1 Portents of conflict

Rivalry and power

The decade of international readjustment which reached a climax in 1907 was characterized by national ambitions and political processes which portended not only fundamental change but also discord and conflict on a global scale. The emerging diplomatic order which was manifestly intended to bring about an accommodation to the new conditions was so different from the prevailing diplomatic pattern that it came to be recognized as a diplomatic revolution. The driving force in the creation of the new strategic-political structure was the emergence as regional and then world powers of Germany and Japan and, in the longer view, the United States. The principal leadership, however, which led to the diplomatic restructuring was provided by Britain, then the only actual world power.

The British motive for undertaking this mission was of course the security of the empire. However, since one of the principal threats to imperial security was the recessive role Britain had been forced for decades to play in the perennial Anglo-Russian rivalry, some alleviation of this situation was considered of the greatest importance. This antagonism had for decades defied all attempts to find a mutually acceptable solution and therewith the means of establishing a stable frontier in western Asia to protect India.

But with the expansion of German and Japanese influence and power and the corresponding intensification of international rivalries, Russia was increasingly drawn into the broader world conflict and diverted accordingly from her strategic rivalry with Britain. This in turn brought about a measure of amelioration of the British strategic preoccupation with Russia. The essential consequence was that by August 1907 not only had Britain and Russia succeeded in concluding a relatively equitable agreement but France and Japan had become associated with it in what formed the Quadruple Entente. Anglo-Russian rivalry had been, with the help of an altered global milieu, suspended rather than terminated.

The new diplomatic era was ushered in both by the revision and

regrouping of existing patterns and practices and by the extension of the diplomatic network to less explored aspects of world relationships. The Mediterranean agreements, which had provided a link between Britain, Austria, Italy, and Spain and between these countries and the Triple Alliance as a means of preserving the status quo in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, were terminated in 1897 by British withdrawal.

This was also the year in which Germany began announcing her new economic and strategic expansion in the Middle and Far East and on the oceans of the world. This evidence of German ambitions and plans also evoked fears that should the Austro-Hungarian Empire disintegrate in case of the death of Emperor Franz Joseph, Germany might be able to annex part or all of it and form a greater German empire reaching across Europe from the Baltic to the Adriatic Sea. The latter region would give Germany possession of the Austrian naval base at Trieste and make it possible for Germany to become also a major Mediterranean sea power.

It was this fear which inspired the St. Petersburg visit in August 1899 of Théophile Delcassé, the French minister of foreign affairs. His objective was to change the basis of the Franco-Russian alliance from reliance on the duration of the Triple Alliance to the principle of the balance of power. The German plan to expand into the Middle East by means of the Bagdad railway, since it affected the vital interests of both Britain and Russia, was one of the factors which ultimately helped to moderate the antagonism between these rivals and to direct it against Germany.

The British and Russian Empires were, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the largest and most expansive existing domains touching both Atlantic and Pacific oceans but, in an age of increasingly rapid communications, the means of spanning these great distances was comparatively time consuming. The British Empire, while historically and fundamentally a maritime power, had nevertheless significant relationships with continental areas. Consequently, it experienced some significant disadvantages inherent for a sea power in the contemporary growth of land powers both in metropolitan and overseas regions.

Britain's maritime routes passed through or near some unavoidable narrows such as the Turkish straits and the Suez Canal *en route* to significant portions of the empire, passages which were becoming increasingly endangered by rival claims and demands. The imperial commitments also included continental frontiers in Canada, South Africa, and western Asia. The last of these had for decades been a mobile frontier where Britain had tried with only limited success to stem the tide of the Russian advance through Central Asia toward India and the Persian Gulf. This enduring Anglo-Russian rivalry became a diplomatic

tradition which other powers, and in particular, Germany, were able to take for granted when making strategic plans.

The Russian Empire, fundamentally a land power, had been, in considerable part because of her inadequate transportation, defeated in the Crimean war by Britain and France. Since then, however, Russia had tried to revitalize her antiquated governmental and social structure and in the process had considerably expanded the transportation network. Railways were projected toward the frontiers in Europe to meet the German challenge, in the south to meet the British challenge more effectively, and in the Far East to meet the Japanese challenge. Still, the demands of the Russo-Japanese war found the Pacific frontier ill-equipped with adequate means of transportation to support a war at such a distance from the European center of the empire. In fact, a continuous railway line wholly on Russian territory did not reach the Pacific until 1916.

The more recently developed empires, Germany and Japan, matured with the support of effective governments, strong political drives, forceful military components, and operable transportation systems. These two nations had emerged on the international scene comparatively late and were conscious of being latecomers in what was already a highly competitive world order. As a consequence they felt the need to use every opportunity to compete for "a place in the sun" before it was too late, i.e., before the best opportunities had been appropriated. Both these nations, however, enjoyed the advantage of sharing access to the Russian frontier in the west and the east. Consequently, this made it possible for them to impose upon Russia a coercive influence often by intended or fortuitous cooperative action. Furthermore, since Russia was also a major participant in the world balance of power this permitted Germany and Japan an opportunity to exercise a unique influence on the development of world affairs.

It became, in fact, the national policy of Germany to seek to alleviate the pressure on her own eastern frontier, thus leaving her free to deal with her other European neighbors, by encouraging Russia to pursue her interests in Asia without concern about her western frontier, the very borderland which in fact caused Russia the greatest apprehension. In a parallel action, Japan, in her own national or regional interests and without any necessary coordination with Germany, could take similar advantage of Russia's widespread multinational frontier and difficulty in defending it.

The German Empire, a product of a military supported unification plan, was located in the center of Europe and while it was strongly nationalist in political bent, it included Poles, Danes, and other nationalities and was, above all, traditionally a descendant of an earlier German

empire. It suffered from its founding days a consciousness and apprehension over "encirclement" and of competitiveness with its neighbors. Its already ample internal railway network at the time of the founding of the empire became a point of departure for the extension of a railway through Austria and the Balkans to Constantinople. From there it was projected as the Bagdad railway to the Persian Gulf. This was a route which, by a fortunate coincidence, would assure the minimum possibility of an encounter with the British navy. Even though this route gave unimpeded and relatively uncontested access to the most significant of the German imperial enterprises, Germany also laid the foundations for a navy which effectively challenged the British naval, colonial, and commercial establishments there and elsewhere.

The Japanese Empire was a nation with a unifying cultural and political identity. Unlike Germany, Japan had to approach its intended colonial objective, with which it also had cultural ties, by sea before it could initiate political and military proceedings and before it could begin the railway construction which was part of its imperial program. Its notable advantages were the proximity of the intended imperial territories compared with the remoteness of its rivals, leaving it relatively free to act independently. These were advantages in some ways comparable to the German overland route to her intended objective.

This situation proved very valuable to Japan when in the early years of the twentieth century the international storm broke over Russia's refusal to withdraw her military forces from Manchuria. Supported by the Anglo-Japanese alliance, Japan was able to command virtually uncontested access to Korea and Manchuria and to rely on the neutrality of her prospective challengers, permitting her to settle her score with Russia on her own terms. In this way, Japan, with this windfall of diplomatic cooperation by Germany and other powers, was able to reduce substantially the prestige and power of a principal rival, Russia, and to undermine Russia's ability to involve on her own behalf other competitors of Germany and Japan.

The interaction of forces such as these helped to bring about the diplomatic revolution of 1907 and with it a more competitive international order. To the existing Triple and Dual Alliances and the Anglo-Japanese alliance was added a group of agreements known as ententes, all formed as sequels to the Anglo-Japanese alliance during or after the Russo-Japanese war and known as the Triple Entente. However, the role and significance of Japan in the creation of the conditions which brought about these four accords, in joining with Britain to help form a new balance of power, and in playing a direct and major part in shaping the last three agreements, make it more reasonable that these should be known as

the Quadruple Entente. These agreements were the Anglo-French, Franco-Japanese, Russo-Japanese, and Anglo-Russian ententes. The Anglo-Russian entente came last, not because it was the least important but because Britain was in the vanguard of the movement to affiliate these nations and Russia needed British support in building cooperation with Germany and Japan.

It is significant that the agreements which composed the Quadruple Entente evolved in response to a perceived strategic necessity rather than to preconceived or preconcerted attitudes or objectives. In fact, all the signatories of these agreements had at one time or another been directly or indirectly associated diplomatically with the Triple Alliance or had seriously contemplated such an affiliation,

The fundamental objective of the first of these four, the Anglo-French entente, was to render difficult or improbable a combination of Germany and Russia against either of the two signatories. Although both France and Russia had continued for some years to consider the possibility of concluding also an understanding with Germany, the Franco-Russian alliance completed in 1894, became for both allies their accepted diplomatic mooring. In fact, however, an important element in Russia continued either because of personal or political preference or of a sense of security to favor a close tie with Germany.

Sergei Iul'evich Witte himself had favored such a choice but as circumstances changed he came to see a Russian association with the entente powers as a more practical solution to Russia's problem. That it was nevertheless wise to continue to maintain correct relations with Germany was demonstrated during the Anglo-Russian negotiations when Germany was kept informed of their progress.

Britain was not so fortunate as to have even this choice. Until the conclusion of the Anglo-French entente in 1904, with the exception of the indirect assistance given Britain's involvement with Russia by the Anglo-Japanese alliance, she had made no direct progress toward overcoming the impediment of the protracted Anglo-Russian rivalry in western Asia. The Anglo-Russian conflict, one of the most prolonged embroilments in modern diplomatic or colonial rivalry, had emerged as an ingredient in world affairs during the half century preceding the Crimean war. In the course of the succeeding four decades, as the Russian frontier moved southward, it was, however, markedly transformed, becoming greatly intensified not only in competitiveness but particularly in the antagonism it evoked.

This mutation was to a considerable degree brought about by the relatively rapid absorption by Russia of Central Asia, an aggressive defensive movement encompassing more than 450,000 square miles.

1. Nikolai Fedorovich Petrovsky, sent to Sinkiang as consul in 1882, became consul general in 1886

Russia became by this southern movement an immediate and troublesome neighbor of Persia, Afghanistan, and of Chinese Turkestan [Sinkiang]. These latter regions constituted a natural protective rampart for British India, the focal point and symbol of British power and prestige in Asia. Britain, with an empire based on seapower, had, accordingly, acquired another land frontier and beyond it a rival for this invaluable heritage whose strength consisted largely in land power.

Political and strategic pressures, aimed ultimately at British India, were exerted even before these Russian and British frontiers had become so nearly coterminous. With the extension of her domain to the mountain frontier, Russia had reached an apparently invulnerable bridgehead from which she could with maximum immunity threaten India. Behind this rampart she deployed military forces and constructed railways, developments which the British saw, in the perspective of the decades-long Russian advance, as evidence of aggressive intent. Accordingly, the achievement of a common frontier with the border states of Persia and Afghanistan opened another and for Britain a more challenging phase of the relentless and menacing aspect of the Russian forward movement, transforming it into a more direct and intensive Anglo-Russian encounter.

As the Anglo-Russian zones of antagonism grew closer the rivalry became more intense and the question of the security of the highly prized Indian dominion more insistent. At the same time, for Russia it raised the question of the security of what had become the southern part of her own realm. British fear was stimulated not only by the Russian advance toward India, but also by her own unpreparedness to meet a possible Russian military encroachment. Britain was also distressed by the possibility of another and perhaps more widespread and more effectively organized Indian mutiny. Such an uprising might be encouraged by the appearance, in fact or prospectively, on or near the frontier of an apparently victorious Russian military force, inviting an Indian uprising.

The Russians on their part saw the British raj in nearby India as more than just another threat on or near their southern border. It was not like the opposition they had already encountered from either the nomadic hordes or the unstable and often turbulent urban-centered states of Central Asia. These tribal and oasis people had been protected largely by their distances from more dynamic neighbors and by harsh geographical conditions on their frontiers. India, ruled by a European power of worldwide dominion and with unknown ambitions and military potential, could, it was at first feared, become a base of operations from which to threaten the Russian frontier, to block Russia's southern advance, and thus to create there a perpetual challenge.

While the principal focus of Anglo-Russian discord remained in the region north and northwest of the Indian frontier the emergence in the 1890s of Germany and Japan as significant forces in international affairs intensified the general rivalry and extended it westward into central Europe and eastward into the Far East. Russia, a continental nation with potentially vulnerable frontiers, sought security in the west by diplomatic affiliation and by a concentration of military forces. In the east she endeavored to strengthen her own frontiers against what she saw as a threat from Japan by trying to convert Korea and contiguous portions of China into a territorial barrier under her own control and by obstructing the Japanese efforts to establish a foothold on the Asian mainland.

The final three agreements, the principal subject of this study, constituted the fundamental settlement of the Russo-Japanese war and issues raised by it and were signed within a period of less than two months in 1907. A comparison of these three agreements with those inaugurated by Britain in 1903 but not concluded shows clearly how the international community had been altered in the intervening years. The Anglo-German negotiations of 1903, a revival of the British attempt to reach an understanding on some significant phase of the global rivalry of these powers, centered on the Bagdad railway question, had failed because there was not the will and the readiness, given the options then available, to accept an accommodation. The Bagdad railway issue must, therefore, be considered as one of the issues which interposed between the Triple Alliance and the entente nations.

This was also the opinion of Friedrich Rosen, a German Foreign Office official familiar with both Middle Eastern and current European affairs. It was he who was sent to Paris to make arrangements for the proposed Algeciras conference. Since Witte opposed Russian participation in the Bagdad railway scheme, it seems likely that this may have influenced his ultimate support of a pro-entente position.

The Anglo-Russian negotiations of 1903 were suspended at the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war. However, at the time of their interruption the significant questions concerning the division of Persia into spheres or zones, the control of the Seistan region, and the status quo in the Persian Gulf had not been settled. It is significant that these three issues were of vital importance to both parties and that in 1907 all three were settled to the advantage of Britain.

Finally, the Anglo-French negotiations of 1903 were in fact preliminary to the Anglo-French entente of 1904 and to increasingly closer cooperation between these two nations as the tension with Berlin and Tokyo, especially the former, became more acute. The anxiety associated with the termination of the war and the acrimony generated by the

Algeciras conference drew Britain and France closer together than the term entente implied and helped to bring about their cooperation in fashioning the final three agreements of 1907.

Britain's new course

The British government, by the turn of the twentieth century, faced not only prolonged rivalry with Russia but other challenges as well, most recently the consequences of the war in south Africa. These sobering circumstances soon brought the British government to a thorough reconsideration of its foreign policy, in particular to a renewed emphasis on the traditional principles of British foreign policy in the light of the current world situation.

One of the foremost of these fundamental principles and the one from which Britain had departed in the late 1880s in order to associate herself with the Triple Alliance through accords with Austria, Italy, and Spain, known as the Mediterranean agreements, was the balance of power.[1] The equilibrium both of Europe and of the broader geographical milieu in which the British Empire existed had been disturbed by the emergence of Germany as a competitor rather than an ally both in Europe and overseas. A return to the balance of power in which the British Empire could find security would have to correct this distortion by giving appropriate attention to future domestic, imperial, and foreign relations. A policy must be sought which would reduce the vulnerability of the nation and the empire to the present and, in view of the current adverse trends, to the future dangers and pressures.

Another of the basic principles by which it was expected that British foreign policy would be guided was the significance of naval power, a factor which was influenced by the current state of Franco-Russian naval power and, especially after 1901, the realization of the implications of the new German naval policies. Germany, in the late years of the nineteenth century, had projected three interrelated programs comprising: the expansion on a worldwide scale of her naval power, the reinvigoration of her role in the Middle East by the projection to the Persian Gulf of the Bagdad railway, and the inauguration of a new strategic-commercial undertaking in the Far East. The last of these plans was intended to grasp the opportunity provided by the intervention of France, Germany, and

[1] Godfrey Davies, "The pattern of British foreign policy: 1815–1914," in Robert L. Schuyler and Herman Ausubel, *The making of English history*, New York, 1952, pp. 604–605; G.H. Bolsover, "Aspects of Russian foreign policy, 1815–1914," in B. Pares and A.J.P. Taylor (eds.) *Essays presented to Sir Lewis Namier*, London, 1956, pp. 320–356; Lillian Penson, "The new course in British foreign policy, 1892–1902," *TRHS*, XXV (1943), 121–138.

Russia which had forced Japan to retrocede to China the areas she had won in the war of 1895.

All aspects of the new German goals would be likely to have a considerable impact on both the national and the imperial interests of Britain. The naval buildup, however, would have special significance for Britain. Whether one accepted as intended literally the most defiant aims expressed in Berlin or assumed that the German government was using forceful language because it was anticipating stubborn competition on the part of Britain, the scale of German naval plans was bound to be a significant challenge to the dominant position of the British navy on the seas of Europe and of the world.

Since the object of the fleet, Admiral Alfred Peter Friedrich von Tirpitz had written to the Emperor, was to neutralize British sea power its major strength must be in battleships rather than cruisers.[2] It is clear that the Anglo-Japanese alliance, concluded five years later with a growing naval power, was to have at least one very useful function. It was hoped in London that it would relieve the British navy of part of its naval obligations in Far Eastern waters and thus leave Britain free to give greater attention to the region "between Heligoland and the Thames."

A third principle which was intended to be a part of the new operational strategy was expressed in a document dealing with defense. "Our plans," the memorandum stated, "must aim at the defense of the Empire as a whole." The defense of only Great Britain and Ireland, entirely apart from the duty owed other areas, would be economically disastrous. "The maintenance of sea supremacy has been assumed as the basis of the system of Imperial defense against attack over the sea," and remains so.

Having stated that a purely defensive posture was insufficient, that railways had considerably reduced the value of sea power, and that Britain could not under present conditions effectively carry on offensive operations against both Russia and France, the writer showed that none of the available avenues of attack on Russia were really possible for Britain. He noted finally that besides the protection of the British homeland, there was India. "Here alone can a fatal blow be dealt us," he stated, undoubtedly unaware of how precisely this coincided with some Russian views expressed in the immediate post-Crimean war years, asserting that only in Central Asia could Britain strike an effective blow against Russia.

[2] Alfred Peter Friedrich von Tirpitz, *My memoirs*, 2 vols. London, 1919, I, 69–79; Paul Michael Kennedy, "German world policy and the Alliance negotiations with England, 1897–1900," *JMH*, XL, no. 4 (Dec. 1973), pp. 608–609; Jonathan Steinberg, *Yesterday's deterrent. Tirpitz and the birth of the German battle fleet*, London, 1965, pp. 125–148, 209; Jonathan Steinberg, "The Copenhagen complex," *JCH*, I, no. 3 (July 1966), 29; William L. Langer, *The diplomacy of imperialism, 1890–1902*, 2 vols. New York, 1935, 1951, II, 430–442.