455.
Chapter 2

The Admiralty Estimates 1919–1920

At the preliminary peace talks, diplomatic discussions had seen an adjustment by the British on their position of insistence on naval supremacy to tacit acceptance of parity with the United States (US). That adjustment was reached on the strength of the probability that the Americans would drop their 1918 naval programme and that an understanding could be reached between the two naval powers, once the League of Nations became a reality.

Although a naval race on a vast scale seemed, thereby, to have been averted, even parity on the scale of the 1916 programme, if completed, was more than the British government had calculated upon in its post-war economic planning. Pending a conclusion to an ‘arrangement’ with the Wilson Administration on the question of relative naval requirements of the two nations, the British Prime Minister Lloyd George fended off Admiralty pressure for specific direction on Britain’s post-war naval policy. Soon after the Peace Conference, the Admiralty abandoned its cry for supremacy and took up instead the concept of parity with the United States Navy (USN) on which to found its demands for a new British building programme. For their part, Treasury officials attempted to enforce not only a ceiling on naval spending, but also an absolute ban on new construction.

Lloyd George occupied a position somewhere between the broiling Departments, conscious of the need for economies but also of Britain’s special dependence on sea-power. He remained hopeful that Britain’s naval primacy might be maintained by diplomatic means rather than by a resumption of construction. By 1921, however, it seemed that any prospect of a resolution to the problems yet remaining between the US and Britain on naval policy was to be confounded. The American Administration failed to respond to British attempts to resume the dialogue begun in Paris.
The Peace Treaty remained unratified by the US legislature and US participation in the League seemed remote. There was no evidence of any modification of the 1916 Programme. The Prime Minister, thereupon, took the first steps towards returning to an assertive foreign policy stance in respect of the US. He approved funding for the resumption of naval construction in Britain.

In respect of the above, this chapter will consider the special embassy of Viscount Grey to Washington, in 1919, by which Lloyd George hoped to resume the Anglo-American naval dialogue. The principal focus of the Chapter, however, will be the Admiralty and Treasury struggle to assert a view on naval policy, encompassing the establishment of the committee of inquiry into the value of the Capital Ship in December 1920. It will conclude with the Prime Minister's decision to authorise the resumption of Capital Ship construction in January 1921.

In April 1919, total expenditure on British defence for the first normal year was proposed by Chancellor of the Exchequer Sir Austen Chamberlain at 110 Million Pounds sterling. In May, Winston Churchill, Secretary for War and Air, sent considerations for the distribution of the sum between the three services to Lloyd George. Churchill indicated that any consideration of the figure depended on a 'really great contribution' of restraint in Admiralty demands, in particular for new construction. Much really depended on how the USN intended to expand its fleet. As long as it did so by the acquisition 'to a reasonable
extent" of ships from the captured German Fleet, parity would apply to quality of ships as well as to quantity. Then, a share-out between the three services of the sum suggested by Chamberlain would be facilitated by the fact that no new building policy would be required by the Royal Navy for many years to come. If, however, the US expanded with a programme of new ships, ‘in the direction of greater power, speed, armament’ then Britain would be able to afford to delay only a year or two before responding in kind.²

The Naval estimates for 1919-1920 contained no requests for new construction, but far exceeded the Chancellor’s budget proposals. Despite Treasury objections, the estimates received Cabinet approval, for in the view of the Cabinet the outstanding costs and the extra-ordinary expenses in transition from war to peace required to be met. This, however, proved not to be the view of Parliament, who rejected the figure (170 Million Pounds) in an uproar of protest, in July 1919. Parliamentary objections largely centred on Long’s admission that the figure was an inflated one and a precaution against the uncertainties of international limitation.³ Parliament was not prepared to countenance measures which presupposed British preparation to engage the US in a naval race.⁴ The Admiralty position was that the race had already begun. Preparatory to a revision of the estimates, Long, on 12 August 1919, sent a memorandum to the War Cabinet seeking direction on what

¹ By April 1919 the United States was no longer interested in High Seas Fleet acquisitions and the scuttling of the High Seas Fleet, June 1919, ended further speculation along those lines.


constituted the Government’s post-war naval policy. Included with the memorandum were appendices on the completion of new construction programmes. The American 1916 Programme, on completion, would alter the hitherto undisputed British naval policy that ‘no one power could be permitted to surpass us in Naval Strength.’ In the absence of a policy for British construction, by 1924 the US fleet would surpass the British qualitatively. In addition, if revisions of the 1919-1920 Naval estimates obliged even a moderate reduction in Admiralty proposals for Capital Ships to be retained in full commission, the completion of the American 1916 programme would see the Royal Navy also surpassed quantitatively by the USN. The memorandum pressed for a decision from the government on whether it was prepared to maintain the policy of British naval supremacy, and also included suggestions by which some immediate reduction compatible with the preservation of British naval supremacy might be made. Pre-requisite would be an anticipation of freedom from war over a period of ten years with any powers likely to reduce Britain’s existing naval preponderance, together with an agreement on international arms limitations under the terms of Article eight of the League Covenant, covering the same period of time. The memorandum suggested that the willingness or reticence on the part of the US to take joint initial action with Britain to initiate international limitation would make America’s real intentions for their navy programme clear.

Lloyd George did not dismiss Admiralty warnings on the loss of naval supremacy. He remained aware that authorisation for new construction might be unavoidable. Nevertheless, his preferred means of preserving Britain’s naval position was by a limitation agreement with the Americans. From the Secretary for War, the Prime Minister

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6 Ibid.
had advice on the time available to reach a settlement before new construction would require to begin. Lloyd George took the opportunity of the period of grace to delay any decision on policy, and mount instead a new diplomatic initiative for the conclusion of an agreement with the US government, to be led by former Foreign Secretary, Viscount Grey.

Late in July, Grey set conditions for his acceptance of the mission. He asked for a formal statement of a British strategic posture, which based Fleet strength on security in European Waters, which renounced claims of a purely British supremacy in the Western Atlantic or Pacific Oceans, and which took no account of the US programme in framing British naval requirements.

Grey was confident such a statement of policy would be sufficient to induce the US government to abandon its naval expansion programme. In private discussion, Lloyd George accepted Grey’s conditions but insisted that reciprocity in limiting naval strength by the US be written into the statement. Grey accepted Lloyd George’s inclusion, conditional on provision of evidence of projected naval estimates more in line with the British negotiation proposals than those presented to Parliament by Long in July. 8

At a Cabinet meeting, 5 August 1919, Lloyd George prepared the way to gain the documentary evidence required by Grey for his mission, and to reserve naval policy decisions, pending the Washington response. 9 He made it clear that, on domestic, political

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7 Ibid; Document # 18 - again substantiated in memoranda from Long to the War Cabinet, Documents # 25 and # 29.

8 Lloyd George, Twelve Essays; op. cit. p.204.

9 Cab 23/15, Meeting of 5 August 1919, War Cabinet, 606A.
and socio/economic grounds, government expenditure on armaments must be reduced, but that there could be no immediate decisions on naval policy. The formulation of naval policy depended on considerations by Cabinet of issues concerning 'foreign policy' and questions of 'Statecraft.' Thereafter, it was the responsibility of Cabinet to give direction to the military advisers for the management of their allocations in a way that supported government policy. Following a discussion on expenditure, the military advisers were then asked 'to prepare such material as they consider may be useful to the Cabinet in the possible formulation of a statement of the responsibilities to be undertaken by the Admiralty and War Office during the next five or ten years.' Long was asked, in particular, to report on the present and future strength of the USN. (Long responded in the memorandum of 12 August, previously discussed).

In addition to the hold on naval policy decisions, indicated by Lloyd George as necessary, an additional tier of civil scrutiny over expenditure was created. It was agreed at that same meeting that a Cabinet Finance Committee would be formed to consider questions 'involving large financial expenditure' and 'the Minister at the head of the Department whose expenditure is under discussion to be an ad hoc member of the Committee during such discussions.' Members of that new Cabinet Finance Committee met on 11 August. Neither the Secretary of War nor the First Lord was present when those members considered the question of the Defence budget and prepared proposals for Cabinet consideration.

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10 Ibid.

The business of Cabinet, on the 15 August, concerned the Naval, Military and Air
estimates. Long was present. The information from the Admiralty requested by the Prime
Minister had been submitted on the 12 August, but there is no record of its being
considered. By contrast, the proposals of the Finance Committee were approved and
included in a seven point Cabinet directive to the three services. Of those seven points,
three were conclusions on business carried forward from the Cabinet meeting of the 5
August, and four were new business, emanating from the meeting of the Nuclear Finance
Committee four days earlier and concerning the Navy most particularly.  

The conclusions of the War Cabinet on those four points were that, in working out their
estimates, the three service departments were to assume that the British Empire will not be
engaged in any great war during the next ten years. No new construction was to be
undertaken. Unless of value as merchant ships, all construction in progress should be
halted, if possible. The figure of 60 Million Pounds was designated as the desired
maximum for Navy Estimates out of a total 135 Million Pounds for defence expenditure.  
The pre-war standard governing the size of the Navy was not to be altered without the
authority of Cabinet.

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12 CAB. 23/15, Meeting of Cabinet, 15 August 1919, War Cabinet 616A.

13 Ibid. See also John R Ferris; The Evolution of British Strategic Policy 1919-26. Macmillan, GB, 1989, pages 16-17. According to Ferris, 135 million pounds sterling represented approximately 10% less than the pre-war expenditure of 1914, in real terms. See also S.W. Roskill; The 10 Year Rule: The Historical Facts, The Journal of the Royal United Services Institution, UK, March 1972

14 The document's reference to the "Pre-War Standard" was vague. Pre-war, the two-power standard had been the recognised measure of British sea-power. The 160% Standard had been introduced as an emergency measure specifically against Germany. Any assumption by the Admiralty of a straightforward return to the two-power standard (ie the Royal Navy to be equal in strength to the next two largest naval powers) presented difficulties for the Government, if one of the powers to be included in that calculation was now to be America.
The above secret instructions constituted the support promised by Lloyd George to Grey, whose mission had been publicly announced on 13 August. Grey’s formal letter of appointment as Special Ambassador at Washington from Balfour’s successor as Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, was accompanied by the written instructions he had requested. Curzon made a special note that the instructions on the Navy went even further than Grey had originally requested.

The final paragraph of Grey’s instructions on naval issues contained Lloyd George’s reservations. They reveal the provisional nature of the policy statement. Its continuance beyond the coming year was conditional on a similar response in naval reductions by the US.15

On the 24 October 1919, Long produced a memorandum in response to the new Cabinet Directive. Using the Battleship as a yardstick, the memorandum argued that the new estimates (based on the 60 Million Pounds allocation) required a reduction in the previous Admiralty calculations of ships in commission under peacetime conditions. Under the Cabinet Directive, Capital Ship figures would number only twenty in full commission. By contrast, in August, prior to the Directive, the Admiralty proposal had been for twenty-one Capital Ships in full commission, together with HMS ‘New Zealand’, on special service with Admiral of the Fleet Lord Jellicoe and HMAS ‘Australia’, in Australasian Waters.16

On Admiralty calculations the fleet strength proposed in August could provide security for

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15 The same paragraph contained the statement that the new estimates would be explained to the House of Commons at the next Parliamentary Session. No such explanation was made. Lloyd George was committed to the strict financial limitation only insofar as US reciprocity was achieved by Grey’s mission. Documents on British Foreign Policy (DBFP) 1919-1939, edited by E.L. Woodward and R. Butler, 1st Series, Volume 5, HM Stationary Office, London, 1954; Document # 366, enclosure.

the Empire in the short term. Where the Admiralty strongly took issue with the new directive was on the naval standard. As far as the Admiralty was concerned the British naval standard was already in the process of being altered by virtue of the expansion policies of the new players in world naval power. Long argued that the reality of US naval expansion and the reality of the US as a factor in World politics had to be recognised in British naval standard calculations. By the simple adjustment in numbers of British Capital Ships to meet the terms of the directive, the US Fleet was made immediately approximately equal to the Royal Navy in ships in full commission. The memorandum provided the additional information that manning levels in USN had already been voted at a figure significantly higher than that considered by the Admiralty for the maintenance of a comparative fleet in full commission and provide two-fifths crews on mobilisation of ships in reserve. Although not stated in the memorandum, the comparison of manning levels would seem to underscore Admiralty perception of firm planning by the USN for maintaining a reserve of experienced men for new US ships as they came off the stocks from the 1916 Programme. The completion of the 1916 Programme, Long again reminded Cabinet, would place the Royal Navy in a position of ‘marked inferiority’ to the USN. The transfer of British naval supremacy to the US would also, he argued, mean the transfer of British commercial and diplomatic pre-eminence, globally.

Long again urged Cabinet to consider the two options for preserving at least a one-power standard with the US – either by persuasion of the Americans to modify or abandon their 1916 Programme or, in twelve months time, by reconsideration of the decision to start no programme of new construction. He emphasised the importance of maintaining a capability in Britain for rapid warship construction.17

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At a Cabinet meeting of 7 December 1919, Long secured approval for Admiralty proposals to preserve construction facilities, at least in the short term. All discharges of dockworkers were suspended for a period of four months. Work was provided by the resumption of previously postponed refit and repair of Capital Ships and Light-Cruisers. Additionally, it was accepted that Naval construction facilities be leased to private firms for the construction of merchantmen, rather than be entirely run down. Cabinet acceptance of the Admiralty proposals was strongly influenced by perceptions of the desirability, on both social and political grounds, of safeguarding the positions of dockyard workers. It was also the case that Grey had made no progress in his mission to Washington.

The denial of any opportunity for formal dialogue to Britain’s Special Ambassador obliged Lloyd George to seek information on relevant US Foreign Policy and Naval issues from other channels. He asked the Foreign Office to prepare a memorandum on the US debate on the League for circulation to Cabinet. The British Naval Attaché in Washington provided a report based on such US Naval matters as were available on public record. Direct inquiries were rebuffed by USN officials.

The Foreign Office memorandum did little to diminish earlier Admiralty hypotheses of the US as a potential problem to Britain on the high seas. The reservations to the League Covenant, demanded in the Senate, selectively protected US national interest to an extent

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18 Cab 23/18, Meeting of Cabinet, November 7, 1919.

19 President Wilson’s deteriorating health was a factor in preventing a meeting with Grey. In addition, association with the British mission came to be perceived by the US administration as an encumbrance to the President, not only for the successful ratification of the League but for Wilson’s political survival. The President’s foreign policies were under attack by the Republicans, bidding for the Presidency in the approaching elections. The attacks targeted the League Covenant as an invention of British vested interests. Grey’s presence as Britain’s Special Ambassador served as grist to the mill of those elements in US politics striving to make US/British rivalry an issue in the electoral contest.

that would render American membership not merely unreliable but possibly obstructive to actions voted by the League. To Article 10, the Senate amendments reserved the right of Congress to refuse US support to combined League action in the case of aggression against a member state. Such a situation could leave Britain doubly vulnerable. The burden of naval responsibility for supporting League obligations would fall upon Britain. The diversion of Britain’s Fleet and Commerce to League activities could leave the US free to exploit trading opportunities. The Foreign Office analysis suggested that, if the reservations were admitted, trade interest alone could produce a situation in which the US chose neutrality or opposition to a League action.

Wilson’s blueprint for the Covenant was savaged by the opposition at every point on which they could make electoral capital as the protectors of American interests and sovereignty. Agreement on arms limitations under Article 8 came under particular scrutiny. On that point, the Republican opposition insisted upon exceptions, in accordance with US national need.20

The domestic political struggle for the Presidency made it impossible for Grey to transmit his government’s concern that the whole substance of the League could be destroyed in America if it were used as a political ‘football’ purely for the ends of domestic power politics.21 House advised him to discontinue any attempt to present a British perspective in America, where in the current climate his presence had become an embarrassment to the

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Administration and an obstacle to the progress of the League. Anti-British elements in America pointed to the League as an ‘invention’ of the British and to the Wilson Administration as the dupes of the British Government. House recommended to Grey that the diplomatic goals they held in common, in particular those of arms limitations, would best be served by the exertion of any influence Grey had upon his Government to set the example in arms reductions.22

In Britain, the 1919-1920 Naval estimates had yet to be re-presented to Parliament. On the 24 November, the Cabinet Finance Committee pressed its interest in economic restraint, and noted reports that great reductions in USN personnel were being carried out. The Admiralty pointed out that new US pay structures were being contemplated as incentives to reverse that trend and that the building programme continued unabated.

On the 24 November, Curzon telegraphed Grey for ‘authoritative, official’ information on US naval personnel, present and proposed, and on ships in commission, present and proposed. He again assured Grey that Britain had no desire to enter into naval competition with the US, but Britain could also not afford to ignore what the Americans were doing. The information was required urgently in connection with British Navy Estimates.23

British/American relationships were so sensitively balanced in the prevailing turmoil of American politics that the most Grey could achieve was to transmit a memorandum. Largely gleaned from public record by the British Naval Attaché in Washington, it was based upon US Navy Secretary Daniels’ annual report of the 1 December 1918 and US

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Public Bill Number 8. It supported the Admiralty reports to Cabinet. It confirmed the fall in personnel noted by the Finance Committee but also advised that measures had been introduced, or recommended, that included short-term enlistment and pay inducements to attract new recruits and re-enlistments. Such measures, together with an existing pool of trained men eligible for recall in emergency, rendered current personnel numbers an unreliable gauge of intended Fleet strength. The authorised strength on the completion of the 1916 Programme closely matched the Admiralty's own calculations.²⁴

The political situation in the US obliged Grey to abort his mission. His personal recommendation to the British Government was that Britain should show good earnest of the strategic posture contained in the Statement he had requested to support his mission and restrict naval estimates in accordance with the recommendations contained in Directive 616A. He remained as convinced as before that, after the elections, the Americans would follow suit and reduce arms spending.

Without a guarantee of reciprocity, Lloyd George preferred to continue temporising on any declaration of naval policy. The new financial restrictions were therefore not applied. Long's Navy Estimates of 158 Million Pounds were passed by Parliament in December 1919. The sum was moderately adjusted from the request of July, but was far in excess of the 60 Million Pounds proposed by the Cabinet Finance Committee for Directive 616A. The uncertainty surrounding international limitations were no clearer but Long made no allusion to them, nor to any precautionary claims on that account. He substantiated the estimates in an explanatory statement, careful to placate proponents of economy. He stated that a large proportion of the sum did not apply to the current year, but to expenses

incurred pre-armistice and for demobilisation costs. The entanglements of outstanding wartime accounts with the current year, together with the doubling of the costs of materials and services, made any comparisons with pre-war estimates impossible. The implication was that the estimates for the current year, while difficult to state with precision, were modest. No requests for new construction were included, but Long's statement did not end there. He drew the attention of Parliament to an Appendix of Statements in summary of the Royal Navy's extensive duties on behalf of domestic and foreign policies since the Armistice. The steps already taken by the Admiralty for the re-organisation of the Naval Staff and in Scientific Research were also contained in the Statements, as were those taken towards policy discussions for Empire defence with India and the Dominions.25

The inclusion of the Appendix was significant. It indicated the bases from which the Admiralty was preparing to support the considered position that postponement of new construction indefinitely was incompatible with the fulfilment of the Royal Navy's post war responsibilities. Re-organisation of the Naval Staff to match peacetime responsibilities had begun under First Sea Lord Wemyss. In November 1919 Wemyss was succeeded by Admiral of the Fleet Sir David Beatty at the Admiralty as First Sea Lord. From the outset Beatty gave his attention to strengthening, in particular, those divisions of the Naval Staff responsible for research and technical development recommendations gained from the experience of the war.26

Beatty was one of the few military leaders whose war record was highly esteemed in Britain. He was the obvious choice to succeed Wemyss. His abilities and prestigious authority were recognised in Churchill’s warning to Lloyd George in light of the proposed defence cuts, that, more than Wemyss, Beatty was in a position to champion the particular interests of the Admiralty.27

As early as December 1918, Beatty, then Commander-in-Chief, Grand Fleet contributed his views on Admiralty scrutiny of Britain’s post-war naval posture. In a memorandum to the Admiralty, he emphasised the strategic importance of the Mediterranean to Britain and urged a re-orientation from concentration of the Fleet in home waters to a representation in the Mediterranean, in strength, and with the most modern Capital Ships. In the same memorandum, Beatty expressed his views on the governing principles for any proposals put forward for post-war fleets thus,

The strength and distribution (of the fleet) should be such as adequately represent the national commitments and duties, including the maintenance and protection of the highways of the sea, the upkeep of communication with our colonial Empire and distant possessions, and the showing of the Empire’s flag in outlying waters. No other consideration should be permitted to weigh against this principle in determining our naval strength.28

Beatty declined Long’s invitation, in September 1919, to offer an opinion on the strength of the post-war fleet as part of the Admiralty response to Cabinet on the basis of Directive

28 Ibid, Document # 5.
616A (above). He gave as grounds, on that occasion, that his views would have no value, 'without information on general naval policy.'

To a further application by Long for comments in respect of the Directive, Beatty responded that the adequacy of the post-war fleet depended in the immediate future on US ratification of the Covenant of the League of Nations and on whether the US 1916 Programme only was continued.

Of the seven points in Directive 616A, Beatty considered the second, concerning Cabinet authority for alteration to the naval standard, the most significant in respect of naval policy issues. He understood that a two-power standard that took account of the US was, for political and economic reasons, out of the question. He abandoned references to sole supremacy. Immediately upon his appointment, he declared in favour of a one-power standard and a naval entente, or alliance, with the US based on equality of naval material. All indications suggested that the US 1916 Programme would be completed. In Beatty’s view, parity with the US in new construction could satisfy the requirements of Britain’s post-war strategic posture.

Following the rebuff of Grey’s embassy, the Admiralty struck a deal with the Cabinet Finance Committee. In return for the maintenance of existing naval strength, the Admiralty offered to hold its demands for new construction on the proviso that a limitation agreement

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29 Ibid; Document # 27.
30 Ibid; document # 28.
could be rapidly concluded. The Finance Committee accepted the compromise, with the reservation that the number of ships in commission would be reviewed again in the next financial year. Subsequently, the 1920-21 Naval Estimates of *circa* 84 Million Pounds were approved by Cabinet and by Parliament.\(^{32}\)

Since Beatty did not expect a rapid conclusion to a limitations agreement, he continued to prepare the case for new construction. In the memorandum to Cabinet for the 1920-21 estimates Long had reiterated the warnings of previous memoranda on the US Programme. He emphasised that if no understanding with the US was possible, then the one-power standard would have to be declared or, by 1923, Britain would have passed to the position of second naval power. After Cabinet consideration of the memorandum, Long was enabled when introducing the estimates to the House of Commons, on the 17 March 1920, to indicate that the government firmly adhered to the principle that the Navy should not be inferior in strength to any other power, that this was the foundation of the naval policy of His Majesty’s government, and that this was not a matter for the Admiralty but was a matter for the government. Beatty believed he had secured his main objective – the government declaration of the one-power standard. The way seemed clear for the Admiralty to make the recommendations on the kinds of construction required to carry out the government naval policy.\(^{33}\)

In fact the way was by no means clear. Lloyd George still pinned his hopes upon achieving a one-power standard, not by the Royal Navy building up, but by the US Navy scaling

\(^{32}\) Cab. 23/20, Conference of Ministers, 26 February 1920.

down. Any illusions entertained by Beatty that Directive 616A had been rendered meaningless by the supersession of new government policy were soon shattered. On the 29 June 1920, Cabinet Command Paper 779, carrying a memorandum from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, advised that, for the new financial year 1921-22, the sum of 60 Million Pounds was set aside for the Navy as estimated expenditure in a normal year.

In Beatty’s perception, the Government had come to a policy decision that meant 1921-22 could no longer be considered ‘a normal year’ but, on the basis of all presented evidence, was the year that new construction had to begin.34

In mid-1920, Beatty’s list for new and resumed construction was ready. He was insistent that an increase in the estimates was now essential to give it effect, ‘in order to maintain our Sea Power and to carry out the policy approved by the Cabinet, and of which the Parliament has been informed, namely, the maintenance of a “One-Power Standard”’. 35 Beatty refused all demands by the Cabinet Finance Committee to compromise on new construction and sought to marshal a weight of opinion behind the one-power standard policy, in a public campaign based upon the emotive themes of tradition and upon strategic considerations. By bringing the naval question into the public forum, Beatty also opened the way for public criticism. The First Sea Lord gave priority to Capital Ship construction in building to commence in 1921.36 The place of the Capital Ship in the post-war navy

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid. Beatty’s proposed construction consisted of 4 new Capital Ships (substantially enlarged versions of H.M.S. Hood), the completion of Light-Cruisers and destroyers already laid down, the completion of “Eagle” and “Hermes” and alteration of “ Furious” as aircraft carriers and one minelayer – all to begin in 1921.
came in for severe criticism. Beatty was not disconcerted by criticism. He was confident that his strategic judgement and the appraisal of the Naval Staff of the lessons of modern warfare and weaponry would stand up to scrutiny. What was welcomed by Beatty was that the debates raised the profile of naval policy as a major political issue in which he hoped Prime Ministerial intervention would oblige the Chancellor of the Exchequer to set aside the necessary allocations from the budget.

Against the Admiralty claims, the Chancellor urged the Prime Minister to use the Cabinet Finance Committee to force retrenchment on the Navy. Failure to do so would oblige the government to make cuts in spending on social programmes. The Prime Minister chose to avoid a clear commitment either to the Admiralty or to the Treasury. Lloyd George proposed to the Chancellor that he explain in his budget speech that, while in full support of sea supremacy, no decision would be made on renewed construction until the government had completed an inquiry into the value of Capital Ships.

Long protested the unprecedented decision for an inquiry, which put the Admiralty Board on trial. He threatened resignations from the Board should the inquiry find against the Board’s recommendations and ‘another body is called to perform their duty.’

To Long, the Prime Minister wrote disclaiming any intention on the part of the government to place the Admiralty ‘on its trial.’ The decision to initiate an inquiry was taken in order to

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38 Beatty Papers; Vol 2, op.cit. Document # 45.

39 Ibid; Document # 50.
satisfy Parliament and the country at large that the government was giving its closest attention to every possible economy measure. Long was advised that the fact that the British naval standard was for the first time taking account of the US Navy involved 'questions of highest policy' for the government which went 'far beyond the technical questions of the form in which naval superiority is to be ensured.'

The real dispute was not the credibility of the Admiralty but the question of whether the standard against which the Admiralty projected Britain’s needs would become a reality. Beatty was certain that the American 1916 Programme would be completed. To achieve a comparable standard by the US completion date, the logistics of Britain’s shipbuilding industry demanded that allocations in the coming budget be voted for construction to begin in 1921.

On the issue of the value of the Capital Ship, the Admiralty had argued the case in a memorandum of 14 December 1920. Secretary to the Cabinet, Maurice Hankey, had advised the Prime Minister that the Admiralty’s arguments appeared 'incontrovertible.' He did not believe Lloyd George shared their view. Rather, he was of the opinion that the Prime Minister hoped the Naval Inquiry would disprove the case for the Capital Ship. Nevertheless, that does not appear to have been the object of Lloyd George’s decision in ordering the inquiry. Rather, Lloyd George’s purpose was to postpone effective decision

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40 Ibid; Document # 53
41 Ibid; Document # 46 and Document # 55
42 Ibid; Document # 54.
on the future of naval power while awaiting the opportunity to take up naval limitation discussions with the US.

The structure of the Committee of Inquiry, both in its composition and in its terms of reference, seems to confirm this. A small sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) conducted the inquiry. Representation on the Committee of the pro-Capital Ship view was evenly balanced by Capital Ship critics, making firm decision, especially a radical one, unlikely. The committee was empowered to report on the testimony of witnesses but not to make recommendations on naval policy. The final decision on naval policy Lloyd George reserved for himself.

At a review meeting of the CID (14 December 1920), the Prime Minister warned that the Americans would regard the introduction of a new shipbuilding programme as a direct threat against them. The consequences would be very serious, for the Americans would retaliate by demanding the repayment of the thousand Million Pounds owed to them before any building operations commenced in British shipyards. Further, he questioned why the US should be considered in relation to Britain’s naval strength, at all. The Prime Minister’s preferred position was to work towards a naval policy based on a system of limitation agreements and a naval ‘holiday’, which could be put to good use by the Admiralty for collecting and understanding all the lessons of the war. To this purpose the Prime Minister

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44 Dingman; *op.cit.* page 117. On the Committee in favour of Capital Ships were Beatty, Long, and Churchill – against were Bonar Law (Conservative Leader), Robert Horne (President of the Board of Trade) and Eric Geddes (Minister without Portfolio).

45 Beatty Papers; Vol.2, Document # 53 and #57
directed Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, to begin sounding out the views of possible members of the new US Administration.46

The First Sea Lord reminded the Prime Minister, in the meeting, that the measures proposed by the Admiralty were in response to the one-power standard, understood by the Admiralty to be the Naval Policy of the government, and took into consideration all the lessons of the war over a period of two years. Superiority over the US in all seas was not the aim of the Admiralty. Britain’s strategic needs could indeed tolerate inferiority to the US in Capital Ships, given a better proportion of other types and of manpower. In this regard, Beatty pointed to Japan’s naval power as a potentially greater menace than the US. Unless building recommenced in 1921, Britain would drop to the position of third naval power behind the two nations (the US and Japan) where naval power was expanding. As to the position of the Capital Ship as a basis of sea-power, the Admiralty had reached its conclusions and did not consider any further investigations necessary.47 Beatty’s response had no effect. The Admiralty was obliged to mark time through the Naval Inquiry while Lloyd George reached again for a solution that would honour a one-power standard at minimal cost to the British economy.48

At the close of the Naval Inquiry hearings, Beatty was confident that the Admiralty case for the Capital Ship had been won.49 His next concern was to avoid further delaying tactics

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid; and Roskill; Hankey, Vol.2, op.cit. page 206.
on the part of the government. He pressed for an expression of ‘opinion’ from the sub-committee to obviate lengthy consideration of a report by the CID and the Cabinet. He pointed out that the Admiralty had thoroughly researched and placed before Cabinet the necessity for immediate authority to proceed with new construction, given that the government accepted, as a result of the inquiry, that the Capital Ship remain the basis of sea-power. Winston Churchill concurred with Beatty but was reminded by Bonar Law that this would mean an enlargement of the sub-committee’s terms of reference. Bonar Law was certain that, since the CID was a small body and the sub-committee constituted a large part of it, the likelihood was that the CID would take the opinion of the sub-committee, in any case, ‘if we can agree here.’

The sub-committee did not agree. Although there was general acceptance that the Admiralty had made its case against the obsolescence of the Capital Ship, Bonar Law drew up a report recommending that Capital Ship construction should not immediately resume. His report was based upon testimony doubting that the primacy of the Capital Ship would continue against development of the submarine and aeroplane in the future. It also drew heavily upon the opinion of one particular witness, Admiral H.H. Richmond, whose view it was that Britain’s best defence lay first and foremost in a sound economy. Beatty suspected political chicanery. Both he and Churchill refused to accept the Bonar Law draft and collaborated on a separate report that Long also signed. To the final report by Bonar Law to the CID, the Admiralty appended remarks disputing the chairman’s conclusions on specific testimonies, and objecting to the greater weight the report gave to

\[50\] Ibid; Document # 72.

\[51\] Ibid; Document # 77.

\[52\] Ibid; Document # 82.
the testimony of irresponsible witnesses than to that put forward by the responsible department. The Admiralty also charged that, in taking account of Admiral Richmond’s opinions on economic policy, the Bonar Law report was outside the terms of reference of the sub-committee.53

Beatty’s appeal for Long’s signature on his report came fully two weeks after the First Lord had made way, on Lloyd George’s instructions, for a replacement in that office.54 Beatty also lost his supporter in the War Office when Churchill was moved to the Colonial Office, in a Cabinet re-shuffle. In Long’s place, Lloyd George appointed Lord Lee of Fareham, in February 1921.

Lee, in his capacity of Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, and Beatty, representing Long, had been at the Cabinet meeting of 8 December 1920, when the naval inquiry was announced. The Admiralty had accepted, then, that no programme of Capital Ship construction would be presented to parliament, until the results of the inquiry had been considered.55 Lloyd George again impressed upon the new First Lord that new construction was not to be encouraged while the matter remained sub-judice. Yet, on the very day (28 February) that the Sub-Committee agreed to disagree and present separate reports to the CID, Lee gave his support to construction renewal. Lee judged a gesture from the government would lift Admiralty morale.56 As a compromise with the Finance Committee

53 Ibid; Document # 84.

54 Illness prevented Long from representing the Admiralty in Cabinet and then in the sub-committee of inquiry. In Long’s place, Beatty had attended a number of Cabinet meetings and had represented him also in the Sub-committee of Inquiry.

55 CAB 23/23, Meeting of 8 December 1920.

56 Beatty believed Bonar Law had “cooked” the report of the Sub-Committee to meet with political requirements. Beatty Papers; Vol 2, op. cit. Document # 77, Document # 78, and Document # 79.
whereby 10 Million Pounds was cut from the Admiralty Estimates, the total was reduced to 82.5 Million Pounds. In return, Lee secured Cabinet approval for the sum of 2.5 Million Pounds to be allocated from the total for the collection of materials to facilitate the construction of four new Capital Ships.

Cabinet approval of the allocation raised Beatty’s morale so far that he regarded it as a vindication of the Admiralty’s whole case. In fact, Lloyd George continued to delay fundamental decision on post-war naval policy. As a domestic political decision the allocation was a modest gesture in the direction of the Admiralty and supporters of British naval supremacy, but not excessively offensive to the economisers. No actual construction would begin before October 1921. The final decision hinged on American intentions.

At Beatty’s urging, Lee had also argued that a new construction allocation would demonstrate to the US that Britain had the capability and the authority of Parliament to build new Capital Ships. Lloyd George saw merit also in that argument. Relationships with America had taken a turn that seemed to call for a show of assertiveness. The Prime Minister was annoyed by the persistent anti-British attacks which emanated from sections of US society, and by the nationalistic bombast of President-Elect Warren G. Harding. Within Lloyd George’s own Cabinet, members were resentful of the attitude to Britain of the US Administration. Members perceived the US to be exerting ‘unusual’ pressure on Britain in the terms of war-debt recovery and, at the same time, placing ‘our whole naval

57 Beatty Papers; Vol 2, *op.cit.* Document # 86
58 Dingman; *op.cit.* page 121.
position in jeopardy by its big Navy programme. Britain’s Ambassador to Washington, Sir Auckland Geddes, had also informed the Prime Minister that the US attitude to limitation, while present in principle, was unfocused. A move on the part of the British towards renewed construction held the possibility of focusing the American attitude.

Still, with so much hinging on American attitudes Lloyd George held in suspension any clear decision on British naval policy. The modest allocation of 2.5 Million Pounds in the Estimates kept alive the possibility of renewed construction. But no definitive action would be taken on the CID recommendations on Capital Ships until after the Imperial Conference, due to convene in June 1921. At that gathering Imperial Defence was certain to figure largely on the agenda.

59 CAB 23/23, Meeting of 17 December 1920
Chapter 3

1921- Imperial Defence Decisions.

In terms of Imperial defence, the vulnerability of the Eastern Empire was well known to British policy-makers. As far back as 1902, Britain had formed a strategic alliance with the Japanese to protect their interests in the Far East against the encroachments of Tsarist Russia. Later, under the pressure of the German challenge in Britain’s home waters, the naval aspects of the Alliance came to provide its central purpose for the British. Under the aegis of the Alliance Britain withdrew most of its own naval presence from the region in order to mass maritime defences in home waters for the duration of the war.

At the end of the war, it appeared to British leaders that America and Britain, the most powerful members of the victorious coalition, might continue in cooperation to underpin a stable world order. In the interest of long-term European stability, the US had promised, together with Britain, to guarantee the future security of France. In addition, the US appeared interested in forming a ‘special relationship’ with Britain. Also, in the course of the Versailles Conference, the leaders of both nations acknowledged an identity of interest on a number of issues, not least of which was the stability of the Asia-Pacific region.

The American President’s close confidant, Colonel E.M. House, had given the British Prime Minister to understand that the specialness of the relationship might extend to strategic cooperation between the two nations. A collaborative approach with the Americans to maintain stability in the Asia-Pacific was a very attractive prospect for the
British government.\(^1\) Indeed, so attractive was it that not only was haranguing with the Americans over naval supremacy dropped, but also a stay was placed on all naval construction in Britain. The formulation of post-war naval policy was postponed, anticipatory to concluding an agreement with the American government that would solve all of Britain’s security needs with the greatest economy. Two years after the Armistice that possibility seemed very remote. Grey’s diplomatic mission to Washington had been rebuffed. Congress had not ratified the Peace settlement. America was outside the League of Nations. Disillusionment grew among British policymakers about the reliability and commitment of the US to a settlement of world problems.\(^2\) But worse was to come. President Harding, newly elected in December 1920, declared himself in favour of completing the 1916 naval programme.\(^3\)

Thus confronted yet again by a threat to naval supremacy, the Lloyd George government was obliged to frame British naval policy in the light of the United States as a competitor for control of the world’s sea-lanes. Inevitably its decision impacted upon efforts to deflate the economy.\(^4\) By the end of 1920 the Treasury warned the government that, in respect of


\(^{2}\) Ibid; 1st Series, Vol. v Documents # 428 and # 435.

\(^{3}\) As a Republican Senator, Harding had been a “Big Navy” supporter.

\(^{4}\) Business had remained unexpectedly buoyant in the immediate post-war period. The anticipated slump did not begin to manifest itself until late 1920. Business then fell off – as did residual government income from the war economy. The sale of surplus war-stores petered out, excess war-profits duty would be repealed in the next Budget. The war-debt remained, in itself a serious burden on the economy. Deflationary measures had been taken in the 1920 Budget (which would show a surplus) but opposition to the Coalition’s “squanderingmania” would continue to grow and press heavily on the Coalition and on the personal political future of Lloyd George. Business and Financial sectors campaigned against ruinous income tax, demanding that government spending be cut to the bone. Charles Loch Mowat; Britain Between The Wars 1918 –1940, Methuen, London, 1968, p. 30.
defence spending, the next budgetary year must be considered as ‘normal’ (i.e. by pre-war standards, the Navy estimates should not exceed 60 million pounds). Cabinet, however, only went so far as to pledge to reduce service spending to the minimum required to maintain Britain’s Imperial obligations and national safety.

The most pressing problem to be solved in that regard was the security of the Eastern Empire. There was no doubting the propensity for instability in the Far East and Pacific. Japan and the United States were the only two nations in the world engaged in major naval expansion, and tensions were growing between them. Britain could not afford to allow the United States to become the focus of the defence expectations of its Imperial dependencies.

Yet, in the absence of any other protection, the Dominions were concerned about Japan.5 While the London government understood the need to assure the Dominions of Britain’s commitment and capacity to guarantee their security, and be certain of their loyalty, options for immediate action were extremely restricted and not merely on financial grounds.

5 Throughout the war, the Japanese had proved reliable partners in the alliance with Britain but they had also used their opportunities, during the preoccupation of the European powers with their struggle at the other side of the world, to improve significantly their own position as a power in East Asia. Their peace settlement demands, together with their naval expansion plans, left little room to doubt that theirs was an expansionist nation on the rise. See sources:
By 1921, Britain’s Far Eastern naval defence forces had neither bases nor shore-based facilities capable of accommodating modern capital ships. Until that situation was rectified the Royal Navy could not be represented in strength in those waters and it was therefore critical that potential instability did not become actual. In the event that the tensions between the Japanese and Americans came to war between them, Britain was in no position to defend its rights and interests, even as a neutral. In those circumstances, the Lloyd George government came to understand that diplomatic influence was Britain’s strongest suit, while the re-establishment of British military preparedness in the region was an essential objective.

In the spring of 1921, therefore, a strategic security plan was drawn up in Cabinet in readiness for the Imperial Conference, due to convene in June. The plan was also intended to advise the American government of the strength of Britain’s diplomatic hand in the Asia-Pacific region, for at the same time as President Harding spoke of continuing naval expansion, he was also signalling an interest in arms limitation talks. During the early months of 1921, strong pressure was put on the London government by the government of Canada to invite the American President to take part in a conference of the Pacific Powers. This Lloyd George was perfectly willing to do but not until after the Imperial conference convened and he had some cards of his own to play at a regional conference table.

The plan contained proposals intended to assure Dominion leaders of the London government’s commitment to imperial security. In a prior agreement, Cabinet had already authorised spending for the resumption of Capital Ship construction. The plan now went on to approve Admiralty proposals for the provision of modern fuelling stations and the expansion and fortification of the Royal Navy base at Singapore. Irrespective of whether
an alliance or 'understanding' remained in force between Britain and Japan, Admiralty strategic planning treated Japan as a potential future threat to British interests in the Far East. For the defence of Britain's interests from Japanese attack Admiralty staff had selected the base at Singapore as a more secure and strategically valuable position than more northerly sites, such as Hong Kong. But in addition the plan also contained Cabinet's recommendations for the renewal, with some modifications, of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.

The Anglo-Japanese alliance was an arrangement of some twenty years standing. Renewal was pending but the British government had awaited the outcome of some settlement with the Americans before deciding on whether to renew or allow the alliance to lapse. A triple alliance would have been entirely acceptable to the British, and infinitely preferable to a tripartite naval race. But, if forced to make a choice, the British would have deferred to the American dislike of the alliance with Japan and would have abandoned it in exchange for one with the more powerful of those two Pacific nations. Once an arrangement with the Harding government seemed out of reach, the Lloyd George government made up its mind to renew its alliance with Japan.

By means of renewal Britain would retain an ally where it had extensive interests but not significant defence forces of its own. In addition, the reaffirmation of ties of friendship of long standing implied the retention of a certain environment within which the British might expect to carry some influence with the Japanese, where the interests of both nations were affected. The maintenance of stability in the Asia-Pacific region was the immediate case in point. If, under the aegis of the alliance, the Japanese could be brought to observe more
closely than heretofore the spirit of the League Covenant in its dealings in China, the chances of stable international relationships would be much greater.

It was not a simple matter for the British to devise an assertive imperial security policy that would not produce the opposite effect and worsen regional tensions. The Americans were very hostile toward the Anglo-Japanese alliance and would be suspicious of renewal, while the Japanese could hardly fail to grasp the implications of the Singapore Scheme. But, there can be no doubt that the Lloyd George government meant to protect its territories and trade, and Dominion Leaders clamoured to know how it was to be done. The resources of the Foreign Office were put to work to find means of minimising any offence the policy might seem to offer towards Japan or towards America. The Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, devised a framework for the policy in terms that diverted it right away from either Japan or America and inscribed it in precautions against the capacity of a possible Russo-German combination to disrupt world peace. The general message, however, was that Britain had the will and the means to hold what it had.

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the issue of Imperial defence in the light of the new problems confronting the Admiralty and the British government arising from changes in the balance of sea-power and advances in naval technology. It will examine how the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, in combination with the Admiralty's Singapore Scheme, came to be the Government's strategic policy of choice to place before the Imperial Conference of June 1921.

If anything, the war had served to emphasise the value of the Empire to Britain. The supply of manpower and materials from the Empire had played a substantial role in Britain's war
effort. After the war, the raw materials of the Empire held their own vital significance in twentieth century industrial/economic calculations. Britain had no known deposits of its own of oil and rubber, for example, but both were available to Britain in its far-flung territories. In the quest for strategic raw materials Britain had, indeed, assumed substantial new post-war responsibilities, under mandate. Most notably, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Britain moved to establish a dominant influence in the Middle East. The traditional reason of securing the route to India and the Far East played its part in that move, but of at least equal importance was the need to secure supply from the region’s oil resources for Britain. Far from decreasing after the war, Britain’s defence obligations had increased, with the weight of responsibility resting on the Royal Navy.

As early as March 1917, concerns had been expressed in the Imperial War Conference about the defence of the Empire east of Suez. The Admiralty had been asked to prepare plans for ‘the most effective scheme of naval defence’ for the British Empire to be presented to the British and Dominion government. At the May 1918 Imperial War Conference, the Admiralty put forward a proposal for a single Imperial Navy under the central control of the Admiralty from London, to which the Dominions would make contributions with either ships or money. Their own contribution to the war effort had greatly raised the self awareness of the Dominions, indicative of which was a growing desire for a new relationship between themselves and Britain, in which greater account of Dominion sensibilities would be taken by British leaders. The Admiralty scheme did not

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6 The Jellicoe Papers Vol.1, op.cit; Document # 124.

7 Ibid; Document # 124.
appear to support that sentiment and the Canadian Prime Minister, Sir Robert Borden, spoke for all of the Dominion Prime Ministers (save that of Newfoundland) when he rejected the Admiralty proposal, preferring instead the development of independent Dominion navies.

The Dominion Prime Ministers did agree that in a war in which the Fleets were required to combine, a supreme naval authority, with adequate Dominion representation, would be desirable. They were prepared to welcome the services of an Admiralty representative to advise them, post-war, on ‘construction, armament and equipment, and organisation’ to ensure uniformity throughout the Empire’s Fleets. In December 1918, therefore, the Admiralty asked Admiral Jellicoe to visit Australia, New Zealand and Canada and to advise on the means ‘of ensuring the greatest possible homogeneity and cooperation between all the Naval Forces of the Empire.’ The details of Jellicoe’s report are superfluous to this thesis, save to note that he shared with the Admiralty a view of the Empire as a strategic whole – any threat to one part of the whole put the rest in danger.

It was from that perspective that the Admiralty considered post-war naval policy. And that policy had to deal with more than numbers of ships. There was also the matter of bases. The Admiralty identified the principal foreseeable strategic threat coming, for the first time, not to the British Isles from Europe, but to the widely scattered Imperial territories from the extra-European powers, the US and Japan. In the view of the Admiralty, those

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8 Ibid.
9 Jellicoe Papers Vol. 2; op.cit, p.290.
10 Ibid; p.296-312.
powers by their mere presence in the region constituted a challenge to the integrity of the
Empire and therefore to Britain’s world position economically, militarily and
diplomatically. East of Suez, the Admiralty knew that the Empire was virtually
defenceless.

As a consequence of the lack of a real threat in the region before 1914 and the exigencies
of the German naval challenge in Europe, for twenty years the infrastructure required to
support Britain’s Far Eastern naval defence forces had been neglected. The alliance with
Japan had permitted the withdrawal of the Navy’s Capital Ships from the Far East. Since
then, the length of a modern Capital Ship had virtually doubled, displacement had trebled,
beam had increased by a half, cost had quadrupled and fuel had changed from coal to oil. It
was impossible to redress the situation simply by despatching ships to the Far East. There
were no shore-based facilities to support them and allow them to operate. The Admiralty
knew all of the existing British dockyards East of Malta were thoroughly incapable of
servicing a modern fleet or, for that matter, a single modern Capital Ship. With all the
above deficiencies in mind, by the beginning of 1919 basing a large British Fleet in the Far
East was impossible. Yet a base was essential.11

Alterations in the practice of sea-power, in particular the change from wind power to fossil
fuel power, had greatly increased the reliance of the battlefleet upon its base, thereby
narrowing its range of action. Those alterations favoured the defensive position of those

11 J. Neidpath; The Singapore Naval Base and the Defence of Britain’s Eastern Empire, 1919-1941,
powers protected by wide oceans from other maritime powers.\textsuperscript{12} They therefore enhanced the position of the US and Japan to claim a pre-eminent naval position in their own local and regional seas. With the hostility existing between the US and Japan, the construction of greatly improved base facilities for the US Navy at Pearl Harbour, and the expansion of the Japanese and US Fleets,\textsuperscript{13} Britain was in danger of finding itself hostage to the whims of those powers in the Far East.

Meanwhile, the Admiralty’s ruminations on strategy were going on in something of a political vacuum. It could not be otherwise until the government identified its likely friends and likely enemies. Future planning could not be finalised without a political decision on Britain’s naval standard of strength and whether the Anglo-Japanese alliance would be renewed in 1921.

The Admiralty, nevertheless, naturally pondered those questions. A paper titled ‘The Naval Situation in the Far East’ was forwarded to the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) in October 1919. It stated,

\begin{quote}
The strategical centre of gravity may be said to have shifted from the North Sea to the Pacific, and future Naval Policy depends on our relations with Japan. The sooner, therefore, the intentions of the Government are known in regard to the renewal or otherwise of the Anglo-Japanese alliance the better.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12} See Appendix B

\textsuperscript{13} The Beatty Papers; Vol. 2, \textit{op.cit.} Document \# 25.

\textsuperscript{14} W. David McIntyre; The Rise and Fall of the Singapore Naval Base, 1919-1942, Archon Books, G.B.1979, p. 20.
The Naval Staff opined, regarding the Alliance, that the Government might be reluctant to 'prolong an Alliance which might cause them to be embroiled with the US.' If the Alliance were dropped through US pressure, or for any other reason, the strategic tableau in the Far Eastern/Pacific theatre would be dramatically altered. The Staff insisted that, if the Alliance were rescinded, then preparations to defend Britain's Eastern Empire would become of pressing importance. The Naval Staff also intimated the impossibility, at least in the foreseeable future, of maintaining a permanently established fleet in the Far East, due to the lack of suitable bases there. To facilitate the defence of both the Eastern and Western hemispheres, therefore, the Admiralty favoured locating Britain's naval forces in home waters, with a strong representation in the Mediterranean. Facilities capable of accommodating a large naval presence already existed in the Mediterranean and their central position enabled rapid fleet movement east or west as necessary.\(^{15}\)

When Admiral Beatty took office as First Sea Lord in November 1919, he was faced with the challenge of balancing commitments to resources in an era of technical change and reduced budgets.\(^{16}\) By and large, the views of the Naval Staff described above reflected his own. He realised the Royal Navy could not be strong in every sea,\(^{17}\) but to be viable as an Imperial defence force it would require to construct ships of the most modern design and be capable of a high degree of mobility. In addition to his relentless campaign for new construction, he addressed the essential issues concerning the mobility of the Fleet east of Suez.

\(^{15}\) Beatty Papers; Vol 2, \textit{op.cit.} Document # 5.

\(^{16}\) Ibid; Documents # 7 and # 27.

\(^{17}\) Ibid; Document # 57.
The difficulty of maintaining a British Fleet outside of European waters was compounded by a lack of adequate bases and by fuelling problems. The Naval Staff developed plans for a first class naval base at Singapore. What recommended Singapore to the Naval Staff as the most favourable site was its strategic value, straddling as it did the major sea-routes of the Far East, the Indian Ocean and Australasia.

The changeover from coal to oil had rendered Britain’s worldwide coaling stations obsolete, and Naval Staff proposals included the construction of a chain of fuel-oil reserve stocks from Malta to Singapore. Stocks were necessary for two reasons. Firstly, there were not, nor were there likely to be in the foreseeable future, enough British registered oil tankers to supply the British main fleet. Secondly, the total output of oil in the world was insufficient to meet the sudden demand that would be placed upon it if the British main fleet went to war, without dislocating industry throughout the world - a situation a major oil supplier country, such as the US, would be unlikely to tolerate.18

In January 1921, an interdepartmental committee chaired by Leo Amery (Under-Secretary of State for Colonies) began to consider the issues for the impending Imperial Conference.19 It was clear that Imperial defence and the future of the Japanese Alliance would be the dominant issues at that gathering. Naval Policy remained in limbo pending endorsement or rejection of the Naval Staff proposals by the CID. In the interim, while the planning staff worked on refining the details for the Singapore Base, the Admiralty promoted the scheme before the Amery Committee. It was presented there as a more

18 Neidpath; op. cit. p.11-12 and McIntyre; op. cit. p. 30.
appealing project to put before the Dominions for their subsidy than would the concept of a single Imperial Navy – to which the Dominions were reluctant to contribute.20

In May 1921, the Naval Staff submitted its security blueprint for the Eastern Empire to the Overseas Defence Committee (ODC).21 As expected by the Admiralty, the main challenge to the proposal came from the Treasury, whose representative in the ODC, E.W.H. Millar, robustly objected to the scheme, estimated to cost over an eight-year period *circa* 4.9 million pounds. Nevertheless, the proposal was passed on to the CID on 10 June, where its importance to the Dominions was strongly emphasised and where on 13 June it was agreed to recommend the project to the Cabinet.22

On 16 June 1921, Balfour, as Chairman of the Standing Defence Subcommittee of the CID, introduced to the Cabinet the Admiralty’s proposals on Singapore.23 At that meeting, despite its prior agreement, in May, to a Treasury proposal that the expenditure of all departments be reduced by twenty percent for the 1922-23 budget year, the Cabinet approved the Admiralty plans for the Singapore base and the accumulation of the Eastern route fuel reserve.24

In a similar way to his use of the 1919 principles (of Directive 616A) to control Naval Policy, Lloyd George now exercised control over the Treasury demands. He invoked a

20 McIntyre; *op.cit.* p.25.


22 McIntyre; *op.cit.* p.29.

23 CAB 23/26, Meeting of Cabinet, 16 June 1921.

caveat by which Cabinet reserved for itself the option to control 'any alterations in policy', for he could no longer allow strategic policy to drift.25

Since no maritime agreement had been reached with the United States, the British Government had to demonstrate its capacity to underwrite the security of its own vital interests and Imperial obligations. Defence spending was one aspect of that capacity; strategic alliance was another. As will be seen below, a decision in Cabinet on the latter accounted for the remarkably swift passage of the Admiralty's programmes through all its stages of approval.

Since 1902, the Anglo-Japanese alliance had served the interests of both parties well for the protection of their interests in the Far East. Its value had been demonstrated to all but the most anti-Japanese critics in Britain by the Japanese Naval victory over the Russians in 1905. The Alliance was renewed in 1905 and 1911 and again was proved of value by the Japanese naval contribution on Britain's behalf during World War One. Up until then the Alliance had been essentially a bi-lateral concern, but was unlikely to remain so. A developing American interest in the Far East and Pacific, pre-war, was marked by an increasingly hostile attitude toward Japan, especially after 1905 and the defeat of the Russian fleet by the Imperial Japanese Navy. Although, at the Versailles Peace Conference, the Alliance was not at stake, the Americans made clear their suspicions of

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25 In May 1921 Cabinet agreed with a Treasury proposal that a reduction of 20 per cent be applied in all Departmental spending for 1922-23, with a caveat that reserved "any alterations in policy" in the control of Cabinet. CAB 23/25, Meeting of Cabinet, 11 May 1921. See also Ferris, op cit. p.77.
Japan and disapproval of Britain’s support of Japanese claims at the Conference.\textsuperscript{26}

American hostility to Japan exposed Britain’s conundrum for the working of a Far-Eastern policy. As articulated in December 1919 by Sir John Tilley, assistant Under Secretary at the Foreign Office, ‘owing to Japan and (the) US being apparently irreconcilable, it is very difficult for us to work a policy in the Far East co-jointly with both of them; while it is essential for us, owing to our naval weakness in the Pacific to have a friendly Japan.’\textsuperscript{27}

What was true at the end of 1919 remained the case in mid-1921. American attitudes still stood in the way of the Anglo-Japanese alliance and good Anglo-American relations. But until Britain was in a position to establish a stronger naval presence in the Far East, a diplomatic arrangement with one or the other power to bolster its present position in the region was essential. To leave British interests and obligations in the Eastern Empire entirely undefended was to risk letting slip from British hands the destiny of the Dominions and have them as a prize of regional power politicking. Australian Prime Minister Hughes highlighted the concerns of the Dominion Leaders for their security. In October 1920, he urged that the Imperial Conference be convened no later than June 1921, since the issues of the Empire’s naval and military defence and the establishment of a common Imperial Foreign policy and the machinery to make it work were matters of

\textsuperscript{26} For examples see DBFP 1\textsuperscript{st} Series, Vol. v, op. cit; Document # 388, enclosure 1 note by Balfour and Documents # 414and # 353. Also DBFP 1\textsuperscript{st} Series, Vol. vi, op. cit; p.564, and Documents # 464, # 484, # 417, # 421and # 439 Note: Although Britain had undertaken to support Japan at the Peace Conference, neither Britain nor America was entirely satisfied with Japanese gains at the Peace Conference, especially in China. However, neither power felt able strongly to contest Japanese claims, firstly because of the necessity of making the Peace Settlement and securing the League of Nations, secondly, because Japan held the dominant strategic position in the theatre. Once the League was established, the Western powers felt confident they could pressure Japan, within the League, to disgorge its gains.

\textsuperscript{27} DBFP, 1\textsuperscript{st} Series, Vol. vi, op. cit. Document # 617.
pressing need. British Leaders who had viewed American strength, in conjunction with an Anglo-French *entente*, in terms of an asset, now perceived its potential to undermine Britain, in the event of trouble with Japan, by subversion of Dominions to its protective shelter.

The renewal of the Alliance with Japan had gained currency as a policy among some, but not all, of Britain’s decision-makers. Among the dissenters in December 1920 was Winston Churchill, at that time Secretary of State for War and Air. Churchill objected on the ground that there could be no policy ‘more fatal’ to Imperial unity than dependence upon an alliance with the Japanese as a substitute for a meaningful British naval presence. Such an arrangement would not receive support from the Dominions. It was Japan, not America, they feared and they would not countenance an alliance which was directed against America.

Lloyd George responded that a ‘more fatal’ policy to Imperial unity would be for Britain to remain at the ‘mercy’ of the Americans. Lloyd George was forming the view that the Americans were attempting to take advantage of Britain, at a moment of weakness, to gain the whip-hand in the Pacific. It was not only the American refusal to modify their naval construction programme and the continuing development of their naval position in the Eastern Pacific which contributed to that perception. The documents reveal that the pressure from America upon Britain for war debt recovery was increasing. This was injurious in itself for Britain, but insult was added to injury by the appearance of an

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28 CAB. 23/22, Meeting of Cabinet, 12 October 1920.

29 CAB 2/3, Minutes of a meeting of 14 December 1920, Ferris; *op. cit.* p.96, McIntyre; *op. cit.* p.24.
absence of even-handedness on the part of the Americans towards their several debtors — their most rigorous demands being reserved for Britain.\textsuperscript{30}

If perceptions of Britain’s vulnerability were indeed driving an opportunist American diplomacy against Britain, then, in the view of Lloyd George, Britain’s best strategy was to disabuse its former associate of such notions. To do that, Britain had to find the means to show that it could and would meet all of its obligations and protect its interests. While acknowledging Churchill’s objections, Lloyd George felt there was no real alternative but to find a substitute for a meaningful Royal Naval presence.

It was not just that the Naval Staff had made clear the inadequacies of the infrastructure to support such a presence or that the Government had pledged itself to economies in defence spending. If Britain gave any indication of building up its position militarily in the region there was always the risk of provoking a naval race with the Americans. Lloyd George pinned his hopes on diplomacy. If the Dominions could be induced to rally behind a renewal of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, then the strength of Britain’s diplomatic position in East Asia and the Western Pacific would be reaffirmed. (Outright British hegemony in the Pacific was no longer achievable nor was it a necessary goal for Lloyd George. However, regional stability attained by means of a balance of power between Britain, under the aegis of the Alliance, and the US would have been an entirely acceptable outcome at this time.) To secure their support, the British Government had to assure the Dominions that the Alliance renewal would not have the opposite effect and exacerbate the tensions in the region by appearing to be directed against America. Framing renewal in

\textsuperscript{30} CAB. 23/21 and CAB. 23/23, Meetings of Cabinet, 21 May 1920 and 17 December 1920.
those terms was a highly complex task in which the Foreign Secretary, Curzon, played a significant part.

Foreign Office officials had not been blind to Japan’s acquisitiveness in the Far East and, during the period of Britain’s preoccupations with war in Europe, had deplored Britain’s impotence to influence developments there and feared the advantages Japan might garner to itself during Britain’s distraction. That concern grew during the marginalisation of Foreign Office officials from policy formulations by the War Cabinet. The end of the war and the replacement of Balfour by Curzon as Foreign Secretary, in late 1919, saw the Foreign Office looking to reclaim its prerogatives on Foreign Policy initiatives.

In the autumn of 1919, soon after his appointment as Foreign Secretary, Curzon took a tough stance towards Japan. He gave a strong warning to the Japanese Ambassador that Japan must restrain herself in China or risk international isolation. He pointed out that although Britain had honoured its diplomatic obligations to support Japanese claims at the Peace Conference, it was not prepared to guarantee them. In so doing, Curzon had not only the specific interests of Britain in mainland China in mind, but was mindful also of America’s attitudes towards China. Curzon at that time felt that ‘America is really necessary to the League and even where they are not quite reasonable we should spare no efforts to meet her points of view.’ Initially, therefore, it seems that Curzon saw the

32 Ibid; Document # 429.
33 Ibid; Document # 340.
alliance as expendable, as long as Britain could count on the support of America, within the League, to maintain regional stability.

By the end of 1920, Curzon had altered his view in favour of Alliance renewal. Disillusioned by the US failure to join the League, he saw the Americans as unreliable and cooperation between Britain and the US as unlikely, regardless of whether the Alliance were to be renewed or not. Curzon then framed his recommendations in favour of renewal within the context of British foreign policy as a strategic whole. He explained that the withdrawal of the US into isolation cast its shadow, not only over Britain’s predicament with respect to the defence of the Eastern Empire, but also over British security in the context of Europe. The fact that the Americans had not endorsed the Peace Treaty rendered Wilson’s security assurances to France null and void and the prospects for a lasting peace in Europe had become more uncertain. Curzon took stock of Britain’s own position in the light of combinations which might form against it – one between Germany and Russia seemed, to Curzon, most likely. He recognised ‘the necessity of avoiding any danger of misunderstanding with the U.S.A.’ but pointed to the necessity of having a friendly Japan, due to Britain’s weak naval position in the Pacific. Despite its imperfections, the Alliance was all that stood between Britain and Imperial isolation. Similarly, it was all that stood between Japan and Imperial isolation. If the Alliance were to lapse, the Japanese, placed as they were between a hostile China and a hostile US, might seek security in a combination with Russia and/or Germany. Such an outcome could result in the Admiralty’s worst

34 Ibid; Document # 789.
strategic nightmare - namely having to face powerful enemy coalitions in two hemispheres simultaneously.\(^3\)

By early 1921, Curzon’s view came into prominence as British policy-makers considered proposals for renewal, when the Canadian Government expressed its objections in a telegram from the Governor-General of Canada, Sir Robert Borden, to the Colonial Secretary. According to Borden, the Canadian view was that conditions in the Pacific were so altered as would cause renewal of the Alliance to be construed by the US as an ‘unfriendly exclusion.’ The Canadians wanted, instead, to send their own envoy to Washington, on behalf of the Imperial Cabinet, to ascertain whether the Harding Government might not accept inclusion in a Pacific conference to thrash out the relevant issues. The Imperial Prime Ministers could then properly consider the options available to them at the Imperial Conference when they convened in June.\(^3\)

Simultaneously with the Canadian Governor-General’s telegram, the British Cabinet considered a similar message from the Canadian Prime Minister, suggesting also that Sir Robert Borden would be ideally fitted to sound out the Americans as to the future of the Japanese Alliance, prior to the June Imperial Conference\(^3\). Curzon’s response was governed by his determination that in matters of policy the tail did not wag the dog. He

\(^3\) At this time the Admiralty supported Curzon’s view only to the extent of suggesting that an “understanding” with Japan would be useful as an interim measure. The Admiralty’s ambivalent attitude regarding outright renewal may be attributable to a recognition that the Alliance antagonised the US but it was also concerned to avoid any consideration of the Alliance as an alternative to the strengthening of Britain’s own naval position in the region, in the longer term. The War Office, by contrast, was very strongly in favour of renewal. Ibid. p.1053-5.

\(^3\) CAB.23/24, A Conference of Ministers, 18 February 1921. See also Appendix C.

\(^3\) CAB.23/24, A Conference of Ministers, 18 February 1921.
'hoped the Government would not place their foreign policy in the hands of a representative of the Dominions in a vital matter of this kind.' He advised the Cabinet the question of the Alliance's renewal was being pursued by various British Government departments and that an Interdepartmental Committee, chaired by Leo Amery, had responsibility for considering the Conference's agenda, central to which was the Japanese Alliance. By June, a great deal of material would have been accumulated to assist the Government in making a decision. The Government decided to follow Lord Curzon's advice to postpone any decision until the various investigating departments had completed their reports and the full extent of Britain's own diplomatic and strategic options was made clear.

The Cabinet met at the end of May 1921 to consider the issues surrounding the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Curzon, at the request of the Prime Minister, spoke to the subject. He began by providing a short history of the Alliance and of the benefits it had brought to Britain and to the region, generally. With respect to concerns raised at an earlier meeting, Curzon emphasised that the terms of the Alliance did not commit Britain to go to the aid of Japan, if Japan found herself at war with the US. He pointed out that in 1911, with just such a contingency in mind, a revision of the Alliance saw the inclusion of Article 4.

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38 Ibid.
39 CAB 23/24, Meeting of Cabinet, 28 January 1921.
40 CAB 23/24, A Conference of Ministers, 18 February 1921.
41 CAB 23/25, Meeting of Cabinet, 30 May 1921.
That inclusion ensured that

should either High Contracting Party conclude a treaty of general arbitration with a third power nothing in the agreement should entail upon such contracting party an obligation to go to war with the Power with whom such Treaty of Arbitration was in force.

Curzon pointed out that the Japanese understood that Britain considered Article 4 to be in operation in consideration of an Arbitration Treaty between Britain and the US. Further, in its existing form the Alliance did not, in any case, entirely accord with the Covenant of the League of Nations. A re-draft would be necessary to bring it into line with the obligations of both Japan and Britain, under the terms of the Covenant.

Curzon then summarised the arguments that had been advanced for and against the renewal of the Alliance. The principal focus of the argument against the Alliance was that it was a source of antagonism to the Americans. Curzon felt that the revision of Article 4 would remove all justification for American suspicions of the Alliance’s intent.

The Foreign Secretary then presented, at length, the arguments in favour of renewal which he himself believed made ‘on the whole the stronger case.’ He pointed out that the Alliance had proved itself to be unquestionably ‘a great and substantial success’ at different times during its existence. Further, it might well be required to repeat its success in the future, against an anti-British combination of a ‘resuscitated Russia and a revived Germany.’ Curzon reminded the Cabinet that the Alliance had afforded Britain the opportunity to exercise more influence in Tokyo than might otherwise have been the case and ‘had given us the means of putting a check on Japan’s ambitions.’ Also, in favour of the Alliance,
Curzon pointed out that as long as it was in force, it absolved Britain from the great expense of maintaining large naval and military forces in the Far East. In addition, Britain’s continued association with Japan would be regarded favourably by European powers, such as France and Holland, having interests in the theatre. Finally, the Japanese wanted to renew the Alliance. Since they had been scrupulous in upholding their part in the agreement, a British decision to withdraw was likely to cause them offence. If offence turned to ‘a spirit of retaliation’ the Japanese might make themselves ‘very objectionable’ - a matter of acute concern as Japan was a nation rapidly growing richer and stronger. Curzon wondered ‘whether we could afford to risk that hostility’ when the Japanese were ready to accept any modifications rather than see the Alliance come to an end.

Curzon’s comments on the reliability of the Japanese in their support of Britain drew positive response from both Balfour and Chamberlain. Curzon then went on to cite other authorities favouring renewal. Among them were the Admiralty and War Office, the Prime Ministers of Australia and New Zealand, and Britain’s Ambassador to Washington, Sir Auckland Geddes.42

Having emphasised the Alliance’s value to Britain and the Far East, Curzon then examined for the Cabinet the possibility of a tripartite alliance between the US, Japan and Great Britain. Although Curzon was disposed to recommend such an agreement, he did not

42 Sir Auckland Geddes had originally favoured seeking an entente with the US and dropping the Alliance to facilitate that. By 1921, his view had altered in favour of Alliance renewal. As did Lloyd George, Geddes had come to think that renewal might have a “sobering effect on the American extremists who were always calling for additional armaments.” Clearly he referred to the supporters of the American challenge to Britain. Balfour interrupted Curzon’s emphasis on Geddes’s arguments for renewal. He pointed out that under no circumstances could renewal be framed in terms of an anti-American position.
regard it as achievable but, by means of dialogue, the British Government would
endeavour to assuage the fears of the US, and of China, that renewal intended any
unfavourable intentions towards them. He therefore advised that the Alliance be renewed
but with modifications to bring it into line with League principles, and that its ten-year
duration should be reduced. He urged, in the meantime, that an interim renewal of at least
six months would allow for the settlement of all new details.

The issue thereupon came under general discussion. Churchill, who by then had been
moved out of his position as War Secretary to Secretary of State for the Colonies,
expressed the hope that Canada also might be brought into the fold to support renewal – if
its concerns were carefully handled. Canada had a goal little different from that of the other
dominions. Motivated by fear, it targeted peace and stability in the region. He expressed
the hope that the Canadian proposals for a Pacific Conference would, therefore, not be put
aside. If at a convocation of the sort suggested by Canada of all the concerned powers,
Japan and the US could come to some agreement about their differences – which were
essentially about China and Japanese immigration to America’s Pacific Coast – then
enormous advantages would accrue to all. He then turned to the implications should the
navalists in the US convince their Government that, as Britain was in Alliance with Japan,
the US would require to build against both countries. Since the British Government had
made a commitment to a one-power standard, the expense, in that event, would be
staggering. Churchill was uncertain of the US reaction but he wanted the dominions to be
fully appraised of the value of renewing the Alliance and to be advised that the British

\footnote{See Appendix D}
Government also favoured a Pacific Conference. In all respects, Churchill essentially agreed with Curzon’s recommendations.

Chamberlain endorsed Churchill’s views on a Pacific Conference, as did Balfour. Chamberlain thought that additional advantage might be had if the President of the US, rather than the British Government, took the responsibility of calling it. He also expressed the opinion that, apart from all other considerations, the most important point was to prevent Japan from drifting into a Russo/German combination. Montague, Secretary of State for India, observed that, although the Alliance was not popular with the people of India, he favoured its renewal. While he also favoured the idea of a Pacific Conference, he cautioned that the Japanese would require assurances that it was not a proposal that would be contrary to their interests.

Curzon responded that arranging a conference would take some time and something would have to be done about the Alliance in the meantime. It was not his opinion that the Conference should in any way conflict with renewal; therefore renewal should be carried out before the Conference took place.44

It is scarcely surprising that Lloyd George endorsed his Foreign Secretary’s views as ‘irresistible’ – especially those regarding the capacity of a Russo/German combination to draw in the Japanese. He hoped such a focus would render the Alliance palatable to all of the Dominion Prime Ministers. Unity in the Imperial Cabinet would enhance his chances of putting together the kind of diplomatic package that would not so alarm the Americans

44 CAB 23/25, Meeting of Cabinet, 30 May 1921.
as to cause them to escalate their naval construction programmes, but that would
discourage them from encroaching upon Britain’s vital interests in the region. The
emphasis he placed upon bringing the Japanese into the picture first, before any moves
were made towards arranging a Pacific Conference, clearly indicates that he had no
intention of approaching the Americans again with anything that resembled a ‘cap-in-hand’
attitude.

At the close of the meeting the Prime Minister had the full support of the Cabinet for
Curzon’s recommendations,\(^{45}\) but they formed only part of what was required to secure
Dominion support. To complete the whole, the British Government had to respond to the
whole of the Dominion concerns, not only with regard to the establishment of a common
Imperial Foreign Policy but, as so succinctly expressed by Hughes, with regard to the
machinery to make it work. In the course of his mission to advise the Dominions on
defence in 1919, Jellicoe had identified Australasia’s defencelessness against naval attack,
unless supported by the Royal Navy.\(^ {46}\) By itself, the renewal of the Alliance with Japan
could never, now, pass muster in the Imperial Cabinet as an alternative to a Royal Naval
presence in the region. To satisfy the Dominion Leaders, the British Government required
to table a naval policy at the Imperial Conference.

It was from that point on that the Admiralty’s Singapore base strategy made swift passage
– through the ODC (7\(^{\text{th}}\) June) the CID (13\(^{\text{th}}\) June) and finally through Cabinet. There, on 16
June, it was presented by Balfour, in his capacity as Chairman of the Standing Defence

\(^{45}\) Ibid.

Sub-committee of the CID, and was approved for submission to the Imperial Conference. Balfour reported that, whether the Alliance were renewed or not, it would not remove the need for the development of a naval base at Singapore. The strategic efficacy of the Singapore Base, however, was not the specific concern of Cabinet at that meeting. What were considered was how the plan supported the British Government’s diplomatic objectives and how the plan matched Cabinet’s pledge to reduce service spending to the minimum compatible with the maintenance of Britain’s Imperial obligations and national safety.

The need to interdict any American designs upon Britain’s role as the mainstay of Dominion security was one objective. Another was the desire to place before the Imperial Cabinet a practical plan to back up Imperial foreign policies. Upon those considerations, the Cabinet concluded that the Government’s submission be accompanied by a statement of Britain’s continued commitment to sea-power as the basis of national and Imperial defence. The statement would acknowledge the Pacific ‘as the most pressing question in this connection’, in good earnest of which Britain was ‘prepared to take the lead in developing (Singapore) as a naval base.’

For the financial aspects, Leo Amery (now Parliamentary and Financial Secretary, Admiralty) joined the meeting. Amery was well placed to attest to the Admiralty perspective on the economic aspects of Singapore. When Under-Secretary of State to the Colonies, he had headed the Interdepartmental Committee set up at the very beginning of

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47 CAB 23/26, Meeting of Cabinet, 16 June 1921.

48 Ibid.
the year to consider a breadth of issues relating to the scheduled Imperial Conference. Among the issues brought to the attention of the committee was the Admiralty’s perspective on the funding of the Singapore Base.\textsuperscript{49} It was the view of the Admiralty that, while the Dominions had shown reluctance to contribute financially towards the maintenance of one Imperial Navy, they might more readily take up some financial responsibility for a facility which was very clearly directed at the security of their region. No great expenditure was envisaged immediately and, overall, the cost of the development would be spread over some eight years. Since the Cabinet favoured the plan on the understanding that ‘no considerable expenditure need be expected for the next two years’, the last statement in support of the submission advised the Dominions of the British Government’s intention to support the base ‘as funds become available.’ At the same time it conveyed to them that their own contributions would be significant in determining how soon the facility might be completed.\textsuperscript{50}

In terms of prestige, power and resources the Empire was the measure of Britain’s global standing. There is no question that the Lloyd George Government was committed to its preservation. When rivalry between the two most powerful Pacific nations, the US and Japan, showed signs of developing into a new naval race and threatened the stability of the Asia-Pacific region, the British government moved to preserve its interests. Thus, although constrained by budgetary concerns, including war debts owing to the US, Cabinet authorised funding for the resumption of new naval construction and endorsed Admiralty

\textsuperscript{49} Roskill; Naval Policy, Vol.1, \textit{op.cit.} p.292.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
plans for the naval base at Singapore and the establishment of a string of fuelling stations to the Far East.

Those measures were intended to assure the Dominion Prime Ministers of Britain’s commitment to restore, over time, a significant Royal Naval capability for deployment in Asia-Pacific waters. To the Imperial Conference Cabinet it also recommended renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance since, in the interim, a lack of naval power made an alliance with at least one of the regional sea-powers mandatory.

The British government had reached the view that if the Alliance could not eliminate, entirely, the risks to Imperial security, it could reduce them substantially – and might usefully serve the interests of arms limitation in the region. Whether the Dominion leaders could be brought to share that view and give their support to Britain’s regional policies remained to be seen.
Chapter 4

The Imperial Conference of 1921.

Following World War One, the Asia-Pacific region gained a particular prominence in respect of Imperial Defence. Concerns for serious instability in the region were linked to growing tensions between the US and Japan. Relationships between those two nations were severely strained by their differences over China's sovereign rights, trade and questions of race and immigration. Alone among the world’s major powers, the US and Japan continued to arm. Both had embarked upon very large naval construction programmes. It appeared that a struggle for hegemony over the region loomed at a time when Imperial Defence there was at its weakest.

For almost twenty years the Anglo-Japanese Alliance had served to underwrite Imperial security against real and potential enemies, but few in Britain and none in the Dominions were prepared to continue in the Alliance if it meant supporting Japan in a war against America. Yet without the Alliance the security of the Eastern Empire would be decidedly under-insured. For Britain could neither secure a new alliance partner in the United States nor, were it to adopt a position of neutrality between the two Pacific Powers, readily project a naval presence of its own into the region to protect its interests.

Although Dominion Leaders and His Majesty's Government were of one mind in viewing regional stability as the most desirable goal, they were divided on how stability might be achieved. By 16 June 1921, the Lloyd George Government had drawn up its own resolutions on how stability, and therefore Imperial security, might best be achieved. The resolutions were comprised of three key elements. First, His Majesty's Government recommended the maintenance of the Anglo-Japanese alliance. Second, Cabinet endorsed
new naval construction, and the renewal of base facilities specifically to serve the
deployment of forces to the Far East. Finally, the Imperial Conference would be advised of
His Majesty’s Government’s favourable views of proposals for a Pacific Conference.

The Government counted on unity of Imperial support for the strategic proposals contained
in the first two elements of its resolutions, particularly in respect of Alliance renewal, to
strengthen Britain’s diplomatic hand in the event that the third, Pacific Conference
proposals, came to fruition.

The Prime Minister, in particular, looked to diplomacy, backed by naval preparedness, to
preserve Britain’s imperial and maritime interests in the Far East from encroachments by
either the US or Japan. To those two Pacific powers the Cabinet resolutions were intended
to convey specific messages. To the Japanese Government, Alliance renewal was intended
to convey the reliability of British friendship and to dispel any concerns there that Britain
was working to form an Anglo-Saxon coalition with the US against Japan. To the US
Government, Cabinet intended to convey that it would not alter British Foreign policy
merely at the whim of the United States without some quid pro quo. The second element
warned both Pacific Powers that, although Britain’s resources had been severely strained
by the war, the capacity and the will to provide all means to defend its rights in the region
remained.

Finally, the expression of a disposition to participate in a Pacific Conference left the way
open to the New Administration in the US to join the Alliance partners for tripartite talks

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1 If it also made the US appear as the aggressive third party where a diplomatic settlement between the other
two was in place, then so much the better. For then the Allies might occupy the moral high ground in respect
of subsequent proposals for arms limitations talks.
on regional issues. It was Lloyd George's belief that if agreement could be reached there, then chances of successful arms limitations talks taking place afterwards would be very good. Much depended upon whether the British presentation would succeed in persuading the Dominion representatives to its view. Lloyd George therefore gave the Imperial Conference his close attention - not only in his opening address but also throughout, meeting with the Dominion Prime Ministers on no less than eleven subsequent occasions.

The Imperial Conference opened in London on 20 June 1921. Whilst world affairs in general featured on the agenda, the Conference was dominated by the questions of naval power, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the problems of the Asia-Pacific region. In his opening speech, Lloyd George set the tone of his government's proposals. The Prime Minister reminded the delegates that the Alliance with Japan had been 'a valuable factor (in maintaining peace and fair play for all nations) in the past' and that the Japanese had been faithful at a time when the British Empire found itself in 'serious and very critical need.' It was the desire of the British Government that that 'well-tried friendship' be preserved and applied to the 'solution of all questions in the Far East where Japan has special interests and where we ourselves, like the US, desire equal opportunities' of trade with China.

He acknowledged the acrimony that existed between Japan and US but saw a part for Britain as broker of better relationships between them. For it was his hope that the region would not divide along racial lines. As for good relationships between Britain and the US, Lloyd George recognised their importance, since it was the desire of the British Government 'to avoid the growth of armaments in the Pacific or elsewhere.' He remained hopeful of the possibility of arms limitation and was 'ready to discuss with America's Statesmen any proposal for the limitation of armament which they wished to set out.'
The Prime Minister concluded his address with a warning. Should the US and Japan engage in an all out competition in naval armaments in a bid to secure hegemony in the Pacific, Britain’s Imperial interests in the region would not be left to the whims of those two powers. Britain would act to safeguard its interests since ‘We cannot forget that the very life of the UK, as also of Australia and New Zealand, indeed the whole Empire, has been built upon sea-power and that sea-power is necessarily the basis of the whole Empire’s existence. We have, therefore, to look to the measures which our security requires, we aim at nothing more, we cannot possibly be content with less.’

Despite the Prime Minister’s strong pro-alliance advocacy, it became clear over the next few days that the Dominion Leaders saw their strategic interests as lying, in the long term, in solidarity among the White races of the Pacific – inclusive of the US. As anticipated in Cabinet, questions were raised on the propensity of Alliance renewal adversely to affect relations with the US. Antipathetic attitudes towards renewal on those grounds varied in intensity among the Dominion Leaders, although that of Australian Prime Minister William Hughes (and of his New Zealand counterpart, William Massey) was tempered by a certain pragmatism. The antipodean dominions were especially aware of their vulnerability in the incipient instability of the region.

Hughes felt that ‘the case for renewal (was) very strong, if not indeed overwhelming’ at least until naval defence was put in place that was adequate to the needs of Australia. Hughes was prepared to support renewal, therefore, at least as a temporary measure, and in a modified form, to bring it into line with the League of Nations Covenant. But he also

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made it clear where he believed Australia’s real interests lay when he remarked that ‘any future treaty with Japan must specifically exclude the possibility of a war with the USA’. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance must not take a form that suggested it to be directed against America.

General Jan Smuts, representing South Africa, was half-helpful to the British point of view. He had a perspective of the Americans as obtuse but necessary friends and of the Japanese as ‘the Prussians of the East’ – whom it was important not to antagonise.

On 27 June, Lloyd George attempted to dispel all notions that the Alliance was directed against the US, but rather was aimed in quite a different direction entirely. The Prime Minister advised the Dominions of Britain’s concerns of a possible German-Russian rapprochement and the threat that portended for Imperial interests in the Far East. Curzon took up the same theme when he addressed the conference on the following day. Together with Balfour’s introduction of the Admiralty’s Singapore scheme, the British ministers hoped that the Dominion Leaders would accept that the Alliance, in combination with the Singapore scheme, was an issue quintessential to Imperial strategic security and support it in that context.

Curzon was of the opinion that whether the Alliance caused friction between Britain and the United States was too narrow a perspective on which to make a decision. The wider

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3 Nish; *op.cit.* p.333.

4 Dingman; *op.cit.* p.169.

5 CAB 23/26, Meeting of Cabinet, 30 June 1921.
question was regional stability. As he saw it, the main argument against renewal lay in the
aggressive behaviour of the Japanese in China. Britain’s commercial and diplomatic
position there might be adversely affected if, by renewal, it appeared that Britain condoned
that behaviour. On the other hand, the Alliance had, in the past, been a stabilising force in
the Far East. Curzon acknowledged Japan’s aggressive expansionist tendencies but warned
of the pitfalls that might conceivably lie ahead were Britain to terminate the association –
lost would be any chance of influencing the Japanese to modify their conduct. Further,
deprived of the Alliance, the Japanese might well seek security in new combinations
(Russia-Germany) which in ‘ten or twenty years time alter the whole face of the Eastern
world and constitute a danger to our position.’ Curzon put up two proposals both of which
involved renewal of the Alliance. One course was to renew the Alliance for a period of
four to five years and to so frame its terms that the US might also come in. It would be a
renewal arrangement independent of, but not inconsistent with, any Pacific Conference.
Alternatively, the Alliance might be renewed as it stood for one year to provide for a
Pacific Conference taking place in that interval. In either plan, it seems clear that his
Majesty’s Government’s intention was to approach a Pacific Conference with renewal of
the Alliance already in hand. Balfour reinforced that position when he introduced the
Admiralty’s Singapore Base scheme, making it clear that friendship with Japan was a
strategic necessity until the British naval base at Singapore had been strengthened and
made capable of accepting a modern fleet. To encourage the Dominion Leaders to support
renewal, he told them that he believed it might be possible to transform the Alliance into a
kind of Monroe Doctrine, consistent with the League Covenant – possibly, too, with US
participation.

The arguments held no sway with Canadian Prime Minister Arthur Meighen. Harmonious
relationships with its powerful American neighbour were an essential of Canadian foreign
policy. Meighen strongly pressed his Government’s point of view that if the Alliance were renewed, British/American relations would plummet. Canada could not subscribe to that and would not agree to renewal.

He refuted the power of the Alliance to restrain the Japanese. They had been, as Lloyd George had said, loyal allies – but only when it had suited them. Elsewhere, and particularly in China, they had persistently pursued their own aggressive, selfish aims, and would continue to act as they saw fit. He argued that were the British Empire to continue its Alliance with Japan, in the eyes of the world it would become tainted with the guilt of association. Thereby, ‘our standing with all other nations’ would be diminished. Further, it was Meighen’s opinion that President Harding was ready to welcome talks on naval limitation but was so opposed to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance that, were it renewed, any prospect of limitations talks with the American Government would be placed in immediate jeopardy.6

The Australian and New Zealand Prime Ministers, however, continued to favour renewal. Hughes pointed out that US naval dominance in the Eastern Pacific, of itself, allowed Canada to assume some assurance of security. In the Western Pacific the position was altogether different. The security of the antipodean dominions relied, perforce, upon a friendly Japan. Hughes could not vote against renewal unless America was prepared to enter into some kind of agreement that might replace the Alliance and guarantee the security of Australia.7 Further, Hughes responded to Meighan’s arguments that renewal put


7 Nish; op.cit. p.335. Massey supported Hughes’ view and added support to the probability of an approach by Germany to Japan. Ibid.
at risk Britain's international esteem and the possibility of talks with America. He put the counter argument that the act of throwing over a friend, who had stood by them in the war, was just as likely to lose Britain esteem in the eyes of the American public.

Those views of the three Dominion Prime Ministers and those of General Smuts who had 'adopted a somewhat balancing attitude', part of which had been to favour discussions with Japan and the US, 'leading to an exchange of identic notes', were summarised by Curzon in Cabinet on 30 June. Curzon next reported an alteration in the advice of Ambassador Geddes from that of six months ago and gave an account of what appeared to be the current position of the US Government. His report was based upon advice arrived at informally by Geddes in Washington and from a recent conversation of his own with the US Ambassador to Britain, Colonel George Harvey.

In November 1920, Ambassador Geddes had advised that Britain renew its Alliance with Japan. On 6 June 1921, Geddes altered his opinion to recommend that an attempt be made to replace the Alliance with a tripartite agreement between Britain, Japan and the US. Geddes explained that over the past months 'anti-British propaganda in the US' had increased 'popular American suspicion of the Anglo-Japanese alliance.' As to the official view, Geddes had been allowed indirectly to understand that renewal would be considered 'disastrous' - and, at the least, as part of a process aimed at hampering America's 'legitimate economic development.'

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8 CAB. 23/26, Meeting of 30 June 1921.
9 See Appendix E
11 Ibid. Document # 294.
On 24 June 1921, Geddes reported on an informal conversation with the American Secretary of State Charles E. Hughes. Hughes had advised him that a decision by Britain to renew its Alliance with Japan would be viewed in America with deep suspicion, which not even modifications, however specifically they excluded the US from the operational obligations of the Treaty, would be likely to dispel. Geddes had raised the question of whether some inclusive, as opposed to an exclusive, arrangement might be possible with the US if the Imperial Conference came to decide ‘at least that it was unable to cast forth Japan as if she were unclean.’ From the discussion that followed, Geddes formed the opinion that there was now a possibility of engaging the US Government in some form of tripartite agreement with Britain and Japan. He did not envisage anything as formal as a treaty (which would be unlikely to be ratified by the Senate) but if ‘agreement could be reached on essential character and practical application of principles’ a declaration of policy might be embodied in an exchange of identical notes. Geddes further reported that Hughes was ‘clearly hopeful that by adoption of some such policy difficulties in America, which he regards as certain to attend a renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty, may be avoided.’

On 28 June, in ‘a friendly conversation’, Curzon raised the matter of the Anglo-Japanese agreement with the American Ambassador in London. He told Harvey that a decision on the matter would be arrived at ‘in a few days time, if not earlier’ by His Majesty’s Government and the Dominion Premiers. None at the conference had any wish to renew the agreement ‘in a form that was likely to estrange, or cause trouble with, America.’ It was therefore ‘very desirable that the British Government should have some authoritative

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12 Ibid; Document #308.
13 Ibid; Document #313.
knowledge of what was in the mind of the American Government on the subject.' Harvey responded that in that respect his Government considered the initiative to raise the subject lay with Britain.\(^\text{14}\)

Although the Geddes-Hughes conversation had touched upon the possibility of a tripartite agreement, it had it in consideration as an alternative option to a renewal of the Treaty between Britain and Japan. However much the British Government might desire talks with its US counterpart on Asia-Pacific issues, it wished to do so, as far as possible, with its diplomatic leverage intact. Curzon, therefore, put to Harvey the hypothesis of an Imperial Conference conclusion that renewal of Britain's agreement with Japan was 'desirable in some form or another.' He asked next whether 'the mere fact of renewal' would be a serious inhibitor in any initiative he might then take to propose discussions within the US Government. Harvey was of the opinion that it would not – but 'would be respectfully treated and examined by his Government.' After acknowledging the recent interest shown by the Harding Government in calling a naval conference, Curzon went on to suggest a range of issues, apart from defence, that with discussion might lead to the conciliation of several interests of the nations concerned. He was satisfied, from Harvey's response, that a proposal to initiate discussions over the extended area suggested would be received favourably by the US Government.\(^\text{15}\) In the light of the above revelations and, while he expressed his own doubts as to whether the Japanese Government would agree to an

\(^{14}\) Ibid.

\(^{15}\) Ibid.
exchange of identical notes, Curzon sought Cabinet approval to approach both the Japanese and US Ambassadors.\textsuperscript{16}

He had in mind ‘while explaining to them frankly the difficulties with which His Majesty’s Government were faced, [to] ask them to ascertain the views of their respective Governments.’ In the meantime, if he were to proceed with those inquiries, Curzon requested a suspension, for a short time, of further discussion of the subject with the Dominion Premiers. Thereupon, Cabinet considered the possibilities of concluding a defensive Alliance with Japan against any European power or combination of European Powers with reference to the Western Pacific region (encompassing China) and of a ‘tripartite arrangement which would include the whole of the Pacific, following the British point of view of the “open door”’.\textsuperscript{17} It was noted that war between the US and Japan seemed unlikely to break out over the next few years. Neither possessed bases from which to strike across the Pacific at the shores of the other. Even were Japan to occupy the Philippines (a US territory), it would be a move more likely to be to the disadvantage of Britain than to the US. Indeed, Britain, rather than the US, was really the only power that Japan was in a position to attack. In summing up the Prime Minister pointed to certain fundamental points that had to be adhered to namely,

i) Great Britain could not quarrel with the United States of America.

ii) It was essential not to insult Japan by doing anything which would be tantamount to casting her aside after the loyal way in which she had observed the Treaty in the past.

\textsuperscript{16} Curzon was correct in that Japan did not want the whole of Asia-Pacific issues to come under international scrutiny.

\textsuperscript{17} CAB.23/26, Meeting of Cabinet, 30 June 1921, \textit{op.cit.}
iii) China must be carried with us and be a party to any conversations.18

He reminded Cabinet that the Alliance had long been invaluable in terms of Anglo-Japanese relations. Further, the Japanese had been generously loyal. Although it was doubtful whether the terms of their Alliance obliged them to go so far, they had entered the last war on Britain’s side. They had done so not because of an enmity towards Germany, nor because of friendship with France, but because Japan was Britain’s ally. It was he said ‘inconceivable’ therefore that Britain now insult the Japanese by casting them off.19

Having made his position clear on the retention of an Alliance with Japan, the Prime Minister turned to the question of avoiding a quarrel on the matter with the US. He felt that, if a solution to the future of Yap could be reached, it would go far in assuaging American concerns.20 As to China, it was important to be sensitive also to that country’s views. The trade potential there was enormous and Britain could not afford to allow ‘China to be walked over by America and for the latter country to get the whole benefit of China’s trade.’ 21

The immediate goal to be secured among all of the above was the renewal of the Alliance. The urgency on the part of His Majesty’s Government to obtain Dominion assent to

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 See Appendix F.
21 CAB.23/26, Meeting of Cabinet, 30 June 1921, op.cit.
renewal at the Imperial Conference was due to the belief that the Alliance would expire automatically in July 1921.\textsuperscript{22} That belief was founded upon the interpretation of the Foreign Office and of the Law Officers of the Crown. It concluded that a joint communication made in July 1920 by the Governments of Japan and Britain to the League of Nations constituted the one-year notification of termination required under Article Six of the Alliance.\textsuperscript{23} The Japanese Government was not of the same opinion. It believed there was a press of time only upon completing necessary modifications, so as not to put the two contracting parties ‘in the wrong as far as the League of Nations is concerned.’ In May 1921, in order to avoid that situation, the Japanese were prepared to agree to another joint notification to the League that more time (three months) was required to carry out modifications. Acknowledging the fact that the Imperial Conference, when it met, might decide against renewal, it was the position of the Japanese Government that termination would then have to be initiated by His Majesty’s Government as prescribed in Article Six\textsuperscript{24}

As recently as 27 June 1921, the question of whether the Alliance was due to expire was still in dispute between the two Governments. Then, Curzon, firm in the view that expiry was imminent, had urged the Japanese to comply in the issue of a second joint notice to the League, temporarily to keep the Alliance in place until the coming October. During that period, while the two Governments worked out a form for renewal of the Alliance,

\textsuperscript{22} DBFP, 1\textsuperscript{st} Series, Vol.xiv, op.cit. Document # 295.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid; Document # 65.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid; Document # 291.
consistent with the Covenant of the League, League procedures would have precedence over the Alliance where inconsistencies occurred.25

Returning to the question of renewal, Lloyd George ‘wondered whether it would not be possible now to get out of the difficulty by saying to Japan either that we would withdraw that notification (of July 1920) or treat it as not being a denunciation of the Alliance.’26 The Prime Minister perceived advantages in such a course. First, rather than pleading against renewal, the Canadian Prime Minister would have the much more difficult task of pleading for the issue of a notice denouncing the Alliance. An even greater advantage lay in the fact that if both Britain and Japan were agreed that the Alliance remained in force, then giving notice of its determination or not would depend on the outcome of the proposed Conference to be held between the Pacific Powers.

After some further discussion on the legal position involved in the notification to the League, Cabinet authorised the British representatives at the Imperial Conference ‘to propose or assent to the initiation of full and frank conversations with the Governments of both the United States of America and Japan with a view to some arrangement satisfactory to all parties.’27

Further,

in order, if possible, to gain time for these conversations without the necessity of taking the overt step of a temporary renewal of the Treaty, to which the Canadian Government objected, the Lord Chancellor should be asked to give an opinion as to whether the notice

25 Ibid; Document # 310.
26 CAB 23/26, Meeting of Cabinet, 30 June 1921, op.cit.
27 Ibid.
given to the League of Nations in regard to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance must inevitably be held as equivalent to a denunciation of the Treaty of 1911. 28

It was further agreed that the Foreign Office transmit all necessary documents to the Lord Chancellor ‘with the least possible delay’ in order that he would have his opinion ready for the meeting of the Imperial Cabinet that afternoon. 29

The Lord Chancellor, Lord Birkenhead, did overturn the opinion of the Foreign Office Secretariat and the Crown Law Officers and agreed with the Japanese legal interpretation that no denunciation of the Alliance had yet taken place and any question of abrogating the Alliance was not raised in the Imperial Conference. 30 Instead, the Conferees concerned themselves with the questions appertaining to a Pacific Conference. On 2 July, the Imperial representatives were unanimous in authorising Curzon to approach ‘interested’ powers in order to convene a conference to discuss the Far-Eastern situation. They agreed unanimously that Britain should communicate with ‘complete frankness’ to the US, Japan and China the British Empire’s keenness

1) to preserve the “open-door” in China
2) to assure the peaceful development of that land
3) to safeguard the Empire’s vital interests in the Far East
4) to ‘preclude any competition in naval armaments between the Pacific Powers. 31

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 CAB.23/26, Meeting of 15 August 1921. Summary of the Transactions of the Prime Ministers and Representatives of the United Kingdom, The Dominions and India, June, July and August 1921.
31 Ibid.
As for the Alliance, it was the view of the British Cabinet its future would be covered by whatever agreements resulted from a Pacific Conference. If nothing occurred there to bring about a change of status or cause a modification in its terms, then it would be renewed in conformity with League of Nations principles.\footnote{CAB.23/26, Meeting of Cabinet, 30 June 1921, \textit{op.cit.} Also DBFP; 1\textsuperscript{st} Series,Vol.xiv, \textit{op.cit.} Document # 328.}

From the perspective of the strategy devised by His Majesty’s Government at the Cabinet Meeting of 30 May 1921, in preparation for the Imperial Conference, the substance of the policy remained, although by the time Beatty came to address the conference on the Singapore Strategy (4 July 1921) the order of priority had shifted.\footnote{The Beatty Papers, Vol. 2, \textit{op.cit.} Document # 87a, Beatty’s Address to the Imperial Conference, 1921.} By means of the revised legal interpretation the Lloyd George Government had made certain the first of its policy priorities – Alliance renewal plans - would proceed. The Prime Minister was now on his desired footing to consider the matter of a Pacific Conference, hitherto placed last among the Cabinet resolutions and then largely at the urging of the Canadians.

Curzon’s news that it seemed the United States Government awaited only a British initiative to engage in discussion on a range of Pacific and Far East issues thrust Pacific Conference considerations to the forefront of priorities. Lloyd George was hopeful that if a successful outcome on the political issues could be realised in that forum, Britain would enter the mooted disarmament negotiations with a few bargaining chips of its own. Before very long it became apparent that those hopes were founded upon error and misunderstandings.
Chapter 5

1921-22 Imperial Security and The Washington Conference

At no time during mid-1921, when talk of American interest in disarmament was in the air, did the British Government contemplate the conjunction of a conference on the Asia-Pacific with a conference on disarmament. It was the view of HMG that a disarmament agreement would follow as a likely outcome of the successful settlement of concerns in the Asia-Pacific region. Conversely, the British held that as long as there continued to be tensions among the key regional players, the region would remain unstable and the prospects for disarmament would be very poor.¹

When Curzon began preparations for a Pacific conference to thrash out regional concerns, he did so believing that he had the accord of the Harding Administration. It was also his belief that, of itself, the fact of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance would not hinder US participation in such a conference.² Quite aside from its decision to preserve the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in some form for strategic security reasons, the British Government saw its alliance with Japan as the cornerstone of British diplomatic influence in East Asia. Upon it, Curzon believed it possible to repair Sino-Japanese relations and remove a major threat to the peace of the Asia-Pacific region.

Initial discussions on the subject in London, with the Japanese Ambassador and then with China’s Foreign Minister, confirmed him in his belief. It gave him to hope, therefore, that

¹ DBFP; 1st. Series, Vol.xiv, op.cit. Documents # 328 and 337.
² Ibid: Document # 313.
at a Pacific Conference there would be support for the Alliance as a stabilising influence in East Asian relations and that any remaining US concerns on its account would dissolve. Should disarmament talks then follow, Britain would enter them with its Alliance intact.

Curzon had not long embarked upon his preparation for a Pacific Conference when it became apparent that he was labouring under a misconception. Curzon had been working towards the settlement of East Asian and Pacific regional concerns with the key regional players, namely Imperial Britain, Japan, the US - the big naval powers, having in view hopes of an end to regional naval rivalry. The Harding Administration had quite a different mindset to that of the British Government. The American President had no desire to become enmeshed in issues concerning spheres of influence or balance of power, least of all in any way that might impel America into military operations on behalf of another power. Harding’s interest was less a concern for the instability of East Asia and more a desire to respond to a very strong resurgence of interest in US domestic politics in reduced arms spending. What Harding had in mind was wide-scale arms limitations. He was looking to call an international conference on general arms limitations as the platform for the announcement of swingeing cuts in US naval power. At about the same time as Curzon was labouring to set up a Pacific Conference, Harding had the final appropriations for the completion of the 1916 Programme safely in hand. He had the leverage to make the big gesture in an international arms limitations conference and lead it to a successful conclusion. Thereby, he would satisfy domestic political demands and achieve a major foreign policy coup.\(^3\)

An accumulation of misunderstandings and diplomatic blunders bred suspicion between

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\(^3\) T.H.Buckley; The United States and the Washington Conference 1921-22, University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, USA, 1970, p.18.
the British and the US governments and between those of Britain and Japan. Under these Curzon's diplomatic mission collapsed. The British reluctantly accepted that instead of two conferences, only one would now be held – at Washington, under the auspices of the Harding Government. The US Secretary of State C.E. Hughes did make a partial concession to British concerns and agreed to include Pacific and Far Eastern issues on the Washington agenda. But he was adamant that those issues would not be given priority of place. That place was the exclusive preserve of disarmament talks and agreements on arms limitations.

Such a framework brought Imperial strategic and security issues right to the fore for the Lloyd George Government. With general disarmament now in priority of place, the Prime Minister moved to rebuild Britain's negotiating position. Imperial security was the main concern. The Lloyd George Government recognised the scantiness of its defences east of Suez. It was not prepared to enter negotiations in which Imperial security concerns would be bandied about among nations having no comparable interests in the region. As far as Imperial security was concerned Lloyd George made it plain that there were limits to the limitations Britain would accept. He authorised work to begin on the first four Capital Ships on Beatty's shopping list. The CID was instructed to prepare advice for the Cabinet 'as to the preparations to be made for the Conference on Disarmament.' Also, the Foreign Office prepared a general survey of the regional politics with reference to the forthcoming Washington Conference. Geddes was instructed to make known to the US Government that Britain would not discuss the Anglo-Japanese Alliance 'or any other matters of Pacific

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4 CAB 23/26, Meeting of the Cabinet, 20 July 1921.
5 CAB 23/26, Meeting of the Cabinet, 15 August 1921.
policy affecting the safety of Pacific dominions and India' at plenary sessions in Washington.⁷

In mid-October the British delegation was named. Pressure of business on the domestic front prohibited a commitment to attend on the part of Lloyd George, while Curzon did not nominate at all. Arthur Balfour undertook to lead the delegation.⁸

Balfour, only just returned from the 1921 Geneva Conference of the League, was given very little direction by the Cabinet, other than that should the conference fail the Anglo-Japanese Alliance would remain intact. As to arms limitations, the findings of the CID left him to conclude that his primary objective was to 'secure the largest possible limitations of armaments consistent with the safety of the British Empire.'⁹ But included in his advisory staff were representatives from the Foreign Office and the Admiralty, with whom he made the voyage to Washington. Both Departments had prepared extensive analyses and recommendations with reference to the Conference. By the end of the voyage, Balfour had formed the view that

if satisfactory and durable results are to be achieved in naval disarmament, which mainly affects the British Empire, the United States of America and Japan, an agreement must be reached in regard to certain political problems which have arisen in China and the Pacific.¹⁰

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⁷ Ibid; Document # 377
⁸ CAB 23/27, Meeting of Cabinet, 17 Oct 1921.
¹⁰ Ibid.
He concurred also with the Government perception of the necessary order of procedure, concluding that the ‘logical’ sequence would be to deal first with the politics of the Pacific question ‘before the final decisions have to be taken on the subject of naval diminution of armaments.’ Thus would there be hope ‘for decisions of lasting importance to the peace, no less than to the economic restoration of the world.’

Balfour referred, in particular, to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and to international frictions over China. Upon arrival in Washington, it was made clear to him by advisers on the ground that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was likely to obstruct any agreement on limitations with the American Government. Thereupon, he drafted as a possible substitute a tripartite arrangement to include the US. He prepared, also, a draft agreement relating to China. On the eve of the opening day of the Conference, he presented both drafts to Hughes. As to any question of the order of procedure, Hughes had his mind firmly on the primary agenda issues of his own Government and was not to be drawn on procedural matters by Balfour at that time. Nevertheless, the two Balfour drafts formed the bases for settlement of political and commercial rivalries in the region.

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the aims of Britain’s Coalition Government to protect Imperial security, at a time when Imperial naval power in the Far East was at low ebb and when tensions between the US and Japan threatened the peace of the region. The British Government counted on the strength of its diplomatic influence in East Asia to broker a Conference of Pacific powers, where regional political concerns would be

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid; Document #416.
14 Ibid.
thrashed out. Regional stability was the primary objective of the British but they had in view, as a consequence of a successful Pacific Conference, the probability of a naval agreement between Britain, the US and Japan. Although, following the US Government’s call for a general arms limitations conference to be held in Washington, plans for a Pacific Conference were abandoned by the British, regional political concerns were not. At Washington, the British continued to support a view of naval limitations as contingent upon regional stability.

A Pact among the three major naval powers and France replaced the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Under a wider arrangement to include other interested nations, a nine-power Pact was concluded. The nine-power Pact made provision for the replacement of international rivalry with international co-operation in the conduct and development of commerce in China, within a context of proper regard to the integrity of China’s sovereign rights. Those political settlements, which were to stabilise diplomatic relations among the key regional players for a decade, left the way open for the conclusion of the negotiations on naval limitations.

The loss of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was regretted by Curzon but not necessarily so by the Admiralty, where for some time attitudes towards it had been ambivalent. What the Admiralty required from the Conference was largely achieved – the restoration by diplomatic means of regional stability and a relationship with Japan which, if not as close as it had been, was not unfriendly. At conclusion, the actual terms of the naval agreement were fundamentally in concert with the objectives set out by the Naval Staff in its pre-conference submission to the CID in October 1921. The submission had, as its focus, the maintenance of the territorial status quo in the region and a naval power balance, as assurance to each of the great naval powers of security in its own regional seas.
On 2 July 1921, the Imperial Conference had unanimously agreed that Curzon sound out the attitudes of the Japanese and Chinese governments towards a conference on Pacific issues. It was the intention of the Imperial delegates that a proposal then be put to the American government to summon a conference at an early date. Representation would be restricted, at least initially, to America, Britain, Japan, China and Britain’s Pacific Dominions at a venue in, or near, the US. Lloyd George and Curzon hoped that the continuation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, in some form, would be supported at such a conference. On the same day, therefore, that the Imperial delegates endorsed his proposal to raise the subject of a conference with Japan, Curzon hastened to contradict a note sent by him on the 27 June to the Japanese Ambassador to Britain, Baron Hayashi. At that time, Curzon had insisted upon His Majesty’s Government's view that expiry of the Alliance was imminent. Five days later, in a new note to the Ambassador, he advised that, after renewed consideration, HMG concurred with opinion in Japan that no denunciation of the Alliance had yet taken place. The long-standing agreement was therefore far from the brink of expiry.

Curzon reinforced his message when he met with Hayashi on 4 July and raised the question of a Pacific Conference. He pointed out 'the old agreement continued until either party took steps to bring it to an end.' He went on to assure Hayashi that the British government placed the highest value upon their continued association. Not only had it served Britain and the Dominions so well during the war but also 'the fulfilment of treaty obligations was a recognised principle of Japanese Statesmanship.' Nevertheless, while in

15 Ibid; Document # 328.
16 Ibid. Document # 310.
17 Ibid; Document # 320.
18 Ibid; Document # 328
no way wishing to convey any slight upon Japan, it was the view of HMG that terms which had not been reviewed for 20 years now required revision.

Circumstances were altered in the region. The Treaty, which had offered protection to both parties against their enemies, now - rightly or wrongly - was being construed by friends as presenting a threat to them. But ‘a wider and even more satisfactory plan’ might be open to the Alliance partners. Next, he reached the crux of the matter. He emphasised that the Alliance partners had to make an effort to remove suspicions of their continued association and place both nations ‘in a position when their co-operation was not likely to be a source of discord or apprehension to others.’ The Lloyd George government, Curzon continued, desired to co-ordinate Japanese and British policy on Asia-Pacific issues in preparation for the Pacific Conference.\footnote{\textit{ibid.}}

The principal area in which Japan and Britain would require to make adjustments so as to co-ordinate policy was in their relations with China. Curzon advised Hayashi of the Imperial Conference’s proposal that the US be the nation invited to host the conference. Given that the US accepted, it would not be Curzon’s entitlement to extend any invitation to the government of China. But he made the frank admission to Hayashi that it was his intention to see the Chinese Minister, Wellington Koo, later that day, in order to ‘ascertain the general attitude of China’ and, on the next day (5 July), to submit proposals to the US Ambassador.

From Hayashi, Curzon gained the impression that the Japanese government would welcome Britain’s decision on the prolongation of the Alliance and would approve of the
plan for talks with America, but that Hayashi himself had doubts about dealing with the problem of China by means of a conference. It was Hayashi’s personal opinion that his own government realised now that it had made mistakes in its policy in China and would be glad of an opportunity to put the relationship on a better footing. The biggest barrier there, however, was that the weakness of the Peking government made it almost impossible to trust in the reliability of its arrangements. Nevertheless, he promised to pass on Curzon’s proposals, with his own ‘warm approval’.20

The Ambassador requested a definition of the ‘precise objects which the conference should have in view’ but Curzon declined on the grounds that it would be premature. Curzon explained that, if the US government agreed to issue the invitations, it would certainly want an opportunity to be involved in drawing up the agenda. In broad terms, Curzon told Hayashi there would be two objects in view; an arrangement for peace in the Pacific and the settlement of the question of China - and from HMG’s standpoint, the first was dependent upon the second.21 For Curzon, settlement of the Chinese question entailed agreement on the ‘open door’ policy among the Pacific powers.22 He reminded Hayashi that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance already contained provision for the ‘preservation of the integrity and independence of China and the maintenance of the open door.’ It should not present, therefore, an insuperable obstacle to extend that provision and to conclude an agreement to which all interested states could be parties.23

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Japanese conduct in China blatantly contradicted the policy of the ‘open door’. In Shantung Province the Japanese were acting as though they were the governing body. They had also seized control of the railway system and the port of Tsingtao, and were running them to their exclusive advantage. Not only were the Chinese outraged but so were the Governments and investors of other Trading Nations, among them the Americans.

It was with an arrangement of this sort in mind that Curzon approached the Chinese Ambassador. He was well aware of the internal divisions that racked China and undermined the authority of the Peking government. No more than Hayashi did he wish to allow China’s domestic political problems to become a liability upon the Pacific Conference.\(^{24}\) He did mean to convey to Koo that the continuation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, in some form, could work to the advantage of the Peking government, who should not, therefore, condemn it out of hand. He intended Koo to understand that Britain would exert its influence to control its Alliance partner in Shantung. The achievement, thereby, of more peaceful relations between China and Japan would strengthen the hand of China’s central government in domestic politics and – most importantly, as far as Britain was concerned – remove a major threat to the peace of the Pacific.

In the afternoon of the 4 July 1921, Curzon met with the Chinese Minister.\(^{25}\) He explained the position with respect to the continuation of the Alliance and the proposed conference. Koo indicated that his government was likely to be delighted by Britain’s sponsorship of the conference but not by the continuance of the Alliance. In the view of China’s leaders, the Alliance prevented Britain, as ‘the only Power in the East with sufficient prestige’, from exercising its influence as an impartial arbiter to bring about a peaceful agreement between China and Japan. Curzon refuted the imputation that Britain was hindered by the Alliance from making independent and impartial decisions in Far Eastern policy – either in the past or for the future. He turned then to what might conceivably accrue to China as a result of the Conference – namely a settlement of its grievances in Shantung Province. He

\(^{24}\) In a memorandum of 24 July 1921, Curzon put the question “is not the real object of the (Pacific) Conference something much wider and bigger than one country only viz. the future peace of the Pacific and the Far East – to be achieved. It may be, by the enunciation and common acceptance of certain broad principles, whether these take the form of a guarantee of the Status Quo in these regions, or of the provisions for communication in the event of this being disturbed?” Ibid; Document # 337.

\(^{25}\) Ibid; Document # 327.
pointed out that the weakness of China’s Central Government placed it in a very poor position to make specific demands on subjects which might or might not come up for discussion. But Shantung, he thought, ‘might come up for discussion [and the] Powers would take great interest in it.’

By the end of that day, Curzon was satisfied that Britain’s proposals would be supported by Japan and by China. Flushed with those successes, he turned to the task of raising the matter of the Conference with the US.

Curzon still harboured the impression gained from Ambassador Harvey that the Harding Government expected the initiative for discussions on Asia-Pacific issues to come from Britain. When he met with Harvey on 5 July 1921 to issue the Imperial conference delegates’ invitation to the US Government to summon a Pacific Conference, he took great pains to stress that it was the intention of the British Government to retain its Alliance with Japan, in some form. For ‘even if the future of the Pacific were provided for by a new arrangement’, the value to Britain in its agreement with Japan had applications elsewhere. He advised Harvey that he had already approached the Japanese and Chinese Ambassadors and expected a positive response from their governments. He urged Harvey to communicate with Washington ‘without delay’. Harvey, nevertheless, did delay. On 7 July 1921, he had not yet communicated with his government, when Lloyd George, questioned on the subject in Parliament, made it a matter of public knowledge that he awaited responses from the US, Japan and China in order to make a full statement.

26 Ibid.

27 By 14 July 1921, Curzon began to realise that Harvey had “committed (his Government) to courses which he himself approved.” Ibid; Document # 335.

28 Ibid; Document # 330.
In Washington, the Administration thought the British were attempting to snatch the initiative on a disarmament conference from Harding. Since the British proposal to the US was, as yet, officially non-existent, Secretary of State Hughes moved swiftly to make official the American government’s own proposals. On 8 July, he sent cables to America’s Ambassadors in Britain, Japan, France and Italy with instructions to transmit to those governments the American initiative for a conference on arms limitation to be held in Washington. On the same day, Hughes received Harvey’s cable containing Curzon’s proposal that the US Government issue invitations to the powers directly concerned to a conference on Far Eastern and Pacific questions including the peaceful settlement of disputes and the elimination of Naval Warfare’. Hughes’ response was that the US Government was unable to take up the Curzon suggestion, since its own proposal had already been issued and must stand. What it was prepared to do, if the British so agreed, was to widen the American agenda to include Far Eastern and Pacific questions and to extend its invitations to include China.

On 10 July 1921, Lloyd George accepted the arrangement. It was his assumption that the position of HMG on the priority of settlement of the Asia-Pacific problems would remain essentially intact. On the following day, when the Harding proposals were made public, Lloyd George also moved to secure the British conception of the negotiations. Speaking in Parliament, he announced there were two separate conferences in view – Harding’s on disarmament, to be held in Washington, and a preliminary meeting on Pacific and Far

28 Buckley, *op.cit.* p.32.

29 Ibid. p.32-33.

Eastern questions ‘between the Powers most directly interested in the peace and welfare of that great region . . .’ 32

No venue for the preliminary meeting was mentioned by Lloyd George on that occasion but, with Washington nominated as the venue for the Disarmament Conference, London’s suitability for the Pacific talks had been discussed with Harvey and seemingly approved by him on behalf of his government.33 Certainly, both Lloyd George and Curzon now favoured a London venue. The Dominion leaders were still assembled there. Also, it was ‘home ground’ for a British initiative in which they believed themselves well placed to broker an agreement between China and Japan, under the auspices of a co-ordination of the policies of the two Alliance partners, in relation to the Far East. Once agreement was locked up, the British could look forward to the Disarmament Conference from a strong diplomatic position – not only having the Alliance still in place, but as the arbiters by diplomatic means of peace and stability in the Far East.

The British relied on such an outcome as fundamental to any subsequent disarmament settlement and to add weight to their voice at such talks when British naval supremacy might, once again, come under severe pressure. With the Asia-Pacific problems in hand, the US would not be entirely free to dominate naval outcomes in Washington, where continued insistence upon American naval dominance in the Pacific would be exposed either as senseless navalism or as dangerous war-mongering.

In a telegram to Harvey (12 July 1921) Hughes repudiated any American concurrence with the British plans for a preliminary conference. On the contrary, the British had ‘specifically

32 Ibid. Document # 343 and Nish, op.cit p.343.
33 Ibid; Documents # 335 and #343.
endorsed' the American proposal that both Far Eastern problems and arms limitation would be on the agenda for the single convention in Washington. Further, the American government was prepared to make a place for Asia-Pacific issues on the agenda but not so high a place as to make the whole subject of the limitation of armaments dependent solely upon their resolution. The confusion was exacerbated by American concern that the British were trying to steal their thunder.

In the course of the next three weeks, Curzon made determined attempts to retrieve the situation and reinstate the British concept of preliminary talks among the Asia-Pacific powers as a mere precursor to the wider international convention which would meet in Washington. Although, in the process, some light was shed upon the nature and origins of the misunderstandings between the two governments, Hughes remained unmoved. No representative from the US would attend any preliminary discussions on Asia-Pacific concerns, no matter where the venue. The Harding Government’s invitation was for a single conference, to be held in Washington. While there would now be a place for Asia-Pacific discussions at that Conference, it would not be first place. Priority was reserved for the wider issue of general disarmament. Not without some bitterness, Curzon abandoned the effort and, on 1 August 1921, instructed Geddes to inform the American government that the British government, wishing to ‘escape all chance of further misunderstanding, [would] leave the exclusive responsibility for the conference to the Government who initiated it’.  

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34 Ibid; document # 335 and Buckley; op.cit. p.35.

35 Ibid; Documents # 335, # 337, # 342, # 343, # 344, # 345, # 346.

36 Ibid; Document # 349.
Whilst tension had marked British and American diplomatic exchange over some weeks, the British had also lost ground with their Japanese ally. Up until the Birkenhead decision on the legal status of the Alliance, the Japanese had been left for some time in considerable doubt about the British attitude towards their continued association. Although the Japanese were gratified by the Birkenhead decision, they soon found cause to be concerned about the motives behind HMG’s sudden *volte-face* and whether it was a case of flattery with intent to deceive.

A certain high-handedness on Curzon’s part led the Japanese government to fear that its voice did not count for much with Britain any longer and that the British might be preparing to trade off the Alliance in exchange for other advantage. Curzon’s failure to consult with them, before approaching China on the subject of a Pacific Conference, first aroused the ire of the Japanese government.\(^37\) China was of acute concern to the Japanese and they were not at all disposed to see their privileges there eroded in an international assembly where China was equally represented with Japan.

Next, the proximity of Curzon’s proposal for a Pacific Conference with that of Harding caused the Japanese to suspect the British, at best, of failing to keep counsel with them and, at worst, of collusion with the Americans against Japan on East Asian matters. Consequently, the Japanese adopted a very guarded attitude. When the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Uchida Yasuya finally responded to the Curzon proposal of 4 July 1921, it was to advise him of the uncertainty in Japan as to whether or not Harding’s proposal now also encompassed Curzon’s. Whichever was the case, his government would readily send delegates to a disarmament conference, but only under the most particular

circumstances would it be induced to negotiate any other Asia-Pacific issues. In the same communication, it was revealed that the British suggestion for the Pacific talks to be undertaken in London that August had only just reached Japan. It was, however, Uchida's opinion that it would in no way alter his government's insistence upon a clear definition of what was to come under discussion before an acceptance could be indicated.38

The Japanese had difficulty in eliciting from either Britain or the US just what the agenda would be for the Pacific Conference. Having himself no clear idea, since it had never been a US initiative, Hughes had avoided making a reply to Ambassador Shidehara in Washington on 13 July. Two days later, Curzon gave the appearance of being equally evasive when he indicated to Hayashi that problems of definition were Washington's responsibility, since the invitations had emanated from there. In the following week, therefore, when he asked to be advised of Japan's response to the US invitation prior to their notifying the US government, the Tokyo Cabinet rebuked him. Time pressed – Japan's reply to the US proposal was due on 26 July and the matter should not be delayed merely to permit discussion to take place in London. Since Britain had tendered its acceptance to the American invitation without any prior consultation with Japan, there seemed no diplomatic or moral reason why Japan should consult Britain.39

The reality was that, by that time, the Japanese had eventually secured an answer from Hughes, giving them reason to believe that subjects disagreeable to Japan would be kept off the agenda. On the due date, the US had Japanese acceptance, under the proviso that the agenda content would be discussed between them prior to the convention. Lloyd George realised immediately that any hope of two conferences was lost, principally on

38 Ibid; Document # 334.
account of a lack of understanding between Japan and Britain. He moved swiftly to repair some of the damage.\textsuperscript{40}

On the 26 July, it was agreed in the Imperial Cabinet that delegates from Britain and the Dominions should travel to the US to join there with Japan for preliminary conversations on the conference agenda. This suggestion was put to Hayashi on the following day. Accordingly, Curzon indicated to Washington that he and Lloyd George would make themselves available at short notice for conversations with the interested parties, on American soil, to prepare the ground on Asia-Pacific issues in advance. Hughes summarily rejected the offer.\textsuperscript{41}

The British government was not alone in recognising that there were inherent difficulties in combining Asia-Pacific issues and Arms limitations in one conference. Hughes understood it also but from a different perspective. By widening the agenda, problems had been created for the Harding disarmament initiative. As had the British, Hughes recognised that the question of Sino-Japanese relations represented a major obstacle to a successful outcome. For that reason, he was determined to keep Sino-Japanese issues off the main Agenda at Washington.\textsuperscript{42} It was a solution most satisfactory to the Japanese who, as much as the other two Naval Powers, wanted to end the naval race but baulked at the price that might be demanded of them in Asia. However, it made wreckage of Lloyd George’s carefully worked out plan to secure all of Britain’s diplomatic and strategic aims.

\textsuperscript{40} CAB. 32/2 Imperial Conference 1921, 29\textsuperscript{th} Meeting 26\textsuperscript{th} July 1921.

\textsuperscript{41} DBFP, 1\textsuperscript{st} Series, Vol. xiv, \textit{op.cit.} Document # 346.

\textsuperscript{42} Buckley, \textit{op.cit.} p.150. In the event, China’s request that Shantung be brought up at the Conference was refused by Hughes and, instead, that matter was settled at separate talks between the Japanese and Chinese delegates, led by Shidehara and Koo, respectively, with Balfour and Hughes cooperating together as mediators. Ibid; p.161.
The prospect of a single conference in which America controlled the agenda on Asia-Pacific issues, as well as disarmament, demanded new tactics. The two key issues of vital interest to Britain were relative fleet strengths and Britain’s vulnerable position in the Pacific. Lloyd George took steps to bolster Britain’s naval bargaining position in preparation for the disarmament talks.

The British remained convinced of the justification for their claim to the continuation of their clear naval supremacy, but they were prepared to settle for parity with the US – if such an agreement could now be struck. By mid – 1921, the bargaining position of the Harding government in terms of new Capital Ships appeared to be very strong. The appropriations for the completion of the 1916 programme had been approved on 11 July 1921, simultaneously with Harding’s call for international limitations talks.43 The 1916 Programme entailed the laying down of sixteen new keels – ten Battleships and six Battlecruisers. Of those, one Battleship had been completed, work was well advanced on three more and about 25% complete on the remaining six. A beginning had been made on two of the Battlecruisers.44

In Britain, since the completion of the ‘Hood’, no new keels had been laid down but on 20 July 1921, a memorandum by the First Lord came under discussion in Cabinet. Lee sought Cabinet authority for work to commence on four new Capital Ships – ‘preliminary expenditure (2.5 million pounds) for which had already been approved in principle by the House of Commons on 17 March, on the understanding that its details could be discussed later in the shipbuilding vote.’ 45 Over a warning by the Chancellor of the Exchequer about

42 Buckley; op.cit. p.18.
44 Ibid. p.56 and Roskill; Naval Policy Vol. 1, op.cit. p.309.
45 CAB.23/26, Meeting of Cabinet, 20 July 1921.
the very heavy expenditure involved in the completion of those ships and a suggestion that, in light of the proposed international disarmament conference, all further expenditure on them should, indeed, be postponed, a third argument prevailed. It was pointed out during the discussion that ‘foreign ships’ already under construction would ‘certainly be completed’. The four ships in question were required merely to prevent the Royal Navy from falling ‘completely behindhand’. Cabinet then agreed to authorise the Admiralty ‘to proceed with the construction of the four Capital Ships provided for in this year’s Naval Programme’ – the decision to be made known by Lloyd George in Parliament on the following day.\footnote{Ibid.}

It was a decision that harked back to a memorandum from Beatty for the Cabinet in December 1920. Beatty’s principal purpose, then, had been to explain, on logistical grounds, the urgency for work to commence on the four Capital Ships. But it had also addressed the suggestion ‘that the result of hesitation on our part might be to encourage the US to modify the 1916 programme’. Beatty’s view was that it was inconceivable that the US would scrap ships already laid down. But it could well pay the US to drop the remaining six Battlecruisers from the 1916 Programme and then call for a building holiday – ‘relying on the effect being to make it politically impossible for Great Britain to lay down any capital ships at all’. In such case, by 1925, the position in post-Jutland Capital Ships would be that Britain would have one, the US six and Japan eight.\footnote{By October 1921 all ten of the Battleships proposed by the 1916 programme were under construction – Buckley; \textit{op.cit.} p.56.}

Beatty’s memorandum had urged the announcement of ‘our policy before the US discuss the modification of their programme, assuming that any modification is in contemplation, in which case we shall be free subsequently to make whatever reductions are reasonable in
view of their action’. Thus, on 21 July, Lloyd George served notice on all concerned of the willingness and capacity of his government to support and maintain British naval policy on the basis of a one-power Standard with the ‘strongest naval power’—by new construction programmes, as the case demanded.

A reappraisal of Britain’s Alliance with Japan was also now required. With something resembling indecent haste, the British had reversed a previously held conviction that the Alliance was on the brink of expiry and declared, instead, their concurrence with the Japanese view that its status remained, as yet, intact. The spur for that action had been a perception of the usefulness of the Alliance to Britain in the proposed Pacific Conference, where a successful outcome by means of British diplomacy was likely, in turn, to facilitate the limitation of arms.

American insistence upon a single conference in Washington had rendered the whole of the British diplomatic strategy for the Far East redundant, and in the process had driven a wedge between Britain and Japan. Hughes had accepted prior exchange of views on the agenda with the Japanese but not with the British and had then advised the British, through Harvey, that the Japanese were opposed to preliminary talks at the level proposed by Lloyd George and Curzon. Curzon made an attempt to re-establish the old intimacy of the British-Japanese relationship. On 6 August 1921, by-passing Hayashi in London, he telegraphed a summary of his actions, since 4 July 1921, with regard to the Pacific

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48 Beaty Papers; Vol 2, op. cit. Document # 55.

49 Hughes’ conduct at his separate meetings with the British Ambassador and the Japanese Ambassador led Geddes to conclude that the “United States government is at present thinking of diplomatic victories and domestic political advantage and not (exclusively) of saving the world from economic ruin. Over this idea of a preliminary conference Mr. Hughes is, in his own mind, fighting the British Foreign Office for prestige. He has practically said so to me almost in so many words and he has no intention of giving way.” - DBFP; 1st Series, vol. xiv, op. cit. Document # 348.

50 Ibid; Document # 345.
Conference to Sir Charles Eliot, Britain’s Ambassador in Tokyo, to be brought to the notice of the Japanese government. It was his wish that it be understood there ‘that at each stage His Majesty’s Government have had in their mind their special relationship to Japan, and that we were unwilling to embark upon any conferences or conversations with America except in the presence of Japan.’ His message continued that he was unsure of Japan’s exact desires but that he had seen ‘no reason to doubt that our points of view have been in all essential particulars the same and that our joint policy will continue and be marked by the closest and most loyal harmony’.  

The agenda continued to remain unclear when the formal invitations to the Washington conference were issued by the American Secretary of State on 11 August 1921. The following day, Eliot conveyed Curzon’s message to Uchida in Tokyo. The Foreign Minister was evasive about sharing any proposals Japan might have for the conference – preferring to await some communication from the US on agenda arrangements. But he treated as news which he was especially pleased to hear that, as far back as 4 July 1921, Curzon had advised Hayashi that Britain had ‘no desire to determine present Anglo-Japanese Alliance without substituting for it something equally good or if possible better’.  

The British now had the Alliance under consideration from a new perspective. A limitations conference no longer had to be ‘facilitated’, it was being all but thrust upon them. When Lloyd George announced the construction of the four new Capital Ships, his purpose was to make it clear that British Naval Policy could accommodate parity with the US, as an acceptable security risk. Parity with Japan, however, was quite a different matter.

51 Ibid; Document # 355.
52 Ibid; Document # 357.
When consulted late in 1920, the Admiralty had been ambivalent about renewal of the Alliance as a strategic security measure — indeed in that sense, only the War Office had supported it with any real enthusiasm.\(^53\) The Admiralty position was that an ‘understanding’ with Japan was certainly desirable. But in the event of war between them, the realities of Japan’s rise as a major power in Asia meant that the Royal Navy would require a minimum superiority of 3:2 over the Japanese Navy to guarantee the security of the Eastern Empire.\(^54\) The Japanese construction programme lagged behind that of the US. Nevertheless, out of their proposed eight/eight construction programme, one Battleship was in the final stages of completion, the keels of four others had been laid, the whole programme scheduled for completion by 1928.\(^55\)

In 1921, however, the Japanese were not engaged in a naval race against Britain. The escalation of its naval programme was perceived, in Japan, as a necessary defensive measure against a threatening America. Paradoxically, Japan’s attack potential was really only likely to be effective against targets in the Western Pacific — in short (apart from the Philippines) against territories belonging to Britain. It was essential for the security of Britain’s Eastern Empire that the Japanese be enabled to accept a lower naval ratio than the US and therefore also than Britain. Only some assurance from the source of danger in respect of Japanese territorial claims and regional security concerns could assist the Japanese government along that path. In that context, the British Government perceived a definite place for the Alliance as a bargaining tool in negotiations among the three principal Naval Powers. Consequently, one day before Britain’s acceptance of Hughes’

\(^{53}\) Ibid; p1053-1055.


\(^{55}\) Buckley, op.cit. p.56.
invitation to Washington, Lloyd George moved to secure the position that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance should neither be a matter for the Conference agenda nor be rendered automatically obsolete by any limitations agreement reached in the course of the Conference. Speaking in Parliament, the Prime Minister emphasised Britain’s desire to retain its relationship with Japan. He reminded the House that the Japanese had stood by the Empire in time of great trouble, and to discard them simply because they were no longer needed would be a despicable act unbecoming of the British Empire. The Prime Minister said, ‘he could not see why it was impossible for Britain to remember her obligations to Japan and preserve a spirit of fraternity with the US.’ It was his hope ‘to retain the alliance or replace it with something superior’.  

Lloyd George’s speech was intended to further reassure Japan of Britain’s good faith and was well received by the Tokyo government, where it also had the effect of dispelling Uchida’s fears of British/US collusion. But it was aimed also at Washington, where it was not well received. Indeed, within days, Hughes made it very plain to Shidehara ‘that the US did not like the alliance and could never take part in any ‘alliance’ with the other two’.

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57 DBFP; 1\textsuperscript{st} Series Vol.xiv, op.cit. Document # 365.
58 Ibid. Document # 304.
59 Nish; op.cit. p.356. Nevertheless, the British government was determined to keep the Alliance as a regional security matter to be discussed elsewhere than in the general disarmament forum. Curzon instructed Geddes that, once the views of Japan had been ascertained he should impress upon the US government that “we cannot discuss the Anglo-Japanese agreement or any matters of Pacific policy affecting the safety of the Pacific Dominions and India at a conference attended by five or eight powers, two or five of which have no interest or responsibility in the Far East comparable with our own and no forces there of any sort. Such a discussion can in our opinion, be conducted with profit only between the US, Japan and ourselves, and only at a conference of principals.” DBFP; 1\textsuperscript{st} Series, Vol. xiv, op.cit. Document # 377.
Curzon was anxious not to repeat the error of failing to consult with Britain’s Alliance partner. The Japanese continued, however, to be very guarded. In Tokyo, Eliot formed the opinion that the “Japanese Government are under the impression that preliminary discussions between them and His Majesty’s Government are not regarded with favour at Washington and that they are most anxious to be on good terms with US” - Ibid; Documents # 378and # 397.
Cabinet instructions had also been issued to the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) to prepare advice 'as to the preparations to be made for the Conference on disarmament'. 60 Beatty, who was already in the US on other business, asked Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (ACNS) Rear Admiral Sir Ernle Chatfield to prepare a preliminary perspective on behalf of the Admiralty. A report from the British Naval Attaché in Tokyo gave Chatfield to conclude that the success of any naval limitations agreement lay with satisfying Japan's regional security fears. For British support for the maintenance of the territorial status quo and prevention, thereby, of the development of US naval bases deep in the Pacific, it seemed that Japan would accept the British decision to build four new Capital Ships, as necessary to maintain Britain's one-power Standard. In addition, it seemed that Japan would accept also, by international agreement, a fleet strength for Japan lower than that of Britain. 61 Against that background the Admiralty Naval Staff prepared very detailed recommendations for presentation to the CID.

Principal among its recommendations the Naval Staff opposed any form of naval 'holiday' as damaging to Britain's naval standard, in actual terms and to the industrial infrastructure essential to its maintenance. As to the practicalities of limitations, the Naval Staff preferred limitation by numbers of ships, rather than by total tonnage, only post-Jutland Capital Ships counting. The life of a Capital Ship should be set at 20 years. The British Capital ship ratio should be 3: 2 in Britain's favour over Japan. The abolition of Submarines should be considered. 62 Given that the territorial status quo was maintained and the strategic reach of the IJN was limited by permitting no Japanese Naval Base any further

60 CAB 23/26, Meeting of Cabinet, 15 August 1921.
62 CAB.4/7/CID 277B, Memorandum by the Naval Staff, 5 October 1921.
south than Formosa, the Naval Staff believed Britain’s most vital Indian/Pacific interests would be reasonably secure, once the British plans for Singapore were carried out.⁶³

Advice for the Cabinet was prepared also by the Foreign Office. In a memorandum of 20 October 1921, Victor Wellesley warned ‘the greatest danger of arriving at decisions on minor issues which are not in harmony with the dominating objective of British policy is a very real one’.⁶⁴ Wellesley identified the dominating objective of British Foreign policy as the ‘so-called Pacific problem’ – of which there were two components, viz. Japan’s policy in China and ‘the question of the mastery of the Pacific’.

Wellesley wrote that the rehabilitation aims of Britain and America towards China were ‘generally speaking’ identical. Neither had any territorial ambitions in China, both sought security for their economic interests there. Japan, however, sought to ‘place herself in so strong a defensive position as to be able to carry out her policy in China without molestation …’ Wellesley saw the prevention of any one nation from obtaining mastery of the Pacific as an essential goal at the Conference. He believed that to be achievable by a naval agreement and a tripartite arrangement, or declaration of policy, between the 3 major powers. He pointed out that any substitution of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance by a tripartite agreement would be at the omission of the kinds of military clauses contained in the Anglo-Japanese Agreement. It was clear that the US would not agree to anything in the

⁶³ Ibid. It would seem that the CID did not specifically endorse the recommendations of the Naval Staff, but found that Britain’s objective at Washington was to achieve the largest possible reduction in expenditure and armaments - in which respect naval disarmament held out the greatest promise. CAB. 4/7/ CID 280B, Memorandum by Standing Sub-Committee, 24 October 1921. According to Dingman, Lee, anxious both as First Lord and conference delegate to assure the success of the coming talks (and Beatty being out of the country), convinced the CID that the British delegation ought not to be committed by the terms of the Admiralty Memorandum. Dingman; Op.Cit. p.176.

nature of an alliance and would reject participation in any military aspects of any agreement.\textsuperscript{55}

On 17 October 1921, it was agreed in Cabinet that Arthur Balfour would lead the British delegation at Washington. Supporting him from the Admiralty would be Lee and, for the first stage of the Conference, Beatty. Chatfield would travel with the delegation and replace Beatty as senior naval adviser when the latter returned to Britain after the preliminary sessions.\textsuperscript{66}

On 2 November 1921, Balfour left for Washington. He had had a final meeting with Cabinet on the previous day when all CID Memoranda on the limitation of armaments came under review.\textsuperscript{67} The CID Memorandum observed that, as far as Britain’s army was concerned, it had already been so reduced as to permit of no further cuts. The ease of conversion of civil to military aircraft made it difficult to make suggestions on air disarmaments, therefore the CID made none. On the general aim of Britain ‘to achieve the largest possible reduction in expenditure on armaments’, naval limitations held out the greatest promise.\textsuperscript{68} From the above perspective, Cabinet discussion turned on the retention by Britain of relative naval power at the arms limitations conference. While adhering to the one-power standard (with the US), discussion centred on what inducements might be

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{66} CAB 23/27, Meeting of Cabinet, 17 October 1921.

\textsuperscript{67} CAB 23/27, Meeting of Cabinet, 1 November 1921.

\textsuperscript{68} CAB 4/7/CID 280B Memorandum by Standing Sub-Committee, 24 Oct 1921, \textit{op.cit.}
offered to the other naval powers to reduce their naval building programmes.\(^69\)

The Cabinet gave Balfour limited directions and very liberal discretionary powers for the Conference. *En route*, he made his own preliminary survey ‘in consultation with the experts accompanying him of the very complete material’ that had been prepared by the various departments and which he summarised in a communication for Lloyd George.\(^70\) Balfour was of the view that the ultimate aim of his delegation – ‘to secure the largest possible limitation of armaments consistent with the safety of the British Empire’ – could not be concluded without an agreement being reached also ‘in regard to certain political problems which have arisen in China and the Pacific’.\(^71\) He addressed as ‘foremost’ among these problems the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Up-to-the- minute evidence from his advisers already on the ground indicated that ‘adherence to the Alliance in its present form’ was likely to pose a major obstacle to negotiations with the US. Consequently, he had prepared a draft for a tripartite arrangement, to include the US, as a possible substitute for the Alliance.

On the subject of China, he singled out Shantung as an issue requiring the particular attention of Japan, the US and China for settlement. The many other problems relating to China should, however, be treated on a broad principles basis with a view to ‘substituting a system of international co-operation for the international rivalry in China which has

\(^69\) The British did not want to be held to ransom on naval ratios by the French, whose strong suit was land forces. Among the possibilities considered by the Cabinet at this meeting was the resurrection of the Anglo-American guarantee to France, as a means of offsetting French military cuts. It was agreed, also, that Balfour should have ready a “*paper programme of capital ship construction*” to be used at his discretion “*for bargaining purposes with a view to inducing the other Powers to reduce their building programmes.*” CAB 23/27, Meeting of Cabinet, 1 November 1921.


\(^71\) Ibid.
produced such unhappy results in that country’. He had prepared a further draft along those lines.  

On the eve of the Conference, Balfour passed copies of both drafts to Hughes, with whom he broached, also, the question of procedure for the Conference. Hughes remained close-lipped on the subject of procedure.

It has been well documented that the audacious naval diminution proposed by Hughes in his opening address, on the following day, surprised everyone. Certainly, all governments represented had strong economic interest in reducing arms spending, but it was more than three months before the Washington Naval Agreement was concluded. During that time, the various delegations worked at securing amendments to the Hughes scheme, favourable to their particular security interests. Nevertheless, by the close of the Conference Balfour was able to report that the ‘happy results’ produced by the long negotiations were due in no small part to Hughes’ ‘bold statement in regard to the limitation of Naval Armaments’ at the inaugural stage. Thereby, the example had been set for the ‘spirit of the closest co-

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72 Ibid.
73 Ibid; Document # 415.
74 The literature on the Washington Conference is vast. Works consulted for the purpose of this thesis include:
Yamato Ichihahi; The Washington Conference and After, Stanford university Press, USA, 1928.
Christopher Hall; Britain, America and Arms Control, 1921-1937, St Martin’s Press, USA, 1987.
And the following Articles from DIPLOMACY and STATECRAFT, op.cit. vol.2, no.4, 1993:
B.R. Sullivan, Italian Naval Power and the Washington Conference
W.R. Braisted; The Evolution of the United States Navy’s Strategic Assessments in the Pacific, 1919-1931.
M.G. Fry; The Pacific Dominions and the Washington Conference, 1921-22.
operation and complete mutual confidence’ which the British Empire Delegation had ‘from first to last endeavoured to follow’. 75

Balfour was justified in claiming that the results of the Conference were ‘happy’. British policy makers had been consistently of the view that any enduring international naval limitations agreement required predication by a settlement of political concerns in the Asia-Pacific region. They had identified as most seriously in need of diplomatic resolution the question of Sino-Japanese relations in Shantung and the question of US objections to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. In the view of the British, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance having both political and strategic content belonged properly with the naval negotiations. It was their expectation, therefore, that the settlement of the Shantung question would precede the conclusion of a naval agreement. That was precisely what occurred in Washington.

By 13 December 1921, the conferees were well along the route towards agreeing Capital Ships ratios, territorial status quo in the Pacific and, as a substitute agreement for the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, a Quadruple Treaty by which Britain, Japan, the US and France agreed to confer together to resolve disputes in the Pacific. 76 The lack of progress in the Sino-Japanese talks, however, put the whole naval package in the balance.

On 22 December, in a letter to Lloyd George, Hankey speculated upon rumours reverberating in Washington domestic political circles that the Senate would reject the Quadruple Treaty. 77 Without the Quadruple Treaty, Hankey doubted that the Japanese

76 Ibid, document # 499.
77 Ibid; document # 517.
would adhere to acceptance of a 60% ratio in Capital Ships. Indeed, since the Shantung deadlock obstructed any progress relating to Open Door policy in China, it seemed to Hankey that the Senate would throw out, not only the Quadruple Alliance, but also the whole naval arrangement.\footnote{78 Ibid. (See also Document # 547 of 13 Jan. 1922 in which Geddes shared the same view in his report to Curzon.)}

From the resumption of the Shantung talks on 4 January 1922 until the end of that month, both Hughes and Balfour exerted maximum pressure and persuasion upon the Japanese and Chinese delegations in order to break the deadlock.\footnote{79 Ibid; Documents # 531, # 532, # 536, # 538, # 560, # 564, and # 570.}

The eventual settlement, and the signing on 4 February 1922 by China and Japan of the Shantung Treaty, allowed signing to take place two days later of the Nine Power Treaty in regard to China. The way was open for ratification of the Naval Agreement.\footnote{80 Ibid; Document # 585. The signatories to the Nine-Power Treaty were Britain, the US, Japan, China, France, Holland, Portugal, Italy and Belgium. Work on the Treaty had been assigned to the Committee of the Conference on Far Eastern and Pacific Questions and remained in harmony with the lines suggested in the preamble of the Balfour draft proposal of 10 November 1921.}

On the first day of business, Hughes had called for the immediate cancellation of all existing Capital Ship construction and a ten-year holiday, during which no Capital Ship construction would be permitted. He listed 30 ships for scrapping by the USN, 23 by the RN and 17 by the IJN, to leave 18, 22 and 10 Capital Ships to each, respectively. His scheme allowed the RN a temporary numerical advantage, as compensation for the qualitative inferiority of British ships to those remaining to the USN and IJN. At the end of the ten-year holiday, a replacement programme would come into operation for Capital Ships of more than 20 years of age. Tonnage limits were set under the replacement scheme.
at an upper limit of 35,000 tons for individual replacement vessels and at 500,000 tons in total each for the USN and RN and 300,000 tons for the IJN. Once the replacement programme was completed, the limits projected both the USN and the RN as having, in numbers, fifteen Capital Ships and the IJN nine.

By 22 December 1922, when the Washington Treaty was ratified, the inaugural naval proposals put up by Hughes remained present in broad terms, although altered considerably in detail. Participating nations, whose view of disarmament was influenced certainly by considerations of economy and of morality, were driven by the predominant imperatives of security to exact amendments favourable to their particular security interests.81

Balfour was successful in negotiating the key amendments sought by Britain's Sea Lords. Beatty expressed his satisfaction with the proposed ratios for the three principal naval powers but was adamant that final settlement required the strength of European navies to be taken into account. He insisted that, over and above those auxiliary vessels likely to be

81 Not least among the nations so compelled was France. It appears that the French Government hoped to develop a role for itself at Washington as mediator between Britain and the US on naval limitations. Britain's obvious readiness to cooperate with the Hughes' scheme put paid to that hope. Alarm bells then sounded for the French when it became apparent that, together with that of Italy, theirs was to be treated as an inferior naval category, to be dealt with later in the discussions. Yet, although Hughes had made no mention of land forces in his address, Balfour had linked them with naval limitations, as interdependent in talks on general limitations. Having little to reduce in naval power, and having failed to interest the Americans in reactivating the Anglo-American Guarantee of 1919, the French put their land-power beyond the dominion of the Conference by refusing to take any part in investigations of land armaments. Thereafter, the French Government turned to projections of new programmes of submarine construction to prop up its naval bargaining position at the Conference.

Balfour was unfazed by the French decision to keep land forces off the limitations agenda. His view was, as long as Britain retained naval dominance, the size of the French Army affected Britain only "in so far as it renders restraint of disarmament [re-armament] impossible." Since "interested states" were not present, military disarmament on a large scale could never be accomplished at Washington, where, realistically, "settlement of Far East and diminution of naval armaments" were the only objects that could be promoted. Ibid, Documents # 437, # 438, # 447 and # 448.
affected by the Battlefleet ratios, it had to be recognised that Britain had special
requirements in auxiliary vessels for the defence of its sea-roads.82

The first of those concerns was settled under a five-power agreement establishing Capital
Ship ratios of 5: 5: 3: 1.75: 1.75 for Britain, the US, Japan, France and Italy respectively.
Thereby, leaving the US out of the reckoning, the Admiralty had the two-power standard it
desired. With respect to auxiliary vessels, too, Admiralty desires were satisfied. Individual
surface defensive vessels were limited to a maximum size of 10 000 tons but their numbers
remained unrestricted by the agreement.83

The proposed ten-year holiday was of most particular concern to Beatty, on grounds of the
threat it posed to the health of British naval industries. The subject was debated at length in
communications between Balfour and the Cabinet. For his part, Balfour became
increasingly convinced that some modification of the proposal would require to be made.84

Any dilemma encountered by the British over raising objections to the proposal was ended
by a deal between Hughes and Japan’s chief naval delegate, Admiral Kato, in which
Balfour had merely to concur. The deal came about when it seemed likely that the
Japanese, who had been holding out for a 70% rather than a 60% ratio on Capital Ships,
would yield on the ratio issue if the Battleship “Mutsu” were exempted from scrapping.85
Hughes conceded the “Mutsu” to the Japanese and thereby, himself, knocked a hole in the

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82 Ibid; Document # 417

83 Ibid; Document # 456.

84 Ibid; Documents # 417, # 420, # 426, # 430, and # 460

85 Ibid. Document # 456. The “Mutsu”, which was close to completion, was the pride of Japan and,
according to Murfett, it had been partly funded by public subscription. Malcolm H. Murfett; Look Back in
Anger: The Western Powers and the Washington Conference of 1921-22- Paper in “Arms Limitation and
ten-year holiday proposal. In order to restore the 5: 5: 3 ratio, the arrangement involved recalculation of the original total tonnage maxima and allowed Britain to proceed with the construction of two new Capital Ships of 35 000 legend tons each.86

As had been expected by the Britain’s naval delegates, the Japanese next linked acceptance of the lower ratio with the limitation of the strategic reach of the naval powers. In particular, Japanese concern centred on the development of US naval bases deep into the Pacific. The British were ready to agree to the maintenance of the status quo in the region and to support a non-fortification agreement that preserved the naval dominance of each of the Powers in their regional seas.87

Prolonged discussion produced an arrangement approved by Balfour, Hughes and Kato, for inclusion in the naval treaty.88 The effect of the arrangement was to recognise the naval dominance of the US in the Eastern Pacific, of Japan in the Western Pacific and of Imperial Britain in the South-Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Particular attention was paid by Balfour to ensure that the exclusion of Singapore from the non-fortification agreement was put beyond doubt.89

Diplomatically, economically and strategically the aims of the British Government were achieved at Washington. International relations in the Pacific region were stabilised and remained so for the next decade – a critical outcome at a time when British Imperial security depended on the sufferance of others.

86 All previous calculations had been in American tons. The decision to use legend tons, in this case, added about three more to the size of the new British ships.

87 CAB 4/7/CID 277-B, Memorandum by the Naval Staff, 5 October 1921.


89 Ibid.
Although the Quadruple Treaty, which essentially replaced the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, offered no support to Britain, the change was not particularly regretted by the Sea Lords, whose intention had never been to leave Imperial Security dependent upon Japanese support. Overall, the Naval Treaty answered the key strategic objectives of the Admiralty. The Agreement set the seal on the one-power standard in British Naval Policy under the Capital Ship ratios, which also allowed for a two-power standard over Japan and the largest European Navy. The exclusion of Singapore from the non-fortification agreement, together with the exclusion of Cruiser numbers from limitation, accorded with Admiralty planning for post-war strategic policy.
Chapter 6


Politicians and Diplomats formed the principal part of the British delegation to the Washington Conference. Beatty and his Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (ACNS) Chatfield were included in the party to provide the principals with expert advice on naval technical matters. But in no way were they to interpose in the government's overall aim of achieving the greatest possible reduction in armaments consistent with National and Imperial Security.¹

Once it became clear that, as a whole, the American proposals would form the basis of agreement at Washington, it remained to the service officers to assist in the technical detail of the naval negotiations. Beatty left that task in Chatfield's hands and returned to Britain where a fresh assault upon naval estimates and policy threatened.²

On this occasion, the threat took the form of an interim report by a committee of businessmen. The committee had its origins in a proposal made to Cabinet by the Chancellor of Exchequer Sir Robert Horne, at a time when squandermania campaigns in the national Press threatened the stability of the Government. The Chancellor had it as an objective to cut 100 million pounds of government spending from the next Budget. His proposal was that an independent committee of businessmen, under the Chairmanship of Sir Eric Geddes, be set up and empowered to make proposals to the government on where

¹ Beatty Papers; Vol. 2, op.cit. Documents # 90 and # 100 and p. 77.
² Ibid; p.778.
cuts might be made. Contrary to the wishes of Cabinet that the Committee should have advisory functions only, at a later meeting Lloyd George insisted that its functions be enlarged to include powers to suggest such policy changes as would support its proposed cuts.

In an interim report of 14 December 1921, the Geddes Committee supported the Treasury’s aim of a 100 million pounds reduction in government spending across the board. And it singled out the armed services as having to bear the bulk of the cuts. To support a cut of 20 million pounds from the navy budget, it went on to make specific recommendations for reductions in personnel and in commissioned ships. It went further Addressing policy and strategic matters, it concerned itself with Directive 616A. It criticised strategic planning that appeared unmindful of the ruling contained in Directive 616A, concerning a 10-year period of peace. In order to remain within the allocation of monies specified in Directive 616A, it was the view of the Committee that the services be required to bring their strategic policies into line with the 10-year ruling. In the case of the Admiralty, since under the 10-year ruling no major threats to peace were anticipated before 1929, expensive policies, such as those proposed for Singapore and the chain of fuel bases, could and should be deferred.

It was not the scale of the cuts that alarmed Beatty. Largely as a result of the Washington proposals, he was able to suggest savings of a similar magnitude without incurring the kinds of reductions in personnel and commissioned ships or the deferment of the Imperial

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3 CAB.23/26, Meeting of Cabinet, 2 August 1921.

4 CAB.23/26, Meeting of Cabinet, 15 August 1921.

5 Ferris, op.cit., p.90.
Defence Policy recommended in the Geddes Report. What alarmed Beatty was the intrusion of the Treasury (under the aegis of the Geddes Committee) into the Admiralty’s management of naval policy and strategic planning, resulting in recommendations which, in his view, were incompatible with the maintenance of the one-power standard and Imperial Security. He was not alone in his alarm. Churchill, at the time Colonial Secretary, protested against the conclusions of the Geddes Committee.

The Coalition was in grave risk of collapse. Desiring to avoid further aggravation from within the ranks of his Cabinet, Lloyd George appointed Churchill Chairman of a Cabinet Committee on Defence Estimates. The new Committee was charged with the specific responsibility of examining the extent to which cuts could be made in defence expenditure without danger to national security.\(^6\)

The Churchill Committee provided opportunity to the Service Chiefs to respond to the Geddes report. Following Beatty’s representation on behalf of the Navy, the Churchill Committee rejected the strategic arguments of the Geddes Committee and also rejected the figures upon which the Geddes economic arguments were based. The Churchill Committee did find that cuts could be made in the Navy Estimates but within certain bounds. Churchill took the view that, whatever economies were agreed to, the existing strength of the Navy must be maintained ‘to enable us to defend ourselves until we were able to bring the whole fighting resources of the Empire to bear against an enemy’.\(^7\)


\(^7\) Ibid.
The findings of the Churchill Committee prevailed and established the basis for service policies for the two years that followed. During that time, government in Britain acknowledged the vital importance of the Navy to national and Imperial Security and the place of military preparedness in foreign policy. The policy of diplomacy backed by military preparedness continued to be considered as having a vital role to play in halting aggressors. It was a policy practised with complete success by the Lloyd George government during the Chanak Crisis in the autumn of 1922. Ironically, although the Chanak affair was the last nail in the coffin of Lloyd George's premiership, his commitment to prevent Turkish intrusion in the recently cast international zone in the Dardanelles resulted in a foreign policy triumph that boosted Britain's international prestige. As will be seen below, during the period under consideration in this chapter the Admiralty preserved its estimates and its policies against Treasury encroachments. Such cuts as were made in Admiralty spending during the period emanated more from the agreements made at Washington than from the Treasury demands for economies.

Beatty's early return from Washington in December 1921 was prompted by warnings of yet another hard round of negotiations with Treasury over the 1922-23 estimates due to be presented to Parliament in the Spring. Treasury demands for economies in service estimates had begun even before war's end. For the past 3 years Cabinet had intervened to the advantage of the Services in moderating the cuts demanded by Treasury. But during the spring and summer of 1921 attacks in parliament and in the national press on government spending were at a furious pitch. To fend off the attacks, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Sir Robert Horne put to Cabinet that a committee of businessmen under the Chairmanship

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of Sir Eric Geddes be formed to make proposals for economies in government spending. ⁹ At a subsequent meeting, and over Cabinet protestation, Lloyd George conceded increased powers to the Geddes Committee, giving it authority to make recommendations, not only on how much required to be cut, but where cuts should be made and policies altered to support them. ¹⁰ In those circumstances the Treasury sought once again to press the case for Service estimates to be fixed at an overall figure of 110 million pounds which, it claimed, approximated to the 1914 levels. The Geddes Committee presented its first interim report, concerning the Fighting Services, to the Chancellor on the 14 December 1921. ¹¹ It scrutinised the sketch estimates of all three services in terms of an assumption of no major wars within the period defined in 1919 under the 10-year rule and concluded that they were grossly excessive. It was critical of the wastefulness created by a lack of co-ordination between the services, and made recommendations for co-ordination under a single Ministry of Defence. As to the sketch estimates for 1922-23, it specified, in the case of the Admiralty, a reduction in personnel of approximately one third from the projected 121 000 to 86 000 and a reduction in Capital Ships in full commission, to effect a saving of 14 million pounds. Further economies should be required of the Admiralty in areas not specified in order to cut its estimates by a further 7 million pounds, reducing them to a total of 60 million pounds. The Geddes Report claimed that, unless in the year 1923, with a broken and exhausted Europe, and with no German menace, we were to have far greater

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⁹ CAB 23/26 Meeting of Cabinet, 2 August 1921.

¹⁰ CAB 23/26 Meeting of Cabinet, 15 August 1921.

¹¹ Cmd. 1581. See also Roskill, Naval Policy Vol. 1, op. cit., p. 231.
fighting power, with a larger personnel and greater preparations for war than ever before in our history’; such steps required to be taken.\textsuperscript{12}

Although the Geddes recommendations were applauded in the press, the report brought very strong reaction from all of the service departments and from members of the Cabinet, notably from Churchill, who took exception to its conclusions. The Coalition was now extremely fragile. Nevertheless, it was Churchill’s view that the national naval position was not a matter to be decided according to ‘the mood of the moment’.\textsuperscript{13} Lloyd George at once passed examination of the extent of defence savings to a Cabinet Committee on Defence Estimates, under Churchill’s chairmanship. The Churchill Committee’s task was to scrutinise the Geddes Report, examine the views of the Service Chiefs and adjudicate on the extent of possible cuts in defence expenditure, as set against the requirements of Imperial Security.\textsuperscript{14}

The Churchill Committee opened its inquiries on 9 January 1922. The First Lord being in Washington, Beatty had responsibility for presenting the case on behalf of the Admiralty. As soon as it had been advised by the Churchill Committee that it, too, was looking for a reduction of 20 million pounds in the 1922-3 Estimates, the Board submitted a fully revised version of its sketch estimates for that period. The revisions acted on the same basis as the 1921 policy of the one-power standard and maritime security but contained adjustments to bring its estimates into line, assuming the ratification of the new

\textsuperscript{12} Roskill; Naval Policy, Vol. 1, \textit{op.cit.} p. 212 and. CAB 23/29, Meeting of Cabinet, 15 February 1922.

\textsuperscript{13} Quoted in Gilbert; \textit{op.cit.} p.443.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid; p.442. Also Roskill; Naval Policy Vol. 1, \textit{op.cit.} p.233 and Beatty Papers; Vol. 2, \textit{op.cit.} Document #104. (The other Committee Members were the Lord Chancellor Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India Edwin Montague and the President of the Board of Trade Stanley Baldwin.)
Washington Naval Limitations agreement. The revised estimates suggested a cut of approximately 20 million pounds and put the new figure for 1922-23 at 61.25 million pounds and a manning reduction of circa 20 000 to bring the establishment figure to 98 750 men.

Subsequently, in his meetings with the Churchill Committee, Beatty refused to concede further reductions unless the Government altered the policy of the one-power standard as the minimum to be maintained for maritime security. Churchill probed for further reductions in the estimates under deferment of the Singapore Base, the fuel reserves programme and the construction of the two new battleships permitted by the Washington Agreement. But apparently fully persuaded of the Admiralty’s ‘earnest desire to meet the demands for economy’, with the rest of the Committee members, he supported the naval planning.

On the 15 February 1922, the Cabinet met to consider the Geddes Report in the light of the findings of the Churchill Committee. At that meeting, Churchill explained that the Chancellor had had, as the basis for his request for a reduction, the Naval Estimates of 1921-22, which had amounted to 83 Million pounds. The sketch estimates for 1922-23, which had been scrutinised by the Geddes Committee, amounted to 81 Million pounds, an apparent reduction of only 2 million pounds. Churchill pointed out that the Geddes Committee had failed to take it into account that there had been no new construction costs contained in the Estimates of the previous year, while the sketch estimates in question contained 12 million pounds in the building vote for the construction of the four new

15 Ferris; op.cit. p.112.

16 Beatty Papers; Vol. 2, op.cit. Document # 105. See also Documents # 102, 104, and Ferris; op.cit. p.113.
Capital Ships. The Admiralty, said Churchill, was to be commended for the economies made elsewhere in order to meet the increase in the Building Vote in its 1922-23 sketch estimates and show an actual reduction of 2 million pounds on the estimates of the previous year.

Assuming agreement at Washington, and including additional economies negotiated by his Committee with regard to the Building Vote and the vote for oil reserves, the revised Admiralty Estimates for 1922-23 amounted to 61.75 millions pounds, a reduction of 20.75 million pounds on the 1921-22 Estimates.

Churchill dismissed the Geddes Committee’s claim that 21 million pounds could be cut from the navy budget even before economies resulting from Washington came into consideration. He explained that the savings that might be assumed as a result of Washington were in the region of 12 million pounds. Taken together with the Geddes claim and a possible saving of 2 million pounds on oil reserves, the result would be a total cut of 35 million pounds, reducing the naval estimates to 46 million pounds. In Churchill’s view, with cuts of that magnitude, not only would it be impossible to maintain the one-power standard, Britain would have a navy inferior to that of Japan. To maintain the one-power standard, he was satisfied that fifteen battleships in full commission was the minimum number required and 98 000 men the minimum necessary to maintain the navy as an effective force.

He pointed out that pressure of time had allowed him and his committee to consider the figures only in the broadest terms. Further savings might be found by the Treasury if the details were examined in collaboration with the Admiralty but, he warned, any pressure on the Admiralty to further reduce its strength would cause it to point out that the one-power
standard could no longer apply. He said that the abandonment of the one-power standard would severely damage British prestige and diplomatic authority world-wide and the United States would come to be regarded as the new centre of Anglo-Saxon power.\footnote{CAB 23/29 Meeting of Cabinet, 15 February 1922.}

Churchill had given the message quite clearly that the decisions of the Washington Conference coupled with the one-power standard placed severe restrictions on reductions in material. For this reason Horne, in the same meeting, took up the question of Vote A – funds allowed for the maintenance of personnel - one of the few areas of the Geddes report containing specific recommendations. The disparity between the Geddes recommendations and the revised estimates stood at 10 000 men. To support the argument for further reductions in personnel, Horne quoted figures that seemed to support a proposed reduction of 43% in naval personnel in the United States, from 139 000 men to 96 000. Lee (now returned from Washington) explained that the figures were in error. The United States Navy was to reduce its enlisted men from 97 000 to 96 000, representing a reduction of a little over 1% of its total establishment of 139 000. Churchill pointed out that the Geddes recommendation on manning levels, too, was based on false premises about manning. Horne remained tenacious. He warned that Sir Eric Geddes had taken exception to the publication of an Admiralty memorandum disparaging the work of his committee. The Geddes Committee was prepared to stand by its figures. Geddes had written a letter to Horne to that effect and wanted it published.

Discussion continued with strong support for the view that the Geddes Committee had not only miscalculated, but was itself guilty of maliciously the Admiralty. Lee spoke in that vein, as did Secretary of State for India E.S. Montague. Montague expressed his belief that
the Geddes Committee's errors extended right across all three of the Armed Services. If the Committee could not prove otherwise, it was Montague's view that 'the Cabinet could not assent to make such reductions as might render it impossible for the Fleet to go to Sea'. Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty L.S. Amery\(^\text{18}\) pointed out that the Admiralty was justified in expecting the public to be made aware that savings of 20 million pounds were recommended. No specifications, however, had been made in respect of seven of those millions, while a further seven millions came from miscalculations in the manning estimates. The true saving recommended by the Geddes Report amounted, therefore, to only 7 million pounds.\(^\text{19}\)

The Prime Minister reminded the members of the risks to the Government if the bitterness between the several departments and the members of the Geddes Committee reached the stage of public recrimination. He preferred that 'the whole report should be carefully studied on its merits, in order that its recommendations should as far as possible be adopted'. The Secretary of State for War, Sir L. Worthington-Evans, protested that he had been unable to obtain any explanation of its figures from the Geddes Committee or from the Treasury Officials who had assisted it. Therefore, while the Chancellor stated that the Treasury officials who had assisted the committee were in agreement with its figures, Cabinet concluded 'that, before further progress could be made, it was essential to endeavour to arrive at an agreement as regards the facts'. In order that this might be accomplished it was decided also that Treasury officials appointed by the civilian heads of

\(^{18}\) Leopold Amery, later appointed First Lord (1922-23). A powerful figure in his Party, he was among the Admiralty's most influential supporters throughout the period covered in this thesis. See his Autobiography; My Political Life, Vol.2, War and Peace, Hutchinson, London. 1953.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.
the Service departments, together, should seek to establish the facts in regard to the disputed figures.20

On the 17 February, the Admiralty Board received Cabinet instructions to review its revised estimates on the basis of risks that might be taken over the next two years.21 Beatty, returned from Europe on the 20 February, took the instructions under consideration. He took full account of the Prime Minister’s urgent desire to acquire further economies from the Navy estimates. He prepared, with Lee’s agreement, to defend the Admiralty position before the Prime Minister that, without a change of policy, no further cuts were possible. He felt certain then he had enough support from the majority of the Cabinet and ‘certainly from the ones that count [to avoid being] forced into a false position’.22

On the following day, he attended a meeting with the Prime Minister. Chamberlain, Balfour and Hankey were also present. Sir George Beharell joined later to advise those present on details of the Geddes report.23 Perhaps because Beatty had never been shy of using the Press to further naval interests, Lloyd George reminded him that, as a consequence of its adversarial attitudes towards the Geddes Committee, the Admiralty was already in bad odour with the Press. The Prime Minister acknowledged the discrepancy between the cuts maintained by the Admiralty as the maximum possible and those recommended by the Geddes Report. He went on to point out that the purpose of the meeting was not to find fault with the Admiralty figures, which he was certain, on

20 Ibid.
21 Ibid; CAB 23/36 Memorandum of 21 February 1922.
22 Beatty Papers; Vol. 2., op.cit.. Document # 108.
23 CAB 23/36 Memorandum of 21 February 1922.
technical grounds, could be entirely justified by Beatty. Instead, it was to make an appeal to Beatty to review the whole question on a new basis, namely ‘from the point of view of the naval risk to be incurred over the next two years.’ The Prime Minister claimed that there was no intention of obliging the First Sea Lord ‘to take the risk’. He went on to invite Balfour to explain to Beatty how, in terms of its financial difficulties on the one hand, and ‘an unsatisfactory naval position’ on the other, the Government was, for the next two years, caught in a dangerous dilemma.  

Beatty defended the Admiralty estimates on the basis of their economic integrity and on the bounds laid down for the Admiralty by government naval policy. He said that the gravity of the financial situation was not lost on the Admiralty, where all means had been minutely scrutinised for cuts to be borne by the Navy. He reminded the Prime Minister that the Geddes Committee had been able to specify means for making 14 million pounds of economies, only. Of that figure, half had been absorbed in the adjusted Admiralty estimates. Further, the adjusted estimates did already involve risks, taken with the ‘greatest misgivings’ by the Admiralty, over not a two but a three-year period with regard to oil reserves. In pointing to the major discrepancy between the Geddes Report and the revised estimates, namely the savings to be made out of Vote A for personnel numbers, he reminded those present of the Government’s policy of a one-power standard. The policy had the endorsement of the Imperial Conference as the basis for recommendations at Washington and had been accepted there. The subsequent acceptance by Cabinet of the recommendations of the Washington Conference consolidated the place of the one-power standard as Government policy.

24 Ibid.
He went on to demonstrate that, in granting even a temporary alteration in government policy over the two years in question, the whole exercise of laying off and re-engaging personnel was likely to prove one of diminishing economic returns, overall.

Sir George Beharell joined the discussion and contributed a general perspective on how the Geddes Committee had arrived at its establishment figure. If the purpose in including Sir George in the discussion was to suggest to Beatty means by which the Admiralty might reconcile the additional cut in the establishment figure with the maintenance of the one-power standard, it did not succeed. Although Chamberlain pointed out that the Geddes Committee ‘differed from the Admiralty not in regard to policy, but in regard to fact’ and that the Geddes Committee had not recommended ‘a third class navy, which government policy could not have accepted’, Beatty remained adamant. He insisted that such a reduction in personnel meant precisely that.25

The meeting closed with a recommendation that Sir George Beharell continue to discuss the establishment figures with the Admiralty on the following day. However, on that day, 22 February, in a memorandum to Lloyd George, the First Lord endorsed, in their entirety, the arguments put up by Beatty the day before.26

The expert nature of the Admiralty’s defence won increasing support for its estimates, whereas the uncovering of flaws in the arguments and accounting in the Geddes Report caused support for the Geddes Committee to decline, undermining the arguments of the Treasury. So that by early March 1922, even the Chancellor distanced himself from the

25 Ibid.

26 Roskill; Vol.1, Naval Policy, op.cit. p. 34 and Adm. 116/1776, Memorandum, dated 22 February 1922.
Geddes Committee. Cabinet finally approved the Admiralty Estimates, which were completed for presentation to Parliament on 10 March 1922 at a total of 64.9 million pounds.

In his Explanatory Statement of the Estimates for the period, Lee drew comparisons with those of the previous year. The Non-effective Votes of approximately 10 million pounds for the coming year were up by almost 3 million pounds on those of the previous year, an increase due to costs to be incurred in the paying off of over 30,000 naval employees over the coming year. If, he said, account was to be taken of the recommendations of the Geddes Committee and such 'abnormal charges' be met out of 'Special Reserve', then, in comparison with the estimates of 1914-15, the Effective Votes for 1922-3 showed a net reduction of almost 50%, after allowance for increased prices and wages. Lee went on to make an unambiguous statement on the origins of the above savings. The Savings were the outcome of the 'Naval Policy of the Government, as approved by Parliament and implemented at Washington' of the maintenance of a one-power standard. In an echo of

Also, quite apart from the Admiralty's public objection to the Geddes Committee, the swingeing cuts in Social Services recommended by the Committee brought an outcry from Labour. The government reduced such cuts as had been specified by Geddes from 75 million pounds to 64 million pounds and refused to countenance any more. As it was, the budget of 1922 made possible a reduction in the income tax rate of 6 Shillings to 5 Shillings in the pound. The economy campaign against the government subsided.
Movat; op.cit. p. 130-131.

28 Roskill; Naval Policy Vol.1, op.cit. Appendix D.

29 Roskill explains that the "Naval Votes were divided into a number of sections known as Votes and Sub-heads covering different services. Thus Vote A (which was actually not an expenditure vote) was the 'Estimate of Numbers of Officers and Men', and was designed to secure Parliamentary authority for the size of the Navy. Vote 1 covered 'Wages of Officer [etc], Seamen etc.', Vote 2 'victualling and clothing', and so on through Educational Services, Shipbuilding and Naval Armaments down to Votes 13, 14 and 15 which referred to 'Non-effective Services' such as the pensions and superannuation allowances paid to former naval and civil personnel. " Roskill notes that the Admiralty had virtually no control over monies expended on Non-effective Services. Also, "when the estimates were considered by Parliament funds were granted Vote by Vote for the specific services named in the titles, and it was not within the Admiralty's power to divert money saved on one vote to meet excess expenditure on another. " Ibid, p. 204 – 205.

the words of his predecessor in March 1920, he defined the one-power standard thus, 'that our Navy should not be inferior in strength to that of any other Power'. Next, he pointed out that it was 'the duty of the Admiralty to carry out that policy with the strictest regard to economy'. He referred to the fact that the Admiralty had responded to the call for exceptional economies and had taken risks which, on purely naval grounds, were not justifiable but which assumed the Fleet would not be engaged in any great war for many years to come.

The subsequent acceptance of the Admiralty Estimates of 1922-23 meant that they remained largely unaffected by Treasury pressure for cuts in that year.

At approximately 8% above the figure of the 60 million pounds considered since 1919 by the Treasury as acceptable in a 'Normal Year', the 1922-23 Naval Estimates represented 2% less than that figure once price and wage changes were taken into account. But if all of the Treasury demands had been met, the Admiralty would have received only 46 million pounds - a drop of approximately 22% comparatively on 1919 values.

The Government did not enforce the demand of the Treasury for reductions by retrenchment over and above the reductions effected under the Washington agreements. The difference between the informed responses of the Admiralty and the lack of precision in the Geddes Report certainly would have weighed with the Cabinet's decision to approve

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31 Ibid.

32 Lee referred to vote 8, Section 2 (Bracket Fuel – sub-Head) where 500 000 pounds had been pared from the scheme to establish overseas oil bases. The Admiralty estimated the effect of the reduction would be to delay completion of the bases until about 1931.

33 Ferris, op.cit. p. 35.
the estimates. But adherence to its policy on Naval Power was the deciding factor for the Coalition Government, assuming, as its ‘duty’, responsibility for how far it would dispense with military service.\footnote{CAB 23/29, Meeting of Cabinet, 24 February 1922.} As the Government of the day, the Coalition recognised the importance of Britain’s sea-power as vital to the defence of National and Imperial security. It did so no less because it acknowledged sea-power as the necessary force that underpinned Britain’s international prestige and the pursuit of an assertive influence in world affairs.\footnote{In October 1921, while gathering information for its investigations, the Geddes Committee had asked the Admiralty for a definition of the one-power Standard. The Admiralty rejected any suggestion that equality in British Home Waters could be adequate, "as it presupposed the adoption of a defensive strategy," which never had nor ever would be contemplated by any Board of the Admiralty. The Admiralty’s point was that Britain’s best defence lay in its capacity not only to keep its own sea communications open but also to cut off those of its enemies. Churchill articulated the diplomatic value placed by the government on sea-power. He reminded his colleagues "if it became widely known that we had abandoned the One Power Standard our diplomatic position throughout the world would be weakened and it would indicate to the Dominions that a new centre had been created for the Anglo-Saxon world." CAB 23/29, Meeting of Cabinet, 15 February 1922 and also Roskill; Naval Policy, Vol. 1, \textit{op.cit.} p.230-231.}

Before the year was out Chanak, in the mandated territories in Asia-Minor, provided the occasion of a demonstration of a combination of assertive diplomacy and military preparedness. The settlement of the Chanak Crisis was in the end a peaceful one and averted also an escalation of the Greco-Turkish war (perhaps to include the Balkans). It reinforced perceptions of the value of military preparedness in deterring aggression.

Further, where Britain had shown its resolve to engage its forces on a question of mandated authority France (and Italy) had wavered. Left to spearhead the conduct of operations that
were ultimately successful, Britain reaped the benefit of a timely boost to its diplomatic prestige.\textsuperscript{36}

Those events combined to strengthen the case for a policy of attention to Britain’s military preparedness. Further, the commencement of a new warship building programme by Japan of 117 new ships including 8 new cruisers, in July 1922, underscored Beatty’s warnings of Japanese domination in the Western Pacific.

Although the Conservatives ended their Coalition with the Lloyd George Liberals in December 1922, they continued in Government, under Andrew Bonar Law and, when illness compelled him to relinquish the premiership in May 1923, under Baldwin to support the naval policy of their predecessors in Cabinet.

At a meeting of Cabinet on 21 February 1923, Cabinet approved and congratulated the Admiralty on estimates for 1923-24 of 58 million pounds, as reduced ‘within the figure proposed by the Chancellor’.\textsuperscript{37} At the same meeting, the decision of the Coalition in June 1921 for the base to be established at Singapore was endorsed. The 1923-24 estimates made their passage through Parliament with little opposition\textsuperscript{38} and the Admiralty began the preparations for those of the following year.

\textsuperscript{36} Mowat, \textit{op. cit.} p116 –119. The timeliness of the boost to Britain’s diplomatic prestige coincided with a requirement for a firm policy stance by Britain to deal with the new crisis developing in European relations. The crisis concerned the occupation of the Ruhr by French and Belgian troops as a response to the failure of the reparations talks in London (9-11 December 1922). Also according to Mowat, “the occupation of the Ruhr proclaimed the virtual end of the Anglo-French entente and of the unity of the war-time allies. France’s consuming passion for security clashed with Britain’s policy of reconciliation.” Mowat, \textit{op. cit.} p158

\textsuperscript{37} CAB 23/45, Meeting of Cabinet, 21 February 1923.

\textsuperscript{38} Beatty Papers; Vol. 2, \textit{op. cit.} Document # 120.
Amery, now First Lord, brought the 1924-25 Sketch Estimates to Cabinet in July 1923. The total of 61.1 million pounds contained a provision for work to begin on a long-term building programme involving, over the first five years, expenditure of 32.5 million pounds. Under the whole programme, the Admiralty planned to replace obsolete units of the Fleet and provide ships suited to warfare in the vast expanses of the Pacific by 1935, at a cost in total of approximately 70 million pounds. The Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, also acting as his own Chancellor of Exchequer, had goals more immediate than those held by the Admiralty. He had pledged his government to economies with the prospect of further reduction in taxes. In a letter of 17 August 1923, he pointed out to Amery that for the coming year the provisional estimates for the Civil Services were down by more than 11 million pounds.

Those of the Fighting Services, however, were up by more than 8 million pounds - half of which increase was contained in the Admiralty Sketch Estimates. He indicated he could not condone an increase in arms spending at the same time as his government was reducing spending on social services. It would be politically disastrous. What he proposed was a ‘ration’ of 112.5 million pounds for the three services, together. Within that sum Amery should prepare Navy Estimates for 1924/25 ‘not exceeding 52 million pounds’. He conceded that rationing was an ‘irrational’ method, but was prepared to offer the Admiralty the opportunity to increase its share and to reinstate, thereby, some of the services it would otherwise be required to postpone. He favoured asking the CID to consider submissions from all three services and to report on whether modifications should be made ‘within the

total allocation’ on the basis of essentiality to defence.40

At the time of writing Baldwin believed that adherence to the new Conservative Administration’s strategy on retrenchment and tax cuts in the next budget was the best course to follow to secure public support. By the autumn, having decided on a snap election, something more immediate seemed called for. Unemployment was running at close to 12% nationally. New naval construction orders would offer relief to some of the worst unemployment blackspots, which were in the traditional ship-building regions. The Baldwin government decided to support the Admiralty’s construction programme with a special allocation of 5 million pounds for the purpose and the Prime Minister announced the new programme to an assemblage of Trade Unionists in Plymouth in October.41

Following the dissolution of Parliament on 16 November, he again proclaimed it, while electioneering on Clydeside on 28 November.42 Nevertheless it remained the desire of the Government to uphold, also, its promises of tax relief. On 9 November 1923, Neville Chamberlain, now Chancellor of Exchequer, wrote to Amery. In his letter, he pressed the First Lord to prepare the Estimates for 1924/25 on the basis of the ‘provisionally fixed’ total of 52 million pounds, excluding the 5 million pounds specifically allocated for new construction.43 Chamberlain wrote to Amery again, on 28 November 1923, to remind him that the government was looking for means to cut taxes and to complain about the Admiralty’s revised estimates of 58 million pounds. He made the point that taxes were

40 ADM 116/3387, Letter Baldwin to Amery, 17 August 1923.

41 CAB 23/46, Meeting of Cabinet, 22 October 1923.

42 CAB 23/46, Meeting of Cabinet, 14 January 1924.

43 Adm. 116/3387, Letter Chamberlain to Amery, 9 November 1923.
calculated on the basis of estimated government expenditure but that it seemed that in recent years the Admiralty had consistently over-estimated its required budget. Taxes had, therefore, been imposed on the basis of expenditure that turned out to be unnecessary. He provided figures to show surpluses of around 7 million pounds in the 1921-22 and in the 1922-23 naval estimates and a projected surplus of more than 2 million pounds in the current year. He felt certain that there would be ‘water’ in the 1924-25 estimates, also, that ought to be squeezed out. Chamberlain next questioned the extent and precocity of the Admiralty’s strategic preparations, which seemed to him unjustified by the current international climate. If, however, Amery concluded that the Estimates could be reduced no further, Chamberlain argued that it was only fair that the CID should have the opportunity to examine the reasons that led him to such a conclusion.

The General Election of 6 December 1923 produced an ambiguous result. Nevertheless, Chamberlain felt obliged to assume that he would still be responsible for the 1924-25 Budget and wrote again to Amery on 1 January 1924 in the same vein as before.\(^4^4\) It was, by then, fairly clear that a Labour Government would soon take over office.\(^4^5\) Before it did so, it appears that the Admiralty was satisfied that, as a result of ‘oral conversations’ between Amery and Chamberlain on 17 January 1924, its case for Ordinary Estimates of

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\(^{44}\) ADM 116/3387, letter Chamberlain to Amery, 1 January 1924.

\(^{45}\) According to Mowat, the Conservatives whose campaign had been run on a platform of tariff protection polled 5,360,000 votes, while the combined popular vote against the Conservatives was more than 8.5 millions. The Conservatives still formed the largest party in the commons with 258 seats. Labour came second with 191 and the Asquith and Lloyd George Liberals, combined against tariff protection, held 158 seats (more going to Asquith followers than to followers of Lloyd George). On 18 December Asquith signalled his intentions – namely, since the country had clearly rejected protection, Labour, as the largest anti-protection party should be given its chance to govern. Parliament resumed under the Conservatives in January 1924. On the 17 January 1924 J.R. Clynes, from the Labour benches, moved an amendment to the King’s speech that “his Majesty’s present advisers had not the confidence of the House” Asquith spoke in support of the amendment, which was carried by 328 votes to 256 on 21 January. Baldwin resigned on the following day and Ramsay MacDonald formed a minority government. Mowat; op.cit. p.168-171.
57.25 million pounds, together with 5 million pounds for new construction, had been accepted as conclusive by Chamberlain. The Admiralty was satisfied, also, that a letter by Amery to Chamberlain, on the following day, clinched agreement.⁴⁶

Up until January, the Admiralty’s long-term planning, which had been in development under Beatty’s leadership since 1919, had been largely unaffected by Treasury attempts to control its spending. The August 1919 principles were not enforced upon the Navy. The Geddes ‘axe’ barely grazed the Admiralty’s estimates.

On the face of things, Beatty appeared to be on the way to getting all he had planned for. He had approval in principle, at least, for the long-term replacement ship-building programme. He had approval for the Singapore base, endorsed by international agreement and by successive Imperial Conferences in 1921 and 1923. He had had approved and endorsed by the Dominions the Admiralty strategy to defend the Far Eastern Empire from Japan by the dispatch of British main fleet to Singapore.

It is not to say the Admiralty obtained no economies throughout this period. The Admiralty took cognisance of the appeals of successive governments for savings by making substantial internal savings through instituting greater efficiency in administration and the running and maintenance of the Fleet and Dockyards, as well as making significant reductions in Personnel. The major cuts on Admiralty spending were brought about, in the first instance, by the transition from a wartime to peacetime establishment and then by the terms of the Washington Naval Limitation agreement. The agreement secured significant naval economies. But it also secured the one-power standard, which no government,

persuaded of the imperatives of maintaining maritime security and having a credible armed force capable of supporting its diplomacy, would be likely to subvert.

However, it was not to Amery that responsibility fell for presenting the 1924-25 Estimates but to Viscount Chelmsford, appointed First Lord of the Admiralty in Britain’s first Labour Government.
Chapter 7


Beatty’s expectations of difficulties with his new masters were well founded. It had never been a view held by the Admiralty that British and Imperial Security could be adequately protected by any supra-national body. In the view of the Admiralty, Navy and Empire were intrinsically linked. That linkage had been reiterated, as recently as November 1923, in a draft of a speech to be made by Beatty at the Lord Mayor’s Banquet –

The Empire was founded on commercial enterprise. It was considered in the past necessary to protect that enterprise. The Flag follows the Trade and not the Trade the Flag, and our commitments in the Pacific are now greater than they were before.

If protection was required 20 years ago, how much more so is it required today. If those who are responsible for our destinies say that protection is not required, that we can afford to live on the goodwill of others, then Singapore is not necessary, but if on the other hand we think it is desirable to safeguard our interests in that part of the world, then Singapore is necessary, for without it they cannot be secured. ¹

Then, the Conservatives were in power. Beatty’s mission on that occasion was, as it had been since the end of the war, to promote the necessity for continuous modernisation of the Navy in order to secure adequate funds from governments pledged to reduce national expenditure.

¹Beatty Papers; Vol. 2, op.cit. Document # 131
The advent of a Labour Government brought an additional dimension to his struggle. Well before the outbreak of World War One, the British Labour movement made no secret of its antipathy to power politics, Britain's traditional system of diplomacy. In the Socialist view, the system itself, depending as it did on balance of power politics, secret treaties and their adjunct, military preparedness, fostered the rivalries that led to war between states. By 1922 the Labour party was pledged to oppose 'any war entered into by any government, whatever the ostensible object of the war'. Its Manifesto of 1923 declared its commitment to the support, enlargement and strengthening of the League of Nations. Within the League, Labour had a vision of the transformation of international relations based on economic cooperation rather than competition between states and upon arbitration and the judicial settlements of disputes, but never upon settlement by main force. The Admiralty also had to deal with a government as dead set as any since the war on a balanced budget. On top of that, it was also a government which was ideologically opposed to the whole system of Capitalist Imperialism, and to the foreign relations traditions which perpetuated the system.

When the new government made its own careful scrutiny of the 1924-25 Estimates, the Admiralty was obliged to absorb some reduction in the overall figure. Although the cruiser construction programme remained substantially unaffected, development of the Singapore base was cancelled; for it was the express desire of the Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, acting as his own Foreign Secretary, that British strategic policy should support his foreign policy initiatives. As their ultimate objective, those initiatives had in view the liquidation of all war-preparation mentality in the international community.

When Britain's first Labour Government took office, the difficulties expected by Beatty manifested themselves at once. Beatty was disappointed by the appointment of Lord Chelmsford as First Lord. It seemed to him that Chelmsford was ill-credentialled to carry the Admiralty view in a Labour Cabinet (although he soon came to the opinion that Chelmsford seemed 'reasonable and open minded'). Then, almost immediately upon his appointment as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Snowden refused to accept the 1924-25 Naval Estimates. At that stage, Beatty did not regard Snowden's objections as a serious problem. It irked him to have to go through the process of convincing yet another Cabinet but he had confidence in the Admiralty's arguments and in the legal basis, through international agreement and Imperial endorsement, which supported them. He was also sure that the Cabinet would not want 'to face the new Parliament with an immediate break with the Admiralty'.

It seems that Chelmsford did, indeed, have a view of naval policy that coincided with Beatty's. According to Sir Alan Lascelles (Private Secretary in the Royal household) Chelmsford was a non-party man who had accepted his office under Ramsay MacDonald with the stipulation that –

1) The Cruiser programme should be carried out
2) The fortification of Singapore should continue

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3 Beatty Papers; Vol. 2, op.cit. documents # 133 and #134.

4 Ibid. Document #136. It is well documented that, in Government for the very first time, and that as a minority Government, Ramsay MacDonald had very much in mind the need to gain the confidence of the nation in the capacity of Labour Ministers to manage ably and responsibly the machinery of Government. MacDonald avoided, therefore, any attempt to force through bold Socialist initiatives in domestic policy. Strong national interest, however, in initiatives for international peace and disarmament left the Admiralty quite vulnerable to the forces of change.
3) He should never be asked in Cabinet to give an opinion on any party question.5

It was perhaps on account of an arrangement of this sort that Chelmsford made certain that a copy of his opening letter to Snowden was sent to the Prime Minister.6

The letter, of 29 January 1924, defended the Admiralty Estimates. In it Chelmsford pointed out to Snowden that negotiations between their respective predecessors had gone a long way beyond the basis from which Snowden wished to resume, namely Baldwin’s August 1923 principle of ‘rationing’ for the Services, with an allocation of 52 million pounds for the Navy. He wrote that, in the view of the Admiralty, a letter of Friday 18 January 1924 from Amery to Chamberlain clinched agreement on 57.25 Million pounds, ‘the result of oral conversations’ which took place between them on the previous day.7 Since, however, there was no Treasury document to show that final agreement was concluded, Chelmsford had examined ‘the particular directions in which any substantial economy might be possible’ of which there were three:

1) Reduction of the Fleet
2) Reduction of the Dockyards
3) Reduction in the rate of accumulation of the Oil Storage Reserve.

Chelmsford dealt with fleet and Dockyards reductions briefly. He reiterated the Admiralty position that Capital Ship numbers were as laid down by the Washington Agreement and,

5 Ibid.
7 Baldwin resigned Government on Monday 21 January 1924 and Amery and Chamberlain were out of office.
as such, must be exempt from cuts, while Cruiser numbers were already seriously low. Similarly, no substantial savings could be made through Dockyard reductions without profound adverse effects on Fleet maintenance and repair, on the cost of work currently in hand, and on employment.

Chelmsford and Snowden had discussed the question of the Oil Storage Reserve on the previous Friday when Snowden, using 4 500 000 Tons as the agreed total, contended that, with almost 2 830 000 tons currently in Reserve, half of the agreed Reserve was already accumulated. Chelmsford replied that he was in a position to contradict Snowden’s contention. He wrote that, in February 1919, it was laid down that 4 500 000 tons was the amount of oil required for the Fleet in time of war for one year. That figure had been based on the experience of war in the North Sea. In the light of the changes in naval power, the figure had been increased to 9 000 000 tons in 1921, for which the CID had approved the long-term plan of 500 000 tons laid down annually. The following year, after the Washington Conference, war against America was taken out of the calculation and the figure of 8 100 000 tons was submitted to the CID and again approved. The Treasury, however, believing that the Admiralty ‘were going in for a duplication of the original home supply of 4 500 000 tons’, had brought the matter to the Baldwin Cabinet. It had not been resolved there; instead was left over until an opinion could be had from the CID. Snowden’s contention, Chelmsford claimed, was based on the Treasury challenge but, under the policy already approved by the CID, the current reserve of 2 830 000 tons represented nothing like six months supply.8

8 Indeed, financial stringency had already caused the schedule to fall behind. Even uninterrupted the plan could not now reach completion before 1935-36, instead of 1929-30, as envisaged by the Admiralty in 1921. ADM 116/3387. Letter Chelmsford to Snowden, 29 January 1924.
Having put the Admiralty view that, in the ‘big categories’, Admiralty policy had been cut
to the bone, Chelemsford went on to explain the Admiralty perspective on the issue of
Cruisers. Admiralty estimations of Cruiser numbers were based on the requirements of the
Battle Fleet and on the requirements of Trade Route protection.

The imperatives of keeping Britain’s vast trade routes open made it necessary for the
Royal Navy to have many more Cruisers than either the Imperial Japanese Navy or the
United States Navy. Both of those navies had the luxury of choice, either to preserve their
Cruisers for Fleet actions, or to deploy them for Commerce Raiding. In respect of war with
Japan, the Admiralty had calculated on seventy cruisers, thirty-one to be assigned to
Battlefleet duties and thirty-nine to Trade Protection. But in the interests of the economy it
had reduced its overall figure to sixty Cruisers, as a minimum consistent with safety.
Present Cruiser numbers stood at fifty-one, built or building, a figure considered by the
Admiralty as seriously below the margin of safety.

But it was not merely a question of raising their numbers. Fifteen Cruisers had passed their
fifteen year age limit, twenty-eight more, suitable for their purpose when built for duty in
the North Sea but of a fuel capacity too small for warfare in Far Eastern waters, would
decommission almost simultaneously, seventeen of them within the next five years. An
extensive replacement plan was required not just to increase the Cruiser Fleet but also to
keep it in being. Having explained the problem, Chelemsford turned to the actual proposals
contained in the 1924-25 Estimates. He pointed out that, in July 1923, in their sketch form,
nothing had been included for Cruiser replacement. By custom, the Admiralty brought new
construction proposals to Cabinet before inclusion in Estimates. It had been the intention
of the Admiralty to put proposals for five Cruisers to be laid down in 1924-25 and four in
1925-26. Instead, Baldwin had called for a scheme of new construction that would serve
the Cruiser replacement policy and make a direct and substantial contribution towards solving unemployment in the worst ‘black spots’. The result was the current proposal to lay down eight Cruisers and a few minor vessels in 1924, for which purpose the Baldwin Government had approved 5 million pounds as additional to the revised estimates of 57.25 million pounds.

Chelmsford next pointed out that the Cruiser replacement programme represented the first stage in a sequence of a class-by-class replacement scheme contemplated by the Admiralty. Under the whole scheme, all classes of warships, excepting Capital Ships, would have undergone a replacement programme by 1932 when, under the terms of Washington, a programme of replacement for Capital Ships would fall due. The scheme had the advantage of maintaining an annual average of expenditure on naval construction over the years to come.

In his closing remarks, Chelmsford indicated that, while he was not prepared to discuss matters ‘from the point of view of policy’, he was happy to work with Snowden in order that they should be agreed on ‘the exact position as it stands between the Admiralty and the Treasury’. By 14 February 1924, Chelmsford and Snowden were very close to agreement on the Ordinary Estimates. They reached agreement on 54 million pounds for the Ordinary Estimates, representing a genuine cut of 1 million pounds to be found by the

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5 Baldwin announced new naval construction while in Plymouth in October 1923 and again while electioneering in Clydeside in November 1923. CAB 23/31, Meeting of Cabinet, 22 October 1922 and CAB 23/46, Meeting of Cabinet, 14 January 1924.


11 Ibid.
Admiralty and a shadow cut of 2.25 million to be restored, if found to be necessary, as a Supplementary Vote.¹²

As to the construction proposals, Snowden wanted time for a policy review. He proposed that he and Chelmsford ask the Prime Minister to appoint a small Committee of Cabinet Ministers who should

a) consider this question of Cruisers,

b) consider the proposed base at Singapore and

c) re-examine, with the assistance of your Naval advisers, the conception of our Naval requirements.

Snowden’s idea was that, ‘if such a committee advised in favour of a Cruiser programme and the Government agreed, a supplementary Navy Estimate would then be put forward’. Snowden was of the view that it might also be found that there were, after all, available on Navy Votes sufficient savings as would make the required sum a token one only.¹³

In his reply, Chelmsford indicated a readiness to agree to a policy review committee but had a single reservation. He pointed out that warships were years in building. Some Cruisers laid down seven years ago were still under construction. The Cruiser replacement programme was a matter of urgency and he was not prepared, therefore, to accept responsibility for further delay and postponement by accepting modifications in the programme announced by the previous Government. He hoped ‘to show that there is not very much between us, even on this point’.


¹³ ADM 116/3387. Letter Snowden to Chelmsford, 12 February 1924.
He reminded Snowden of the two factors which had contributed to the allocation by the previous Government of 5 million pounds for new construction, namely naval requirements and provision of employment. Chelmsford was of the view that it was a matter for the Cabinet, as a whole, whether any modification should be made of that part of the sum allocated by the previous Government for the provision of employment. On their own, however, Naval requirements of 5 Cruisers and 2 Destroyers, to be laid down in the current year, could be met from an allocation of 1.8 million pounds. Chelmsford was agreeable to the 'large question' of the warship replacement policy being examined by a committee on the basis that the policy of the previous Government on naval requirements in construction for the current year was taken as accepted. He advised Snowden that he would be informing the Prime Minister, directly, of his view on that subject. In addition to the large question of warship replacement policy, Chelmsford agreed also to both the Cruiser question and the Singapore base coming under discussion in the same Committee but insisted that they should be dealt with separately and as separate issues.

On 19 February 1924, Snowden confirmed agreement on 54 million pounds for the Ordinary Estimates, representing a genuine cut of 1 million pounds to be found by the

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14 Frank Hodges and Charles Ammon, respectively the new Civil Lord and Financial and Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty had also written to Snowden on the subject of a reduced Cruiser programme. They appealed to Snowden as to "whether the full weight of the economy has been balanced i.e. the financial saving against the continued unemployment, the consequent loss of morale and working skill and efficiency of the thousands of workpeople directly concerned." ADM 116/3387. Letter 8 February 1924.

15 ADM 116/3387. Letter Chelmsford to Snowden, 14 February 1924. Beatty did not want Cruisers and the Singapore base to be regarded as interdependent subjects for discussion. The Admiralty view was that Cruisers were required regardless of the decision on Singapore. Britain's Imperial responsibilities dictated a sufficient number of Cruisers for operations with the Main Fleet and for Trade Defence. The limitation of Capital Ships at Washington had increased the importance of the Cruiser as an adjunct in the gun line of the Main Fleet. The Cruiser was the largest gun armed warship not limited in numbers by treaty, and therefore was a means by which the Admiralty sought to maintain British Naval Supremacy over the gun line of a potential enemy. This was in addition to the Cruiser's established role as a weapon for ensuring the safe passage of Imperial merchant traffic and the key naval unit for the enforcement of Belligerent rights against enemies of Great Britain, wherever they may be in the world.
Admiralty, and a shadow cut of 2.25 million pounds to be restored, if found to be necessary, as a Supplementary Vote. But he continued to insist upon postponement of new construction, pending its approval by the examining committee and then by the Government.\textsuperscript{16} Chelmsford responded by referring the Cruiser question, once again, back to MacDonald.\textsuperscript{17}

Over the next two days these matters were settled. On 20 February 1924, Cabinet agreed that, under the Chairmanship of the Lord Privy Seal J.R. Clynes, the examining committee would have as its terms of reference:

\begin{enumerate}
\item To consider Cabinet policy in respect of the requirements of the Navy during the next ten years as regards the replacement of units of the Fleet other than Capital Ships, and to make recommendations to the Cabinet in regard to these requirements.
\item To consider the necessity for a Naval Base in the Far East and the reasons which led to the decision to develop Singapore for this purpose and to report whether the scheme should be proceeded with and, if so, whether any substantial saving can be suggested in its cost.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{enumerate}

And, on the following day, contrary to any question of postponement, Cabinet approved measures that would expedite the start of work on the new Cruisers, immediately after parliamentary sanction.\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{16}] ADM 116/3387. Letter Snowden to Chelmsford, 19 February 1924.
\item[\textsuperscript{17}] ADM 116/3387. Letter Chelmsford to Snowden, 19 Feb. 1924.
\item[\textsuperscript{18}] CAB 23/47, Meeting of Cabinet, February 21, 1924.
\item[\textsuperscript{19}] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Parliamentary sanction for the programme was secured that same day by the Conservative and Labour Parties combined against strong Liberal opposition, and although Beatty speculated that many had been brought to support ‘the proposition of a strong Navy’ against their grain, he was nevertheless optimistic about the next round with the Government, before the Clynes Committee.\textsuperscript{20}

Beatty believed the main task before him to be one of educating a new Government, ignorant of the essentials of imperialism. Despite the ‘bitter pacifism’ exhibited by men like Snowden, he believed that, as a whole, the Government was beginning to grasp some of these essentials.\textsuperscript{21} He had confidence in the case he had to present, and although he wrote to his wife on 23 February 1924 ‘one can never be certain what wind will deflect the political mind’, he expected to win through.\textsuperscript{22}

He was mistaken in that expectation, for the Clynes Committee, and MacDonald’s part in it, revealed the ideological chasm that stood between Beatty’s naval doctrine and the 1924 Labour Government. Beatty’s naval doctrine was deeply rooted in a British tradition for the conduct of foreign relations that saw diplomacy and military preparedness as necessarily bound together. But it was a tradition that the Labour Party repudiated and, immediately on coming into office,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Beatty Papers; Vol. 2, op.cit. Documents # 146 and # 147. Ostensibly, the imperative behind the decision to support new naval construction was the relief of unemployment (Parliamentary Debates, House of commons; Vol.169, col. 1971 ff.) The reality was, the Government had taken a decision that would reduce previously proposed Unemployment Relief Funding by 3.2 million pounds. Ramsay MacDonald certainly had no commitment to a “strong Navy” but he had made a commitment to Chelmsford in respect of the funding for the Cruiser programme and Chelmsford held him to it.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Beatty Papers; Vol. 2, op.cit. Documents # 143, # 144, and # 145.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid; document # 147.
\end{itemize}
it asserted its repudiation by scrapping Beatty's entire scheme for Imperial Defence east of Suez.  

The Clynes Committee began its deliberations on 27 February 1924. It was established at once that, in accordance with the Admiralty's request, the questions of naval construction over the long term and that of the Singapore Base were to be treated separately. The Committee next agreed 'the first part of their inquiry should be into the question of Singapore'. Beatty was asked to open by explaining the strategical aspect of the question. He did more. He explained the strategical aspects in terms of a continuation of a tradition of naval policy that had, as its object, the maintenance of 'sufficient naval forces to protect our commitments and interests in all parts of the world, having regard to the naval strength maintained by other powers in those waters'. He described how, at the start of the German naval threat, Britain had pulled its second largest Fleet from permanent station at its principal base in the Far East to home waters. War had broken out before an intention to reverse that decision and to restore Far Eastern protection could be carried out. After the war, new factors had to be taken into consideration in order to restore the traditional naval protection policies to the Far East. Vast changes in technology in naval warfare required large-scale changes in main base facilities and in fuelling

23 Michael R. Gordon; op.cit. p. 22-23. See also Elaine Windrich; British Labour's Foreign Policy, Stanford University Press, USA, 1952.

24 The Composition of the Clynes Committee was as follows:

| J.R. Clynes | Lord - Frizzey Seal and committee Chairman. |
| Philip Snowden | Chancellor of Exchequer. |
| P.M. Ramsay MacDonald | Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. |
| Stephen Walsh | Secretary of State for War. |
| J. H. Thomas | Secretary of State for the Colonies. |
| Lord Olivier | Secretary of State for India. |
| Lord Thomson | Secretary of State for Air. |
| Viscount Chelmsford | First Lord of the Admiralty. |

Each appointee having the right to be represented by deputy. CAB.23/47. Meeting of 20 February 1924.


26 Ibid.
stations. After exhaustive examination by committees and then by the CID, the Admiralty proposal to develop and fortify Singapore as a main base, in lieu of Hong Kong, was accepted by Cabinet in June 1921 and endorsed at the 1921 Imperial Conference. He went on to explain that, since then, Hong Kong had, in any case, been entirely ruled out as a possible site under the terms of the Washington Conference. But, as a result also of the Washington terms, until the Royal Navy had a useable base at Singapore, only Japan could engage in any meaningful action in the West Pacific. British interests there rested ‘on the sufferance and good will of another Power’. The importance and seriousness of the situation had been recognised by ‘three Cabinets and two Imperial Conferences, all of which had accepted and confirmed the decision to proceed with a base at Singapore’.27

Following his summary of the historical background to the Far Eastern security policy, Beatty then addressed the strategical aspects of the policy. Under present conditions, he reported, an attack by Japan would see Singapore seized and all Royal Navy capacity to operate destroyed - in the Indian Ocean for 42 days and in the Pacific for at least one year. The effect of Japanese dominance in the Indian Ocean over 42 days would be to place at risk ‘in any one day ... 742 ships of 3 000 tons gross of a value equal to 180 million pounds’. When set against the total of 890 million pounds in trade carried, Beatty pointed out that the cost at ‘2 shillings per 100 pounds for the nine years estimated to complete the base’ was very small insurance.28 Control of sea-communications in the Western Pacific for 1 year by the Japanese would see the fall of Hong Kong - ‘the door to the Far Eastern markets’ - and of the Malay States, with the loss of 107 million pounds of trade, including 70% of Britain’s rubber supply and 57% of tin. British North Borneo would fall and place the Japanese in control of oil supplies vital to them. Australia and New Zealand would be open to invasion by Japan. Although invasion of Australia

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
and New Zealand by Japan was considered unlikely by Beatty, the very fact that they had been left exposed would be very damaging to the Empire. Beatty went on to dismiss as a consideration the intervention by the US against Japan. He explained that the American authorities now realised that naval war between Japan and America was a 'practicable impossibility'. There was little that either could do against the other to bring about a decision.

Beatty then explained what changes were required to bring the Singapore base up to standard and the strategical reasons for its selection over other sites. He thought it a matter for the Foreign Office to answer as to how the Japanese Government regarded development of Singapore. But there was no question of any infraction of the Washington Agreement or of anything other than open dealing on the subject of Singapore on the part of the British Government. On that subject the committee had as evidence the summary of Secretary Hankey.29

Victor Wellesley, Deputy Under-Secretary responsible for Far Eastern affairs, on this occasion deputising for the Foreign Secretary, confirmed that the Japanese fully realised that Singapore had been kept out of the status quo area in the Washington Treaty, and that they had no objection to the development of the Base. 'Their only objection [he said] was to suggestions in our press of the possibility of a war between Japan and Britain'. J.H. Thomas, Secretary of State for the Colonies, was of the view that more consideration was required as to how far the decision to construct the Base remained warranted, in light of an 'evident lack of desire by the

Japanese to attack us. He felt also that 'the effect of the recent earthquake should be weighed'.

Beatty pressed on with the case for work to commence. Even beginning now, he claimed, the Base could not be finished before 1933. Its completion would allow Britain to revert to its traditional naval policy. In his summary, he pointed out that large sums were being expended annually on a Fleet which, 'without a Base in the East, was unable to carry out its task of safeguarding the commerce of the Empire'. He said also, 'the acceptance of the one-power Standard had made Singapore increasingly necessary and any further limitation of Fleets would make it more so'. The Committee closed at that point, agreeing to continue on 3 March to hear a statement from the Foreign Office representative on the foreign policy aspect of the question and to put questions to Admiral Beatty.

At their next meeting, the members of the Committee put their own questions on strategical matters. Thereafter, Thomas acknowledged that 'Lord Beatty had made out a most admirable case for a base at Singapore from a strategical point of view'. That was always likely to have been the case, but it was never really the point at issue. Hardly more so had been the financial

30 1923 Japanese Earthquake.
The Great Kanto earthquake of September 1923 was the most devastating in Japanese history. The cities and outlying districts of Tokyo and Yokohama were heavily damaged. Whilst the shocks of the quake itself were very damaging, by far the most devastating were the fires that swept through built up areas in the aftermath of the quakes. Many Japanese buildings were made of wood, which fed the flames in both cities for days. Over 100,000 people lost their lives and over one third of the homes in the Kanto district were destroyed. The earthquake also destroyed some military equipment and facilities in the Tokyo/Yokohama area, most notably the Battleship Amagi, which was undergoing conversion to an aircraft carrier, in accordance with the Washington Treaty. It was so badly damaged, it had to be scrapped.


32 Ibid; Beatty already understood at this stage that the Prime Minister intended to veto development of the Singapore base. That being so, it was his object to oblige the Government to make plain its responsibility for the decision and to release the Admiralty from the responsibility for Imperial security and trade in the memorandum that would be presented to Parliament. Beatty Papers; Vol. 2, op. cit Document # 208.

33 Ibid; Document # 209.
aspects of the proposal, which Snowden said he hoped the Committee would also hear before the end of the Inquiry. The crux of the matter was that ideologically and programmatically the Labour government was debarred from supporting military coercion as an instrument of foreign policy.

The Labour Party had a frame of reference of its own for the conduct of international affairs. It was pledged to ‘the enlargement and strengthening of the League’ and to disarmament ‘as the only security of the nations’. While MacDonald, as leader of a minority Government, deemed the time inopportune for the introduction of much in the way of Socialist policy in the domestic arena, he was ready to venture in the international arena. The main game, however, was current not in the Far East but in Europe, where, since January 1923, the French were in occupation of the Ruhr. The dual forces of security concerns and the need for reparations drove French action against Germany. Curzon had already laid the groundwork for a thorough examination of the reparations question. And, on 30 November 1923, two committees of experts had been set up by the Reparations Commission to examine the whole issue. But Britain’s position on the place of force in European security had been left in a state of ambiguity. The Labour Party’s position on force as an arm of diplomacy was, however, quite unambiguous and it was MacDonald’s object to give the lead in international arms limitations.

When he appeared, during the second meeting of the Clynes Committee in his capacity as Foreign Secretary, he reported that a Memorandum prepared by the Foreign Office supported the development of Singapore. He described the Foreign Office support, broadly, as based on

34 ibid.

35 “Labour’s Appeal to the Nation,” December 6, 1923, Report of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Conference of the Labour Party, 1924, page 192, quoted in British Labour’s Foreign Policy, Elaine Windrich; op.cit

36 Curzon’s condemnation in August 1923 of France’s bullying tactics appeared to be contradicted by Baldwin in the following month. Mowat; op.cit. p.159-160
the need to meet force with force when necessary and on the value of military preparedness in Foreign Office negotiations. He, however, disagreed with the Foreign Office support and with the reasoning behind it. It was his view that 'if we start on the expansion of the military situation in the East at the present moment (not necessarily in a year hence) it would hamper us rather than help us'. 37 He told the Clynes Committee he believed the Singapore 'scheme should be prepared but pigeon holed'. 38

Beatty protested strongly at any further delay in the scheme. He argued that, given that the Singapore Base was the strategically correct decision, responsibility for its accomplishment rested on the Admiralty. He asked only for a very small sum (150 thousand pounds, part of which would be subscribed by the Dominions) for preliminary work, nothing that 'could in any way be alarming from the Foreign Office point of view'. He stressed the importance of the time factor. Work could not even begin on the Base until the preliminary work was completed. Until it was completed the whole of British interests east of Aden existed 'on sufferance of another power'. 39

MacDonal held to his view that any risks were theoretical only. In practice, he considered there to be none at this time. He believed that the opportunity presented itself for an attempt 'to improve the world conditions and reach an agreement on armaments'. No matter how limited the intentions of the Singapore Base, to begin work on it at such a moment he clearly regarded

37 Beatty Papers; Vol.2 op.cit. Document # 209.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
as hardly politic. The examination ended there to allow the Committee to confer.\textsuperscript{40} That same evening, Beatty was already resigned to the suspension of work on Singapore.\textsuperscript{41}

On March 5 and 6, the British Government canvassed the Dominions for their views on the decision to cancel the Singapore scheme. Only South Africa expressed whole-hearted support for the decision. Canada abstained from comment. New Foundland, Australia and New Zealand objected to cancellation. Macdonald noted the uneven response but did not allow it to deflect him from his decision.\textsuperscript{42} For, on 18 March, during the debate that followed the announcement of the suspension of the Singapore scheme, Macdonald defended the decision on the basis of the prepared statement of policy agreed by Cabinet on the previous day.\textsuperscript{43} As justification for the decision he quoted ‘general foreign policy’. He claimed also ‘a large measure of sympathy in the Dominions with our international policy, even if all parts of the Empire do not feel able to endorse the methods by which we consider that that policy should be carried out’. \textsuperscript{44} He reiterated that his Government stood

for a policy of international cooperation through a strengthened and enlarged League of Nations, the settlement of disputes by conciliation and judicial arbitration and the creation

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid; document #210.

\textsuperscript{42} The Collective Naval Defence of the Empire 1900-1940; \textit{op.cit.} Documents # 198 and # 199, and #200, # 201 and # 202.

\textsuperscript{43} The 1924-25 Admiralty Estimates were presented to Parliament on 18 March 1924 at 55.8 million pounds. In his statement, Ammon confirmed the appropriation of 1.8 million pounds for the construction of 5 new cruisers and 2 new destroyers. His statement revealed also the decision not to proceed with Singapore. Roskill; Naval Policy, Vol 1, \textit{op.cit. }p.423.

\textsuperscript{44} The Collective Naval Defence of the Empire; \textit{op.cit.} Document # 203. Also CAB.23/47, Meeting of Cabinet, 17 March 1924.
of conditions which will make a comprehensive agreement on limitation of armaments possible.\textsuperscript{45}

MacDonald’s foreign policy objectives were given a boost with the publication of the Dawes Report on 9 April 1924.\textsuperscript{46} The Dawes Plan held up a prospect of European reconstruction through international economic cooperation, a key plank of Labour foreign policy. MacDonald set his sights, next, on the twin goals of a League strengthened by German (and Russian) membership and disarmament. When the Clynes Committee met on 11 April, it was to ask Chelmsford to prepare a memorandum for the Foreign Secretary (MacDonald) on whether the time was opportune to explore the possibilities of naval limitation between Britain and Japan or one between Britain, Japan and the US. According to Roskill, Chelmsford confided in a note to Beatty that MacDonald had in mind a world disarmament conference, once he had secured French co-operation on European security.\textsuperscript{47}

Over the following months, events turned MacDonald’s way. The French rejected Poincare’s hard-line stance on the reparations issue and replaced him with the radical socialist, Edouard Herriot, at their elections in May. In June, MacDonald invited Herriot to Chequers and assured him of his commitment to resolving the problem of general security, once the Dawes Plan was agreed. During July–August, MacDonald presided over an inter-allied conference in London and the procedures to put the Plan into operation were settled. That brought the Ruhr crisis to an end. (The Dawes Plan came into operation on 24 October 1924 and the German delegates had French assurance that evacuation of the Ruhr would be completed within a year).

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{46} American General Charles G. Dawes headed the principal Committee of Experts set up by Curzon to examine the reparations issues in October 1923.

\textsuperscript{47} Roskill, Naval Policy, Vol. 1, \textit{op.cit.} p.424
True to his promise to Herriot on general security, MacDonald personally attended the Fifth Assembly of the League in Geneva (September 1924), as did Herriot. MacDonald came prepared to seek an alternative to the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, which he had already condemned in July 1924 as ‘essentially a war preparation document’, in which there was no provision for the peaceful settlement of disputes. MacDonald saw no incentives in the Draft Treaty to encourage disarmament. In his view, its guarantees were too weak, its obligations indefinite, it preserved provision for regional alliances. MacDonald reminded the Assembly of the dangers inherent in military alliances and argued, instead, for expansion of League membership. He proposed that disputes be submitted to the League Council for precise definition of aggression. Therein, he believed, lay the crux of collective security. For once so identified, the aggressor would be subject to the sanction of all the member states.

Herriot agreed that arbitration was ‘essential’ but not enough. He urged the expedition of disarmament, for as far as France was concerned ‘arbitration, security and disarmament’ were inseparable. The Protocol for the peaceful settlement of international disputes that was drawn up, thereafter, carried also the stipulation that a disarmament conference would convene in Geneva in June 1925.

Soon after MacDonald’s return from Geneva, the Labour Government collapsed. But, in its wake, it left in European relations an atmosphere of hope for conciliation, and a hope that

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48 MacDonald and Herriot were the first premiers of the Great Powers to attend the Assembly. - Mowat; op.cit. p.180.

49 Quoted in Gordon; op.cit. p.50.

The Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance had been drawn up in 1923 for the approval of the Fourth Assembly of the League. It failed to secure approval there but was submitted to Member governments for their consideration. Northedge; op.cit. p.233.

50 Ibid. p.240.

disarmament might not be too far distant. MacDonald himself came away from Geneva ‘fully convinced that peace was possible’. His conclusion was that ‘the alteration that was required was the very smallest fraction of a change in the angle of vision’.52

As far as the Admiralty was concerned, such optimism had been bought at the cost of sound strategic policy in the event of war with Japan. Further, in the Admiralty view, the abandonment of the Singapore Base acted against Britain’s negotiating position in any future talks concerning Naval Limitations.53 Immediately upon the resumption of government under the Conservatives, therefore, the Admiralty pressed for the reinstatement of its policies for Imperial defence.

52 Northedge; op.cit. p.235.
Chapter 8

The Admiralty and the Second Baldwin Government in the period November 1924 – August 1927.

One year before his appointment as First Sea Lord, Beatty had put his own perspective on Admiralty responsibilities and prerogatives before the Board. Simply, Beatty saw it as the business of the Admiralty to formulate naval requirements consistent with the Government’s policy on national security and commitments. It was a perspective that he defended consistently throughout his tenure as First Sea Lord.

As far as the Battlefleet was concerned, Beatty was satisfied with the outcomes of the Washington Conference. Since then, Admiralty planning had, as its focus, the development of the Singapore Base and a Cruiser replacement programme of which the completion would coincide with the resumption of Capital Ship construction, in accordance with the Washington terms. Those two projects were the pillars of the Admiralty’s ‘special needs’ claim and had been carefully excluded by the British Delegation from the Washington settlement.

In the view of the Admiralty, the lessons of the war, together with changes in the concentration of global naval power, lent urgency to the projects. World War One had revealed modern war as war of attrition; resources had held the key to survival or capitulation. Of the three dominant naval powers of the post-war, the US had its own internal resources to tap. Commercially and strategically, Japan had been expanding its influence in the resource-rich Asia mainland since before the turn of the century. As had been pointed out in the Clynes Committee by Beatty, significant sources of key raw

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1 Beatty Papers; Vol. 2, *op.cit.* Document # 5 (December, 1918).
materials, necessary to Britain’s war-waging capacity, lay east of Suez, and carried the particular problems of protection of long supply lines. It was the view of the Admiralty that the Singapore development and adequate Cruiser numbers for the specific protection of supply lines were vital to national and imperial security.

The General Election of 29 October 1924 returned the Conservatives to power with 419 seats as against 151 for Labour and a mere 40 for the Liberals. Stanley Baldwin formed his Second Government with William C. Bridgeman as First Lord of the Admiralty, Austin Chamberlain as Foreign Secretary and Winston Churchill (returned to the Conservative fold) as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

As soon as the new government was formed, the Admiralty pressed for the reinstatement of its policy for Singapore and, at a meeting of 26 November 1924, Cabinet approved a submission by Bridgeman for the resumption of the Singapore project ‘in principle’. But in the same meeting the Treasury/Admiralty battle-lines were again drawn up; Churchill proposed new inquiries concerning the immediacy of the need to proceed with the Admiralty projects.

In the Coalition Cabinet, Churchill had been a strong supporter of Admiralty policies, first when Secretary of War and Air, and later when Secretary of State for the Colonies. During the Washington negotiations he had been particularly anxious ‘that our freedom of action in regard to Singapore has been preserved’. But as Chancellor of the Exchequer he had new priorities and specific goals – balanced budgets, reduced taxation, the direction of government spending to ‘vital’ social issues. To achieve his goals, he employed a number

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2 CAB 23/49, Meeting of Cabinet, 26 November 1924.

of economic strategies during his period at the Treasury, among them attempts to control Admiralty spending.

Throughout the period covered in this chapter, Beatty and Bridgeman thwarted Churchill’s attempts to gain Treasury control over Admiralty spending. They made economies but they guarded the prerogatives of their Department. That they were able to do so was due in no small part to the Prime Minister’s management tactics.

Baldwin’s very large parliamentary majority had its down-side. The Government benches were packed with Conservative die-hard reactionaries. But the reality was, Labour was now the major parliamentary voice of radicalism in Britain. Baldwin saw it as in the Conservative interest to keep the destructive inclinations of the extremists in his own party towards the labour movement in check. Social and political change was already in motion in Britain. Baldwin recognised that and, in the poor showing of the Liberals in the election, saw the opportunity to make secure for the Conservative Party the support of the middle-of-the-road voter. To do so, he avoided or postponed, whenever possible, troublesome issues that might be used as a rallying cry to extremists on either side. Arms limitation was one such issue. It was not an unpopular issue in Britain in the 1920s but it was an issue that in political circles could be sharply divisive. It had the capacity to split the Conservative Party and Baldwin’s new Government. The Prime Minister interrupted Cabinet discussion of the Churchill proposals with one of his own that ‘the precise form of

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4 For a study of Baldwin’s Second Government see McKercher; The Baldwin Second Government, op.cit. Also, K. Young; Stanley Baldwin , op. cit.

5 Beatty was confident that, if it came to trial of strength, the Conservative “die-hards” would rally to the Admiralty and force Churchill “off his perch” or split the Government. Beatty Papers; Vol 2, op.cit Document # 151. See also Gregory C. Kennedy; Britain’s Policy Making Elite, The Naval Disarmament Puzzle, and Public Opinion 1927-1932. Albion, Winter 1994, Vol.26, No.4, USA, 1994 for a perspective on arms limitation and public opinion in Britain.
the inquiry and the Terms of Reference should be reserved until he had time to consult personally with the Ministers concerned'.

Three weeks later, Cabinet agreed to a CID inquiry ‘into the rate at which the Naval Base at Singapore is to be proceeded with’ - the question to be considered separately from ‘certain larger inquiries [of which the] desirability [was still] under consideration’. It was a compromise decision, calculated to excite the smallest amount of domestic controversy, at a time when the limitation of armaments remained an object of the League Assembly and was an object, also, of renewed US Government interest.

Within the League, the European Powers wanted land-sea-air armaments to be considered together as a whole for General Disarmament purposes. At the risk of appearing obstructionist, Britain opposed the linkage. The renewed interest of the US government in arms limitation appeared timely, therefore. America, like Britain, had little to offer in land-air limitations; interest there was in naval limitation and was bound up with extending the Washington Naval Agreement. Given that all five major naval powers participated, such a forum better suited British limitations concerns.

Those concerns came under scrutiny in the ‘larger inquiries’ initiated by Baldwin. And, in the period encompassed by this chapter, Baldwin demonstrated that there were limits to his willingness to reduce Britain’s preponderance of naval power, whatever were the pressures from foreign governments or the enticements of saving to annual budgets. On the questions

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6 CAB 23/49, Meeting of Cabinet, 26 November 1924.

7 CAB 23/49, Meeting of Cabinet, 17 December 1924.
of Britain’s absolute need in naval power, the Baldwin Government accepted and supported Admiralty policy.

In considering the above, this chapter will address the Admiralty/Treasury struggles over Naval Estimates for the period 1925–1927, the outcomes of the Government authorised inquiries into Admiralty policy during the period, and the 1927 Geneva Naval Conference.

Early in November 1924, Stanley Baldwin, returned to government at the head of a very large Conservative majority, formed his Cabinet. The Admiralty lost no time in submitting its policy before the new First Lord, William Bridgeman. No time was lost either at the Treasury, on behalf of which the new Chancellor of Exchequer, Winston Churchill, immediately raised the banner of economy.

At a meeting of Cabinet of 26 November 1924, both the Chancellor’s financial situation review and Bridgeman’s Memorandum on Singapore were on the Agenda. At that meeting, Churchill reviewed the current financial situation and outlined his objectives for the 1925–26 Budget, with Government spending concentrated on services ‘of vital national importance’. Among those, in the social sphere, were the ‘great issues’ of housing and an ‘all-in’ insurance scheme. To assist him in making the necessary financial provisions for each Department and avoid excessive taxation, it was important that none over-estimated its needs. Therefore, he urged careful financial administration on all of them.8

Ideologically, Churchill was not opposed to the Admiralty’s defence policies but he was aiming high in his new role as guardian of the nation’s wealth. Careful financial administration on the part of the various Departments was unlikely to produce the big cuts

8 ibid.
in Government spending he was looking to achieve. He had to target departmental programmes. The Admiralty was, by far, the largest spending Government Department and he focused his attention there. Pointing to the Admiralty’s Imperial Defence Programmes, he proposed an investigation as to the ‘rate at which these projects could be undertaken’. On economic and political grounds, he was concerned to avoid ‘any increase in expenditure in the forthcoming financial year [and wanted] a fresh survey of the situation as a whole, and the dangers to which the British Empire is exposed’ to be under taken by the CID. The CID should inquire, also, into the ‘desirability and practicability’ of renewing the Ten-Year Rule and undertake ‘a review of the Cruiser Programme’.  

Although there was general approval in the meeting for the motivating sentiments behind the Chancellor’s proposals, there was no firm view regarding the precise form of the inquiry. The Prime Minister put his own curb on proceedings, therefore, ‘until he had had time to consult with the Ministers concerned’. The Cabinet, next, considered the Bridgeman Memorandum and agreed to ‘approve in principle that the Naval Base should be proceeded with’ but that the rate of its procedure should be investigated as part of the proposed inquiry put up by Churchill.  

Almost a month passed and Baldwin continued to temporise. The question of the investigation was raised in Cabinet on 17 December 1924, when it was decided that the CID should consider Singapore as a separate question, since ‘the desirability of the larger inquiries was still under consideration’.  

9 Ibid.  
10 Ibid.  
11 Ibid.
For the purposes of war planning, the CID had already decided that Britain should view France, Germany and Japan as potential enemies. Much of the Admiralty’s strategic planning revolved around Japan which it considered to be the most significant of the trio. Admiralty perceptions of the East Asian situation led it to assume that a major war would occur in this theatre. British Naval Policy makers saw three potential threats to the British position in East Asia. One, they feared Japan might seek hegemony over the entire region, including China. Two, they feared the instability of China might invite Russian intervention there. Any extension of the Russian sphere of influence in Asia would be problematic for British interests but Japan, in such a case, facing a Russian threat not only to her interests but also to her national security, would be likely to take military action against Russia. Three, the acrimony that had existed between the US and Japan prior to the Washington Conference had resurfaced, bringing with it a revival of their dangerous naval rivalry. The Admiralty view was that large-scale naval preparations to defend British interests required beginning immediately.

The Foreign Office shared the view that if danger were to arise in Asia, Japan’s part in it would be a pivotal one. But its view differed from that of the Admiralty in its recommendation that Britain’s eastern defence should proceed at a rate of construction significantly slower than that contemplated by the Admiralty, so as not to alarm the Japanese and make enemies of them.

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12 Ferris; *op.cit.* p.155.

13 CAB. 23/49, Meeting of Cabinet, 26 November 1924.

14 Beatty Papers; *op.cit.* Document # 147. Also Richard W. Fanning; *Peace and Disarmament, Naval Rivalry and Arms Control 1922-1933*, University Press of Kentucky, USA, 1995, p 87.

15 Ferris; *op.cit.* p.146.
Those respective views were debated at a meeting of the CID of 5 January 1925. Beatty again insisted on the urgency of a situation that saw Britain defenceless in the East and absolutely powerless to prevent Japan, at its chosen moment, from dealing a naval blow upon Britain from which it could never recover. Bridgeman supported him. Clearly with an eye on the proposed resurrection of the Ten-Year Rule, Bridgeman was sceptical of any reliance upon governments to forecast wars. His view was that Britain’s overseas interests were so great and so lucrative that there was no choice but to ensure them 'against any reasonable risks wherever they may be in the world'.

Austin Chamberlain’s presentation of the Foreign Office view, however, added grist to Churchill’s mill. Churchill’s demand that the proposed investigation into Singapore extend its inquiries to encompass the entire project – rate of development, site, and methods of defence - prevailed over Beatty’s protest at delay to the completion of, at least, a Floating Dock at Singapore, by 1928. Subsequently, Curzon was chosen to chair a CID Sub-committee composed of the Service Ministers, the Chiefs of Staff and Churchill.

In the meantime, the Admiralty Estimates for 1925-26 had yet to be approved. The Sketch Estimates prepared by the Admiralty Finance Committee amounted to a total of 65.5 Million Pounds. The sum represented an increase of almost 10 Million Pounds over the Estimates of the previous year. It contained almost 2 Million Pounds for the construction of 8 new Cruisers and 25 new Flotilla Craft, as well as 1.75 Million Pounds for the Fleet Air Arm.

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16 Maclntyre; op.cit. p.46.
17 Ferris; op.cit. p.160.
18 Maclntyre, op.cit. p.47.
Churchill had requested and received notification of this figure early in December 1924. Throughout the greater part of January 1925, he wrangled with Beatty and Bridgeman to reduce the figure. Out of budgeting concerns for the next few years, he also wanted them to agree to spread the programme of construction over double the number of years contained in the Admiralty plan. He failed to secure those aims.

On the last weekend of that month, Beatty wrote to his wife that Churchill had ‘burst a bomb on us which he thinks will pulverise us …’ He referred to a lengthy memorandum for Cabinet in which Churchill attacked the broad policy of the Admiralty and the extravagance of its claims. It contained Churchill’s argument against any new Cruiser construction for 1925-26 and his recommendation for the whole question of the building of new Cruisers to be re-examined by a subcommittee of the CID.

Bridgeman hurried back from canvassing the PM at Chequers to assist in framing the Admiralty’s counter memorandum for Cabinet. The riposte reiterated the Admiralty policy arguments. Further, it accused Churchill of inviting the Cabinet ‘to reverse, in the few days which elapse before the estimates are finally settled, the policy of the late Conservative administration’. It pointed out that the Churchill Committee of 1922 had drawn up the very policy on which the Estimates were framed. Finally, it raised the spectre of a Party backlash in the House of Commons and in the country against an abandonment


21 Beatty Papers; Vol 2, op.cit. Documents #149, #150, #151, #153, #155, #155.

22 Ibid; Document # 156.

23 Roskill, Naval Policy, Vol.1, op.cit. p.446.

of the one-Power standard adopted in 1921, 'to follow the cheese-paring parsimony of the Labour Government'.

By 5 February 1925, the Admiralty had made an offer to reduce the figure to 63.5 Million Pounds, by a shadow cut of 2 Million Pounds. Churchill found 'no basis for an agreement' in the revision. His position was, while a shadow cut was 'of great value in preventing over-budgeting, it has nothing to do with the question of Naval expenditure'. A shadow cut was represented in programmes approved. The Treasury was bound to provide the money for them, if required, in Supplementary Estimates.

What Churchill was after was a cut back in programmes. But, even at this point, Beatty still hoped that the Prime Minister would 'use his good offices with Winston' and settle the matter outside the Cabinet. Baldwin was not a disarmer. He favoured strong national defence. Bridgeman, as a close friend of the PM, was well placed to present the Admiralty case personally. But most persuasive of all was the threat of resignations. Baldwin was very concerned to keep his Cabinet intact. The possibility of the resignation of the Lords of the Admiralty was very strong. Beatty calculated, accurately, that Churchill was not prepared to go so far. Once the memorandum had been submitted, however, Beatty was determined that it was in Cabinet, and nowhere else, that the matter had to be decided.

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27 Beatty Papers; vol 2, op. cit. Document # 158.

28 Fanning; op. cit. p.21. Also, Young, op. cit. p.70 and Beatty Papers; Vol 2, op. cit. Documents # 156, # 157, and # 158.
On 8 February 1925, in a holograph to Bridgeman from the Mediterranean, Beatty stressed, ‘Churchill’s proposal cut at the root of the Naval Policy of the Empire. If the Cabinet decide to alter the Policy of Naval Defence (and only the Cabinet can make this decision, not the CID) then the Admiralty will make new proposals to give effect to the policy.’ He added, ‘The Admiralty have alone [sic] the responsibility of giving effect to the Government’s policy, not the Chancellor, supported by Sir George Barstow.’ He was ‘distrustful of CID meetings’ and hoped the Cabinet would ‘not try to foist what is their responsibility alone on to what is after all only an Advisory Committee.’

On the same day, after having absorbed the whole of Churchill’s statement, Beatty sent a second holograph to Bridgeman. He understood that the whole question of Far Eastern Defence Policy was now on the table and was pleased; for it was clear there were many points ‘on which the Treasury needs education and enlightenment’. He was confident the Naval Staff should have no difficulty in providing answers, with arguments, to the contentions raised in the Chancellor’s statement. He also pointed out that Churchill, having recognised all that was involved, was now going ‘so far as to propose a change of policy’. In Beatty’s view that was another issue altogether and a matter for the Government. ‘The main question and no other [was that] at present the Admiralty’s responsibilities are very different to those that the Chancellor envisages’. In that regard, he emphasised that ‘it must be remembered by the Committee that the only responsible authority are the Admiralty, and not Chancellor of Exchequer [sic] with his naval adviser, Sir George Barstow’.

Against such a perspective, Churchill’s next suggestion as a settlement for the pressing matter of the Estimates had little chance of Admiralty acceptance. The Chancellor

29 Beatty Papers; Vol 2, op. cit. Document # 159.
proposed Admiralty Estimates fixed at 60 Million Pounds per annum, for the next few years. The Treasury would not reclaim any of the annual allocation left unspent. Instead, the Admiralty would, from year to year, retain its own economies and freely transfer them to new construction.31 Beatty, however, was not about to sacrifice the prerogatives of the Admiralty for what amounted to a free hand with the housekeeping money.

In a Memorandum of 11 February 1925, the Admiralty rejected the suggestion.32 It reiterated that the Admiralty framed its Estimates ‘to give effect to an approved Naval Policy’. Present Policy laid down:

> a genuine maintenance of the One-Power standard ... the number of British Cruisers to be based not upon the number of Cruisers maintained by other Powers but upon the length and variety of sea communications over which food and other vital supplies for the United Kingdom must be transported.

The Admiralty estimated 62.5 Million Pounds as the minimum it required in the 1925-26 Estimates to enable it to carry out those responsibilities. It was pointed out in the memorandum that there were means by which costs might be reduced. The Government might change the Policy. In that case ‘the Board would represent that any such change of Naval Policy and the resultant change in the responsibility of the Admiralty should be publicly stated’. There could be an effect on new construction, if ‘the proposed International Conference [were to] arrive at some agreement for limiting the size and armament of Cruisers’. The scheduled beginning on the new Cruisers allowed ‘ample time

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31 Roskill; Naval Policy, Vol.1 op. cit. p. 447., Ferris; op. cit p. 162.
32 ADM 116/3387, Memorandum, 11 February 1925.
for a revised programme and Votes to be put before Parliament later in the Session and was the course the Admiralty recommended.\textsuperscript{33}

The International Conference, to which the Admiralty referred in its Memorandum of 11 February 1925, was brought up that same day in Cabinet.\textsuperscript{34} Austin Chamberlain gave an account of a farewell conversation between himself and the American Ambassador to Britain, Mr. Frank B. Kellogg, who had been appointed to Washington as Secretary of State in the Calvin Coolidge Administration. They had discussed the ‘adverse’ attitude of Coolidge to the Geneva Protocol and the possibility of a Conference on naval limitation of armaments. Chamberlain had suggested the US Government put out ‘feelers’ to ascertain the attitude of other Governments towards the proposal. He had entered his own \textit{caveat} ‘in regard to the obvious difficulties of rationing the construction of cruisers on the same lines as capital ships’. But he had indicated Britain would ‘welcome a Conference and had suggested that it might consider such questions as the size of cruisers, the rate of replacement and the submarine question’. \textsuperscript{35}

The Bridgeman and Churchill Memoranda were also before the Cabinet that day. The opening statements of the two were heard, followed by general discussion on the subject, which was eventually adjourned until the following day’. \textsuperscript{36} At the meeting the next day, Baldwin summarised ‘the general view of the Cabinet’. As to the 1925-26 Estimates, the summary was very much on the lines of compromise suggested in the Admiralty Memorandum of the 11 February 1925 (above). An inquiry into the requirements of a

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{34} CAB, 23/49, Meeting of Cabinet, 11 February 1925.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
programme to replace obsolete units of the Fleet ‘not now within the scope of the Washington Agreement’ should be instituted. Since participation in a new naval conference could also have a bearing on the recommendations of the inquiry, authority for new construction should be postponed until later in the year, when Supplementary Estimates would be introduced ‘for whatever may prove to be required for the current year’. It was then agreed that Baldwin, Churchill ‘and such colleagues as the Prime Minister might desire’ should meet with Beatty and Bridgeman and, on the basis of Baldwin’s summary, try to reach agreement on the final sum to be presented to Parliament for the Naval Estimates of 1925-26. It was also agreed steps would be taken to make formal ‘the welcome which Mr. Chamberlain had already given to the American Ambassador of the idea of a new Naval Conference at Washington…’

Following the meeting with the PM, which took place on 13 February 1925, Beatty was satisfied that the ‘situation [was] saved [and the way] clear to an understanding which will preserve the issues’ for which he had been struggling. For, again, the Admiralty Memorandum of 11 February seems to have provided the platform for a compromise agreement. On 18 February 1925, following a summary of their meeting with the PM by the two Ministers concerned, Cabinet approved Admiralty Estimates of 62.5 Million Pounds as a total for ‘actual’ expenditure. A shadow cut of 2 Million Pounds would apply, so that in the ‘printed Estimates’ only 60.5 Million Pounds would appear. It was agreed also that a Cabinet Committee should consider the Navy’s programmes for construction,

37 CAB 23/49, Meeting of Cabinet, 12 February 1925.

38 Ibid.

39 Beatty Papers; Vol 2 op.cit. Document # 161. See also Bridgeman Diaries and Letters, op.cit. for Bridgeman’s gratitude to Baldwin for his ‘appreciation of our difficulties.” Letter Bridgeman to Baldwin, 15 February 1925.

40 CAB.23/49, Meeting of Cabinet, 18 February 1925.
manning and oil fuel reserves. Among the other business considered and approved by Cabinet, on that occasion, was Chamberlain’s draft dispatch for the British Ambassador in Washington Sir Esme Howard. The dispatch regarded ‘a new Naval Conference at Washington for the further limiting of naval armaments and expenditure’. In it, Chamberlain instructed Howard to advise Kellogg of Britain’s formal welcome of a new conference at Washington. It also carried guidelines for the Ambassador. These took the shape of Chamberlain’s caveat on the kinds of limitations the British Government was prepared to consider. Excluded was the application of the agreed Capital Ship ratios to Cruisers. Included were:

1. Dimensions and armament of cruisers.
2. Armament of aircraft carriers.
3. Total number, dimensions and armament of submarines.
4. Dimensions and armament of destroyers.

On 27 February 1925, Beatty had further reason to be satisfied; for the CID subcommittee, set up under Curzon’s chairmanship on 5 January to investigate the rate of development, site, and methods of defence of Singapore, had ‘definitely and irreversibly given in and agreed to our demands’. Curzon submitted an interim report to Cabinet recommending the Admiralty’s choice of site and its proposals to spend 785 Thousand Pounds over the

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41 Ibid.
42 Ibid. Appendix C.P. 56(25)
43 Ibid.
next three financial years to complete the Floating Dock by spring of 1928.\textsuperscript{45} Cabinet approved the Curzon recommendations on 2 March 1925.\textsuperscript{46}

According to Roskill, when Bridgeman presented the 1925-26 Estimates in Parliament on 9 March 1925, there were objections from the Opposition but it was the announcement of the resumption of work on the Singapore Base that produced ‘unanimous hostility’ from the Labour benches. Labour condemned the decision as a ‘waste of time and money, and provocative towards Japan’.\textsuperscript{47} But Bridgeman had been able to point out that the work of investigating the naval building programme, begun by the previous Government (in the Clynes Committee), was to continue. At 60.5 Million Pounds, therefore, the Estimates contained no money for new construction, such proposals being reserved until later in the year and passed easily in Parliament.\textsuperscript{48}

The work of investigating the naval building programme had, indeed, already resumed in the Naval Programme Committee, chaired by Lord Birkenhead, and where Beatty anticipated a ‘long and bitter’ campaign.\textsuperscript{49} The opening rounds took place over the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 5\textsuperscript{th} March 1925 and produced the first, but not unexpected, clash.\textsuperscript{50} It began with Beatty’s exposition of the Admiralty’s Construction Plans for the next ten years. Between 1925 and 1931, the Admiralty wished to construct 31 cruisers, 2 Aircraft Carriers, 44 Submarines, 92 Destroyers and 42 Auxiliary Vessels at a cost of 110 Million. Thereafter, in accordance

\textsuperscript{45} CAB 23/49, Memorandum by the Chairman of the Committee of Imperial Defence, C.P. -124(25).
\textsuperscript{46} CAB 23/49, Meeting of Cabinet, 2 March 1925.
\textsuperscript{47} Roskill, Naval Policy, Vol.1 \textit{op.cit.} p.449.
\textsuperscript{48} Bridgeman Diaries and Letters; \textit{op.cit.} Letter Bridgeman to his wife Caroline, 20 March 1925.
\textsuperscript{49} Beatty Papers, Vol 2, \textit{op.cit.} Document # 163.
\textsuperscript{50} CAB 27/273. 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} Meetings of the Naval Programme Committee, 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 5\textsuperscript{th} March 1925.
with the terms of Washington Naval Agreement, the Battleship Replacement Programme could begin. For this second phase, to cost approximately 137 Million Pounds, Admiralty planning called for the construction of 7 Battleships, approximately 15 Cruisers, 45 Destroyers, 1 Aircraft Carrier and 40 Submarines.\footnote{51}{Ibid.}

On 5 March, Churchill countered by challenging the Far Eastern Defence Policy, as a whole, with proposals of his own to change it.\footnote{52}{Ibid. Also Ferris, \textit{op.cit.} p.164-5.} He doubted there would be war with Japan 'in our lifetime' and was critical of a policy aiming at the maintenance of the entire Fleet on a war basis. Instead, he suggested the Navy's present Cruiser numbers attaching to the Main Fleet (up to Fifty in commission with some older types in Reserve) would sufficiently answer the purposes of 'Imperial policing' over the next ten years. There would be no need, for those purposes, to upgrade the base at Singapore but Cruiser construction would continue. The construction rate suggested by Churchill would produce 16 new Cruisers, as against the 46 desired by the Admiralty as a minimum, over the same ten-year period.

Bridgeman took exception to Churchill's presumption of prerogatives properly belonging to the Admiralty, the CID, and Cabinet as a whole.\footnote{53}{Roskill; Naval Policy, Vol 1, \textit{op.cit.} p.450.} Birkenhead brought the policy and strategic controversy back to Cabinet, where, at a meeting of 18 March 1925, the Beatty/Bridgeman view of prerogatives was endorsed. Cabinet agreed to refer the issues raised in the Birkenhead Committee, concerning the agreed Naval Policy and the Admiralty's responsibility for strategic planning, 'in the first instance to the Committee of

\footnote{51}{Ibid.}

\footnote{52}{Ibid. Also Ferris, \textit{op.cit.} p.164-5.}

\footnote{53}{Roskill; Naval Policy, Vol 1, \textit{op.cit.} p.450.}
Imperial Defence.' 54 The reference to the CID carried the preamble that ‘The policy of leaving to the Admiralty the responsibility for the Naval defence of the Empire on the basis of the one-Power standard was last reaffirmed by the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1923’. What the CID was asked to consider was whether it was proposed to reverse or modify that policy. If neither was the case, the CID was to consider what the practice involved, with regard to the RN requirement ‘to be as strong as any other Power’. It was to consider whether the requirements of a one-Power standard would be fulfilled if ‘our fleet wherever situate is equal to the fleet of any other nation wherever situate’. 55

The probability of war in the Pacific between Japan and Britain during the next ten years was to be investigated. It was to be considered whether such a contingency was to be so seriously apprehended ‘as to impose upon the Admiralty the responsibility of making material preparations to meet it, upon the basis that we must in the Pacific be able to confront and defeat their whole maritime strength’. 56

If the policy contained in the preamble still stood, two further tasks were asked of the CID. First, ‘having regard to the strength which must be retained in Home Waters’, the CID was to consider ‘whether the British war plan ought to contemplate placing at Singapore for a decisive battle in the Pacific a British battle fleet…superior in strength, or at least equal to, the sea-going Navy of Japan’ and, if so, to suggest a timeframe in which such a plan could, or should, be achieved. In the same connection, suggestions for an interim war plan was also requested of the CID, ‘in the event of war occurring before the

54 CAB 23/49, Meeting of Cabinet, 18 March 1925
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
base at Singapore is capable of sustaining such a British fleet. If, irrespective of its findings regarding the probability of war with Japan in the next ten years, the CID was to recommend abandonment of the Admiralty’s war plan, centring around the Singapore Strategy, it was required to provide guiding principles on which to base a British war plan.

Cabinet further agreed that

the decision on the above questions should be reserved entirely for the Cabinet, with whom the ultimate responsibility could alone lie, to whom should be communicated not only the recommendations but also the Minutes of the Committee of Imperial Defence on the subject, and any other Papers necessary to set forth the views of the Chiefs of Staff of the three Services.  

The CID had completed those assignments by Thursday, 2 April 1925. On the following Wednesday, in view of Bridgeman’s absence on the occasion, Cabinet deferred further discussion of the subject. In the interim, Cabinet agreed that the ‘Naval Programme Committee should continue its Inquiry on the basis of the Conclusions of the Committee of Imperial Defence.’ Although it was not until the following month that the CID conclusions received formal Cabinet approval, Beatty was already concerned that his advice on naval policy now carried less weight with the Government.

What had occurred was that Churchill had added to the weight of his advice with that of

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57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 CAB. 23/49, Meeting of Cabinet, 8 April 1925.
60 Beatty Papers, Vol 2; op.cit. Document # 164.
the Foreign Secretary. For, although Chamberlain agreed with development of the Singapore Base, he did so ‘solely on the ground that the Fleet ought to have full freedom of movement throughout the British Empire’. But he endorsed the view provided by the Foreign Office for the CID investigations that ‘in existing circumstances aggressive action against the British Empire on the part of Japan within the next ten years is not a contingency seriously to be apprehended’.

The dismissal of the threat of Japanese aggression produced the strategic conclusion in the CID that, as had been agreed on 2 March 1925, the preliminary arrangements to develop Singapore should remain, but found against the necessity ‘for placing at Singapore, for a decisive battle in the Pacific, a British battle fleet … superior in strength, or at least equal to the sea-going Navy of Japan’.

If the CID recommendations did not amount to an absolute victory for the Admiralty over the Churchill proposals, neither did they amount to an unqualified defeat. They found the requirements of a one-Power standard to be satisfied, ‘if our fleet, wherever situated, is equal to the fleet of any other nation, wherever situated’. That ruling effectively ended any Admiralty hopes of permanently basing a Battle Squadron at Singapore. But it carried the proviso that arrangements would require to be ‘made from time to time in different parts of

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62 CAB. 23/50, Meeting of Cabinet, 6 May 1925. See also Grayson; op.cit. p.170-174. According to Grayson, Foreign Office Policy towards China was conducted in the context of China’s internal power struggles. Opposing Chinese factions exploited the special concessions held by foreign governments in China as obvious targets for criticism and demonstrations. When he became Foreign Secretary, Chamberlain inherited the treaty obligations contained in The Nine Power Treaty, concluded at Washington in 1922. The Treaty was an attempt to solve problems caused by the foreign presence in China. To support its interests in China, British Diplomatic Policy counted upon international cooperation. To that purpose, Japan was assumed to be friendly throughout Chamberlain’s term of office.

63 Ibid.
the world, according as the international situation requires, to enable the local forces to maintain the situation against vital and irreparable damage, pending the arrival of the main fleet, and to give the main fleet on arrival sufficient mobility'.

The Foreign Office view, as accepted by the CID and by Cabinet, also carried the attachment of important riders. The Foreign Office was to be responsible for warning the Cabinet and the CID of any change in the international situation in the Far East which would necessitate a fresh view of the question. Also, Chamberlain was to be asked "to instruct his office to bear in mind that any warning of a change in the international situation in the Far East would not be of much value for the purposes of expediting our defensive preparations in that region unless issued some years in advance of a situation of actual danger'.

So that, although for diplomatic considerations the Ten-Year Rule was resurrected, it was cautious and restricted to the case of Japan. The policy of 'leaving to the Admiralty, subject to the paramount authority of the Cabinet, the responsibility for the naval defence of the Empire on the basis of the one-Power standard' stood. So also did authority to establish docking facilities for Britain's largest ships at Singapore and to develop necessary oil fuel installations on the Eastern sea-routes. Those findings meant that the Admiralty retained its prerogatives in the formulation of naval requirements consistent with Government policy - albeit reworked within a framework more suggestive of defensive, as

64 Ibid.

65 CAB. 23/50, Meeting of Cabinet, 6 May 1925.

66 The earliest hopes of the Admiralty had been to complete the whole of the Singapore Scheme by 1930. Plagued by controversy and deferment, the facility had still not been completed at the start of World War 2. For studies of the progress of the Singapore Base Scheme, see Neidpath; op. cit. and MacIntyre, op. cit.
opposed to offensive, preparedness. In that light, the Admiralty revised its new
collection programmes. According to Ferris, the revised plan deferred those preparations
particular to a war with Japan until post-1935. The revisions reduced by one-third the new
collection proposals. They projected construction of 21 Cruisers, 1 Aircraft Carrier, 45
Destroyers, 48 submarines and 35 Auxiliary Vessels, spread over the years 1925-1931 for
general security maintenance, and to have in place general preparedness against
aggressors. 67

When the revised plan was placed before the Naval Programmes Inquiry, the contentious
emphasis against it shifted from strategic and diplomatic considerations to those of timing
the economic and political implications for the Government. By the end of June, Churchill
had put up a proposal to accept the whole of the revised plan that the Inquiry was prepared
to endorse. Under its terms, the plan would be shelved for one year. The Treasury would
guarantee 65 Million Pounds, inclusive of 10 Million to begin the revised programme, for
the Admiralty Estimates of 1926-27. The practice of returning unspent funding at the end
of the financial year to the Treasury would be waived. The Admiralty would retain those
monies, together with any other savings made from its internal economies, to be carried
forward into each successive year of the programme. 68

The Admiralty rejected this proposal and the position was deadlocked when Birkenhead
submitted, for the consideration of the Cabinet, a Report containing a compromise

68 Ibid.
solution, but which neither Churchill nor Bridgeman had been asked to sign. In discussion 'from all aspects, including Naval, Financial, Foreign, Imperial and Unemployment Policy, the trend of opinion was shown to be in favour of the Report of the Cabinet Committee.' But on the issue concerning postponement of new construction, there were differences of opinion. Further discussion was postponed to allow Baldwin to talk again with Churchill and Bridgeman, after which the PM 'hoped to be in a position to make a recommendation to the Cabinet'.

The question was, in the end, a political one and Baldwin made up his mind on that basis. By this time, the PM understood that Bridgeman and the Admiralty Board would not accept accountability if their recommendations on construction were not accepted and were ready to resign. Bridgeman's influence in the Party was considerable and, in the Cabinet, the Admiralty view did have its own very influential supporters.

Mass resignation at the Admiralty meant not only a Cabinet split but was likely also to unleash the forces of Reaction in the Government back-benches and in the Conservative Party at large. For, flushed with their Party's landslide victory in the General Election, Tory die-hards were ready to jump on anything that smacked of pandering to socialism.

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69 CAB.23/50, Report of the Naval Programme Committee, C.P.-342(25), Meeting of 15 July 1925. See also Ferris, op.cit. p.168. I have been unable to obtain the document, C.P. - 342(25) but according to Ferris, its recommendations were "between 1926 and 1932 Britain should build 20 cruisers, one carrier, 45 destroyers, 35 submarines and 23 auxiliary vessels (66 per cent of which should begin before 1930-31) for 68 873 000 Pounds. This compromise between Churchill and Bridgeman excluded the Chancellor's guarantees and included his 'blank year' for construction in 1925-26."

70 CAB.23/50, Meeting of Cabinet, 16 July 1925.

71 Roskill; Naval Policy, Vol.1, op.cit. p.451. See also William Manchester; The Last Lion, Winston Spencer Churchill, Visions of Glory: 1874-1932, published by Dell Publishing, New York, 1983, p 790 and Bridgeman Diaries and Letters, op.cit. Memorandum, Bridgeman to Baldwin 11/12 July 1925 warned "The most loyal part of the Conservative Party and Press are convinced supporters of an adequate navy. If we alienate their support and come down on the side of a little Navy, trust-to-luck policy of procrastination, the Prime Minister will have no solid body of Conservative support to rely on."
Nevertheless, times had changed. Within the Parliamentary leadership, it was understood that Conservatism, while maintaining its philosophical traditions on trade and defence, had to put forward, also, progressive social policies. Only thereby would it establish its credentials as the Party of government in a two-party system - Conservative and Labour - and all opportunity for a Liberal revival eliminated. Although the Labour Government lost the Election, votes for Labour increased from 4.3 million to 5.5 million. Reactionary government, in the view of the leadership, would be mere grist to the mill of the new Party of Opposition, on the rise, and do Conservatives harm more than good. As for Churchill, resignation by him was hardly likely to open the floodgates of Tory reaction but Baldwin wanted to keep him under his eye. There was no real suggestion either, that Churchill was likely to resign. He had made his case but he had also indicated early that it was for the Government to say how its available funds were to be spent.

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72 Young; op.cit p.62-64 and Mowat; op.cit. p.190.

73 On 31 October 1924, with regard to the overwhelming majority secured by the Conservatives over the other Parties, A. Chamberlain wrote to Baldwin, "I have one clear conviction which you will share – Reaction would be fatal." Quoted in Grayson; op.cit. p.9.

74 Young; op.cit. p.64.

Churchill began his political career with the Conservatives in 1900 but transferred his allegiance to the Liberals in 1908. He lost his Liberal seat in the October 1922 General Election. The Labour - Liberal combination that gave Labour its First Government in January 1924 led to another opportunity for Churchill to get back in to Parliament. The opportunity came from Baldwin. Although Baldwin needed to take care that Churchill did not become the centre of a Liberal revival he saw value in using Churchill to give the lead to Liberals ill at ease with their Party’s support for Labour and turn their support to the Conservatives. He attempted to secure a new seat for Churchill, unopposed by any Conservative candidate, in a by-election in the Conservative stronghold of the Abbey Division of Westminster in March 1924. But the Westminster Branch Association chose to put up its own candidate and Churchill, standing as an ‘Independent Anti-Socialist’, was narrowly defeated. Baldwin then made the safe Conservative seat of Epping available to Churchill in the October 1924 General Election. Churchill’s manifesto declared his support for the Conservative Party and he won, but he had stood as a ‘Constitutionalist’. Not formally returned to the Conservatives, he had not vindicated his orthodoxy to the Party. See Martin Gilbert; Churchill, a Life, Heineman, London, 1991, Chapters 8, 9 and 21 and Mowat; op.cit., p.177.

75 ADM 116/3387; Letter from Churchill to Bridgeman, 5 February 1925.
The above political considerations bore strongly upon the proposals on the Naval Construction question Baldwin brought back to Cabinet on 22 July 1925. 

He told Cabinet he had decided 'in the light of the present political situation' on a recommendation. Pointing out that an early decision was now necessary and that other business, in the shape of 'the threatened industrial crisis, pressed, he appealed to Cabinet to accept his proposals. His proposals, largely in keeping with those put forward by the Birkenhead Committee, excepting postponement of the Cruiser construction programme, received unanimous Cabinet approval. Under the arrangement, 4 new cruisers could be laid down during the current financial year. Provision had already been made for the purpose of new construction in the 2 Million Pounds shadow cut, and authorisation for the construction of 4 China Gunboats and 3 Sections for the Floating Dock at Singapore had already been granted.

It was further agreed, therefore, that 'the Admiralty should meet the increased charge in 1925-26 by savings on other heads and by further underspending ... and that no new money shall be asked for unless at the end of the financial year the Cabinet is satisfied that there is no other alternative.' Approval was given for the rest of the Admiralty programme to begin in the following year and to be 'thereafter in accordance with the Committee Report (C.P.-342(25)).'

76 CAB 23/50, Meeting of Cabinet, 22 July 1925.

77 Ibid. See also Mowat; op cit. p.290-293 -The industrial crisis to which Baldwin referred concerned the wages and conditions dispute raging between the Miners' Federation and the Mine Owners since 30 June 1925. From 10 July, the General Council of the Trades Union Congress had begun organising to support the Miners with an embargo on the movement of coal when the Miners' stop-work began. The possibility of escalation to a General Strike was very serious; the Government was later to commit over 20 Million Pounds in subsidies to prevent it, unsuccessfully. The 1926 General Strike was the outcome.

78 CAB 23/50, Meeting of Cabinet, 22 July 1925.

79 Ibid.
The outcome was a good one for the Admiralty, for it represented an endorsement by the Government of the policy of general preparedness for war and acknowledged the Admiralty’s prerogative to formulate naval requirements consistent with the policy. Nevertheless, economies were to remain the subject of close scrutiny. All Naval Votes, other than those for new construction, would be scrutinised by a new inquiry. The new investigation would extend also to the other Services and have as its object the presentation to the Cabinet of ‘proposals for reduction of expenditure to equalise from Admiralty Votes the increased cost involved in the earlier beginning of the cruiser programme’. 80

On 13 August 1925, Baldwin appointed the Fighting Services Committee, under the Chairmanship of Lord Colwyn, to examine the spending of all 3 Service Departments. The Committee’s other two members were Lords Chalmers and Bradbury, both of whom had served as Secretary of the Treasury. At Colwyn’s request, the Admiralty provided detailed memoranda canvassing every aspect of naval policy and areas for possible economy. 81 Chatfield, serving as Third Sea Lord with responsibility for the material departments at the Admiralty, in all their forms, including research, was closely concerned with a Colwyn sub-committee - the Dockyard Committee, otherwise called the Biles Sub-Committee. 82 According to Chatfield, having an interest in giving effect to economies in dockyard administration, he gave wholehearted support to assist the Biles Committee in its inquiries and at its hearings. But when the Committee reported in October, it ‘neither mentioned the evidence nor bore any relation to it’. In Chatfield’s view, ‘hearing evidence was only whitewash [and the task of the] Henchmen of the Treasury [was] to make a report that

80 Ibid.
81 Roskill; Naval Policy, Vol.1, op.cit. p.473 fn.3.
would still further strengthen [the Treasury] in resisting the next Naval Estimates'.

Nevertheless, an Admiralty challenge, led by Chatfield, defeated the Biles Report. 83

Indeed, Cabinet took no immediate action to give effect to any of the recommendations that came out of the Colwyn Committee. But, in November 1925, while the circular argument of Naval Policy and responsibility for giving it effect raged around Bridgeman and Colwyn, Colwyn advised Bridgeman that his Committee's terms of reference had been expanded. Baldwin had asked for 'suggestions for reducing the net total expenditure of the three departments by millions below the Parliamentary provision for the current year'. 84

Subsequently, following the publication of the Colwyn Report, Baldwin wrote to Bridgeman asking him to frame the 1926-27 Estimates on the basis of 57.5 Million Pounds, as the sum recommended by Colwyn. The Admiralty was in no way 'precluded from submitting to the Treasury alternative proposals to any of the recommendations of the Colwyn Committee, provided that they secure equivalent economies'. 85

Under its own economy review, the Admiralty had already arrived at a figure below 60 million Pounds. By means of cuts in oil fuel reserves and in the Fleet Air Arm (FAA) the final figure, presented and passed by Parliament, was 58.1 Million Pounds. 86

83 Chatfield, op.cit.

84 Quoted in Roskill; Naval Policy, Vol.1, op.cit. p.478.

85 ADM 116/3387, Letter from Baldwin to Bridgeman, 15 January 1926.

86 According to Bridgeman, confirmation of the building programme had made great economies possible. Many obsolescent vessels that otherwise would have been kept under repair were scrapped. "The result was that we not only saved enough to pay for the new construction of the year... i.e. about 3 million, but actually reduced the other expenses by over 2 million - over 5 million in all of savings ... Winston has shown much appreciation of our exertions." Bridgeman's Diary and Letters, op.cit. 24 January 1926, Beatty Papers, Vol 2, op.cit. Document #173. Also document #179 and CAB 23/51, Meeting of Cabinet, 11 November 1925.
In April 1926, while presenting his Budget, Churchill gave an undertaking to consider the Estimates of the three Fighting Services jointly. In July, he raised the matter in Cabinet in connection with the 1927-28 Service Estimates, suggesting as an aggregate total, 110 Million Pounds (to reflect economies of 6 Million on the aggregate total of the previous financial year). At a meeting with the PM the following November, the three Service Ministers expressed their joint agreement that 'what was really required was not a general figure to which the aggregate of the three Services should be adjusted by the Service Ministers themselves, but a figure to which each Department should be told to work to'.

The Admiralty, then, put forward its Estimates for 1927-28 at just over 60 Million Pounds, subject to a shadow cut of 2.4 Million. Scarcely different from those of the previous year, they passed with relative ease. Among the strategies agreed upon between Churchill and Bridgeman, in order to keep the printed Estimates for 1927-28 as low as possible, was postponement of the commencement of construction until the latest possible date in the financial year, without actually pushing any part of it out of the year. Churchill commended the strategy particularly on account of its usefulness in the domestic political climate and also with regard to Cruiser construction in the US and in Japan. Churchill was certain that the Japanese were, in any case, already behindhand with their programme but that 'retardation … for one cause or another by five or six months [of the Admiralty

87 CAB. 23/53, Meeting of Cabinet, 28 July 1926.

88 ADM 116/3387; Notes of a Meeting held in the Prime Minister's Room, House of Commons, Tuesday, 30 November 1926.

90 ADM 116/3387; Correspondence on 1927-28 Estimates, Letter, Baldwin to Bridgeman, 17 December 1926, Bridgeman to Baldwin, 20 December 1926, Churchill to Bridgeman, 22 December 1926, Bridgeman to Churchill, 6 January 1927. The Admiralty was able to demonstrate substantial contributions to the exigencies of the economy drive but at the same time point out that the Chancellor of Exchequer had himself clearly understood and had made it plain to the Cabinet that “the effect of embarking on a new construction programme must be to cause a steady increase of Navy Estimates.”

90 ADM 116/3387; Letter Bridgeman to Baldwin, 20 December 1926.
programme] would have a beneficial effect in chilling off Japanese, and still more American, competition'.

Reminding Bridgeman that it was ‘a profound interest of Britain to keep the naval temperature low’, he took the view that the ‘smallest turn on the side of diminution and retardation would ... bring about favourable reactions’. On the other hand, while Churchill conceded that compared to Japan, the US had a ‘rotten cruiser outfit’ and ‘on merits’ the American case for construction was ‘considerable’, he was not prepared to yield to any bullying tactics on the part of the Americans. It was Churchill’s opinion of President Coolidge’s position on construction that he did ‘not want to build but only to bluff and bluster’. In the eventuality of the US ‘threatening a large programme’, as a means of forcing Britain’s hand, Churchill hoped to be able to range himself with the Admiralty ‘as to the manner in which such a threat should be dealt with’. 92

Since first mooted at the end of 1924, movement towards a naval conference had been slow. With the collapse of Labour’s first government, it had fallen to the Conservatives to decide the fate of the Geneva Protocol. With the full support of the Governments of the Dominions they had rejected it, providing an explanation for the decision in a declaration to the League Council.93 The declaration expressed HMG’s objections that the Protocol did not, as was purported, merely clarify obscurities and fill in omissions in the original Covenant, but destroyed ‘its balance’ and altered ‘its spirit’. 94


92 Ibid. See also Bridgeman Diaries and Letters, op.cit. p.208, entry for period June-August 1927- Bridgeman recorded Churchill’s concern that the British were in fact “giving away too much” to the Americans at Geneva.


94 Ibid; quoted on p.155.
In its criticism of the Protocol the declaration continued:

The fresh emphasis laid upon sanctions, the new occasions discovered for their employment, the elaboration of military procedure, insensibly suggest the idea that the vital business of the League is not so much to promote friendly co-operation and reasoned harmony in the management of international affairs as to preserve peace by organising war, and (it may be) war on the largest scale. It certainly seems to His Majesty's Government that anything which fosters the idea that the main business of the League is with war rather than with peace is likely to weaken it in its fundamental task of diminishing the causes of war without making it in every respect a satisfactory instrument for organizing great military operations should the necessity for them be forced on the world.  

The Baldwin Government preferred 'with the co-operation of the League' to supplement the Covenant with 'special arrangements in order to meet special needs ... by knitting together the nations most immediately concerned, and whose differences might lead to a renewal of strife, by means of treaties framed with the sole object of maintaining, as between themselves, an unbroken peace'.

Thereafter, Britain had been preoccupied with negotiating a European security pact with France, Germany and the Low Countries, finally culminating on 1 December 1925 with the signing of the Treaty of Locarno. But member nations of the League, presuming acceptance of the Protocol, had agreed to establish the Preparatory Commission on Disarmament as a preliminary to a General Disarmament Conference under the auspices of

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95 Ibid; quoted on p. 155.

96 Ibid; quoted on p.157.
the League and the Commission remained as a legacy of the defunct Protocol. The US Government participated by sending observer delegates to the Preparatory Commission which met for the first time in May 1926.  

It would be superfluous to the purposes of this thesis to examine, at this point, how and why the US, as a non-League member, became attached to the Preparatory Commission. Similarly, it would be superfluous to examine, in detail, the whole of what took place at the Geneva Naval Conference of 1927. Those matters are well documented elsewhere. But it is necessary to underline that, unlike the US, British interest in the diminution of arms remained intrinsically linked with the terms of the Versailles Peace Agreement. Hence, when Coolidge, desirous of accelerating progress on naval limitations, independently invited the 4 major naval nations to join the US in a naval limitations conference at Geneva, the seeds of the failure were already germinating. For the British Delegation (led by Bridgeman and Cecil) brought, as the basis of its proposals, plans prepared in the first instance for the benefit of the Preparatory Commission. Also, the governments of France and Italy declined the Coolidge invitation.

In drafting the plan the Admiralty had had in view, as well as the general question of economy, diminution of British naval power as a likely product of a General Disarmament Agreement, there being little to offer for reduction in the nation’s other Fighting Services.

97 McKercher; op.cit. p.58.


The keynote of the scheme was, in all classes of vessels, qualitative rather than quantitative reduction. In the case of Cruisers, the scheme proposed the introduction of two distinct classes – Heavy Cruisers (maximum displacement 10 000 tons, maximum gun calibre 8 inches, already established under the Washington terms and known also as “Washington Cruisers”) and Light Cruisers (maximum displacement 7 500 tons, maximum gun calibre 6 inches).\(^{101}\)

This last proposal was founded on the Admiralty doctrine of absolute need that set 70 as the minimum number of Cruisers, compatible with National security - the number recommended in the Birkenhead Report and approved by the Cabinet in July 1925.

The proposals put forward by the US were less wide-ranging than were those of Britain. They focused specifically upon Cruisers. The US sought no adjustment in Cruiser displacement or gun calibre but wanted a definition of relative power in this class of vessel under an extension of the 5:5:3 Ratio covering Capital Ships. Economy came into the American scheme in terms of total tonnage maxima. The US proposals suggested total tonnage maxima be set at 300 000 each for the US and Britain and 180 000 for Japan. Patently, it was a scheme that could never produce the absolute numbers of Cruisers defined by Britain under the requirements of defensive security.\(^{102}\)

That numbers of Cruisers was the crux of the matter, as far as Britain was concerned, was again fully endorsed by the Cabinet. At a meeting of 29 June 1927, Cabinet authorised Bridgeman to say 'publicly and at once [that] while we mean to build cruisers up to our

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\(^{101}\) DBFP, Series 1A, Vol III, op.cit. Document # 365

\(^{102}\) Ibid.
needs, we lay down no conditions limiting cruisers to a smaller number. The statement conceded Cruiser parity with the US, by implication and by implication left it to the discretion of the US Government to decide whether US needs had to match British levels. But it was not enough to prevent ultimate Conference failure. For the standard upon which the British Government insisted was far beyond the real security requirements of the US. It set a price far beyond that which the US Government was prepared to contemplate and a disparity, therefore, in Cruisers numbers that it would not accept. Despite the presence of some rancour, on all sides it was agreed that the Conference ‘should close in a friendly atmosphere’, on which note the Conference ended on 4 August 1927 with a Plenary Session and final statements from the delegations.

Beatty retired from Service only days before the close of the Geneva Naval Conference. At its close, his assumption was that the naval programme would continue ‘as if there had been no Conference’. His coincidental prediction of ‘a rough passage’ for the 1928-29 Estimates seems paradoxical. But it merely highlighted Baldwin’s bipartition of Naval Policy. At a time when, fundamentally, his view of naval limitation was from a political standpoint, Baldwin’s object was to make it clear to the nation that his Government would pursue two compatible Naval Policy strands. On the one hand, the Government was prepared to maintain Britain’s preponderance of naval power. On the other hand, scrupulous economy would be demanded of the Admiralty Board. As far as responsibilities and prerogatives for the execution of the Policy were concerned, Baldwin maintained the

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103 CAB. 23/55, Meeting of Cabinet, 29 June 1927.
104 CAB. 23/53, Meeting of Cabinet, 3 August 1927, Appendix I, Telegram from Sir E. Howard to Foreign Office, Nos 370 and 371.
107 Ibid. Document # 201.
status quo – to the Government would adhere those pertaining to Policy definition, and to the Admiralty those pertaining to the formulation of naval requirements consistent with Government Policy.
Chapter 9


By the end of Beatty’s tenure at the Admiralty the Baldwin Government had given clear evidence of its acceptance and support of the Admiralty’s definition of Britain’s absolute need in naval power. But disarmament was a highly topical and popular issue in domestic and international politics. To avoid accusations of sheer obstructionism, any position seeming to conflict with its furtherance had to be demonstrably well founded.

In the wake of the failed Geneva Conference, therefore, the Baldwin government sought to clarify and defend its naval policy. Underpinning the argument for disarmament argument were the two pillars of economy and pacifist ideology. In terms of economy, the Government could put a very strong case against its pre-war predecessors. Consideration under pacifist ideology inevitably put naval policy and foreign relations together, and it was in their inter-relationship that Austin Chamberlain defended the government’s policy. In Chamberlain’s view, the success of any international agreement to reduce armaments depended on the prior resolution of political differences between the nations concerned.

Following upon the failed Geneva Conference, Chamberlain worked towards confidential pourparlers between the British and American governments with the object of determining the prospects of success in any future conference on naval reductions. Chamberlain identified their differences concerning the application of Belligerent Rights as the root cause of tensions, obstructing naval agreement between them and thereby also the progress of work in the
League Preparatory Commission. Chamberlain believed that only by the resolution of their political differences was there a prospect of acceptance in conference of differences in their respective naval needs and commitments, and that only such acceptance would allow each to determine reduction in terms of its own national security minimum.

The occasion for confidential *pourparlers* was within grasp when the Baldwin Government fell in June 1929. Returned at the head of a minority Labour Government, Ramsay MacDonald made Arthur Henderson Foreign Minister, but took charge personally of leading Chamberlain's work on naval matters to a speedy conclusion. He chose to ignore the Chamberlain priority regarding the settlement of Belligerent Rights and went straight to the armaments reduction issue. Ideologically predisposed towards disarmament in the universal interest, in order to secure the reduction of armaments by international agreement, he sacrificed the Admiralty policy providing for national safety.

In considering the above this chapter will examine the policy decisions leading, as a consequence of the Geneva Naval conference, to further retardation of the Admiralty’s construction programme and the Treasury’s part therein. Focus then will be on Austin Chamberlain’s efforts to break the deadlock in the League Preparatory Commission on Disarmament. In conclusion the chapter will review Ramsay MacDonald’s preparations for a new naval conference and the results of that conference, in brief.
Despite the failure of the Geneva Conference, the large majority of the Cabinet was in favour of Naval Limitations. On 4 August 1927 Cabinet approved the following formula for use by Ministers when speaking in public on the subject of Naval Disarmament: ‘Notwithstanding the failure of the Geneva Conference we still desire to study a policy of moderation in Naval construction.’ What the Cabinet rejected were US proposals that, according to Admiralty analysis, would have resulted in a total of only 47 British Cruisers rather than the 70 considered to be the minimum necessary to protect Britain’s sea communications.

Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the failure at Geneva, the Cabinet was concerned to forestall any interpretation of Britain’s general policy of Naval Construction as constituting British competition with the US. With the object of a demonstration of British goodwill in recognising any undertaking in the US of large Cruiser construction as a catch-up programme, the decision was taken to investigate the possibility of postponing the laying down of new Cruisers for a year or two.

Three weeks later Churchill raised the question of cruiser postponement again – this time directly as an economy issue. Again he stated the case for postponement on account of the US’s being well behind hand with its programme and because of Japan’s declared position at

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1 Bridgeman; Diaries and Letters, *op. cit.* June-August 1927.
2 CAB 23/55, Meeting of Cabinet, 4 August 1927.
3 Ibid. Appendix 1 – Memorandum by First Sea Lord Presented to Cabinet, August 1927.
4 CAB 23/55, Meeting of Cabinet, 4 August 1927.
Geneva that no increase in its cruiser construction programme was contemplated before 1936. In response to this statement Cabinet resolved that a Cabinet Committee should be set up within the next few weeks to review the programme of Naval construction in light of the situation disclosed at the recent Geneva Conference on Reduction and Limitation of Naval Armaments, not with a view to an alteration of a general policy already announced to Parliament but in order to ascertain what adjustment should be made in that policy in the present and prospective situation.

Churchill, however, made an early start. On what appears to have been his initiative, he engaged in preliminary discussions with Beatty's successor, Admiral Sir Charles Madden. On the basis of the 5:3 ratio policy and Japan's announced policy until 1936, Churchill calculated Britain could afford to suspend all cruiser construction until early 1929, without harm to the ratio. On Admiralty evidence at a subsequent meeting he stood corrected, and conceded that to remain on track with the Government's policy, at least 4 cruisers had to be ordered by early 1929. Further discussion centred on timing the distribution of the orders, with the Admiralty

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6 Ibid.

7 The Keyes Papers, Selections from the Private and Official Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Keyes, Vol.II 1919-1938, Edited by Paul Halpern, George Allen & Unwin for the Navy Records Society, 1980, Document #189, Letter Pound to Keyes, 9 December 1927. The Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (ACNS), Rear-Admiral Sir Dudley Pound believed the initiative was Churchill's, so that 'he (Winston) should try and come to an agreement without having to refer the matter [of the 1927cruiser programme] to a Cabinet Committee.' Pound regarded it as 'bad policy for the Admiralty to treat with anyone except Cabinet or C.I.O.' for "- why should the Chancellor be allowed to dictate or try to dictate Naval policy."
agreeing to 1 in the 1927-28 programme and 3 in 1928-29. On 11 November 1927, with the endorsement of the Birkenhead Naval Programme Committee, the Cabinet approved the postponement of two of the three cruisers in the 1927 programme.

But this did not deflect increasing criticism of the Government’s disarmament record. In the Lords, on 16 November 1927, Cecil gave vent to his dissatisfaction with the handling of the disarmament question in general and of the Geneva Naval Conference in particular. In the Commons the Opposition hammered the Government on the same themes. MacDonald, still Labour’s main spokesman on foreign affairs, looked to use Labour’s foreign policy as ‘a well-shod battering ram to smash the Government.’ If successful, MacDonald had hopes of reviving the Geneva Protocol and thereby also the Preparatory Commission on Disarmament. It was MacDonald’s view that the Conservatives’ rejection of the Protocol had crippled the Preparatory Commission. For, although the Conservative Government had concluded a treaty at Locarno, it was a regional security arrangement, confined to five signatory nations. It was not a substitute for the general security agreement, guaranteed by the League, envisaged in the Protocol. Hence the Preparatory Commission had lost the original premise for its disarmament

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8 ADM 167/76 Memorandum for the Board (undated, attached to a document 3 October 1927) The Board viewed with scepticism any possibility that either domestic or international observers might be deluded as to the fact that the 1928 construction was anything other than a three Cruiser programme. But it was prepared to co-operate with the Chancellor. There was no question of any concession on Naval needs in absolute terms but in relative terms vis-à-vis the current Japanese and US Cruiser positions, the Admiralty had given way to the extent of postponing two Cruisers from the 1927 programme.

9 CAB 23/55, Meeting of Cabinet, 17 November 1927.


11 Quoted in David Marquand; Ramsay MacDonald, Jonathan Cape Ltd., London, 1977, p.469.
deliberations. With the introduction of a motion of censure, MacDonald forced the Government to debate these issues in parliament on 24 November 1927.\footnote{CAB 23/55, Meeting of Cabinet, 23 November 1927.}

Bridgeman and Chamberlain were the principal speakers for the Government in the debate. Charged by the Cabinet rebutting Press allegations that the ‘Chancellor of the Exchequer was in some special sense responsible for the policy followed at the Naval Conference’, Bridgeman had responsibility also for the response to charges against the Government of ‘ever-increasing expenditure on arms and men’.\footnote{Ibid. (During the Naval Conference, Churchill had been among the most outspoken in Cabinet against concession to US demands. CAB. 23/55, 4 July 1927.)} He did so by showing that in real terms Naval Estimates for the current year were only 68% of those of 1913-14 when Lloyd George was Chancellor of the Exchequer in the then Liberal Government.\footnote{McKercher, The Second Baldwin Government, \textit{op.cit.} p.89.}

Chamberlain was well satisfied with his own part in putting the Government case in the debate. In a letter to his sister, he acknowledged that MacDonald ‘by his opening of the discussion [had] untied’ him and given him the opportunity, rare to Foreign Secretaries, of making ‘his full case.’\footnote{Chamberlain, Diary, \textit{op.cit.} 12 December 1927.} And according to McKercher, the effectiveness of Chamberlain’s explanation in the House for the Government’s rejection of the Geneva Protocol and adoption of Locarno ‘can be gauged by the fact that MacDonald dropped his campaign for the Protocol right afterward.’\footnote{McKercher, The Second Baldwin Government, \textit{op.cit.} p.90.}
As to the Naval Conference, Chamberlain conceded that diplomatic preparation had been deficient but argued that, as the summoners of the conference, that responsibility belonged properly with the Americans. The British delegates, on the other hand, had gone well prepared, having proposals for naval economy at the expense of the ‘aggressive power’ of the fighting units. The failure of the Coolidge Conference had had no effect, however, upon the work of the Preparatory Commission, where, supported by the Government’s every effort for their success, deliberations continued.  

Bridgeman had given a good accounting in parliament of the Government’s economic handling of its naval policy, but the reality was, while in theory the policy remained intact, it had been severely retarded. The earliest date at which the ‘truncated scheme’ for Singapore could now be completed ‘economically’ was July 1937. For the purpose of reporting to the Committee of Inquiry into the Singapore Base, it was a date the Board could accept as long as the new Floating Dock was on site and in service by 1929.

The cruiser schedule had suffered a new setback with the postponement decision handed down in November. But even with this the Chancellor was not satisfied. For, when on 21 December 1927 Bridgeman wrote with some pleasure to Churchill proposing Estimates for 1928-29 of 58.33 million pounds (only 330 000 pounds above those of the current year, yet allowing 595 000 pounds for the Oil Fuel Policy) Churchill responded sharply. He was entirely dissatisfied with Estimates not only above those of the current year, but which also exceeded

17 Ibid. Pages 90-91.
18 ADM 167/75, Admiralty Board Minutes, 3 October 1927.
by 2 million pounds the Admiralty quota contained in the economy scheme he had outlined in a Cabinet Meeting of 15 December.  

It was Churchill’s view that under every head in the Estimates there was potential of cancellation, reduction or delay in light of ‘the favourable political situation, especially as regards Japan, now existing or the decision of the Government that no great war need be anticipated for at least ten years.’ He warned that if agreement could not be reached he was prepared ‘to propose a series of reductions which could be submitted seriatim to a Cabinet Committee.’

The Admiralty-Treasury harangue over Estimates dragged on well into February 1928. A Cabinet meeting of 17 February 1928 revealed the efforts of both sides to reach an accommodation. Admiralty revisions proposed 57.6 million pounds net, while Churchill had found resources elsewhere for bridging the greatest part of the Budget deficit. He asked for and received Cabinet approval for some final adjustments – among them a further contribution by the Admiralty of 100 000 Pounds from the latest net proposal and a reduction of 200 000 Pounds in the Shadow Cut. Bridgeman protested but was obliged to comply when, following the Report of the Birkenhead Committee to Cabinet on 22 February 1928, Cabinet, taking full responsibility for the decision, approved the Committee’s recommendation that the Approved Oil Fuel Policy to provide for a steady, equal, annual increase of 330 000 tons of Oil Fuel


22 CAB 23/57, Meeting of Cabinet, 17 February 1928.
Reserve, beginning in 1928, be limited in this instance to 100,000 tons. Subsequently, Bridgeman presented the Estimates at 57.3 Million Pounds, announcing under 1928 construction, only 2 of the 1928 Cruisers.

No sooner were the 1928 Estimates agreed than the Treasury struck again. In a letter to the Admiralty of 13 March 1928 the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury proposed that, in light of the 'considerable differences' existing between the two Departments regarding 'the proper basis in present circumstances of Navy Estimates', a Cabinet Committee should examine 'the whole position in advance of discussions on the total of Navy Estimates for 1929.'

Essentially, what the Treasury now pushed for was a reduction in ships in commission, reduced materiel consumption, fewer personnel – in short, a cutback in training and development amounting in the Admiralty view to impaired capacity to mobilise quickly and fight the ships. Under the head of General Basis of the Estimates, the Treasury Lords took issue with the Admiralty interpretation of the Ten-Year Rule. Also, they questioned the admissibility of accelerated spending by the Admiralty in 1928 in order 'so far as possible to liquidate their commitments by 1931' – especially since, in the view of the Treasury Lords, it

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23 CAB 23/57, Meeting of Cabinet, 22 February 1928.

24 Ordering of the third of the 1928 Cruisers was to be held back for inclusion in the 1929 Financial Year. See Note 8, above. In a letter to Keyes Rear-Admiral Pound expressed his concern that the "dropped" cruisers were "lost forever", for the Government seemed incapable of grasping the logistical difficulties "in laying down extra cruisers when we have to commence replacing capital ships." The Keyes Papers, Vol 2, Op Cit. Letter Pound to Keyes, 19 December 1927, Document # 189.

was by no means 'certain that fresh expenditure on battleships will be necessary in 1931.'

Thus broadly justified, the letter went on to make claims for reduction, cancellation or postponement under the heads originally itemised in Churchill's letter of 16 January 1927 to Bridgeman. Not surprisingly the Admiralty vigorously challenged the claims point by point, stressing most particularly that 'the fact that the Royal Navy is being run on a much smaller proportion of Active Service personnel than any other important Navy in the world is strong evidence of the economy which is being practised in this sphere of naval administration.'

The struggle over spending moved to its next phase. What had been the threat of the previous year was now the resolution of the current one – namely, scrutiny, item by item, of the remnant of Admiralty priorities in a Cabinet Committee. On 15 June 1928 Churchill circulated to the members of the Cabinet, under his own memorandum, the official Treasury and Admiralty correspondence on the subject of the basis of Navy Estimates. The Churchill memorandum proposed asking the CID 'to advise the Cabinet upon the general assumptions which should now govern our preparations for war, with particular reference to the Estimates of the Fighting Services.' And, desiring to make sure of the assumptions, he further proposed that 'it should now be laid down as a standing assumption that at any given date there will be no major war for ten years from that date, and that this should rule unless or until, on the

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26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 ADM 167/78, letters from Secretary of the Admiralty to Secretary of H.M. Treasury, Numbers of Ships in Commission, Vote 10, 12 April 1928, Vote A, 13 April 1928.


30 Ibid.
initiative of the Foreign Office or one of the Fighting Services or otherwise, it is decided to alter it."\(^{31}\)

The Cabinet considered the Chancellor's proposals on 22 June 1928, when it was agreed to refer them to the advice of the CID.\(^{32}\) When the CID deliberations concluded, Cabinet approved the following recommendations on 18 July 1928.\(^{33}\)

(i) That it should be assumed for the purpose of framing the Estimates of the Fighting Services that at any given date there will be no major war for ten years.

(ii) That this assumption should be reviewed annually by the Committee of Imperial Defence before the Estimates of the Fighting Services are drawn up, that is to say, not later than the month of June, and that it shall be the duty of the Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence to remind the Prime Minister of this Conclusion at the appropriate moment and take his instructions as to placing the subject on the Agenda Paper of the Committee.

(iii) That it shall be the duty of any Department in His Majesty's Government in Great Britain, no less than the right of the Government of any Dominion, to ask the Committee of Imperial Defence to review the above Conclusion at any other time if, in the opinion of any of them, the circumstances are so changed as to render its application to the then existing conditions doubtful.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

\(^{32}\) CAB 23/58, Meeting of Cabinet, 22 June 1928. In the course of discussion, Bridgeman suggested "that the question of detail raised in the correspondence between the Treasury and the Admiralty should be discussed at the full CID before being referred to ant Sub-Committee". But, because he wanted to expedite a decision on the disputed question of the provision of a new type of Anti-Aircraft Gun, claimed as urgent by the Admiralty, Churchill had proposed that item alone as requiring the "immediate advice" of the CID. The remaining items in dispute he was content to refer to the Naval Programme Committee (since March 1928 a Standing Sub-Committee of the CID), as soon as the general assumptions had been concluded. Ibid. Also, ADM 116/3388, C.P.169 (28), Cabinet, The Basis of Navy Estimates, 15 June 1928.

\(^{33}\) CAB 23/58, Meeting of Cabinet, 18 July 1928.
In light of the new Ten-Year Rule formula, Churchill opened his correspondence with Bridgeman on the subject of the 1929 Estimates by pressing ‘from the point of view of immediate economies’ for cuts in the Navy’s materiel reserves. Bridgeman promised the matter of the reserves would be looked at yet again but advised Churchill not to put his hopes ‘too high.’

When the Admiralty re-examination of each individual reserve was completed, Bridgeman wrote again, providing the results in the detail and form desired by the Chancellor. Bridgeman was ‘sure that the basis on which the reserves are being maintained is so reasonable that no further important modification can be made.’ The Treasury charge of the ‘apparent tendency of the Admiralty to frame expensive replacement programmes over the period between now and 1931’ he countered with his own.

In his opinion it was more accurate to say:

the present tendency of the Treasury to try to put off indefinitely even the most inevitable naval expenditure, vaguely imagining that we could redeem our position by a great extensive effort at some future time, is one which is open to strong practical objections. It is a policy which would inevitably lead to the disappearance of the very

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34 ADM 167/78, Letter Churchill to Bridgeman, 31 July 1928. No provision had been made in the original budget for the British troop contingent dispatched in 1927 to help defend the International Settlement in Shanghai in China’s civil war. Already confronted with an 800 000 pounds deficit on that account, Churchill was looking for substantially reduced estimates next year, and contributions out of the current year to cover this lack of providence.


36 ADM 167/78, Letter – Bridgeman to Churchill, 29 November 1928.
organisations, skilled designers and workmen whose assistance we should require to recover ourselves when the need arose. 37

What Bridgeman was able to offer was the hope of ‘wiping out’ the current ‘adverse balance’ (i.e. the Shadow Cut of 2.4 million pounds) before the financial year ended. 38 The following week he circulated in Cabinet a memorandum explaining hopes for a reduction of 1 million pounds on Navy Estimates for 1929-30 but any really large reduction in naval expenditure could not be effected ‘except by changes of policy by His Majesty’s Government.’ 39 The Admiralty concern was that delay and postponement were killing the Government Naval Policy by degrees.

However closely the Baldwin Government linked naval spending with the imperatives of domestic policy it could not ignore the imperatives of security. Nor did it. Neither did it ignore the fact that the problem of British security was a global one. Ironically, it was Austin Chamberlain who sounded the note of caution concerning adoption of the new principles concerning the Ten-Year Rule.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 CAB 23/59, Meeting of Cabinet, 7 December 1928. At further meeting of Cabinet it was agreed that while the decision to construct 2 cruisers in the 1928-29 financial year should stand, the issue of tenders should be delayed pending the outcome of a new Cruiser Bill in the US. CAB 23/59, Meeting of Cabinet, 19 December 1928. When savings arising from delay in ordering the new cruisers, savings in the price of oil, together with other lesser adjustments had been taken into account, the total reduction effected was in the region of 1.4 million pounds compared with the Estimates of the previous year. ADM 167/78 Admiralty Board Minutes 31 January 1929. Naval Estimates for 1929-30 were approved at just below 56 million pounds.
In 1919, as Treasurer in the Coalition Government, Chamberlain had been at the forefront in the promotion of the original Ten Year Rule. In 1925 (excepting his support for developing the Singapore Base as a requirement for the full freedom of movement of the Fleet throughout the Empire) when Churchill raised the issue of the Ten-Year Rule as applied to war with Japan, Chamberlain supported the Treasury position, for it dovetailed nicely with Foreign Office Far Eastern Policy. Perhaps 4 years as Foreign Secretary had caused him to have reservations concerning the reliability of prophecies of peace. Bridgman had expressed such reservations in 1925 at the resurrection of the Ten Year Rule. Chamberlain echoed them in 1928 at its assumption as a Perennial Rule.

When Britain rejected the Geneva Protocol in March 1925, the League Disarmament Conference, scheduled for June of the same year, also fell through. The British Government position was that until some scheme to allay the ‘brooding fears that keep huge armaments in being’ was worked out, a disarmament conference was premature. Chamberlain endorsed his Government’s position on disarmament believing ‘there could be no reduction without security’. As far as Chamberlain was concerned, Locarno made a start in the direction of

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40 See this Thesis, Chapter 2.
41 Ibid. See also Bridgeman; Diaries, op. cit. 22 July 1925.
such a scheme but it was only a start, and no disarmament conditions attached to that Agreement.45

But, irrespective of Chamberlain’s point of view, disarmament was a major international issue not easily dismissed. No more was it easy to dismiss the issue in domestic politics. Any Government arms spending provided a wonderful platform for Labour to promote arguments very attractive to the voting public - namely its views on the abolition of armaments as the route to the abolition of war and the direction of greater funding to raise living standards. For those reasons and for what developed in the League Chamberlain was obliged to address the disarmament issue.

The League Covenant required members to reduce armaments to the lowest level consistent with national safety. Since its constitution in December 1925, nothing had been achieved in the Disarmament Preparatory Commission. The Assembly of 1926 demanded some positive progress from the Preparatory Commission that would lead to the summoning of a Disarmament Conference the following year, if possible before the full Assembly gathered.46

Cecil, active since the founding of the League as Britain’s principal representative in its Assemblies, led an initiative to hasten matters. From the work of the Commission’s Technical Sub-Committee he prepared a draft convention designed to ‘unite the views of the various Governments.’ When the CID had made such revisions to the draft as HMG ‘would be prepared to accept’ Cecil tabled his draft in the Preparatory Commission in March 1927. The

45 A. Chamberlain, Down the Years. op.cit. p.169-170. Neither was the evacuation of Germany’s occupied territory a condition of the Agreement, Ibid.

French countered with a draft of their own and by the following month negotiations had foundered on 'the two difficulties of army reserves and the naval question' \(^{47}\)

It was at this point President Coolidge, impatient for US naval economies, made his move. Having a team of US observers to the Preparatory Commission already in Geneva, the President issued invitations to the four major naval powers to join them for a Naval Conference. Since security assurances were excluded from the agenda the French declined (as did the Italians). With the French out of the picture the British were hopeful of agreement with the US and Japan on the basis of the naval proposals that had failed in the Preparatory Commission; for the proposals did not fail to address the question of economy. However, as has been seen above, the Americans were unreceptive to naval limitation by a combination of tonnage and numbers of vessels. Like the French, the Americans preferred limitation on the basis of total tonnage ratios and, in any case, the economies did not go far enough to meet US desires.

The Preparatory Commission was an inheritance from the previous Government, unwanted by Chamberlain. But it could not be ignored and together with its corollary, the failed naval conference, it had repercussions that redounded on his management of British foreign and disarmament policies for the next two years, leading, in the following year under MacDonald, to profound alterations to Naval Policy and the collapse of the Admiralty's national and imperial defence strategy.

\(^{47}\)Ibid. The French would have nothing to do with any limitation of army reserves and would consider only total tonnage for naval limitation purposes. Cecil proposed a measure of limitation for army reserves and required a combination of numbers and tonnage to apply to naval limitation.
On the disarmament issues Chamberlain saw the deadlock as a mess, largely attributable to undue haste and poor preparation and very damaging to international relations that were yet fragile.\textsuperscript{48} Adverse effects of the failed Naval Conference on Anglo-American relations, although not immediate, followed soon after Cecil’s resignation from the Cabinet.\textsuperscript{49} Chamberlain concluded that what lay at the root of the failed naval conference was the unresolved political questions surrounding the practice of Belligerent Rights.\textsuperscript{50} But if the question were to be resurrected for discussion, he wanted no repetition of over-hastiness and poor preparation. The matter was to be treated with strict confidentiality until it was possible to ‘get our own ideas clear in the F.O.’ and refer them to the Cabinet or to a Sub-Committee of the CID. Thereafter pourparlers might be attempted with members of the US Administration in order to discover whether by resolving their differences over belligerent rights, the two Governments might not also resolve their naval differences.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{48}Grayson; \textit{op.cit.} p.157 and DBFP, Series 1A, \textit{op.cit.} Document # 215, Memorandum by Sir A. Chamberlain.

\textsuperscript{49}Cecil’s letter of resignation, submitted on 7 August 1927, was expressed in terms that neither Chamberlain, acting in Baldwin’s absence, nor Baldwin, on his return from Canada, was prepared to accept. Cecil’s action was not publicly revealed therefore until 30 August 1927 when his modified version of his letter of resignation was published together with the PM’s reply. Bridgeman; Diary \textit{op.cit.} June-August 1927; Also A Chamberlain: Diary, \textit{op.cit.} p.306

In October, according to a memorandum for the Cabinet by Robert L. Craigie, Head of the American Department at the Foreign Office, the effect of the resignation of so noted an advocate of arms reduction as Cecil served to confirm in American minds, even in those sympathetic to Britain’s special Naval needs, that behind the failure of the Naval Conference was a lack of genuine commitment on the part of the British to further Naval Limitation. Craigie’s memorandum advised that “the President, who had originally been reported as still hoping that an agreement might eventually be reached now considers it a waste of time for him to talk of another Disarmament Conference since Lord Cecil is no longer in the Cabinet.” DBFP, Series 1A, Vol iv, \textit{op.cit.} Document # 212. Memorandum by Craigie respecting the Effect on Public Opinion in the United States of Lord Cecil’s resignation from Government. 11 October 1927.

\textsuperscript{50}DBFP, Series 1A, Vol.iv, \textit{op.cit.} Document # 215, Memorandum by Sir A. Chamberlain.

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid.
Of greater immediacy for Chamberlain was the effect of the failed naval conference in the Preparatory Commission. There, following the revelation of British naval policy at odds not only with France but also with the US, the French were encouraged in their opposition to Cecil’s general disarmament proposals. As a way out of the deadlock the French proposed that the Commission turn its attention to an examination of the question of security. But this was unacceptable to Germany’s delegates, who wanted the French to show why, after pressing last year for the calling of a conference of limited scope based upon the present degree of security, they should now be insisting that work cannot advance unless it is accompanied by an immediate increase in security. In Germany’s view the French proposal cast doubt over the value of the Agreements reached at Locarno.

Chamberlain’s European diplomacy revolved around Franco-German reconciliation. Locarno was its core. In order to support it some means now had to be found to move things forward in the Preparatory Commission to quieten German objections, to satisfy the concerns of the French and put an end to aspersions of British obstructionism at home and abroad.

By November 1927 two new Cabinet Sub-Committees had been set up. One under the chairmanship of the Lord Privy Seal Lord Salisbury was to examine Government

52 Ibid. Document # 219, Memorandum by Sir A. Chamberlain, The Present Situation in Regard to Disarmament, Annex 1 to # 219, Memorandum by Mr. A. Cadogan (Foreign Office), 27 October 1927.

53 Ibid. Document # 207, Memorandum by Mr. Roberts (Geneva), 19 September 1927. On behalf of his Government, German Delegate, Count Bernstorff, made a statement of Germany’s readiness “to collaborate in any work calculated to forward the general effort to increase arbitration and security... But he insisted on a distinction between (1) the work that the League should undertake in the direction of disarmament which should be based on the degree of security existing at present and (2) the work which the League might undertake in general to extend arbitration and security in the future.”

54 Ibid. Document # 219, Memorandum by Sir A. Chamberlain, The Present Situation in Regard to Disarmament, Annex 1 to # 219, Memorandum by Mr. A. Cadogan (Foreign Office), 27 October 1927.
Disarmament Policy. The other, formed at Chamberlain's request, was a CID Sub-Committee on Belligerent Rights, also to be chaired by Salisbury. Cecil's Cabinet position and League responsibilities were filled by the appointment of Lord Cushendun.

With Cushendun due to leave the following week for the resumption of Preparatory Commission discussions and Chamberlain scheduled to respond that very day to the MacDonald motion of censure, the Cabinet met on 24 November 1927 to consider the report of the Disarmament Sub-Committee and co-ordinate policy.55 It was agreed that on matters concerning Compulsory Arbitration in International Disputes, British representatives in the Preparatory Commission were required to base their attitudes on Section VII(a) of the Report of the Imperial Conference, 1926, whereby it was understood 'that none of the Governments represented at the Imperial Conference would take any action in the direction of compulsory jurisdiction of the Permanent Court, without bringing up the matter for further discussion.'56

On Disarmament, it was further agreed that, both in Geneva and in the Commons debate, the British case would be presented as 'resting on the great and unparalleled measures of disarmament which had been spontaneously carried out since the War. It was for other Powers to follow the example set by this country.' While 'raising controversy on the question of total tonnage and Cruiser policy' was to be avoided, it was to be made clear that the Admiralty's limitation proposals — 'a most important contribution to the cause of peace and economy' — were still available. Also, the recent modification in Britain's naval construction programme


56 Ibid.
should be mentioned ‘as evidence of the spirit in which we are pursuing the cause of disarmament.’

On 21 December the subject of US relations came again under Cabinet discussion, at which time Chamberlain reported that there were certain difficulties. They concerned ‘false allegations current in America as to an increase in the elevation in heavy guns in British Capital Ships.’ But because they were attributable, in part, ‘to the approach of the Presidential Election’ (i.e. electioneering propaganda) Chamberlain had advised Ambassador Howard to ‘avoid public controversy on matters of this kind which could be better dealt with at home.’

Discussion then turned on the many British concessions made towards America since the end of the War, with the object of improving relations, and made in vain. But when such reflections were pointed in the direction of the question of Belligerent Rights, Chamberlain cut them short with the reminder that ‘the question of belligerent rights was under investigation by a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence.’

Clearly, having put the preliminaries to careful preparations in train, Chamberlain did not want them randomly disturbed. They were disturbed, however – not indeed by any member of the Government, but as a result of political and diplomatic developments in the US.

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57 Ibid.

58 CAB 23/55, Meeting of Cabinet, 21 December 1927.

Early in November 1927, seemingly influenced by the US Press response to an address by British journalist, H. Wickham Steed to the English Speaking Union in Philadelphia, Coolidge and key members of his Party (notably Senator Borah) were drawn to believe the time was coming 'for some move on the part of the Republican Party in the direction of world idealism, as opposed to mere isolationism.'

The moment was indeed opportune. America had Treaties of Arbitration with France, Britain and Japan. All were due to expire in the course of 1928 - the Franco-American in February, the Anglo-American (the Root-Bryce Arbitration Treaty) in April. Kellogg seized the occasion of Franco-American renewal to develop a worldwide pact 'outlawing' war.

In a Cabinet meeting of 18 January 1928 Chamberlain gave notice of these developments in reporting receipt of US proposals regarding 'revision of the Root Arbitration Treaty, as well as a suggestion for a multilateral treaty.' It seemed that 'these proposals would include the question of Belligerent Rights at Sea among the subjects for possible arbitration and the question would arise as to whether a reservation should be entered.' The Foreign Secretary

60 H. Wickham Steed, journalist and historian, Editor of The Times, 1919–1922.

61 DBFP, Series I A, Vol. iv, op. cit. Document # 223 Sir E. Howard (Washington) to Sir A. Chamberlain, 4 November 1927 (Received November 14). Howard reported Wickham Steed as claiming that "the leading statesmen of Europe fear hostile neutrality from the United States", that "through the action of some accredited statesman in laying down a doctrine of peace and enouncing it to the world", the face of the world would be changed. For "war can't be waged successfully today without the participation of the United States." A peace doctrine enounced by America would silence "those who talk of the 'next war' in imbecile ignorance. [It] would be a pillar of safety for the world. And the United States lacks neither the idealism nor the courage to express its convictions."


hoped ‘to deal with the various proposals in a single Memorandum which would be circulated to the Cabinet.’  

Chamberlain’s Memorandum bearing on –

(i) The Franco-American negotiations for the completion of a Pact of Friendship, and

(ii) The American Draft of an Arbitration Treaty to replace the existing Root-Bryce Arbitration Treat on its expiration next June

was before the cabinet on 8 February 1928. But it was Chamberlain’s suggestion that a definite opinion be delayed to allow time to gather more information – particularly regarding the kinds of reservations that would be appropriate to treaties of arbitration. Work on this subject was in progress in the Preparatory Commission Sub-committee on Security and the report of the CID Sub-committee on Belligerent Rights would have a bearing. Further, while the Dominion leaders should have the opportunity as soon as possible ‘to give us the benefit of their observations [in light of the] preliminary opinion reached by His Majesty’s Government of Great Britain in regard to the two Draft Treaties’, Chamberlain wanted discussion postponed until he had in hand the full details of the Kellogg-Briand Pact which had only just been signed.

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64 CAB 23/57, Meeting of Cabinet, 18 January 1928.
65 CAB 23/57, Meeting of Cabinet, 8 February 1928.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
Chamberlain also advised Howard by telegram that he wanted time, and ‘a good deal’ of it, to consider the US proposals.68 He warned the Ambassador against making any suggestion or giving any indication of British views in Washington before receiving instructions.69 It was not Chamberlain’s intention to alienate or to antagonise the US Government but neither did he shrink from making it wait for a response. For, innocuous as it might seem to Kellogg,70 the American proposal for a multilateral treaty to renounce war had to be considered in the light of national interest, of League commitments and of the Locarno guarantees – all at the very nub of Chamberlain’s European policy - his highest foreign policy priority. Further, other than on issues that were justiciable, the Baldwin Government was not prepared to tie the nation to compulsory arbitration in any supranational body. Time was needed, therefore, to allow the Government legal experts to scrutinise the proposals. The processes relating to the consideration of these matters are well documented and will not be discussed in detail here.71

As months passed on these deliberations Kellogg was barely able to conceal his impatience. The Pact to Renounce War was a much-publicised American initiative. It was a key plank of Republican foreign policy in the run up to the elections. Kellogg was eager for a successful conclusion soon. Indeed, in May 1928 he gave short shrift to Chamberlain’s proposal, as a

69 Ibid.
70 Ibid. Document # 251, Sir A. Chamberlain to Sir E. Howard, 12 January 1928.
bridging measure while British deliberations continued, of an eight months extension on the

term of the original Root-Bryce arbitration treaty.\(^2\)

The CID inquiry into Belligerent Rights at Sea was an entirely internal matter and demanded a
great deal less circumspection.\(^3\) With hindsight, it appeared that the fundamental reason for
the failure of the Geneva Naval Conference was that it had attempted to regulate naval
armaments without due consideration of the reasons for their being. What Chamberlain
required to determine was to what extent the exercise of Belligerent Rights was a national
security priority and whether, as a practice, Britain could afford to abandon it, in whole or in
part, as a preliminary to any future naval limitation talks with the US.

Predominantly Chamberlain’s own American Department advised that the practice was now in
any case an anachronism and should be abandoned in the interests of good Anglo-American
relations.\(^4\) Shortly before the establishment of the CID inquiry Cushenden, as Minister
responsible for League affairs, also suggested that the time might be opportune ‘to abandon or

\(^2\) Ibid. Document # 345. Because the period of the Treaty was definite, the Administration would require to seek
the advice and consent of the Senate to extend it. Kellogg felt that for a few months Britain and the US could get
along perfectly well without an arbitration treaty.

\(^3\) With Salisbury in the Chair, other Cabinet members on the Sub-committee were:
Austin Chamberlain, Arthur Balfour (Lord President of the Council), Sir P. Cunliffe-Lister (Board of Trade), Sir
Douglas Hogg (after March’28 Lord Chancellor), Lord Peel (First Commissioner of Works) Cushenden and
Bridgeman. Appointed as “expert assessors” were Hankey, Madden and Sir Cecil Hurst, Legal Adviser to the

\(^4\) As an official assessor, Hurst was a notable exception. His Memorandum of 10 November 1927 argued against
opening up negotiations with the US unless absolutely necessary. He wrote, “The existing rules of international
law give us all we want.” An “attempt to negotiate would inevitably involve great risk” and if the attempt failed,
“the situation would be worse than before.” DBFP, Series 1A, Vol.iv, op.cit. Document # 224 Annex II,
Memorandum by Sir C. Hurst on Sir Maurice Hankey’s Paper on ‘Blockade and the Laws of War’, 10 November
1927.
modify our traditional doctrine of blockade in time of war.' Initially Chamberlain seemed to favour these suggestions but then abandoned them, preferring to keep belligerent rights as high as possible, keep the issue well clear of the League and reserve it as a political matter to be worked out strictly through Anglo-American diplomatic channels, perhaps in conjunction with renewal of the Anglo-American Arbitration Treaty.

Although, therefore, the Belligerent Rights Sub-Committee continued to sit throughout 1928 and into 1929, very early in the piece, and to the relief of the Navy, Chamberlain’s support concerning the practice of Belligerent Rights turned to favour the Admiralty view. Certainly there were powerful voices supporting the practice of Belligerent Rights as a vital national interest. But it seems likely that the suddenness of Chamberlain’s volte face can be attributed to his realisation that if a case were to be argued, it could be well argued; not in terms of a national defence requirement but as a League requirement; as a strategy to be applied by the Royal Navy if called upon by the League to enforce economic sanctions on nations in

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76 According to ACNS Rear-Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, Madden was “absolutely sound on the B.R. question and would fight it to the last ditch.” Of Chamberlain he wrote there had been a “great volte face” and “he is now roaring like a lion for ‘maximum belligerent rights’.” The Keyes Papers, Vol. 2, op.cit.- Letter Pound to Keyes, 24 January 1928, Document # 193.

77 According to Roskill, Hankey played a key role in marshalling powerful pro-belligerent rights forces. Apart from the unequivocal support of Balfour, Bridgeman and Madden within the Sub-Committee, the King and Churchill lent their support from without. On 10 February 1928, in ‘A Survey on Anglo-American Relations’, Churchill secretly transmitted through his Principal Private Secretary at the Treasury, Sir Percy Grigg, his views to Hankey supporting retention of British freedom of action in the matter of belligerent rights. Churchill saw advantages in “immunity of peaceful commerce at sea for all nations” in certain cases in which Britain might be at war. Nevertheless, he opposed placing “final faith in any international instrument”. He rejected too ready acceptance of the suggestion that “all naval competition with the United States is hopeless”. Britain could add “20 or even 30 millions a year [to the Navy Estimates], which we could easily afford if we had to” and provide a fleet “which the United States could not surpass without encountering the gravest internal problems”. For he judged Britons would be more ready than Americans to “make far greater sacrifice for sea-power over a long period”. Churchill quoted in Roskill, Hankey, Vol II, op.cit. p 455-456.
violation of the Convention and perhaps prospectively under terms yet to be settled in the Kellogg Pact.

Nevertheless, it was a position entirely consistent with the Baldwin Government’s support of the Admiralty proposals in the deadlocked Preparatory Commission and in the failed Geneva Naval Conference. For in terms of defence strategy, the Admiralty’s Naval Programme and the practice of Belligerent Rights were intrinsically linked. Once the retention was largely established, the Sub-committee’s principal focus during 1928 was on how, when or whether Britain should broach the subject with the US. By the middle of the year, the view that it should be left to the Americans to open the question was uppermost. But by then Chamberlain had made a diplomatic faux pas that greatly upset the US Administration.

In May 1928 a Cushendun memorandum expressed the view that the disarmament question was at the point where it required ‘the very careful consideration of H.M. Government.’ He reported that the Preparatory Commission, ‘without having in any way altered the situation as it existed a year before’, had again adjourned in March 1928. The adjournment had been brought about ‘mainly by a statement made by the French Delegate’, and confirmed by Cushendun, ‘that conversations were in progress between some of the powers which might

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79 DBFP, Series 1A, Vol.v, op.cit. # 332, Memorandum by Lord Cushendun, 1 May 1928.
perhaps result in an agreement.' Cushendun expected that he and the French Delegate would be 'closely examined as to the progress of the aforesaid negotiations' in the Commission's Security Sub-Committee due to meet in June and in any case in the Preparatory Commission, expected to reconvene before the 1st September. He was of the view that failure to arrive at some arrangement in the course of the next six or seven weeks would enable hostile critics at home and abroad to 'represent the British Government as the sole obstacle to international disarmament by agreement.' The danger of being so represented was 'now even more menacing than before since the atmosphere created by the American proposals for renunciation of war will intensify the odium incurred by any Government that can be represented as resisting any progress towards international settlement.'

The conversations to which Cushendun alluded began with the outline of a compromise discussed by Chamberlain and Briand in March 1928. The compromise was based on revisions in Britain's naval proposals, reducing naval categories from nine down to six and allowing limited transfers of tonnage from higher to lower categories, and on 'withdrawal of open resistance on [Britain's] part to French views on army reserves.' The Cabinet approved the Salisbury Disarmament Sub-Committee's instructions to Cushendun that the 'Interval between adjournment and next meeting of the Preparatory Commission should be utilised to forward the compromise.' Matters however became bogged down in discussions between the naval experts of the Admiralty and the French Ministry of Marine. On behalf of the Sub-Committee

80 Ibid.

81 CAB 23/57, Appendix II, Meeting of Cabinet, 13 March 1928. See also DBFP, Series 1A, Vol.iv, op.cit. Documents # 304, Memorandum by the British Delegation (Geneva) 10 March 1928 and # 306, Letter from Sir A. Chamberlain to M. Briand, 10 March 1928.

82 Ibid.
on Disarmament, Chamberlain again raised the question with Briand in Geneva on 3 June 1928. The inquiry revealed that the French Cabinet was unanimous in desiring agreement with Britain but (with an eye to Italian ambitions in the Mediterranean) looked for parity with the largest naval power in heavy cruisers and large submarines. As a colonial power, basing strength in those categories on the length of lines of communications to their overseas possessions suited their case. 83 But the Admiralty repudiated this as a basis of calculation, as fraught with problems. 84 Chamberlain, advised to warn Briand 'that it would be useless to proceed on this basis', in turn advised both the Sub-committee on Disarmament and the Cabinet that, in the absence of 'positive or constructive suggestions' from either the Admiralty or indeed the Cabinet to enable him 'at least to lay the basis of agreement', there was little to be done now through Foreign Office channels to seek agreement with France before the next meeting of the Preparatory Commission. 85

A few days later, following conversations with French Foreign Minister M. Paul-Boncour and with German Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Herr Carl von Schubert, Chamberlain was again in touch with the Cabinet. 86 He advised that the upshot of the conversations was a common understanding that failure to make some progress in the question

84 CAB 23/58, Meeting of Cabinet, 5 June 1928.
85 DBFP, Series 1A, Vol.v, op.cit. Documents # 369, 7 June 1928.
86 Ibid. Documents # 376 and 377, 9 June 1928.
of disarmament would result

inevitably in Germany's repudiation of the disarmament provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, with what consequences for the immediate or future peace of the world I cannot at this moment pretend to predict. Germany accepted these provisions under duress and she has more or less respected them in the hope that they were but the first step to a general limitation of armaments. The moment that this expectation is definitely falsified she will feel herself under no moral obligation to observe the restrictive clauses of the Treaty of Versailles and no League investigation, nothing indeed short of actual violence, will prevent them from becoming practically a dead letter.

It was the view of Chamberlain and Paul-Boncour that 'the question was now a political one to be settled by the two Governments in the light of the higher political considerations involved which it could not be the duty of the technical advisers of either Government to take into consideration.'

For the Admiralty the prospect of being set aside by the politicians made a resolution with its French counterpart a matter of particular urgency. On 22 June 1928, as a consequence of some personal suggestions made by a French Naval Representative to the Preparatory Commission, Captain Deleuze, in private conversation with Britain's Representative Vice-Admiral W. H. Kelly, Bridgeman informed the Cabinet of a possible resolution. The essential point of Deleuze's proposal was 'to limit, on a basis of parity between Great Britain and the United States, and between France and Italy, all Cruisers of 10 000 tons and below which were armed

87 Ibid.
with 8-inch guns or with guns above 6-inch calibre, but there should be no limitation on cruisers armed with 6-inch guns and below. It was a proposal that formed the basis of the compromise approved by Cabinet on 25 July 1928 because it postponed any dealings with the US on the controversial question of the British claim for a preponderance in small 6-inch gun cruisers until a more propitious time. As desired by the French Government Chamberlain undertook to ‘communicate to the governments of the United States, Italy and Japan the compromise which has already received the approval of France and Great Britain.’ But before that duty was complete, he committed the diplomatic ineptitude of announcing the compromise in parliament.

Whatever chances there might have been of securing the concurrence of the other three governments were thenceforth destroyed. For, bad as was his diplomatic ineptitude in itself, by stopping short of revealing the fundamental objectives of the compromise Chamberlain left the Press to jump to its own conclusions. In the US anti-British feeling flourished under perceptions that Britain had bought France off with the whole purpose of securing British objectives in the controversial cruiser question.

A period of fairly relaxed Anglo-American relations came to an abrupt and angry end. Nevertheless, by the autumn US Ambassador A.B.Houghton was fully in the picture of

88 CAB 23/58, Meeting of Cabinet, 22 June 1928.
89 CAB 23/58, Meeting of Cabinet, 25 July 1928.
91 Ibid. Document # 436, 9, August 1928 and # 452 31 August 1928.
Chamberlain’s objectives for the Compromise and although it was by then in any case too late to save it, on 12 September 1928 he was able to report back to the State Department ‘we now see a molehill where we formerly saw a mountain.’ 93 But as far as securing US support for the Compromise in the Preparatory Commission was concerned, the damage had been done. A Note of 28 September communicated the US Government’s refusal to accept the Anglo-French proposals as a basis for further negotiations. In October Mr. Ray Atherton, US Chargé d’Affaires in London, made it clear to Craigie, albeit unofficially, that while ‘it might have been possible for the United States Government to negotiate informally on the basis of the compromise had the whole negotiation taken a different and less public course [the] campaign of misrepresentation’ had tied his Government’s hands. In Atherton’s view the best hope for reconciliation of Anglo-American naval differences ‘was to approach it via the Treaty for the Renunciation of War.’ 94

The Treaty for the Renunciation of War, signed in Paris on 27 August 1928, now only awaited Senate ratification.95 But it soon became clear just how much capital the American Big Navy party had made out of the Anglo-American Compromise furore. In his 1928 Armistice Day speech retiring President Coolidge hinted ‘at the necessity of the United States having the largest fleet in the world’ 96 and again, on 4 December in his annual message to Congress, urged the passage of the Navy Bill. A reaffirmation of the five-year programme first put


95 Ibid. Document # 451, 27 August 1928.

96 Ibid. Document # 490, Note by Lord Cushendun and Annexed Memorandum by Mr Craigie, 14 November 1928. Circulated to the Cabinet by Cushenden, Acting Foreign Secretary of State in Chamberlain’s absence.
forward in 1927, the Bill called for construction of 15 large cruisers to be completed at the rate of 5 in each of the next three years.\(^7\)

Nevertheless, however clumsily,\(^8\) on both occasions Coolidge seems to have intended to suggest preferred options; on Armistice Day that Americans would rather spend on European aid than be forced, as a result of the failure of European disarmament, to divert that money to American arms; and in Congress, that in naval matters America’s interest was not in competition but in agreement on limitations.\(^9\)

Giving as grounds the possibility that Coolidge might jump at a chance of securing his most cherished ambition in foreign affairs since his election in 1924 and complete ‘the work of naval limitation so ably commenced by Mr. Hughes in 1922’, and that President-Elect Herbert Hoover was ‘notoriously difficult to deal with,’ Craigie advised giving some indication of HMG’s preparedness to discuss this matter with the present US Administration before it ‘has passed away.’\(^10\)

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\(^8\)Reporting on the Armistice Day speech to Cushendun (Acting Foreign Secretary), Howard reckoned Coolidge must have been “feeling too spread-eagly”. DBFP, Series 1A, Vol. v, op.cit. Document # 493. Sir E Howard to Lord Cushendun, 16 November 1928.

\(^9\)Ibid. and see also Documents # 490 postscript to Craigie Memorandum, # 494 and # 496 Howard to Cushendun 17 November 1928.

\(^10\)Ibid. Document # 490 Craigie Memorandum, op.cit. See also Record by Mr. Craigie of a conversation with Mr. Castle (i.e. William R. Castle, State Department Official, later appointed US Ambassador to Japan for the duration of the London Naval Conference of 1930, O’Connor, op.cit. p.157 n.3) Document #492, 15 November 1928.
At a meeting of 21 November Cushendun put this advice to Cabinet. Discussion must have been heated, for Churchill had circulated a memorandum of his own on Anglo-American Relations to Cabinet, 'deprecating a panic mood in our relations with the United States' and passionately putting the case against 'renewed naval negotiations with the United States during Mr. Coolidge's tenure.' In the course of discussion it was suggested 'having regard to the nature of President Coolidge's recent statement, our relations with America might better be promoted by allowing time to do its work, and that in any event it would be better to postpone discussions until after the Kellogg Pact is ratified; the new President was installed, and our own general election taken place.' At further suggestion that there might be some questions of immediate urgency to consider, such as 'the reply to the American Note on the Anglo-French compromise proposals,' Baldwin brought discussion to a close. He reminded his colleagues Chamberlain would be in London in time for their next regular weekly meeting and 'would, no doubt, consider the whole situation and ask for consideration of these questions by the Cabinet as soon as he deemed it advisable.'

In line with his Government's view, Chamberlain had consistently supported the Admiralty's definition of Britain's absolute need in naval strength, arrived at in 1925. Other than on the lines proposed by Britain at Geneva in 1927, there was no latitude for further British naval reductions and no hope of agreement in any negotiations where they were demanded. But what Chamberlain understood, as a result of his European experience, was that international

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101 DBFP, Series 1A, Vol. v, op. cit. Document # 497, Memorandum by Mr. Churchill, 19 November 1928. See also Document # 500, Memorandum by Lord Cushendun, Anglo-American Relations, 24 November 1928 (subsequently also circulated to the Cabinet) for Cushendun's indignant response to Churchill's "tary" dismissal of the questions raised in Craigie's "able and well informed Memorandum."

102 CAB 23/59, Meeting of Cabinet, 21 November 1928.

103 Ibid.
co-operation implied some trust and mutual respect in allowing nations to define their own security requirements. It was also Chamberlain’s conviction that without settlement of the political differences that could lead to conflict between nations, little headway could be made towards any arms settlement that would reduce these definitions to absolute minima. He had identified the exercise of Belligerent Rights at Sea as the only issue that might possibly lead to armed conflict between Britain and the US. He had also reached the conclusion that the practice was a vital war waging strategy that Britain required to keep at the highest level. Accordingly, without a meeting of minds on this issue, naval agreement on the cruiser question was likely to remain out of reach. He wanted to find out whether a meeting of minds was possible before the subject of naval limitation was again raised with the US.

On his return to London he acknowledged Anglo-American relations as the most difficult question in foreign affairs. He hoped to deal with the immediate matter of the reply to the US Note on the Anglo-French Compromise the following week but he would require more time and probably a ‘special meeting of Cabinet to consider the broader question of our relations with the United States.’

Having before it a whole battery of memoranda covering the views of the Foreign Office and the political perspective of the CID and including Churchill’s memorandum and Cushendun’s, in reply, the Cabinet gave practically the whole of Friday 7 December 1928 to discussion of Anglo-American Relations. Chamberlain addressed the issue under the component parts of the

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104 CAB 23/59, Meeting of Cabinet, 28 November 1928.
US Note on the subject of the Anglo-French compromise, the renewal of the Arbitration Treaty, reduction and limitation of Naval Armaments and Belligerent Rights at Sea.\textsuperscript{105}

It was agreed to include in the reply to the US Note respecting the Anglo-French compromise an expression of HMG’s ‘readiness to examine any suggestions which may be put forward with the view of promoting the cause of disarmament.’ Chamberlain was anxious to dispatch the reply to Howard, with instructions to consult Kellogg as to whether ‘the present moment was a convenient one for him to receive it.’ But in recognition of Cabinet disunity concerning any approaches on naval limitations to the out-going Administration, and being due to leave London again for a League meeting in Lugano, he agreed to defer the dispatch to allow for further discussion on his return.\textsuperscript{106}

In Lugano Chamberlain still had to address prevention of the collapse of the Preparatory Commission. As yet empty-handed for the furtherance of naval agreement, he explained to Briand that HMG was postponing continuance of correspondence ‘owing to the very delicate discussions which were pending in the American Senate’ (by which, of course, he referred to the Senate debate on the Kellogg Pact to Renounce War and the Navy Bill). He pointed out too that Britain had little new to propose that the US Government was likely to find acceptable, and that perhaps the only way Britain would be able to forward naval limitations would be to avoid any increase in its own programme as a consequence of a failure to reach

\textsuperscript{105} CAB 23/59, Meeting of Cabinet, 7 December 1928.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
agreement with the US.  

Since, however, the principal concern of mainland Europe was land forces, Chamberlain urged Briand not to block all further disarmament by insisting on its dependence on simultaneous limitation of land and of naval armaments, otherwise Germany would assume itself justified in renouncing its Versailles Treaty obligations.  

In reporting these matters in Cabinet, the Foreign Secretary advised his colleagues of French interest in developments in the issue of Belligerent Rights ‘as a most important question in its relation to Article 16 of the Covenant as it would be a very serious matter for the League if they were unable, owing to the opposition of the United States, to apply the sanction of Article 16 in an emergency.’ Chamberlain added, ‘The fact that the whole Continent would be affected by the surrender of our means of co-operation in carrying out Article XVI of the Covenant was a factor which had to be borne in mind.’  

By 7 February 1929 it was known that the Senate had ratified the Kellogg Pact, without reservations, and passed the Navy Bill. The stated policies of the two naval powers were now clearly on the table. In Chamberlain’s view any moves now in the direction of reductions in their respective programmes should not be allowed to progress without a clear

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108 Ibid.

109 CAB 23/59, Meeting of Cabinet, 19 December 1928. It was during this meeting also that Cabinet agreed to postpone the announcement of the 2 large cruisers in the Admiralty’s 1928 programme. Bridgeman deferred to the political expediency of postponement until the outcome of the US Navy Bill debate was known. However, in subsequent meetings he successfully opposed all attempts by Churchill to secure, on economic grounds, longer-term postponement and on 7 February Cabinet agreed that “the programme already approved for the construction of two Class ‘A’ Cruisers of 10 000 tons, with 8-inch guns, to be laid down in the financial year 1928-29, should stand, and that the First Lord of the Admiralty should have authority to proceed herewith”. See CAB 23/60, Meetings of Cabinet, 21 January and 7 February 1929.

110 Cab 23/60, Meetings of Cabinet, 21 January and 7 February 1929.
understanding and acceptance on both sides of the political and security bases of their reason for being. He circulated to the Cabinet a letter from Howard regarding Anglo-American relations (which he had already circulated to the CID Sub-Committee on Belligerent Rights), preparatory to further Cabinet discussion.\textsuperscript{111}

The letter in question, sent on 20 December 1928, advised Chamberlain of Senator Borah’s intention ‘to reintroduce into the senate his resolution in favour of calling a Conference to codify Maritime Law in time of War.’\textsuperscript{112} Howard was in no doubt the resolution would pass and that ‘Mr. Hoover’s Government will be obliged to act on it some time next year.’ He reported Borah as having given him to understand that if the question of ‘the Freedom of the Seas could be settled by Treaty or Agreement … the whole campaign for a greater navy would lose its raison d’

\textit{etre} and support among the great mass of American electors.’ As to what the \textit{desiderata} of the US Government might be, Howard was not yet clear. But it seemed from his inquiries that any suggestion along the lines put to him by France’s Ambassador to Washington for a distinction to be made between ‘wars conducted against a violator of the Covenant or of the Kellogg Pact and private wars’ - the distinction, carrying strictest blockade in the first instance and in the second, practically complete freedom for neutrals – would be unacceptable in the US.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
At a meeting on 13 February 1929, the Cabinet took note of Chamberlain’s telegram to Howard, sent on 7 February after consultation with the Belligerent Rights Sub-Committee, with instructions that

His Majesty’s Government earnestly deprecate the issue of invitations to a Conference on Belligerent Rights at an early date, and, above all without their having been given an opportunity of discussing a solution of all questions at present outstanding with the United States of America confidentially with the United States Government before any decision is taken.  

Howard expected Hoover’s response on the lines of HMG’s instructions, either directly or through the State Department, as soon as the President returned to Washington.  

What remained outstanding between the two Governments was the renewal of their Treaty of Arbitration. The British draft revisions had been circulated in Cabinet on 4 April 1928, at which time the members were assured ‘the question of Belligerent Rights was excluded from compulsory arbitration by a passage in Article 2 of the draft Treaty making it clear that it only applied to differences “which are agreed to be justiciable in their nature by reason of being susceptible of decision by the application of a recognised rule of international law”.  

In light of the Borah resolution, therefore, Salisbury advised the Cabinet he hoped to circulate the First

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114 CAB 23/60, Meeting of Cabinet, 13 February 1929.

115 Ibid.

116 CAB 23/57, Meeting of Cabinet, 5 April 1928. Circulated to the Cabinet as C.P. 117 (28), the draft is contained in DBFP, Series 1A, Vol iv, op.cit. Document # 341, Revised Draft Treaty of Arbitration with the United States, 4 April 1928.
Report of the Belligerent Rights Sub-Committee dealing with the renewal of Arbitration Treaties by evening, in readiness for Cabinet consideration in two days time.\textsuperscript{117}

The meeting on 15 February 1929 revealed the Sub-Committee, with the exception of Cushendun, agreed on the importance of maintaining belligerent rights ‘in the highest form that is possible’ but undecided on how this should be done.\textsuperscript{118} Cabinet discussion turned on the proposal of the Sub-Committee majority (inclusive of Chamberlain) to accept ‘the American draft as amended and that Maritime Belligerent Rights should not be excluded from the Arbitration Treaty’ and the minority alternative favouring acceptance of the amended draft, ‘but subject to an intimation that Maritime Belligerent Rights must be reserved from its operation until such time as agreement has been reached as to what those rights are.’ As to the appointed assessors, the Report stated that ‘the First Sea Lord, on behalf of the Naval Staff, demurred to the submission of Belligerent Rights to Compulsory Arbitration under any condition, and that Sir Maurice Hankey associated himself with this view.’\textsuperscript{119} To a suggestion at the end of discussion that ‘these highly contentious questions ought not to be taken up at the very end of the life of a Parliament,’ Chamberlain responded that ‘provided the Government had a policy and could indicate with sufficient definiteness that they meant business’ securing an American agreement to postponement ‘might not be impossible.’\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{117} CAB 23/60, Meeting of Cabinet, 13 February 1929,

\textsuperscript{118} CAB 23/60, Meeting of Cabinet, 15 February 1929,

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
On 19 February, the American Ambassador told Chamberlain he understood the difficulties caused by the proximity of elections and was of the opinion that the President would not be in any hurry. Soon after this conversation Hoover let it be known to Baldwin he would be willing to engage in private conversations with a view to putting an end to Anglo-American misunderstanding in order to assist disarmament. Then, in his inaugural address, basing his remarks on the spirit and intention of the Kellogg Pact, the President appealed for a reduction in armaments.

From then on, the object of HMG, and of its Delegates when the Preparatory Commission reconvened on 15 April, was to prevent as much as possible public discussions of naval disarmament and to glean as much as possible in confidential discussions between the British and American Governments as would assist in discovering a basis of agreement between them.

On 22 April 1929 Gibson addressed the Preparatory Commission. His opening remarks precisely reflected Chamberlain’s view concerning the separation of maritime and land disarmament to be dealt with by those nations most directly concerned. Maritime reduction being the concern of the US, Gibson went on to state that his Government was prepared to accept the combination of total tonnage and tonnage by categories, as proposed by France in April 1927, as a basis for discussion and that his Government was ‘disposed to give full and

121 CAB 23/60, Meeting of Cabinet, 20 February 1929.

122 Marquand, op. cit. p.502. See also O’Connor; op. cit. O’Connor also states the President “emphatically instructed members of his administration that reduction of armaments, not limitation, was his goal.” p.23.

friendly consideration to any supplementary methods of limitation which may be calculated to make our proposals, the French thesis, or any other acceptable to other Powers and, if such a course appears to be desirable, ... be prepared to give consideration to a method of estimating equivalent naval values which takes account of other factors than displacement tonnage alone.’ Regarding the latter, his next remarks addressed the desirability of reaching a formula ‘as a basis of comparison in the case of categories in which there are marked variations as to unit characteristics ... ’ Referring to the ‘careful consideration’ his Government had given ‘to various methods of comparison’, Gibson predicted the American delegates ‘will be in a position to discuss the subject whenever it comes before the commission.’ 124

In the view of the Foreign Office, as a result of ‘private and confidential conversations with Mr. Gibson, it was clear that Mr. Hoover desired to take full account of the British need for a larger number of small cruisers and that his new proposals for estimating equivalent naval values had been made for this express purpose.’ 125 Two days after Gibson’s address Chamberlain endorsed this view.126 Informing the Cabinet ‘a great development had taken place ... in regard to the reduction of naval armaments”, Chamberlain explained that while both sides desired to reduce naval armaments,

the real difficulty had been as to how the categories were to be defined ... The importance of Mr. Gibson’s statement was that he brought in other considerations besides tonnage namely age and calibre of guns, but not speed. But he set out to find a way to enable President Hoover

124 Ibid.

125 Ibid. p.5.

126 CAB 23/60, Meeting of Cabinet, 24 April 1929.
to concede us the small cruisers we needed while presenting a sound case to Congress that parity had been preserved.\textsuperscript{127}

At this highly promising moment the Cabinet agreed Chamberlain should inform Cushendun by telegram

his desire to gain time for the technical discussions on reduction of naval armaments was approved, and that, although no final decision had been taken, the Cabinet also thought it desirable that someone of Cabinet rank should proceed to Washington after the General Election to discuss the whole question of reduction of naval armaments with President Hoover, and that he was authorised to inform Mr. Gibson accordingly.\textsuperscript{128}

Chamberlain followed up this decision with a telegram to Howard for immediate communication to the Secretary of State in the new US Administration Henry Stimson.\textsuperscript{129} The message warmly welcomed Gibson’s public statement and expressed confidence the US and Britain ‘could find a standard of parity which allowed sufficient latitude to meet the special needs of each.’ It offered the US Government the option either to receive HMG’s independent calculations on the ‘weight to be given to the various factors on the basis suggested by Mr. Gibson [or as perhaps the] speedier and more practical plan ... to furnish confidentially to His Majesty’s Government their own calculations for the consideration of His Majesty’s

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{129} CAB 23/60, Meeting of Cabinet, Appendix IX, 1 May 1929.
Government.'\textsuperscript{130} The message earnestly stressed HMG’s desire that ‘there should be no publication of any figures until there has been a confidential discussion between the two Governments’, suggesting for that purpose ‘immediately after the general election at the end of this month ... and in the first instance through diplomatic channels.’\textsuperscript{131}

Stimson replied that his Government was in complete agreement with avoidance of public discussion of details before private discussion had enabled agreement. As to the initial communication of calculations, he had yet to confer with the President before he could respond.\textsuperscript{132}

Given the opportunity, it was clearly Chamberlain’s object to reach a clear understanding in confidential discussion with US Administration on their respective political and security commitments and the attendant issue of belligerent rights. In Chamberlain’s view those, rather than the pursuit of parity, were the real needs that ought to underpin the claims of minimum naval requirements and they required to be fully recognised before any naval agreement could be satisfactorily concluded. He did not get the opportunity. The General Election of 30 May 1929 saw the Conservatives defeated and MacDonald back in Downing Street at the head of a minority Labour Government.

During Labour’s first Government MacDonald had acted as his own Foreign Secretary; in the second he appointed Arthur Henderson to the office but assumed personal control over Anglo-

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.

American negotiations. On 14 June 1929 the new US Ambassador to Britain General Dawes arrived in Britain. Two days later in the informal setting of Logie House at Forres in the north of Scotland, the whole of Chamberlain’s diplomatic scaffolding was torn down.

According to Henderson, when Dawes

proceeded to discuss the order in which the various problems, all hanging upon each other, should be approached ... the Prime Minister at once threw out the hint that it might be easiest, if the President was keenly interested in a reduction of naval armaments and was preparing a scheme for the private consideration of His Majesty’s Government, to leave everything else in abeyance for the moment. Much to Mr. MacDonald’s satisfaction, General Dawes at once agreed, so that questions of belligerent rights, freedom of the seas, and so on will not arise at the moment. 133

This was the moment that defined the whole compass and inevitable outcome of the negotiations. It disallowed the opportunity to account cogently for any settlement that ended in disparity. Of the two leaders, MacDonald was the more driven to secure agreement. He was a man in a hurry. Ideologically committed to disarmament, his political position was tenuous. Hoover seems to have had a view closer to that of MacDonald’s predecessors in government – namely, capable simultaneously of supporting disarmament by agreement while preserving the means of maintaining peace by force. 134 Hoover, although ‘anxious that no time should be wasted’, warned of the dangers of rushing to conference prior to preliminary non-technical


134 O’Connor; op.cit. p.22-23
consultation on broad questions of general policy. Parity was axiomatic and Hoover required ‘an assurance of this as basis of discussion.’ MacDonald readily agreed – not only to parity but also to the adoption of ‘the US proposal that parity should be measured by an agreed “yardstick” which enables the slightly different values in our respective national needs to be reduced to equality.’

Since no new American ‘scheme’ for conciliating differences actually existed, the negotiators were driven back upon the advice of their experts and dragged down the much-aggravated path of technical argument in a repeat of the arguments of 1927. The emergence of any ‘scheme’ or ‘yardstick’ capable of measuring relative values against their respective and different needs continued to elude the negotiators, and success or failure came then to depend upon agreement on the lowest common denominator in gross tonnage.

On 29 July, subject to the consideration of the Admiralty, MacDonald tentatively and personally proposed to Dawes, 60 cruisers for the Royal Navy, distributed as 15 large and 45 small and up to 18 large cruisers to be completed for the USN.

I have been unable to find documentation of the details discussed subsequently between MacDonald and Madden but it seems probable the Perennial Ten-Year Rule and Japan’s declared programme until 1936 figured among them. By 1936 Japan’s declared schedule

135 DBFP, Series 2, Vol.i, op. cit. Documents # 9, Note by Mr. R. Vansittart of a conversation between Mr. MacDonald and General Dawes, 28 June 1929 and # 10, Howard to Henderson, 28 June 1929.

136 Ibid. Document # 12, Letter from Mr. MacDonald to General Dawes, 8 July 1929.

137 Ibid. Document # 39, Memorandum from General Dawes to Mr. MacDonald, 29 August 1929.

138 Ibid. Document # 25 Memorandum by Mr. MacDonald, 29 July 1929.
would produce 29 cruisers. A 60-cruiser limit would see the Admiralty in numerical terms well in excess of the 5:3 ratio it sought to maintain over Japan.  But it was more than probable in any new agreement Japan would claim its ratio in large cruisers against the highest quota in the category. In order to preserve a margin of numerical superiority over Japan in large cruisers, setting 18 as a ceiling in that category was important to the Admiralty. With regard to the Anglo-Japanese ratio Madden had no room to object.

But Hoover objected. MacDonald’s proposal amounted to 487 000 total tonnage. The total US tonnage projected, before reductions, amounted to a mere 300 500. Not only was the disparity unacceptable, Hoover was looking to reduce, not increase naval spending. For the PM who had ridden rough shod over the pleas of Beatty in 1924, Madden’s presented no obstacle and he came back with a new offer. In a letter to Dawes that gave no recognition to the Admiralty’s global defence strategy concerns (but acknowledged policing as a necessary part of its responsibilities) MacDonald offered 50 cruisers, as the minimum required by Britain ‘irrespective of programmes which compete with any other nation.’

The proposal amounted to 339 000 tons, distributed as 15 large cruisers, carrying 8-inch guns and 35 small, carrying 6-inch guns. This was as far in the direction of reduction as MacDonald felt he could go in an agreement with America alone ‘unless in the meantime, by our united

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140 US tonnage included completion of 23 large cruisers and its current fleet of 10 “Omaha Class” cruisers of 7 050 tons each.

141 It is well documented that Madden, while he did his duty in advising and warning his political masters, unlike Beatty he did not challenge them on their clear intentions. See The First Sea Lords: From Fisher to Mountbatten, edited by Malcolm H. Murfett, Praeger, USA 1995, Chapter 10.
efforts, we can make the world feel peace.' He would, however, 'steadily reduce as national security is found by other means than arms ... [and would] continue to work for that other security.'\textsuperscript{142}

A month later the US responded with a reduction in its large cruiser claims from 23 to 21 and the addition of 5 new, small cruisers to its Fleet of 10 in the Omaha Class. The US Navy Board deemed the total of approximately 315000 tons represented in this proposal, 'after taking into account both the age and gun factors,' was sufficiently close as to represent parity. Although the distribution left something to be desired as far as Britain was concerned, Hoover believed he had room for further compromise but the time for that would be at the Five-Power Conference.\textsuperscript{143}

The London Naval Conference opened on 21 January 1930. At its close in April only Britain the US and Japan signed the Treaty. Among its provisions was a building 'holiday' on capital ships – none now to be laid during the period 1931-36. Under the agreement the US further reduced its large cruiser requirements to 18 and British cruiser numbers were confirmed in accordance with MacDonald’s proposals of the previous August.\textsuperscript{144}

The agreement marked the final chapter in the destruction of the Admiralty’s expectations for battleship replacement and 70-cruiser policy. Following the Washington Agreement domestic politically driven cutbacks began the process by delaying replacement of old for new.

\textsuperscript{142} DBFP, Series 2, Vol.i, \textit{op.cit.} Document # 28.

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid. Document # 57, Sir E. Howard to Mr. A. Henderson, 12 September 1929.

\textsuperscript{144} The details of the London Naval Treaty are contained in DBFP, Series 2, Vol.i, Appendix I
Proponents of disarmament carried it the rest of the way. At the end of the term of the London Treaty agreements and just three years before being involved again in a major war, Britain’s battle-fleet was elderly and its cruisers, only 23 of which could be called modern, were inadequate in number.\footnote{Douglas Morris; Cruisers of the Royal and Commonwealth Navies, Maritime Books, UK, 1987, p.173-174.}

In marking the end of the Admiralty policy, the agreement also marked the end of the use of military preparedness as an instrument of foreign policy by Britain for the greater part of the new decade. The spirit of international co-operation for the maintenance of peace was on the wane. Rampant and aggressive nationalism in Germany, Italy and Japan was on the rise. Military weakness forbidding assertive diplomacy, British decision makers chose appeasement as their tool for the decade of \textit{Realpolitik}. 
Conclusion

The Versailles Treaty bore the mark of US President Woodrow Wilson. At his insistence the League Covenant was placed at the forefront of the Peace negotiations and in the framework of the Treaty. But when his countrymen failed to ratify it, it created an enormous dilemma for the other signatories who, in agreeing to the Wilson agenda, had counted on US participation for its implementation. Until implementation was complete the treaty amounted little more than to a truce. Because this was so, there remained for the signatories a conflict between the disarmament aims contained in the Covenant and the predications of national security. Barely suppressed suspicion and rivalries among nations resurfaced – not least those between Britain and the US.

In those circumstances the position of the British Government on disarmament was different from that of France, its principal European ally. Britain had moved early to demobilise its army. It had also made a beginning at Versailles on a naval limitations agreement that would set the standard for its post war naval strength to finalise its reduction plans. Despite US rejection of the Treaty, the Lloyd George Government anticipated further developments in the direction of Anglo-American naval limitation. But when the US Administration failed to reciprocate, the British suspected American ambitions in the Asia-Pacific Region where Britain was strategically vulnerable. The PM signalled intent to preserve Britain’s political and commercial status in the Asia-Pacific Region and approved new capital ship construction, approved the Admiralty’s Singapore Strategy and approved renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Soon after, in conjunction with agreements on political concerns and rivalries in relation to China, Britain, the US and Japan concluded the Washington Naval Agreement that limited capital ship numbers and left each secure in its own seas. The agreement secured both significant naval economies
for all three Governments and in Britain set the One Power standard as the benchmark for any government having a commitment to maritime security.

The Labour Government was not a government of the sort. In power in Britain for the first time, beginning in January 1924, it fell in November of the same year. In the short time available to him on this first occasion of government MacDonald set his stamp on the general disarmament issue still plaguing Continental relations. Ideologically MacDonald was committed to the peaceful settlement of disputes and to disarmament. Conditions were favourable; the Reparations Crisis in the Ruhr was on the way to resolution under the Dawes Plan and France's new Premier, Edouard Herriot, was also a Socialist. In June, MacDonald assured Herriot of his commitment to resolving the problem of general security as an obstruction to disarmament. Setting the pace, he cancelled the Singapore Base Scheme and personally attended the Fifth Assembly of the League in Geneva where his proposals resulted, under the Geneva Protocol, in the greater enhancement of League Council authority over the Member States, whereupon the Assembly called for a Disarmament Conference for the following year.

Returned to power the Conservatives rejected the Protocol. Abiding by the traditions of British maritime security and limited Continental commitment the Baldwin Government reinstated the Singapore Scheme, declared its naval construction programme and concluded the Locarno Agreement with France, Germany and the Low Countries, all in 1925. The Government not only considered that the time was not yet ripe to debate general disarmament but also that there was nothing in the Convention to say that it was a debate for the League. Yet it inherited the decisions of the previous Assembly binding it to contribute in preparations for a League Disarmament Conference or be accused as obstructionist.
It demonstrated its preparedness to do so with a commitment of diplomatic resources to reduce international tensions and maintain peace. But to the end of its tenure it showed no sign of going so far as to compromise, by international agreement, its minimum maritime defence requirements.

It was on the domestic front that Baldwin’s second Government undermined its maritime defence requirements. The widened franchise in Britain cried out for a broadening of the Conservative power-base; practical politics demanded it. Enlargement of the Conservative manifesto came at the price of delay to the naval schedule and, against the repeated warnings of the Admiralty, seriously undermined the industrial infrastructure on which naval power depended.

On armaments issues Britain’s Socialist leaders did not make distinctions between national and universal interest. In the Socialists’ view disarmament was in their equal interest. To this purpose, in September 1929, less than four months into his second Government, MacDonald had completed pourparlers with the US Government and undertaken to reduce drastically the Admiralty’s defence programme. Once this undertaking was formalised in the London Naval Conference, it reduced commensurately British Government options for assertive diplomacy and the tool of appeasement attained prominence.
APPENDIX A

Capital Ship Critics

In naval circles two of the most notable critics of the place of the Capital Ship in future wars were Rear-Admiral S.S. Hall, who had been a torpedo specialist in charge of the submarine service during the war, and retired Admiral Sir Percy Scott, a noted pre-war gunnery expert.

They argued that the battleships of the Grand Fleet had been impotent against the German submarines, which had almost accomplished the defeat of Britain. They were of the opinion that smaller, cheaper vessels were better suited to the protection of trade and sea routes, and to commerce raiding. In their opinion, battleships were defensive rather than offensive weapons, and offered little return on their investment when compared with the evolving weapons of the submarine and naval airpower.

Air Marshal Sir H. Trenchard, Chief of the Air Staff, predicted that the battleship would make an easy target and have no effective defence against the rapidly developing bombing aircraft. It was Trenchard’s view that airpower would soon make the battleship obsolete as a weapon of war.

Arguments of the sort were publicised in the press and aired in government committees throughout the post-war period.
APPENDIX B

Bernard Brodie has written:

Taken together, the inventions which comprise the last hundred years of change in the conditions of Sea-Power brought about, among many other things, a far greater dependence of the battle-fleet upon its base and a sharp narrowing of its range of action. Such effect enhanced the defensive strength of those Powers separated by wide oceans from their rivals. (By means of distance and economical defensive measures such as mines, torpedo-boats and submarines, a defending power could perform ‘attrition attacks’ on an attacking enemy fleet). They therefore favoured the aspirations of the U.S. and Japan to military hegemony in their own and adjacent waters.¹

The modern fleet required a base, secure from storms and against enemy attack of any description. The fleet required repair and dry-docking facilities, to receive damaged ships and return them repaired to their battle stations in the minimum of time. Otherwise, the strength of the Fleet would be severely reduced by attrition. Undamaged vessels could also, through routine wear and tear, lose up to 40% of their endurance and speed unless docked after 12 months.²

The greater size and complexity of warships made breech careening or the use of commercial docks impracticable. All ships of course required victuals, stores and ammunition. Invariably the ammunition had to be of a particular type (i.e. one could not seize enemy ammunition for one’s own weapons, as had sometimes been done during the Napoleonic wars.) Improvements in weaponry, particularly in rate of fire, meant warships could consume vast quantities of ammunition.

² Neidpath; op. cit. p.11
The changes in the motive power of warships further increased the importance of bases. The replacement of wind power by coal and then oil-fuel held ships more tightly to their sources of fuel supply and/or distribution. The changeover from wind power to fossil fuel, and the greater size and complexity of modern warships, gave the naval base an entirely new significance in Naval Warfare.³

With regard to the Royal Navy in particular, G.D. Franklin has this to say:

In the mid eighteenth Century supply ships carried beer and bullocks to Hawke’s fleet and fifty years later the ships of the Channel Squadron were spending months at a time blockading Brest, in the process becoming highly skilled in the process of replenishing at sea. Coal, however, was harder to replenish so the techniques were lost, and were not relearnt even with the introduction of pumpable oil fuel. The Royal Navy had spent the century before the Second World War developing a network of bases around the world from which a fleet could obtain victuals, engineering support, coal and oil. This had resulted in a Navy of short haul vessels with little seagoing support.

Britain’s ships were not constructed with the vast distances of the Far East and Pacific in clear focus. The ships’ fuel tanks were too small and their engines and machinery were not designed to run for the long periods that were now required of them. What this signified was that the oil-fuelled Royal Navy in the first half of the Twentieth Century had ‘lost the art of keeping to the sea for long periods.’ ⁴

³Ibid.
APPENDIX C

The Canadian Government expressed its objections to renewal in a telegram from the Governor – General of Canada to the Secretary of State for Colonies, Churchill, on the 15th February 1921. The telegram made it clear that it would be far preferable that the Japanese Alliance was not renewed. Noting the past usefulness of the agreement, the Governor-General now thought ‘conditions have been so altered [that the] objections (to the Alliance) have greatly increased’. To the Canadians, British/American relations were paramount. The Canadians thought that a continuance of the Alliance would only be a barrier to good relations with America. The Canadians saw the British Empire as sharing an identity of interest with America with regard to China and its development – an interest that by implication Japan did not share. The telegram also highlighted that in view of the increasing prominence of the Pacific as a scene of action, there is a danger that a special confidential relationship between ourselves and Japan concerning that region to which she (the U.S.A.) was not a party would come to be regarded as an unfriendly exclusion and as a barrier to an English speaking concord.

Therefore, the Alliance should be terminated and the Empire’s objectives in the Far East sought in other ways. The first step in this would be to bring about a conference of Pacific powers ‘for the purpose of adjusting Far Eastern and Pacific questions. Such a straightforward course would enable us to end the Alliance with good grace’ and would enable relations with the U.S.A. to be improved. Canada felt this would ease the stresses in the Far East and Pacific and bring untold benefits to British-American relations. In order that the Imperial Conference could properly consider the options available, the Canadians suggested that an attempt should be made to ascertain from the new American President
Warren Harding whether it would be possible to hold a Pacific Conference where relevant issues could be thrashed out. As a Pacific Dominion and more actively concerned with these issues than other parts of the Empire, the Canadian government felt ideally suited to the role of middle-man between Britain and the USA. It also felt that the US would be more responsive to an approach by Canada than by any other power.¹

¹ 23/24 CAB 8(21) A. Conference of Ministers, 18 February 1921. Appendix, telegram from the Governor-General of Canada to the Secretary of State for Colonies, 15 February 1921.
APPENDIX D

In recognition of Japan's contribution as a war ally and in the face of strong Chinese and American opposition, the British had sanctioned the surrender of all German rights on the Chinese mainland to Japan, under article 156 of the Peace Treaty. By reducing the period for Alliance renewal the British now meant to put the Japanese government on notice to show good faith and be more mindful of its behaviour in China. In particular, the British were eager to induce the Japanese to surrender the exclusive privileges they had acquired in Shantung and consent to the inclusion of the Shantung railway in the Chinese railway nationalisation scheme. Continued Japanese refusal to act contradicted any general policy that purported support for the maintenance of the integrity of China and for its rehabilitation, together with the 'open-door' trade policy. British authorities believed that the desire of the Japanese government to remain in the Alliance was so strong that it would yield on the issue of the Shantung railway, if pressed by Britain to do so.¹

Curzon also had to hand the recommendations of Auckland Geddes on the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance for a reduced time period. Geddes suggested linking the time scale of any Alliance renewal to the duration of the American Presidential term.

Geddes thought there is

... little chance of the Senate agreeing to anything of the nature of an Anglo-American alliance and I do not believe that America could be relied upon to stand indefinitely, or for many years, by any informal undertakings entered into by the executive, unless it were to her interest to do so. Even if a formal treaty were made, it would in all probability, not bind

¹ DBFP; 1°. Series, Volume xiv, op cit. Documents # 40 # 61 and # 97 and #212
American action longer than her interest appeared to be served by it, so that there is not much difference in effect between a treaty with America and an understanding.

I believe, however, that an understanding entered into by a President will be observed by him to the close of his period of office, so that if an agreement with regard to Far Eastern policy and naval strength in the Pacific could be made with the new administration early in their term of office, it would substantially have four years validity attaching to it, so far as diplomatic action is concerned.

Geddes concluded that he believed the Anglo-Japanese alliance should be renewed, in a modified form, to bring it into line with League of Nations principles:

The parties to the treaty should be limited to ourselves and Japan. The term of renewal should be limited to four years to coincide in duration with the term of the American Presidency. We should then endeavour to secure agreement with America to expire on the same date as the treaty. The agreement should be in some form not requiring ratification by the Senate. We should then aim to engage America, President by President, for so long as we consider it desirable or until the temper of the Senate changes.\(^2\)

\(^2\) Ibid. Document # 162.
By 28 June 1921, Curzon had received no formal communication on the subject of arms limitations from the US Government. Nevertheless, throughout the spring of 1921 talk of arms limitation in American political circles reached a prominence which suggested a proposal of some sort might emanate from the Harding Administration.

As a Republican Senator, Harding had been a ‘big navy’ supporter. As the Republican’s Presidential nominee he claimed to favour arms reduction but only after the US Naval programme was completed and would hold a position of strength from which to lead an international limitations conference. Very soon after the election, Senator Borah resumed his tenacious pursuit of a reduction in armaments. On 14 December 1920, he submitted a resolution that the President work with Britain and Japan towards the reduction of Naval Construction programmes, arousing what came to be very strong public support for arms limitations.

Borah was then successful in delaying the passage of the Naval Appropriations bill on 1 March (just prior to the close of session). Three days later, in his inauguration speech, Harding said that while his administration would not enter into alliances with other nations it was prepared to confer with them on issues such as ways in which disarmament among them might be worked out.

After Congress reconvened in April, pressure on Harding to reduce arms spending mounted, with resolutions similar to Borah’s being submitted by Democrats and Republicans. Certainly, Harding did not want to be perceived as dragging his feet on an

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1 DBFP; 1st Series, Vol.xiv, *op.cit* Document # 31
important and very popular issue. Nevertheless, Harding held out for the appropriations to complete the 1916 Programme. He stuck to his view that his best chance of success at an international arms limitation conference would be when his Government could offer a 'limitation of its large navy to countries with navies of equal size'.

It was not until after 11 July 1921, with those conditions in place, that the US Government was ready to make an official proposal to the other major naval powers.

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APPENDIX F

A controversy had developed between Americans and Japanese over the small island of Yap, in the Western Part of the Caroline group nine degrees north of the equator in longitude 138 degrees East, 1200 miles from Manila and 500 miles from Guam. Yap was a cable centre from which messages went to Guam, Menado, Shanghai, and indirectly to the Philippines, a US Territory. In a secret pact of 1917 the Japanese and British had agreed to split German possession in the Pacific at the equator, Japan to gain those to the North and Britain those to the South. The Paris Peace Conference accepted this agreement by so assigning mandates. The Wilson administration contended that it had made protests at the Conference against inclusion of Yap in the mandates agreement. It did not believe one country should control this centre. Lansing and Wilson had informally asked the council to reserve Yap. But the mandate was conferred on Japan and an agreement drawn in December 1920. The department refused to recognise it. Its position was that Germany under Article 119 of the Versailles Treaty had turned over all territories to the Allied and Associated Powers, which in turn had granted mandates to member nations of the League. As one of the Allied and Associated Powers the American Government contended that it had not given its permission.

The Japanese Foreign Ministry, however, replied that President Wilson had made no reservation of record on 7 May 1919, nor was any included in the terms of the mandate. The League ducked the issue by pointing out that the American dispute was not with it but with the Allied and Associated Powers, who had conferred the mandate.¹

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