

## Transition of Power

*Britain's Loss of Global Pre-eminence  
to the United States, 1930–1945*

This book addresses one of the least understood issues in modern international history: how, between 1930 and 1945, Britain lost its global pre-eminence to the United States.

The crucial years are 1930 to 1940, for which until now no comprehensive examination of Anglo-American relations exists. *Transition of Power* analyses these relations in the pivotal decade, with an epilogue dealing with the Second World War after 1941. Britain and the United States, and their intertwined fates, were fundamental to the course of international history in these years. Professor McKercher's book dissects the various strands of the two Powers' relationship in the fifteen years after 1930 from a British perspective – economic, diplomatic, naval, and strategic: security and disarmament in Europe; economic diplomacy during the Great Depression, especially the introduction of the Ottawa system of tariffs and the Roosevelt Administration's determination to get freer trade after 1933; threats to the Far Eastern balance of power between 1931 and 1941 and the British and American responses; growing American interests in the British Empire and their impact upon Imperial unity; and strategic thinking and planning at London and Washington revolving around naval power and armed strength in the wider world, from the London naval conference through such events as the 1935 Anglo-German naval agreement to the response to Axis and Japanese aggression after September 1939.

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B. J. C. McKercher



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For my son, Asa



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## Abbreviations

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ADM	Admiralty
AHR	<i>American Historical Review</i>
AJPH	<i>Australian Journal of Politics and History</i>
BDFA	<i>British Documents on Foreign Affairs</i>
BIS	Bank for International Settlements
<i>BjIS</i>	<i>British Journal of International Studies</i>
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
CAB	Cabinet
CC	Cabinet Conclusion
CCS	Combined Chiefs of Staff
CEH	<i>Central European History</i>
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
<i>CjH</i>	<i>Canadian Journal of History</i>
CNO	Chief of Naval Operations
COS	Chiefs of Staff Committee
CP	Cabinet Paper
CR	<i>Contemporary Review</i>
DBFP	<i>Documents on British Foreign Policy</i>
DBPO	<i>Documents on British Policy Overseas</i>
DCNS	Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff
DH	<i>Diplomatic History</i>
DOT	Department of Overseas Trade
DPR	Defence Policy and Requirements Sub-Committee
DPR(DR)	Defence Policy and Requirements (Defence Requirements) Sub-Committee
DRC	Defence Requirements Sub-Committee
DS	<i>Diplomacy and Statecraft</i>
<i>EcoHR</i>	<i>Economic History Review</i>
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
FA	<i>Foreign Affairs</i>
FDRFA	<i>Franklin D. Roosevelt and Foreign Affairs</i>
FO	Foreign Office

<i>FRUS</i>	<i>Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
GB	Great Britain
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
<i>HJ</i>	<i>Historical Journal</i>
<i>HZ</i>	<i>Historische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>IA</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs</i>
<i>IHR</i>	<i>International History Review</i>
<i>IJ</i>	<i>International Journal</i>
IJN	Imperial Japanese Navy
<i>INS</i>	<i>Intelligence and National Security</i>
<i>JAH</i>	<i>Journal of American History</i>
<i>JBS</i>	<i>Journal of British Studies</i>
<i>JCH</i>	<i>Journal of Contemporary History</i>
<i>JICH</i>	<i>Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History</i>
<i>JEEH</i>	<i>Journal of European Economic History</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Economic History</i>
<i>JRUSI</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal United Services Institution</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Strategic Studies</i>
LND	League of Nations Published Document
LNU	League of Nations Union
LNP	League of Nations Private Papers
LNR	League of Nations Registered Files
LNS	League of Nations Section Files
NCM	Naval Conference Ministerial Committee
PCIJ	Permanent Court of International Justice
PRO	Public Record Office
PSF	Private Secretaries File
RAF	Royal Air Force
Reparation	Official Documents of the Allied Reparations Commission
RIIA	Royal Institute of International Affairs
RN	Royal Navy
<i>RP</i>	<i>Review of Politics</i>
<i>SAQ</i>	<i>South Atlantic Quarterly</i>
SDDF	State Department Decimal Files
SWC	Supreme War Council
T	Treasury
UDC	Union of Democratic Control
USN	United States Navy
USNGB	United States Navy General Board
<i>VfZ</i>	<i>Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte</i>
WCP	War Cabinet Paper

# 1 The end of Anglo-American naval rivalry, 1929–1930

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[Hoover] is, it is generally understood here, much more interested in naval reduction and restriction which he regards as immediately feasible than in the 'Freedom of the Seas' which he is supposed to think will anyhow take a very long time to settle internationally with or by treaties or by conference.

Howard, June 1929<sup>1</sup>

Baldwin and the Conservatives lost the 30 May 1929 General Election and, although Labour lacked a majority in the House of Commons, MacDonald formed a government. Assured of Liberal support because of Lloyd George's antipathy towards Baldwin, the second Labour ministry took office on 7 June.<sup>2</sup> Whilst the new prime minister had an abiding interest in foreign policy – serving as his own foreign secretary in 1924 – intra-party manoeuvring saw him offer the Foreign Office to his chief rival, Arthur Henderson, the party chairman.<sup>3</sup> Yet, despite relinquishing the Foreign Office to Henderson, MacDonald retained control over Britain's American policy. Success here might strengthen the electoral appeal of the party and enhance his position as leader. Moreover, such a course flowed from his interest in Anglo-American relations and, importantly, his public posturing whilst leader of the Opposition after 1924. In terms of the former, he privately reproached American smugness: '[The United States] seems like one of our new rich families that put a heavy and vulgar foot upon our life, that have a big and open purse, but that even in its gifts and in its goodness has an attitude and a spirit that makes one's soul shrink up and shrivel.'<sup>4</sup> But because he was

<sup>1</sup> Howard to MacDonald, 6 Jun. 1929, Howard DHW 9/62.

<sup>2</sup> S. Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party. The Crisis of 1929–1931* (New Haven, 1988), 6–7; P. Williamson, 'Safety First: Baldwin, the Conservative Party, and the 1929 General Election', *HJ*, 25(1982), 385–409.

<sup>3</sup> D. Carlton, *MacDonald Versus Henderson. The Foreign Policy of the Second Labour Government* (New York, 1970), 15–17; D. Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (1977), 489–90.

<sup>4</sup> MacDonald to Howard, 8 Feb. 1926, Howard DHW 4/Personal/10.

an atlanticist, removing Anglo-American differences became the focus of his thinking on foreign policy.<sup>5</sup> This informed his utterances whilst in opposition. During that time, he continually criticised Conservative handling of the American question, especially naval limitation. After the Coolidge conference, for instance, he launched a blistering parliamentary attack on the Baldwin government's disarmament policy, holding it responsible for the poor state of Anglo-American relations; and in 1929, just before the election, he wrote for the newspapers of the American press magnate, William Randolph Hearst, arguing that if Labour won office it would move to eliminate the rancour that had grown up since 1927.<sup>6</sup> That Baldwin and Chamberlain had fostered a co-operative spirit in Anglo-American relations by May 1929 would make his task easier.

Within days of becoming prime minister, MacDonald received reports about the American question from Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service experts. On 10 June, Robert Craigie, the head of the Foreign Office American Department, sent memoranda discussing the main points of contention: naval limitation, blockade, and the arbitration treaty.<sup>7</sup> MacDonald learnt of the Belligerent Rights Sub-committee's determination to keep those rights as high as possible, and about not mentioning blockade specifically in any new arbitration agreement. Craigie emphasised that a blockade agreement would benefit both Powers, hence the need for Anglo-American consultation should a conference to codify maritime law be called. He also stressed that the Preparatory Commission had still to produce a single draft disarmament convention and that France would oppose any separate naval arms agreement. At this moment, Howard reported from Washington that Hoover and Stimson wanted a settlement.<sup>8</sup> Believing that ameliorating differences could be achieved by direct discussions at the highest level, the ambassador implored MacDonald to travel to Washington. Craigie's memoranda and Howard's report showed that material for a naval settlement and its attendant problems lay at hand. But others also sought to influence the new premier. Abhorring any strictures on British blockade practices, Hankey dusted off arguments that the hardline

<sup>5</sup> Marquand, *MacDonald*, 467–74.

<sup>6</sup> See McKercher, *Baldwin Government*, 88–90; Ritchie [Hearst Newspapers] to MacDonald, 17 Apr. 1929, Rosenberg [MacDonald's secretary] to Ritchie, 22 Apr. 1929, both MacDonald PRO 30/69/1439/1.

<sup>7</sup> Craigie memoranda, 'Naval Disarmament Question', 'Question of an Agreement with the United States in regard to Maritime Belligerent Rights', 'Question of the conclusion of an Anglo-American Arbitration Treaty', all MacDonald PRO 30/69/1/267.

<sup>8</sup> Howard to MacDonald, 6 Jun. 1929, Howard DHW 9/62.

minority in the Belligerent Rights Sub-committee had vainly employed and sent them to his new political master.<sup>9</sup>

Cognisant of British security needs, MacDonald saw the opportunity to transform his rhetoric about settling Anglo-American differences into practical politics. But this could not be done in a vacuum. First, the Preparatory Commission had gone into suspended animation waiting for the particulars of the naval 'yardstick'. Second, as the Washington naval treaty would lapse in December 1931, a new conference would have to be convened to extend its life. Both matters touched the League and French reaction to naval talks outside the Preparatory Commission. Moreover, the Labour Party contained a coterie of pro-League activists who, deprecating bilateral arbitration agreements, wanted Britain to sign a 1920 amendment to the Protocol of the Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ), a League appendage. Called the 'Optional Clause' because it was not compulsory until signed, its signatories accepted PCIJ jurisdiction without reservation in disputes involving treaty interpretation, all questions of international law, any 'breach of international obligation', and the level of award should such breach occur.<sup>10</sup> If MacDonald's government signed the 'Optional Clause', Britain and the United States would lack, given the American Congress' opposition to United States membership on the PCIJ, an arbitration mechanism to settle bilateral disputes. Finally, domestic considerations in both countries had to be faced. With Labour in a minority in the Commons, and Borah's thirst for a conference to codify maritime law unslaked, any agreement would have to pass legislative scrutiny. As pressures for a naval settlement and improving relations were building amongst some elements of the press and public opinion in both countries – Edward Price Bell, an anglophile American newspaper correspondent was prominent<sup>11</sup> – raising hopes prematurely had to be avoided.

Dawes' arrival in London on 14 June set in train negotiations lasting until mid-September. Howard had informed MacDonald privately that Dawes received instructions 'not to go too far' concerning the freedom of the seas.<sup>12</sup> This suggested Hoover's inclination to ignore codifying maritime law in achieving a naval agreement. When MacDonald met Dawes on 16 June, Howard's sanguine assessment proved accurate. In

<sup>9</sup> Hankey to MacDonald, 13 Jun. 1929, with enclosures, PREM 1/99; Hankey diary, 18 [but 8] Oct. 1929, HNKY 1/8.

<sup>10</sup> F. P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations* (1960), 125–6, 274–5.

<sup>11</sup> Bell, 'Private Memorandum for Prime Minister MacDonald', 26 Jun. 1929, MacDonald PRO 30/69/673/1; Bell, 'Memorandum for the President', 9 Jul. 1929, HHPP 1031.

<sup>12</sup> Howard to MacDonald, 6 Jun. 1929, Howard DHW 9/62.

friendly conversation, Dawes indicated that a naval settlement was imperative, that the other naval Powers should not be confronted with appearances of an Anglo-American *fait accompli*, that MacDonald's American visit should occur only after the achievement of the lines of a settlement to avoid raising public hopes in Britain and the United States, and that 'questions of belligerent rights, freedom of the seas, and so on, will not rise for the moment'.<sup>13</sup> A naval agreement now took first priority; getting one became the goal of diplomatic efforts over the summer.

These efforts, guided by MacDonald and Hoover, have been chronicled elsewhere.<sup>14</sup> By September, they produced a four-part compromise: MacDonald conceding formal parity in vessels under 10,000 tons; Britain's minimum cruiser requirement reducing to fifty; American heavy cruiser demands dropping to twenty-one, with the possibility that this might be reduced further after discussions with the Japanese; and Hoover allowing Britain an extra 24,000 tons of light cruisers to compensate for the USN having more heavy ones than the RN. Fundamental to the negotiations' success was MacDonald and Hoover's desire to get a settlement, which led them to override their naval experts' advice to achieve a political compromise that downplayed technical considerations. This element of the compromise has been misunderstood. Traditionally, it is argued that a drawn-out resolution of the problem stemmed from MacDonald's domination by the Admiralty and his inability 'to escape the imperatives of Empire and the traditions of a glorious past'.<sup>15</sup> Highlighting the normal give-and-take in the negotiating process, this view belittles the political will in both Downing Street and the White House to break the cruiser stalemate.

Just after MacDonald's 16 June meeting with Dawes, Vice-Admiral Sir William Fisher, the deputy chief of the Naval Staff, expounded the established RN line that 'the Naval Claims of the United States are founded on unsound principles'.<sup>16</sup> Pointing to the doctrine of absolute need and Britain's concession of informal equality in 1927, he opined

<sup>13</sup> Henderson despatch to Howard, 24 Jun. 1929, *DBFP II*, I, 8–10; MacDonald diary, 20 Jun. 1929, MacDonald PRO 30/69/1753. The idea that MacDonald was chagrined at not getting an immediate invitation to Washington – O'Connor, *Equilibrium*, 32 – is wrong; cf. '[Dawes] said that America would welcome me but I said I thought that it should be staged as the final & not as the opening act', in MacDonald to Howard, 17 Jun. 1929, Howard DHW 9/62.

<sup>14</sup> W.-H. Bickel, *Die anglo-amerikanischen Beziehungen 1927–1930 im Licht der Flottenfrage* (Zurich, 1970), 100–30; Carlton, *MacDonald Versus Henderson*, 105–14; Hall, *Arms Control*, 69–75; O'Connor, *Equilibrium*, 40–6; Roskill, *Naval Policy*, II, 37–44.

<sup>15</sup> Carlton, *MacDonald Versus Henderson*, 111–12; O'Connor, *Equilibrium*, 32–43.

<sup>16</sup> Fisher draft memorandum, n.d. [but mid-Jun. 1929], FHR 11; emphasis in original. Cf. Field [C-in-C, Mediterranean Fleet] to Hankey, 7 Jun. 1929, HNKY 4/21.



that American-defined parity meant 'each side should possess the same *number* of 8" and 6" ships or that each side should have the same 8" and 6" *tonnage*'. As RN and USN strategic roles differed, this meant holding to the seventy-vessel minimum, chiefly fifty-five light cruisers for fleet work and patrolling sea lanes. As recent Preparatory Commission discussions had shown, the Americans would not go above a maximum of forty-five, twenty-three of which had to be heavy. Thus, the Admiralty did not see how British and American requirements could be reconciled. In Washington, American experts led by the USN General Board and Admiral Hilary Jones, the chief naval disarmament adviser since 1926, proved reluctant to define the 'yardstick'.<sup>17</sup> The Board argued that only warship ages and displacements be computed in devising a limitation formula; gun calibres should be ignored because determining firepower would be a matter of interpretation on which both sides would surely disagree. Thus, the yardstick's impracticality: 'Any attempt to establish such a value necessarily must be based upon highly technical assumptions and complex computations upon which general agreement is most improbable if not impossible.' Jones asserted that Britain's worldwide network of bases and large merchantmen capable of mounting guns meant the USN could achieve parity only by having more heavy cruisers than the RN. Although Hoover and Stimson looked for a suitable formula, opposition from within the General Board prevented the sending of specific 'yardstick' figures to London.

Given the naval experts' inflexibility and the futility of compromising over the technical issues, MacDonald and Hoover agreed tacitly on a political settlement. In Britain, this conformed to Foreign Office views about Anglo-American differences that arose after the Coolidge conference and, because of Chamberlain's arguments, formed the basis of the Belligerent Rights Sub-committee's reports. Like Baldwin and Chamberlain, therefore, MacDonald reckoned that the naval experts were blocking a cruiser settlement. Hoover concurred; he had a close political adviser, Dwight Morrow, impress this on Howard as early as January – 'a working arrangement could be found and ought to be found without delay provided the matter was handled by real statesmen and not sailors'. Howard reported this to Vansittart, now a private secretary in the prime minister's office advising on foreign policy matters.<sup>18</sup>

In Britain, Downing Street sought Admiralty opinions, and Albert

<sup>17</sup> USNGB 438-1, Serial 1427, 10 Jun. 1929; USNGB memorandum, 14 Jun. 1929, with annexes, HHPP 998 [the subsequent quotation is from p. 3]; Jones to Adams [secretary of the Navy], 18 Jun. 1929, Jones 5.

<sup>18</sup> Howard to Vansittart, 24 Jan. 1929, Howard DHW 9/61; Craigie memorandum, 27 Jun. 1929, *DBFP II*, I, 15-16.

Alexander, the first lord, and his advisers were informed of what transpired. This course derived from the consultative nature of Cabinet government in which the premier remained, theoretically at least, first amongst equal ministers. But MacDonald overruled Admiralty advice when difficulties in the negotiations emerged, for instance, when he lowered Britain's cruiser demand to fifty.<sup>19</sup> MacDonald's task was made easier in that unlike the preceding Cabinet, which contained staunch naval hardliners like Baldwin's chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston Churchill, the second Labour ministry lacked equivalent advocates. Urging reform and arms reduction, and wanting British security tied to the League, leading members of the new government supported the prime minister over his navalist opponents in the Admiralty. This does not mean that MacDonald ignored British security in seeking a rapprochement. As he confided to an MP: 'I am keeping my eye upon our relations not only with America, but with the rest of the world, and any agreement which I make with the former will be on condition that it has to be varied if it in any way weakens us dangerously in relation to the latter.'<sup>20</sup> Still, a deal with the United States had to be struck and, whilst other threats were not overlooked, Britain had to make some concession.

Hoover had more freedom of action. This stemmed from the authority that the United States constitution bestowed on the presidency. Cabinet members served at presidential discretion; and, as the various departments and their specialist consulting bodies, like the Navy Department and the USN General Board, only advised, presidents had decided independence in policy-making. Hence, when MacDonald made a public show of good faith in July by cancelling three small auxiliary vessels and slowing down construction of two cruisers, Hoover responded by suspending three vessels authorised by the fifteen cruiser bill.<sup>21</sup> In doing so, he disregarded the expert advisers in his government and weathered criticism from their 'Big Navy' supporters outside. And when Jones and the General Board continued obfuscating over the 'yardstick', Hoover decided on 11 September that USN heavy cruiser

<sup>19</sup> MacDonald to Dawes, 8 Aug. 1929, *DBFP II*, I, 36–8. Cf. Vansittart to Alexander, 3 Jul. 1929, AVAR 5/2/2; MacDonald to Dawes, 24 Jul. 1929, MacDonald PRO 30/69/672/1; CC 33(29)1, CAB 23/61. See Fisher to Madden [first sea lord], 31 Aug. 1929, DCNS memorandum, 'Disarmament Conversations', 5 Sep. 1929, both FHR 11.

<sup>20</sup> MacDonald to Bellairs, 30 Jul. 1929, MacDonald PRO 30/69/672/1; MacDonald to Dawes, 8 Aug. 1929, *DBFP II*, I, 36–8; MacDonald diary, 6, 26 Aug., 11 Sep. 1929, MacDonald PRO 30/69/1753. Cf. Fisher minute, 23 Aug. 1929, ADM 116/2686/3672.

<sup>21</sup> O'Connor, *Equilibrium*, 37. Cf. Hoover to McNutt [American Legion], 30 Jul. 1929; unsigned memorandum [on favourable US editorial comment on suspending cruiser construction], Aug. 1929, both HHPP 998.

demands would have to be reduced to appease Britain.<sup>22</sup> At that moment, a naval lobbyist, William Shearer, brought a lawsuit against Bethlehem Steel and other large American corporations involved in naval construction, claiming these firms owed him money for successfully disrupting the Coolidge conference. Exploiting adverse public reaction to Shearer's charges, Hoover manipulated the controversy to discredit American 'Big Navy' disciples and win public support for appeasing the British.<sup>23</sup> MacDonald even aided Hoover's bid to conduct unfettered diplomacy. In late August, Howard reported that Borah threatened to block any agreement that did not reduce naval construction to a level he thought appropriate. When MacDonald wrote privately to his friend on the importance to international security of Anglo-American reconciliation, Borah backed off.<sup>24</sup> Thus, as MacDonald left London on 28 September, statesmen rather than sailors had it in their power to settle the naval question.

The importance of MacDonald's mission cannot be overemphasised. As Howard had been predicting since mid-1928, a prime ministerial visit would mend the rift separating the two Powers. Indeed, it inaugurated a period of Anglo-American co-operation that lasted, with difficulty here and there, until Hoover surrendered office in early 1933. Part of this devolved from the MacDonald-Hoover discussions that, if they did not flesh out the September compromise, reaffirmed the principles on which the compromise was based; and, as important, thanks to a public relations triumph engineered by Howard, it saw public American suspicions of British policy begin to be replaced by feelings of trust. Despite a full schedule of public appearances in New York and Washington, MacDonald held private talks with Hoover at the president's country retreat on the Rapidan River on 6-7 October and, afterwards, in the American capital.<sup>25</sup> The two men looked to give

<sup>22</sup> USNGB 438-1, Serial 1444A, 11 Sep. 1929; Hoover to Stimson, 11, 12 Sep. 1929, both HHPP 998.

<sup>23</sup> Hall, *Arms Control*, 75-6; O'Connor, *Equilibrium*, 59-60. Cf. Shearer to Hoover, 6 Mar. 1929, Grace [Bethlehem Steel] to Hoover, 9 Sep. 1929, Hoover [Bureau of Investigation] to Richey [President Hoover's secretary], 10 Sep. 1929, with enclosures, O'Brian [assistant to the attorney-general] to Hoover, 17, 20, 23 Sep. 1929, all HHPP 1062. Hoover told Howard: 'I wish you could find a Shearer'; in Howard telegram to Henderson, 12 Sep. 1929, *DBFP II*, I, 78.

<sup>24</sup> Howard to MacDonald, 22, 23 Aug. 1929, Howard DHW 9/63; MacDonald diary, 26 Aug. 1929, MacDonald PRO 30/69/1753; MacDonald to Borah, 26 Aug. 1929, MacDonald PRO 30/69/673/1.

<sup>25</sup> Except where noted, the next three paragraphs are based on 'Memorandum by Mr. MacDonald respecting his Conversations with President Hoover at Washington (October 4 to 10, 1929)', *DBFP II*, I, 106-15; Hoover to Stimson, 9 Oct. 1929, with enclosures, Stimson R79; Hall, *Arms Control*, 77-80; O'Connor, *Equilibrium*, 47-51; Roskill, *Naval Policy*, II, 45-50.

substance to the principles agreed over the summer. For instance, since the Coolidge conference, the Admiralty had wanted to loosen Washington treaty strictures on battleships: extend their lives from twenty to twenty-six years and reduce their displacement to a maximum 25,000 tons and gun calibres to twelve inches.<sup>26</sup> MacDonald pressed this on Hoover who, arguing that 'the days of the battleship were numbered owing to the development of aircraft', countered that battleship numbers be reduced. When MacDonald rejoined about RN reluctance to cut its battlefleet, Hoover accepted reductions to 25,000 tons. His only proviso involved the USN being allowed a 35,000-ton vessel to compensate for two equivalent battleships – the *Nelson* and the *Rodney* – granted Britain by the Washington treaty and commissioned in 1925. Though a final decision on this matter would have to await the anticipated naval conference, MacDonald told the Cabinet that 'elements favourable to a compromise are present'.

Inconclusive discussions touched on destroyers, submarines, and aircraft carriers, together with a British proposal to transfer up to 10 per cent of a class tonnage from one category to another. Still, the elusive 'yardstick' remained the focus of the Rapidan and Washington conversations. By the September compromise, the USN would be permitted 315,000 cruiser tons, 210,000 set aside for heavy vessels. The RN would be allowed 339,000 tons, 150,000 for heavy vessels. With a replacement programme of fourteen cruisers by 1936, the end of a renewed treaty, this would meet Britain's new absolute need. But twenty-one USN heavy cruisers opposed to fifteen British caused concern for MacDonald and his advisers: the Japanese, demanding a cruiser ratio of 5:3.5, might build fifteen. Hoover suggested dropping the American total to eighteen if the British extended the life of their cruiser fleet by delaying their replacement programme until 1937 – this would limit the IJN to twelve heavy cruisers. A decision was made 'to examine ways and means' to reconcile this divergence before the impending naval conference. Obviating an impasse in these discussions, this action had the added benefit of not presenting the other naval Powers with what might be construed as an Anglo-American variant of the 1928 Anglo-French compromise. By 7 October, MacDonald and Hoover agreed that the other three major naval Powers be invited to meet with British and American representatives in London in January 1930. Their brief would be to extend the Washington naval treaty by five years.<sup>27</sup> The invitation outlined four considerations to guide the

<sup>26</sup> London [British Legation, Geneva] telegram (129) to Howard, 24 Jun. 1927, London telegram (133) to Tyrrell [Foreign Office], 25 Jun. 1927, both FO 412/115.

<sup>27</sup> 'Note of Invitation to the Naval Conference', 7 Oct. 1929, *DBFP II*, I, 103–4.

negotiations: the Kellogg Pact would be 'the starting-point of agreement'; the RN and USN would achieve parity by 31 December 1936; the Washington treaty replacement programmes should be re-examined to effect battleship reductions; and London and Washington would urge the abolition of the submarine.<sup>28</sup>

Although dialogue about limiting warships proceeded amicably, potential danger to the growing rapprochement emerged when Hoover suddenly announced that good Anglo-American relations 'could never be fully established until the problems associated with the capture of property at sea in time of war had been squarely faced'.<sup>29</sup> Ignoring the agreement reached at the first MacDonald-Dawes meeting, the president pointed to Borah's desire to preserve 'the freedom of the seas'. Hoover also had a personal interest in belligerent interception of 'food-ships' – during the war, he had headed an organisation that had fed starving European states occupied by the Germans and subject to the British blockade.<sup>30</sup> MacDonald obliquely referred to the Belligerent Rights Sub-committee, which 'found [the question] replete with dangers and complexities of every sort'; but following the sub-committee's recommendation to consult secretly with Washington should a conference to codify international law be in the offing, the prime minister indicated that his government would rather have a separate Anglo-American treaty, that if a conference to codify international law was still called, only the five major naval Powers should attend, and, in either case, private Anglo-American talks should be held to ensure a unified view respecting blockade.

MacDonald telegraphed the Cabinet about his willingness to 'examine this question fully and frankly' with Hoover.<sup>31</sup> This message induced paroxysms of disapproval in Hankey. Whilst Admiralty opinion had been skirted in the political process that produced the September compromise – and Hankey had contributed nothing through his involvement in reparations negotiations beginning in August – he would not allow what he perceived to be an emasculation of British belligerent rights. From his central position in the Cabinet, CID, and COS, he galvanised Henderson and other ministers to block the proposed

<sup>28</sup> MacDonald pressed abolition on behalf of the king, who saw the submarine as 'this terrible weapon'. Stamfordham [George V's secretary] to MacDonald, 10 Jul. 1929, Vansittart to Stamfordham, 12 Jul. 1929, both PREM 1/71.

<sup>29</sup> 'Memorandum by Mr. MacDonald', cited in n. 25, above.

<sup>30</sup> Hoover memorandum for MacDonald, 5 Oct. 1929, HHPP 998. Cf. H. C. Hoover, *An American Epic: Famine in Forty-Five Nations: The Battle on the Front Line, 1914–1923*, 3 vols., (Chicago, 1961).

<sup>31</sup> Howard telegram (493, 494) to Henderson, 6 Oct. 1929, *DBFP II*, I, 116–17.

examination.<sup>32</sup> Henderson then wired MacDonald to outline Cabinet opposition, explaining that an Anglo-American arrangement could adversely affect any economic or military sanctions imposed in future to support either the Covenant or the Kellogg Pact.<sup>33</sup> A signatory of both instruments, Britain could not indulge in a bilateral examination: there had to be multilateral talks involving all League members and signatories of the Kellogg Pact. Beyond this, the unspoken and far more important reason involved RN ability to impose future blockades in defence of Britain's narrow national and Imperial interests. Though the Cabinet's action compelled MacDonald to have mention of blockade excluded from the joint communiqué summarising the talks, he promised Hoover that informal examination might occur after he returned to London.<sup>34</sup> The matter went into abeyance.

Cabinet intercession was not unwelcome to MacDonald – Hankey's lobbying conformed to Foreign Office notions about first getting a naval agreement.<sup>35</sup> Determined to keep political rather than technical considerations at the fore in Washington, MacDonald took no naval officers with him. Apart from Thomas Jones, the pro-American deputy secretary of the Cabinet, who handled administrative matters, MacDonald's hand-picked advisers on this mission were the two diplomats most responsible for Britain's American policy: Vansittart and Craigie. With Howard, who shared their ideas about a political resolution of the naval question, Vansittart and Craigie ensured that MacDonald's discussions with Hoover followed Belligerent Rights Sub-committee recommendations. Emphasising this to the Foreign Office on 8 October,<sup>36</sup> Vansittart pointed to MacDonald preventing an international conference and, 'by great exertion', getting a joint Anglo-American examination accepted by Hoover. A Hoover ploy to have the British abandon their naval bases in the Western Hemisphere in return for the Americans building none in the Eastern Hemisphere was also politely, but firmly, rebuffed.<sup>37</sup> There were limits to Britain's desire to resolve Anglo-American naval differences – the fifty cruiser minimum lay at the edge – that Hoover had to accept. This says much about the success of MacDonald's mission.

<sup>32</sup> COS Meetings 81–82, 8–9 Oct. 1929, both CAB 53/3; Hankey memorandum, 'Relations with the United States of America including the Question of Belligerent Rights', 10 Oct. 1929, CAB 53/17; Hankey diary, 8–10 Oct. 1929, HNKY 1/8; Hankey to MacDonald, 11 Oct. 1929, CAB 21/352; Hankey to Snowden [chancellor of the Exchequer], 11 Oct. 1929, with enclosure, Hopkins T 175/36.

<sup>33</sup> Henderson telegram (506) to Howard, 8 Oct. 1929, *DBFP II*, I, 120–1.

<sup>34</sup> 'Memorandum by Mr. MacDonald', cited in n. 25, above; Craigie to Cotton [US under-secretary of state], 7 Oct. 1929, HHPP 998.

<sup>35</sup> The irony is lost on Roskill, *Hankey*, II, 490–5, who distorts Hankey's influence.

<sup>36</sup> Howard telegram (499) to Henderson, 8 Oct. 1929, *DBFP II*, I, 121–2.

<sup>37</sup> Howard telegram (500, 501) to Henderson, 9 Oct. 1929, *ibid.*, 122–3.

Hoover's failure to find an answer to the food-ship question, his inability to overcome British resistance about abandoning bases, and the process of doing no more than reaffirming the principles of the September compromise did not damage the co-operative spirit in relations that had been developing for almost a year. Despite Hoover and Stimson being unhappy about British intransigence, compromise on both sides remained the order of the day.

Howard handled the public side of MacDonald's trip. Judging from Howard's reports, American and British press coverage, plus a deluge of congratulatory messages reaching the Washington embassy,<sup>38</sup> his efforts produced a swell of positive comment that suggested a more favourable British image in the United States. During his tenure as ambassador, which began in 1924, Howard used the public platform, including radio, to great effect in explaining his government's views to the American public on a range of subjects. Aided by the propaganda arm of the embassy at Washington – the British Library of Information at New York (BLINY) – his remarks were disseminated across the United States.<sup>39</sup> Howard had also established personal contacts with leaders of the two major political parties and influential bodies like the Council on Foreign Relations. Given his long-standing arguments favouring a high-level British mission to the United States, he used his connexions to get MacDonald as much public exposure as possible: addresses to the Senate in Washington and six different groups in New York, including the Council on Foreign Relations. MacDonald's central thesis concerned maintaining international peace by co-operative efforts, for which Howard and BLINY achieved the widest possible press coverage, including a national radio audience for MacDonald's speech to the Council. Along with improving relations at the official level,<sup>40</sup> the public tone of the relationship began to change for the better by the time MacDonald left the United States on 13 October to spend two weeks in Canada.

When MacDonald returned to Britain on 1 November, preparations for the London naval conference were underway. Favourable French, Italian, and Japanese replies to the 7 October invitation had been received within ten days.<sup>41</sup> These speedy answers resulted from Paris, Rome, and Tokyo being kept abreast of the summer negotiations and

<sup>38</sup> Except where noted, this paragraph is based on Hall, *Arms Control*, 80; McKercher, *Howard*, 348–9; O'Connor, *Equilibrium*, 49–50. Cf. MacDonald diary, 25 Sep. 1929, MacDonald PRO 30/69/1753; Howard to Henderson, 10 Oct. 1929, Henderson FO 800/280.

<sup>39</sup> McKercher, *Howard*, 297–337 *passim*; McKercher, 'Images', 221–48.

<sup>40</sup> See Stimson to Nan [his sister], 1 Nov. 1929, Stimson R79.

<sup>41</sup> *DBFP II*, I, 128–31.

the ensuing MacDonald–Hoover discussions; and, in line with the understanding made at MacDonald’s first meeting with Dawes, the Powers were not presented with irreducible Anglo-American limitation proposals. French perceptions, always tinged with suspicion, typified the reaction to the invitation. ‘There is now a fairly widespread understanding’, Sir William Tyrrell, the ambassador at Paris, reported, ‘that, so far as naval matters are concerned, what the conversations and Mr. MacDonald’s visit have really secured is the acceptance by the British and American Governments, in principle, of parity between the two fleets.’<sup>42</sup> But agreeing to attend a conference and limiting naval arms were different propositions. Franco-Italian mutual distrust turning on the naval balance in the Mediterranean, which had led both Powers to boycott the Coolidge conference in 1927, remained.<sup>43</sup>

More ominous, Tokyo’s desire to increase the IJN cruiser building ratio over that allowed for capital ships could not be ignored. Whilst in the United States, MacDonald approved Hoover’s suggestion that Japanese delegates to the conference be invited to stop in Washington for preliminary discussions.<sup>44</sup> To this end, informal talks between Stimson and the Japanese ambassador occurred by the end of October. Stimson expressed his concern about Japanese views to Ronald Ion Campbell, the *chargé* at the British Embassy: the Japanese seemed apprehensive about ‘rigid’ Anglo-American agreement on limitation; and their desire for a 3.5 ratio for heavy cruisers could affect the naval balance in the southern Pacific.<sup>45</sup> To avoid irritating the Japanese, Stimson asked for information on any Anglo-Japanese talks being held in London. He wanted to avoid any divergence between the English-speaking Powers that might harm the conference. Stressing that the Japanese should be told that London and Washington were examining ‘ways and means’ to reconcile the 24,000-ton difference in their cruiser requirements, and built around the idea that eighteen American heavy cruisers would limit the IJN to just twelve, Henderson’s friendly response hid nothing from the Americans.<sup>46</sup>

The time between MacDonald’s return to London and the opening of the conference on 21 January 1930 saw the British and Americans draw closer together. This had two dimensions: the first, the more obvious,

<sup>42</sup> Tyrrell despatch to Henderson, 14 Oct. 1929, *ibid.*, 125–7.

<sup>43</sup> Graham [British ambassador, Rome] to Henderson, 18 Oct. 1929, Henderson to Graham, 22 Oct. 1929, both Henderson FO 800/280.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Memorandum by Mr. MacDonald’, cited in n. 25, above.

<sup>45</sup> Stimson memoranda on conversations with Debuchi [Japanese ambassador, Washington], 16, 23 Oct., SDDF 500. A. 15a3; Campbell telegram (535) to Henderson, 7 Nov. 1929, *DBFP II*, I, 132–3.

<sup>46</sup> Henderson telegram (571) to Campbell, 12 Nov. 1929, *ibid.*, 135–6.



involved smoothing over the unresolved issues that had emerged during MacDonald's trip; the second, hidden from view and a derivative of the first, entailed the evolution of attitudes within the two governments about the need for co-operation. The most important unresolved matter concerned blockade. As MacDonald's Cabinet had not yet seen the Belligerent Rights Sub-committee's reports, these were circulated on 4 November. Although no evidence exists to explain this delay, the premier's desire to have a free hand in pursuing his American policy during the summer probably had much to do with it. Within two days, criticism came from the pro-League section of the Cabinet. Lord Parmoor, the lord president of the council, reproached both reports for being based 'on assumptions which the Labour Party and Labour Government have publicly rejected': that Britain did not want belligerent rights watered down, and that it might impose blockades without reference to the League.<sup>47</sup> MacDonald did not respond. Instead, he wrote to Hoover that his government, mindful of the British people's 'deep sentimental regard for their historical position on the sea', could not agree to an examination of blockade, even concerning food-ships.<sup>48</sup> Raising the spectre of political divisions within Britain that might prevent an Anglo-American agreement, MacDonald cautioned that 'a re-examination is apt to unsettle and stampede' British opinion. Hoover let the matter drop.

Britain's legal right to blockade had also been strengthened in September when the Cabinet decided to sign the 'Optional Clause'.<sup>49</sup> On this single point, MacDonald strayed from the Belligerent Rights Sub-committee recommendations. Nonetheless, this constituted inspired diplomacy on the Labour ministry's part, even if endorsing the 'Clause' occurred because pro-League elements in the Cabinet sought to strengthen the PCIJ rather than improve Anglo-American relations.<sup>50</sup> It meant that the worry about the Americans seeking to arbitrate future blockades, League or otherwise, had evaporated: not only could London now not conclude bilateral arbitration agreements, even with the United States, it could only accept PCIJ adjudication should British orders-in-council and other legal forms be questioned. League wars would be

<sup>47</sup> Parmoor memorandum [CP 310(29)], 6 Nov. 1929, CAB 24/206.

<sup>48</sup> The rest of this paragraph is based on MacDonald to Hoover, 19 Nov. 1929, Hoover to MacDonald, 3 Dec. 1929, both HHPP 999.

<sup>49</sup> Cmd. 3452. See discussions of the Cabinet committee, created in July 1929 and on which Henderson and Alexander sat, which formulated arbitration policy: CAB 27/392.

<sup>50</sup> 'Note of a Meeting . . . June 20, 1929', 'Minute by the Secretary of State', 24 Jul. 1929, Dalton [FO parliamentary under-secretary] to Henderson, 20 Aug. 1929, Dalton to Noel-Baker, 21, 27 Aug. 1929, all Dalton II 1/1.

'public' wars, fought under the fiat of the League, because as even Hankey had realised a year earlier:

Once we have a code drawn up for public wars we shall always be able to apply it *mutatis mutandis* to private wars, which by the way, we should always try and induce the world to believe were public wars or else wars like the American operations in Nicaragua, which Phillip [*sic*] Kerr politely designates as police measures.<sup>51</sup>

Although some Admiralty–Foreign Office disagreement developed over elements of the 'Clause', for instance, its legitimacy should League machinery prove inadequate, they concurred that it would not regulate 'naval action in the event of war having broken out'.<sup>52</sup> With Hoover's reluctance to push for an examination of blockade, this meant that the divisive issue of belligerent rights had fallen by the wayside.

Pre-conference exchanges occurred not only between London and Washington. As MacDonald and Hoover had agreed to avoid the appearance of prior Anglo-American commitments, the 7 October invitation solicited the other Powers' views. Beyond Hoover's desire for Japanese–American conversations, this devolved into bilateral discussions between the French and Italians, and between the British and both the Japanese and French. Stretching from 19 November to 18 December, Franco-Italian deliberations were distinguished by France's bid to increase its building ratio over that agreed at Washington whilst denying Italy an equivalent acceleration.<sup>53</sup> Refusing to concede naval supremacy to France, the Italians cunningly called for the abolition of the submarine, a course designed to win support from the British and Americans whilst isolating the French, who saw this warship as a cheap weapon for naval defence. Unable to force the Italians to relent, the French declined to give specific limitation figures.

Although Anglo-French conversations occurred sporadically after MacDonald's return, the Franco-Italian impasse saw the French outline their general goals to the British on 20 December;<sup>54</sup> still foregoing specific figures (Paris wanted an overall tonnage rather than ones for individual categories of vessel), this amounted to pre-conference

<sup>51</sup> Hankey to Balfour [Conservative minister], 20 Dec. 1928, CAB 21/320.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Alexander note [CID 966B], 11 Nov. 1929, enclosing Madden memorandum, 'Optional Clause – British Reservations', 11 Nov. 1929, Henderson memorandum [CID 970B]), 'The Optional Clause', 19 Nov. 1929, both CAB 4/19.

<sup>53</sup> The rest of this paragraph is based on FO–Admiralty memorandum, 'Historical Survey of the Negotiations Since the War for the Limitation of Naval Armament', Jun. 1930, CAB 4/19; Hall, *Arms Control*, 81–83; O'Connor, *Equilibrium*, 57.

<sup>54</sup> 'Memorandum Communicated by the French Ambassador on December 20, 1929', *DBFP II*, I, 173–7. Cf. Craigie memorandum, 18 Dec. 1929, *ibid.*, 167–70; MacDonald diary, 20 Dec. 1929, MacDonald PRO 30/69/1753.

demands that MacDonald and Hoover wanted to avoid. The most important involved using Article 8 – the disarmament article – of the Versailles Treaty as the basis of French naval proposals; this would tie naval limitation to air and land limitation, and ensure that security guarantees accompanied any arms agreement. This put Paris at odds with both London and Washington.<sup>55</sup> The British replied that this translated into pre-conference demands;<sup>56</sup> holding that ‘the measure of security’ demanded by France had already been achieved through the League, the Washington four-Power treaty, Locarno, the ‘Optional Clause’, and the Kellogg Pact, MacDonald’s government, with American support, refused to bargain before the conference opened.

Whilst the relative weakness of the Italian and French navies allowed MacDonald and Hoover to evade the concerns of Rome and Paris at this stage,<sup>57</sup> such luxury did not exist concerning Tokyo. Japanese overtures to the English-speaking Powers, like those which worried Stimson in late October, showed a determination to achieve a 5:3.5 ratio for IJN auxiliary vessels, mainly cruisers. Although MacDonald spoke for both governments by characterising this privately as an ‘impossible position regarding Japan’s intentions at [the] 5 Power Conference’,<sup>58</sup> Japan’s strong naval, military, and political position in East Asia meant that its wishes could not be ignored. In addition, domestic pressures on the Japanese Cabinet by militarist and nationalist opinion suggested that if a compromise proved impossible, any agreement reached at London might see Japan’s failure to ratify. Thanks to Stimson’s approach to Campbell in early November, London and Washington endeavoured to avoid any divergence when talking to the Japanese.<sup>59</sup> By early

<sup>55</sup> MacDonald diary, 29 Nov. 1929, *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Craigie minute, 23 Dec. 1929, enclosing Cadogan [FO Western Department] minute, 18 Dec. 1929, Craigie minute, 19 Dec. 1929, MacDonald minute, 1 Jan. 1930, all FO 371/14256/130/1; ‘Memorandum communicated to the French Ambassador’, 10 Jan. 1930, *DBFP II*, I, 195–8.

<sup>57</sup> Craigie to Atherton, 3 Dec. 1929, Graham telegram (150) to Henderson, 15 Dec. 1929, Tyrrell despatch (1748) to Henderson, 27 Dec. 1929, Henderson telegram (683) to Howard, 29 Dec. 1929, Howard telegram (619) to Henderson, 31 Dec. 1929, all *ibid.*, 157–9, 163–5, 179–83. Cf. ‘I instructed our delegation that we did not care whether the French limited their navy or not, and our major purpose of parity with Britain and the extension of the 5–3 ratio with Japan would be accomplished even if France and Italy stayed out of the agreement’: in Hoover to Shaw [a friend], 9 Feb. 1946, Hoover Misc. MSS.

<sup>58</sup> MacDonald diary, 29 Nov. 1929, MacDonald PRO 30/69/1753.

<sup>59</sup> Campbell telegram (553) to Henderson, 20 Nov. 1929, Henderson telegram (593) to Campbell, 22 Nov. 1929, both *DBFP II*, I, 144–6. Except where noted, this and next paragraph are based on Henderson telegrams (584, 604, 605, 606) to Campbell, 16, 26 Nov. 1929, Campbell telegrams (550, 559) to Henderson, 19, 23 Nov. 1929, Henderson despatch (1634) to Campbell, 25 Nov. 1929, Henderson telegram (204) to Tilley, 2 Dec. 1929, all *ibid.*, 140–1, 144–5, 146–7, 156–7.

December, British and American co-operation had reached new levels. Stimson was fully informed about discussions between MacDonald and Matsudaira Tsuneo, the Japanese ambassador at London, in which cruiser limitation loomed large. Matsudaira learnt that the British 'would accept fifteen 8-inch vessels against 18 for the United States and regard this as parity', the difference being made up by 'certain compensations in the matter of small vessels [light cruisers]'.<sup>60</sup> Though this proposal had not yet been accepted by Washington, it would, if sanctioned, translate into twelve heavy cruisers for Japan, a ratio of 5:3.3 each for the RN and USN *vis-à-vis* the IJN.

Like the French, the Japanese pressed for principles to guide limitation before outlining specific numbers. This entailed setting a precise ratio for heavy cruisers and getting a force of submarines 'necessary for [Japan's] naval purposes', followed by an adjustment regarding 'small cruisers and destroyers'. But as Hoover's Administration had not yet decided whether to accept eighteen heavy cruisers, Tokyo delayed offering precise numbers. This was the situation when the Japanese delegation to the London conference, led by Wakatsuki Reijirō, a former premier, arrived in Washington.<sup>61</sup> Stimson learnt that Japan would not tamper with the Washington treaty capital ship ratio, but that anything less than a 70 per cent ratio for auxiliary vessels would disturb 'Japan's sense of national security'. As neither London nor Washington was prepared to entertain pre-conference commitments – and as the Americans had not determined their heavy cruiser requirements – Stimson won Wakatsuki's approval that the conference 'find a way by which the national feeling of the Japanese people could be protected and their national sensibilities not in any way offended by anything like an attempt to impose upon them or put them in a position of inferiority to other nations'. Once in London, Wakatsuki discovered similar sentiments in talks with Craigie, who reported: 'I gained the impression that both the Japanese delegates [Wakatsuki and Admiral Takerabe Takeshi] are well disposed towards this country and will do their utmost to secure an agreement.'<sup>62</sup> On the eve of the London naval conference, the three major naval Powers understood the requirements of each other – unlike at Geneva in 1927; the problem would be to reconcile their differences over cruisers.

Just after returning from the United States, MacDonald announced a

<sup>60</sup> Henderson telegram (192) to Tilley, 16 Nov. 1929, *ibid.*; Atherton telegram (334) to Stimson, 20 Nov. 1929, HHPP 999.

<sup>61</sup> Campbell despatch (2386) to Henderson, enclosing State Department memorandum, 26 Dec. 1929, with Craigie, Vansittart, MacDonald minutes, all FO 371/14255/72/1.

<sup>62</sup> Craigie minute, 2 Jan. 1930, with MacDonald minute, FO 371/14256/241/1.

major change at the uppermost level of the Foreign Office that strengthened the immediate policy of settling the naval question: Vansittart would become permanent under-secretary. Done to provide continuing competence at the administrative and policy-making heart of British diplomacy, and assuredly to give MacDonald influence in Henderson's Foreign Office,<sup>63</sup> this action also proved decisive to the course of Anglo-American relations, in particular, and British foreign policy, in general, for the next seven years – Vansittart held this post till December 1937. Sir Ronald Lindsay, the permanent under-secretary since August 1928, had been at odds with Henderson and his parliamentary under-secretary, Hugh Dalton, since Labour took office in June.<sup>64</sup> Lindsay's abilities were unquestioned; but, selected by Chamberlain in reward for two brilliant years as ambassador at Berlin, he embodied what many Labour Party supporters disliked about professional diplomats: patrician, wealthy, and possessing a sense of duty to the state that drawing-room socialists like Dalton confused with 'prejudices' towards them.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, on two matters – the 'Optional Clause' and Egyptian policy<sup>66</sup> – Lindsay had gone over Henderson to MacDonald. Using Howard's long-planned retirement, scheduled for February 1930, as an excuse to send Lindsay as his replacement, MacDonald chose Vansittart as the Civil Service head of the Foreign Office. Although some criticism of this appointment emerged from those passed over, the overwhelming opinion of both the Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service, as well as the king, an array of politicians, including Baldwin, and even Dalton, applauded this promotion.<sup>67</sup>

Just forty-eight when he began his new duties on 7 January 1930, Vansittart had been at or near the highest levels of the elite for a decade: Curzon's private secretary from 1920 to 1924; four years as head of the Foreign Office American Department; and, since February 1928, in the prime minister's office advising on foreign affairs. He had joined the Diplomatic Service in 1903 and, by 1911, had entered the Foreign Office where he remained for the rest of his career. In this process, he

<sup>63</sup> N. Rose, *Vansittart. Study of a Diplomat* (1978), 66–70. Cf. Vansittart to MacDonald, 24 Dec. 1929, MacDonald PRO 30/69/672/3.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Lindsay to Dalton, 16 Aug. 1929, Dalton minute, 'Parliamentary Questions', n.d., both Dalton II 1/1; Lindsay to Phipps [British minister, Vienna], 11 Nov. 1929, PHPP 2/20.

<sup>65</sup> Dalton diary, 8 Nov., 10 Dec. 1929, BLEPS; H. Dalton, *Memoirs*, I (1953), 219.

<sup>66</sup> Dalton diary, 29 Jun., 4 Nov. 1929, BLEPS.

<sup>67</sup> For criticism, see Carlton, *MacDonald Versus Henderson*, 23 n. 2; W. Selby, *Diplomatic Twilight* (1953), 4. Selby was Henderson's private secretary. On support, see Chamberlain to Vansittart, 13 Nov. 1929, Stamfordham to Vansittart, 2 Jan. 1929 [but 1930], both VNST II 1/2; R. I. Campbell to Vansittart, 21 Nov. 1929, VNST II 1/3; Baldwin to Vansittart, 30 Dec. 1929, VNST II 6/9; Dalton diary, 8 Nov. 1929, BLEPS.

imbibed heavily the 'Edwardian' foreign policy: the absolute importance of maintaining the balances of power in Europe and abroad in concert with other Powers; and, when possible, threatening or using force to support policy.<sup>68</sup> The war only strengthened the utility of these lessons in his mind; and his exposure to their practical application continued into the postwar period as 'Edwardians' dominated the Foreign Office: Curzon and Chamberlain in the foreign secretary's chair; and Sir Eyre Crowe (1920–25), Sir William Tyrrell (1925–28), and Lindsay in that of the permanent under-secretary.<sup>69</sup> Possessing the poise, wit, and charm of the professional diplomat, Vansittart was also atypically pugnacious and competitive, which is shown by his 1927 arguments about sending a gunboat to the Nicaraguan coast; and this was married to cold realism. After the Coolidge conference, he had observed:

A war with America would indeed be the most futile and damnable of all, but it is not 'unthinkable' . . . If it is childish – and it is – to suppose that two nations must forever be enemies, it is also childish to stake one's whole existence on the gamble that two must be forever friends (especially when they never have been really.)<sup>70</sup>

Such attitudes permeated Vansittart's advice during his tenure as permanent under-secretary, placing him firmly amongst those British diplomatists who endorsed Palmerston's sage comment about Britain 'having no eternal friends or enemies, only eternal interests'. He provided British diplomacy for most of the 1930s with the indispensable element of *realpolitik*.

During the first six months of the second Labour government, more than anyone else, he served as MacDonald's chief adviser concerning the United States. Apart from his efforts during the summer negotiations, he had made a secret visit to Washington in September to help prepare for the prime minister's visit<sup>71</sup> – this masked by business concerning the estate of his late American wife. After MacDonald returned to London in early November, Vansittart continued to advise him daily.<sup>72</sup> It is significant that the last six years before Vansittart became permanent under-secretary saw him heavily involved in the American question, particularly in his central role in settling the

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Lord Vansittart, *Lessons of My Life* (1943), esp. 3–36; Lord Vansittart, *The Mist Procession. The Autobiography of Lord Vansittart* (1958), 43–121. Also important is an unpublished chapter from Vansittart's autobiography, 'Somme Toute', which discusses the art of diplomacy, in VNST II 3/10.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Rose, *Vansittart*, 45–65; Collier [FO official] 'Impressions of Sir Eyre Crowe', n.d., Collier Misc. 466.

<sup>70</sup> Vansittart minute, 15 Sep. 1927, Chamberlain FO 800/261.

<sup>71</sup> Howard telegram (407) to Henderson, 4 Sep. 1929, *DBFP II*, I, 65.

<sup>72</sup> MacDonald diary, 4, 5 Nov. 1929, MacDonald PRO 30/69/1753.

blockade claims controversy of 1925–27 and in the year's diplomacy after Coolidge's 1928 Armistice Day speech. This meant that he possessed a knowledge of the issues that provided continuity and consistency to policy. It also meant that he could advance the careers of officials who shared his views, chiefly Craigie, his friend and close colleague since 1925.<sup>73</sup> It was no coincidence that by December 1929, Craigie had emerged as the Foreign Office naval expert who, despite carping from Hankey and others about his 'wrecking the British Empire',<sup>74</sup> accentuated the political dimension of a naval settlement. Equally important problems had to be addressed by the British – reparations, French demands for security and their impact on the Preparatory Commission, and the East Asian balance; thus, like his political master, Vansittart saw the necessity of burying Anglo-American differences to deal better with these threats to Britain's 'eternal interests'.

MacDonald and Hoover kept naval officers in secondary roles in their delegations to the conference.<sup>75</sup> MacDonald led the British delegates and, although Henderson, Alexander, and the Indian secretary, William Wedgewood-Benn, were nominal members, he relied almost solely on Vansittart, Craigie, and two Foreign Office officials, Alexander Cadogan, the League expert, and Herbert Malkin, the chief legal adviser. Admiral Sir Charles Madden, the first sea lord, Fisher, and Captain Roger Bellairs, the Admiralty director of plans, were included to offer technical advice. Stimson headed the American delegation. The senior political delegates who accompanied him were Charles Adams, the navy secretary, and two senators, David Reed, a Republican, and Joseph Robinson, a Democrat; the latter two were selected to ensure bipartisan Senate support for the renewed treaty.<sup>76</sup> The American delegates who corresponded to Vansittart and his Foreign Office retinue were three ambassadors whom Hoover trusted: Dawes, Hugh Gibson, and Dwight Morrow, now the envoy to Mexico City. Assisted by a clutch of naval officers, Jones and Admiral William Veazie Pratt, the chief of naval operations, were to provide technical guidance.

On 5 December, MacDonald had asked that the American delegation reach London early for preliminary talks.<sup>77</sup> Accordingly, although conversations continued with the French, Italians, and Japanese to prevent

<sup>73</sup> McKercher, *Baldwin Government*, *passim*.

<sup>74</sup> Hankey diary, 15 Nov. 1929, HNKY 1/8.

<sup>75</sup> Hoover to Adams, 2 Nov. 1929, Stimson to Atherton, 5 Nov. 1929, Atherton telegram (309) to Stimson, 6 Nov. 1929, all HHPP 999.

<sup>76</sup> Borah declined to join the delegation; Borah to Hoover, 19 Oct. 1929, HHPP 998.

<sup>77</sup> Dawes telegram (362) to Stimson, 5 Dec. 1929, HHPP 999.

any whisper of Anglo-American collusion,<sup>78</sup> MacDonald and Stimson held a lengthy discussion on 17 January.<sup>79</sup> The two men colluded; and the significance of this meeting cannot be stressed too much. Here, the British and Americans ended the naval rivalry that had suffused their relations since the war; the eventual treaty, ready by April, only sealed the deal. Of course, whilst both sides entered the conference with their naval needs defined within the parity principle, both were looking for some advantages. But neither was going to press so hard as to damage Anglo-American accord. In the preceding week, MacDonald had enforced his vision of a political settlement on the Cabinet, chiefly by using the competing interests of the Treasury and the Admiralty to cancel one another.<sup>80</sup> He, thus, ensured that British proposals for reopening the battleship question and extending the building ratio to auxiliary craft would not antagonise Washington. On the American side, earlier informing MacDonald that the United States could accept reduced battleship numbers but not a scaling down in displacement and gun calibres,<sup>81</sup> Hoover and Stimson were moving towards accepting eighteen heavy cruisers for the USN. Whilst this process had yet to be completed before Stimson left Washington on 7 January – it meant side-stepping opposition on the USN General Board – the president understood that compromising over heavy cruisers would be necessary to reach an agreement with the British.<sup>82</sup>

MacDonald and Stimson ranged over a number of issues: conference procedure; Japan's demand for a better cruiser ratio; difficulties presented by France and Italy; and battleship limitation. Significantly cruisers and blockade remained unmentioned. Arguing that Congress would not ratify a treaty giving Japan a 10:7 cruiser ratio, Stimson

<sup>78</sup> Tyrrell to Henderson, 20 Dec. 1929, FO 371/14256/244/1; Craigie minute, 6 Jan. 1930, FO 371/14256/336/1; Stimson diary, 19 Jan. 1929, with two Stimson telegrams to State Department, 20 Jan. 1929, all Stimson 12; Cambon to Stimson, 19 Jan. 1929, Stimson R79.

<sup>79</sup> Except where noted the next two paragraphs are based on MacDonald diary, 17 Jan. 1930, MacDonald PRO 30/69/1753; Stimson diary, 17 Jan. 1930, with Stimson memorandum, 'Conference with the Prime Minister of Great Britain', 17 Jan. 1930, both Stimson 12.

<sup>80</sup> Grigg [Snowden's secretary] to Snowden, 13 Dec. 1929, enclosing, Alexander memorandum, 'First Lord's personal and *minimum* proposals', n.d., Upcott [Treasury] memorandum, 'Shipbuilding Programme', 23 Dec. 1929, Snowden minute to Grigg, n.d., all T 172/1693; CC 1(30), CAB 23/63; Madden memorandum, 15 Jan. 1929, [CP 1(30)], CAB 24/209 Parmoor to MacDonald, 9 Jan. 1930, MacDonald PRO 30/69/676; Snowden to MacDonald, 12 Jan. 1930, enclosing Treasury memorandum, 'Naval Conference', 10 Jan. 1930, T 172/1693.

<sup>81</sup> Stimson telegram (3) to US Embassy, London, 3 Jan. 1930, HHPP 987.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. USNGB memorandum, 7 Jan. 1930, GB 438-1; n.a., [but Hoover] memorandum [on instructions to the American delegation], n.d., HHPP 999.



contended that if the Japanese delegation withdrew because they did not get their way:

we might make a treaty without them and they know that in that case they ran a great danger of having two cruisers laid down to their one by both the United States and Great Britain and that if it was done under those circumstances those four cruisers would be more likely than not to be used against their one in case of trouble.

Whilst it was necessary to find a 'means of saving Japan's face', the desire to achieve Anglo-American agreement above all else emerged in the 17 January meeting. Stimson told MacDonald that 'he was to work with me'. MacDonald recorded afterwards:

We discussed the attitude of both Japan & France & resolved that neither was to place us in an impossible position with our people if complete co-operation between us could prevent it. 'If the worst comes', [Stimson] said, 'we can make an agreement ourselves two'.

The stage was now set for the London naval conference, which met from 21 January to 22 April.<sup>83</sup> Given all that had passed since the Coolidge conference, the cruiser question occupied a central position in the conference. The British and Americans had reconciled their competing visions of cruiser strength during the MacDonald-Hoover talks at Rapidan and Washington; the only unresolved issue concerned whether the Americans would accept eighteen heavy cruisers. As Tokyo's probing had suggested, and Wakatsuki's discussions in London and Washington confirmed, Anglo-American requirements could not be divorced from those of Japan.<sup>84</sup> Hoover and Stimson had been pressing for the lower figure since late December, but USN General Board deadlock on whether this would meet American strategic requirements prevented a decision before Stimson left for Britain. Accordingly, determining the final bargaining position fell to the delegation after it arrived in London and could survey the situation. Discussions conducted by Reed and Robinson showed that a hard line over twenty-one vessels would prevent a settlement.<sup>85</sup> The Americans would have to accept eighteen to avoid another deadlock. In a tense meeting of American delegates on 28 January, Jones

<sup>83</sup> Hall, *Arms Control*, 88–115; O'Connor, *Equilibrium*, 62–108; Roskill, *Naval Policy*, II, 37–70.

<sup>84</sup> Reports from Tilley and Castle, the latter the temporary US ambassador at Tokyo, reinforced this. Tilley despatch (540) to Henderson, 23 Dec. 1930, FO 371/14257/631; Tilley telegram (30) to FO, 30 Jan. 1930, FO 371/14258/856; Castle to Reed, 27 Jan. 1930, Reed to Castle, 20 Feb. 1930, both Castle 71; Castle telegrams (25, 31) to State Department, 10, 19 Feb. 1930, both HHPP 991.

<sup>85</sup> Stimson telegram to Cotton, 5 Feb. 1930, *FRUS* 1929, I, 18.

promoted the higher figure.<sup>86</sup> Pratt overruled him, arguing that the views of Stimson and the civilian representatives had priority – Pratt's appointment as chief of naval operations by Hoover on the eve of the conference suggests the president's determination to outflank the intransigents on the General Board. The decision to accept eighteen vessels was then incorporated in 'The Tentative Plan of the American Delegation', telegraphed to Washington on 4 February;<sup>87</sup> Hoover's approval came the next day. As the conference began its third week, the basis for an Anglo-American compromise had been achieved. All that now needed to be done was, first, to bring this in line with the parity principle as it touched light cruisers for the RN and USN and, then, find some way of blunting the Japanese demand for a 70 per cent ratio. These two goals became the focus of subsequent cruiser negotiations that lasted until 1 April.

Anglo-American agreement proved relatively straightforward. MacDonald and his experts held a series of discussions with Stimson and the Americans after 21 January.<sup>88</sup> By 7 February, after Hoover had approved the 'Tentative Plan', both delegations had circulated memoranda setting out their proposals for limiting all classes of warship.<sup>89</sup> They concurred on eighteen heavy cruisers for the USN and fifteen for the RN, although the American memorandum posited that 'Great Britain would have the option, by reducing the number of its small cruisers, to increase its large cruisers from 15 to 18 so as to give it a total tonnage of 327,000 tons, the exact amount of the tonnage which the United States now asks'. After this, Japan's requirements became the subject of negotiation. Conducted by Reed and Matsudaira, the search for an acceptable compromise took nearly two months.<sup>90</sup> The

<sup>86</sup> Jones daily journal, 28 Jan. 1930, plus Jones memoranda, 28 Jan., 5 Feb. 1930, all Jones 5.

<sup>87</sup> Stimson telegram (35) to State Department, 4 Feb. 1930, State Department telegram (55) to American delegation, 5 Feb. 1930, Stimson diary, 5 Feb. 1930, all Stimson 12. Cf. 'Comment by Rear Admiral Moffat [US naval expert]', 29 Jan. 1930, Gibson 109.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. MacDonald diary, 4–6 Feb. 1930, MacDonald PRO 30/69/1753; Jones memorandum, 30 Jan. 1930, Jones 5; Stimson diary, 26, 29 Jan., 3 Feb. 1930, 'Memorandum of conversation', 30 Jan. 1930, 'Memorandum of Conversation', 3 Feb. 1930, Stimson telegram (39) to Washington, 6 Feb. 1930, all Stimson 12. The British and Americans consulted the other delegations: see Stimson diary, 4 Feb. 1930, *ibid*.

<sup>89</sup> 'Statement by Henry L. Stimson ... February 6, 1930', 'Memorandum on the Position at the London Naval Conference, 1930, of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom', both in Foreign Office, *Documents of the London Naval Conference 1930* (1930), 513–14, 523–6. Cf. MacDonald diary, 7 Feb. 1929, MacDonald PRO 30/69/1753.

<sup>90</sup> Except where noted, this paragraph is based on minutes of meeting of British and American delegates, 11 Feb. 1930, MacDonald PRO 30/69/679; Henderson telegram (94) to Howard, 11 Feb. 1930, 'Notes of a meeting ... February 17, 1930', Henderson telegram (39) to Tilley, 15 Mar. 1930, 'Notes of a meeting ... April 2, 1930', plus

Americans won a hard-fought campaign to redefine heavy and light cruisers: the former would conform to the Washington treaty maxima, 10,000 tons with eight-inch weapons; but the latter were now determined by gun calibres. This derived from the Americans having some vessels exceeding 7,000 tons; hence, by arming them with six-inch guns, they need not be scrapped. By 31 December 1936, the termination date of the new treaty, the USN would be allowed eighteen eight-inch-gun ships, the RN fifteen, and the IJN twelve. But because of tonnage limitations in this class for the United States, Britain, and Japan – respectively, 180,000, 146,800, and 108,400 – the Japanese received a ratio of 66 per cent in numbers but only 60 per cent in total displacement. Japanese compensation was to come from Britain and the United States conceding a ratio of 70 per cent in six-inch cruisers, 70 per cent in destroyers, and 100 per cent in submarines;<sup>91</sup> and to sweeten the deal further, the Americans would slow down their construction to produce just fifteen heavy cruisers by 1936.

For their part, the British wrested 50,000 tons more of six-inch-gun ships than the Americans to compensate for the USN having three more eight-inch vessels. And MacDonald and his advisers were able to get an ‘escalator’ clause included in the treaty: if any of the three Powers felt that ‘the requirements of [its] national security’ were endangered by the unanticipated construction of any non-signatory, they could, after notification, increase tonnages in any category limited by the treaty.<sup>92</sup> Although Britain might have surrendered the two-Power standard *vis-à-vis* the United States and Japan, it had not done so respecting its potential European rivals, France and Italy. Moreover, as the CID no longer considered war plans against the United States,<sup>93</sup> the London conference ratios gave Britain a two-Power standard against Japan and either France or Italy. Along with the ‘escalator’ clause, this would allow the RN the strength to protect British sea-lanes running out to the Empire and adjacent to the home islands. Although opposition to the cruiser portion of the treaty surfaced in each country during the negotiations, particularly in the United States and Japan, it did not prevent the conclusion of a cruiser agreement.

Appendix I, all *DBFP II*, I, 209, 227–33, 249–51, 282–7; Gibson ‘Notes on the Cruiser Problem’, 3 Feb. 1930, Gibson 109; Stimson telegrams (156, 161, 195) to Cotton, 23, 25 Mar., 2 Apr. 1930, all HHPP 987. Cf. Hall, *Arms Control*, 92–7; O’Connor, *Equilibrium*, 76–83; Roskill, *Naval Policy*, II, 63–4.

<sup>91</sup> Articles 15 and 16, ‘International Treaty for the Limitation and Reduction of Naval Armament’: Foreign Office, *Naval Conference*, 26–8.

<sup>92</sup> Article 21, *ibid.*, 30. Cf. Craigie to MacDonald, 12 Apr. 1930, CAB 21/343.

<sup>93</sup> Report on Defence Exercises, 22 Dec. 1927, CAB 53/15; ‘Defence Exercise 2’, CAB 53/18–19; COS memorandum, ‘Imperial Defence Policy: Annual Review’, 21 Jun. 1929, CAB 53/17.

Battleship limitation proved easier. A ten-year construction prohibition for vessels of this class – the ‘naval holiday’ – had been integral to the Washington treaty; it was to lapse in 1931. As battleships were the most expensive weapons of the time, expanded limitation would not only save the exchequers of the Powers considerable sums, but also aid the ratification of the treaties in each legislature by appeals to retrenchment in arms spending. As late as MacDonald’s visit to the United States, Hoover had agreed that the USN might accept a scaling down of battleship displacement and gun calibres and, to compensate for the *Rodney* and *Nelson*, the right to build an equivalent 35,000-ton vessel. In this matter, the Japanese proved willing to follow any compromise worked out by the two English-speaking Powers for, as Stimson remarked to MacDonald on 17 January, ‘the chief hold which we had over Japan – to persuade her to make a satisfactory agreement – was her desire to be relieved from the financial pressure of battleship replacement’.<sup>94</sup> Agreement on battleship limitation, therefore, fell to the British and Americans. Pre-conference deliberations within the American government overturned the possibility of scaling down. In the best Mahanian tradition, the USN General Board argued convincingly that the ‘backbone of the fleet’ should not be diminished.<sup>95</sup> It also asserted that in keeping with the 1921 ratio, battleship numbers should be reduced to fifteen each for Britain and the United States and nine for Japan. (By 1930, Britain had twenty, the United States eighteen, and Japan ten, the latter two Powers having not built to their permitted maxima.) This would mean scrapping five RN warships, three USN ones, and one of the IJN’s; and, to counterbalance the RN’s two post-Washington battleships, the USN would be allowed two new 35,000-ton vessels, the IJN one. After this, the United States and Japan would scrap an equal number of older vessels to bring full battleship parity into force by 1936.

In general terms, these proposals emerged in the American plan announced on 6 February. They found a receptive audience within MacDonald’s ministry. During the pre-conference discussions within the British government, the Admiralty held firm to its demand for no reduction in numbers.<sup>96</sup> But with MacDonald pressing for a political settlement, and pacifists and economists dominating amongst ministers, the Cabinet countered: ‘The battleship is simply and solely a ship of war, and as political security is strengthened it must stand to disappear.’ Although still affirming the desire to scale down displacement and armament and extend age, the British memorandum of

<sup>94</sup> Stimson diary, 17 Jan. 1930, Stimson 12.

<sup>95</sup> O’Connor, *Equilibrium*, 71.

<sup>96</sup> This and the next sentence based on Madden memorandum, 15 Jan. 1930, and CC 1(30), in n. 80, above.

7 February also left room for reducing numbers. This produced discussions in February, March, and early April to find an acceptable limitation formula.<sup>97</sup> The desultory nature of this quest derived from battleship strength being tied to the cruiser question, as well as the problems posed by Franco-Italian differences. In addition, outside pressures were exerted on the British delegation by supporters of the iconoclastic naval thinker, Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, who saw small battleships as more effective in future exertions of British naval strength.<sup>98</sup> Nonetheless, once cruiser limitation had been arranged in early April, the conference turned to battleships. The five Powers all saw the financial benefits of extending the 'holiday' to 1936, although the French and Italians refused to tie this to any reductions in the numbers of battleships their navies should possess. But while the British were willing to accept fifty cruisers and avoid the scaling down of battleships, they were averse to American and Japanese construction of new 35,000-ton battleships. When MacDonald refused to compromise on this point at the fifth Plenary Session of the conference on 14 April, Stimson withdrew the American demand and the three major Powers, having decided to push on without France and Italy, agreed to establish their battleship strength in the 15:15:9 ratio.<sup>99</sup>

Although MacDonald and Stimson were prepared after their 17 January conversation to ignore the French if need be, serious efforts to bring France into the expanded Washington naval treaty occurred until mid-March. Where the Americans, through Reed, took the lead in negotiating with the Japanese, the British endeavoured to break the Franco-Italian impasse. In initial discussions, the senior French delegates – Briand, the foreign minister in the latest government, and André Tardieu, the premier – seemed flexible despite pre-conference demands centring on the disarmament provisions of Versailles, tying any London agreement to air and land limitation, and arranging security guarantees. Consequently, as the conference began, MacDonald and Stimson

<sup>97</sup> Alexander to MacDonald, 4 Feb. 1930, MacDonald to Madden 11 Feb. 1930, both MacDonald PRO 30/69/676; Stimson telegrams (156, 161, 195) to State Department, 23, 25 Mar., 2 Apr. 1930, all HHPP 987; Morrow memoranda, 8, 28 Mar. 1930, Stimson R79. Then cf. 'Notes of a meeting ... February 13, 1930', 'Notes of a meeting ... February 17, 1930', 'Notes of a meeting ... March 12, 1930', 'Notes of a meeting ... April 2, 1930', with Appendix I, all *DBFP II*, I, 211–18, 227–33, 242–8, 282–7.

<sup>98</sup> On Richmond's ideas, see B. D. Hunt, *Sailor-Scholar. Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, 1871–1946* (Waterloo, Ont., 1982), 189–207. Cf. Trevelyan [president, Board of Education, and Richmond's brother-in-law] to MacDonald, 27 Mar., 2 Apr. 1930, Alexander to MacDonald, n.d. [but 28 Mar. 1930], MacDonald to Trevelyan, 1 Apr. 1930, all MacDonald PRO 30/69/676; Alexander to Trevelyan, 1 Apr. 1930, AVAR 5/2.

<sup>99</sup> 'Sixth Report of First Committee', 12 Apr. 1930, 'Stenographic Notes of the Fifth Plenary Session of the Conference ... April 14th, 1930', Foreign Office, *Naval Conference*, 229–40, 505–7.

believed that a compromise could be arranged which would see the French accept approximate parity with the Italians in auxiliary craft based on the 1921 ratio.<sup>100</sup> For the first few weeks, progress seemed possible. But on 12 February, the French finally tabled specific figures: a total of nearly 725,000 tons, including provision for three new battle-ships, a force of ten Washington treaty heavy cruisers, and 100,000 tons of submarines.<sup>101</sup> MacDonald despaired: 'The French mentality is exactly what it was before the war. It allows no value for political security. It thinks in guns & bayonets.'<sup>102</sup> The next day, through Craigie, the British sought to soften French demands by suggesting that a consultative pact for the Mediterranean, akin to the four-Power Pacific treaty that had emerged at Washington in 1921, underpin French security.<sup>103</sup> Whilst MacDonald's government opposed a Mediterranean Locarno, which implied automatic sanctions against a violator of the status quo, it would be willing to do all possible 'within the limits imposed by public opinion [in Britain], to increase France's sense of security'. The collapse of Tardieu's government four days later delayed further negotiations.

When the French delegation returned in early March – again led by Tardieu and Briand – compromise had become impossible. The Italians had finally produced their proposals, which amounted to equality with the French; along with reports from Paris and Rome indicating that neither government would entertain concessions, MacDonald and Stimson concluded that any chances for compromise were slipping away.<sup>104</sup> Confirmation came on 16 March, when Tardieu met separately

<sup>100</sup> MacDonald diary, 22, 23, 27 Jan. 1930, MacDonald PRO 30/69/1753; Stimson diary, 21, 23 Jan. 1930, with Morrow memorandum [of a private meeting of senior British, American, and French delegates], 21 Jan. 1930, 'Memorandum of conversation at the Prime Minister's Office [between the British and Americans]', 30 Jan. 1930, both Stimson 12.

<sup>101</sup> 'Statement by the French Delegation', 'Statement by the French Delegation to the Press', both 12 Feb. 1930, Foreign Office, *Naval Conference*, 515–22. Cf. Tyrrell telegram (25) to FO, 10 Feb. 1930, FO 371/14258/1151/1.

<sup>102</sup> MacDonald diary, 14 Feb. 1930, MacDonald PRO 30/69/1753.

<sup>103</sup> This and the next sentence based on 'Note by Mr. Craigie of a Conversation with M. Massigli', 13 Feb. 1930, *DBFP II*, I, 209–11. Cf. Craigie to Hankey, 24 Feb. 1930, CAB 21/339.

<sup>104</sup> 'Memorandum Setting Forth the Position of the Italian Delegation at the London Naval Conference', 'Explanatory Note for the Press Issued by the Italian Delegation', both 19 Feb. 1930, Foreign Office, *Naval Conference*, 527–32. On the lack of compromise, Henderson to Graham, 20 Feb. 1930, Tyrrell to Henderson, 24 Feb., 4 Mar. 1930, all Henderson FO 800/281; Stimson to Nan, 22 Feb. 1930, Morrow memoranda, 24 Feb., 8 Mar. 1930, Reed to Borah, 5 Mar. 1930, Stimson to Hoover, 11 Mar. 1930, all Stimson R79. On MacDonald and Stimson's growing antipathy towards the French, see MacDonald diary, 23 Feb., 7, 11 Mar. 1930, MacDonald PRO 30/69/1753; Morrow memorandum, 27 Feb. 1930, 'Confidential Memorandum of a Conversation Between Prime Minister MacDonald and H. L. S[timson].', 5 Mar. 1930, Stimson diary, 12 Mar. 1930, all Stimson 13.

with MacDonald and Morrow.<sup>105</sup> The British and Americans now recognised that a three-Power treaty would be the goal of the conference. The result was the final settlement of the cruiser and battleship questions involving the British, Americans, and Japanese and confirmed at the fifth Plenary Session on 14 April. That MacDonald and Stimson were intent on removing Anglo-American naval differences regardless of the other Powers can be seen in mid-March when Stimson told Wakatsuki that he and MacDonald were willing to conclude 'a two power treaty' come what may.<sup>106</sup>

On 22 April, after feverish work to bring the disparate elements of the agreed formulae together in acceptable language, the British, their dominion representatives, the Americans, and the Japanese signed the London naval treaty.<sup>107</sup> It extended the 'holiday' for the revised battleship numbers to December 1936; it brought parity in cruisers between the RN and USN whereby the Americans received an extra 30,000 tons of eight-inch-gun ships, and the British 50,000 tons more of six-inch vessels; the Japanese received an improved ratio for auxiliary craft over that which they got in 1921 for capital ships; and the 'escalator' clause allowed each Power, but especially Britain and Japan, to increase tonnages in any category should construction by any non-signatory endanger perceived requirements of national security. The delegates adjourned by agreeing that further discussions would be undertaken by the British to bring the French and Italians into the treaty – although the treaty allowed the French and Italians to construct capital ships authorised at Washington in 1921 but not yet laid down. Like all negotiated settlements, the London naval treaty represented compromise. The British reduced their cruiser number to fifty, a cut of 30 per cent from the seventy demanded since 1927; the American heavy cruiser requirement dropped by one-third compared with that demanded when MacDonald took office; the Americans and Japanese accepted no new battleship construction until 1936; and the Japanese received an improved ratio for vessels under 10,000 tons.

But such compromises should not have been unexpected. Since the twilight months of the second Baldwin government, there had been a realisation on both sides of the Atlantic that Anglo-American naval rivalry should end. The problem was how to do this without repeating 1927. And as the British and Americans understood even before Labour

<sup>105</sup> MacDonald diary, 16 Mar. 1930, MacDonald PRO 30/69/1753; Stimson diary, 16 Mar. 1930, with Morrow 'Memorandum of a Conversation', 16 Mar. 1930, Stimson 13.

<sup>106</sup> Stimson diary, 12 Mar. 1930, Stimson 13.

<sup>107</sup> Hankey minutes to MacDonald, 11, 12 Apr. 1930, British Delegation 'Notes for the Chairman', 14 Apr. 1930, all CAB 21/343; 'Stenographic Notes of the Sixth Plenary Session ... April 22nd, 1930', Foreign Office, *Naval Conference*, 253–78.

took office, any naval settlement would have to be essentially a political one. At the London conference, this translated into accepting restrictions on the RN, USN, and IJN that might not meet the desires of naval officers like Madden and Jones, but which were exchanged for an agreement that obviated discord and reduced government arms spending. Indeed, Jones left London at the end of February because of ill-health; whilst infirmity might have been the reason for his departure, his inability within the American delegation to promote the hardest of hard lines seems equally crucial.<sup>108</sup> But even he could not prevent the ratification of the London treaty once back in the United States, in the same way that die-hards in Britain and Japan could not in their countries.

No one at that time disputed that the London naval treaty was imperfect, that it could be broken, or that it might not prevent the Powers from circumventing it by means fair or foul. There is much truth in Jones' comment that:

While the treaty runs it undoubtedly puts an end to competition, [but] the treaty has merely transferred competition to subjects not mentioned in the treaty, and chiefly to the skill of the naval inventor. For navies are, by their very nature, *competing instruments who have no excuse for existence if they are not able to win in battle competition*.<sup>109</sup>

In this, he shared the views of treaty opponents in Britain like Churchill, who told Baldwin in May 1930, 'the arsenals of all the signatory Powers will be clanging for the next five years with large additions to existing naval strength'.<sup>110</sup> However, Stimson epitomised the temper of the times when he remarked at the sixth Plenary Session: 'We believe that naval limitation is one of the most accurate measures of the world's belief in the possibility of the settlement of all international matters by pacific and rational means.'<sup>111</sup> Here the leaderships in London and Washington were at one, their views supported by domestic opinion, so that in Britain and the United States, as well as in Japan, the treaty was ratified despite powerful opposition.<sup>112</sup> These accomplishments derived largely from Anglo-American co-operation that, although buffeted by minor nuisances like American anxiety over Britain and the dominion governments having six votes in committee,<sup>113</sup> gained strength as the delibera-

<sup>108</sup> Jones to Andrew [USN rear-admiral], 17 Feb. 1930, Jones 2.

<sup>109</sup> Jones 'Comment on the Treaty of London', n.d. [but Summer 1930], Jones 5. Emphasis in original.

<sup>110</sup> Churchill to Baldwin, 17 May 1930, Baldwin 117.

<sup>111</sup> Foreign Office, *Naval Conference*, 265.

<sup>112</sup> Hall, *Arms Control*, 105–9; O'Connor, *Equilibrium*, 109–21. The United States ratified in July, Britain in August, and Japan in October.

<sup>113</sup> 'Memorandum of conversation at the Prime Minister's Office', 30 Jan. 1930, Stimson 12.



tions progressed. Of course, on some matters, pre-conference objectives had to be jettisoned. In the British case, submarine abolition proved untenable, though no one in London, except George V, seemed broken-hearted by this development. But it remains that Anglo-American naval rivalry dissipated in a warming transatlantic political atmosphere and, from the perspective of London and Washington, Japanese ambitions were contained. Whilst some impediments remained, like those tied to Franco-Italian rivalry, they were small beer and could be addressed later.

The London naval conference removed the emotive issue of naval rivalry that had buffeted Anglo-American relations since the Great War. The question is did Britain's concession of formal parity with the United States weaken London's ability to underpin its foreign policy with strength? The simple answer is no. And this is because the London naval treaty was a political document that sealed a political deal over naval weapons. For instance, whilst the British wanted seventy cruisers, the RN actually had just about fifty at the end of 1929; the USN seventeen; and the IJN thirty-four. The debate at London, and in the two-and-a-half years since the Coolidge conference, had been over theoretical limits to the British, American, and Japanese navies, not over limiting actual vessels.<sup>114</sup> Here, men like Jones in the United States, Churchill in Britain, and Japanese naval hardliners like Admiral Katō Kanji were

<sup>114</sup>	Britain	United States	Japan
<i>Capital ships</i>			
Battleships and battlecruisers	19 550,000 tons	17 502,000 tons	10 299,390 tons
Aircraft carriers	6 104,300 tons	2 (1) 24,400 tons	3 (1) 65,658 tons
<i>Cruisers</i>			
Heavy	17 165,930 tons	5 (9) 48,150 tons	4 (4) 40,000 tons
Light	32 (4) 137,725 tons	12 76,900 tons	33 190,572 tons
<i>Destroyers</i>	142 (14) 130,355 tons	215 240,537 tons	125 (8) 122,950 tons
<i>Submarines</i>	57 (7) 53,756 tons	102 (2) 82,796 tons	67 (5) 72,525 tons

The numbers in brackets are vessels building; the tonnages of vessels building are not included. From *Jane's Fighting Ships* (1930). Official American figures, differing slightly in total tonnage, ships building, and so on, show the same disparities amongst the three major navies; see tables of fleet strengths built, building, appropriated for or authorised, as of 31 December 1929, in HHPP 999. The 'Summary Table of Fleet Strengths, Built, December 31, 1929' in *ibid.*, shows British total cruiser strength at 54, American at 12, and Japanese at 29.

justified in their criticisms of the London naval treaty. And for Jones, it meant putting a brake on the expansion of the USN, which was already weaker in numbers than either the RN or IJN. But foreign policy, in general, and its variant, arms control, are the art of the possible. The political leaderships in London and Washington had come to understand this even before June 1929. For the British, as the Foreign Office and Esme Howard had been arguing since at least late 1927, a naval agreement would not see the surrender of RN naval pre-eminence. Rather, it would satisfy American *amour propre*, take the wind out of the sails of 'Big Navy' advocates in the United States, and enhance the possibility of Anglo-American co-operation in other international endeavours. On the American side, it would promote Anglo-American co-operation whilst avoiding massive expenditure on warships. Such expenditure would damage American public finances since, as Hoover discovered, it cost twice as much per ton for American shipyards to build warships as it did for British ones; additionally, as Hoover surmised that the British would never allow the United States to surpass them in naval strength, a political settlement had to be the order of the day.<sup>115</sup> Not surprisingly, Hoover prepared American policy on the assumption that the British will to keep the RN at maximum strength would bring little benefit to the United States if hardline policies like those advocated by Jones triumphed within his government.

Thus, in 1930, just as in 1921, the British surrendered the symbol not the substance of sea power to the United States, especially when Britain's massive lead in merchant shipping added to its preponderance in fighting ships.<sup>116</sup> Several senior British naval officers felt that the RN had emerged from the London conference relatively unscathed, given that neither the USN or the IJN was being built to its allowed maximum. Fisher, for one, argued that the American climb-down from twenty-five heavy cruisers to eighteen had been a signal achievement of the negotiations and, given the United States record of never constructing what it was allowed, he posited that 'there is quite a reasonable chance she will only build 15 – the same number as ourselves'.<sup>117</sup> Japan presented problems, but as Fisher told Jellicoe: 'Japan is prohibited from building any more [eight-inch-gun ships] than she now possesses before 1936, so that a halt has been called in the type of cruiser most

<sup>115</sup> 'We cannot get parity by naval building; the UK can build for  $\frac{1}{2}$  our cost and will continue to build as long as we do'; in unsigned memorandum [in Hoover's hand], n.d. [but Summer 1929], HHPP 998.

<sup>116</sup> See G. C. Kennedy, 'The 1930 London Naval Conference and Anglo-American Maritime Strength, 1927–1930', in McKercher, *Arms Limitation*, 149–71.

<sup>117</sup> The rest of this paragraph is based on Fisher memorandum for Jellicoe, n.d. [but April or May 1930], FHR 11.

dangerous to our sea communications and most ruinous for us to have built in the requisite number.' Representing that of other senior naval officers, Fisher's purpose now became simple: 'All possible pressure and argument should be brought to bear to make the Government lay down a Building Policy which will cover the period of the Treaty and put us in possession of every ton that the Treaty allows.'

In this, he was not unlike other members of the foreign-policy-making elite who had to utilise the diplomatic resources of the state to protect its external interests. Vansittart put this clearly in his first major assessment of the international situation after the conference.<sup>118</sup> Although the London treaty had ended Anglo-American naval rivalry, it did not eliminate other problems that might arise over the competing financial interests of the two Powers. Moreover, other potential threats to Britain remained. French and Italian refusal to sign the treaty might jeopardise British naval security in the Mediterranean. This needed addressing and, even as the ink on the treaty dried, Craigie began efforts in this direction. In addition, problems involving Germany and tied to reparations held the potential for trouble. Outside of Europe, the vehemence of domestic Japanese opposition to the settlement at London – delaying ratification until October 1930 – suggested some uncertainty in the Far East, despite the naval treaty and the four- and nine-Power pacts. But this was an issue that, like those relating to Europe, could now be given more time and energy because of improved Anglo-American relations.

In fact, the co-operative spirit in Anglo-American relations could help to resolve these problems in the interests of the two English-speaking Powers. Exchanging letters in May 1930, MacDonald and Hoover concurred in the desire to work together.<sup>119</sup> 'It has been such a pleasure to me to co-operate with you in this work,' wrote MacDonald. 'The mentalities of Europe will mean much negotiating and persuading on our part yet but we shall go on as best we can.' 'The world makes its progress in short steps,' Hoover responded, 'it is disheartening at times; but the main thing is to keep the light ahead. I do feel that we have laid foundations upon which we or others can build more greatly in times to come.' These sentiments were genuine, but they were now to be tested in Europe and the Far East by a series of financial and political crises spawned by the onset of a global depression that would shake not only the foundations of emerging Anglo-American co-operation, but those of the international order hammered out at Paris in 1919–20.

<sup>118</sup> Vansittart memorandum, 'An Aspect of International Relations in 1930' [CID 991-B], 1 May 1930, CAB 4/19.

<sup>119</sup> MacDonald to Hoover, 1 May 1930, Hoover to MacDonald, 14 May 1930, in Hoover to Stimson, 26 May 1930, Stimson R79.