

11 Great Britain, France and Southeast Asia

To the north, in continental Southeast Asia, lay another area of conflict between the European powers, in this case between France and Great Britain. France had acquired its first foothold in Indochina, or Further India as the British preferred to call it, in 1859. This happened after France, in a joint expedition with Spain, had ordered a fleet to Annam to punish that kingdom for the persecution of Roman Catholics converted by French and Spanish missionaries. In February 1859 Saigon (present-day Ho Chi Min City), according to the British author Norman (1884: 158) the 'finest harbour' in Annam, was occupied, resulting in what one French author described as 'diatribes' in the British press (Garnier 1864: 40). In those years, the position of France in Cochin China or South Vietnam was still far from secure. During the Second Opium War (1856-60), troops were needed in China, leaving the French in Cochin China vulnerable and delaying the movement of the French inland. When, in 1860, Saigon was besieged the French were forced into a defensive position, having to leave the city to the enemy. Fortunes changed after the Opium War had ended. In the Treaty of Saigon of 5 June 1862 Annam (Central Vietnam) ceded Cochin China to France. The treaty also secured freedom of religion for French citizens (and for Spanish ones; the Queen of Spain was the third party in the treaty) and Vietnamese converts. Popular resistance in the newly acquired regions forced the French to get Annam to confirm the treaty in the Treaty of Hué of 14 April 1863.

Cambodia, to which both Bangkok and Saigon (following in the footsteps of Annam) laid claim, came next, making France the master of the Middle and Lower Mekong. When the naval officer Pierre-Paul de La Grandière, a man with colonial ambitions, had become Governor of Cochin China in May 1863 one of his first acts was to send Ernest-Marc-Louis Doudart de Lagrée to Cambodia. In August of that year, in what was called a Treaty of Friendship and Trade, Doudart de Lagrée succeeded in having King Norodom of Cambodia accept a French protectorate. Thailand responded immediately by concluding a similar treaty with Cambodia in December. Four years later Bangkok gave way. Thailand and France agreed on the frontier of Cambodia in the Franco-Siamese treaty of 1867. It was an agreement that the French were later to regret. Two important provinces, Angkor (Siemreap, Siem-Réap) and Battambang (Batdambang, Patabang, Battanbang), were assigned to Thailand and not to Cambodia.

France also looked north. In 1866 Doudart de Lagrée and another naval officer, Francis Garnier, surveyed the Upper Mekong River in search of a trade connection with Yunnan and the other southern provinces of China. They also had to investigate the commercial prospects for Cambodia and Cochin China of the regions they would traverse, especially northern Laos. The aim was not only to allow for the sale of French products and exploitation of their natural resources by French companies, but also to cut out Chinese traders, in whose hands lay trade in such valuable Chinese export products as tea and silk. For the occasion Doudart de Lagrée was promoted to the rank of *grand mandarin* by La Grandière, from whom the idea of the expedition had originated. Permission for the expedition was sought and granted in the capitals of the countries the expedition was to pass through: Bangkok, where the Thai permission spoke of Napoleon III as 'the Sovereign of a friendly nation', Hué (Annam), Mandalay (Ava or Upper Burma) and Beijing. In the old tradition of voyages of discovery members of the expedition were instructed to pay ample attention to the flora and fauna of the regions they were to enter and to the customs and history of the people who lived there (Garnier 1873: 15-21).

Doudart de Lagrée and Garnier found the Upper Mekong almost un-navigable for steamers and another entry into China had to be found. The most promising was the Tonkin or Red River, which linked Hanoi and the Gulf of Tonkin with Yunnan. Garnier (1873: 549) – Doudart de Lagrée had died during their Mekong expedition – had high hopes. As he wrote, 'the opening of commercial relations with the south of China through the Valley of Tonkin is one of the most important results French politics could seek to obtain in Indochina'. A second explorer, the adventurer Jean Dupuis, who in 1871 and 1872-73 sailed the river twice, agreed. He even predicted that within a couple of years trade along the Red River might amount to half of that along the Yangtze, the river which played such an important role in British China commerce (Sentupéry 1890: 231). The coal fields of Tonkin formed an additional attraction. Both the French and the British in those days were well aware that should it come to an Anglo-French confrontation, the French would be seriously handicapped in Southeast Asia without a source of coal of their own. Its trade prospects – according to Dupuis, the local population was eager to trade and keen to buy European products (Sentupéry *ibid.*: 81, 283) – and its mineral wealth made Tonkin a desirable object; one Frenchman even ventured that it might well be 'one of the richest countries in the world'¹

1 Louis de Carné, *Voyage en Indo-Chine et dans l'empire chinois* (Paris 1872) cited by Sentupéry (1890: 77).

Inspired by such considerations, Rear Admiral Marie-Jules Dupré, Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Cochin China, tried to convince his superior in Paris, the Minister of the Navy (France did not have a Ministry of the Colonies yet), in the middle of 1873 that for the future of French domination in the Far East the occupation of Tonkin was 'a matter of life and death' (Sentupéry 1890: 85). The supposed richness of Tonkin's natural resources was one of the reasons for him to advance his plea. Another was to secure a safe and profitable trade route to Yunnan, but paramount probably was his desire to keep the British out. Since Dupuis had sailed the river it had become general knowledge that the Red River was navigable; though – as would only be fully realised later – rapids, seasonally changing water levels and its silting up posed formidable obstacles (Scott 1885: 222-3; Doumer 1905: 117). With others also aware of the accessibility of the Red River, Dupré feared that France might have to face the rivalry of British, German and American commerce. He and his confidant Garnier did not even preclude an invasion by another European power or China. They may even have considered China the most likely aggressor, impressed as both were by the strength of the Chinese army in Yunnan fighting Islamic insurgents, equipped as it was with quick-firers and having been trained by European instructors. The government troops were clearly winning and after having suppressed the rebellion and with no enemy anymore to fight in Yunnan, Beijing might well decide to direct them to Tonkin to restore order in a what was a very volatile vassal of Annam.

In the opinion of Dupré and Garnier, a Chinese Tonkin could only benefit Great Britain. Their judgement seems to have been clouded by an intense distrust of the British. Essential in their line of reasoning was the belief that London's influence in Beijing was considerable. They saw proof in the fact that a Briton, Robert Hart, had become Inspector General of the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs Service in 1863. Garnier, and probably also Dupré, was sure that the British envoy in Beijing was actually trying to talk the Chinese government into invading Tonkin.² A Chinese Tonkin would increase the commercial significance of Hong Kong to the detriment of Saigon, Garnier wrote to the French minister in Beijing and others.³ He also saw a British hand in what had happened in Yunnan. To draw the province into its own orbit Great Britain would have encouraged its Muslim population to rise and gain independence from China, in which

2 Garnier to friends in Paris (no date) (cited in Norman 1884: 107).

3 Garnier to French minister in Beijing 8-9-1873 (cited in Norman 1884: 110).

case, Garnier's reasoning was, Yunnan would have become closed to French trade (Norman 1884: 114).

The French military expeditions to Tonkin

Annam's hold over its vassal Tonkin was weak. Without the assistance of Chinese troops Annam/Hué could not cope. Its inability to maintain law and order made Tonkin seem an easy prey for any foreign power out to take control over it. Part of the trouble was caused by the fact that piracy, a term used by Annamese authorities as well as the French, was rampant on land and on sea. Collectively known as the Pavillons Noirs or Black Flags and branded as pirates and smugglers, they formed a serious obstacle to any commerce Europeans had in mind and thus a reason to act for the powers intent on expanding their trade in the Far East.

To stay ahead of the British; or, as the British author Norman (1884: 157) wrote, to wrest from Great Britain its 'China trade – by fair means, if possible; if not by foul' – in November 1873 French forces briefly occupied Hanoi, the capital of Tonkin. Taking the city had not been among the original French plans. Dupré and Garnier were well aware that the French in Cochinchina lacked the necessary manpower for an annexation of Tonkin. What they wanted to accomplish by applying military pressure was freedom of French trade, suppression of piracy and, inspired by Hart's position in China, a Frenchman to head the customs service of Tonkin (Norman 1884: 112).

The immediate cause for the French, or rather Dupré, to act was Dupuis' second Red River voyage of 1872-73, undertaken to provide the Chinese army in Yunnan with arms and ammunition. In April 1873 Dupuis returned to Hanoi and immediately ran into trouble with the Annamese and Tonkinese authorities. He was accused of conducting illegal trade, ignoring a ban on foreigners trading along the Red River and evading Tonkin customs duties. Dupuis, who could count on a small flotilla of junks and a force of about 350 well-armed men, including a contingent of soldiers from Yunnan, established himself firmly in the city of Hanoi. Annam, reluctant to offend France by using force against a French citizen, turned to Dupré to mediate. About the follow-up Paris and Saigon differed in opinion. In France the government was not looking forward to a Tonkin adventure. Foreign Secretary Jacques-Victor-Albert Duc de Broglie cautioned Dupré not to engage France in Tonkin. In Saigon Dupré decided otherwise, afraid that non-French adventurers, especially British ones, alerted to the weakness of Annam by Dupuis' obstinacy, might follow the Dupuis example, with

ultimately a British intervention as the result. What also motivated Dupré to act were reports that Hué had contacted the Governor of Hong Kong. Convinced that the British were only waiting for an excuse to gain control over Tonkin, Dupré informed the king of Annam, Tu Duc, that he could not tolerate the interference of other powers in a matter that only concerned France and Annam (Norman 1884: 94-5).

Dupré was full of confidence that for what he had in mind the French troops already in Cochin China sufficed. No reinforcements from France would be needed. Success was assured, he wired to the Minister of the Navy a few days after he had received De Broglie's call for restraint (Sentupéry 1890: 85). To have his superiors in Paris agree to the venture, Dupré presented the expedition he wanted to send to Tonkin as a reply to the request by Hué to act upon Dupuis; conveniently forgetting to report that Hué had rejected his suggestion to send a gunboat to Hanoi, but had agreed to the visit of a French officer to make Dupuis see reason. Dupré's stratagem worked. Paris gave the go-ahead (Norman 1884: 90-5). Put in command of the expedition was Garnier, according to Norman (1884: 98), not an author to hide his dislike of the main French actors, 'a man well versed in Oriental character, well skilled in Eastern languages and ways; but, hot-headed by nature, ... little inclined to study their diplomatic finesse, and too ready ... to resort to force'. Obviously Dupré's interests went beyond Tonkin. Garnier wrote to friends in Paris that with the rebellion in Yunnan suppressed, he also had to acquire mining concessions in Yunnan and this before the British did. That mission also had some urgency. Garnier was worried by a British advance in Yunnan from the other side, from Burma, where they had just stationed a political and trade agent, Thomas Thornville Cooper, on the Upper Irrawaddy River, in Bhamo, where the river ceased to be navigable. The French had some reason to be anxious. Cooper was an exponent of British mercantile and political expansionism. He had played a role in efforts by the India Office to befriend the Yunnan rebels and in 1868 had travelled deep into the interior of China to find an overland trade route between India and Burma and the Chinese coast.⁴ He published *Travels of a pioneer of commerce in pigtail and petticoats*, an account of this last adventure, in which he claimed to have had the backing of 'several of the most influential merchants of Shanghai'. In the same breath, however, he bemoaned the lack of support from the city's mercantile community, where, his expedition, if Cooper is to be believed, was considered to be a threat to

4 Bickers 2011: 255-7; [en.wikisource.org/wiki/ Cooper,_Thomas_Thornville_\(DNBBoo\)](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Cooper,_Thomas_Thornville_(DNBBoo)), (DNB biographies) accessed 3-1-2013.

Figure 12 A street in Bhamo, Burma, circa 1885



Source: Browne 1888

existing trade (Cooper 1871: 8). Adding fuel to the French suspicion were reports in newspapers in India linking Cooper's appointment in Bhamo with the desire to outmanoeuvre the French in Yunnan (Norman 1884: 109-11).

Garnier, as Dupré and other Frenchmen, full of praise for Dupuis' exploration of the Red River, arrived in Hanoi on 5 November. In his negotiations with the local authorities and envoys from the Court of Hué he emphasised trade and the opening of the Red River (and the treatment of Christians), not how to deal with Dupuis. For the Tonkin authorities it was the other way around. Dupuis' menace was the issue, not the trade treaty Garnier was set to conclude. Such a matter had to be decided upon by Hué. Garnier threatened to resort to violence. When the Tonkin authorities persisted that they needed instructions from Hué he took the citadel of Hanoi with a force of only a few hundred men, among them Dupuis' Yunnan soldiers, and raised the French flag on 20 November. It was an easy victory. Norman (1884: 132) observed that the defenders, said to be some 7,000 men strong, were 'unaccustomed to artillery fire and hitherto ignorant of the terrible effect of shells'. After having captured Hanoi and still on the 20th, Garnier, in his capacity as 'grand mandarin' and 'envoy of the noble French Kingdom', issued a proclamation in which he informed the people of Tonkin that he had come to their country to

open a trade route, that he had no intention to take possession of the region, but that the obstruction by the Tonkin authorities had forced him to act. The Tonkinese were assured that they could continue to live in peace, that customs would be respected, and that the Tonkin officials who accepted French rule would retain their position (Norman 1884: 132-3). Other towns and forts in the Red River delta were also occupied, but the French expedition ended in disaster. Everybody – except the Christians – united against the French. At the end of December, a large force of Annamese, Chinese and Black Flags besieged the French in Hanoi. During a sortie Garnier fell in battle.

In Saigon, Dupré could not condone Garnier's vigorous action. He had Paris to consider. When in early December he heard of the occupation of the Red River delta, he dispatched another of his naval officers and colonial administrators, Paul-Louis-Felix Philastre, to Hué and Tonkin to undo the damage. Philastre had to end the military occupation and to negotiate the opening of the Red River for commerce by foreigners. His negotiations would result in a treaty concluded in Saigon on 15 March 1874, the beginning, as it was stated in the first article, of an 'eternal' alliance between France and Annam.⁵ France acknowledged Annam's sovereignty and its 'complete independence *vis-à-vis* all foreign powers' (a stipulation China and Annam preferred to ignore).⁶ Still, Annam – on paper at least, practice would be different – was firmly drawn into the French sphere of influence. In return for a French promise to support Annam in maintaining order and peace and to protect it against foreign aggression, Hué had to conform to French foreign policy and had to promise not to enter into commercial arrangements with other nations without consulting the French first. France also offered instructors to train Annam's army and navy, and experts to manage the country's tax and customs service. Annam in turn had to allow trade by foreigners on the Red River and to open three ports, Hanoi and Haiphong on the Red River and Qui Nhon in south Annam, to commerce and industry by foreigners.⁷ In each of them France was allowed to station a consul or agent, complete with a consular guard of up to a hundred men 'to guarantee his safety and to have his authority respected'.⁸ These consuls had

5 Franco-Annamese treaty 15-3-1874, Art. 1. (The text is among other places to be found in Norman 1884: 148-155).

6 Franco-Annamese treaty 15-3-1874, Art. 2.

7 Haiphong had been selected to serve as a port without much prior study and soon discussions would start in France about the selection of another, more suitable place in Tonkin, the millions spent in developing Haiphong, and even about abandoning the place (Doumer 1905: 111).

8 Franco-Annamese treaty 15-3-1874, Art. 13. In return, France agreeing to commerce by people from Annam in France and its colonies allowed Annam to station agents in cities of its

to act as judge in conflicts in the foreign community; foreigners (including Frenchmen) who wanted to take up residence in the three ports had to register with them, while a French passport provided by them was needed to travel into the interior. Freedom of religion of Roman Catholics was also part of the treaty. Dupuis must have been pleased that in one of its other stipulations a 'full and complete' general amnesty was proclaimed. A commercial treaty concluded on 31 August dealt with preferential customs duties for merchantmen from French ports. It also confirmed the French hold over the Annamese customs service, stipulating that only Frenchmen and no other foreigners could be employed in it (Norman 1884: 145-6, 155-6).

The treaty did not bring the French what they had hoped for. The consuls in Tonkin, living in stockaded settlements, would have 'an unpleasant time', as Scott (1885: 12) noted. Commercially, Dupré's fears became a reality. Hong Kong and not Saigon dominated Tonkin trade. In 1880 imports in Haiphong almost exclusively came from Hong Kong. Saigon's share was a mere 0.5 per cent. Of Haiphong's exports 79 per cent was shipped to Hong Kong, compared to 16 per cent to Saigon. To make matters more embarrassing for the French, Hong Kong also dominated Yunnan's export trade (Scott 1885: 215-7).

As Dupré had experienced, obtaining new colonial possessions was not easy to justify in France. This was especially so in the late 1860s and 1870s, when France first had to deal with war with Prussia and later had to come to terms with its consequences, military and otherwise; though for imperialists like Garnier expanding the French presence in Indochina was exactly one of the ways to have France recover from the economic downturn occasioned by the Franco-Prussian War and its aftermath (Sentupéry 1890: 232). In the early 1880s the mood changed. France embarked on an active colonial policy and went in search of new territory and national glory; enough reason for a British author like Scott (1885: 329, 368-9) to write about 'French earth-hunger' and the 'great Indo-Chinese Empire' France wanted to create, leaving the British at the most Burma. One of the targets was Annam, which had hurt French pride by not treating the French representative in Hué with the respect the French deemed due to such an official, and, more importantly, by preferring relations with China over those with France (Doumer 1905: 155). Annam also refused the French a concession to win coal, while French ships still did not have unrestricted access to the Red River.

choice there. Equally, while France got the right to station a Resident in Hué, Annam could do so in Saigon and Paris.

The train was set in motion during the first prime ministership of Charles de Freycinet. As he wrote in July 1880 to his Minister of the Navy, Admiral Jean Bernard Jauréguiberry, Freycinet did not expect any trouble from China should France occupy the Red River. He was also sure that such an occupation would be a money-maker and that the costs of the expedition would be offset by future customs revenues.⁹ On finding out what France intended to do Beijing protested, but Freycinet's successors, Jules Ferry and Léon Gambetta, continued on his course. In 1881 the Governor of Cochin China, Charles le Myre de Vilers, was instructed to stage a show of force impressive enough to convince the King of Annam that he had to abide to the 1874 Saigon Treaty and to show him that France had the means to enforce its demands (Norman 1884: 181). An occasion presented itself when the consul in Hanoi asked for reinforcement of his escort. In response, Le Myre de Vilers ordered the Commander of the French naval station in Cochin China, Captain Henri Laurent Rivière, to proceed to Tonkin in January 1882, impressing upon him that he had to proceed with prudence. In March, before he sailed to Tonkin, Rivière's task was extended. Rivière, who, Norman (1884: 191) maliciously wrote, lacked experience in the East but 'had written several excellent novels', was to command a military expedition. What followed was a repeat of the Garnier invasion: a commander who overstepped his brief, the taking of the citadel of Hanoi without much trouble (in April 1882), followed by massive popular resistance and guerrilla warfare, and Rivière being killed during a sortie (on 19 May 1883), only a few miles from Hanoi and not far from the place where Garnier had died.

Just a few days before it had come to that, the Ferry government, supported by Parliament, had already agreed to step up the French military effort in Tonkin. As an additional step, Paris appointed François-Jules Harmand, a former consul in Bangkok who had also taken part in the Garner expedition, as Civil Commissioner-General of France to Tonkin. He had to arrange the political aspects of the expedition. When Harmand arrived in Hanoi in June 1883 he almost immediately issued a proclamation stating that France was 'a great and powerful kingdom ... feared and respected all over the world', that its patience had run out and that France had to show that a treaty concluded with it was a serious matter (Norman 1884: 222-3). France, he also stressed, did not intend to conquer Tonkin. Its only aim was to restore law and order. Officials who accepted this had nothing to fear, but those who resisted would be shown no mercy. They would not be able to escape the wrath of France, not even when they sought the protection of

9 Freycinet to Jauréguiberry 26-7-1880 (cited in Norman 1884: 174).

the citadel of Hué, which, Harmand boasted, the French forces could take as easily as they had done other forts.

By this time Paris no longer ruled out a protectorate. During Ferry's first premiership from September 1880 to November 1881 France had already proclaimed a protectorate over Tunisia. His Tunisia policy had been Ferry's downfall, but during his second term in office, from February 1883 to April 1885, Annam and its dependency Tonkin – the latter considered to be economically the more important of the two – came into view.

Later, Ferry would be hailed by one of the protagonists of French colonialism, Lorin (1906: 35), as 'the visionary patriot to whom France owes Tunisia and Tonkin', but his expansionist policy did reap as much resistance in France as that of Bismarck would do in Germany. Opposition was not just a matter of the profitability of colonies and protectorates. Franco-German antagonism loomed large. Part of the criticism was aimed at the fact that France should concentrate its money and effort on a confrontation with Germany to regain Alsace-Lorraine, which France had lost to Germany in 1871. Some also reasoned that because of Indochina France lagged behind Germany in the building of fast cruisers and battleships, or blamed colonial ventures for the weakness of French defences along the frontier with Germany. In line with this, it was further argued (as also later historians would do), that Germany looked favourably upon and even stimulated the French colonial ambitions, to direct part of the French energy away from Europe (Norman 1884: 308-9; Geiss 1990: 137). From his side, Ferry (1890: 46) would complain that each time France tried to regain its place amongst the powers, there were those in opposition to such plans who exaggerated the dangers which loomed in Europe.

Ferry himself was an ardent protagonist of French colonial expansion. Economic reasons formed part of his arguments. France, he stressed in March 1884, had to find new outlets for its export in a period in which Germany was erecting trade barriers, the United States had become 'extremely protectionist' and foreign products were flooding the French market. But he also mentioned the greatly changed 'conditions of naval war' to impress upon the French public how important it was to have overseas possessions. A ship could carry 'no more than two weeks' supply of coal' and without it was 'a wreck on the high seas, abandoned to the first occupier'. That was why France needed 'Saigon and Indochina' and other places of 'defence and provisioning'¹⁰ What France aimed at, Eugène Tenot (1904: 49) wrote

10 Speech before the French Chamber of Deputies 28-3-1884 (web.viu.ca/davies/H479B.Imperialism.Nationalism/Ferry.Fr.imperialism.1884.htm, accessed 3-10-2011).

around the same time on behalf of a Parliamentary commission, was 'a vast colonial empire, industrial and commercial development, accumulation of wealth and power, [and] radiation of civilisation'. Still others mentioned overpopulation as a reason for colonial aggrandisement. International developments formed an additional incentive. Annam provided the French who just months before had been forced to accept the bitter fact of British preponderance in Egypt with an opportunity to restore some of their national pride. As Ferry (1890: 36) would write, Tonkin was a 'revenge' for Egypt.

In line with the new mood in Paris, Harmand first demanded from Hué to accept a French protectorate over Tonkin. In the end the whole of Annam would suffer this fate.¹¹ In August 1883, French troops, allowed to do so by Paris, took the coastal forts guarding access to Hué. The way to the capital of Annam lay open. Still in the same month, on the 25th, Harmand forced Annam (its court being in disarray after the death of its king, Tu Duc, in July) under the provisional Treaty of Hué to accept a French protectorate; including the French running the customs service. He also gave Annam a new king, a boy of about 15 years of age (Tu Duc's successor, who had resisted the French, had fled Hué). The treaty reflected the importance attached by France to Tonkin. It allowed for the opening up of Tonkin to foreign trade, industry and mining, for a strong French administrative presence, and for a good road and a telegraph line between Saigon and Hanoi. Annam also had to part with the province of Binh Thuan, which was added to Cochin China territory. On the morning of 5 January 1884 the Treaty was ratified in the Royal Palace in Hué with much display of splendour by the Annamese Court (see Scott 1885: 301-4; *The Straits Times* 26-1-1884). The court showed what it was worth, but could not, as hard as it tried, mollify the French into making concessions. During the ceremony in the palace the young king had already tried to do so and afterwards during a breakfast offered by the French his regent pleaded in vain for less French officials to be stationed in Annam than the French intended. In Hué the answer was that the 'railroads, telegraphs, &c.', which the residents were to introduce would 'only contribute to the wealth and prosperity of Annam' (*The Straits Times* 26-1-1884). In Paris a different mood prevailed. Politicians shrank from the impact of the treaty and refused to ratify it. A 'lighter' protectorate was in order, something like France had established in Cambodia. As the French

11 In 1888 the French would take the port of Danang (Da Nang, which they called Tourane or Turon), south of Hué, from Annam, to turn it into a real 'concession' administered by the French and under French jurisdiction.

had not yet accomplished much in Cambodia, and pleased with the way matters were turning out in North Africa, Tunisia should be the example to follow (Neton 1904: 48).

To acknowledge the new political relationship, an Annamese delegation, escorted by its own soldiers, with their 'inlaid mother-of-pearl scabbards to their swords', visited Saigon. In the city they were received in March by a guard of honour, salutes, and a military band playing 'the *Marseillaise* and some opera-bouffe airs', and could watch 'the ascent of field-balloons' (Scott 1885: 306). Nice words were spoken, but, the suspicion was that on the way back to Hué the delegation incited the population against the French and the local Roman Catholics, the start of years of unrest, even 'anarchy', especially in the southern part of Annam (Scott 1885: 306; Doumer 1905: 60, 299).

In Great Britain, the French advance was perceived as a threat to its China trade. It would, a member of the House of Commons stated in August 1883, place a 'French Naval Station right in the track of our trading fleets'.¹² Or, as Norman (1884: 8), a former officer of the Indian Army, would write: 'French cruisers supplied with coals from its mines in Tonkin would lie in the fairway of our China trade, Burma and Calcutta would be effectively blockaded, and our outlying Oriental possessions grievously threatened'. For the British, always insecure about the security of their Empire, there was an additional hazard to worry about. Alarmed, Norman (1884: 1-2) pointed out that foreign colonies in the vicinity of British possessions would not only mean 'the divergence of trade to other markets', but would also 'necessitate the further dislocation of our forces, none too large for the efficient protection of the British Empire'. There were also the indirect consequences for trade to be considered. The French did not adhere to the principle of free trade in their colonies. Where they could, the French government gave preferential treatment to French trade, to, from and in the colony. As in the days of Doudart de Lagrée, the aim was not only to strike at Western commercial rivals, but also at Chinese ones (Chambre 1898a: 23-4). Norman was sure that British commerce would suffer the consequences, also when it did not come to an Anglo-French confrontation. 'In times of peace', he lamented, France did its 'utmost to ruin our trade by the imposition of heavy duties and of equally onerous bounties'. New French colonies without such impediments would be a blessing for European trade but, every 'fresh conquest made by France, every new Custom-house over

¹² Ashmead-Bartlett in House of Commons 9-8-1883 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/1883/aug/09/supply-civil-service-estimates).

which the Tricolour flies, is an injury to the trade of the world' (Norman 1884: 307, 331-2).

As a French author, Prince Henri d'Orléans would observe, the French 'had not been masters of Tonkin for two years' before they 'surrounded it with a thick wall of Customs dues' (Cunningham 1902: 46). The way the French colonial authorities proceeded in Indochina fortified the image of a protectionist France. It seems certain, the British author Browne (1888: 445) wrote about Indochina, that 'the French by their usual policy of imposing heavy import duties are doing their best to strangle the commercial prosperity of the country in its infancy'. His compatriot Scott (1885: 241), was equally sure that in view of 'the present temper of France', new French colonies would not 'be thrown open ... to the commerce of the world'. To leave no doubt about France's protection of its own trade and industry, in 1893 Paris instructed the colonial authorities, not only in Indochina but also elsewhere in the world, to order the goods they needed in France, even mentioning the towns where they should do so (tiles in Marseilles and Bordeaux, salted pork in Le Havre, etc.) (Lanessan 1895: 346). Such a policy also drew criticism from part of the French business community, making a strong plea for free trade, by pointing out that the discriminatory import and export duties levied hurt trade, also that of the French, and made some products too expensive for the local population to buy (Chambre 1898a: 23-4, 44-5, 84).

Norman published his book at a moment when Great Britain and France were engaged in a naval race and the fighting capacity of the British navy had become a topic of public debate in Great Britain. Among the topics discussed were also the strength of the British fleet in the Far East and the defence of Hong Kong and Singapore (which would actually be improved because of the tension in Southeast Asia). The French showed themselves full of confidence. Newspapers optimistically predicted that the French navy was strong enough to take on the British fleet (Norman 1884: 8). In Great Britain, such a spirit seemed wanting; with naval officers and others, whether really concerned or for less altruistic motives, stressing the urgency of a build-up of the navy to counter the French threat.

The country most directly involved, China – which as France was more interested in Tonkin than in Annam (Scott 1885: 305) –, had more real issues to complain about. It could not condone any treaty Hué made without its approval. Annam was a Chinese vassal and to add insult to injury, in the treaty Harmand had enforced upon Annam China was mentioned by name as one of the powers Annam was not allowed to conduct foreign relations with without the consent of France. Beijing protested when Rivière had

taken Hanoi. Paris was not quick to respond and when it did it only insulted the Chinese government by informing it that the conflict only concerned France and Annam, not China.

Both sides prepared for war; strengthening their armed forces by purchases from abroad and mobilising extra troops for a coming confrontation, those of France including 'fanatical men of Algeria' (Norman 1884: 243). A setback for China was that it had three cruisers under construction at the Vulcan yard at Stettin (Szczecin), but in December 1883, when Chinese sailors were already on their way to Germany to sail them home, Berlin delayed delivery at the request of Paris.

For a moment it seemed that war could be avoided. In the Preliminary Treaty of Tianjin (Tientsin) of 11 May 1884 – signed by the Governor of Zhili and François-Ernest Fournier, commander of the French warship *Volta* – China promised to withdraw its troops from Tonkin and to recognise the treaties concluded between France and Annam. The agreement paved the way for an adjusted Franco-Annamese treaty, signed in Hué on 6 June 1884. France remained responsible for Annam's foreign relations but any reference to foreign powers had been dropped from the text of the relevant article. A cessation of Binh Thuan was not mentioned and neither was the road between Saigon and Hanoi. In a combination of seeking economic advantages and a belief in a Western modernisation mission, it was stated (as it had been in the Harmand treaty) that Annamese civil servants could continue to work as they always had, but an exception was made for the customs service, public works and 'in general, all that required unique management and know-how of European technicians' (Lanessan 1895: 18).

Within weeks hostilities were resumed in Tonkin, and in August these spilled over (there was no declaration of war) into the Sino-French War of 1884-85; presented by Paris as a punishment of China for not honouring the Tianjin treaty. A French fleet defeated a Chinese one at Fuzhou (Foochow) in Fujian; French soldiers briefly occupied the Penghu (Pescadores) Islands and the city of Jilong (Chilung, Keelung) on the northeastern coast of Taiwan. In Tonkin itself, at the end of March a Chinese army defeated the French at Lang-Son. In Hanoi, hearing of the news the commander of the French army in Tonkin, Brigade General Louis Alexandre Esprit Gaston Brière de l'Isle, panicked and sent a telegram to Paris conveying his doubts about the French army being able to hold its position in Tonkin and asked for extra troops. When his telegram and other private ones about a chaotic French retreat from Lang-Son reached Paris, alarm spread there as well. Frustration and anger focused on Ferry, who was widely blamed for the 'Tonkin disasters'. He should resign and did so on 30 March 1885. Five years later, in an effort

to show that he had been right, Ferry (1890: 1) would write about the 'violent prejudices, the furious ill feelings', his policy had encountered, in equal terms complaining about a hostile press and a public opinion averse to the Tonkin expedition. Clearly, he was still angry over what had happened: 'The real enemies of the French flag ... are in France', Ferry (1980: 19) wrote.

In spite of the panic and the military setbacks on land the French emerged victorious. A few days after Ferry had resigned A. Billot of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and James Duncan Campbell of the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs Service, who acted on behalf of the Chinese government, signed a protocol in Paris for the suspension of hostilities, the withdrawal of Chinese troops from Tonkin and an end to the French military operations in Taiwan. A definitive treaty was signed on 9 June 1885 in Tianjin. China agreed to all French demands. Mentioned in the new treaty was a promise that were railways to be constructed in south China, cooperation with France had to be sought. The treaty further noted the French intention to build a railway in Tonkin. In April 1886 and June 1887 Beijing and Paris agreed on commercial links and the demarcation of the frontier between China and Tonkin.

During the Franco-Chinese War there had been calls for mediation by London, Berlin and Washington, coupled with criticism of London for not doing so out of fear for complications in Britain's relations with France. The British once again had their trade in mind. Commercial circles (and the government) expressed their apprehension over the damage that the war had done to British China trade, in this case also hampered by a French blockade of Taiwan. Another cause of concern had been the territorial concessions France might gain, ranging from the fear that France and Russia would divide up China between themselves, to the less unrealistic suspicion that France was aspiring to a piece of China.¹³ Among the rumours circulating was that France would demand Zhoushan (Chusan) near Shanghai as a security for the payment of a war indemnity. To show that they would not allow the island to fall into French hands, the British government sent an expert to Zhoushan, who had to advise the Chinese on the improvement of its fortifications.

When peace was concluded, the British anxiously considered the gains and trading benefits it might bring France. There were cries demanding compensation from China, including the opening up of Nanning to British trade (Browne 1888: 449). In France the feeling was that by gaining hold of Tonkin the French had outwitted Germany and Great Britain, where

13 Ashmead-Bartlett in House of Commons 21-11-1884 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/1884/nov/21/france-and-china-the-hostilities).

its commercial circles were supposed to be equally eager to exploit the possibilities Tonkin offered (Sentupéry 1890: 96). The reality was that once again all threatened to go terribly wrong for the French. Almost immediately after the Tianjin Treaty they were confronted with a fully-fledged rebellion and the massacre of Christians in Annam and Tonkin.

Tonkin not being a success story (even its coals were initially supposed to be entirely unsuitable for steamers), the French lost interest in their new possession (Chambre 1898a: 62; Lorin 1906: 32). Algeria was more important. Indochina, formally constituted in October 1887 and encompassing Cochin China, Annam, Tonkin and Cambodia, cost the French more than it yielded. The region, Neton (1904: xix) complained, was only viewed as a 'military colony' without any real commercial or industrial value of its own, its significance being that it served as a springboard for economic penetration into a much more promising China. No efforts were made for its development. Apart from a small track in the South, from Saigon to the port of My Tho, built between 1881 and 1885, railway construction did not take off. Railways were even considered useless. The idea was that in the lowlands, rivers sufficed, and in the thinly populated mountains there was nothing to transport (Lorin 1906: 345). Another illustration of the relative insignificance of French Indochina in those days was that until at least 1895 the mail boats connecting France with Saigon and from there with China and Japan were much slower than those sailing to and from Australia (Lanessan 1895: 208). Parliament refused to furnish additional money allowing for faster communication.

For the French in Indochina the neglect was difficult to swallow. In 1891 Acting Governor-General of Indochina, E.A.G.R.J.G.P. Bideau, complained about the sorry state of affairs in Tonkin, the region that for decades had figured so prominently in the French effort to expand its territory in continental Southeast Asia. There was a huge financial deficit and for years no public works had been carried out. Soon, Bideau feared, there might even be no money to pay for civil servants' salaries or to purchase essential goods, such as food. Politically the situation was equally disastrous. The border with China was still far from secure, along the coast piracy was still rife, and the Tonkin Delta and its mountainous hinterland were in the hands of insurgents and so-called Chinese rebels (*ibid.*: 1-3; Norman 1900: 98). In Cambodia it was not much different, Lanessan (1895: 5) observed. Since 1863 the French had remained strangers, without much contact with the local population or leaders. The result of it all, Lanessan (1895: 279) lamented, was that French colonists had 'lost all confidence in the future'. Still, not everything was so bad. Within a few years of France becoming master

of Tonkin, travellers praised the way the French had turned the swamp of Haiphong, at the mouth of the Red River, into a seaport town, which, initially, some French optimistically thought might become a commercial rival to Shanghai (Browne 1888: 445; Cunningham 1902: 43, 48-9).

The end of the Kingdom of Ava

In the west of continental Southeast Asia, Great Britain had established itself earlier than the French had done in the east. In 1852, after the Second Anglo-Burmese War, Great Britain had gained Lower Burma, an achievement the British were quite happy with. Some thirty years later Secretary of State for India Kimberley could state with satisfaction that '[no] other portion of Her Majesty's Dominions has made greater progress than Lower Burmah'.¹⁴ Burma, his Under-Secretary Ughtred Kay-Shuttleworth also stated, 'had been a source of very considerable Revenue to India' for many years.¹⁵

The central and northern portion of the country, the Kingdom of Ava or Upper Burma, had survived as an independent state. It had the misfortune of becoming a pawn in Anglo-French rivalry, with Frenchmen at least since the early 1860s pleading for greater influence in the kingdom to prevent further British expansion, and the British set to avoid this (Garnier 1864: 35). For the British there were two additional considerations. Trade in British Lower Burma depended for about one-eighth on Ava, which, because of its geographical location, lay in the way for establishing trade with southwest China, a goal that many had high hopes for. A breakdown of law and order or misrule in Ava would seriously affect commerce; or, as it was worded in a note from the India Office, 'anarchy and disturbance on one side of the border makes it felt on the other, and paralyses every effort in the direction of friendship, civilisation, or trade'.¹⁶ Furthermore, the foreign-drilled native troops syndrome had to be contended with. The armies of Ava and Thailand would be no match for French-trained and -led soldiers from Annam. 'Without being alarmist', Scott (1885: 241), referring to this, alerted his countrymen to the fact that 'every Frenchman who writes about Cochin

14 Kimberley in House of Lords 22-2-1886 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/lords/1886/feb/22/kingdom-of-ava-resolution).

15 Ughtred Kay-Shuttleworth in House of Commons 22-2-1886 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/1886/feb/22/resolution).

16 Note on the Relations between the Government of India and Upper Burmah during the present King's Reign (www.nectec.or.th/thai-yunnan/22.html).

China draws attention to the ease with which troubles may be created for England on the Siamese and Burmese frontiers'.

In 1867 a treaty had guaranteed British free trade in Ava. Having concluded the treaty, 'measures were taken for the opening of old trade routes with Western China, by which in former days a considerable trade had been carried on' (Browne 1888: 83). One was the appointment in 1873 of Cooper, in his day a famous explorer who had traversed eastern Tibet and Yunnan, in Bhamo, which had so alarmed Garnier. At that time there was already a feeling on the British side that war might be unavoidable. In 1871 Edward Charles Browne, one of those who propagated the annexation of Ava from an early juncture, and other British soldiers reconnoitred the Upper Irrawaddy River to prepare for an invasion (Browne 1888: 84). Geopolitical motives also played a role. Conquering Ava, the reasoning went, would place British troops along part of China's southern frontier, which would give London an additional leverage in respect of getting Beijing to resist any demands made by Russia and France. In the mid-1870s the *North China Herald*, published in Shanghai, wrote that expanding British rule over Ava and the 'contiguity of the British Indian Frontier with that of Yunnan would mean a pressure on China that could hardly fail to be felt at Peking'.¹⁷

Relations reached a low when, first, in 1878, Cooper was murdered and, subsequently, in the autumn of 1879 the British Resident in Mandalay, 'insulted daily' and with his life in 'imminent danger', had to be recalled (Browne 1888: 95). Burmese trade also experienced a setback (Scott 1885: 313). War threatened but the British already had the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-80) on their hands, besides the risk of an Anglo-Russian confrontation (Browne 1888: 94). The Afghan War had another consequence as well. The Viceroy of India, the 1st Earl of Lytton, unnerved by the killing of the British mission in Kabul in September, withdrew the whole mission in Mandalay in October.¹⁸

The confrontation came six years later, at a time when France was consolidating its position in Southeast Asia and Ava made overtures to France. In May 1883 there had already been some trepidation among the British when the King of Ava, Thibaw (Theebaw) Min, had sent a delegation to Italy and France; countries to which he had looked since the beginning of his reign in 1878 for modernising his country and his army. Ava informed

17 *North China Herald* cited by Richard in House of Commons 22-2-1886 (hansard.millbank-system.com/commons/1886/feb/22/resolution).

18 Note on the Relations between the Government of India and Upper Burmah during the present King's Reign (www.nectec.or.th/thai-yunnan/22.html).

London that its objectives were 'purely scientific and industrial', but his assurances did not make a great impression.¹⁹ The influential Indian officer, Colonel Edward Bosc Sladen, warned of a number of dangers. He accused Ava of 'forming alliances with European States which have no interests in Burma' and whose presence would form a threat to the British position in British Burma. France in particular had no right to be there. Unlike Great Britain it had no political or commercial interests whatsoever in Ava, except 'of a very remote or clandestine character'. Moreover, Ava's scheming might land Great Britain 'at any moment in serious complications with European foreign Powers' (Browne 1888: 106).

British anxiety mounted in 1885, both in Rangoon, where a French advance was primarily seen as a danger to British interests in Ava, and in London, where the fate of India was uppermost in mind. In January Paris informed London that France and Ava had signed a treaty, dealing with commercial matters. The news made the India Office in London conclude in November that 'King Theebaw was now anxious, according to reliable report, to throw himself in the arms of France in order to escape from English control'.²⁰ In particular, the right that Paris had won to station a consul in Mandalay worried the British. The new Viceroy of India, Lord Dufferin, informed London that this was likely to increase British 'difficulties in dealing with the Court of Ava, and to prove antagonistic to British interests'.²¹ In London the India Office saw the new French consulate as a 'central point for intrigue'.²²

Frederick Haas, appointed as French Chargé d'Affaires and Political Resident in Mandalay, almost immediately overplayed his hand by trying to conclude a secret treaty with Thibaw, according to which a Frenchman would become head of Ava's customs service and a French bank would be set up in Mandalay. Even more alarming to the security-obsessed British was that a French company was said to have received a concession to construct a railway running from Mandalay right up to the border of Lower Burma. The treaty, an Australian – who would meet Haas later on in China, and describe him as the 'most gentle-mannered of men ... with strange rancour against the perfidious designs of Britain in the East', – wrote, would have made Ava 'virtually a colony of France ... with France to support her in any difficulty

19 Cross in House of Commons 30-7-1883 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/1883/jul/30/burmah-burmese-embassy-in-paris).

20 Note on the Relations between the Government of India and Upper Burmah during the present King's Reign (www.nectec.or.th/thai-yunnan/22.html).

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

with British Burma' (Morrison 1895: 42-3). In London the India Office voiced a similar concern: 'French Agents would dominate all trade and chief sources of revenue in Ava, and ... the consequences for British interests and trade would be fatal'.²³ The India Office also suspected Haas of being behind the sanctions of the Kingdom against the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation, which held large forest concessions in Ava and whose Burmese and Indian workforce formed the bulk of the British subjects who had to be protected against mistreatment. A large fine was imposed on the company for illegal logging, and it was feared that it might lose its large timber concessions in Ava.

The treaty was bilingual. Haas spoke no Burmese and Thibaw no French and, both being distrustful of one another, they needed somebody to check the text in the language they did not master. Both turned to the same person, the Italian Chargé d'Affaires in Mandalay, Giuseppe Andreino, who also happened to be the local representative of the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation, the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company (on whose ships the British army would sail to Mandalay a few months later) and a number of other British firms.

The 'French Question' was born, with people being sure that France wanted to turn Ava 'into a second Ton-King' (Browne 1888: 102). The news of the treaty occasioned a sudden change in British policy, always susceptible to possible threats to India's flanks. As late as March 1885, though this might have been too rosy a picture, Calcutta was still assuring London that there were hardly any problems in Anglo-Ava relations, nor had the British Chief Commissioner in Burma been in favour of annexation.²⁴ Nevertheless, before the year was over, British troops were to march into Ava, with Edward Bosc Sladen as Political Officer of the invasion army. They did so in spite of the fact that the French government, after a strong British protest, had disavowed Haas' action and recalled him. In September French Foreign Secretary Charles de Freycinet even assured London that no treaty had been signed and that France did not aim at a position of preponderance in Ava. The British had difficulty believing him. 'The French Government disclaimed what was going on', one British Member of Parliament, voicing British distrust, stated, 'but European Governments generally disclaim intrigues until they were successful'.²⁵

23 Ibid.

24 Hunter in House of Commons 22-2-1886 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/1886/feb/22/resolution).

25 MacLean in House of Commons 22-2-1886 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/1886/feb/22/resolution).

There was a certain eagerness on the side of the British government in London, and the Indian administration in Calcutta, to act. What the King of Ava had had in mind, Kimberley explained afterwards, would have caused Great Britain 'great embarrassment' and might have had 'an injurious effect upon the peace and security of Her Majesty's Indian Dominions'.²⁶ Apparently, one of Thibaw's faults was that he had established diplomatic relations with France and Italy, where an ambassador was stationed. Perhaps Ava was even seen as having no right at all to establish diplomatic relations on an equal footing with any country. In 1882 negotiations initiated by Ava to come to a commercial treaty had broken down, among other things because Great Britain refused to allow Ava an ambassador in London.

In October 1885, after Thibaw had refused to submit his sanctions against the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation to arbitration, Lord Dufferin sent him an ultimatum. As the Amir of Afghanistan had earlier, so should Thibaw follow the advice of the British in all matters concerning foreign relations. Ava also had to accept a British consul, facilitate 'the opening up of British trade with China', and should leave the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation in peace. Thibaw was not, as he had wanted, allowed time to think things over and consult France, Germany and Russia (Browne 1888: 165-6). In response, he 'issued a hostile proclamation threatening to efface the heretic Christian barbarians, and to conquer and annex their country', as the British Under-Secretary of State for India, Ughtred Kay-Shuttleworth, phrased it in retrospect. Consequently, Great Britain declared war on Ava in November.²⁷ At that moment the British Parliament was in its six-month recess and could only withhold its consent and reverse matters after it had assembled again. Momentum had shifted to British India, where Calcutta was most eager to act. The military campaign was financed and executed by India, which made it possible to go to war without consulting the British Parliament. The Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885) did not pose many problems to the British. Within six weeks British troops entered Mandalay and imprisoned Thibaw. He was first taken to Rangoon and subsequently exiled to India.

On 1 January 1886 Great Britain annexed Ava on the advice of the Viceroy of India, Lord Dufferin, who had dismissed a protectorate as 'inexpedient

26 Kimberley in House of Lords 22-2-1886 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/lords/1886/feb/22/kingdom-of-ava-resolution).

27 Ughtred Kay-Shuttleworth in House of Commons 22-2-1886 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/1886/feb/22/resolution).

and impracticable'.²⁸ Contrary to the French, the British did not opt for a protectorate. A month before the war Edward Bosc Sladen, 'one of the best living authorities on Upper Burma', had already pleaded in favour of incorporation. A protectorate was 'complex'. The Burmese would never accept it. Keeping a King on the throne and appointing a Resident 'would be proof of political imbecility'. The 'temperament of its people would result sooner or later in the usual fiasco', while, because of the 'almost superstitious veneration for the royal family', a protectorate would force the British to deport 'all surplus members of the royal family'. Annexation was simpler, 'nothing more than a quiet military parade' (Browne 1888: 107-11).

All that remained was to seal the annexation. Lord Dufferin and his wife visited Mandalay in February. In preparation, the streets leading from the river bank to the Palace, soon to be renamed Fort Dufferin, were improved. At the landing place a 'sort of young Crystal Palace was getting taller and taller, day by day', while 'some hundreds of Chinese carpenters hammered away night and day to metamorphise Theebaw's barbarously splendid palace into modern reception rooms for Lady Dufferin and suite' (ibid.: 236). After his arrival Lord Dufferin – who, Browne (1888: 237) wrote, 'talked a great deal, and said very little' – and his wife 'rode in a handsome carriage drawn by four magnificent English horses, and all his bodyguards, tall, stalwart Sikhs, clad in long scarlet coats and jack-boots, bestrode a like breed of animal'. These horses would have been much taller than any horse the Burmese would ever have seen, Browne explained to his readers. The carriage, outshining anything the Burmese knew, had to convey a similar message of British superiority. The climax came at Lord Dufferin's departure. In the presence of the 'city magnates' he thanked the audience for their 'friendly feelings', informing them that they had 'become British subjects under the rule of Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen-Empress'. Showing himself confident that the Burmese would 'serve Her with loyalty and fidelity', Lord Dufferin assured them that the British officers who had taken over the administration of Ava would do all they could to

promote the happiness and well-being of Her Majesty's Burmese subjects, to restore tranquillity amongst them, to develop the resources of the country; to respect the customs; to place its religious property and establishment under protection of the law; and to advance the well-being of all classes as good citizens (ibid.: 239).

28 Kimberley in House of Lords 22-2-1886 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/lords/1886/feb/22/kingdom-of-ava-resolution).

The annexation of Ava, which came within months of the Penjeh crisis in Central Asia, the Franco-Chinese Treaty relating to Indochina and the partition of New Guinea, had the odour of being engineered, with incidents of previous years being raked up. In the reconvened British Parliament the war met with passionate opposition. One of the bones of contention was the annexation itself. Annexation went against accepted British policy. Such a step should only be taken as a last resort and might not have had the approval of a significant portion of the British politicians and public in those days. The 'great British public' found annexation 'an ugly word', Browne (1888: 228) – himself in favour of it – wrote with some regret. From his words, it can be surmised that, until Dufferin's visit to Mandalay, there was doubt in Calcutta and Rangoon about whether the British government would allow an annexation. 'Great anxiety prevailed', Browne (1888: 238) – himself an eyewitness – wrote, 'lest the word "annexation" should choke the Cabinet at the last moment'. In London the Secretary of State for India, Randolph Churchill, came out in support of annexation and convinced the cabinet to take up this cause. Churchill was said to be proud of the course of action taken. It had added territory to the British Empire, given stimulus to British commerce, and had 'added to the area of civilisation and of progress so vast and so valuable a possession'.²⁹ To justify the step his successor, Kimberley – also full of hope of that the incorporation would result in an increase in trade with China, which he said might 'ultimately become very great' – would insinuate that among Thibaw's 70 children no-one could be found with the right character to succeed him.³⁰ In London doubt was also expressed about the reasons presented by Salisbury's Conservative government to justify a military expedition. Great Britain had acted, it was explained a few months later in the Queen's Speech of January 1886, because 'the protection of British life and property, and the cessation of dangerous anarchy in Upper Burmah, could only be effected by force of arms'.³¹

The prestige of Great Britain was also at stake. As a young Curzon, who just a few days before had become a Member of Parliament, stated: '[L]ives and property of British subjects and the honour and credit of the Empire' were at stake.³² One month before the war started, Bosc Sladen

29 Churchill in House of Commons 25-1-1886 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/1886/jan/burmah-military-operations-incidence-of).

30 Kimberley in House of Lords 22-2-1886 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/lords/1886/feb/22/kingdom-of-ava-resolution).

31 [Hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1886/jan/21/the-queens-speech](https://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1886/jan/21/the-queens-speech).

32 Curzon in House of Commons 21-1-1886 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/1886/jan/21/first-eight).

had expressed himself in a similar vein: circumstances in Ava were 'so barbarous and insecure and the attitude of the Government so intractable, that we cannot consent on the one hand to countenance massacre and misrule, or on the other to invite insult and risk the lives of our political officers' (Browne 1888: 104). There had indeed been insults. Apart from King Thibaw's 'hostile proclamation', there was the 'shoe question', the treatment of the British Resident at Court. When he ascended the throne Thibaw had insisted that court etiquette should be honoured. During an audience the British Resident also had to take off his shoes, remove his sword and to sit on the floor. While some made fun of this, Roper Lethbridge, a Member of the House of Commons, pointed out that the Resident 'was ordered to sit on the floor with his feet behind him', and that any Member of the House of Commons who tried to sit in such a position for any length of time would find it 'most disastrous to him'.³³ To the British it was no trivial matter. One of their demands of the King of Ava had been for an envoy to the court 'with free access to the King upon the same terms as are usual at other Courts, and without submitting to any humiliating ceremony'.³⁴

Members of the Liberal opposition opposed the war and after Gladstone's new cabinet had taken office on 1 February 1886 and hesitantly supported the stand taken by his predecessor, many stuck to this position. Those against the invasion suggested that the economic and political arguments presented to justify the invasion had been trumped up. British merchants in Rangoon had already spent years pleading for annexation; and amongst those who cried foul, that they were treated unfairly by the Ava administration, was the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation. W.A. Hunter, a Liberal Member of the House of Commons, who was sure that the 'Chambers of Commerce' were behind the invasion, spoke of 'a war to open up new markets for British trade'.³⁵ Another Member remarked that Salisbury's government had 'given an exaggerated importance to the interests of commerce as represented by the Chambers of Commerce, and had appealed to the worst instincts of a nation of shopkeepers'.³⁶ Yet a third blamed the 'modern freebooters, the commercial Jingoos, who believe that they are entitled to do anything in

33 Roper Lethbridge in House of Commons 22-2-1886 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/1886/feb/22/resolution).

34 Note on the Relations between the Government of India and Upper Burmah during the present King's Reign (www.nectec.or.th/thai-yunnan/22.html).

35 Hunter in House of Commons 22-2-1886 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/1886/feb/22/resolution).

36 McIver in House of Commons 22-2-1886 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/1886/feb/22/resolution).

the name of British trade'.³⁷ Hunter was also not impressed by the alleged insult to the British Agent:

taking off the shoes in a hot climate was not worse than taking off the hat in a cold; leaving one's sword outside the Palace was not more absurd than a civilian wearing a sword, to which he was in no way accustomed ... and as for sitting on the floor, that was, no doubt, an attitude to which they were not much accustomed, but neither were they walking backwards, like a crab'.³⁸

Another issue was the ruthlessness of Thibaw's rule. Some of the facts to substantiate Thibaw's offences against Great Britain dated from the early years of his rule and Burmese 'atrocities' loomed large in the debate. In the House of Lords Salisbury, during a debate on the Macedonian massacres, even stated that in Burma there was 'constant perpetration of horrors on a scale and characterised by an atrocity before which anything which can be related with regard to Macedonia would pale'.³⁹ There was also scepticism about the fear of the French gaining a footing in Upper Burma, which had been a main reason to act. French goods could only reach Ava through the Irrawaddy and the Pegu rivers, both running through Lower Burma; allowing the British to keep control of armaments and other goods imported into Ava. For some, like Lord Napier of Magdala, such control could only result in 'serious complications' with France.⁴⁰ For others this was a reason why the invasion had been pointless.

Upper Burma was to be administered from Calcutta. The British government was pleased. The war had cost relatively little money, and Dufferin was also sure that its administration would be conducted 'cheaply'.⁴¹ In the not so long run Upper Burma might become a profitable possession. In 1888, at the end of his Governor-Generalship, the Earl of Dufferin was made Marquess of Dufferin and Ava. By annexing Ava, Great Britain had

37 Clark in House of Commons 22-2-1886 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/1886/feb/22/resolution).

38 Hunter in House of Commons 22-2-1886 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/1886/feb/22/resolution).

39 Salisbury in House of Commons 17-11-1884 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/lords/1884/nov/17/question-observations).

40 Lord Napier of Magdala in House of Lords (hansard.millbanksystem.com/lords/1886/feb/22/kingdom-of-ava-resolution).

41 Kimberley in House of Lords 22-2-1886 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/lords/1886/feb/22/kingdom-of-ava-resolution).

secured part of the trade route to Yunnan, and from there it was hoped further into Central China. But by controlling Tonkin and its access to the Red River, France was in a better position than Great Britain to establish a trade connection with that province; one which was much faster and where the terrain offered fewer obstacles.

Among those who opposed the annexation of Ava there had been some who feared complications with China. China considered the Kingdom of Ava one of its vassals. Within months a solution was reached in the Anglo-Chinese Convention relating to Burma and Thibet of July 1886; though rumours that Chinese troops might invade Upper Burma did not cease. Beijing recognised British rule in return for the continuation of 'the customary ten-yearly Missions' of the Burmese authorities to the Viceroy of Yunnan.⁴² China also undertook to promote trade between China and Burma. A Delimitation Commission and Frontier Trade Commission were established. Because British troops had some difficulty in bringing Upper Burma under control; the Delimitation Commission, tasked with determining the border between China and Burma, could not start its work for some time.

42 Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, James Fergusson, in House of Commons 26-8-1886 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/1886/aug/26/england-and-china/treaty-regarding-burmah). In 1894 a French missionary told Morrison (1895: 146) that the Chinese in Yunnan were sure that the 'English had determined to renew the payment of the tribute which China formally exacted by right of suzerainty from Burma. The Chinese were daily expecting the arrival of two white elephants from Burma ... the official recognition by England that Burma is still a tributary of the Middle Kingdom'. According to the story told, the procession went complete with 'yellow flags floating from the howdahs [carriages on the back of the elephants] announcing, as did the flags of Lord Macartney's Mission to Peking, "Tribute from the English to the Emperor of China"....'