22 Great Britain's Search for Secure Colonial Frontiers

On 12 August 1905, two years before it was to expire and about a month before St Petersburg and Tokyo signed their peace treaty, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 was adjusted. This time, with the British not ruling out a Russian revenge attack elsewhere to make up for its reversals in Manchuria, India was included in its scope. The preamble mentioned as one of the objectives of the renewal the 'consolidation and maintenance of the general peace in the regions of Eastern Asia and India'. Article IV noted that Great Britain had 'a special interest in all that concerns the security of the Indian frontier' and that Japan recognised the British right 'to take such measures in the proximity of that frontier as she may find necessary for safeguarding her Indian possessions'. The revised treaty, which in its preamble now specifically endorsed the 'principle of equal opportunities for the commerce and industry of all nations in China', could more easily engage Great Britain and Japan in war than before. The 1902 provision about support in a war with two enemies had been changed. Article II of the new treaty stipulated that if 'by reason of an unprovoked attack or aggressive action, wherever arising, on the part of any other Power or Powers' Japan or Great Britain 'should be involved in a war in defense of its territorial rights or special interests' in East Asia or India, the other would 'at once come to the assistance of its ally' and would 'conduct war in common, and make peace in mutual agreement'.[1]

With the Russian fleet in Asia having been cut out and the assurance of Japanese support should the British position in India be endangered, there was no longer any urgent need for the British to have a strong naval presence in Asia. Before the end of the year, London could effectuate plans, which had already been considered at the beginning of the century, to reduce the strength of its fleet in Asia. Five battleships were redirected to Europe (Massie 1993: 462). By doing so Great Britain, as people in the dominions did not fail to notice, ceased to be a naval power in the Pacific,

1 In Article VI Great Britain promised to 'maintain strict neutrality' in the Russo-Japanese War and that it would join in on the side of Japan should any other Power enter into hostilities against Japan. Article VIII stipulated that the treaty would be in force for ten years and that, if at that moment Japan or Great Britain was engaged in war, the alliance would continue until peace was concluded.

while its negotiation position in China had also suffered. Britain could no longer rely 'on her prestige and naval strength', but had become dependent on 'paper and on promises', Putnam Weale (1908: 627) observed. Japan was a British ally but also a threat. In Great Britain there was concern about Japan's growing economic presence in the Yangtze Valley (Steeds 2002: 10). Pessimists, as they had done before and would continue to, foretold the decline of the British Empire. One of them, Putnam Weale (1908: 636, 638), alerted his readers to the determination of Japan to gain the same preponderance in the Yangtze Valley that it had already acquired in Korea and southern Manchuria, warning that steps had to be taken to prevent a British 'commercial downfall' in the Far East.

Besides entering into an alliance with Japan, Great Britain tried to come to an understanding with France over their relations in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. The two powers had to find a solution to the thorny questions of the British position in Egypt and their respective spheres of influence in continental Southeast Asia. A problem less likely to involve the two in a confrontation, but nonetheless of a delicate nature, was the delineation of the British and the French possessions in the South Sea.

The South Pacific

In France colonialists came to regret that after the 1840s and 1850s, due to 'unnecessary considerations for foreign reproaches', France had not pressed on in the South Pacific (Lorin 1906: 420). None of the larger islands was French. France only ruled over 'a few scattered archipelagos in the immense Ocean' (ibid.: 420). In 1874, after the British annexation of Fiji, France, much to the disappointment of French advocates of a colonial empire, had not even reciprocated by annexing the New Hebrides. A few years later the situation had changed. Anglo-French conflicts in the South Pacific re-emerged after France, inspired by a recently refound colonial mood, or by what Carnarvon described as a 'desire for territory, and the wise foresight which looked to the opening of the Panama Canal', aimed at colonial expansion, not only in Southeast Asia but also in the South Pacific.[2]

In the Jarnac Convention or Declaration of 19 June 1847 – signed in London and named after the French Chargé d'Affaires Comte de Jarnac – London had recognised the French Protectorate over Tahiti. Great Britain and France

2 Carnarvon in House of Lords 2-5-1887 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1887/may/2/questions-observations).

had also agreed – because of a mistake by the French negotiator, Frenchmen would later claim (Froment-Guieysse 1922: 109) – that of the Society Islands the Leeward Islands of Tahiti (Raiatea, Tahaa, Bora-Bora and Huahine) would remain independent. In the early 1880s France strengthened its position in this part of the South Pacific. In 1880 Tahiti was annexed, as were the Tuamotou Islands and Tubuaï and Raivavae, two islands that had been under French protectorate in the Austral Islands since 1842.[3] In the same year, following visits to the islands in the previous two years by the German warships *Ariadne* and *Bismarck*, and indifferent to British protests, France impressed the spectre of a German occupation on its inhabitants and also established protectorates over Raiatea and Tahaa (Froment-Guieysse 1922: 132, Newbury 1967: 13). A German protest put an end to any further French aggrandisements in the Leeward Islands of Tahiti, but an annexation of the Gambier Islands and Rapa followed in 1881. However, the annexation of Rapa, which in those days was considered to be strategically located along the sea route between the United States and the Australasian colonies – and its importance was to increase once ships could sail the Panama Canal – was never effective. What had been agreed upon was, in fact, more of a protectorate, leaving the Islanders in charge of their own administration and legal system (Bambridge & Ghasarian 2002). In 1887 France re-annexed the island, establishing effective control. A year later it annexed Raiatea, Tahaa, Bora-Bora and Huahine (Germany had dropped its opposition to the islands becoming French in the 1855 Bismarck-de Courcel Protocol). In turn, Great Britain accepted a request for a protectorate from the Cook Islands, which emanated from a fear that, without British patronage, the islands would become French.[4]

In 1887 Carnarvon would, with some exaggeration, speak about 'the enormous amount of recent French annexations' in the South Pacific. One of his concerns was the New Hebrides or Nouvelles-Hébrides, located west of Fiji. Should this archipelago become French, he said, 'there would stretch a great block of intervening islands between Australia and Fiji, all French'.[5] The New Hebrides, with copra as its major export product, had all the problems associated with a South Pacific island group. Like the Bismarck Archipelago, it was a centre for the recruitment of labour and,

3 The other Austral Islands, Rurutu and Rimatara, became a French Protectorate in 1889 and were annexed the following year. Wallis Island was annexed in 1913.

4 The Cook Islands were annexed by New Zealand in 1900.

5 Carnarvon in House of Lords 2-5-1887 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1887/may/02/question-observations).

similar to Fiji and Samoa, conflicts between Islanders and white settlers and disputes over land titles were endemic. As late as 1907 Winston Churchill, in his capacity as Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, would describe the New Hebrides as 'a group of islands over which no Power has exercised any authority … a sort of no man's land … [where] … owing to the habits of cannibalism and other savage customs, a state of grave disorder has always prevailed'.[6]

As elsewhere in the South Pacific, Europeans had settled in significant numbers in the New Hebrides Archipelago only in the early 1870s. Since then, law and order had had moments of relapse, resulting in the usual annexation requests, in which at first nationality was not the overriding factor, but rather the desire to gain armed protection (Pelleray 1922: 66). In 1878, after a meeting of missionaries in Melbourne had urged for a British annexation of the islands, Paris contacted London. Informing the British government that France had no intention of violating the independence of the New Hebrides, Paris asked and also got a similar commitment from London (Pelleray 1922: 68).

For Australia and New Zealand it was imperative that the New Hebrides should not become French. Since the French annexation of New Caledonia in 1853, Australia had 'striven with more or less energy and vigour to stiffen the back of the Colonial Office in combating French claims' regarding the New Hebrides, an indignant Australian Senator, Miles Staniforth Cater Smith, would write in 1904 (Australia 1904: 1). Likewise, in France there was a strong lobby for establishing French control over the islands, with proponents of a French annexation accusing the French government of 'excessive timidity', just like their Australian adversaries did London (ibid.: 12).[7]

Sentiments in Australia and New Zealand were the greater because it was believed there that France considered the New Hebrides a good location for a new convict colony, with newspapers taking up the theme, speculating about scores of hardened French criminals succeeding to escape and reaching the shores of Australia and New Zealand. In 1883, to ward off the danger of the New Hebrides becoming a French convict colony, Victoria had called for their annexation, but failed to get the support of the other Australian colonies. For Queensland, a continued supply of labour was an overriding

6 Churchill in House of Commons 12-2-1907 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/1907/feb/12/kings-speech-motion-for-an-address).

7 Germany was no contender. Godeffroy had tried to set up business in the islands, but had failed and left in 1883 (Pelleray 1922: 80). In May 1885, when Berlin and London had agreed on their respective sphere of influence in the South Pacific, they had come to the understanding that the New Hebrides were located in the British portion.

factor. Its Premier, McIlwraith, suspected the calls for annexation to be an attempt by missionaries to end labour trade.[8] The French also singled them out as the culprits, accusing the missionaries and their campaign against convict labour of having thwarted a French annexation of the New Hebrides (Lorin 1906: 432). In 1886, with the Agent-General for Victoria in London, Graham Berry, still warning the Colonial Office that new French possessions could 'only be regarded as the first landing place, and eventually these sweepings of the French prisons will be precipitated on Australian shores', London showed itself prepared to consider a French proposal to allow France to have its way in the New Hebrides in return for a French commitment to stop sending convicts to the South Pacific.[9] London had two conditions. France should allow for 'full protection and freedom for religion and for trade'.[10] And Great Britain would get the Island of Rapa, which, it was imagined, would become Great Britain's Pago Pago 'on the trade route of the future', but in fact would never gain the importance as a strategically located port that contemporaries attached to it (Colquhoun 1902: 188). London further persisted in its view that the colonies in Australia and New Zealand should be consulted before the two countries came to an agreement. Negotiations came to nothing. Only New South Wales and New Zealand could agree to handing over the New Hebrides to the French.

The discussion took place when the archipelago almost became French. In May 1886, only months after Berlin had indicated in the Bismarck-de Courcel Protocol of 24 December 1885 – which had not remained secret – that Germany would not protest, the Governor of French New Caledonia decided to invaded the islands. He did so after over twenty foreigners had been murdered in four years, and new attacks on settlers had taken place. In a move widely seen not just as a punitive expedition, but as an effort to establish French rule, he ordered two warships to the New Hebrides. French garrisons were established and the French flag was raised. After a British protest Paris disavowed the action and entered into negotiations with London. The resulting Anglo-French Convention of 16 November 1887 displeased almost every interested party: British and French settlers, New Caledonia and the Australian colonies. French troops had to leave the islands within four months. The task of guaranteeing law and order came

8 www.schudak.de/timelines/newhebrides1606-1948.html.

9 Berry to Knutsford 27-10-1890 (PRO FO 534 49).

10 Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, George Osborne Morgan, in House of Commons 15-5-1886 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons1886/may/14/the-western-pacific-the-new-hebrides).

to rest with a Joint Naval Commission, 'charged with the duty of maintaining and protecting the lives and property of British subjects and French citizens in the New Hebrides'.[11] Simultaneously, the Jarnac Declaration of 1847 about Tahiti's Leeward Islands, about which Paris and London had been quarrelling for seven years since the French had taken Raiatea and Tahaa, was abrogated. After a French pledge that British nationals would be treated equally and that no convict colonies would be established, Great Britain consented to the annexation of the island group by France. They formally became French in April of the following year. In Great Britain the government had some explaining to do. Regarding Raiatea, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs James Fergusson pointed out that it did not appear 'desirable, or, indeed, practicable, to remit to an aboriginal administration an Island which has been for some years under French government'.[12] In the background of the treaty loomed negotiations over the Suez Canal, which would lead to the Suez Canal Convention of 1888. Such an issue was too important to allow discord over the New Hebrides.

By the turn of the century feelings were as strong as ever. On the British side, also at home, they in fact extended to the mere presence of the French in that part of the Pacific. Colquhoun (1902: 193, 391-2) would compare these French possessions, according to him badly run, to 'an open sore in a healthy body' and to 'a sore in the side of Australia' that should be removed; not forgetting to mention that a Frenchman had called Noumea, New Caledonia's capital, Criminopolos. And, as late as 1902, a British Member of Parliament, Charles Dilke, played with the idea of an invasion of New Caledonia and the New Hebrides (Hiery 1995: 13). In Australia the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* wrote that for 'geographical and economic reasons' the New Hebrides were of 'vital national importance' (Australia 1904: 10). Frenchmen – in the New Hebrides as well as at home – made similar observations. They considered the New Hebrides to be 'a natural complement of the Caledonian Archipelago' or a 'natural dependency of New Caledonia', while 'the advance which the

11 Convention between Great Britain and France, Respecting Abrogation of the Declaration of the 19th June 1847, Relative to the Islands to the Leeward of Tahiti, and for the Protection of Life and Property in the New Hebrides, Art. 2. In January 1888 Great Britain and France agreed on the details of the Joint Naval Commission. It would have a President (alternatively the Commander of the British and French squadron in the New Hebrides; the lot to decide whether the first President should be French or British), and two British and two French naval officers (Declaration between Great Britain and France, for the Constitution of a Joint Naval Commission for the Protection of Life and Property in the New Hebrides, Art. 2).

12 Fergusson in House of Commons 27-2-1888 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1888/feb/27/islands -of-the-southern-pacific-the-convention'-of-1847).

English race' had made in the South Pacific was said to be 'a danger to French colonisation in New Caledonia' (*New York Times* 13-6-1886; Australia 1904: 12-4; Pelleray 1922: 98). Frenchmen also wondered why Great Britain, with its vast dominions of Australia and New Zealand, begrudged France, with the few 'miniscule archipelagos' it had in the South Pacific, extra land (Darcy 1904: 24).

The boost of sea traffic expected from the Panama Canal, convicts, composition of the population, land ownership and religion all entered the discussion. Though in 1897 France had stopped sending convicts to New Caledonia – trying in vain to promote its colonisation by *colons libres* – the phantom of a new convict colony had not disappeared in Australia, nor had the image of New Caledonia as 'a French dumping-ground for criminals' (Colquhoun 1902: 391). To some, the French decision was an empty gesture, only made because New Caledonia was already overcrowded. Should France gain the New Hebrides, the consequence could only be 'a fresh flood of the moral off-scourings of Europe … emptied out at our doors' (Australia 1904: 8-9). Unfortunately, Australians and New Zealanders had to admit that in the New Hebrides French settlers formed the majority and that French land claims exceeded those of the British. Two-thirds of the land – 'most of the best land' it was moaned in Australia – was owned by Frenchmen (ibid.: 5-7; Lorin 1906: 432). A culprit could also be identified: John Higginson, one of the earlier settlers in New Caledonia, whose business ventures would earn him the epithet of King of New Caledonia. Being a French national of Irish origin, and well-known for his efforts to expand French influence in the islands to the detriment of that of the British, to Australians he was a 'renegade Englishman'.[13]

Higginson had been the driving force behind the Compagnie calédonienne des Nouvelles-Hebrides (CCNH), founded in New Caledonia in 1882. Besides its other business activities, the CCNH was involved in the purchase of land in the New Hebrides and the promotion, in close cooperation with the Société française de Colonisation in Paris, of the settlement of Frenchmen from the home country in the islands (Pelleray 1922: 68, 81). As a belated countermove, the Australasian New Hebrides Company was founded on the urging of the Presbyterian Mission in 1889. Its task was to promote trade, purchase land and encourage Australians to settle in the New Hebrides. Though the initiative got the support of an impressive number of leading politicians and businessmen, the company would be defunct within years.

13 John Higginson, New Caledonia & New Hebrides: threat to the colonies (www.auspostalhistory.com/articles/1849.shtml, accessed 28-6-2011).

In 1897 its task was relegated to Burns, Philp & Co., which also opened a subsidised monthly steamer service to the islands, but this also ended in a 'lamentable failure' (Australia 1904: 6). CCNH did not fare well either. After its initial success, it ran into financial difficulties. In 1894 the CCNH was reorganised and renamed the Société française des Nouvelles-Hebrides. A French bank, the Comptoir National d'Escompte, took over and acquired all assets and land, but also failed to make the venture profitable. Though this could not have been the only reason, later, French authors would blame the policy of the then French government to treat imports from the New Hebrides into New Caledonia and elsewhere in the French Empire as foreign products and tax them accordingly (Lorin 1906: 432; Pelleray 1922: 82). Only in 1901 were the customs tariffs for products from imports from the New Hebrides removed.

Larger global considerations were also at stake. One option considered by some Frenchmen around 1900 was to allow Great Britain to take possession of the New Hebrides in exchange for concessions in Africa (Australia 1904: 3). Indeed, the New Hebrides became part of a British-French effort in 1903-04 to settle their colonial disputes worldwide, resulting in the Entente Cordiale of April 1904.

The Entente Cordiale

Conditions allowing for a rapprochement between Great Britain and France had already existed for some time. By mid-1898 doubts had crept in about the Anglo-French 'race for Yunnan' and the rest of south China. At that moment neither the British in Burma nor the French in Indochina had succeeded in constructing a railway penetrating south China. It had dawned on the Foreign Office in London that Yunnan might not be the commercial money spinner some had assumed it to be. On top of this came a growing awareness in London and Paris that what Salisbury had dubbed the 'policy of railways and concessions' in China, had inundated their administration at home and in China with requests for support and investments, which were often unrealistic and had been designed without any knowledge of local circumstances.[14] In Paris the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Delcassé, who sought French expansion in Africa, wondered whether Indochina and a possible sphere of influence in south China, compared to other French

14 Buchanan in House of Commons 30-3-1900 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1900/mar/30/british-commercial and political-interests-in-china).

possessions, were worth the money, effort and political conflicts with Great Britain they might occasion (Chandran 1977: 280, 289). To him, Indochina was militarily 'indefensible' (and it goes without saying that Doumer, to counter that view, stressed what he had achieved in this field, concluding confidently that the defence of Indochina was assured) (ibid.: 292; Doumer 1905: 363). Delcassé also recoiled from becoming entangled in a south China adventure by the exploits of Doumer, fearing a xenophobic reaction by the local population and the trouble China might stir up along the frontier of Indochina (ibid.: 301). Cracks had also appeared in the Franco-Russian Dual Alliance. The Anglo-Russian Railway Agreement of April 1899 indicated that, in China, Russia considered Great Britain to be of more importance to deal with than France, where the agreement had made a bad impression. For Salisbury it had been an indication that Russia had 'ceased to attach more than a formal value to the French alliance'.[15] The Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 would weaken the strategic importance of the Dual Alliance still further; though in political issues in north Asia France continued to side with Russia.

In 1903 London and Paris made their first moves to come to an amicable understanding. In May King Edward VII visited Paris. He was booed when he arrived but was remarkably successful in turning an anti-British mood in the city around. The following month the French President, Émile François Loubet, reciprocated. Afterwards, there was much praise for both efforts to pave the way for a change in public sentiments in the two countries, also in the press, making political overtures possible.

The Entente Cordiale settled the disputed between Great Britain and France about the shared frontiers of their colonies and spheres of influence. Three documents were signed on 8 April 1904, just two months after the Russo-Japanese war had started. One, generally considered the backbone of the newly found friendship, dealt with Egypt and Morocco, giving Great Britain preponderance in the former and France freedom of action in the latter. In a second agreement France surrendered its fishing rights in Newfoundland in return for territorial compensation on the west coast of Africa. The third accord concerned Thailand, Madagascar and the New Hebrides. With respect to Thailand, and taking the Anglo-French Declaration of January 1896 as the starting point, it was agreed that the territory to the west of the Menam basin, including, it was explicitly stated, the Malay Peninsula and adjacent islands, would fall within the British sphere of influence, and the territory to the east and southeast within the French. Great Britain and

15 Salisbury to Curzon 8-4-1899 (cited in Chandran 1977: 291).

France had 'liberty of action in their spheres of influence'. Bangkok had no say in this, it had not been consulted. London and Paris further vowed to respect Thailand's territorial integrity – 'disclaiming all ideas of annexing any Siamese territory' – and to honour the principle of free trade in the Menam Valley and the Upper Mekong region.[16]

With respect to the New Hebrides, London and Paris agreed to draft an agreement, 'which without involving any modification of the political *status quo*' would 'put an end to the difficulties arising from the absence of jurisdiction over the natives of the New Hebrides'. A second objective was 'to settle the disputes of their respective nationals ... with regard to landed property'.[17] To accomplish this, further talks took place in London in January and February 1906 and on 20 October 1906. This culminated in the French ambassador Pierre Paul Cambon and Grey signing the Anglo-French New Hebrides Convention in London on 20 October 1906. The New Hebrides became a 'region of joint influence'.[18] An Anglo-French Condominium, dual control, came into existence with a British and a French High Commissioner and a British and French police force. The Joint Naval Commission remained responsible for law and order. A joint Condominium Court, consisting of a British and a French judge and a president appointed by the King of Spain, was also set up, with both French and English as official languages; and which, among other things, had to decide on land title claims. The French fell under the jurisdiction of France, the British under that of Great Britain (other foreigners could choose which legal system they preferred).[19] The Islanders, regarded as 'minors and incapable', remained stateless and were governed by a Joint Administration (Unrecorded n.d.: 2). Labour recruitment was also regulated. Only vessels sailing under the British or French flag which had a licence issued by the French or British High Commissioner,

16 Declaration concerning Siam, Madagascar, and the New Hebrides (8-4-1904), Art. I, Earl Percy (Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs) in House of Commons 1-6-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1904/jun/01/the-anglo-french-convention-bill).

17 Declaration concerning Siam, Madagascar, and the New Hebrides (8-4-1904), Art. III.

18 Protocol between Great Britain and France respecting the New Hebrides, 27-2-1906, Art. 1 (www.paclii.org/oldpits/english/treaty_database/1906/2.html, accessed 10-5-2011).

19 The Condominium did not put an end to demands for a French annexation; nor did it end the distrust that Great Britain might aim at taking control over the whole island group. One of the reasons for the first was that dual rule generally within a few years came to be considered to have become a failure (Pelleray 1922: 97-8). A joint administration and judiciary did not work. The Condominium Court was slow in coming into existence, and after it had would, at least until 1922, not settle any land title case (Pelleray 1922: 70). A conference was held in London in June 1914 to try to remedy its deficiencies. A new Anglo-French Protocol signed in August of that year was only ratified in 1922.

could engage in it. Labour contracts should not exceed a period of three years. As in other cases where European governments took charge, the sale of liquor to Islanders was forbidden.

Taylor (1971: 415) suggests that because of 'the sentimental weight of Egypt', the general feeling in both France and Great Britain was that 'France had paid the higher price'. The reality was more nuanced. Not only Australasians were upset. In Great Britain there was also disappointment, coupled with a feeling that France had gained more, a conclusion fortified by statements by Delcassé and other French politicians and by reports in the French press that treated the accord as a French victory. The suspicion also lingered that France had not discarded its plans to annex the whole of Thailand, with all the worries about the future of British trade in Thailand that such an assessment entailed. In this respect, it was also considered disappointing that London had not succeeded in persuading France to abandon the special tariffs for foreign goods exported to Thailand and southern China via French Indochina. Still others were uncomfortable about British and French spheres of influence touching each other.

In Australia and New Zealand the reaction was outright negative; one of the suggestions there had been to offer Mauritius (which the British had conquered from the French during the Napoleonic Wars) to France in exchange for a British annexation of the New Hebrides. Balfour, at that time leader of the Opposition, observed that people 'were extremely indignant'.[20] Once again, London had succeeded in upsetting its Pacific Dominions, whose politicians were confronted with a fait accompli. In London the French had stood their ground and an accord had been hammered out that the British government considered the best result possible. London had communicated this to the governments of Australia and New Zealand and had informed them that they had to take the Declaration as it was. The proceedings made the Australian Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin, complain that the accord favoured France and that the suggestions made by him and his New Zealand colleague, Richard Seddon, 'appeared to have had no effect except, possibly, in very minor matters' (*Hawera & Normanby Star* 24-10-1906). Angrily, he and the new Prime Minister of New Zealand, Joseph George Ward, left 'the responsibility for the completion of the Convention on the shoulders of the Colonial Office' (ibid. 2-11-1906). Disappointed as Australians and New Zealanders were, the Entente Cordiale did not alter their opinions about the French a great deal. As late as April 1914 it was

20 Balfour in House of Commons 12-2-1907 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1907/feb/12/kings-speech-motion-for-an-address).

observed that though the Entente Cordiale had made London and Paris partners, the rapprochement had not removed the suspicion in Australia and New Zealand of the French intentions in the South Pacific (Hiery 1995: 14).

In Germany the Entente Cordiale infuriated Wilhelm II, who, in his correspondence with Nicholas II, would depict Delcassé as an 'anglophile enragé'.[21] It had also robbed Germany of a political advantage that Bismarck, as early as 1877, had considered essential to containing France, and which successive German governments had tried to exploit as leverage to gain concessions from Great Britain: 'Separation of England because of Egypt and the Mediterranean from France' (Steinberg 2011: 355). Germany, which had not been consulted about the Moroccan deal in advance, tried to hit back by presenting itself as the champion of Morocco's independence and the Open Door in the country. The result was a low in the relations between Germany and France, whereas until that moment the German colonial policy of *Weltpolitik* had hardly caused any commotion and thus had not added to Anglo-German frictions (Grupp 1980: 51-3). To highlight the German case, Wilhelm II travelled to Tangiers at the end of March 1905. Germany urged for an international conference about the future of Morocco. During the meeting, which took place in Algeciras in early 1906, Berlin did not get the international support it had counted on.[22]

The Anglo-French rapprochement caused Satow, in faraway Beijing, to conclude in 1906 that since the signing of the Entente Cordiale his French colleague, while not 'quite trustworthy', had become 'very friendly'.[23] Nanning was no longer a bone of contention between London and Paris. In January 1907 the city was opened up to foreign trade.

Yet also in France, as in Great Britain, scepticism about the intentions of the other had not disappeared. Ignoring the anti-German sentiments in the country, champions of French expansion initially continued to view Germany as a counterweight against Great Britain colonialism; persisting in this even after the Morocco crisis (Grupp 1980: 159-60, 217). One point of concern was Indochina, threatened more by Japan than by Great

21 Wilhelm II to Nicholas II 14-10-1904 (Bernstein 1918: 68).

22 Morocco only became a French protectorate in March 1912 after a second German-instigated crisis. The 'Agadir' conflict over Morocco in July 1911 had misfired after Great Britain, with Grey evoking the country's treaty obligations to France and probably also not looking forward to a German base along the Moroccan coast, came out on the side of France (Massie 1973: 729). In November 1911 Germany gave up its objections to French control over Morocco in return for part of French Congo.

23 Satow to Grey 8-2-1906 (PRO FO 800 44).

Britain. After the Entente was signed, Cambon concluded that its future was secured.[24] The renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1905 and speculations about its implication for Indochina made for renewed worries.

The Anglo-Russian Convention

A rapprochement with St Petersburg was also in the making. The shock of the Boer War, the prospect of a military confrontation with Germany and the disappointment over the position taken by Berlin with regard to the Anglo-German Agreement of October 1900, made some in Great Britain consider Russia a potential treaty partner. A new, additional factor was that the Persian Gulf was emerging as a target of German ambitions. Germany, already a political factor of importance in the Ottoman Empire, would only attain a greater presence in Persia once the Berlin-Baghdad railway (complete with special concessions in a 20-kilometre zone on both sides of the track) would have given it a foothold – perhaps even a naval base – in the Persian Gulf. Neither London nor St Petersburg was looking forward to such a new economic and political competitor in Persia. By the turn of the century, German had entered the British mind as one of the 'other and sometimes rival nations' interested in the Persian Gulf.[25] In Russia the prospect of a greater German presence made for pleas to push forward to the Persian Gulf before the Berlin-Baghdad railway was completed (Soroka 2011: 3).

In 1901 there were pleas, e.g. in *The Times* and other British papers, in favour of Russia and Great Britain solving their differences. Reconciliation was also on the agenda of Lansdowne who, in the lead-up to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, in October 1901 had sounded out St Petersburg regarding whether the two countries could come to an understanding over Persia and north Asia (Nish 2002: 3). In Russia the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of January 1902 made for some overtures to London, but this time Lansdowne was not forthcoming (Soroka 2011: 34). The Tibet expedition of 1903 put an end to any concrete steps to come to a rapprochement. By the end of that year the Russian ambassador in London confided to Lansdowne that

> it was most unfortunate that, at the present moment, when the Russian Government were, as I am aware, disposed to enter into an amicable

24 Paul Cambon to Henri Cambon 9-4-1904 (Soroka 1911: 78).

25 Government of India to Secretary of State for India 21-9-1899 (cited in Shuster 1912: 231).

> discussion of our relations at the various points where British and Russian interests were in contact, an event of this kind, so calculated to create mistrust on the part of Russia, should have occurred.[26]

Lansdowne continued to work on some kind of agreement. In May 1904 he conveyed to Tsar Nicholas II, through King Edward, a champion of reconciliation not only with France but also with Russia, that Great Britain had the 'earnest desire … that at the conclusion of the [Russo-Japanese] war our two countries may come to a satisfactory settlement regarding many difficult matters'.[27] France was also strongly in favour of a British-Russian rapprochement, partly out of fear that its Dual Alliance with Russia might somehow involve it in a war, party in an effort to isolate Germany on the European continent (Soroka 2011: 35).

It took three more years before the Anglo-Russian Convention was signed in St Petersburg on 31 August 1907 (or 18 August according to the Russian calendar). It hammered out an agreement about the main sources of conflict in Central Asia which for so long had poisoned Anglo-Russian relations: Tibet, Afghanistan and Persia (without, of course, consulting the local governments concerned). Other controversial topics stayed out of the deal. Initially, Russian diplomats had hoped that the negotiations might lead to British support for Russia's position in the Far East, but Great Britain, having to consider its ties with Japan, was not receptive (ibid.: 127, 134).

Russia and Great Britain pledged to respect Persia's integrity and independence and spoke out in favour of 'equal advantages for the trade and industry of all other nations'.[28] At the same time, to avoid 'all cause of conflict between their respective interests', Persia was divided into a Russian zone in the north, south of the Russian-Persian frontier (which included the capital Tehran), where, as London later had to admit, Russia had already been the dominant power for decades;[29] a much smaller British zone in the southeast (about half of the Russian zone); and a neutral zone in between. The two countries would not seek concessions in each other's

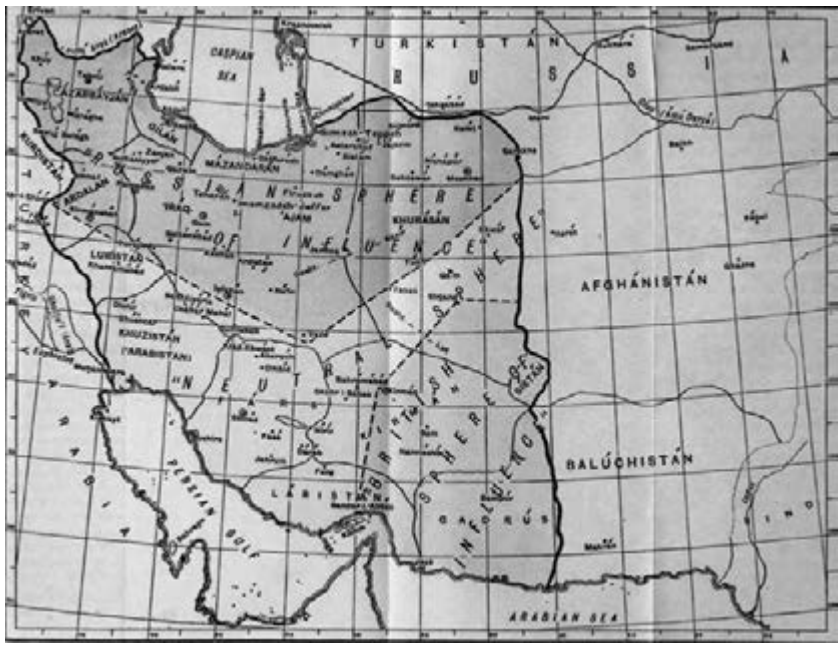
26 Lansdowne to Spring-Rice 17-11-1903 (cited in hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/feb/26/the-mission-to-tibet). In February 1904 the Under-Secretary of State for India, the Earl of Hardwicke, and Lansdowne both denied in the House of Lords that the Russian ambassador's remark had anything to do with the Tibet expedition (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/feb/26/the-mission-to-tibet).

27 Edward to Nicholas 12-5-1904 (cited in Carter 2010: 308-9), see also Soroka 2011.

28 Agreement Concerning Persia, Preamble.

29 Grey in House of Commons 21-2-1912 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1912/feb/21/persia-anglo-russian-agreement).

Figure 33 The British and Russian sphere of influence in Persia and the neutral zone



Source: Shuster 1912

zone 'of a political or commercial nature – such as Concessions for railways, banks, telegraphs, roads, transport, insurance, etc.'[30] In the neutral zone there were no such restrictions. Carefully, the British had seen to it that the Russian zone and the Persian-Afghan frontier touched nowhere.

The Convention remained silent about the Persian Gulf. London had wanted to include a clause confirming the British preponderance there, but Russia had refused, playing the card that it was a matter that also concerned Germany (Soroka 211: 137-8). When queried about this later, the British government could only draw attention to a letter by Grey to the British ambassador in St Petersburg in which he mentioned an assurance by the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs that Russia did not 'deny the special interests of Great Britain in the Persian Gulf'.[31] Not all British were happy with this. They would have preferred a Russian commitment in writing.

30 Agreement Concerning Persia, Art. I and II.

31 Grey to Hardinge 29-8-1907 cited by Percy in House of Commons 17-2-1908 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1908/feb/17/the-anglo-russian-convention).

For some, it was even a reason to moan that also in the Persian Gulf, once a British reserve, Russia had made considerable headway.

In Persia, the content of the Convention only became known on 4 September. It was immediately concluded that the treaty was a first step on the way to real partition and that it would not take long before Russia and Great Britain would intervene. A week later, a joint Anglo-Russian Note of 11 September finally informed Persia about the Convention. It maintained that Great Britain and Russia, 'desiring to avoid any cause of conflict between their respective interests' in the north and the east of Persia, had signed a 'friendly agreement'. Twice in the document Tehran was assured that the integrity and independence of Persia would be respected and that London and St Petersburg desired 'the pacific development of that country, as well as the permanent establishment of equal advantages for the commerce and industry of all other nations'.[32] Tehran responded by informing London and St Petersburg that it could not accept the Convention and its implicit division of the country into spheres of influence.

Regarding Tibet, Great Britain and Russia recognised 'the suzerain rights of China' and the 'special interest [of the British] in the maintenance of the status quo in the external relations of Thibet'.[33] Consequently, both promised not to enter into direct negotiations with Tibet, nor send 'Representatives' to Lhasa or seek concessions. Two other sensitive points were also settled. Great Britain would allow religious contacts between Russian Buddhists and the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan religious leaders, in the past identified as a source of anti-British sentiments in Tibet, while in an appendix London reaffirmed its commitment to withdrawing from the Chumbi Valley after Tibet had fulfilled its commitments.

Afghanistan remained within the British sphere of influence. In the convention, which endeavoured to 'ensure perfect security on their respective frontiers … and to maintain … a solid and lasting peace', St Petersburg acknowledged that Afghanistan was 'outside the sphere of Russian influence'.[34] Russia also promised that it would not 'send any Agents into Afghanistan' and that it would consult the British government should political complications arise in its relationship with Afghanistan. London, in turn, promised to respect Afghanistan's independence and not interfere in domestic Afghan affairs. In an effort to remove Russian worries, Great

32 Joint Note Russia and Great Britain 11-9-1907 (cited in Shuster 1912: 286-7).

33 Convention between Great Britain and Russia, Arrangement Concerning Tibet, Preamble (www.tibetjustice.org/materials/treaties12.html).

34 Convention concerning Afghanistan, Preamble, Art. I.

Britain also pledged to exercise the influence it had 'in a pacific sense' and not to 'encourage Afghanistan to take any measures threatening Russia'.[35] Confident in their status as powers, Russia and Great Britain made their agreement dependent on the assent of the Amir of Afghanistan. He was not as pliable as the British government had expected (others from the beginning had had their doubts). Angry that he had only been informed afterwards, the Amir waited a year before announcing that he could not agree with what the British and the Russians had concocted.

On the British side, the Convention was inspired by two old-standing interconnected fears: one about the security of India and the other about a Russian advance into Persia, which, after a brief interlude, St Petersburg was to resume with vigour in order to compensate for the territory lost in Manchuria. Both had acquired a new dimension. In August 1904 Prime Minister Balfour had dismissed earlier scares about a Russian invasion of India as 'most foolish', but he did so to call attention to a new danger to India's security. In the past, logistics had been Russia's greatest problem, making an incursion into India unlikely. This had changed. Russia had a railway line reaching the Afghan frontier, and soon it might have a second one as well.[36] The Persian Question had assumed an additional urgency as Persia seemed to be in a state of collapse, making the British government fear that without some sort of understanding with Russia, an Anglo-Russian confrontation might well be in the making. Such an escalation, Foreign Secretary Grey told the House of Commons, was what he had wanted to avoid. The choice was between an agreement with Russia and having to counter 'Russian encroachment in the north … by corresponding measures to protect British interests in the south'.[37] Grey refused to go 'forward':

> [W]hatever you gain and whatever you take, you have always to push your influence further still to protect what you have recently taken, and while you think all the time that you are making yourself safer, you are increasing the burden of your expenditure.[38]

British anxieties were matched by Russian ones. In Russia, which was weakened by the war with Japan and domestic unrest, the bogey was a British

35 Ibid., Art. I.

36 Balfour in House of Commons 2-8-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1904/aug/02/class-ii-1).

37 Grey in House of Commons 17-2-1908 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1908/feb/17/the-anglo-russian-convention).

38 Ibid.

advance, even an invasion of Persia, its army passing through Afghanistan (Soroka 2011: 124, 129-30, 133, 139).

Persia was an important British consideration, India even more so. By concluding the Convention, the British government was sure – at least this was the position it took publicly – that a Russian invasion of Afghanistan and India had been averted once and for all. The Convention was, in the words of Secretary of State for India John Morley, 'undoubtedly first and foremost an Indian treaty'.[39] To him, the Convention was 'an enormous gain'.[40] Grey, in this respect, stressed that Great Britain had gained control over Sistan (Seistan), which was in the British zone and was now presented as 'the key to the whole of it', 'the main point of danger to Indian interests', and 'a new land door of advance into India'.[41] It could no longer serve as an intermediate station for a Russian railway, right down to the port of Bandar Abbas (Bunder Abbas) on the Persian Gulf; for which the Russians would continue to press. Without the Convention, Grey also posed, Russia might one day have gained the right to build a railway to the Indian frontier, to which Great Britain could only react by advancing in Persia, resulting in the partition of that country and a joint Russian-British frontier.[42] Now that India was considered safe, there were immediately calls to lower its defence budget.

In Russia the Convention was not popular and met with hostility by the press (Soroka 2011: 141). A Russian advance in Afghanistan and Tibet had been blocked, while with respect to Persia even Foreign Secretary Alexander Isvolsky had to admit that the British had gained more (ibid.: 142, 146). In Great Britain there were also objections, as in the case of the Anglo-French Entente, in part inspired by long-standing anti-Russian sentiments and aversion to making deals with the autocratic Russian regime. Curzon even spoke of 'humiliation'.[43] Critics pointed out that the British government, eager – maybe even desperate – to come to an agreement, had conceded too much; some, such as Balfour, even argued that Russia had made no

39 Morley in House of Commons 17-2-1908 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1908/feb/17/the-anglo-russian-convention).

40 Ibid.

41 Grey in House of Commons 17-2-1908 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1908/feb/17/the-anglo-russian-convention).

42 Grey in House of Commons 21-2-1912 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1912/feb/21/persia-anglo-russian-agreement).

43 Norman in House of Commons 17-2-1908 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1908/feb/17/the-anglo-russian-convention).

concessions at all.[44] In Tibet, it was said, the British had failed to exploit the position of strength the Younghusband expedition had given them, which critics did not fail to mention had cost a lot of British money and suddenly, according to some, also a lot of British blood. With regard to Afghanistan, it was pointed out that the British promise to keep out had not been balanced by the Russian undertaking not to build a railway to the Afghan frontier. London had refrained from asking for this, so Grey explained, to prevent Russia from counter-demanding that Great Britain would not construct a railway line to the Indian-Afghan frontier.[45] The fifth article of the Afghanistan Convention also drew much criticism. Referring to 'the principle of equality of commercial opportunity in Afghanistan', it stipulated that 'any facilities … obtained for British and British-Indian trade and traders, shall be equally enjoyed by Russian trade and traders'. It was wondered why London had not pressed for a similar construction for Russian territory along the Afghan border. Causing equal, if not greater, commotion was the clause that should 'progress of trade establish the necessity for Commercial Agents', London and St Petersburg would consult each other about how to proceed. The possibility of Russian trade agents in Afghanistan was received with some horror, given the double function such functionaries could have and often had.

The Persian Question

What the British government had consented to regarding Persia, at times received sharp condemnation in Great Britain. The Convention was called a setback for free trade in Persia, detrimental to the prospects of British commercial activities there. Furthermore, it was seen as a blow to the process of democratisation, which was slowly taking form in Persia where, in the second half of 1906, the Shah, Muzaffar ad-Din, had been forced to accept a Constitution and Parliament, the Medjlis. Important trade routes came under Russian control, with few British putting much faith in Russian assurances about free trade. What the British themselves had received was 'a triangle of desert and sparsely populated country half the size of

44 Balfour in House of Commons 17-2-1908 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1908/feb/17/the-anglo-russian-convention).

45 Grey in House of Commons 17-2-1908 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1908/feb/17/the-anglo-russian-convention).

the Russian sphere'.[46] (Oil would become an economic and political factor only a few years later.) People also wondered – as they had done at the time of Port Arthur – what the effect of giving in to Russia would have on the British image in India and the rest of Asia. There was also some fear that, over time, the zones might be turned into leased territories *à la* those in China, but then much larger and in closer proximity to one another, with the concomitant danger of serious international complications, if not an armed confrontation.

Berlin's reaction to the Convention was different from that to the Entente Cordiale of April 1904. Before formal negotiations were started, Isvolsky had sounded out Germany. Berlin was not to object, he was told, as long as German interests were not infringed upon (Massie 1993: 598; Soroka 2011: 123). There was no Morocco-like attempt to hit back. In fact, one month after the conclusion of the Convention, Tirpitz pleaded for an acceleration of the German fleet programme, advancing as one of his arguments that, contrary to two years before, there was no 'foreign political danger' (Steinberg 2005: 134). But there were always Germany's economic interests to consider. Assurances were needed. Wilhelm II was to visit Great Britain in November 1907 and, in advance, Grey suggested that he should be informed that 'care had been taken' to ensure that German commercial interests in Persia would not be damaged by the Convention (ibid.: 136). Soon, however, Germany, tending (as France did) to side with Russia when conflicts over Persia arose, and evoking the principles of free trade and an Open Door (just as it had done regarding Morocco), was bitterly complaining about supposed commercial restrictions imposed by the British.

Domestic unrest, if not chaos, in Persia, so detrimental to trade and the security of their nationals, gave both Russia and Great Britain a reason to act. To restore order Russian troops entered north Persia in April 1909, with St Petersburg pledging that the incursion would only be temporary. In the south, where the situation, in the words of Grey, was 'very unsatisfactory', with frequent robberies and telegraph wires being cut, Great Britain reacted in a similar way. In October 1910 Persia was presented with what was widely called an ultimatum. Officers of the British-Indian Army should be allowed to take charge in restoring order along the trade routes in the south (with Tehran having to bear the costs). A year later, in October 1911, in view of what Grey now called 'the chaos in Persia', some 400 to 500 cavalry troops from India were deployed to protect British lives, property and trade. They

46 Earl of Ronaldshay in House of Commons 17-2-1908 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1908/feb/17/the-anglo-russian-convention).

Figure 34 William Morgan Shuster

Source: Shuster 1912

were, the phrase went, and the same terminology was used for the Russian build-up in the north, to reinforce the consular guards. India was also a factor. As Grey explained, Great Britain could not 'allow the part of Persia which adjoins the Indian Frontier to be in a condition which threatened the security of that country'.[47]

In 1911 internal strife and power struggles made for a brief indirect American involvement in Persian affairs when the American lawyer William Morgan Shuster became Treasurer-General, a position which, for obvious reasons, could not go to a Russian or Briton. In May 1911 Shuster arrived in Tehran with three American assistants. His stay was short and eventful. Not a diplomat by nature – Grey said he was 'quite innocent of any political intrigue'[48] – almost from the first day Shuster provoked the Russians and, by doing so, irritated the British government, which was not looking for complications. In June the Persian Parliament passed a law, drafted by Shuster himself, giving him, in his own words, 'plenary powers

47 Grey in House of Commons 27-11-1911 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1911/nov/27/sir-edward-greys-statement).
48 Ibid.

in matters fiscal' (Shuster 1912: 313). His effort to control all Persian financial proceeds, including those of the customs offices in the north, brought about his first confrontation with Russia. The north was Russian 'territory'. To make matters worse, to collect taxes Shuster instituted a special Treasury Gendarmerie, which, he hoped, would eventually consist of 12,000 to 15,000 men (ibid.: 338). He did not think anything was wrong with this. Collecting taxes from the rich in this way had 'always been the procedure' (ibid.: 158). The gendarmerie was to be under Shuster's control and, his plan was, should be headed by Major C.B. Stokes, an officer of the Indian Army and member of the British Legation, whose contract as military attaché would soon expire. Shuster never tired of arguing that his decision was 'actuated by no political motive in the faintest degree' (ibid.: 321). Stokes was the perfect man for the job because of his military experience, knowledge of Persia and fluency in Persian (and French).[49] The British ambassador, George Barclay, saw nothing at fault in his appointment, as long as Stokes would resign from the Indian Army (which he did), but London did, expecting 'some international jealousy'.[50] When it learned that Russia would protest, Tehran was warned 'not to persist in the appointment of Major Stokes unless he is not to be employed in Northern Persia', adding that otherwise London would recognise 'Russia's right' to safeguard its interests there (Shuster 1912: 99). Stokes' appointment, Grey would later explain, went against the 'spirit' of the Anglo-Russian Convention.[51] Stokes left Persia for India in December. Shuster had to settle for American officers to command his gendarmerie.

Another one of Shuster's faults was the appointment, against Grey's advice, of Lecoffre (in spite of his name a British subject; though there was some confusion about his nationality, as some thought he was a Frenchman), an official of the Persian Ministry of Finance, acting as treasurer in Tabriz in the north near the Russian frontier; again presenting as one of the reasons for his decision Lecoffre's fluency in Persian. In London unease increased. Grey thought it unwise and 'absolutely contrary to the spirit of the Anglo-Russian Agreement' to appoint Britons or Russians to 'administrative posts on the frontiers of Russia or India respectively'.[52] The 'constant appointments of British subjects in the north of Persia' might

49 Shuster to Stokes 6-7-1911, Shuster to Barclay 14-7-1911 (Shuster 1912: 327-8).

50 Barclay to Shuster 14-7-1911 (Shuster 1912: 328).

51 Grey in House of Commons 8-8-1911 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1911/aug/08/persia).

52 Grey in House of Commons 14-11-1911 and 12-12-1911 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1911/nov/14/persia, hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1911/dec/12/adjourned-debate).

give the impression that Russian influence there was replaced by British, which, he feared, could 'provoke counter-measures on the part of Russia'.[53]

For Russia, Shuster's gendarmes occupying, in early October, the properties of two noblemen who had taken up arms against the government in Tehran and could count on Russian sympathy, was the last straw. On 11 November St Petersburg threatened to sever diplomatic relations with Persia if the gendarmerie did not withdraw. Grey advised Tehran to yield to the Russian demand, which it eventually did (Shuster 1912: 162). A second Russian ultimatum followed on 29 November. Shuster and Lecoffre had to be dismissed and the Persian government had to promise not to employ foreigners 'without first obtaining the consent of the Russian and British Legations'. Grey refused to come to Tehran's assistance. He could agree to two of the Russian demands, though not to a third one: an indemnity to compensate Russia for the costs involved in directing troops to Persia, which, the Russian ambassador in Tehran explained to the Persian government, it had been forced to 'owing to the recent insulting acts of Mr. Shuster towards Russia' (ibid.: 165). For one, Persia could not 'pay anything', but more importantly, it was 'adverse to British trade interests'.[54] The consequences could be that Persia would lack the money to restore order and tranquillity in the 'British' south.

On 15 December Russia increased pressure. If the Persian government did not comply with its latest ultimatum, Russian troops would march on Tehran. On 25 December Shuster was fired. He left Persia on 14 January, boarding a Russian steamer bound for Baku in Enzeli. Once back in the United States, Shuster would start an anti-Russian campaign, stressing how devious St Petersburg's policy in Persia was, giving lectures and publishing *The strangling of Persia: A record of European diplomacy and Oriental intrigue.* Shuster not only blamed Russia but also Great Britain. For instance, he wrote about Anglo-Russian condominium in Persia and lashed out at 'the scarcely less injurious timidity of England so far as thwarting Russia's evident designs' on Persia was concerned (Shuster 1912: 287, 43).

53 Grey in House of Commons 14-11-1911 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1911/nov/14/persia).

54 Grey in House of Commons 12-12-1911 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1911/dec/12/adjourned-debate).