5 The Samoa Conflict

Shortly after the problems over land titles and loans on Fiji had arisen, the German and British Empires fell out over control over Samoa, an island group much smaller than Fiji, and which in those days was about three days' steaming away. In Samoa missionaries had already done their work. Since the 1830s two Protestant missionary societies had been active on the islands: the London Missionary Society and the Methodist Wesleyan Missionary Society. In the mid-1840s, the French Roman Catholic Marist Brothers had joined the fray, but Protestantism remained the dominant religion among the Samoans. By 1850 almost all Samoans had become Christians (Göbel 2008: 193-4).

On these Navigators' Islands, as Samoa was also called, the Pacific adventure of the Godeffroy Company had taken off and the archipelago had remained the centre of its Pacific trade. Apia, on the Island of Upolu, Samoa's main port, a nucleus of trans-Pacific shipping, served as the firm's entrepôt harbour, where the cargo of smaller vessels sailing the Pacific was loaded into larger freighters bound for Europe and Australia. Initially, the foreign community in Samoa – some 150 persons strong in 1860 and about 400 in 1895 (Gilson 1970: 367, 403) – had been dominated by British and American citizens, but the presence of Godeffroy & Sohn had changed this (ibid.: 178). Citizens of other states still had their share in the commerce of the island group, but Germans and their mercantile interests had become predominant among the tiny but articulate foreign community. Second came the British and third the Americans, but for most of the time it was political and strategic considerations that involved the United States in the Samoan Question. In 1887 the American Secretary of State, Thomas F. Bayard, called the American interests in Samoa 'unimportant'.[1] By the end of the century, when international tension over Samoa climaxed, the British would outnumber the Americans 'ten to one' and British trade with Samoa was 'vastly greater' than that of the United States, an American government official wrote in 1899.[2] And yet it was the Americans, and not the British, who would become major players in the domestic and international complications that were to arise regarding Samoa.

The German success was due to the already mentioned Theodore Weber, local manager of Godeffroy & Sohn, and during his first years in Samoa also

1 Memorandum by W.A Cockerell 1-4-1887 (PRO FO 534 35).

2 Chambers in *The New York Times* 16-2-1899.

representative of the German government. His position nicely mirrored the change in political structure in Germany. Appointed consul of Hamburg in 1865, he became consul of the *Norddeutscher Bund* in 1868, and finally German Imperial consul in 1872. According to some of his contemporaries, Weber was one of the most remarkable personalities of his era. Stevenson (1892: 34), who lived in Samoa from 1890 until his death in 1894, describes him as being 'of an artful and commanding character; in the smallest thing or the greatest, without fear or scruple'. Unscrupulous was an image that stuck. In the American movie released in 1954, *His Majesty O'Keefe* (after the book published two years earlier by Laurence Klingman and Gerald Green), Weber figures among what a plot summary on Wikipedia describes as the 'evil German empire-builders' whom the hero (Burt Lancaster) encounters.[3]

Weber was also successful. As early as 1869 a French sea captain, Théophile Aube, observed that all the imposing buildings in Apia carried the flag of the *Norddeutscher Bund*, and that the local warehouses and estates were mostly Weber's (Brookes 1941: 291). Samoans were aware of this. One local song relates 'how all things, land and food and property, passed progressively, as by a law of nature, into the hands of *Misi Ueba,*' or Mr Weber (Stevenson 1892: 35).

Since the late 1860s, Weber, alert to the prospects of the cultivation of coconut palms and cotton, had started buying up land from Samoans, first modestly and then on a large scale. Before that time, Samoans had been reluctant to sell their land (and their labour) but a long drought had upset their economy (Gilson 1970: 256-8, 276). Due to Weber's actions, Godeffroy & Sohn would own vast tracts of land in Samoa, amassing claims of, in total, about 150,000 acres (ibid.: 340). Briefly, the Samoans' eagerness to sell land, also because internal warfare made them desperate for money to buy arms, made the American Central Polynesian Land and Commercial Company (CPLCC), which had begun to speculate in land in Samoa in the early 1870s, a major competitor. Within years it acquired titles of 300,000 acres of land. The company had started modestly but had expanded its activities when the sale of land reached, what Gilson (1970: 281) calls, a 'suicidal rate'. In particular, agents of the CPLCC tried to make use of this new situation to acquire land, but the crooked way in which they proceeded saw to it that, already by 1873, the company had run into serious problems, soon to go bankrupt (ibid.: 295-6). Weber and the other European settlers acted with more reserve than the CPLCC in acquiring land; though some of their deals also could not meet strict legal standards (ibid.: 282, 285). The matter was

3 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/His_Majesty_O'Keefe (accessed 30-12-2011).

still complicated by the fact that many Samoans who sold land in the early 1870s had no right to do so. Gilson (1970: 288) estimates that 'perhaps a few thousand … of some two hundred thousand acres' were sold in a correct way.

CPLCC's land purchases far outshone those of Weber, but to the Samoans they were less vexatious. The company was primarily engaged in land speculation and did not put the land to use; neither did New Zealanders and other British nationals who were also involved in such activities. Weber did. He turned the land he bought for his company into plantations, growing mainly coconut palms, and initially also cotton and coffee, actually evicting the Samoans from the land (ibid.: 377).

The dealings of these foreigners, among them some from Fiji, who had 'fled' the strict Gordon regime, their competition over land and over control of the administration of the island group and above all their intrigues, would, coupled with the civil wars among the Samoans themselves, for years put Samoa high on the agenda of the governments of Germany, Great Britain and the United States. For a couple of years the tiny island group would even be a focal point of international tension. In that period, 'Samoa played a part in world affairs quite out of proportion to its size and intrinsic importance', a historian put it in 1934 (Masterman 1934: 15). Contemporaries held a different view, awed as they were by the dreams of the islands' economic prospects. Perhaps, there are some who are of the opinion that 'the game is not worth a candle', it was written in a journal in the Netherlands East Indies in 1886, but one should not forget that the Samoa group is 'one of the richest and most fertile in the Pacific, and after the opening of the Panama canal is located in the centre of one of the biggest trade routes of the world' (Australië's 1886: 56). Germany, accenting its preponderance in the island group, wanted to have a major say in Samoan affairs; London, in order not to disturb relations with New Zealand and Australia, could hardly assent to such a course of action. The annexation by Great Britain of Fiji brought into force an element of security as well, the prospect of an uncontested enemy naval base near to a British possession.

Samoa's domestic politics was dominated by rival lineages who contested each other's right to rule, of which the chiefs wore the title of Malietoa (Chief or Great Warrior), Tupua Tamasese and Mata'afa. Weber had purchased part of the land owned by Godeffroy & Sohn from Tupua Tamasese Titimaea, but it was a disputed deal. In 1872 Malietoa Laupepa made it clear to Weber that only he, and not Tupua Tamasese Titimaea, had the authority to sell land to foreigners. Weber threatened Laupepa with the might of German guns. He succeeded in persuading the captain of the first German warship to call at Apia, the *Nymphe*, Louis von Blanc, to intervene on his behalf

and force the Malietoa to recognise the Titimaea land deals; but Blanc had second thoughts and shrank back from the military force Laupepa could muster (Nuhn 2002: 68-9). Over time the situation would only deteriorate. Samoa, in the words of Stevenson (1892: 8), would become a land 'full of war and rumours of war'.

An American takes control

Samoa in the 1870s was rife with internal, often violent, strife. The foreign community, their consuls leading the way, interfered, trying to protect – physically as well as legally – their landed property and expand it. The aim was to secure land with a clear title, at least with a title recognised by the local ally they supported, and in general an advancement of their own commercial interests and those of their compatriots. It was not only the British and Germans – and to a lesser extent the French – who acted in this way. During the administration of President Ulysses S. Grant, himself an 'expansionist', Americans had shown the way. In 1871 William H. Webb, a New York shipbuilder, dreamt of a shipping line between San Francisco and Australia served by 'magnificent side-wheel steamships' (Gilson 1970: 277). San Francisco was the port to be. The American transcontinental railway had just been completed and hopes were high. Such a rail link, Secretary of State Seward had prophesied, would make the city 'the Constantinople of the American Empire' (Immerman 2010: 115). Webb insisted that the railway could offer a faster connection between Great Britain and New Zealand and East Australia than transporting passengers and goods all the way by ship. Using this argument, he sought financial support not only from his own government but also from those of Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and even Hawaii to realise his plans (Gilson 1970: 276).

In search of an intermediate harbour between San Francisco and Australia, Webb sent Captain E. Wakeman to Samoa. Wakeman's eye fell on the village of Pago Pago, on the island of Tutuila, which he called 'the most perfectly land-locked harbour that exists in the Pacific', and bought land there for Webb's company (Brookes 1941: 318). In his report, which was published to whet the appetite of investors and to elicit a favourable response in Washington, Wakeman described Samoa as one of 'the richest tropical territories in the world' (Gilson 1970: 278). Webb, in fact, had a double aim. He was also involved in the CPLCC and its scheme to buy up land, while the CPLCC, in turn, had incorporated Webb's plan for a coaling

station in Samoa, and envisaged a 'central Polynesian depôt' serving as a hub in the trade in the South Pacific (Masterman 1934: 114).

At Webb's request an American corvette, USS *Narragansett*, commanded by Commodore Richard W. Meade, was ordered to inspect Pago Pago the following year. Reflecting the suspicion of Weber's intentions, among Meade's brief was to conclude a treaty with the local ruler 'to frustrate foreign influence which is at present very active in this matter, seeking to secure the harbor' (Dulles 1938: 104; Gilson 1970: 279). On her way to Samoa, the *Narragansett* called in at Honolulu, where Meade met the American envoy in Hawaii, Henry Pierce. Pierce put it to him that bringing Samoa within the American sphere of influence was essential for 'the future domination of the U. States in the N. & S. Pacific Oceans' and that Washington would not object to a treaty with the local leaders to accomplish this (Brookes 1941: 321). In February 1872, Meade indeed obtained Pago Pago as a coaling station for the Americans. During his stay on Tutuila he also succeeded in getting a number of its chiefs cooperate in a new confederation, in return for an offer of protection. He presented them with a flag, 'a hastily-designed parody of the Stars and Stripes' (Gilson 1970: 279). Thus, having secured Pago Pago as a coaling station for the United States, Meade sailed home. A few weeks later the CPLCC, which clearly had a vested interest in American backing for maintaining law and order in view of the massive claims to land it had, succeeded in having a number of chiefs in Western Samoa sign a petition for annexation by the United States. In Washington these steps did not get a follow-up. Though the American navy had expressed its support for Webb's proposal and for the Pago Pago treaty, Congress refused to discuss it (Brookes 1941: 323). It made Meade's treaty, which had the support of President Grant, void, but for the Godeffroy Company the episode – and the prospect of an American annexation – was reason enough to ask Berlin to act (Staley 1935: 1-2). Sensitive as Australians and New Zealanders were about the prospect of others taking possession of islands in the South Pacific, there also was some uproar in Australasia. In New Zealand the treaty was presented as a sign of Washington's imperialist intentions and as a danger to New Zealand's security (Ward 1876: 203, Sewall 1900: 14).

After Congress had spoken out against any action in Samoa Washington did not completely discard its plans. The visit of the *Narragansett* was followed by the sending of a special commissioner, an 'intelligent special agent', as he was called, to Samoa to investigate the commercial prospects of the islands and the merits of Pago Pago as a coaling station and harbour (Stathis 1982: 88). In the instructions drawn up by Secretary of State Hamilton Fish it was called 'not unlikely that perhaps in the not distant future the interests

Figure 5 Albert B. Steinberger

Source: *Daily Graphic,* 4-8-1875 (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Albert_Barnes_Steinberger.jpg)

of the United States may require not only a naval station in the Samoan group, but a harbor where steam and other vessels may freely and securely frequent' (Dulles 1938: 105).

The special commissioner in question was Colonel Albert B. Steinberger, a personal friend of Webb and Grant. Briefly, Steinberger was to play a crucial role in Samoa's history. He was 'a man of medium height, and with nothing to distinguish him from any ordinary well-dressed gentleman to be met with in the street', an Australian journalist described him later, rather disappointed that a person who would dominate Samoan politics for some two years did not have a more commanding posture (*The Age* 3-7-1876).

When Steinberger was sent to the islands it was well known in the United States how shady the Samoa land deals were and apart from assessing Pago Pago, Steinberger was tasked by Fish to convince the Samoans not to sell any more land to foreigners, and to make clear that many of the sales concluded could not stand legal scrutiny (Brookes 1941: 324-5; Gilson 1970: 295). Steinberger arrived in Samoa on 7 August 1873. Just a few months earlier, in May, years of civil war, occasioned by a conflict between Laupepa and Talavou over the Malietoa title, had come to an end and he immediately took an active part in the discussions surrounding the drafting of a constitution, which was proclaimed on 21 August (Stathis 1982: 90). Two central political councils were established: one, the Ta'imua, made up of Samoa's

most important chiefs; and the other, the Faipule, consisting of representatives of the Samoan districts, for which a general election was to be held every five years. Steinberger stayed two months in Samoa, campaigning for an American annexation and, stressing the defects of the land deals of the CPLCC, by now already in trouble, holding out special tribunals to investigate the land deals. These were not to convene immediately, but only after a year, and they were not to alienate other landowners (Gilson 1970: 300-2). In October, he sailed back to the United States to report to his government. He took with him a request from Samoan chiefs to turn their island group into an American protectorate. However, the two main Samoan contestants for power of that moment, Malietoa Laupepa and Mata'afa Iosefo (also spelled Iosefa and Josefo) had not been involved in the drafting of the request; the first, as Stevenson (1892: 48, 157) notes, was 'educated for the ministry', the second was 'a devout Catholic'. Laupepa, a former student of the seminary that the London Missionary Society had set up in 1844, the Malua Theological College, could count on the support of its missionaries, though their sympathies fluctuated (Gilson 1970: 261-7).

At this stage, it seemed that most of the German, British and other foreign settlers and missionaries could live with an American takeover, longing as they were for peace and orderly government. Weber probably would have objected, but he was on leave. Great Britain, reluctant to provoke the United States, was prepared to let the Americans have Samoa. London took the position that Great Britain could hardly deny others, having done precisely the same elsewhere. Colonial Secretary Kimberley considered this no more than fair: 'Considering the number of points in the world we have annexed, we cannot object to other maritime Powers seeking to obtain some stations of their own' (Brookes 1941: 330). As could be expected, London's attitude was much to the dismay of the government of New Zealand. As elsewhere in the South Pacific, the home government had to take public opinion in its Australasian colonies into account, but in this case it was New Zealanders in particular, supported by the Australians, who urged the home government to assume control over Samoa; or were actually scheming to reach this aim. Samoa should become a British protectorate. If necessary, New Zealand made it known, it would take the lead in realising British rule, not only in Samoa but also in Fiji. However, history would show that it could not and would not do this (Brookes 1941: 328-32).

No further steps were taken in Washington. Fish had his doubts that he could count on enough support in Congress and also did not see how the American people could be convinced that an annexation of Samoa was in the interest of America's safety and prosperity (Brookes 1941: 337). The Pago

Pago coaling station also did not materialise for the time being. Webb's own ambitious plans had already come to nought a few months earlier, in March 1873, when he failed to get the financial support for the shipping line he had intended to establish (Gilson 1970: 295-6).

In August 1874 Grant wrote to Fish that Steinberger should once again be sent to Samoa with 'such powers as may be consistent with law and the best interest of the country' (Stathis 1982: 92). In April 1875 Steinberger returned to Samoa for a second visit, this time travelling aboard an American warship. He claimed that he represented the United States government, though again he was sent out only as a 'special agent of the United States' (Stathis 1982: 93). Steinberger may have had the tacit support of Grant and the more cautious Fish, but, as the latter was well aware, Congress would not agree to anything that resembled an American protectorate of Samoa. Hence Fish impressed upon Steinberger the need to limit his activities 'to observing and reporting upon Samoan affairs' (Stathis 1982: 93). Steinberger also had to convey to the Samoan leaders a message of thanks from President Grant, which, as Gilson (1970: 307) points out, was so 'flowery and imprecise' that everything could be read into it, including an American annexation. Steinberger himself had bigger plans – to be in command of Samoan politics. The gifts he brought along on his second trip were indicative of what he intended to accomplish. They included three American flags, guns and ammunition, and one hundred sailors' uniforms to kit out a militia to be drilled by another American, Major J.H. Latrobe (Dulles 1938: 106; Gilson 1970: 313).

Once back in Samoa, Steinberger, a charismatic person and skilful negotiator, set out to restructure Samoan politics and to transform Samoa into constitutional monarchy along Western lines. To accomplish this, he first reconciled the Malietoa and Tupua Tamasese lineages. Alternatively, the heads of the two would serve as king for four years. The first to assume royal status on 22 May 1875 was Laupepa. Four days earlier a new Constitution had been promulgated. Its preamble, a 'declaration of rights', spoke of 'man's inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' (Gilson 1970: 318). Steinberger himself was asked by Laupepa to become his Prime Minister. Duly, Steinberger informed Fish, asking him to have Congress allow him to hold such a position, and, having received no reply from Washington, he resigned as American commissioner (Stathis 1982: 95-6). Steinberger had wide support. Gilson (1970: 318), writing about a welcome ceremony three weeks after he had arrived, concluded that never 'had the political leadership or guidance of a European been so enthusiastically, so generally or so blindly accepted in Samoa as on this occasion'.

Peace was short-lived. Steinberger quickly alienated the settlers; opposed as they were to his suggestion to submit their land claims to arbitrage. A number of them, and rightfully so, also suspected Steinberger of special dealings with Godeffroy & Sohn, agreed upon during a visit he had paid to Hamburg ostensibly made to get the company's support for submitting its land claims to arbitrage (Stathis 1982: 93; Gilson 1970: 308).[4] In return for financial compensation – and a schooner, the *Peerless* – Steinberger promised the firm preferential treatment by the Samoan government. The titles of land Godeffroy & Sohn had bought would be authorised, while, among other prerogatives, Godeffroy & Sohn would get the first right to buy the products that Samoans had to pay as taxes and fines. Equally important was that Steinberger pledged to allow the recruitment of labourers of other island groups; a measure that put British planters, who had to take into account London's policy in this regard (and who knew what had happened in Fiji), in a disadvantaged position (Staley 1935: 4; Brookes 1941: 337; Gilson 1970: 309, 321).

Before the year was over, the American consul, S.S. Foster, a former agent of the CPLCC and intent on rescuing as much as he could from its operations, and his British colleague, S.F. Williams with the backup of Captain R.N. Stevens, captain of the H.M.S *Barracouta*, decided to act; in the process restoring the extraterritorial rights of the Europeans and Americans they had lost because of Steinberger. They were also motivated by the fact that Steinberger, honouring his agreement with Godeffroy, tended only to discuss policy with Weber, the German consul (Gilson 1970: 323-4). The plotters, *The New York Times* (7-5-1876) wrote, got the support of 'beachcombers, grog-shop keepers, and other lawless foreigners who had hitherto been under no restraint'. In fact, Steinberger had lost the support of many in the foreign community, including the missionaries (Gilson 1970: 328). By the end of December 1875 a number of settlers – Britons, Germans, Americans, and people of other nationalities – issued a statement and accused Steinberger of 'acting as an absolute dictator of these islands'. He was also said to have instigated the Islanders against the settlers and threatened a number of the latter with 'summary vengeance' once the *Barracouta* left (*New York Times* 15-6-1876).

To get rid of Steinberger, Laupepa was invited on board the *Barracouta* in February 1876. There, 'harangued, cajoled and intimidated' as he was by residents of the foreign community, who feared that the new government

4 Later Steinberger would claim that his understanding with the Godeffroy company had been abrogated a few days after his arrival in Samoa (Stathis 1982: 101-2).

would harm their business interests, he ordered the arrest and deportation of his Prime Minister, Steinberger (Gilson 1970: 330). In Steinberger's own version of the event, on board the *Barracouta*, Laupepa 'became intoxicated and was got to sign the paper deposing [him]' (*New York Times* 15-6-1876). Subsequently, Steinberger, who continued to claim that he was the American commissioner for Samoa, was arrested by the American consul and, on Foster's order, deported to Levuka on Fiji on board the *Barracouta* in March. In Levula, after Gordon had castigated Stevens for his actions Steinberger was released. Washington and London were not pleased. The affair cost Foster, Williams and Stevens their position.

It also meant the end of Laupepa's kingship. Enraged by the deportation of Steinberger and the unhappy role Laupepa had played in it, the Ta'imua and Faipule dethroned him but did not appoint a new king. The prime ministership was also left vacant. In the civil war that followed between the Ta'imua and Faipule and Laupepa, who set up a government of his own, the former could count on American support and sympathy and also on that of the Roman Catholic missionaries. The Germans and Britons, including a number of missionaries from the London Missionary Society, tended to side with the deposed king. British support for Laupepa became evident as early as March when a small British force from the *Barracouta*, commanded by Stevens, set out to the town of Mulinu'u, near Apia, the seat of the Samoan government, in an effort to reinstate him. The expedition was ill-fated. The marines retreated after clashing with a newly established militia and other Samoans. Three marines were killed and eight seriously injured.

Weber goes on the offensive

With a divided foreign community, meddling consuls who did not shun gunboat diplomacy and actually spurred each other on, and an intense rivalry amongst the Samoan elite, alliances were far from balanced. These could easily change when settlers and Samoans thought that a re-alignment served their aims better. For the Germans in Samoa the civil strife, and especially the prospect that the islands might become an American or British protectorate, held several dangers. Weber and other Germans virtually monopolised the plantation sector, but the way in which they managed the estates and the manner in which they had acquired their lands also made them very unpopular among the foreign communities (Masterman 1934: 74). Internal unrest, besides forming a direct threat to German life and property, could herald a repetition of the problems German planters

and traders had experienced in Fiji. A foreign protectorate, which Samoans never offered to Germany, might imply an investigation into land titles held by Germans, or could force British rules concerning the recruitment and treatment of labour upon them.

Initially, the Germans in Samoa had only the economic power of Godeffroy & Sohn to guard their interests. At that time, they lacked the threat of warships calling at Samoa that the Americans and British on the islands could deploy. When, as of 1874, the German consul was also able to count on naval support, the Germans became an equal partner in the tripartite strife for control over the Samoan islands. Almost immediately, they demonstrated their new might by shelling a couple of villages into submission in an effort to enforce recognition of the land claims held by the Godeffroy Company (Gilson 1970: 308).

Weber, who, as a British official phrased it, was to acquire a position of 'unequalled influence' on the islands, was not averse to threats of violence.[5] In 1876 and 1877 he asked Berlin a number of times to dispatch a warship to lend additional force to his effort to have the Samoans sign treaties in which they agreed to pay compensation for the damage done to the property of his company and promised to stay clear of the land it owned. Twice the German corvette *Hertha*, commanded by Eduard von Knorr, paid a brief visit to Apia, but the Samoans resisted German pressure. Fearing that Germany intended to take control over the islands, the Ta'imua and Faipule turned to Gordon, who besides being Governor of Fiji had just been appointed as the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific, and offered Great Britain a protectorate over the islands in April 1877. They were encouraged to do so by American residents, obviously blind to Gordon's policy in Fiji, who had a stake in the CPLCC land titles and feared that the claims would become null and void might Germany annex Samoa and should Godeffroy's interests prevail (Gilson 1970: 347).

After the British had declined the offer – Gordon was only interested in the incorporation of Samoa into Fiji, not in a protectorate, also aiming at an annexation of Tonga, while the government feared a countermove by France in the New Hebrides (Masterman 1934: 167; Gilson 1970: 346; Thomas 2010: 269) – the Ta'imua and Faipule set their hopes on the new American consul, Gilderoy W. Griffin, a person not averse to such an option and who, within weeks of his appointment in October 1876, had already travelled back to the United States to plead in Washington in favour of American support.

5 Thurston to Stanhope 8-10-1886 (PRO FO 534 35).

By that time Weber had already accomplished what he wanted. In July 1877, in his capacity as German consul, he entered into treaties with the two factions in the Samoan civil war: Laupepa and the Ta'imua and Faipule. Weber secured a promise from both to regard the German settlements as neutral territory. German property, houses, estates and land were to be respected and any damage inflicted by their followers had to be compensated. They also vowed not to give other foreigners special prerogatives denied to Germans (Koschitzky 1887-88 II: 7-10). In persuading the Samoans to comply to the German demands, this time Weber could count on the backing of the German corvette *Augusta*, which had arrived in March 1877, and her captain Ludwig Hassenpflug (Nuhn 2002: 70-1).

Not much later – and Gordon's reaction to their request of accepting a British protectorate had added to this belief – the Samoans began to suspect that Great Britain also had the intention of incorporating their islands. To blame was the British consul. After the futile expedition to reinstate Laupepa as king a monetary penalty had been imposed to compensate for the slaying of the British marines of the *Barracouta*. When payment was not forthcoming in September 1877 the English consul demanded from the Ta'imua and Faipule that any land in Samoa that had not yet been sold to a third party should be bequeathed to the British crown to serve as a security for the fine. In an effort to thwart a possible British annexation of the islands, and facilitated by Griffin, a deputation set off for Washington to ask for protection by the United States.

In Europe, the German government was clearly annoyed by the approaches made by the Islanders to offer Great Britain and the United States a protectorate over the islands and the role their respective consuls had played in this. Berlin protested in London and Washington. In German eyes, the requests to become a protectorate had been brought about by intrigues of the American and British consular agents. Indeed, they were convinced that the British consular agents would have made Samoans believe that Germany was intent on occupying the islands (Koschitzky 1887-88 II: 8). Both London and Washington disavowed the steps of their consular representatives in Samoa. The American government contented itself with a Treaty of Friendship and Commerce concluded with the Samoan delegation, which had travelled to Washington with the help of Griffin. Signed in January 1878, the treaty, amongst other things, reiterated the right of the United States to build a naval station in Pago Pago and waved the levying of custom duties in Samoa to Americans. This time Congress ratified the treaty. The treaty made for a sudden but short-lived renewal of American interests in Pago Pago. The warship the *Adams*, on which the delegation

sailed home, called in at Pago Pago in July. The following year a second warship, the *Lackawanna*, was sent to Samoa. She had, in the words of President Rutherford B. Hayes to 'make surveys and take possession of the privileges ceded to the United States'.[6] The land on which the naval station was to be built was purchased. In order to save time and trouble the American government decided to pay all the Samoans who contested ownership title of the plots (*New York Herald* 5-1-1892). The first real arrangements would only be made in 1892, after rumours had begun to circulate that the British navy wanted to establish their own coaling station at Pago Pago.

Shortly after the Americans had concluded their treaty the British tried to do the same. In February 1878, a British warship with Gordon on board arrived in Samoa to conclude a treaty which, amongst other things, would have protected land purchased by British nationals in a 'normal and regular' way (Gilson 1970: 352). Heartened by Griffin, the Ta'imua and Faipule refused to comply. Gordon had to content himself with the seizure of a Ta'imua and Faipule ship, as payment of the penalty imposed after the ill-fated *Barracouta* expedition of March 1876. In response, Griffin, who with his consulate had moved to Mulinu'u, raised the American flag on the government flagpole in town. It was a dramatic gesture that could be interpreted as American support for the Ta'imua and Faipule. Some ten years later, Koschitzky (1887-88 II: 6-8) wrote that once again the Samoans had turned to the American consul and with his consent had raised the American flag.[7] Not much later Griffin would be transferred to Fiji. Washington could not agree with him championing the cause of a protectorate.

When the news of the American treaty reached Samoa, Weber accused the Ta'imua and Faipule government of having broken its promise to the Germans that it would not grant any other foreign nation special privileges. He informed Berlin and again asked for a warship to be sent to Samoa. The German government decided that the time had come to show that Germany was at least as apt in gunboat diplomacy as the other Western powers and ordered the *Ariadne* to Samoa. There, to make matters worse, a special envoy of the American government, Gustavus Goward, after his arrival in Samoa in July 1878 to see to the execution of the Treaty of Friendship and Commerce, had upset the German community by suggesting to the Samoans that the treaty they had concluded the previous year with Weber was void,

6 Hayes' Third Annual Message 1-12-1879 (presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29520).

7 In May 1877, when Griffin was in the United States, the American vice-consul J.G. Colmesnil, disquieted by the appearance of the German corvette *Augusta*, had made a similar gesture to warn off the Germans from seizing control over Samoa (Masterman 1934: 141).

and that they had every right to grant the United States special prerogatives. Still, in January 1879 the corvette *Ariadne*, with Weber on board, steamed to the small ports of Saluafata and Falealili on the east coast of Upolu, and 'with the customary ceremony in the presence of the gathered chiefs' occupied them in the name of the German Empire (Koschitzky 1887-88 II: 10). The reason to do so, it was explained in a statement, was the 'doubt as to the evil schemes and desires on the part of the chiefs of the Taimua and Faipule to transfer the whole of Samoa to some great Government'. Denying that Berlin had any intention of annexing the islands, it was stated that 'it is due to us that we should obtain some security for German rights' (Masterman 1934: 144).

After the Ta'imua and Faipule, bowing to the pressure of two German warships moored at Apia (and a third on its way), had once again acknowledged the stipulations of the 1877 treaty Saluafata and Falealili were returned to the Samoans in January of the following year. This new treaty of January 1879 implied some additional advantages. It gave Germany the right to establish a naval and coaling station in the port of Saluafata, which Germans boasted was the only place in the archipelago deserving the name of a harbour (Nuhn 2002: 73). Further, it acknowledged the titles and even 'peaceful possession' of land that German citizens had 'bought from Samoans in a regular manner and in accordance with the custom at the time'.[8] Also reflecting the dangers of having to live on islands where war was the rule rather than the exception, it was further agreed that the Germans in Samoa would 'be exempt from occupation of their houses, lands, and plantations by war parties'.[9] Satisfied by this, German soldiers in the two ports 'saluted the flag of the Ta'imua as the recognised government of the land' (Koschitzky 1887-88 II: 11). Weber, as the Melbourne newspaper *The Argus* (18-3-1879) described it, deploying the 'moral influence of two gun boats', also tried to get the deposed king Laupepa to sign a similar treaty in return for a promise to restore him to the throne, but failed.

The internal situation by now had deteriorated to such an extent that, in the words of Gordon, there was 'no Government whatever' in Samoa (Ward 1976: 268). Even Steinberger tried to intervene from a distance. He persuaded his friend General J.J. Bartlett to travel to Samoa, to take on the premiership. Bartlett arrived in August 1878, but the Ta'imua and Faipule were reluctant to comply, giving him the title of Teacher of Laws instead (Gilson 1970: 355-6). The Ta'imua and Faipule, discredited by their dealings

8 Treaty of Friendship between Germany and Samoa 24-1-1879, Art. 6 (Masterman 1934: 217).
9 Ibid., Art. 2 (Masterman 1934: 216).

with the United States and Germany, lost much of their popular support and had to give way to the Malietoa faction. In May 1879 Talavou, a Roman Catholic and, since 1860, contending with Laupepa for the Malietoa title, became the new king of Samoa, with Talavou's nephew Laupepa, as deputy king. The Ta'imua and Faipule were disbanded. Talavou, as a clerk of the British consulate would write maliciously about him some twenty years later, 'like all natives, loved the man who could keep him supplied with tinned salmon and sardines'.[10] For the Germans the new situation looked all the more promising as Talavou recognised the treaty Weber had concluded with the Ta'imua and Faipule. This happened after the German navy had come to his rescue in July 1879, when, on board a German schooner rented by Talavou, he had been taken prisoner by his old enemies trying to regain their lost position (Koschitzky 1887-88 II: 15).

Now Great Britain again rushed in to make a treaty. It was concluded in August 1879 by Gordon and also secured Great Britain a naval and coaling station in the island group (and the assurance that houses and lands of British settlers would not be occupied by war parties). The treaty between the Samoan government and Great Britain completed diplomatic manoeuvring, with Samoa now having a 'Treaty of friendship' with the three major powers present on the islands; all three containing phrases such as 'peace and perpetual friendship' and 'perpetual peace and friendship'.[11] Each was assigned the status of 'most favoured nation'. The treaties meant a victory for foreign economic interest. 'Full liberty for the free pursuit of commerce, trade and agriculture' was guaranteed, and land titles were recognised when they had been obtained in 'a customary and regular manner'.[12]

The new king, Talavou, became a party in the negotiations with the foreign consuls; negotiations in which Weber took the lead. It was a good moment for the three powers to join forces to end civil strife, 'this state of affairs so exceptional and so injurious to the interests of foreign commerce and industry', as their representatives called it in a joint statement (*The Argus* 4-11-1879). In September 1879 Great Britain, the United States and Germany finally decided to act in concert and jointly support the Malietoa faction. The three foreign consuls agreed to recognise Talavou as the rightful king and to lend him the necessary support in the struggle against

10 Johnston to acting British Consul 20-3-1900 (PRO FO 534 90).

11 Treaty of Friendship between Germany and Samoa 24-1-1879, Art. 1, Treaty of Friendship and Commerce between the United States and the Samoan Islands 17-1-1878, Art. 1 (Masterman 1934: 214, 216).

12 Treaty of Friendship between Great Britain and the King and Government (Malo) of Samoa 28-8-1879, Art. 3 (Masterman 1934: 218).

his remaining enemies. The task to enforce this was delegated to the new German consul, Naval Captain O. von Zembsch, who had been appointed in November, and to the commander of the German corvette *Bismarck*, Captain August Deinhard. It was also on board the *Bismarck* that peace was finally concluded in December 1879, confirming Talavou's status as the ruler of Samoa and that of Laupepa as his deputy. Mata'afa Iosefo was also given a place in the new constellation. He became chairman of a newly established council, without whose agreement no policy could be executed (Gilson 1970: 364). The Ta'imua and Faipule were reconstituted. In return, Talavou had to accept that much of the executive authority of his government was in foreign hands. Plans were worked out according to which the Minister of Justice would be an American, the German community was to provide the Minister of Finance, while the position of Minister of Public Works was to be filled by a Briton. All three were to be paid by the Samoan government but selected by their respective consul.

The system, worked out by the these consuls, was soon disbanded again as neither Washington nor London could assent to the deep involvement in Samoa's administration that their consuls had come up with (Koschitzky 1887-88 II: 17-8; Gilson 1970: 365-6). Nevertheless, a few months earlier, in September, the three foreign communities had gained control over the city of Apia, the major foreign settlement in Samoa. In times of civil war it had to be recognised as neutral territory (a vow that in practice would not amount to much). Apia and its hinterland became a foreign settlement under joint British, American and German administration. The three consuls were to form a municipal board, whose tasks included appointing a magistrate. As a token gesture, to show that the agreement would 'in no way prejudice the territorial integrity of Samoa', it was magnanimously promised that in Apia the Samoan flag would be 'hoisted at such place of meeting of the Municipal Board as may be permanently adopted'.[13]

13 Convention between Great Britain (Germany, the United States), and the King and Government of Samoa, for the government of the town and district of Apia, 2-9-1879, Art. 8 (Masterman 1934: 221).