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VI. THE STRATEGIC BACKGROUND TO THE ANGLO-RUSSIAN ENTENTE OF AUGUST 1907

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IN July 1905 Lord Kitchener, the Indian chief of General Staff, wrote at the request of the viceroy a memorandum entitled *A note on the Military policy of India*, which was in due course sent to England for consideration by the home government. Its plea was for a consistent policy with regard to the North-West Frontier. At the moment, Kitchener complained, this was 'apt to change with every ministry and almost with every minister, while each incoming Viceroy probably develops a policy of his own'. The main danger facing India was uncompromisingly described as 'the menacing advance of Russia towards our frontiers'.¹

Kitchener denied both to Balfour² and to Sir George Clarke that 'I am one of those that believe in an impending Russian bogey or that I wish in anyway to exaggerate dangers'.³ Nevertheless, the picture that he painted was sufficiently alarming. To Broderick, in a letter of about the same date, he claimed, 'we have every indication that our northern neighbour is pushing forward her preparations for the contest in which we shall have to fight for existence. Even at this moment, as I write, the political outlook is threatening; he would be a bold man who would venture to predict that we shall not become involved in the struggle before our preparations are complete',⁴ and indeed that the struggle would not even be precipitated if it were known that India was unprepared to meet it.⁵

Home governments, whether Conservative or Liberal, were traditionally disinclined to pay much attention to the views of the authorities at Simla, regarding their ideas on foreign policy and strategic defence as 'provincial'.⁶ However, the situation in Central Asia was sufficiently alarming at that time, and Anglo-Russian relations sufficiently tense, for the home government not to be surprised by the anxiety of those responsible for Indian defence. By the end of the Boer War Anglo-Russian relations had reached their lowest ebb since the Pendjeh crisis, and during the years immediately following the peace in Africa they showed, contrary to expectation, little sign of improvement. Of the three traditional fields of rivalry between the two powers, attention was now increasingly focused on Central Asia. It is interesting that

¹ Kitchener MS. P.R.O. 30/57.30 (henceforth referred to as 'Kitchener's note'). Sir G. Arthur, *Life of Lord Kitchener* (London, 1920), ii, 151-9.

² *Ibid.* p. 146.

³ Kitchener to Clarke, 24 January 1906, Sydenham MS. B.M. Add. 50935.

⁴ Arthur, *op. cit.* II, 206.

⁵ *Ibid.* 146.

⁶ J. Morley, *Recollections* (London, 1917), II, 241-2.

Lord Salisbury's overture to St Petersburg in January 1898 did not mention Central Asia. It was Muraviev who raised 'the mutual advantages of disposing with all uneasiness with regard to Russia's designs on India'. Salisbury, however, merely remarked that 'the difficulty about extending the arrangement to Persia is that the northern part of Persia would be the natural sphere of Russian preponderance, including Teheran; and the Shah would think we had deserted him'. Afghanistan was not mentioned.⁷

Nine years later the convention was to deal solely with Central Asia. It was here that the Russians had taken most advantage of the Boer War, and in the following years, urged on by an anti-English press led by the *Novoe Vremia* and encouraged by their agents in the Middle East, the Russian government had continued to pay close attention to the area. Between 1902 and 1905 British representatives reported a long list of Russian successes in Persia and Afghanistan. In Persia Russian penetration through such means as the Russian bank; the establishment of a troop of Persian cossacks under Russian officers; the acquisition of concessions of various kinds; control of certain telegraph lines; and, above all, loans amounting to over three million pounds to the Shah, aroused the lively apprehension of the British. In Afghanistan the Russians were attempting to force the British to recognize their right to establish direct communications with the Amir and his agents, and generally to replace British by Russian influence in Cabul. In May 1903 an attempt by Whitehall to mediate in an Afghan-Russian dispute over the position of some boundary pillars near Herat brought a sharp, almost insulting pro-memoria from Lamsdorff on 5 October.⁸ The Russian foreign minister had also made it known a year earlier that he did not understand why the British claim to control the foreign relations of the Amir had been accepted by his predecessors and hinted that the time would come when the Russian government would no longer feel itself bound to accept it.⁹

There is a certain amount of documentary evidence on the Russian side to show that the penetration and advance of Russian influence into Persia and Afghanistan, if not Tibet, during these years was a deliberate policy planned from St Petersburg, and that economic penetration if not military advance remained the official Russian policy after the defeat in the Far East until Isvolsky secured sufficient support to get the Anglo-Russian convention accepted.¹⁰

More important here are several indications that the Russian advance, and even the danger of actual military advance, was seen as a serious threat in Simla and in some parts of Whitehall. Once the war in South Africa was over the British were free to counter the Russian movement and there are signs

⁷ British Documents, II, nos. 11 and 12.

⁸ *Ibid.* iv. app. ii.

⁹ Scott to Lansdowne, February 1902, copy in P.R.O. Cab. O. 17/60.

¹⁰ P. Terenzio, *La Rivalité Anglo-Russe en Perse et en Afghanistan jusqu'aux accords de 1907* (Paris, 1947), pp. 113-35. *Krasnyi Arkhiv*, vol. I (Moscow, 1933).

that during the last years of Lansdowne's term of office there was an increasingly firm policy in this area, paralleled by the first tentative feelers for agreement in 1903.¹¹

The English were particularly anxious to uphold their position in the south of Persia, although they recognized the impossibility of dislodging Russian preponderance in the north and in the capital. In May 1903 Lansdowne warned the Russians, in the House of Lords, that any attempt to fortify a port on the Persian Gulf would be 'a very grave menace to British interests' and would be resisted by all means at Britain's disposal—a phrase described four years later by Lord Ripon as 'unusually threatening language for a diplomatist to use'.¹²

It was part of the same forward policy against the threat of increased Russian encroachments that sent Younghusband to Lhasa; sent Lord Downe to Teheran (with the Garter but, unfortunately, no money); and inspired what the foreign secretary delightfully described as 'George Curzon's prancing in the Persian puddle'.¹³ It also sent Dane to Kabul in 1905 to renew the treaty with a new Amir, who was proving, to Curzon's alarm, far less amenable than his father had been. Curzon encouraged and indeed initiated many of these projects but there is some evidence to show that his desire for a firm stand against Russia was shared by the Conservative government. Balfour's biographer states that he continued to regard Russia as Britain's only serious enemy until he fell from office,¹⁴ and a recent authority has shown that he regarded the situation in Central Asia as the most dangerous problem Britain had to face.¹⁵

The Russo-Japanese war, which at first gave grounds to hope that the pressure in Central Asia would be relaxed, aroused renewed fears in that area. Charles Hardinge at St Petersburg took seriously for a time the prospect of the Russian government seeking renewed popularity at home, and success abroad, by ending the war in the Far East and turning against Japan's allies in India.¹⁶ Claude MacDonald, in Tokyo, regarded it as more than a possibility, and agreed with the Japanese that the Russian's 'next venture is much more likely to be an attack upon us through India than an attempt to wipe out old scores with them'.¹⁷ He pointed out that, in spite of defeat, the Russians were still capable of maintaining, in July 1905, an army of 250,000 men three thousand miles from Russia proper and linked by only a single track of railway. India, he added ominously, was a good deal nearer than Manchuria.¹⁸

¹¹ For the most recent and most detailed account of the foreign policy of the Balfour administration see G. W. Monger, *The End of Isolation* (London, 1963).

¹² Ripon to Fitzmaurice, 3 July 1907, Ripon MS. B.M. Add. 43543.

¹³ J. Newton, *Lord Lansdowne* (London, 1929), p. 242.

¹⁴ B. Dugdale, *A. J. Balfour* (London, 1936), I, 389-91.

¹⁵ G. W. Monger, *op. cit.* p. 94.

¹⁶ Hardinge to Lansdowne, November 1904. B.D. IV, no. 26.

¹⁷ MacDonald to Lansdowne, 25 May 1905, B.D. IV, no. 117.

¹⁸ Same to same, 15 July 1905, B.D. IV, no. 135.

Hardinge and Napier, the military attaché in Russia, by this date were agreed that the danger of the war being extended to the North-West Frontier was over,¹⁹ but the home government was sufficiently alive to the danger, especially at a time when the Dogger Bank incident and other disputes concerning British shipping had exasperated Anglo-Russian relations to a dangerous level, to take precautions. Despite Japanese reluctance the English delayed the negotiations for a renewal of the Anglo-Japanese treaty until the Japanese agreed to extend its scope to cover not only India but the adjacent regions as well.²⁰ Balfour defined these as, 'Afghanistan, the strip of Persian territory adjoining Afghanistan and Baluchistan, or if the last be too large, then Seistan alone, and possibly Tibet'.²¹

What was it that the British feared? Few with any real knowledge of the situation were actually expecting a Russian attempt to invade India. Cecil Spring Rice believed in it and saw German machinations behind it,²² but Spring Rice was generally regarded as an alarmist. Arthur Nicolson, writing in 1917, thought that the Russians had never seriously contemplated such a step.²³ Grey was frankly sceptical of Russian ability or manpower in 1906 to attempt such an invasion when they confessed their inability to drive back the Turkish troops from the Persian frontier.²⁴ Most diplomatists now realized that the Russians had for many years found the threat of a move towards the Indian frontier, and the resulting panic which this never failed to produce in London, a convenient means of putting pressure on the British to obtain concessions elsewhere.

Kitchener himself did not foresee a Russian invasion of India in the near future. But he pointed out in the memorandum referred to above that for the first time the extension of the Russian railway system brought the project within the bounds of practicality. By the end of the Russo-Japanese war the Russian position with regard to a possible advance towards India was extremely favourable. Two railway systems now gave the Russians possible lines of advance—which the British named the Kandahar and Kabul approaches. The first started at the Caspian ports and continued, via the Central Asian Railway, to Merv and so to the Russian fortified railhead at Kushk, only 483 miles from Kandahar. The second line followed the railway from Orenburg to Charjui on the Oxus, via Tashkent and Samarkhand. The railway from Samarkhand to the Afghan border at Termez had, the British knew, been surveyed and was under construction. Meanwhile the latter town could be reached from Charjui by river. Early in 1906 Lord Minto reported with alarm

¹⁹ Hardinge to Lansdowne, 5 July 1905, F.O. 1701, no. 432.

²⁰ See B.D. iv. For the naval importance of the renewal see Monger, *op. cit.* pp. 200-1.

²¹ Balfour to Lansdowne, 30 June 1905, Balfour MS. B.M. Add. 49729.

²² S. Gwynn (ed.), *The Letters and Friendships of Sir Cecil Spring Rice* (London, 1929), I, 395-6.

²³ Sir A. Nicolson, *Diplomatic Narrative* (unpub.), I, 68-9.

²⁴ C.I.D. minute, 25 May 1906, P.R.O. Cab. O. 2.2/I.

the arrival of Russian troop boats on the Oxus,²⁵ and in 1907 a War Office survey of the military resources of the Russian Empire refers to a 'flotilla of steamers'.²⁶ It was this system of strategic railways which Hardinge, speaking in 1910, referred to as a 'sword of Damocles' hanging over Britain's head, and which made necessary the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese treaty as a protection against it.²⁷

A third Russian 'tentacle for the absorption of Afghanistan and subsequent attack upon India'²⁸ was the Persian route through Seistan via the future extension of the Russian railway, from Djulfa on the Persian border into Persia itself, via Meshed.

Both Nicolson and Hardinge regarded the blocking of the Russian path to the Persian Gulf, and the safety of Seistan, as the two chief gains of the convention.²⁹ Here the situation was complicated by the imminence of revolution in Persia and the growth of German influence at Teheran. Nicolson proclaimed throughout the negotiations his fear of German influence in Persia and his desire to prevent German influence becoming as paramount in Persia as it had already become in Turkey and Morocco.³⁰

As far as Indian defence was concerned, however, the threat via Seistan was a subsidiary one to the danger presented now by the two possible lines of Russian advance through Afghanistan, and it was with Afghanistan that both the Indian government and the War Office were chiefly concerned. Relations between Afghanistan and Great Britain were peculiar. The external relations of Afghanistan had been under English control for the last twenty-five years and Great Britain was pledged by treaty to maintain the integrity of the Amir's dominions. The Amir received through India money, armaments and advice. Yet the actual situation belied this apparently close, protector-protected relationship. No British or Indian agent was allowed to reside in Kabul, and Simla depended on an unreliable Afghan agent who was little better than a prisoner. The English complained that they had no way of receiving reliable information about the country they were pledged to defend. The Amir refused to allow them to construct the roads, railways and telegraphs which the British thought necessary for his defence, and he was not averse to playing the Russians and the British off against each other and intriguing with the rebellious tribes inside the Indian border. If troops were ever needed to defend Afghanistan 'no man can be sure that the armies despatched for that purpose would not have to fight their way through

²⁵ Minto to Morley, 12 June 1906. Morley MS. I.O. Eur. D. 573/8.

²⁶ *The Military Resources of the Russian Empire*, 1907, W.O. 33/419, p. 292.

²⁷ Quoted in Cambon to Pichon, 27 October 1910, no. 401, M. des A.E., N.S. (Europe), 28.

²⁸ W.O. 33/419, p. 286.

²⁹ Nicolson to Hardinge, 8 May 1907, F.O. Carnock MS. supplementary vol. 1906-10; Hardinge to Nicolson, 15 May 1907, *ibid.* 1907, vol. 1; Nicolson to Spring Rice, 20 May 1907, Spring Rice MS. vol. 1.

³⁰ Nicolson, *Diplomatic Narrative*, 1, 2; Nicolson to Grey, 2 August 1906, Carnock MS. S.V.

Afghan troops and tribesmen to the positions they would be required to take up'.³¹

In this situation to defend Afghanistan against a Russian attack would not be easy and it was by no means certain that the Afghans would co-operate with the British or even remain neutral. The Indian defensive front was, and had been for some time, the Kabul-Kandahar alignment whose defence was felt to be essential to the protection of the North-West Frontier itself.

'There can be no doubt whatever', Kitchener's memorandum continues, 'regarding the ultimate aims of Russia. That she intends to establish herself in Afghanistan sooner or later is now generally established.'³² This opinion was endorsed in 1907 by the War Office's *Survey of the Military Resources of the Russian Empire*, already referred to.

The purpose underlying Russia's patient and methodical advance and her vast expenditure upon unremunerative railway construction [runs the report] is obvious; without necessarily intending to conquer and absorb our Indian Empire, she aims at eventually making her frontier and that of India conterminous, or at least, bringing it so near that she may be in a position to strike effectively if Great Britain should, as in 1878, venture to thwart her policy elsewhere.³³

This interesting document went on, much in the same tone as Kitchener's own calculations, to call attention to the new situation which the existence of the Russian strategic railway network implied. It laid on the British, in fact, 'practically... the military burdens and anxieties of a continental state'.³⁴ The Russian peace strength in Turkestan was sixty thousand men; their war strength was calculated to be one hundred thousand men. Although no appreciable additions of troops in the area had taken place recently, even during the Russo-Japanese war, reinforcements to the area would be easy to arrange. The British General Staff regarded the numbers of men that the Russians could pour into Central Asia at will as 'practically unlimited'.³⁵

Both Kitchener and the War Office authorities reckoned that Herat could be captured and besieged within a week and that all northern Afghanistan, as far south as the Kabul-Kandahar alignment, could be overrun with more or less speed depending on the attitude of the Amir; one hundred and fifty thousand Russians reaching Kabul within a year. The Russians would then be in a position to occupy Afghan Turkestan indefinitely, without the British, whose military plans did not include forward action beyond the Kabul-Kandahar alignment, being able to prevent it. A border incident would be easy to arrange and the Russians could also put themselves in the right by blaming the Amir and appealing to London, who claimed to control Afghan foreign policy, for redress. If the Amir refused to admit himself in the wrong, as was likely,

³¹ W.O. 33/419, p. 282.

³² Kitchener's note, Kitchener MS. P.R.O. 30/57. 30.

³³ W.O. 33/419, p. 274. This document has been referred to above, and as far as I know has never been published. It was printed in book form by the War Office General Staff and has several maps as appendices. There is no indication of individual authors.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 275.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 287.

the British could do little to make him grant redress. The Russian government might then, wrote Kitchener, 'politely inform us that as we appear unwilling either to persuade or coerce our ally to grant the redress, she must regretfully determine, though desiring to remain on the best of terms with us, to take the case into her own hands and exact the required reparation by force'.³⁶

If the Amir, as was by no means impossible, proved friendly to the invader, the Russians could not only rely on Afghan assistance or neutrality, but possibly also on the Amir's influence over the border tribes to ferment rebellion in India itself. One reason for the expedition to Tibet in 1903 was the fear that Russian influence, once established in Lhasa, could be extended to Nepal and Sikkim.³⁷

It was, then, with some justification that Kitchener argued that, in guaranteeing the integrity of Afghanistan, 'we have promised more than we are able to perform. Guarantees and pledges given diplomatically must to be effective be founded on military means to make them good. . . We are in the position of a firm which has written cheques against a non-existent balance.'³⁸

Kitchener believed that at least five years active preparation would be needed before India was ready to meet what he saw as the inevitable Russian threat to the integrity of Afghanistan. He believed that if measures were taken immediately this would be sufficient. After the Russo-Japanese war Clarke put the danger at ten years away;³⁹ Esher at six or seven.⁴⁰ But that the danger was none the less real for being a long-term one even Nicolson, the least likely to be swept away by the Russian bogey, agreed.⁴¹

Kitchener's policy of preparation was to make it known that any Russian encroachment on Afghanistan, even an incident on the Pendjeh scale, would be met by a declaration of war. He advocated a firm military alliance with the Amir—a policy supported by the viceroy, Lord Minto, who repeatedly opposed the Anglo-Russian agreement on the grounds that it would alienate the Amir, who, from the point of view of India, was a more valuable friend and a more dangerous enemy than the Tsar.⁴² Kitchener also advocated a forward policy against the tribes on the frontier, including permanent occupation of the territories bordering on the Afghan frontier, and, most controversial of all, he proposed extending the Indian railway system towards Afghanistan by two lines. The first from Thal to Parachinar, within ninety-five miles of Kabul; the other through the Khabar Pass to Loi Dakka. These

³⁶ Kitchener's note, Kitchener MS. P.R.O. 30/57.30; see also W.O. 33/419, pp. 288-91.

³⁷ P. Fleming, *Bayonets to Lhasa* (London, 1961), p. 308.

³⁸ Kitchener's note, Kitchener MS. P.R.O. 30/57.30.

³⁹ Clarke to Kitchener, 6 June 1906, Kitchener MS. P.R.O. 30/57.34.

⁴⁰ Esher to Kitchener, 16 Aug. 1906, Kitchener MS. P.R.O. 30/57.33.

⁴¹ Nicolson to Spring Rice, 14 August 1907, Spring Rice MS. vol. 1.

⁴² Minto to Morley, 12 June 1906, Morley MS. Eur. D. 573/8.

would enable the British, if war broke out, to reach Kabul and Kandahar before the advancing Russian army.⁴³

Such a policy also meant an increase in the numbers of the frontier army. Kitchener claimed that Balfour and the Committee of Imperial Defence had given him a pledge for eight divisions or a hundred thousand men as reinforcements from England during the first year of a war. This pledge, which does seem to have been given,⁴⁴ was later denied by the Committee.⁴⁵ Nevertheless Balfour's speech in the House of Commons in May 1905 cited Kitchener's opinion with approval and gave Kitchener grounds to hope that such support would be forthcoming.⁴⁶

Those concerned in London also recognized the necessity for preparations on the frontier. A memorandum, probably by Sir George Clarke, written late in 1905 or early in 1906 called *Possible British objectives in a war with Russia*, stated:

It is clear that (whether the Russian threat upon the North-West Frontier be deemed imminent or remote, whether the peril be regarded as serious or insignificant) India's geographical position and the presence of Russian soldiers on the banks of the Oxus will compel the British Government to detail a large force for the defence of India as a matter of precaution.⁴⁷

Clarke privately expressed his support for Kitchener's views.⁴⁸

The whole question of Indian defence was discussed by members of the new Liberal government in a Committee of Imperial Defence meeting on 9 March 1906, when Kitchener's proposals were badly received. Despite the latter's assurances to the contrary, Haldane regarded them as drawn up in the assumption of immediate danger from Russia during the Russo-Japanese war and he believed that the international situation and events in Russia had now made them unnecessary.⁴⁹ Grey and Morley both agreed with the War minister, the latter remaining 'obstinately dubious' as to the necessity for new railway construction.⁵⁰

The previous day Haldane had spoken in the House of Commons of the desire to reduce the general defence expenditure of the country and had revealed that it was in India that he intended to start his economies. 'A short time ago', he said, 'we were menaced on the North West Frontier by Russia. Are we menaced by Russia today? [cries of "no"] Have circumstances

⁴³ Kitchener's note, Kitchener MS. P.R.O. 30/57.30. See also his revision of the note 25 August 1906 in Morley MS. Eur. D. 573/37d.

⁴⁴ Even although the numbers required were later raised (Cab. O. 6/1; 2/1). See Monger, *op. cit.* pp. 95-6.

⁴⁵ M. V. Brett (ed.), *Journals and Letters of Viscount Esher* (London, 1934), II, 187-8.

⁴⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th ser., vol. 146, pp. 154-5.

⁴⁷ Cab. O. 17/60.

⁴⁸ Clarke to Kitchener, 26 May 1906, Kitchener MS. P.R.O. 30/57.34.

⁴⁹ Cab. O. 2. 2/1.

⁵⁰ Morley to Minto, 19 April 1906, Morley MS. Eur. D. 573/1.

changed or have they not? . . . If circumstances have changed is it necessary to maintain that vast establishment in India . . . ?'⁵¹

After such a speech support from the secretary for War was not to be expected. Instead, at Haldane's request, two questions were sent to Simla to be considered in the light of new political and strategical considerations which had supposedly arisen out of the Russo-Japanese war, the Anglo-French Entente and the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese alliance. These were '(a) whether in times of peace the present numbers of the British garrison in India are adequate or excessive, and (b) what are the reasonable demands that India should make on Great Britain for military reinforcements during the first year of either a war with Russia or a rising in India?'⁵²

The reply of the government of India, incorporated in a memorandum by Beauchamp Duff (Kitchener's second in command) and dated 9 June 1906, upheld Kitchener's view uncompromisingly. Admitting that recent events had lessened the probability of an early war, it nevertheless claimed 'that her [Russia's] potential power of offence as against India has not been reduced'. Her communication system in Central Asia was sufficient to enable Russia to put enough men in the field for her purpose. As for the Anglo-Japanese alliance and the Anglo-French Entente, it was argued that it would be 'inexpedient and inadmissible' actually to introduce Japanese troops into India, while the French, however much they might give in the way of diplomatic aid to prevent a clash, once a war started were bound to assist their Russian ally, who could also count on German sympathy. The War Office, it was pointed out, also had little faith in the practicality of direct Japanese aid. Any reduction of the 70,000 men in India was regarded by Duff as out of the question. Their primary task was to counterbalance over 400,000 armed Indians and the ratio of Europeans to Indians generally was 1:3,800.⁵³

By the time Duff's memorandum was received in London, however, Nicolson was in St Petersburg and negotiations had started with regard to Tibet. The Liberal government had decided on other means of checking Russia. Sir George Clarke in October 1905 had submitted to the Foreign Office a detailed draft agreement including in its scope the Dardanelles as well as Central Asia, and he had included in his supporting arguments the fact that it would replace the expensive necessity of constructing railways to the frontiers of Afghanistan. Charles Hardinge had merely minuted that 'happily there was no immediate necessity to discuss it' as negotiations with Russia were then out of the question.⁵⁴

In July 1906 Clarke returned to the subject in an attempt to help Morley sell the idea of this alternative to Simla. In a memorandum entitled *Anglo-*

⁵¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th Ser., vol. 153, p. 675.

⁵² Morley to Minto, 30 March 1906, Morley MS. Eur. D. 573/1.

⁵³ Morley MS. Eur. D. 573/8.

⁵⁴ Cab. O. 17/60.

Russian relations as affecting the situation in India, he argued that Kitchener's fears regarding Afghanistan could be checked as easily by an agreement with Russia as by taking precautions against her—and at much less expense.⁵⁵

There were many reasons why the Liberal government preferred to negotiate with Russia rather than prepare against her. Paramount, and stressed by almost every supporter of the negotiations, was the question of cost. The Liberal government had come to power pledged to economy and retrenchment. Morley privately regarded Kitchener's proposals as 'nothing short of a grave scandal in the way of uncontrolled and unsupervised expenditure'.⁵⁶ He warned Minto against any forward or expensive designs à la Curzon on the frontier. 'Of a policy of that sort I am incurably jealous, and the Cabinet will assuredly sympathise with my jealousy.'⁵⁷ Kitchener had been warned in the same terms by Clarke,⁵⁸ but the revised version of his memorandum, drawn up in August 1906, if less drastic in tone was not changed in any fundamental respect.⁵⁹

But there were other factors besides mere finance. Grey, in another context three years later, was to excuse expenditure on the grounds that promises of economy 'must be subordinate to national safety'.⁶⁰ These months coincided with a general reconsideration of strategic thinking among those responsible for the defence of Great Britain and the Empire. Admiral Fisher, who lamented the prevalence of 'the bogey of the North West Frontier' among Campbell-Bannerman's Cabinet early in 1906,⁶¹ had other bogeys in mind. In 1905 the Committee of Imperial Defence discussed whether or not a foreign invasion of the British Isles was possible.⁶² It came to a negative conclusion but the alarm was such that the discussion, and the conclusion, was repeated in 1907.⁶³ In both cases the main enemy was seen not as Russia but as Germany. Lords Selbourne and Fisher, representing naval opinion, had regarded the Germans as a potential naval enemy as early as 1902; the Anglo-Japanese alliance of that year was justified by the argument that it would enable part of the fleet to be withdrawn to home waters.⁶⁴

In 1904 Fisher drew up a plan to redistribute the fleet to ensure a concentration in the Channel as a precaution against German ambitions. The Foreign Office objected to the scheme, but not because they disagreed about the German threat. 'It is generally recognised', wrote Hardinge in October 1906, 'that Germany is the one disturbing factor owing to her ambitious schemes for

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Morley to Godley, 19 March 1906, Morley MS. Eur. F. 102/8.

⁵⁷ Morley to Minto, 16 January 1906, Morley MS. Eur. D. 573/1.

⁵⁸ Clarke to Kitchener, 6 April 1906, Kitchener MS. P.R.O. 30/57.34.

⁵⁹ Morley MS. Eur. D. 573/37d.

⁶⁰ Grey to Asquith, 5 February 1909, Asquith MS. 21.

⁶¹ I. A. J. Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought* (London, 1952), I, 320–1.

⁶² E. Halevy, *History of the English people in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1961 ed.), VI, 158–9.

⁶³ Cab. O. 1.7.

⁶⁴ J. S. Steiner, 'Great Britain and the Creation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance', *Journal of Modern History* (March 1959).

a "weltpolitik" and for a naval as well as a military supremacy in Europe.⁶⁵ A month previously Esher had written of a future 'titanic struggle between Germany and England for mastery'.⁶⁶

If the navy was now looking to Germany as its opponent, the army, which in 1903 had seen Russia as its chief enemy, was also turning its attention nearer home. Mr Mackintosh, in a recent article on the Committee of Imperial Defence,⁶⁷ has written that after 1904 the War Office turned its attention to Europe and co-operation with France, and was not organized for the active defence of India.

With the growth of the slowly realized German menace, Britain was forced to consider that she was no longer capable of meeting all her commitments. In December 1906, five months after a war with Turkey over the Egyptian frontier had been seriously regarded as possible by the Cabinet, the General Staff reported that an attack on Gallipoli with a view to seizing the straits would be 'too difficult under modern conditions' and that passage of the straits could not be guaranteed without an alliance with Turkey. Two months later the Admiralty concurred and the government was forced to face the fact that, if Russia had tried to force the Strait during the Russo-Japanese war, Britain alone could not have prevented her. Grey urged the necessity of keeping this information strictly secret.⁶⁸

Another deficiency, and one which affected India, was the size of the army which Haldane was intending to reduce. Not only was the army now geared to Europe, but its size was inadequate for the protection of India in time of war. In the autumn of 1906 the Committee of Imperial Defence denied that any pledges had been given to Kitchener regarding the number of men the government of India could rely upon in time of war from England. Esher explained the decision by saying that 'circumstances of the moment must decide the case, and any way the eight divisions named of infantry do not at present exist'.⁶⁹

The view that the army was not up to sufficient strength to fight a war on the North-West Frontier was confirmed by an army officer writing in 1908. He spoke of the forces on the frontier as 'barely sufficient' for a war and said of the agreement with Russia that 'by reducing our risks we have escaped from some of the evils arising from the scantiness of our resources'.⁷⁰ To ensure that the army was in a position to meet a Russian threat would have meant raising the army estimates. This, for a government pledged to economy and already aware that the naval estimates would have to rise, was an impossibility. In the next four years, as the naval estimates rose from £31½ million to over £35 million, the army estimates fell correspondingly.

Thus neither military nor naval thinking in 1906 were geared to a forward

⁶⁵ F.O. 371/168.

⁶⁶ Brett, op. cit. II, 179.

⁶⁷ *English Historical Review* (July 1962).

⁶⁸ Cab. O. 4.2 and 2.2/1.

⁶⁹ Brett, op. cit. II, 188.

⁷⁰ L. Abrahams, Report in Morley MS. Eur. D. 573/37d.

policy in India. This must have influenced the Liberal government in deciding to come to an agreement with Russia. There were of course better known, and possibly more important, factors. The international situation in Europe was confused at the end of 1905. The Anglo-French entente was recent and by no means cordial between the fall of Delcassé and the Algeciras Conference. Enough was known in London of the meeting between the Tsar and the Kaiser at Bjorko for English diplomatists to be apprehensive of a possible Russo-German alliance and worried about the loyalty of France. Moreover, German diplomacy was giving grounds for anxiety both in Europe and in the Middle East, and, if there were as yet no open areas of Anglo-German friction, neither was there confidence in German goodwill.

The Liberal government had come to office pledged to improve relations with both Russia and Germany, but there was little hope of an agreement with Germany in 1906 and, indeed, little on which such an agreement could be based. As for Russia, they had the example of their predecessors; a change of personnel at St Petersburg; a liberal turn in Russia's internal development which raised high hopes in London, and support from Paris at a time when the financial necessity of maintaining the French alliance was being forcefully brought home to the Russians.⁷¹ Above all they had a limited and clear-cut area of friction which was sufficiently dangerous to make agreement worth having, and sufficiently localized not to concern any other power.

An agreement with Russia would prevent a European coalition which might isolate England. A bargain in Central Asia as to the safety of India was, also, undoubtedly preferable to an expensive policy of preparation against her on the North-West Frontier, and to tying up troops, which in fact the British did not have, on the Hindu Kush at a time when the uncertain situation in Europe could make such a policy dangerous to the safety of the British Isles themselves.

The negotiations with Russia were long, difficult and more than once were on the point of breaking down completely. During the eighteen months when Nicolson, in St Petersburg, was working for an entente, the debate as to what was to happen if he failed continued in London. During the first half of 1907 the General Staff of the War Office wrote the book, marked secret and never published, *The Military Resources of the Russian Empire*, which has been referred to before. Its analysis of the situation in Central Asia was in entire agreement with Kitchener's forecasts, although, oddly enough, not with those of the secretary for War. Its recommendations of future policy also gave a late support to Kitchener's policy. First of all it regarded the latter's proposed railways as 'an urgent necessity if we are to anticipate Russia at the Hindu Kush passes and even make sure of holding Kabul.' Secondly, it maintained that the whole basis of Indian military policy—that of a defensive

⁷¹ See O. Crisp, 'The Russian Liberals and the 1906 Anglo-French loan to Russia', *Slavonic Review*, xxxix (1960-61).

stand on the Kabul–Kandahar line, but no forward policy even if the Russians occupied Afghan Turkestan—must be altered. To take up such a passive attitude would not only be contrary to Britain’s treaty obligations to the Amir, but would lower enormously British prestige in India and the Middle East generally.

If, then, it is, given our existing military strength, impossible for us to advance beyond the Kabul–Kandahar alignment towards Herat, either the policy of maintaining the integrity of Afghanistan should be abandoned as impractical or our resources and preparations should be such as will, in the event of Russia invading Afghanistan, enable us to meet any of the contingencies which may arise.

That is, including a forward advance to expel the Russians from the northern half of the country.

The survey, obviously sceptical of a successful outcome of Nicolson’s negotiations, pointed out that, even if Russia’s protestations that she had no designs on India were true, the Russians had never denied that they intended to absorb Afghanistan and make the Russo-British frontiers conterminous. ‘When that has been effected,’ the survey concluded ominously, ‘the military burdens of India and the Empire will be so enormously increased that, short of a recasting of our whole military system, it will become a question of practical politics whether or not it is worth our while to retain India or not.’⁷²

This astonishing conclusion, which surpassed in pessimism anything that Kitchener had written, may possibly, together with the difficult phase through which the negotiations were passing, explain the re-opening of the question in January 1907. A sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence held six meetings through January and February. Headed by Morley it included Grey, Haldane, Asquith, Esher and was attended by Tweedmouth and Fisher. The government of India considered it of sufficient importance to send over Duff. Its purpose was to consider the reasonable military requirements of the Empire.⁷³ ‘The main idea’, Esher explained to the king, ‘is that the peace requirements of India govern and cover the military requirements of the Empire inasmuch as a war with Russia on the North West Frontier, being the gravest military operation which Your Majesty’s army could be called upon to undertake, covers by its magnitude all other conceivable operations.’⁷⁴ A revised, but not greatly altered version of Kitchener’s note of 1905 remained the basis for discussion. Morley repeated his previous arguments that the changed international situation and the news of the temporary abandonment of the Termez railway made the Indian railway schemes unnecessary.

The committee reported in May 1907. Esher had told Kitchener in February that he expected that he would be granted his immediate objects.⁷⁵ Actually he did not receive support for all of them. The military agreement with the Amir was ruled undesirable and a loophole was discovered in the

⁷² W.O. 33/419.

⁷³ Morley MS. Eur. D. 573.37.

⁷⁴ Brett, *op. cit.* II, 218.

⁷⁵ Esher to Kitchener, 15 February 1907, Kitchener MS. P.R.O. 30/57.33.

Anglo-Afghan treaty which pledged the British to defend the country only 'if the Amir follows unreservedly the advice of the British government in regard to your external relations'. No definite policy was decided upon regarding the tribes. But the report read,

we accept the view that the gates of India are in Afghanistan, that the problem of Afghanistan dominates the situation in India, and that the line we are pledged to defend determines our true strategic frontier in time of war...the frontiers of India and Afghanistan are, from the point of view of Anglo-Russian relations and resistance to designs of aggression identical...the deliberate crossing of the Oxus or the occupation of Herat by Russia would be the violation of a frontier we are bound to defend.

The railway lines were approved as far as Parachinar and Smetsai, and Kitchener's reorganization of the Indian army was approved. Above all, 'in our opinion a military organisation at home that would enable 100,000 men to be sent to India during the first year of a war appears a military necessity'.⁷⁶

Thus a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence, composed of the most important members of the Cabinet, in May 1907 recognized the situation in Central Asia outlined in the Kitchener memorandum and the War Office survey, and accepted, implicitly if not explicitly, many of the necessary precautions suggested by these two documents—with the military reorganization which this would entail.

The alternative policy of agreement with Russia was still under negotiation and no action was contemplated until it was seen how it would end. Whether the committee's recommendations would have been formally accepted by the government if the negotiations had broken down cannot be known. But their report was used to justify the agreement when it was finally signed. 'The vital point of the report', wrote Morley to the Viceroy in September, after the signature, 'was the conclusion that the despatch of 100,000 men to India in the first year of a war with Russia is a military necessity. That is the fundamental argument for the Convention for we have not got the men to spare and that's the plain truth of it.'⁷⁷ With a sigh of relief the Indian secretary then set about urging on Simla, with little success, the obvious corollary to the convention, one seen by Cromer in 1903: the reduction of Indian military expenditure.⁷⁸

Looking back over the last two years in March 1908 Morley summed up neatly the motives behind the Anglo-Russian entente. 'In entering into negotiations with the Russian government...His Majesty's Government were actuated not only by considerations affecting the Empire as a whole, but also, very largely, by considerations relating to India alone.'^{79,80}

⁷⁶ Morley MS. Eur. D. 573/37g. Cab. O. 6/3.

⁷⁷ Morley to Minto, 19 September 1907, Morley MS. Eur. D. 573/2.

⁷⁸ Cromer to Balfour, 15 October 1903, Balfour MS. B.M. Add. 49749.

⁷⁹ Morley to Minto, 20 March 1908, Morley MS. Eur. D. 573/5.

⁸⁰ I should like to thank Professor W. N. Medlicott of the London School of Economics for help and advice during the preparation of this article.