

9 Samoa Remains a Source of International Tension

With the proclamation of the protectorate over Kaiser-Wilhelms-Land and adjacent island groups, the German territorial expansion in the South Pacific had almost come to a halt. Only Germany's position in Samoa remained unsettled. There the relationship between the three main foreign competitors, Germany, Great Britain and the United States, continued to be an uneasy one. Economic rivalry, political strife and nationalist emotions, all played a role. About the German community Robert Louis Stevenson (1892: 34) noted, 'Patriotism flies in arms about a hen; and if you comment upon the colour of a Dutch umbrella, you have cast a stone against the German Emperor'. Elsewhere he spoke of 'national touchiness and the intemperate speech of German clerks', which saw to it that a 'scramble among dollar-hunters assumed the appearance of an inter-racial war' (ibid.: 37-8). The culprit was the DHPG, 'the true centre of trouble, the head of the boil on which Samoa languishes' (ibid.: 28).

Though Great Britain and Germany had agreed in Berlin upon the neutrality of Samoa, the islands not falling within the sphere of influence of either country, Germany continued to strive for a dominant position in Samoa, which its statesmen considered was warranted because of Germany's preponderance on the islands. In Samoa itself, Weber, by now a man of political importance, continued to be haunted by a Fiji scenario and kept warning Berlin that should the British take possession of the islands, this would be the end of the DHPG, because he would no longer be able to recruit labour for its estates (Koschitzky 1887-88 II: 30).

The position of the Samoan king, recognised by the three powers, was precarious. To stay in power he had to be responsive to the demands of the foreign residents. Talavou had been in this position and after his death in 1880 so was his successor, Laupepa, whose authority had been confirmed in July 1881 aboard an American warship, the *Lackawanna*, and not on a German one. On the *Lackawanna* it had also been decided that Tamasese Titimaea and not Mata'afa Iosefo would be deputy king. It was the foreign consuls, senior naval officers of German, American and British warships visiting the islands and, of course, Weber who called the cards. The king owed his position more to their backing and scheming than to his own popular acclaim and had to deal with rebellions by fellow Samoans contesting his right to rule.

Germany presses on

Laupepa's position became all the more insecure after December 1883 when Weber, whose company by now had its own jail for Samoans who had committed offences against the German community, fittingly called 'Weber's prison' (Stevenson 1892: 44), acquired ownership of the land of Mulinu'u where the Samoan seat of government was located. Grand the place was not. Stevenson (1892: 21) described Mulinu'u as a flat, windswept cliff, 'planted with palms. Backed against a swamp of mangroves and occupied by a rather miserable village'.

Owning the Mulinu'u land gave Weber and the German consul in Samoa extra leverage: the opportunity to evict the Samoan government should the king or his officials and followers displease them. On 5 November 1884, in a desperate attempt to counter increasing German pressure, King Laupepa and the chiefs supporting him turned to Queen Victoria and offered her a protectorate over Samoa. The Governor of New Zealand, William Francis Drummond Jervois, was petitioned in the same manner.¹ To the Germans, such requests for protection could only be the result of British intrigue. With what had happened in Fiji in mind, they were sure that New Zealanders, scheming for an annexation, had convinced Laupepa that he would get back the land he had sold the Germans once Samoa had become a British protectorate (Koschitzky 1887-88 II: 39). Land was not the only issue. The German consul of those days, Otto Wilhelm Stübel, as Weber did, informed his government at home of the dangers that British labour legislation posed to the German estates on the islands. London refused to place Samoa under its protection, but such was the mood in New Zealand that Jervois informed London that New Zealand was prepared to finance the annexation not only of Samoa but also of Tonga, and that the colony was also willing to take on the administration of Fiji (Ward 1976: 304).

On 10 November 1884 Stübel, who had learned about Laupepa's annexation offer to Queen Victoria, backed up by the might of a German warship, the SMS *Albatross*, which had just arrived in Samoa, forced Laupepa and Titimaea to sign a new agreement. Reiterating the stipulations of 1879, it expanded the German intervention in internal affairs even further. The new pact called for the establishment of a Samoan police force manned by the Samoans to protect German estates and it held the king fully responsible for the damage inflicted upon German property and for attacks on German residents and people in German employ; thus also the armed guards used

1 Memorandum Hertslet 28-7-1900 (PRO FO 534 90).

to protect the plantations who were recruited from among their workforce. Furthermore, Laupepa had to accept German say over government affairs. A new legislative body was established, the German-Samoan Council of State, made up of the German consul or his representative and two Samoans, one selected by Laupepa, the other by Titimaea. The Council had to decide on all matters that, as stipulated in one of articles of the November agreement, were of 'joint interest to the Samoa government and the Germans living in Samoa'.² German land claims were recognised.

In January 1885 London told Berlin that the new German-Samoan agreement was a clear breach of Samoan independence. Laupepa had, as Thurston, now the British High Commissioner for the Western Pacific, would phrase it, granted Germany 'concessions of an exceptional nature which the other Powers could not regard with indifference'.³ Bismarck thought differently. The new agreement only aimed at the restoration of law and order in Samoa. As it had done before, Berlin accused the British of inciting the Samoan population against Germany. They did so, it was alleged, by spreading false rumours about German desires to annex Samoa; hence, the requests to Queen Victoria and the Governor of New Zealand.

When, as the German version goes, the Samoan government – on the instigation of the British – delayed the execution of the 1884 agreement with Germany, action was taken. On 23 January 1885 an *Albatross* landing party occupied Mulinu'u and hoisted the German war pennant. The act, Stübel was quick to assure in a special proclamation, did not imply an annexation. It was just intended to force the Samoan government to comply with the 1884 treaty. Stübel ended his proclamation with an appeal to the Samoans to remain calm: '[T]rust the Imperial German government and also me, then everything will turn to the best for Samoa' (Koschitzky 1887-88 II: 36). Laupepa, who wrote to Stübel that he intended to hoist his flag again in Mulinu'u, was told that he had better not. If he did, arrest by the marines of the *Albatross* would follow. A distressed Malietoa Laupepa now even turned to the German Emperor for help. He sent Wilhelm I a letter – a letter from 'a so-called King ... I believe his name is Malietoa or something like that', Bismarck was to refer to it in the Reichstag – begging the Emperor to forbid any further agitation in Samoa by Stübel and Weber (Koschitzky 1887-88 I: 283). Laupepa's plea was counterproductive, the more so because the letter

2 For the text of the agreement, see Koschitzky 1887-1888 II: 31.

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

held 'several passages and forms of address which were contrary to German feelings and etiquette'.⁴

Stübel and Weber now backed the deputy king, Titimaea, providing him with arms, and they did all they could to make the life of Laupepa as miserable as possible. Paramount was that German life and property was protected, also outside Apia. Laupepa was not the right man to accomplish this. He no longer exercised sufficient authority over his subjects and, worse, he had not honoured the treaty arrangements with Germany. The British argued the opposite. Titimaea was no match for Laupepa. The fact that Laupepa had not yet shown this was only because the British consul, wanting to avoid bloodshed, had persuaded him not to wage war on his rival.⁵

Yet in January 1885 Weber and Stübel encouraged Titimaea to rise in rebellion and set up his own government in Leulumoega in the province of Aana, his home base. At the end of the same month between three and four hundred German marines, for the second time, marched into Mulinu'u, where Laupepa had indeed hoisted the Samoa flag again. Once again they replaced it with the German war pennant. Stübel had gone too far. In Berlin Bismarck reminded the German navy in the middle of February that it was not in Samoa to establish a German protectorate (Nuhn 2002: 75). He also took care to assure London that he had never ordered the raising of the war banner and that Germany still recognised Laupepa's government until the powers had come to an understanding (Ward 1976: 306). Berlin's intervention did not help Laupepa much. In desperation, he turned to New Zealand for help and, because of London's opposition, pleaded in vain for annexation by Great Britain or New Zealand. He even lost his seat in government. On the pretext that for years they had not paid the rent of the land owned by the DHPG, he and his supporters were evicted from Mulinu'u. They withdrew to Apia where the flag they raised was lowered by Stübel and his sailors at the end of December.

When, in January 1886, Laupepa, having moved lower down the bay of Apia, flew his flag there, Stübel acted once more. Stübel, in the estimation of Thurston, a man who had shown 'great want of discretion, and an amount of temper incompatible with the dignity of his office', boarded the *Albatross*, sailed to the new seat of Laupepa's government and there hoisted the German war pennant. Using 'abusive language' he ordered the king to take down the Samoan flag.⁶ When Laupepa refused, Stübel called in the help

4 Memorandum Hertslet 28-7-1900 (PRO FO 543 90).

5 Memorandum Hervey 3-11-1886, Memorandum Krauel 3-11-1886 (PRO FO 534 35).

6 Memorandum Hertslet 28-7-1900 (PRO FO 534 90).

of an armed party from the *Albatross*. Under the protests of the American and British consuls, who by now had also arrived on the scene, Stübel ordered a sailor of the *Albatross* to climb into the tree where the flag had been hoisted and remove it. In London the German ambassador, Hatzfeldt, took up the incident, asking the British government to restrain its 'strong anti-German' consul, Wilfred Powell. Salisbury was not impressed, replying that 'the German Consul was quite as much in need of recommendation of a peaceful character from home'.⁷

German support for Titimaea, in what by now was a fully-fledged civil war, culminated in April when the German East Asia Squadron, four warships in total, called at Samoa and its commander, Knorr, now a rear admiral, left no doubt that in his view Titimaea was the rightful ruler. To add to the confusion, after the German squadron had sailed away the American consul raised the American flag and declared Samoa an American protectorate on 14 May 1886. As Berlin had done, Washington renounced the act of its consul, but in the United States among proponents of a more active American Pacific policy there was support for this 'timely and courageous action of an American representative at a distant post', as his successor as consul, Herald Marsh Sewall (1900: 11), would later phrase it. In view of such complications, Bismarck now thought it wise that, for the time being, no German warships would be directed to Samoa (Nuhn 2002: 76). The incidents were illustrative of, as it was called in a report by Friedrich Richard Krauel of the German Foreign Office on the visit to London in October 1886, 'the recurrence of past jealousies and recriminations between the foreign Consuls which rendered good government and its results, the security of life and property, and the maintenance of peace and order almost impossible in Samoa'.⁸

At that moment the powers were already working on a solution. In June 1886 Great Britain, Germany and the United States each sent a special Commissioner to the islands for an on-the-spot investigation into the causes of disorder. London assigned Thurston with the task, Berlin appointed G. Travers, the German Consul General in Sydney, and Washington sent George H. Bates. On the basis of their reports, the three powers were to meet in Washington, where Bayard played the card that as the United States had so few real economic interests in Samoa, it could act as a perfect mediator between Germany and Great Britain.⁹ Furthermore, in August London

7 Ibid.

8 Memorandum Hervey 3-11-1886 (PRO FO 534 35).

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

agreed to a suggestion from Berlin, made as early as March, to recall their quarrelling consuls in Samoa, Stübel and Powell.

The German position was clear. Emphasising the 'absolute preponderance of German interests', Berlin wanted such dominance to be reflected in the agreement reached. If the preference was for an international trusteeship, with Germany, Great Britain and the United States successively being entrusted with heading the administration, then it should be a German who took the first turn. Were Samoa to remain independent, then 'native affairs should be left to the natives', but a government composed of foreigners, in which Germany should have 'the absolute majority', should be established to look after their specific interests.¹⁰ For this, Berlin was even prepared to withdraw its support for Titimaea.

Still, as Herbert von Bismarck had phrased it, in their colonial honeymoon, though love was disappearing quickly, Germany and Great Britain tried to find a mutual understanding before the start of the Washington conference, also with respect to the complicated and sensitive issue of land titles. Yet there were obstacles. Thurston was sure that a majority of German representatives in a Samoan government, or even in Apia's municipal board, which was Berlin's aim, would only add to the discord between the foreign communities in the island group: 'The rivalry and ill-feeling, so long existing, would not be allayed, but highly aggravated'.¹¹ The final result could well be that Great Britain and the United States would make one front against Germany. The German government wanted to avoid such an outcome, discussing a possible solution with the British first, before submitting their plans to the Americans. London responded well to the German overture. It even drafted a proposal about the desired political structure of Samoa. Taking up the suggestion of the German ambassador in London about a foreign adviser to assist a newly elected king, the British suggested that a German should be the first to take up such a function.

At that time, Samoa losing its independence almost seemed to be a foregone conclusion. The only questions that remained were when and who would get what. On the German side there was a strong tendency in favour of replacing indigenous with foreign rule. Initially, Thurston even suspected the Germans in Samoa, in particular Weber, of deliberately trying to bring this about by creating a situation of perpetual disorder through their support of Titimaea.¹² In the end he came to the same conclusion as

10 Memorandum Krauel 3-11-1886, Hatzfeldt to Iddesleigh 10-11-1886 (PRO FO 534 35).

11 Confidential dispatch Thurston to Stanhope 8-1-1886 (PRO FO 534 35).

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

the Germans that indigenous rule was to the detriment of law and order. In his report to the British government he concluded that 'the Samoan natives are incapable of forming, independently, a stable and efficient administration'. The only satisfactory way, he suggested – and London was to agree – 'of preventing the peace of the islands from being disturbed by conflicting native claimants to the throne, and of securing the interests of the three civilised nations' was foreign supervision.¹³

The Tonga Islands

Yet another source of discord between Great Britain and Germany influencing negotiations loomed – the status of the Tonga island group, or the Friendly Islands as Captain James Cook had baptised them. In Tonga, Germany had acquired a coaling station at the Vava'u Islands in the north as a consequence of the treaty with King George Tupou I in 1876, and Anglo-German business competition intensified after the New Zealand firm McArthur & Co. had taken over the estates of Ruge, Hedemann and Co. in 1880 (Koschitzky 1887-88 II: 30). In December 1884 the status of Tonga had already been discussed in the margins of the Congo Conference. The British representative, Meade, had suggested that, as compensation for German concessions elsewhere, Great Britain could agree to a neutral status for Samoa and Tonga. Bismarck dismissed the proposal and told Meade that (as in the Bismarck Archipelago) German economic interests and settlements were predominant, which would make agreeing to their neutral status a German and not a British concession. In April 1886 the joint Anglo-German commission delineating the British and German sphere of influence in the South Pacific had agreed upon the neutral status of Samoa and Tonga, but this had not stopped Germany and Great Britain from quarrelling and worrying about the two island groups.

Already during a meeting with Travers in October 1886 Thurston alluded to his fears that Germany, after taking hold of Samoa, might turn its attention to Tonga. He left no doubt that Germany expanding its influence in these islands was even more unacceptable to the British. Tonga was within one day's sailing from Fiji, and might even be considered 'Eastern Fiji'. Travers was quick to react, asking how Great Britain would respond with regard to Samoa when Germany gave it a free hand in the Tonga Islands. Thurston did not take up the suggestion of Great Britain abandoning its

13 Memorandum Cockerell 1-4-1887 (PRO FO 534 35).

interests in Samoa in return for Germany doing the same in Tonga. Yet he did not fail to point out that, should law and order collapse in Tonga, which at that moment was not the case, Great Britain might well claim the islands 'on behalf of the Colonies generally, and of Fiji in particular'.¹⁴ Privately, the scheme appealed to him. Regarding Samoa 'in all but name ... a German dependency' and pointing out that the British position in Samoa was 'not sufficient to make it worth being on unfriendly terms in respect of them with a neighbouring Power having such intimate relations with us as Germany', he suggested accepting Travers' suggestion. In view of the 'unstable character of the Samoans' and the 'present disposition of Germans', any solution in which Samoa remained independent would only 'lead to new complications and further unprofitable entanglements'. It would be much better to try to reach 'amicable and favourable settlements to our convenience in other places' and, for instance, ask Germany to 'withdraw her political interests, acquisitions, and influences in Tonga'. To strengthen his argument, Thurston added that the British navy did not need a Samoan coaling station. Fiji served that purpose as well. It would be even better for the navy to establish an additional coaling station not in Samoa, which was relatively close to Fiji, but somewhere further to the east.¹⁵

The idea appealed to London and in January 1887 the British ambassador, Edward Malet, was instructed to suggest this possibility when Samoa came up in his conversation with representatives of the German government.¹⁶ A new diplomatic tug of war was born. The German and the British governments both began to emphasise how important Tonga was to their own Empire, each trying to demonstrate that their country's share in Tongan trade and commerce far exceeded that of the other. In his conversation with Thurston, Travers had mentioned that German trade in Tonga was 'slipping away', but when a few months later, Baron von Plessen, the German Chargé d'Affaires in London, visited Salisbury the opposite case was argued. Plessen told Salisbury that the Tonga Islands 'were most important to Germany and that German interests there in regard to shipping and the export trade were considerably larger than those of Great Britain'. Moreover, as law and order prevailed in Tonga there was no urgency to intervene in its internal affairs. Consequently, the island group could not be viewed in the same way as Samoa.¹⁷ Salisbury struck back though. Henry Francis Symonds, the former

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

15 Ibid.

16 Iddesleigh to Malet 12-1-1887 (PRO FO 534 35).

17 Salisbury to Malet 7-1-1887 (PRO FO 534 35).

British consul in Tonga who had just been transferred to Samoa, provided him with the ammunition. The German commercial interests, Symonds had reported, were falling rapidly below those of Great Britain. There were forty-two British merchants in the islands and only thirty-four German ones; against the sixty-three German nationals living in the islands stood 150 British subjects. Shipping tonnage confirmed the British preponderance. Also, to turn to the field of religion, Christianisation of the Tongans was largely due to the efforts of the British Wesleyan Church. Salisbury submitted the information to Count Paul von Hatzfeldt, the German ambassador, stressing that German control over Samoa would not go down well in Australia and New Zealand either. London required something in return to demonstrate that an agreement with Berlin about Samoa was 'reasonable and harmless to Colonial interests'. In short, Tonga – whose Prime Minister was already a British national, but this fact should not enter negotiations to avoid London overstating its case – should be brought within the British sphere of influence. The matter, Salisbury added, was all the more pressing since the king was old and civil disorder might follow if he died or become incapable of governing. Such complications had to be prevented on an island group located so close to British held Fiji.¹⁸

Germany could not agree, also not with the figures provided by Symonds. It was an error, Plessen told the British government in April, to suppose that German commercial interests in Tonga had fallen below those of Great Britain. The British figures gave a highly distorted picture. There were forty-two Germans in Tonga engaged in trade, of whom only three worked for a British firm. Of the British living in the islands, on the other hand, twenty-one were in German employ. Apart from that there were ten German firms represented in Tonga, the biggest one employing thirty-four people. The number of British firms was seven, while they had, at the most, fifteen employees. Symonds, Plessen pointed out, had moreover only been able to show a larger tonnage of British shipping by including 'two visits of a steamer on a pleasure trip'. No other conclusion could be drawn: German trade and shipping exceeded those of the British.¹⁹ But Great Britain was not yet defeated. Plessen had boasted of a German monthly shipping line that had been recently established and which called at Tonga; one of the lines Bismarck had championed. Its existence, he had said, 'made the superiority of the German flag still more considerable'.²⁰ His words gave Great Britain

18 Memorandum Salisbury to Hatzfeldt 16-3-1887 (PRO FO 534 35).

19 Memorandum Plessen 15-4-1887 (PRO FO 534 35).

20 Thurston to Colonial Office 13-9-1887 (PRO FO 534 35).

the opportunity to retaliate. 'The steamer', Thurston wrote, 'one of a large tonnage, carries little or no cargo, and but for the heavy State subvention the line receives, could not be maintained there'. There was, he argued, nothing amiss with mentioning the pleasure trips. They carried many passengers, and even some cargo, while the freight of the German liner 'does not, it is believed, pay her wages bill'.²¹

Civil war in Samoa

When London instructed Malet to investigate the Tonga solution, in Samoa Weber and the new German consul Eduard Becker put their full force behind Titimaea. On their instruction, Eugen Brandeis, a former Bavarian officer and now in the employ of the DHPG, became Prime Minister of Titimaea's government in January 1887. Among his tasks was the drilling of Samoan troops and the routing out of any resistance remaining against Titimaea. On the diplomatic front matters had not improved, with Germans viewing the British and Americans with much suspicion, and vice versa.

What followed put a strain on the relations between the United States and Germany in particular. In June and July 1887 the Washington Conference took place to discuss the future of Samoa. Bismarck entrusted the negotiations to his son, Herbert. Weber attended as member of the German delegation. The atmosphere was far from friendly. Herbert von Bismarck refused to shake hands with one of the American negotiators who had written an article in favour of the United States taking control of Samoa because the islands were the 'key of maritime dominion in the Pacific' (LaFeber 1998: 139). The conference came to nought. Great Britain did acknowledge Germany's economic preponderance and, consequently, was prepared to allow Germany to play a leading political role in the island group. London could do so not only because the British stakes were much smaller than those of Germany and the United States, but also because the British government considered the Samoa dispute irrelevant compared to the other international complications the country was involved in. As Salisbury was to write a few months later to Malet: 'Samoa matters very little to us' (Ward 1976: 308).

The United States, though equally convinced that the commercial value of Samoa was not that great and might remain small (Sewall 1900: 13), refused to follow the British, and demanded a joint three-power administration.

21 Ibid.

Washington, declining to annex Samoa itself, presented itself a champion of Samoa's independence and was determined that Samoa should not come under the control of another power (Dulles 1938: 111). It also did not want to part with Pago Pago. As its commissioner to Samoa, George Bates, suggested, now that the United States had acquired a foothold in Samoa 'it would be shortsighted indeed if we were to permit the advantage of this action to slip away from us by leaving the way open to European domination in this group' (Dulles 1938: 113). It was a foothold Bates valued very much, convinced as he was that after the construction of the Panama Canal the importance for inter-Pacific shipping of Samoa would outshine that of Hawaii. Pago Pago was destined to become 'the key of maritime dominion of the Pacific' (Dulles 1938: 126). Washington agreed. Increased Pacific passenger and freight trade made the islands too valuable to retreat. As Secretary of State Bayard explained during the conference, the transcontinental railway and the prospects offered by the Panama Canal gave Samoa a highly strategic position (LaFeber 1998: 55). Those Americans who were in favour of annexing Hawaii argued the opposite, stressing the advantages of Pearl Harbor over Pago Pago.

In August, just after the Washington Conference and at a moment when there were no American or British warships moored at Apia, the Germans in Samoa acted against Laupepa; apart from his impolite letter to the Kaiser, among his other sins was his refusal to offer his apologies – and pay damages – for the maltreatment of German nationals celebrating the Kaiser's birthday in May in a bar in Apia, and for the theft from German plantations during the previous four years. Using the insult to the Kaiser as an excuse, Bismarck decided that the time had come to act and ordered the German East Asia Squadron to Samoa. Care was taken that it would arrive when there were no British and American warships in Samoan waters, and also after the Australian mail boat had left Apia on 23 August. This would give the German warships a couple of weeks to act in which no news from Samoa could reach the outside world; or as Stevenson (1892: 68) wrote, 'when the eyes of the world were withdrawn, and Samoa plunged again for a period of weeks into her original island absurdity'. Backed by the presence of the *Bismarck* and four other German warships, Becker declared war on Laupepa on 24 August 1887. The German flag was raised over Government House in Apia and German troops raided Apia and searched houses in the hope of arresting Laupepa. With German backing, Titimaea was now formally declared king and moved from Leulumoega to Mulinu'u. German warships, flying his flag, sailed to different parts of Samoa, spreading the news of him being king. In one of the villages they sailed to the proclamation was torn

up: 'For this offence the village was ultimately burned by German sailors, in a very decent and orderly style' (Stevenson 1892: 73). In Washington Bayard dismissed Titimaea's government in a note to Berlin as a 'government of the islands by the local German commercial and landed interests' (Dulles 1938: 113). One of Brandeis' deeds was to do away with the special status of Apia and its municipal board in October 1887, bringing the city under the jurisdiction of the Samoan government, a decision ignored by its non-German residents (Gilson 1970 391-2).

Laupepa surrendered in September and was first deported to Cameroon, and subsequently, for reasons of health, to Jaluit. Weber tried to make use of the German moves to acquire a monopoly over the copra trade. Britons, Americans and other non-German nationals feared that their land titles were at stake (Staley 1935: 7). Samoans themselves did not take kindly to the new government and the repression to which the German navy resorted to enforce its acknowledgement. They were, as Gilson (1970: 393) wrote, 'whipped into a revolutionary fury' by the 'reign of terror'. Civil war once again erupted in September 1888 when Mata'afa Iosefo, who had declared himself king, turned against Titimaea. The German consul, confronted with a large popular rebellion, and finding the presence of one German warship insufficient, had to ask for and received the backing of two additional ones (Nuhn 2002: 82). Prospects for the Germans looked bleak. Titimaea could not stand his ground against Iosefo's soldiers, who Brandeis to his surprise discovered 'were well-trained and commanded', forcing his Samoan troops to retreat to Mulinu'u, where they had to seek the protection of German marines (Nuhn 2002: 83). The rebels were also well-armed, for which the commander of the only German warship present, Captain Ernst Fitze, blamed the British and the Americans. Fitze did not fail to inform the German Admiralty about his suspicion, adding that the Iosefo's rebel force were gaining the upper hand. In Berlin the reaction was one of 'rage and indignation' (Nuhn 2002: 82-3). Bismarck decided that stern action was in order.

The decision to end the rebellion by engaging German soldiers misfired. In December 1888, German troops suffered a humiliating defeat. A navy detachment of 140 men sent ashore at Fangalii to engage the followers of Iosefo was ambushed and suffered heavy losses. According to Stevenson (1892: 213), and later authors often copy this figure, fifty-six of them were killed or wounded; the actual number of dead was probably 16, while 30 Germans were seriously injured (Nuhn 2002: 85). Fritze asked Berlin for an additional thousand soldiers.

The German action was ruthless. They applied excessive force. As the American consul reported: 'Shelling and burning indiscriminately,

regardless of American property. Protests unheeded. Natives exasperated. Foreigners' lives and property in greatest danger. Germans respect no neutral territory' (Dulles 1938: 115). On top of this, the new German consul, Wilhelm Knappe, having taken up his post in November, informed the British consul that martial law apply to non-German nationals as well and that non-German ships could also be searched, as indeed they were. This was a mistake. Bismarck, telling Knappe that he had no authority over non-German settlers and that Germany did not want to put Samoa under German administration, ordered him to back down immediately. He blamed Knappe's behaviour on *morbus consularis*. Nevertheless, after consultation with the new Emperor, Wilhelm II, only about half a year in office, German Naval Command prepared for large operations in Samoa. Bismarck, also after discussing the matter with the Kaiser and fearing international complications, especially with the United States, did not want to hear of it, and disavowed Knappe and Brandeis (Nuhn 2002: 87-8; Gilson 1970: 396).

In Washington Congress earmarked extra money for the protection of American interests in Samoa and for the development of Pago Pago. President Cleveland furthermore decided to send two additional warships to Samoa, where one American warship was already stationed, as 'a gesture of protest against the amoral actions of the Germans' (Nuhn 2002: 88). Matters might have developed into a serious international conflict between the United States and Germany. Germans and Americans in the city 'were on the brink of war, viewed each other with looks of hatred, and scarce observed the letter of civility', Stevenson (1892: 247) noted. In the United States, public opinion was aroused. People demanded action. There was 'a growing popular demand for an aggressive foreign policy' (Dulles 1938: 120). The mood had definitely become anti-German: 'Germans in America publicly disavowed the country of their birth. In Honolulu, so near the scene of action, German and American young men fell to blows in the street' (Stevenson 1892: 247). American politicians were not immune to voicing such nationalist sentiments; though there were also those who questioned whether Samoa was worth all the trouble and all the money. They presented Europe as a threat to the American presence in the South Pacific and called for decisive action by the American government. Losing Pago Pago would be a disaster (Dulles 1938: 119-0).

In March 1889 disaster struck. At that moment three American, three German and one British warships were moored in Apia to protect the interests of their nationals and the Samoan faction they backed. All were 'ready for battle' (Nuhn 2002: 89). The American warships included the USS *Trenton*. On board was the commander of the American Pacific Station,

L.A. Kimberley. A confrontation was avoided because on the 16th a hurricane destroyed six of the warships. Only the British HMS *Calliope* was not shipwrecked. Ninety-three Germans and 117 American perished. To Stevenson (1892: 245), the loss of 'any modern war-ship with the power of steam' in Apia belonged 'not so much to nautical as to political history'. Their captains had ignored the warning signals of an impending hurricane and, entangled in the show of power in Samoa, had not left the bay.

The loss of the warships brought about a new round of talks. On the invitation of Bismarck the three powers involved in the Samoan conflict met in Berlin in April. Again Washington came out in favour of Samoa's independence. In the words of the American Secretary of State James G. Blaine the United States refused 'to subordinate the right of this amiable and dependent people to the exigencies of a grasping commerce, or to the political ambition of a territorial extension on the part of any one of the treaty powers' (Dulles 1938: 124). In June a compromise was reached. Samoa was to become a 'Condominium', a joint protectorate. In the Final Act of the Conference on the Affairs of Samoa (sometimes referred to as the Samoa Convention or the Berlin General Act of 1889) Germany, Great Britain and the United States agreed to respect 'the Independence and Neutrality of the Islands of Samoa'.²² The powers recognised Laupepa as king; also because Berlin was adamant against Iosefo holding that position. The Germans could not forgive him the defeat he had brought upon them. Because of the 'disordered condition of government' in Samoa Laupepa becoming king would not be subject to an election. That of his successor would. He would 'be duly elected according to the laws and customs of Samoa'.²³

Iosefo detested the selection of Laupepa by the powers and insisted on an election. That he was a popular leader became evident in October when the Samoans, disregarding the powers, proclaimed him king (with Laupepa as deputy king). The following month in November, Laupepa returned to Samoa on board the German gunboat *Wolf* after two years in exile. He was received with 'royal salute' (Nuhn 2002: 92). Among those to greet him was Stübel, now the German Consul General in Samoa (Knappe had, as other German officials before and after him, been recalled for incompetent, headstrong behaviour, and getting in the way of Berlin's diplomatic strategy). Laupepa, reluctant to take the throne, and even speaking out in favour of Iosefo, was crowned in December, with the foreign warships once more firing their salutes. Iosefo resigned as king, but soon turned against the

22 Final Act of the Conference on the Affairs of Samoa signed at Berlin June 14, 1889, Art. I.

23 Ibid, Art. I.

new government. In 1891 he was branded a rebel by the powers. Two years later, he was exiled to Jaluit for rebelling against Laupepa.

The three powers also forbade the import of fire arms and alcohol and, more importantly, agreed on the setting up of a Municipal Council of Apia and a Supreme Court. If they could not agree on the people to head these institutions, the king of Sweden and Norway would decide. The Head of the Supreme Court, the Chief Justice, who could be removed at the joint request of two of the three powers involved, would act as adviser to the Samoan government. The first to hold the position was a Swede, Otto Conrad Waldemar Cedercrantz. He assumed office in 1891. It was decided in Berlin that the President of the Municipal Council of Apia should 'be a man of mature years, and of good reputation for honour, justice and impartiality'.²⁴ If the powers were unable to agree on a candidate he should come from a neutral country (mentioned were Sweden, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Mexico and Brazil). The first President of the Municipal Council was a German, Arnold Freiherr Senfft von Pilsach. He was not selected from among the residents. Instead, following the position being the outcome of diplomatic bickering, the decision was made to give the post to a German civil servant appointed by Berlin. Accused of mismanagement Senfft von Pilsach had to resign in 1893. His successors were also Germans.

An agreement on the problem of land titles also was reached. There should be no new alienation of land to foreigners, who in future would only be allowed to lease land, not to buy it; and this only with the agreement of the king and the Chief Justice. Existing land titles were to be investigated by a commission made up of representatives of the three powers to be assisted by a 'Native Advocate', who had to enlighten the commission about local customary law. Final responsibility lay with the Chief Justice. Inspired by what had happened in Fiji, where the Land Commission had proceeded slowly, the Samoan commission had to finish its task in two years, later expanded to three and a half years (Gilson 1970: 407). Valid claims should be properly registered. All land obtained before 28 August 1879, the date of the Anglo-Samoan Treaty, moreover, had to be regarded as validly acquired, providing it had been purchased 'in good faith, for a valuable consideration, in a regular and customary manner'.²⁵ The land claims were settled by a fact finding commission and the Supreme Court. Among the criteria to decide whether they were valid was that the land had to be occupied and cultivated for ten years. This highly favoured those land titles Weber held

²⁴ Ibid, Art. V, Section 5.

²⁵ Ibid, Art. IV, Section 8.

for the DHPG, and was a blow to those who had been involved in land speculation. Hence, 56 per cent of the German titles were acknowledged, seven per cent of the American ones, and three per cent of the British ones (Gilson 1970: 411). Proof of payment was also necessary. Titles of land paid for by providing firearms and liquor were not recognised.²⁶ Claims to a total of 1.7 million acres were investigated; only the titles of 135,000 acres, or about one-fifth of Samoa's total acreage, were deemed legal (ibid.: 411, 415).

American opinion about acquiring territory had been and remained ambiguous and divided along party lines. Not everybody in the United States was happy with what had been agreed in Berlin. Some did not see why the country needed a naval station in faraway Pago Pago or did not understand why, as *The Nation* wrote, it should worry about 'a group of islands in the South Pacific Ocean more distant from our shores than Berlin itself' (Dulles 1938: 120). The most powerful opponent was President Cleveland, who assumed office in March 1885. While under his successor, Benjamin Harrison, London would be warned that it should keep away from Pago Pago, Cleveland suggested, in vain, to the American Congress that the United States should withdraw from Samoa. Pago Pago – though still not much of a coaling station – was too dear to the Americans (Dulles 1938: 128-9; LaFeber 1998: 140). Similar misgivings about staying in Samoa were expressed in London and Berlin, in the latter case inspired by the adverse effects of years of turmoil on the financial results of the DHPG (Nuhn 2002: 94).

26 www.samoarealty.ws/land_tenure/top_lt.htm (accessed 20-3-2009).