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Setting the Table

GERMAN REASSURANCE, BRITISH BROKERING, AND FRENCH UNDERSTANDING

France in 1924 was still preoccupied with security and terrified of Germany. In the winter, at French insistence, the allies announced that they would not evacuate the first zone of the Rhineland occupation area, centered around Cologne, as scheduled in 1925. The Treaty of Versailles gave them the right to maintain their forces in German territory if Germany did not disarm completely. The allied decision demonstrated the depth of the problem posed by French insecurity. The German infractions were for the most part trivial. Given French fears and the allies' position of strength, German leaders fretted that foreign troops might remain on German soil indefinitely. In addition, the post of foreign secretary in Britain had been taken up by Austen Chamberlain, in the past a strong and consistent voice for a bilateral entente with France. The possibility of a Franco-British alliance threatened a further deterioration of the already prostrate German position (Jacobson 1972: 10–12; Gratwohl 1980: 62–63; Stresemann, Vol. 2: 97–113; *Vermächtnis II*: 73–80; Wright 2002: 303).

The German foreign minister, Gustav Stresemann, sought through diplomacy to reverse the declining fortunes of Germany and its persistent role as the "object" of international negotiations. He wanted Germany to be a subject, demonstrating its own agency (Jacobson 1972: 10–12; Gratwohl 1980: 62–63; Stresemann, Vol. 2: 97–113; *Vermächtnis II*: 73–80; Wright 2002: 303). Stresemann wrote of "fundamentally changing the situation" (Vol. 2: 88–95) and avoiding "passive purposelessness" (Vol. 2: 225). "German foreign policy need not be inactive," he wrote (*Vermächtnis II*: 171). To reassure France, and to block a Franco-British alliance, Stresemann proposed a multilateral security pact in which France and Germany would both legally renounce the use of force to change their

mutual border, backed by a British guarantee of both sides against aggression from the other.

The chances of success were slim. The French would have to enter an agreement with their most hated and feared adversary and face the prospect of armed military action against them by a German-British combination. The British would have to make a commitment on the continent they had so far been reluctant to give. And Franco-German relations were at a nadir. The failure by Germany to pay its reparations on time had led the conservative Poincaré government in 1923 to move French occupation forces deeper into Germany territory, seizing the industrial Ruhr area as compensation. German passive resistance, marked by the refusal of German workers to report to their jobs in factories held by the French, was bankrolled by printing money. This hyperinflation ruined the German middle class and further poisoned relations with the French. This type of animosity and mistrust made value creating very difficult.

Making things even more difficult, Germany had little to offer. To convey its vulnerability, the German foreign minister referred to his proposal as *das Kind* ("the child" or "the baby") (Stambrook 1968). How would Stresemann be able to keep his progeny alive long enough to develop and thrive? Stresemann was armed only with diplomacy.

Stresemann's proself motivation and high level of epistemic motivation, consistent with the ideology of his party, led him naturally toward a realist diplomatic approach. Stresemann was a center-right politician and leader of the DVP (German People's Party). Given the very weak German position, realism dictated that returning Germany to its former position as a great power required conciliation rather than confrontation. Stresemann's pragmatism allowed him to put himself in the French position and realize that French insecurity was the source of German problems. Only when France felt secure could it be led to withdraw its troops from the Rhineland and take a softer line on the longer-term ambitions of Germany, particularly to revise the territorial settlement in Eastern Europe and regain its former lands with large numbers of German inhabitants.

His proposal was an expression of pragmatic statecraft in which Germany would surrender something of value now for greater gains down the line. It was a costly signal of reassurance. The pact amounted to the de facto recognition of the loss of Alsace-Lorraine to France. And the German foreign minister also offered to conclude arbitration treaties with the eastern neighbors of Germany so that its efforts would not be seen as a ruse to tie France up legally while Germany turned its sights in the other direction. The foreign minister believed that, by making concessions,

Germany would create the rapprochement and trust that would allow France to ease and end the Rhineland occupation early. He was setting the table for future gains.

Rationalists might argue that Germany, given its weakened state, simply had no other options. Its conciliatory diplomacy of concessions was structurally determined. This is belied, however, by the opposition that Stresemann faced in cabinet from his coalition partners, the DNVP (German National People's Party). This far-right party, with a low epistemic and a proself motivation, embraced coercive diplomacy even though Germany had little leverage. Although Stresemann shared all the goals of the DNVP—unification with Austria, the rectification of eastern German borders, and the early end of the occupation—the nationalists wanted a resolution of all these issues quickly and without any significant German concessions, much less unilateral ones. Consequently, Stresemann found support from the centrist parties in his coalition and the socialist opposition in the legislature.¹ Diplomacy was not endogenous to structure.

The German gambit came at precisely the right moment for the British, who were struggling to articulate an alternative to the Geneva Protocol. Austen Chamberlain, center-right politician and British foreign secretary, was an ideological fellow traveler. He had a two-stage strategy of, first, reassuring France and, then, bringing Germany into a new Concert of Europe in which the three powers would institutionalize the quiet, private, and pragmatic diplomacy of the post-Napoleonic period. With the long-term perspective facilitated by a high level of epistemic motivation, Chamberlain believed the return of Germany to great power status was inevitable, so pragmatism dictated that its main concerns be addressed lest it turn violent. Britain would pay the present price of guaranteeing the European status quo for the future gain of European peace, which was in the British interest.

The right-wing members of the conservative British cabinet opposed a guarantee of French security at the current time. They shared Chamberlain's foreign policy goal of improving relations between France and Germany but did not share his diplomatic style. The more conservative Tories wanted to withhold British willingness to make such a commitment until later in the negotiation process to extract as much as possible from the French. Only the foreign secretary's threat of resignation led Britain to reveal its preferences and make such a commitment before formal negotiations began. By making such a pledge, British brokering

1. The Communists opposed any rapprochement with the West, seeing it through their Marxist lenses as the precursor to a capitalist alignment against the Soviet Union.

contributed to constructing a zone of possible agreement between the French and the Germans. The realist diplomacy of Britain was a necessary condition for successful agreement.

Value creating, however, requires reciprocation by others. Therefore, it was crucial that the French government still be led by the left-leaning and more prosocial Cartel des Gauches. Although distrustful of Germany, the coalition still engaged in liberal diplomacy, which led the Cartel to explore the German proposal rather than dismissing it outright. As coercive bargainers, the French right derided the significance of the German offer; it did not see the German offer as a costly signal. Had it been in government, the diplomatic style of French conservatives would have strangled Stresemann's baby in its cradle.

GERMAN REASSURANCE

Stresemann's Realism in Theory: Recognizing German Weakness

The origins of the German initiative cannot be understood without reference to the pragmatic statecraft of the German foreign minister, Gustav Stresemann. The man himself constantly described his approach as "sober realpolitik" (in Wright 2002: 285). Stresemann's realism is evident in his insistence on putting vital interests first, a careful "ordering of priorities" as Robert Gratwohl (1980: 120) puts it. In an indictment of coercive bargaining, the foreign minister cautioned that "a nation must not adopt the attitude of a child that writes a list of its wants on Christmas Eve, which contains everything that the child will need for the next fifteen years" (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 221; Wright 2002: 345). Good diplomacy "depends . . . on the actual restriction of these aims, and the consequent abandonment of a policy that attempts to advance in every direction at once" (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 159; Jacobson 1972: 116).

Separating vital interests from more peripheral ones was particularly important given the disarmed state of Germany (Vermächtnis II: 172). Realism required an objective view of German options that was "conscious of the limitations on our power" (Wright 2002: 298). "Power politics works to our disadvantage presently," Stresemann wrote. "It is necessary to draw the consequences from that in order to be able to move forward, as difficult as it is to admit" (Vol. 2: 88–95). Lacking military might, Germany needed to develop friendlier relations with other nations: "Progress within the sphere of these foreign-political aims is not dependent on warlike resources, which Germany lacks. But it does depend on co-operation and understanding with the Powers whose decision on these questions is essential for its attainment" (Stresemann,

Vol. 2: 159). Cooperation would bring greater gains than saber-rattling. He wrote that “abroad, we have at present neither political power nor influence. You can conduct successful policy only if you have one or the other or the first through the second. The only policy which can succeed is that which aims to become a worthwhile ally for other nations” (in Wright 2002: 285).

Stresemann was therefore carefully attuned to situational constraints. He was inspired by the example of Otto von Bismarck, as a “master of the art of the possible” (Wright 2002: 267). He admired the former chancellor’s ability to adapt to circumstances and conditions, quoting him in public that “consistency in a politician must mean that he had only one idea” (in Wright 2002: 329). Stresemann himself was constantly adjusting: “I frankly declare that it is to-day not possible to lay out a programme of policy, because in certain circumstances events dash onward like a torrent, and in others, barely trickle forward at all” (Vol. 2: 225).

This was, of course, not a principled commitment to cooperation but, rather, an instrumental one: “The preservation of peace and the attempts to secure it are not weakness, are not timidity, they are the realistic recognition of our own national interest,” Stresemann said (in Wright 2002: 472). In his famous letter to the crown prince, Stresemann wrote that his first priority was the “assurance of peace, which is an essential promise for the recovery of our strength” (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 503). Stresemann’s diplomacy was thoroughly proself in its social motivation. Nations “are always egoists,” he claimed, and cooperative relations with other states depended on “parallel interest” (in Wright 2002: 344). Under his leadership, Germany sought “understanding and peace because we need both” (in Wright 2002: 298). More specifically, but in a similar vein, he said: “If I am told that I pursue a policy friendly to England, I do not do so from any love of England, but because in this question German interests coincide with those of England, and because we must find someone who helps us” (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 225).

Although Stresemann was deeply discontented with the current circumstances of Germany, he recognized that changing them would be a long-term process (ADAP B1/2: 665–69; Wright 2002: 285). Expressing frustration with that long “Christmas list,” Stresemann said, “In foreign politics I often have the feeling that I am being confronted with such a list, and that it is forgotten that history advances merely step by step, and by Nature not by leaps and bounds” (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 20).

The foreign minister recognized that not everyone in his country was similarly pragmatic and unemotional. It was “a difficult inner burden,” as he put it, for many Germans to admit their current circumstances and to remain patient as Germany overcame its obstacles and achieved its objectives one by one. Stresemann cautioned that they had to objectively

evaluate their situation, “which will not change any time soon” (Vermächtnis II: 73–80). Emotion was the enemy of pragmatism. “We are letting ourselves be led too much by our feelings,” he wrote. “If our policy is driven by our feelings, then we have to reject diplomatic relations with the world. . . . That will not get us anywhere” (Vermächtnis II: 173–74). “One cannot make foreign policy or domestic policy with sentimentality,” he advised his compatriots. “It is a question of adopting *realpolitik*” (in Wright 2002: 298). Stresemann preached sober and calm diplomacy. “It would be wrong to indulge in too much indignation,” he wrote in his diary. “We should rather try to dispose of the matter on a common-sense basis, by negotiation” (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 21). In true pragmatic fashion, Stresemann thought the ends would justify the means, only in this case the means were cooperative. The foreign minister told German audiences: “Do not always worry about the [cooperative] methods so long as one is moving forward. For in the end success decides which methods are right” (ADAP B1/2: 665–69).

Statecraft required attentiveness to the interests of others. Stresemann lamented previous German failures to do so, even when Germany was a great power. “We are not yet so great that we can ignore all this, and I believe that, in earlier days when we were great, we should have often held a different position in the world if we had paid more attention to this world atmosphere and other such considerations” (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 196–204).

The foreign minister was the architect of German foreign policy but throughout had the wholehearted backing of his parliamentary caucus, something that had not been true on domestic political issues at other points during Weimar Republic. Stresemann was the founder of the DVP, which occupied a center-right position in the party system and therefore combined a proselyt motivation in international affairs with a high degree of epistemic motivation that made it supportive of Stresemann’s realist diplomacy. As he saw it, the DVP, along with the centrist parties, would mediate between the far right and the left to allow “that great diagonal without which no *statesmanlike* policy can be conducted” (Wright 2002: 276, emphasis added). Before the December 1924 elections, at the DVP conference, Stresemann opposed a right bloc or left bloc, instead backing a coalition of bourgeois parties united behind a foreign policy of “national *realpolitik*” (Wright 2002: 298).

Stresemann also had the consistent support of Hans Luther, the chancellor at the time. The head of the German government was also politically of the center-right but refused party affiliation throughout his career, making him an ideal selection for coalitions ostensibly composed of experts rather than party officials. Consistent with his political ideology, he was a pragmatist. Luther disliked doctrinaire thinking, seeing it

as an impediment to solving practical problems (Clingan 2010: 2, 4–5, 9, 19, 23, 32, 55). C. Edmund Clingan writes, “Luther lived a variety of lives, but there were consistent traits. The first trait was flexibility” (2010: 7).

Stresemann’s Realism in Practice: Acknowledging French Fear

The most vital interest for Germany was regaining “the sovereignty of Germany on German soil” (Jacobson 1972: 8; ADAP B1/2: 665–69), the easing and eventual termination of the French occupation of the Rhineland, and the assurance that there would no future incursions into German territory such as the Ruhr invasion. Stresemann put it more colorfully before nationalist audiences. He called the Rhineland the “burning wound on the German body” (Vermächtnis II: 88–95). Stresemann wrote to the crown prince: “The most important thing . . . is the liberation of German territory from any occupying force. We must first get the stranglehold from our neck” (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 503–6; see also Jacobson 1972: 42). Only then could Germany turn toward longer-term German goals, particularly the revision of the eastern borders of Germany with Poland and the return of ethnically German majority areas to the Reich, aims that Stresemann shared with the nationalist right (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 503–6; Wright 2002: 268).

France was the primary obstacle to restoring Germany to its former great power status (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 158). Given the present weakened state of Germany, however, only a policy of reconciliation was possible. Stresemann advocated “reaching an understanding with France as the most stubborn opponent of international German renewal, thereby laying the foundation for German viability” (Vermächtnis II: 171).

Stresemann’s high degree of epistemic motivation, which he shared with the German center-right and left, allowed him to see that, even in its current preeminent state, France required reassurance given its fear of an eventual German *revanche*. In his diary, Stresemann revealed that he personally thought that the French fears were irrational: “How far the madness has gone in France may be seen from the statement of a deputy in the French Chamber that Germany is to-day better equipped for a war than she was in 1914,” he wrote. “We ourselves know that we have no weapons . . . so that the way stands open for a Polish march on Berlin. . . . Anyone who ventured on even a defensive war would be sending his men to certain death” (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 15). More irreverently, he wrote in a private letter: “The fact that in France the idea of security should still beset people’s minds is comprehensible, though absurd” (Stresemann, Vol. 3: 421). He complained that the France maintained its troops in Cologne “because twenty thousand rifle-barrel castings have been found somewhere” (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 15).

Yet pragmatically Stresemann recognized that the Germans “shall do no good by ignoring this attitude. The other Allies will have to take it into account” (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 15). He set about trying to find some way of resolving French fears. “We must . . . ask ourselves whether the question of French security, this nightmare of a future German attack, all these modifications regarding the control of the Rhineland . . . whether all these obsessions could be abolished,” he wrote (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 64; Jacobson 1972: 9). He had “security dilemma sensibility” (Booth and Wheeler 2008).

A more secure France would be less intransigent regarding the remaining disarmament questions that were postponing the evacuation of Cologne. Through diplomacy, Germany could avoid the strict interpretation of the Versailles Treaty and forestall the implementation of the permanent disarmament-monitoring regime that the French desired (*Vermachtnis II*: 88–95). It might also eventually allow for the alleviation of the stringent conditions under which the Rhine population lived, perhaps even an early end to the occupation in the other zones (Cohrs 2006: 228). In a memo to the German ambassador to France, Stresemann explained that the issues of the Rhineland and disarmament had to be understood as part of a general problem of security. The French would not leave the occupied areas unless “beforehand something in the general security question occurs” (ADAP A12, No. 22). Without security, the French would forever find reasons to drag their feet in leaving the Rhineland, perhaps, Stresemann and others feared, even staying beyond the date that was foreseen in the treaty (ADAP A12, No. 67). The French could always find some legal pretext for extending their stay (ADAP A12, No. 67).

A fearful France would also block any efforts by Germany to redraw its eastern borders. The settlement of the western situation was necessary for the resolution of the eastern (Cohrs 2006: 251; Wright 2002: 306). A peaceful transformation through diplomacy would be possible only “if [Germany] had previously effected a political understanding with all the world Powers who would have to decide the matter.” France was the most important (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 215; see also Wright 2002: 342; Stresemann, Vol. 2: 73–80). Were he to successfully steward Germany toward better relations with Britain and France, it would have the “best and friendliest relations with those world powers” when it raised border questions down the line (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 73–80). France had established a system of alliances and agreements with the eastern neighbors of Germany, the Little Entente, as a second-rate replacement when the United States and the United Kingdom failed to provide the guarantee promised in 1919. Pragmatically, Stresemann explicitly thought in terms of a gradual progression of steps (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 503–6; Cohrs 2006;

Wright 2002: 327). He asked rhetorically, "But what stands in the way of a strengthening of Germany? What stands in the way of a recovery of German soil . . . ? What stands in our way is the eternal anxiety that if this 60-million nation becomes a 70-million nation. . . . The moment the incessant threat of war on our western frontier ceases to exist, this argument is no longer valid" (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 221).

The Price of Realism: The Costly Signals in German Memoranda

In the deteriorating context sketched in the introduction, Stresemann proposed to bring about a rapprochement in Franco-German relations and open up opportunities for Germany to secure other longer-term interests by offering France a security pact. The two nations would pledge not to use force to alter their common border. France and Germany would also negotiate arbitration treaties establishing procedures to settle their bilateral disputes peacefully. Other interested parties, the most important being Great Britain, could be drawn in to guarantee, with force if necessary, the integrity of the present territorial status quo against any aggressor, whether it be France *or* Germany (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 189; ADAP A12, No. 64).

Recognizing that Great Britain was crucial to the success of such a project, the Germans ran the idea by Chamberlain first. Stresemann's first memorandum framed the issue as providing security for France. He began, "The present acute questions of disarmament and evacuation are frequently considered in France from the standpoint of security against possible aggressive intentions on the part of Germany. For that reason it would probably be easier to find a solution for them if they were combined with an agreement of a general nature, the object of which would be to secure peace between Germany and France." In an indication of his instrumental empathy, Stresemann wrote that "Germany is perfectly ready to take this [French] point of view into consideration. She is anxious to see the problems arising between her and France dealt with by no other method than that of friendly understanding" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 189).

After sounding out the British, the Germans sent a similar memo to the French. When transmitting the document, Stresemann instructed his ambassador in Paris to describe it as a "sign of our goodwill," in spite of the very difficult and fraught relationship that prevailed currently between the two countries. Herriot had just recently given a sharp speech critical of Germany before the French parliament (ADAP A12, No. 67). In his conversation with the French premier, the German ambassador explicitly acknowledged French security concerns and pledged the willingness of Germany to begin open, fundamental, and discreet conversations to

improve bilateral relations, perhaps even somehow making use of the preferred French vehicle, the Geneva Protocol (ADAP A14, No. 80; see also ADAP A12, No. 64). In his memo to the British, Stresemann wrote that, given the desire for peace of all involved, “a secure treaty foundation . . . cannot be difficult to find” (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 189). Rather than stressing, as one would using a coercive bargaining strategy, the great distance between the positions of each side, the Germans minimized the differences between the parties.

The German note contained two concessions meant as costly signals. First, the acceptance of the current territorial status quo between Germany and France amounted to a German “renunciation” of Alsace-Lorraine, the former German territory that many Germans still coveted and considered ethnically German (Gratwohl 1980: 78). The very offer by Germany of a security pact amounted to a concession of a long-standing German goal before any formal negotiations even began, one that would be particularly difficult for the nationalist right in the German governing coalition to accept. Rather than retaining all items as bargaining chips in a coercive diplomatic style, Stresemann let go of one without simultaneous reciprocity to demonstrate his cooperative intentions. The foreign minister used the German term for “renunciation,” *Verzicht*, in his guidelines to his ambassador, although not in the written note presented to the British and Germans (ADAP A12, No. 67).

In a second costly signal in his memos, to alleviate French concerns that Germany was simply trying to neutralize the French militarily by treaty so that Germany could move with force against the east, Stresemann offered to negotiate arbitration treaties with any other states that desired them, a clear reference to the eastern neighbors of Germany (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 189; ADAP A12, Nos. 64, 67). Although these would not lock in the current territorial status quo, as the western agreement would (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 73–80, 88–95), this was nevertheless a concession, particularly given the special importance that nationalist Germans placed on the recovery of these territories, through force if necessary. It was meant again as a “sign of good faith” (ADAP A12, No. 99). German representatives were told to continually stress pacific German intentions in this regard (ADAP A12, Nos. 67, 99).

Honor and Dignity: German Nationalist Diplomacy and the Battle of the Proselfs

Might this simply have been the only way to respond to the particular structural circumstances of Germany? In other words, would a foreign minister or government of any ideological stripe have been forced to pursue such a policy? After all, what other options did such a weak

country have? Rationalists and realists would emphasize these structural constraints in an explanation of German behavior, in which case diplomacy was simply endogenous to the distribution of power.

Had there been no room for agency, however, we would observe cross-party consensus on the course Germany should take, particularly among those who bore the responsibilities of governing. Yet a clear contrast in diplomatic style can be seen between Stresemann, his DVP, and his centrist allies, on the one hand, and their coalition partner, the highly conservative DNVP, on the other. The nationalists were the largest non-Socialist party in the German parliament and the most significant right-wing party in the country, dwarfing the only nascent Nazi movement.

As a rightist party, the DNVP shared the proself motivation of Stresemann and the DVP and their foreign policy goals—the restoration of Germany as a great power. They had identical foreign policy ends in mind—the most important being the return or incorporation of German-speaking populations in Eastern Europe and Austria, the revision of borders with Poland, and the pursuit of colonies. Yet the DNVP consistently opposed Stresemann’s realist diplomacy. The nationalists preferred a coercive diplomatic style of direct confrontation with Britain and France and opposed Stresemann’s pragmatic statecraft. Gratwohl writes, “It was the old story of catching bees: the Nationalists wanted to use vinegar; Stresemann preferred to use honey” (1980: 120). The nationalists wanted to “refight the war through the diplomacy of confrontation in order to assert Germany’s rightful place in the sun” (Gratwohl 1980: 119).

The difference was epistemic motivation. Stresemann criticized the nationalists for their lack of pragmatism. They lacked objectivity, setting their immediate sights too high and not coming to terms with the weakened state of Germany. “That Germany is completely disarmed and cannot contend with other great powers at its current strength is only contested by a few fools hoping for a miracle,” he wrote in an anonymous article (*Vermächtnis II*: 170–75). At a party conference, Stresemann spoke of a nationalist prayer, “Give us each day our daily illusion” (in Wright 2002: 380). He said, “Those who hope for a miracle can reject all constraints and dream of growing wings that will fly him again to the dawn. Those who think that we must have both feet on the ground will frame the question: ‘What serves my ultimate goal and brings me forward?’” (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 172).

With a high degree of cognitive closure, the nationalists were also overly short-sighted and emotional, thereby undermining their very own objectives. The nationalists believed Germany was unjustly persecuted. Even when the DNVP was in government and at its most restrained, Graf von Westarp, a powerful leader in the party, complained that Germany “stands under the pressure of force and injustice.”

Germany had “right without power” and the allies “power without right.” The nonevacuation of Cologne was one of the “most disgraceful days in world history.” The DNVP had no empathy, instrumental or otherwise, for the position of France; French policies were driven not by fear but by the “1000 year old” desire to dominate (VDR 62: 1894–1903). And this was the DNVP at its most moderate, before the decisive turn further toward the right led by Alfred Hugenberg in 1929.

For Stresemann, pragmatic statecraft was the surest path back to power. “The honor and dignity of the German nation, about which so much is spoken, will be protected soonest, if the success of this step serves to secure the development of Germany’s vital needs in a peaceful way” (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 175). He was following the example of Bismarck, unlike those “political philistines who put principle above everything” (in Wright 2002: 275). He contrasted their emotional diplomacy with his own pragmatic diplomacy of “rational understanding” (Wright 2002: 380).

Stresemann criticized the DNVP for not prioritizing their goals and setting out a long-term program of diplomacy. He noted, “there were of course people in Germany who attach importance to raising question of Polish frontier at once, but this was the view of irresponsible individuals” (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 264). Stresemann shared their goals, but any effort to raise all the concerns of Germany at once would backfire, raising the hackles of the French right in particular. “I am of the opinion that everything must now be done first to achieve the evacuation of the Rhineland. . . . When we have achieved that, then we must consider whether the eastern question is more important than the colonial question, and that further to be considered is whether and when it would be desirable and successful to tackle the Austrian question.”

The foreign minister justified this plan by referring to how it would be perceived in France, demonstrating greater epistemic motivation. “For if in my speeches and statements and my appearances in Geneva I let it be known that I wanted all that, then [the French nationalists] would say to [French Foreign Minister] Briand: ‘There we have it! If we evacuate the Rhine, then they attack Poland, then they want Austria and then they want to have colonies!’ and then Poincaré would declare: ‘That is German imperialism against which you poor French must defend yourselves.’ Therefore I have concentrated on one thing and I believe that we must do things one after the other” (in Wright 2002: 405). The center-right had a longer-term horizon and an ability to see things through other eyes that the far right lacked. The DNVP “still operated with delusions of pre-1914 grandeur,” writes Gratwohl (1980: 119).

We might argue that the far right in Germany simply had different preferences. In rationalist terms, perhaps they simply preferred continued

deadlock to reconciliation with France, regardless of the terms. Perhaps they were preparing for the day when Germany could take back former German territories by force. But such an argument neglects the impatience of the nationalists. Stresemann was the patient one. Gordon Craig writes that Stresemann's goals "were objectives that most people in the rightist parties regarded as desirable. The trouble was that they wanted them to be proclaimed publicly and to be accomplished forthwith. . . . They would not understand that the realities of the European situation made patience, ambiguity and opportunism requirements of German foreign policy" (1978: 512). The difference was in the level of epistemic motivation. "Unconditional men with a proneness to over-simplification, they had no sympathy with a minister who was always as acutely aware as Bismarck had been of the limitations of foreign policy" (Craig 1978: 512). Indeed, had the far right been more pragmatic, it might have supported Stresemann's efforts as a way of lowering the French guard for a later German strike. Stresemann is often accused, unjustly, of pursuing just such a strategy (see chapter 9).

At the time that Stresemann made his proposal to the allies, Germany was somewhat fortuitously in the midst of a political crisis. The previous coalition had fallen, and the cabinet did not have the backing of parliament. Constitutionally, however, German ministers were still allowed in the interim to pursue policies in their areas of responsibility, provided that they stayed within the guidelines set by the chancellor, who supported Stresemann's bid. An untraditional government was eventually formed in late January 1925. Rather than having the formal support of a set of parties in the Reichstag that constituted a majority of legislators, ministers were "personalities" without the explicit backing of their parties in a vote of confidence. Nevertheless, they served as the conduits between their caucuses and the government and functioned essentially as a multiparty coalition cabinet (ADAP A12, No. 28; Wright 2002: 317; Stresemann, Vol. 2: 127–28).

Even after the German government was formed and the DNVP took its place at the cabinet table with the greatest number of cabinet positions (although not a majority), Stresemann did not brief the government about his plans, preferring instead to work out the overall framework with the French and British in private without domestic complications in either Germany *or* France. Stresemann knew the pact idea would be extremely controversial in France and Germany and wanted to give the notion room to germinate before it was smothered by nationalist outrage on both sides (ADAP A12, No. 67; also No. 81). Stresemann conceived of the process as first winning over the French government, then convincing the German cabinet, and then bracing for the "right-wing circle's storm" (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 90). The foreign minister was wise. Had he

not acted when he did, he would have had to seek prior cabinet (i.e., DNVP) approval and his initiative might very well never have gotten off the ground (Wright 2002: 317; Gratwohl 1980: 67–69; Stresemann, Vol. 2: 62–71). But when word of the proposal leaked in the international press, Stresemann and the German chancellor were eventually forced to discuss and justify the proposal in meetings with Martin Schiele, the DNVP minister of the Interior and spokesperson for the party in the cabinet, as well as a number of rank-and-file DNVP parliamentarians.

When details about the proposed pact became known, the DNVP promised the Pan-German League and Fatherland societies, conservative and nationalist pressure groups that were key electoral constituencies for the party, that it would protect the “honor and dignity of our nation” and oppose the renunciation of German populations (Gratwohl 1980: 77). The DNVP addressed a formal letter to the Chancellor insisting that further negotiations be undertaken in closest consultation with the DNVP and asserting the right of the party to refuse any deal if foreign policy continued in “the present spirit.” This provoked a mini-crisis that almost ended in the exit of the DNVP from the cabinet.²

Despite this, save the German communists, who considered any security pact a de facto Western alliance against the Soviets (Cohrs 2006: 215; DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 234), the other German parties largely supported Stresemann. The SPD (German Social Democratic Party), according to Leon Blum, prominent French leftist, showed the “same abnegation that the French Socialists had shown when they urged M. Poincaré to enter into negotiations with Germany on . . . the Ruhr” (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 252). It had suggested a similar policy, along with the centrist DDP (German Democratic Party), the previous year (Gratwohl 1980: 59). The SPD leader, Rudolf Breitscheid, spoke warmly of the German initiative. In keeping with the prosocial motivation and preference for reasoned dialogue of the left, he hoped for a “system of European states . . . without thoughts of the past, only with thoughts of the future, to live equally” in contrast to the vision of the nationalist right (VDR 62: 1886–94).

2. Luther accused the party of indicting the entire trajectory of Stresemann’s foreign policy. The chancellor agreed to a formal response in which he pledged to consult with the DNVP going forward, but only if the DNVP reframed its previous letter as objecting to the secretive style rather than the substance of the German proposals. This was, of course, not the case, but Schiele agreed to it to prevent a cabinet crisis (Kabinette Luther, Vol. 1, No. 55; see also Wright 2002: 306–7; Gratwohl 1980: 71–73; DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 263; Stresemann, Vol. 2: 78). That buried the issue for the time being. The secretive beginnings of the German initiative allowed the DNVP to deny any prior knowledge of the policy and therefore preserve its credibility while simultaneously justifying its continued participation in the cabinet to shape future developments (Gratwohl 1980: 78, 83).

The centrist parties were not as enthusiastic, waiting to see the details. But they took a more realistic line than the DNVP, in keeping with their moderate position on the ideological spectrum. Ludwig Kaas spoke for the Center Party, noting the possibility for steady, if not revolutionary, progress in German relations with the western powers and the importance of reassuring the French as a step in that process (VDR 62: 1903–11). Johann Heinrich Graf von Bernstorff of the DDP was less charitable but embraced Stresemann's practical approach given the German dependence on others. As "laughable" as it was to think that France, "armed to the teeth," was afraid of Germany, Germany would be unable to free the occupied areas until France had security. There was no use in "putting their head in the sand" (VDR 62: 1930–34). Germany should see things objectively.

BRITISH BROKERING

Chamberlain as Castlereagh: British Realism and the New Concert of Europe

Stresemann, however, was only one piece of the puzzle. Whether the foreign minister's opening to the allies would produce anything tangible depended on how they received his signals of peaceful reassurance. The German gambit could not have come at a better time for the British. The new Tory government was set to reject the Geneva Protocol, but, as seen in chapter 3, it needed an alternative to avoid the opprobrium of the international community and prevent a deepening of the sense of crisis prevailing on the continent (Jacobson 1972: 15). Here the Conservatives disagreed due to differences on how to conduct diplomacy, opening up a divide between advocates of coercive bargaining and of pragmatic statecraft.

Chamberlain, the new foreign secretary, took it upon himself to find an alternative to the Geneva Protocol. As a moderate in his rightist party, he was inclined, as expected, toward realist diplomacy in a way not true of his more conservative predecessor at the Foreign Office. In an indication of his centrist ideological position, a few years earlier Chamberlain, as leader of the party, had sought a merger into a new "centre party" of the Tories and the Lloyd George Liberals, with whom the Conservatives had governed during and after the war. This would have amounted to a shift to the left, and Chamberlain's initiative led to an intraparty split along ideological lines. Chamberlain talked of a union of those with "progressive" views, whereas his opponents appealed to those "who still believe in their principles" (Lindsay and Harrington 1974: 35–36, 39).

Chamberlain ultimately failed, and the coalition parties split apart, leading the Conservatives to fight the election of 1922 as a separate party (Smith 1997: 77–78).

Chamberlain's proself and high epistemic motivations are seen clearly in a memorandum early in his tenure outlining his vision for British diplomacy. "A successful British foreign policy depends, first, on a clear appreciation of the facts of the situation with which we have to deal, and secondly, on an equally clear conception of British interests and of their relation to the facts," he wrote. Consistent with this realism was a preoccupation with the vital interests of Britain: "The only sound line of British policy is the path of British interests. The road is too dark for any altruism or digression; it is our own security which must remain the sole consideration" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 205).

Chamberlain identified as vital those interests that no Conservative (or Labour or Liberal Party member, for that matter) would have objected to, such as the safety of sea communications with the British dominions (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 205). More relevant to the European situation, Chamberlain highlighted, again uncontroversially, the need to prevent any single power from occupying the channel and North Sea ports (CP 122 (25)). In light of changes in military technology such as the advent of air warfare, this required that Britain also prevent any aggression against France and the Low Countries: "The frontiers of France and the Low Countries now bear the same relation to the heart of the Empire as the Channel ports did 100 or 200 years ago." Chamberlain had Germany in mind: "A Germany established in the Low Countries and dominating France would hold the heart of the British Empire at its mercy" (CP 122 (25)).

Even though the foreign secretary admitted he was the most pro-French member of the cabinet and that he loved France "as a man loves a woman" (Grayson 1997: 32; Jacobson 1972: 16), his epistemic motivation is evident in his ability to objectively evaluate the situation in Europe and see the perspectives of both sides. Chamberlain diagnosed the problem on the continent as one of French fear and German hatred that created a cycle of acrimony and conflict, which could trigger war and draw Britain in. He wrote,

The main psychological factors in every case are almost the same. All our late enemies continue full of resentment at what they have lost; all our late Allies are fearful of losing what they have won. One-half is dangerously angry; the other half of Europe is dangerously afraid. The friction between these inflamed emotions is incessant, and acts as some septic irritant, poisoning the wounds which are yet unhealed. Fear begets provocation, armaments, secret alliances, ill-treatment of minorities; these in their turn

beget a greater hatred and simulate a desire for revenge, whereby fear is intensified, and its consequences are enhanced. The vicious circle is thus established. (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 205; see also No. 180; CP 105 (25), December 16 CID meeting)

Chamberlain believed that both the German and French positions were emotionally driven, rather than based on sober realism. Chamberlain's perceptions of the French were similar to Stresemann's: "As the genuineness of the feeling, I have no doubt. . . . If you ask me whether the facts are such as to justify fear as to the immediate future, in my opinion they are not" (CP 105 (25), February 13, 1925, CID meeting).

The foreign secretary identified a worst-case scenario, in which Britain would be "dragged along, unwilling, impotent, protesting, in the wake of France towards the new Armageddon. For we cannot afford to see France crushed, to have Germany . . . supreme on the Continent, or to allow any great military power to dominate the Low Countries" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 180). It was up to Britain, therefore, to provide security and interrupt the cycle, thus encouraging more pragmatic behavior on the part of others. "As long as Security is absent, Germany is tempted to prepare for the Revanche," he wrote. "'The Day' will still be the national toast and with far more reason, whilst French fears, goading France to every kind of irritating folly, will keep alive German hatred and lead us inevitably, sooner or later, to a new catastrophe" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 180). He sought to prevent France from "committing suicide under the influence of her fears."

This aim was not altruistically or prosocially driven. Chamberlain wrote in a memorandum, "So far I have spoken of the uneasiness of Europe and of the feelings of Frenchmen. But the case for an agreement with France does not rest only or mainly upon these considerations. British interests are affected at every turn by the insecurity of the European situation. We live too close to its shores to escape being affected by the unrest of the Continent" (CP 122 (25)). Even for the Francophile Chamberlain, Britain was interested in the security of France because its interests were interdependent with those of his own country. He wrote to a like-minded friend: "Do not let you and me because of our strong French sympathies tie ourselves to the defence of all the vagaries of French policy or allow our reason to be quenched in her fears" (Grayson 1997: 45). His epistemic motivation made him conscious of his biases.

Because the problem was psychological and emotional, Chamberlain believed that the task was to preserve peace long enough for scars to heal. His diplomacy was far-sighted and oriented toward the long term: "The only hope for world peace is that the situation should be stabilized for long enough to allow new generations growing up who *can* accept

the *fait accompli* and *will* accept it rather than face again the horrors of war with no certain prospects of success" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 180). In a letter to the king, he wrote, "I am working not for today or tomorrow but for some date like 1960 or 1970" (Grayson 1997: 41; see also CP 105 (25), February 13, 1925, CID meeting).

More specifically, Chamberlain's realist plan had two main components. In a memorandum, he wrote: "I believe that Great Britain has it in her power at this moment to bring peace to Europe. To achieve this two things are indispensable: 1) that we should remove or allay French fears. 2) That we should bring Germany back into the concert of Europe. Both are equally vital. Neither by itself will suffice & the first is needed to allow the second" (Grayson 1997: 45; see also Cohrs 2006: 212). The foreign secretary proposed that Britain should first offer France and Belgium a security guarantee that would allow them to adopt a more pragmatic, conciliatory policy toward Germany. Had such an entente been in place before 1914, Chamberlain believed, the Great War would have never broken out. The foreign secretary imagined that Germany would be admitted into the security arrangement later, after French fears had softened due to the British commitment to their security (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 205).

The second, longer-term aspect of Chamberlain's plan was to bring Germany back into the community of nations as a great power. He did not want to "hold Germany down in a position of abject inferiority and subjection." The foreign secretary proposed to "close the war chapter and start Europe afresh as a society in which Germany would take her place as an equal with the great nations" (Jacobson 1972: 24). This was not, as Jon Jacobson correctly notes, the expression of an "internationalist" frame of mind like that of Labour, in which Chamberlain sympathized with the German plight (1972: 215) but, rather, based on a far-sighted and pragmatic conception of British interests. The return of Germany to great power status would occur "sooner or later," however objectionable. Chamberlain believed that "no power on earth can keep Germany disarmed indefinitely" (Wright 2002: 383). And when Germany became a military factor again, it would inevitably set out to fix the "two most objectionable provisions" of the Versailles order: the Polish corridor and the partition of Silesia (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 205). Chamberlain wanted to lock in a favorable status quo before the structural environment and the distribution of power shifted in favor of Germany. If Germany were not accommodated beforehand, it would challenge the status quo by force (Cohrs 2006: 214).

Chamberlain shared this thought with Herriot, the French premier. The allies "could not hold Germany down forever, and our object ought to be to bring about such a change in the situation that by the time that

Germany might really have become dangerous again she should enjoy sufficient well-being and have travelled too far away from the bitter thoughts of today to care to risk what she then possessed on the chance that she might recover what she had lost in 1914" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 225). He wanted to make "the position of German tolerable, so that she may lose something of her bitterness and forget something of her humiliation" (CP 105 (25), February 19 CID meeting).

Chamberlain conceived of a re-creation of the Concert of Europe, in which Germany would take its rightful place. Points of friction would be resolved through pragmatic, unemotional, and far-sighted diplomacy. "If the concert of Europe can thus gradually be recreated, saner councils will prevail," he believed. He drew a direct analogy with the situation after the Napoleonic Wars, where the position of France was that now occupied by Germany. He was the new Robert Stewart, Lord Castlereagh: "That policy was in principle the same as I was pursuing today: first to secure the Allies against a possible attempt by France to reverse the settlement of 1815, and, having secured their own safety, to bring France into the comity of nations" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 326; see also Jacobson 1972: 217). Chamberlain envisioned the League of Nations Council as providing the forum (Grayson 1997). Although he made this idea his own, it was a common British conception of the League of Nations, even at the inception of the organization (Rathbun 2012; also CP 105 (25), February 19, 1925). Chamberlain's concert strategy contrasted sharply, of course, with the Labour view of the League of Nations (seen in chapter 3). Whereas the Labour Party, based on its diplomatic style, wanted to institutionalize reasoned dialogue through a legalistic process of compulsory arbitration under League auspices, Tory pragmatists such as Chamberlain sought to institutionalize realist diplomacy.

When it became clear that he would not obtain his first option of proceeding step by step, first through a bilateral agreement with France, Chamberlain backed Stresemann in earnest. He sought to make the German initiative a vehicle for his Castlereaghian strategy, proposing "to found upon the German proposals a restoration of the concert of the Great Powers in Europe and a lasting peace for our countries" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 259). Chamberlain recognized the importance of the German memorandum, calling it the "most hopeful sign yet" from Germany (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 200; Cohrs 2006: 210).

Chamberlain was impressed by the German concessions. It "appeared to me an incident of the utmost importance, which might be of vital consequence to the Allies and have a determining influence upon the whole question of our future security. As I understood the German proposal, it was in the first place a voluntary acceptance of the present western frontiers of Germany. These frontiers Germany had accepted under

compulsion at the time of the signature of the Treaty of Versailles. Now they not only for the first time accepted them voluntarily, but they offered their guarantee" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 212; see also No. 269).

He also noted the German pledge to resolve eastern border changes peacefully: "I took their reference to the eastern boundaries as a fact of great importance and as an earnest of their good faith and their pacific intentions" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 283). The memo was particularly important given the high cost that the government would pay in domestic politics. This was indicative, to Chamberlain and others, of "courage and statesmanship" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 395). The British ambassador to Germany, Edgar Vincent, Viscount D'Abernon, expected that "when text of this communication becomes public there will be general surprise at boldness of policy indicated—a surprise which in many circles [in Germany] will be accompanied by resentment" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 218).

As Stresemann had hoped, Chamberlain also appreciated what Germany did *not* ask for. He attached "immense importance to this new move on the part of the Luther Government" precisely because it was not made conditional on a shortening of occupation (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 200). He spoke of Germany's "reasonable representations" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 212). The foreign secretary also noticed the German consideration of French needs. Chamberlain wrote that he "welcomed the evidence afforded by this communication that the German Government appreciated the reality of French fears and were spontaneously considering what Germany could do to allay them" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 195).

Chamberlain's reaction indicates a high level of epistemic motivation, particularly because Chamberlain and his colleagues frequently expressed negative and essentialist views about the Germans as a whole, even during this process. Yet they did not let this blind them, which facilitated productive discussions (cf. DBFP I, Vol. 27, Nos. 409, 493; Grayson 1997; DBFP IA, Vol. 1, No. 53).

Conservative Coercion: The Distributive Style of the British Right

As with Stresemann and Germany, it might be argued by rationalists that any foreign minister would have taken Chamberlain's position. Was his strategy simply the "rational response of an overcommitted world power seeking peace" (Jacobson 2004: 14)? In other words, was the foreign secretary's realist diplomacy endogenous to Britain's structural position? Again, the fact that there were very different approaches within the government suggests otherwise. A significant number of "conservative imperialists" within the cabinet opposed Chamberlain's proposal to immediately offer France a security guarantee as a first stage toward European pacification. Leo Amery, Lord Curzon, and Frederick

Smith (Lord Birkenhead) all spoke out against it (Jacobson 1972: 19; Jacobson 2004: 23). Curzon, the former foreign secretary, was the fiercest opponent (Jacobson 2004: 23), but Winston Churchill, the chancellor of the Exchequer, was the most articulate spokesman of the group. His precise ideology is hard to identify, but his followers in the British cabinet were primarily drawn from the right of the party (Cohrs 2006: 208; Jacobson 1972: 18) and Churchill's views on foreign affairs have been identified by others as lacking in epistemic motivation (Tetlock and Tyler 1996). As expected, ideological divides corresponded with differences between the coercive bargainers and pragmatic realists.

Churchill and his counterparts had a similar diagnosis of the continental situation and British interests, especially that Franco-German rivalry and friction threatened to draw Britain into a conflict that it would prefer to avoid. In his memorandum for the cabinet meeting at which Chamberlain's alliance idea was also presented, Churchill echoed Chamberlain: "What is the cause which brings this dreaded possibility and choice before our minds? It is the quarrel between France and Germany. This antagonism, which has lasted through centuries, is unappeased. All the minor feuds of Europe group themselves around it. Everyone fears that it may lead to another World conflict. No one at any rate feels any assurance that it will not. We feel that we are deeply involved in this quarrel. Though we do not share its hatreds, though we cannot control its occasions, though all our interests and desires are to avoid it, we may irresistibly be drawn in" (CP 118 (25)). Nor did the groups differ on foreign policy goals. Churchill also believed that "Our interest in the ports of the Channel and North Sea is vital. . . . This necessity has given to the foreign policy of this country in European affairs whatever consistency it has possessed. The creation of the British Empire may almost be said to be a by-product of its execution" (CP 122 (25)).

The British advocates of coercive bargaining were even warm to the idea of a trilateral pact. Curzon urged Chamberlain to "seize this favourable opportunity" (CP 105 (25), February 13, 1925). Churchill had earlier expressed his willingness for Britain to act as a guarantor of a pact between France and Germany (CP 105 (25), February 13, 1925). Stresemann's note could attract the support of all conservatives such as Churchill because it was less universal in character than the Geneva Protocol (CP 118 (25)). Its application was limited to where Britain had vital strategic interests—in Western Europe (Jacobson 1972: 23, 37; Grayson 1997: 36; DBFP I, Vol. 27, Nos. 300, 349; CP 105 (25), February 19, 1925).

The difference lay in diplomatic style. Whereas Chamberlain and the British realists were willing to make this short-term concession now as a long-term investment in British security, the coercive bargainers proposed withholding a British commitment for the time being in hopes of

inducing more conciliatory French behavior vis-à-vis Germany. Churchill believed that “increasing French anxiety will make them all the more desirous of obtaining our assistance. We may be in a position at a later date to procure from the French concessions to Germany of a far more sweeping character than any they contemplate at the present time” (CP 105 (25), February 19, 1925). He argued, “It is by standing aloof and not by offering ourselves that we shall ascertain the degree of importance which France really attaches to our troth” (CP 118 (25)). He suggested a message for France: “These are the years in which you have the opportunity of establishing much better relations with Germany, and so rendering a renewal of war less likely. We will do everything in our power to promote these improved relations. The better friends you are with Germany, the better friends we shall be with you” (CP 118 (25)). Cabinet members Amery, Arthur James Balfour, Birkenhead, and Curzon agreed (Grayson 1997: 49; Jacobson 1972: 15; Cohrs 2006: 209). They advocated postponing discussions on security until France was ready to end the military occupation and discuss a change to the eastern borders of Germany. Chamberlain, they thought, was too willing to concede a British commitment without appropriate compensation (Jacobson 2004: 25).

For these advocates of coercive bargaining, French conciliation was not something to be expected as a consequence of reassurance. It was a price to be paid in advance for British security. Were Britain to make such a commitment prior to French concessions, it would lose its leverage and encourage French provocation. Churchill told his colleagues that “there is a tremendous risk in our being involved in that way in a policy which will simply keep alive this antagonism between Germany and France. France, with us, would feel strong enough to keep that antagonism alive” (CP 105 (25), February 13, 1925).

This group lacked the instrumental empathy for France that accompanied pragmatic statecraft. Curzon asked rhetorically, “Is there any ground for that feeling [of insecurity] existing in an aggravated form now? . . . There is no defenceless condition there. France is the most powerful military country in Europe.” He suspected that the French were overstating their fear to exploit British sympathy: “For the moment, surely, there is no danger at all and when we hear about the French government and the French nation being obsessed with their own helplessness and insecurity, is not that done to a large extent to put pressure on us?” (CP 105 (25), February 13, 1925, CID meeting). Balfour remarked, exasperated, on how the French “are so dreadfully afraid of being swallowed up by the tiger, but they spend all their time poking it.” Curzon replied pithily: “And the tiger is not a tiger for the moment” (CP 105 (25), February 13, 1925, CID meeting). Balfour complained of being

asked to do things “which we should never do if [the French] were not rather insane” (CP 105 (25), February 13, 1925, CID meeting). Birkenhead agreed.

With other cabinet members backing Chamberlain’s realist diplomacy and diagnosis of the situation (CP 116 (25)), the government was sharply split. “I am frankly at a loss,” lamented Chamberlain in early January 1925 (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 180). The British cabinet, in meetings in early March, first endorsed the position that Britain “do[es] not feel able to enter into a dual pact with France” but that a “quadrilateral³ agreement . . . for mutual security and for guaranteeing each other’s frontiers in the West of Europe, stands on a different footing and might become a great assurance to the peace of Europe” (CC 12 (25)). Chamberlain, who was soon to travel to meet the French foreign minister in Paris on his way back from rejecting the Geneva Protocol at the League offices, was authorized to tell Herriot that the government “attached the highest importance to Germany’s overture” as the “best chance for giving security to France and peace to the world.” The British hoped that “the proposals would be most carefully considered” and pledged that they “would also do their utmost to contribute to the successful development of this most hopeful episode” (CC 12 (25)).

Then, due to pressure from conservative imperialists, the cabinet walked back from a decision to give a definitive pledge to participate, hoping to extract more concessions from France first. “So extensive a commitment,” it was represented in the cabinet conclusions, “went considerably beyond what public opinion whether at home or in the Dominions would be willing to accept, *at any rate at this stage of the negotiations*, and the Cabinet were not prepared to sanction any step in that direction which it might afterwards be difficult to retrace” (CC 14 (25), emphasis added). In other words, the Tory right wanted to take a hard line and concede only gradually. It was only through threat of resignation that Chamberlain was able to force the cabinet to make a firm statement of British willingness to participate in a pact. In his meeting with Herriot, the foreign secretary blamed the conservative imperialists for the British indecisiveness (Jacobson 1972: 20; DBFP I, Vol. 27, Nos. 224–25).

FRENCH UNDERSTANDING

It cannot be contested that the structural position of France, particularly its geography, made it more vulnerable to a German *revanche*. This

3. Including, perhaps, Belgium.

made it difficult for any French government, regardless of its ideology, to ponder rapprochement with its former adversary. As discussed in chapter 3, the leaders of the Cartel des Gauches demonstrated as much distrust of Germany as those of the Bloc National. Herriot confessed his fears privately to British officials. Citing the recovering German economy, which contrasted positively with lagging French fortunes, the foreign minister said, "From my heart . . . I tell you I look forward with terror to her making war upon us again in ten years" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 224). He called the Rhine the "last condition of our security" (Jacobson 1972: 19). Chamberlain remarked that, when he spoke with Herriot, the French premier said that the only word that properly described the French attitude toward security was "obsession" (CP 105 (25), February 13, 1925, CID meeting). "We cannot have too many securities," the French premier stated (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 186).

Herriot's public position was hardly suggestive of, or conducive to, a security arrangement that included Germany. His speech before the French parliament in late January 1925, before he received the German note, was truculent. The foreign minister defended the continued occupation of the Cologne area, citing a litany of failures by Germany to comply with its disarmament obligations. He even suggested an indefinite occupation of Germany beyond the term specified in the Versailles Treaty (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 193; Grayson 1997: 51). The British ambassador reported that the "speech was acclaimed by the entire Chamber, most of the deputies rising to their feet. [Herriot] was throughout listened to in almost religious silence, save for occasional outbursts and spontaneous and unanimous applause in which the right took a prominent part." Indeed, wrote the ambassador, many passages might "have been made by M. Poincaré himself" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 193). Foreign policy under the left was not weak or neglectful of French interests, despite the prosocial motivation of the Socialists and Radicals. There was unanimity on foreign policy goals and beliefs in a way that was not true in Britain at the time.

The British move was therefore decisive. As seen in chapter 3, the French valued a British security guarantee of some form more than anything else. Briand, who became foreign minister in April 1925 after Herriot's cabinet collapsed, declared that "the best security for France is to remain always in close contact with her allies and to do nothing save in agreement with them" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 294). The British offer had the effect of transforming a distributive game vis-à-vis Germany into a potentially positive-sum one. Without British assistance, French security from Germany depended mostly on the occupation and demilitarization of the Rhineland (Jacobson 1972: 19), but ridding the area of French troops was Stresemann's top priority. A British guarantee allowed the possibility of providing France enough security to allow it to restore

German sovereignty. British realist diplomacy had real value in solving the European crisis of the 1920s. Herriot stated that without Britain a pact was a nonstarter, given “sentimental distrust of any German promise” (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 216). Chamberlain was not modest, taking the credit (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 283).

Reserving the Right: The Exploration of Stresemann’s Proposals by the French Left

British diplomacy was not sufficient, however. Britain had, after all, been willing to make such a pledge in 1922 as well, but the conservative Bloc National government under Poincaré had refused a bilateral security guarantee on British terms. The French left was somewhat suspicious when first hearing about the plan from the British. They were concerned initially that the German proposal would be coupled with a demand for a reduction in the length of the occupation and might also be intended to split the allies (DBFP I, No. 27, No. 224; Jacobson 1972: 13; Cohrs 2006: 210; Wright 2002: 304). Herriot confessed that, the more the Germans stressed their desire for peace in the west, the more he feared war in the east (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 225).

Yet Herriot was very receptive to the German proposal when it was actually delivered by the German ambassador. The French premier expressed the “greatest interest” in the German memorandum (ADAP A12, No. 99) and promised to bring it to the attention of the French President Gaston Doumergue that very evening (ADAP A12, No. 81). Herriot subsequently sought him out at the opera house (ADAP A12, No. 107). The German ambassador reported to Stresemann that his impression of his meetings with Herriot were “favorable beyond expectations” (ADAP A12, No. 99), even the first time he broached the subject (ADAP A12, No. 81). The British also reported that Herriot “received the memorandum rather favourably” (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 197) and that he had no objection to the inclusion of Germany in a security pact (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 198; Jacobson 1927: 27).

What explains the favorable reaction of the French? The prosocial motivation of the coalition and its preference for reasoned dialogue made the French government more likely to engage the German government in a way that a conservative government could and would not have done. Had the left not been in government, the German plan would have been stillborn. Chamberlain’s realism was a necessary but not sufficient condition for the pact idea to survive its infancy.

The French were seeking a mutually beneficial solution consistent with their prosocial motivation. The French left indicated empathy and consideration for the German position. Herriot told the German ambas-

sador that he understood that Germany also wanted and needed security, that any bilateral alliance would jeopardize the prospects for the German proposal, and that this was not his intention (ADAP A12, No. 99). Similarly, he told the British that “He recognized completely that, if France is guaranteed against German aggression, Germany has an equal right to be similarly guaranteed against any attack by France. He said this . . . with no sort of *arrière pensée* [“ulterior motive”]” (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 198). Briand expressed understanding when the German ambassador stressed that little could be accomplished on the diplomatic front unless Cologne were evacuated (ADAP A12, No. 263). Herriot even told the British in private that “it must be admitted that there was much in the present arrangement of the map in the east which lent itself to serious criticism” and that it should be possible to work out deal between Poland and Germany peacefully (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 232). Briand recognized that French behavior was also part of the solution: “We must take all precautions, but we must also take precautions in order that we do not uselessly disturb people’s minds” (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 294).

Herriot was replaced shortly afterward by Briand, who continued the same path. The British attributed the diplomacy of France to its foreign minister’s liberalism, implicitly evoking his epistemic and prosocial motivations. Chamberlain described Briand as “a man of supple & ingenious mind, capable of admitting disagreeable truths & forming broad & liberal views” (Grayson 1997: 57). He remarked on the liberal diplomacy of France and Briand’s belief that the creation of the right character of diplomatic interactions could transform European relations. “What struck me most about Briand was . . . the conviction which he holds, and which appeared again and again in the course of the conversation, that if we can bring these negotiations to a successful conclusion, our success will change the whole situation, and many problems which are now of great difficulty will solve themselves” (DBFP I Vol. 27, No. 364). The foreign minister was actively trying to create a new spirit that could make agreement easier.

The French left, therefore, appreciated the concessions embedded in the German memorandum rather than denigrating their importance. Briand admired Germany for how it had “acted courageously” in sending its memorandum (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 516). Herriot called Stresemann “well intentioned and honorable” (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 198). He publicly empathized with Stresemann’s domestic situation, noting that the German foreign minister had to reckon with his own public opinion and pointed out that the conciliatory attitude of the German government persisted even in the wake of the recent election of the nationalist Paul von Hindenburg as president, which had so unsettled France. Referring to Stresemann’s recent speeches, he said, “One must think of the intention

of his words. I was not able to find in what he said the brutal *non possumus*⁴ that might have been expected after a certain election." Stresemann picked up on the significance of this statement (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 346; Stresemann, Vol. 2: 84). Rather than engaging in reactive devaluation and ego defensiveness, Briand noted the "many Germans who were genuinely anxious to reach a pacific solution" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 353). The approach of his government became known as the policy of "understanding," conveying both the epistemic and social motivation that drove it.

The Reservations of the Right: Conservative Opposition to Stresemann's Proposals

Rationalists might argue that a French government of any ideological make-up, given the vulnerable position of France, would have been receptive to a German proposal that offered the prospect of a British guarantee, particularly given the recent and painful failures to commit the British to French defense. France had failed in its efforts to handle Germany unilaterally, evident most clearly in the Ruhr crisis. From this perspective the French had overplayed their previous hand and returned to a conciliatory diplomacy that more closely reflected their structural bargaining position.

But this potential argument is belied by the fact that the French right did not greet the pact idea with enthusiasm. When news of the pact began to leak, Herriot felt pressured to put the record straight in a private session before the Foreign Affairs Committee of the French parliament. Poincaré, a member of the committee, dismissed the German idea as a mere retreat of proposals made a few years before by the Wilhelm Cuno government in Germany that he had rejected when premier. Even before the security pact had developed a specific form, Poincaré was opposed and saw little need to negotiate. In keeping with his preference for reasoned dialogue, Herriot responded that the French should keep an open mind to see how discussions developed (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 134).

After the German memo became public knowledge, the conservative former prime minister made public statements against it. In an indication of his coercive style of diplomacy, he dismissed both the value of the concessions made by the Germans and the worth of a pact from Britain. Costly signals did not speak for themselves. He pleaded of Marianne: "Let her not be asked to exchange those means of protection for the

4. Latin for "We cannot," shorthand for an intransigent and uncompromising attitude.

semblance of guarantees or the mirage of security. In the diplomatic negotiations now going on France must not sacrifice the substance for the shadow" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 277). He engaged in reactive devaluation: "In exchange for a few concessions, we are obtaining a commitment from the Reich worth only what the reigning mood in Germany is worth" (Keiger 2004: 103).

Poincaré's views were shared by prominent figures on the French right (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 266). French conservatives accused Herriot, by engaging in an exploration of conciliation, of "naïve idealism" and believed that his government's "policy of understanding" would lead to a "fiasco" according to German reports (ADAP A12, No. 48). The leftist coalition had difficulties with the French military as well, which was conservative and nationalistic. Particularly problematic was the French war hero, Marshal Ferdinand Foch. A British diplomat described him as low in epistemic motivation. He was "impervious to arguments of any kind. . . . He certainly represents one of those solid breakwaters of obstinacy on which the waves of M. Herriot's eloquence and good intentions must dash themselves in vain" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 238). The French right might have given up on the use of force to realize French objectives; however, the experience of the Ruhr did not convince conservatives to change their style of diplomacy. The Cartel des Gauches did manage to elicit the support from some center-right politicians, but given the lack of cohesiveness of French political parties in general, this meant less than it did in Germany (Keeton 1987). This pragmatist group was not well organized.

The hostility of the right presented a significant challenge for the Cartel des Gauches, which did not have a secure majority and was recognized as fragile both at home and abroad (Stresemann, Vol. 1: 75; Wright 2002: 287). This necessitated a difficult balancing act between domestic and international politics. Herriot explained to the British that if too cool a reception were given to the German proposals, the DNVP would be strengthened and encouraged. And if the proposals were greeted too warmly, it would stimulate opposition in France and perhaps put the rightist Bloc National in power (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 266). After taking over as foreign minister, Briand told Stresemann, "You are not to imagine, however, that you have a monopoly of [nationalist opponents]. . . . They are to be found everywhere. . . . There are people in my country who gaze into the past and remember that we once held the Palatinate, that Mainz was once French, and that the Rhine policy was once the historic policy of France; and I must fight against these people in France just as you have to contend against such moods in Germany" (Stresemann, Vol. 1 224–25). The French asked for patience from the Germans, time to make palatable the idea of a security pact "step by step" (ADAP A12,

No. 134). Briand reminded the Germans that they did “not have a monopoly of insanity” (Unger 2005: 494; Stresemann, Vol. 2: 180–81). He explained his need to reassure public opinion as they embarked on a “new way of reaching mutual agreements between former war adversaries” (ADAP A13, No. 219).

Both the British and Germans believed the French, recognizing that the French left would be more receptive to Stresemann’s ideas than the right, given variations in diplomatic style. Of the French, a British diplomat wrote, “What a relief it is to have Briand to talk to after the sinister Poincaré” (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 354). The British understood the value of diplomacy. A memorandum cautioned that “if the spirit of France becomes again the spirit of Poincaré, the negotiations will break down” (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 255). British officials in Paris urged their home government to be more forthcoming to make the job of the French government easier: “Unless [Herriot] can allay feeling on the [security] subject, he may be swept away and replaced by an administration of more Nationalist temper” (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 198). Referring to the Poincaré government, Chamberlain noted that the German memorandum, though brave, “met with a far more friendly reception from the French Government that would have been possible a little time ago” (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 395). The Germans recognized Briand’s “goodwill” (ADAP A12, No. 263).

The British and Germans understood the French government to be well intentioned but forced by domestic circumstances to behave somewhat differently, precisely because of their political stripes. Stresemann wrote pessimistically, “[Herriot] is a Democrat and a Pacifist, and for that very reason he cannot give way to any weakness on the question. Against the attacks of the Right we must prove that he is guarding the rights of France and not sacrificing the security of France. . . . In any event there can be no doubt that Herriot’s standpoint being what it is, we have nothing to expect from him. He will, in this connection, roar with the lion, and we have to reckon on determined opposition from France to the evacuation, for these reasons, which may be regarded as originating in home politics” (Stresemann, Vol. 1: 17–18; see also ADAP A12, No. 22). Stresemann expected the French to engage in coercive bargaining. The German foreign minister compared this dilemma to his own position at home (Grayson 1997: 58) and attributed the failure to evacuate Cologne to these pressures rather than to a lack of good faith on the part of the Cartel des Gauches (Stresemann, Vol. 1: 30). The German ambassador gave his impressions of early meetings with Herriot: “I became convinced of the unconditional honest and personal intentions of the minister, who is under great pressure due to the security the problem and is honestly striving to find an exit” (ADAP A12, No. 99). Similarly, a British

memorandum described how Herriot was often overcome by military resistance to his plans: "M. Herriot may enter the marshal's [Foch's] presence an *homme de gauche* ["man of the left"]. . . . He must always leave it so transformed as to be indistinguishable . . . from M. Poincaré" (DBFP I, Vol. 27, No. 238).

The situation in early 1925, therefore, presented a potentially favorable window of opportunity for consolidation of peace in Western Europe due to the conjunction of domestic political developments and diplomatic styles in these three countries. The British, in particular, recognized the importance of the ideological character of the governments and the change in diplomatic styles that accompanied them. Chamberlain told his colleagues, "You have a Government in Germany which can settle some of these questions, and certainly I do not think you are likely to have a more pacific Government or one more anxious to find a reasonable solution than exists at present in Paris" (CP 105 (25), February 19, 1925). Others agreed. Curzon noted, "It gives us a chance which we have never had before. You have got a friendly minister in France; you have for the first time a reasonable minister in Germany. It is an extraordinary combination" (CP 105 (25), February 13, 1925). British pragmatists saw the possibility of value creating negotiation in the Baptist-bootlegger combination of the French left and the German center-right. The various parties had set the table for the tough diplomatic work that would follow, which is the subject of the next two chapters.