The Central Asian Paradigm in Anglo-Russian relations, 1885 – 1895

Adam Oliver Jolly

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School of History, University of East Anglia, Norwich

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Abstract

The driving factors behind British foreign policy have attracted much scholarly attention, causing a good deal of disagreement. A fundamental dispute concerns which rival state shaped British foreign policy the most significantly. Although both Berlin and Paris influenced London, this work will prove that it was St. Petersburg which was of the primary importance. Through this work, two significant factors concerning the importance of Anglo-Russian relations, during the period 1885 – 1895, will be made evident. Firstly, this piece demonstrates the significance of Central Asia to British foreign policy. The British Empire was a world empire with interests that stretched far beyond Europe. Her greatest asset, the Indian Raj, was the focus of British policy during the late nineteenth century. The imperial government in London wanted, and needed, to maintain its Indian Empire. This extra-European aspect was more consequential than any European factor in driving British foreign policy during this period. Due to the importance of the Raj, Anglo-Russian relations were pivotal to British foreign policy. To defend this 'jewel in the crown', Britain formed a buffer defence system involving Afghanistan and Persia; the period 1885 – 1895 was spent protecting these buffer states through a variety of methods. However, while this work will prove the importance of Central Asia, it will also demonstrate how the security of India dictated Britain's broader decision making in Europe. For instance, in 1885 the Penjdeh Crisis on the Russo-Afghan border was followed in quick succession by a European crisis over Eastern Roumelia. This cannot simply be coincidence. The link between Central Asia and Europe, and therefore the role played between Britain's wider imperial power and her European interests, will form the crux of this work. It will also be shown that it was Anglo-Russian and not Anglo-German relations which were pivotal to Britain's foreign policy. The current historiography shows too much emphasis upon the role of Germany, which is a result of the period being viewed through the lens of the First World War. To counter this trend,

this piece will join and improve the smaller but growing body of work which is re-evaluating the respective roles of Russia and Germany within British foreign policy. Focusing upon the foreign policies of Salisbury and Rosebery, this work will concentrate on a decade of great importance to British foreign policy, and illustrate how Britain's foreign policy-makers navigated a world that was rapidly changing.

Note on Names

For reference, where place names are used, a preference for the nineteenth-century version is made so as to ensure uniformity with the sources. For individuals' names, I have utilised the modern spellings so as to remain consistent with other secondary literature. In addition, I have used 'afghan' instead of 'Afghan' where it has been written in primary sources, so as to remain true to the original material.

In addition, the use of 'London' should not mislead the reader into anticipating that there was agreement between the Foreign Office, India Office and other service departments. It has been used as shorthand for the decisions taken by the Foreign Secretary and more broadly the Foreign Office. As with all institutions, there was a variety of opinions across the government, but in this thesis there is not the room necessary to deal with them all.

Introduction

The nature of Anglo-Russian relations in the period 1885 – 1895 was one of rivalry, fear and distrust. Long-standing foes, each was the other's most significant rival. There was little to choose between the two in terms of overall strength or power. As Gordon Martel has observed, 'power determines who gets what, when, where, and how, but it is never absolute, either in its presence or in its absence.' Russian power was based on the immense quantity of manpower St. Petersburg could call upon. With such an army, autocratic, Tsarist Russia could both maintain her position and expand her horizons when she chose. British power, on the other hand, was based on the Royal Navy, which controlled the oceans and defended a vast, global empire. Moreover, this force protected the trade routes that were the bedrock of the British Empire's economic power. With this financial strength Britain was more than a match for Russia. Arguably, such diametrically opposed empires should never have come into contact with one another. The land-based Russian empire, dissatisfied with her territory, was intent upon pushing her borders south and east. Logic would suggest that this would take her away from areas of British interest. This was not, however, the case. Firstly, St. Petersburg sought to obtain an ice-free port, so, far from moving away from the sea, Russia was expanding towards the water. This put her in direct conflict with Britain. Secondly, as Russia spread south, she came increasingly close to British India, the 'jewel in the crown'. Although Britain was a satiated power which did not want to extend formal authority over new colonies, she was not willing to cede any control either. Well matched, neither Britain nor Russia was powerful enough to be 'able to exercise sufficient authority to get precisely what it wanted, when it wanted.'[1] It is evident, however, that it was in Central Asia where the two empires intersected. This would therefore be the single most important aspect of British

[1] G. Martel, 'The Meaning of Power: Rethinking the Decline and Fall of Great Britain', *The International History Review,* Vol. 13, No. 4 (Nov. 1991), p. 671.

foreign policy in the late nineteenth century, as the imperial government in London sought to maintain its dominance in India in the face of Russian expansion.

This work seeks to demonstrate both the importance of Anglo-Russian relations to Britain's broader foreign policy, and more specifically the significance of Central Asia to London's dealings with St. Petersburg. Keith Neilson argued that 'Russia was the most significant long-term threat to British interests in the twenty years before the First World War and that a driving force – perhaps the driving force – in British diplomacy was the effort to reach an accommodation with Russia.'[2] Other works, such as *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* by Keith Neilson and Zara Steiner, and Edward Ingram's *In Defence of British India,* have agreed that Russia was the primary driving force behind British foreign policy-making. Neilson and Steiner assert that 'until the last decade of peace Russia was at the centre of British defence planning ... [and that as a result] the needs of imperial defence seemed boundless' due to the size of the threat that Russia posed.[3] They argue that this 'enmity with Russia was both expensive and limiting to Britain's room to manoeuvre diplomatically.'[4] This led Britain to seek regional agreements with Russia. The authors do not, however, narrate Britain's declining power but rather demonstrate how one world power affected another during the late nineteenth century.

The security of India shifted the focus of attention in Anglo-Russian relations on to Central Asia. Her vulnerability to Russia is well known. 'Beyond Canada and India, no part of the Empire was susceptible to landward attack by other than indigenous peoples, unless enemy troops were first transported by sea.'[5] With the dominance of the Royal Navy, a movement of troops by sea would have been unthinkable for any would-be attacker. Neilson

[2] K. Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar, British Policy and Russia 1894 - 1917,* (Oxford, 2003), p. xiii.
[3] Z. Steiner and K. Neilson, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War,* 2nd ed. (Basingstoke, 2003), p. 86.
[4] Ibid., p. 88.
[5] J. Beeler, 'Steam, Strategy and Schurman: imperial defence in the post-Crimean era, 1856 - 1905', K. Neilson, G. Kennedy (eds.), *Far Flung Lines. Studies in Imperial Defence in Honour of David Schurman,* (Oxon, 1997), pp. 27 - 54, p. 32.

has shown that the 'defence of British India had ... a dual nature: on the one hand, it was a local, Indian issue; on the other, it was a global, British issue.'[6] As a result, 'Russia's place in British defence planning was a mixture of the commonplace and the unique: Russia was a major player in the balance of power on the Continent, a significant factor to be considered in the maintenance of British naval supremacy, and a threat to the Empire in a variety of locales (particularly in India). With respect to the balance of power, Russia was treated no differently than was any potential British rival.'[7] However, for Britain, with her interest in Central Asia, St. Petersburg was distinct. Neilson contends '[that] the essential point is that Anglo-Russian relations were never far from matters of defence. The centrality of Russia in British defence planning and the unique way in which Russia affected Britain's position both globally and in Europe meant that Russia occupied a special place in British foreign, as well as in defence, policy.'[8] As has been discussed, it was in Central Asia where the British and Russia empires intersected; this was where British defence policy, and therefore her foreign policy, was made.

This work will also build upon the literature that highlights the influence of Russia on British foreign policy over that of other powers, significantly Germany. Britain and Germany had no reason to quarrel. They were both Protestant dominated, satiated territorially, fundamentally *status-quo* powers, and none of their respective territories came into contact with those of the other. One was a continental power with a formidable army; the other was an island nation with the strongest navy in the world. Anglo-German relations rarely spread outside the confines of Europe, so it proved unusual for German and British agents to come into contact with one another. The issue, as Neilson has identified, is that 'historians' memories work in two directions; they know in advance how the events they study turn out.

[6] K. Neilson, 'Greatly Exaggerated: The Myth of the Decline of Great Britain before 1914', *The International History Review*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Nov., 1991), p. 709.
[7] Neilson, *Last Tsar*, p. 110.
[8] Ibid., p. 143

Thus, they often find themselves drawn to the conclusion that what did happen was inevitable.'[9] The First World War has narrowed the window through which we observe the history of this period. This narrowing has limited historians to a study of Anglo-German relations, with a disproportionate emphasis on what Paul Kennedy termed the 'Anglo-German antagonism'.[10] This minimises the impact of other powers upon Britain's foreign policy. The writer wishes to re-enforce Anglo-Russian relations as the basis of British foreign policy through this period.

This is not to say, however, that Britain was uninterested in Germany. Late twentieth-century 'research has highlighted the ebb and flow of Anglo-German relations in these years and has emphasised Britain's continuing tensions with other powers.'[11] As a European power Britain was necessarily interested in the security of Europe, for reasons of trade and imperial defence. But the connection between British policy in Europe and her global policy is often misunderstood. Andrew Roberts pessimistically stated that 'every Great Power except Austria impinged on the British Empire somewhere, be it Germany in Zanzibar ... Russia in Asia and Afghanistan, or France in Egypt ... and Indo-China.'[12] The reader is left in no doubt that Britain was in difficulty. Yet Roberts fails to distinguish between colonial disagreements, which caused relatively minor misunderstandings, and direct threats to British imperial security. The former were mere irritations, leaving Anglo-Russian difficulties representing the only substantive threats.

It is the contention of this thesis that the impact of Russia upon British foreign policy cannot be divided into compartments, one labelled Europe and another Central Asia. There should be no separation of the two. Although the Foreign Office was divided into separate

[9] Ibid., p. xi.
[10] P. M. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism 1860 - 1914*, (Boston, 1980).
[11] D. Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the 20th century*, 2nd ed. (Harlow, 2000), p. 62.
[12] A. Roberts, *Salisbury: Victorian Titan*, (London, 2000), p. 431.

regional areas for administrative ease, each can only be truly understood when viewed together, as portions of a much greater narrative, than they could ever be on their own. As Thomas Otte has stated: 'nineteenth-century British foreign policy revolved around two strategic objectives: the maintenance of an equilibrium in Europe, and the containment of Russia in the East.'[13] For Britain's policy-makers, there was no distinction in imperial policy between Central Asia and Europe, as both informed the other.

Similarly, this work intends to demonstrate that there needs to be a concerted effort to look at Britain's foreign policy from a broader point of view. For instance, as a means to defend her interests, British statesmen loosely tied London to the Triple Alliance. Yet an emphasis on Anglo-German relations has over-simplified what this meant to the Great Power system. This 'system' has become defined as simply the inter-relations between Britain, Germany, France, Austria and Russia, but it is much more than that. There is a need to start viewing international relations as systems within larger systems. As Otte argues, 'whenever two or more states are in such regular and sufficient contact that their respective actions form a necessary element in the calculations of the other they act as part of a whole: they are part of a system.'[14] Where British and Russian interests clashed in Central Asia we must identify this as one system within a larger whole, and question how this affected British relations and foreign policy as part of a broader context. To this end, this work will show that Europe represented a line of defence for British India, not a separate field of foreign policy. Moreover, this thesis will also argue that Malcolm Yapp's assertion that 'Europe always held

[13] T. G. Otte, ''A Very Internecine Policy': Anglo-Russian Cold War's before the Cold War', C. Baxter, M. Dockrill, K. A. Hamilton (eds.), *Britain in Global Politics, From Gladstone to Churchill*, Vol. 1, (Basingstoke and New York, 2013), p. 18.
[14] T. G. Otte, 'Diplomacy and Decision Making', in, P. Finney (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in International History*, (Basingstoke, 2005), p. 39.

first place and India and its defence a lowly place in British foreign policy' requires re-examination.[15]

This work will therefore seek to demonstrate the strong link between British interests in India and her narrower European interests. As Ingram highlighted in 'Defence', British dependence on India became a 'strategic problem as soon as a feint at invasion of India could be used as a lever to control British actions in Europe.'[16] Russia's ability to apply pressure on the British Empire allowed her to attempt to force Britain to accommodate Russian wishes in Europe, particularly in the Balkans. Britain's other rivals did not enjoy such a geographical advantage. Additionally, it was 'with the support of the *Dreikaiserbund* and with a new government in London [that] Russia was able to press forward in Central Asia. It is interesting to note that many of those who feared war in Europe or Asia Minor now supported Russian expansion here;' there was therefore almost tacit European support for the Russian invasion of Central Asia, if only to draw off Russian military energies away from the Balkans and Constantinople.[17] British awareness of such undertakings will be investigated, for there can be no doubt that an awareness would have impacted British decision making as regards Central Asia and Europe.

British foreign policy centred on the security of Central Asia in view of the fact that the Indian subcontinent was vital to the British Empire. India was a great place to export excess goods which had been manufactured in Britain, and which could not be sold to Europe or America. In terms of imports, India was a source of commodities such as tea and cotton. Meanwhile, goods leaving India for Europe were exempt from the numerous taxes which were levied on British goods. 'By the 1880s India was absorbing approximately £270 million

[15] M. Yapp, *Strategies of British India, Britain, Iran and Afghanistan 1798 - 1850,* (Oxford, 1980), p. 4.
[16] E. Ingram, *In Defence of British India. Great Britain in the Middle East 1775 - 1842,* (London, 1984), p. 3.
[17] B. Jelavich, 'Great Britain and the Acquisition of Batoum, 1878 - 1886', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 48, No. 110 (Jan. 1970), p. 56.

of British overseas investment and was purchasing 13 per cent of Britain's exports, making India the most important market for British manufacturers in the Empire.'[18] Linked to this was Britain's use of India as a source of manpower. The size of the British army was dictated by two factors: firstly, as an island nation she naturally had a smaller population than many of her rivals so she could not afford to have all of her young men enlist in the army. This would be at the expense of the wider economy. Also, given Britain's more liberal constitutional arrangements, governments were wary of conscription. Her full-time, professional force was therefore much smaller than those of her rivals. The Indian army, meanwhile, was both loyal and capable, so it offered London the ability to threaten her rivals with a substantial land force. More importantly, however, was the notion that 'possession of India symbolised the pretensions of Great Britain to be a world power;' without the subcontinent and the wealth it brought, it was assumed that Britain would fall from her Great Power status.[19] Thus the most serious issue for London was the danger posed to imperial security by the 'annihilation of distances intervening between Russia and India.'[20]

Russia caused Britain this trouble by design. The decade 1885 – 1895 must be viewed within its own historical context. This requires some consideration of the repercussions of the Crimean War (1853 – 1856). The Russian army was humbled in that conflict, while the prospect of improved Anglo-French relations offered the possibility of a period of peace on the continent. Such an alignment would only have ostracised St. Petersburg further from Europe. However, there was no peace in Europe, and it was of great benefit to Russia that the Anglo-French entente did not last. Nevertheless, the die was cast. 'Since the Crimean war there had been a pretty steady advance on the part of the Russians in Turkestan and towards the frontiers of Afghanistan and India. The gradual conquest of the

[18] J. Siegel, *Endgame: Britain, Russia and the Final Struggle for Central Asia*, (London, 2002), p. 1.
[19] Ingram, *Defence*, p. 2.
[20] B. H. Sumner, *Russia and the Balkans 1870 - 1880,* (London, 1962), p. 39.

tartar tribes and the incorporation of their territory in the empire of the tsars may, in fact, be regarded as the counterpart of the imperialistic drive of the western European powers in Africa.'[21]

There was some argument during the late nineteenth century as to Russia's intentions as she moved closer to India. For Nikolai de Giers, the Russian Foreign Minister, there was no intention of Russia invading British India. The object of the exercise was to apply pressure on the subcontinent in order to force London to allow St. Petersburg to make gains in Europe. 'This [Russian] advance, dictated not by any desire for territorial extension, but by the same necessity which has caused England to extend her conquests in India, and of which the annexation of Burmah is a recent instance, was misunderstood in England, where the public, and even some statesmen, believed that Russia advanced intentionally, and possibly with the ultimate object of bringing her frontiers into contact with those of the Indian Empire.'[22] There continues to be discussions between historians on this matter. Barbara Jelavich has asserted that there is 'no indication that Russia had any real designs for the conquest of India.'[23] None the less, as Yapp has highlighted: 'it did not matter ... whether the Russian intent was hostile or not ... the mere presence, however innocent, of Russian agents upon the borders of India could be sufficient to invoke the danger of an internal insurrection.'[24] British control of the subcontinent rested on the prestige which she had earned amongst India's leaders. If Russian troops could cross the borders into Afghanistan and Persia and foment dissent in the various local tribes, then the image of Great Britain as the provider of law and order was undermined, perhaps provoking the Indian population to overthrow the small administration that ruled over it. As a result, as B. H. Sumner has argued, Britain perceived herself to be at a

[21] W. L. Langer, *European Alliances and Alignments 1871 - 1890*, (New York, 1931), p. 309.
[22] Ridgeway to Rosebery (confidential, no. 21), 25 Mar. 1886, FO 65/1284.
[23] B. Jelavich, *St. Petersburg and Moscow: Tsarist and Soviet Foreign Policy 1814 - 1974* (London, 1974), p. 200.
[24] Yapp, *Strategies*, p. 15.

disadvantage for 'the danger of ignition or explosion, rather than the direct invasion of Russia ... was [at] the core of British apprehensions.'[25]

The Russian proclivity for expansion was a result of a particular mentality inherent in Russian foreign policy. 'Russian expansion ... grew out of a fear for the security of the empire's political and economic heartland.'[26] This was a response to collective memories of invasion. For St. Petersburg the greatest defence was distance. The priority was to create as large a gap as was possible between her borders and her centres of power and administration, the cities of St. Petersburg and Moscow. Such a policy caused Russia to aggravate her rivals: the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires in the Balkan Peninsula, and the British in India. Nevertheless, there was an economic edge to Russia's expansion south. It was well known that Russian businessmen and her middle classes could not compete with the wares and costs of their business rivals outside of Russia. The answer to this was the formation of a protectionist trade barrier around the Russian empire. For St. Petersburg, seeking 'to extend by annexation the protective system under which alone they see prosperity,' was a good way of improving the economy.[27] This was a particularly strong driving factor for Russian interest in Persia.

There were, of course, repercussions for Britain. 'The Anglo-Russian antagonism increased as the distance which separated the territories under their control diminished.'[28] A significant fear was the 'possibility that Russian activities on or beyond the Afghan frontier would cause disaffection with India.'[29] 'Russia's expansion into Central Asia undermined

[25] Sumner, *Balkans,* p. 42.
[26] D. Lieven, *Empire. The Russian Empire and Its Rivals*, (Yale, 2002), p. 214.
[27] Drummond Wolff (secret, memorandum), 22 Sept. 1889, FO 881/6145x.
[28] M. Soroka, *Britain, Russia and the Road to the First World War - The Fateful Embassy of Count Aleksandr Benckendorff, 1903 - 16*, (Farnham, 2011), p. 5.
[29] M. Yapp, 'British Perceptions of the Russian Threat to India', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1987), p. 648.

Britain's prestige and authority among Muslims and Buddhists.'[30] A failure to retain the respect, if not the fear of the local population, could have led to a repeat of the 1857 Indian Mutiny. This event had highlighted to Britain's rulers that the various religious groups were hugely important in maintaining the security and stability of India. If a repeat of the mutiny was to be avoided, it is of no surprise that 'diplomats posted along the rim of the Russian empire were alive to the creeping growth of Russia's influence. This rekindled concerns about the unsettled state of India's north western frontier.'[31]

From 1884 and the conquest of the Merv oasis, in modern day Turkmenistan, Russia posed a threat to British imperial security through her proximity to Afghanistan. Her ability to move across Central Asia almost at will was disastrous for British foreign policy-makers. It threatened Britain's system for defending India. This system had two important facets: firstly, it was understood that 'India's security depended ... on the control of the land and sea routes which linked her to England via the Middle East.'[32] This meant maintaining the supremacy of the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean Sea, to protect the short route to India via the Suez Canal. It was with just cause that Giers wrote in 1884: 'England had always striven to ruin Russian sea power, especially in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.'[33] The Suez Canal was of vital importance to British defence policy in general, although this policy did necessarily change depending on which power Britain was fighting. As General Sir Garnet Wolseley (later 1st Viscount Wolseley), Adjutant-General of the Forces at the War Office, explained to Major-General John Ardagh, the assistant Adjutant-General: 'in the event of a war with France it would be essentially necessary for us to stop all navigation through it [the Suez Canal], and if at war with Russia it would be of immense importance to us to keep it

[30] Soroka, *Road*, p. 5
[31] T. G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind. The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1865 - 1914*, (Cambridge, 2011), p. 164.
[32] S. Becker, 'The Great Game: The History of an evocative phrase', *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (2012), p. 68.
[33] Langer, *Alliances*, p. 309.

open.'[34] A war with Russia would be a global war with multiple fronts, including in India and Persia. To support this effort with supplies and crucially, manpower, the Suez Canal would have to remain open. To protect the canal Britain would therefore also have to maintain the security of the eastern Mediterranean Sea. To achieve this, it was imperative that the Russian fleet not be allowed to leave the Black Sea. Britain would have preferred to be able to access the Black Sea herself in order to neutralise this threat, but the Straits Convention (1871) forbade the passing of warships through the Straits of the Dardanelles. To this end, Britain understood that 'without the co-operation of Turkey our operations against south Russia must be confined to establishing a close watch of the entrance of the Dardanelles to prevent the egress and ingress of Russian vessels.'[35] None the less, Ottoman Turkey, with her capital at Constantinople, was strategically placed to dominate the waterway in and out of the Black Sea. It was thought this barrier would be sufficient in the short term. However, London understood that the Sultan would need protecting from Russian aggression in order to protect British interests. St. Petersburg sought the capture of Constantinople so that her fleet could access the Mediterranean. Moreover, Russia sought to control the Slav peoples in the Balkan region only loosely, seeking to deny the Ottoman Empire of its European inhabitants so as to weaken it economically, materially, structurally and militarily. To protect Constantinople Britain sought to ensure that Russian resources were tied up elsewhere, or negated by helping the Balkan peoples. This was to ensure that Russia did not have free reign to attack Constantinople from the north. This support of the Sultan went against the British public's deep dislike of the 'Turk', a result of the widely reported atrocities which Muslims had inflicted upon Christians. But 'protecting the Turk from the inveterate enmity of the Tsars

[34] Wolseley to Ardagh (confidential), 29 Aug. 1887, Ardagh MSS, PRO 30/40/2.
[35] Hall to Key, (most confidential), 14 Mar. 1885, ADM 1/8869.

was a policy dictated by English self-interest.'[36] Maintaining the strength of the Ottoman Empire was directly linked to Britain's preservation of her Indian territory.

British influence in Afghanistan and Persia was the other facet of British India's defence. To limit the threat of Russia to India, Britain instituted a buffer defence policy, through which she sought to exert control over the states of Afghanistan and Persia. In doing so, British statesmen hoped to keep Russia from being able to attack India's borders directly. In addition, without control of those states Russia would not have the resources left to launch a successful invasion of India. Such a gap was meant to aid Indian defence by increasing Russian difficulties before she had managed to breach India's borders, giving British and Indian authorities more time to face the threat. Britain did not seek to control either Persia or Afghanistan directly, but rather sought to use her 'soft power' to gain their loyalty and trust. This meant diplomatic ties, trading, investment, military training and equipment, anything which the British could do to ensure that the Shah and Amir, respectively, stayed the course with Britain and refused to secede to Russian control. On the other hand, it is of course true that 'when great powers quarrel their lesser neighbours are often worst affected. Cajoled and wooed, they are drawn into conflicts they would prefer to avoid.'[37] The key, therefore, for Britain was to make administrative changes to each government as far as they could, in order to improve the financial and therefore political stability of each respective government. While Britain's efforts were largely aimed at trying to appeal as the safer and better option than the Russians, this of course meant that they were vulnerable to the Persian Shah or the Afghan Amir playing them for fools and seeking to play the two sides off against one another. For the most part, however, despite the inherent risks, Britain found that this buffer policy was the best solution for the situation. Such a course of action was used across the empire. 'Great

[36] D. Steele, 'Three British Prime Ministers and the survival of the Ottoman Empire, 1855 - 1902', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (2014), p. 43.
[37] L. P. Morris, 'British Secret Service Activity in Khorassan, 1887- 1908', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Sept., 1984), pp. 657 – 675, p. 657.

Britain possessed ... India, Canada, and a large portion of Africa, but insisted on dominating vast territories which for strategic reasons, it wanted to keep from falling into the hands of another power even though it did not seek to control them directly.'[38] It is clear that 'the British concept of a safe world required weakening the Russian empire and at the same time building up the military might of Russia's contiguous states.'[39]

That there was a clear contrast within Britain's Central Asian policy, between how her interests were defended in Afghanistan and Persia, will also be demonstrated. The strategy in Afghanistan was largely resolute and combative; in Persia there was a more conciliatory tone. None the less, as Otte argues in *The Foreign Office Mind*, 'there was no appetite for a 'forward policy' in the region around India's security glacis.'[40] Britain did not seek to control either Afghanistan or Persia, or force their respective rulers to bend to her will; a forward policy was simply too expensive and too risky. Moreover, due to competition for control over Britain's foreign policy, 'it was unclear whether ... official[s] ... [based in Persia were] responsible to London or to India, which had different priorities and preoccupations.'[41] However, for reasons of prestige many British diplomats felt almost honour bound to support the Afghan Amir, with force if necessary, to protect his territory. In Persia, however, 'there was limited room for manoeuvre' as a result of Russia's superiority in the north of the country and at Tehran.[42] Diplomacy was the only way forward here. It must also be considered that what each state offered to Britain differed greatly, and this had a direct correlation with British policy.

An investigation of Russian foreign policy during this period will be necessary to provide the context for British actions to ascertain the reasoning behind them. This was a

[38] H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (London, 1994), p. 178.
[39] Soroka, *Road*, p. 5.
[40] Otte, *Mind*, p. 205.
[41] Morris, 'Secret Service Activity', p. 660.
[42] Ibid., p. 204.

period of domestic difficulty for Tsarist Russia, and these internal issues impacted her capacity to carry out an effective foreign policy. Important works on Russian foreign policy include the studies by Dominic Lieven, Hugh Ragsdale and John LeDonne. All of them agree that Russia could only threaten British interests in Central Asia and in the eastern Mediterranean. LeDonne also asserts that at St. Petersburg there had long been the 'realisation that Afghanistan was the only place where Britain was vulnerable on land.'[43] It was here, therefore, that pressure had to be applied. Lieven stresses the normality of Russian policy: 'territorial expansion was one of the most traditional methods for a nation to shift the balance of power to its own favour'.[44] Although few can argue with this assertion, Lieven's argument considering the ordinariness of Russian intentions is not one which is seen in British documents from this period. This stands to reason, as there was little appreciation of this factor in Russian foreign policy during the late nineteenth century. Such expansion was, however, typical of Russia. It had long been Russia's plan to seek to interfere in British policy through Central Asia, and the Russian press was not shy about celebrating this approach. The publication 'of an article in the *Temps,* widely circulated by the *'Agence Havas',* according to which Russia would find means to fight efficiently against British rule in Egypt by erecting difficulties in Afghanistan.'[45] None the less, both Egypt and Afghanistan, as Lord George Curzon argued, were the lesser of Russia's targets. '[Her] object is not Calcutta, but Constantinople ... [the Tsar] believes that the keys of the Bosphorus are more likely to be won on the banks of the Helmund than on the heights of Plevna. To keep England quiet in Europe by keeping her employed in Asia.'[46] The Russian press had proven an important source of information for Britain throughout the nineteenth century. Sir Robert

[43] J. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World 1700 - 1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment,* (Oxford, 1997), p. 133.
[44] D. Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals* (London, 2000), p. 267.
[45] M. P. Hornik, 'The Mission of Sir Henry Drummond -Wolff to Constantinople 1885 - 1887', *English Historical Review,* Vol. 55, No. 220 (Oct. 1940), p. 619.
[46] G. N. Curzon, *Russia in Central Asia in 1889 and the Anglo-Russian Question* (London, 1967), p. 321.

Morier, the British Ambassador to the Russian Empire (1884 - 1893), therefore continued the practice of having articles from the various newspapers translated and sent home. He, like his predecessors, realised that the Russian government controlled the press and disseminated everything it wanted the wider world to know through the medium of popular print. Often these articles proved more useful to British policy-makers than did the brief meeting between the Ambassador and the Russian Foreign Minister. As a result, 'the British ... based their analyses of the Russian motives less on the spurious will than on the writings of Russian generals, the facts connected with her expansion in Central Asia, and the tenor of her important newspapers.'[47] 'There can be no doubt that, if not directly inspired, the writers are in very close touch with the official managers of Russian international affairs.'[48] The press was therefore a consistent source of information, although it had to be taken with caution. Use of the press was necessary because structurally the Tsarist government was far removed from the norm, meaning an alternative approach to gathering information had to be found: there was no parliament; the Tsar remained in absolute control of policy; and the nominal heads of departments, such as the Foreign Ministry, all reported directly to the Tsar and had little room for their own policy initiatives. Furthermore, there was very little official political correspondence from this autocratic state, so there was little 'official' documentation to be forwarded from the ambassador in St. Petersburg to London.

Russia, meanwhile, had her own vulnerabilities that needed to be addressed before she could focus on Britain in Central Asia. For this reason, it is also important to understand how Russia's standing *vís-a-vís* Germany and Austria-Hungary was fundamental to the Central Asian paradigm. In order to be able to maintain pressure on Britain in Central Asia, Russia needed to ensure that her western border in Europe was secure. If there was no tension

[47] R. L. Greaves, *Persia and the Defence of India 1884 - 1892: A Study in the Foreign Policy of the Third Marquis of Salisbury*, (London, 1959), p. 11.
[48] Morier to Salisbury (no. 1010), 2 Dec. 1885, FO 65/1219.

between St. Petersburg and the European powers, more Russian resources could be spent in Central Asia, moving towards the borders of Afghanistan or Persia. When there was tension, however, these resources had to be moved to Russia's western border, to fend off any potential attack. This meant that a delicate balancing act had to be found between Russia's desire to expand and her need to keep the German powers on side. However, as matters unfolded over Eastern Rumelia, it became clear that Russia's pan-Slav leanings would prove her undoing.

This work will focus almost entirely on the foreign policies of Britain and Russia, respectively. Domestic concerns, in so far as they affected foreign policy-making, will also be given due consideration. We must therefore understand what we mean when we use the term foreign policy. 'The foreign policy of a country is an expression of its national objectives. Its dimensions are determined by the resources which the country commands and the ideological affiliation it builds up for itself.'[49] In addition, 'foreign policy is the use of political influence in order to induce other states to exercise their law-making power in a manner desired by the state concerned.'[50] A key issue is therefore influence, which can be gained: either by strengthening a state's army and/or economy; or by securing territory and resources. The bigger an army, the stronger an economy, the more pressure could be applied on other states. This is influence. There were states which could exercise influence, and those that could not. Those that could were labelled the 'Great Powers'. During the late nineteenth century this group consisted of: Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia. The omission of both Italy and the Ottoman Empire is deliberate. Neither state could unilaterally influence the decisions of their rivals. They could only do so in tandem with the Great Powers; Italy as part of an alliance; Ottoman Turkey as the 'sick man of Europe'. Each state

[49] R. Kumar, *India and the Persian Gulf Region 1858 – 1907: A study in British Imperial Policy*, (London, 1965), p. 1.
[50] F. S. Northedge (ed.), *The Foreign Policies of the Powers,* (London, 1974), p. 11.

had its own objectives, and invariably there was some overlap. This meant that there were routinely periods of tension between them. The achievement of these objectives would be the mandate of the statesman in charge of a state's foreign affairs. They may be labelled as a Foreign Secretary or a Foreign Minister. 'The starting point of the foreign ministers work is generally not what he wants to see done, but something already being done by other countries' ministers, which he must either stop or influence in a manner favourable to his goals.'[51] Self-preservation was the primary objective of the Great Powers. To this end, the Foreign Secretary would use force and/or manipulation to hold back the objectives of Britain's rivals. At every turn she was alienating one power or another in order to achieve her own aims. This led to resentment from her rivals, as they had objectives which were both similar and dissimilar to her own. It is important to remember that neither the British Empire nor Tsarist Russia were all-powerful, and that both had to consider their actions and the reactions of others when constructing their foreign policies. To ascertain which powers were important to Britain, we must look at where her foreign policy was directed. Hence this thesis will be investigating the ability of Britain and Russia to affect the policies of the other.

It is also necessary to consider perception when studying Anglo-Russian relations. This will represent a fundamental theme throughout this work. Robert Jervis, an international relations scholar, has asserted that it is 'often impossible to explain crucial decisions and policies without reference to the decision makers' beliefs about the world and their images of others.'[52] Without an understanding of how British foreign policy-makers in London viewed Russia and Russian intentions, the driving factors behind British polices cannot be comprehended. The decision makers for Britain through this period were, to a large extent, Lord Robert Cecil, the 3rd Marquis of Salisbury, and Archibald Primrose, 5th Earl of Rosebery. Both men received considerable input from the Viceroys of India, Morier, and Sir

[51] Ibid., p. 17.
[52] R. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, (Princeton, 1976), p. 28.

Henry Drummond Wolff, the Minister to Persia, but the decisions and policy rested with the Foreign Office.

This work will largely focus on the policies of Salisbury, the dominant political figure in the period under consideration here. Prime Minister twice during this period (23 June 1885 - 28 January 1886; 25 July 1886 - 11 August 1892), he was also his own Foreign Secretary for much of these terms. Salisbury was an intellectual who was greatly respected, both at home and abroad. He summed up British foreign policy '[as] to perform our own part with honour, to abstain from meddling diplomacy, to uphold England's honour steadily and fearlessly, and always to be prone rather to let action go along with words than to let it lag behind them.'[53] Salisbury epitomised the mid-Victorian aloofness and quiet confidence in Britain's strength. The Prime Minister placed 'severe limitations on the objectives of British foreign policy, believing that while the Empire was vital to England's future as a world power, there was no need to expand its frontiers.'[54] Otte has identified that 'the key to Salisbury's foreign policy lay in the Middle and Near Eastern crisis crescent that stretched from Afghanistan and India's north-western frontier to the Ottoman dominions in the Balkans and north-eastern Africa.'[55]

Salisbury appreciated that there was more than one way for Russia to disrupt Britain in India. Force, or the threat of force, was one method that could be used against Britain in Central Asia. Another would entail Russia trying to provoke dissent amongst the Indian population to British rule. This threat had to be taken seriously as a key factor of Britain's stewardship was based upon keeping India's religiously diverse population both happy with British rule and able to live together harmoniously. Salisbury, unlike many of his

[53] R. Taylor, *Lord Salisbury*, (London, 1975), p. 132.
[54] Ibid., p. 133.
[55] T. G. Otte, ''Floating Downstream?' Lord Salisbury and British Foreign Policy 1878 - 1902', T. G. Otte (ed.), *The Makers of British Foreign Policy from Pitt to Thatcher*, (Chippenham, 2002), p. 103.

contemporaries, recognised that Russia's intention was to use intimidation on the subcontinent to make gains elsewhere. This assertion is, therefore, at odds with David Steele's suggestion that Salisbury did not view Russia as an immediate threat to India. Steele argues: '[he] let it be known that he saw Russia and the endlessly discussed Russian threat to India as bogies that filled the public mind in England with absurd fears. India's natural line of defence lay along its mountainous north-western border, if the Russians ever got so far.'[56] Although the mountains were a physical barrier and source of comfort for Britain's policy-makers, the Prime Minister did nevertheless shape his policy to protect the Raj from Russian interference. For instance, he was careful not to overreact when Russia made sudden moves in Central Asia, to ensure that an escalation of aggression did not occur. These movements may have been border skirmishes, or diplomatic gestures towards the various tribes along the frontier, but to counter them the Marquis always sought to ensure that there was military protection or nominal loyalty to British rule in India prior to these movements. In Central Asia he favoured 'the buffer state theory, as is witnessed by his policy in connection with Persia' and with Afghanistan.[57] 'His foreign policy revolved necessarily around two twin objectives: to defend India against a Russian invasion or Russian-inspired subversion; and to maintain the independence and, as far as was possible, the integrity of the adjacent, increasingly unstable countries.'[58]

Salisbury understood that British foreign policy was based upon both Central Asia and Europe. 'Faced with the Russian threat in Asia, Salisbury wanted to co-operate with the powers of the Triple Alliance. But he believed this co-operation should be based on mutual interests at the actual time when joint diplomatic action was required. He was not prepared to

[56] Steele, 'Three British PMs', p. 55.
[57] J. A. S. Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy and the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, (London, 1964), p. 19.
[58] Otte, 'Floating', p. 103.

promise material assistance in the future by signing an alliance.'[59] To this end, if a short-term relationship helped to negate 'the danger to security in the Mediterranean and on the frontiers of India', Salisbury would choose the course of action that best promised to ensure the longevity and security of the British Empire.[60] Salisbury was also aware that the Ottoman Empire might soon fracture, and that this could affect Britain's ability to defend her Middle Eastern and Asian interests and possessions. He therefore sought 'the orderly dismemberment of his [the Sultans] empire ... if it could be agreed by the powers.'[61] None the less, Salisbury deemed it necessary that while the security of the route to India remained tied to the fate of the Sultan, he would have to keep the bedraggled Empire afloat as best as was possible. Additionally, it must be understood that 'no consideration of Salisbury's foreign policy is complete which does not take into account his strong moral feelings. To him human suffering was an evil, and the one great object of his diplomacy was to avoid war.'[62] 'Salisbury's foreign policy ... wanted to avoid war; [and] it abhorred taking risks.'[63] He always ensured that no knee jerk reactions were taken, as these were all too often violent and inappropriate.

Rosebery, meanwhile, was foreign secretary during the Liberal administrations of 1886 and 1892 – 1894, succeeding William Gladstone as Prime Minister in March 1894. The differences between Salisbury and Rosebery in their respective foreign policies were few. The Earl was committed to the idea of continuity in foreign policy: he 'believed that Britain's national interests were far more important than party politics.'[64] This was an acknowledgement of his own party's failings under the leadership of Gladstone and his foreign secretary, Earl Granville. In Central Asia, during the Penjdeh crisis 'Rosebery urged strong action, and wrote a memorandum which attacked any suggestion that the Russian

[59] Grenville, *Salisbury*, p. 16
[60] D. Read, *England 1868 - 1914: The age of urban democracy*, (London, 1979), p. 372.
[61] Steele, 'Three British PMs', p. 45.
[62] Grenville, *Salisbury*, p. 6.
[63] J. Charmley, *Splendid Isolation? Britain, the Balance of Power and the Origins of the First World War*, (London, 1999), p. 195.
[64] L. McKinstry, *Rosebery: Statesman in Turmoil*, (London, 2017), p. 178.

aggression should be shrugged off.'[65] A decade later his position, seemingly, had changed. Concerns 'over Russian advances in the Pamirs he negotiated with patience and eventually concluded a settlement which, considering the weakness of Britain's military capacity in the area, was favourable.'[66] There was, however, no change, simply a realisation of when to apply more pressure on St. Petersburg to prevent Russia from threatening British interests. One significant contrast between Rosebery and Salisbury was over Persia. The former dismissed the Shah, while the latter tried to forge closer Anglo-Persian ties to enhance the security of British India.

In Europe, Rosebery maintained Salisbury's stance of using 'Britain's influence to maintain the balance of power in Europe, thereby protecting British imperial interests and avoiding a conflagration on the Continent.'[67] This was not, however, an easy policy to follow. Staying close to Europe without being part of the alliance system meant treading a thin line. In his first term at least, Rosebery did not have the necessary experience to follow Salisbury's policy. Britain had 'no means of knowing how long Russia's irritation at the Bulgarian union would remain passive. The only sanction which Rosebery could devise ... was to continue with what he believed had been Salisbury's policy: namely to keep the Russians guessing but avoiding any indication of *détente* proclivity. This was perhaps why Rosebery seized so avidly on a cause for complaint ... when the Russians issued a circular about the status of Batoum.'[68] However, 'Rosebery found himself the only European minister prepared to defend the Treaty of Berlin when the Russians suddenly announced their intention of unilaterally tearing up that part of the Treaty which made Batoum a free port.'[69] This Black Sea port was irrelevant to the rest of Europe, but Rosebery considered its militarisation as a

[65] R. R. James, Rosebery, (London, 1963), p. 166.
[66] P. J. V. Rolo, 'Rosebery and Kimberley', K. Wilson (ed.), *British Foreign Secretaries and Foreign Policy: From Crimean War to First World War*, (London, 1987), p. 147.
[67] McKinstry, *Statesman*, p. 179.
[68] Rolo, 'Rosebery and Kimberley', p. 141.
[69] R. R. James, Rosebery, (London, 1963), p. 193.

threat to British interests in Central Asia. While this was more aggressive than how Salisbury is likely to have reacted, it does demonstrate Rosebery's intention to defend British India in Europe. This continuity was important to the Anglo-Russian antagonism in Central Asia. None the less, Rosebery's over-reaction in 1886 caused difficulties for Britain that were not needed.

Perception also allows for the critical evaluation of Anglo-Russian relations. Emanuele Castano suggests that on 'a continuum from absolute ally to absolute enemy, it seems reasonable to argue that a linear relationship might exist between one's perception of a foreign country's position on this continuum and the perceived harmfulness to one's country of an action undertaken by that country.'[70] It is necessary to understand the threat which Russia posed from the perspective of the British and Indian governments so that we can understand the context of decisions and why those decisions were made. It is worth noting that, if Britain had not perceived Russia's expansion south as a threat, then there would not have been a Central Asian paradigm. The enigma that Britain perceived Russia to be was summed up best by Morier:

> What is Russia? ... In one sense it is the Czar ... In another sense, it is a dual double-headed being – not a double headed eagle like the national emblem, but a double-headed bear like the national heart ... Lastly in another sense – the most important of all and the least considered – an immense ocean, now violently agitated, now subject to deep and sullen calm, but all the while, whether on the surface still & furious, moving on with an irresistible tide in a very ascertainable direction.[71]

It was 'the dual character of the Russian Government' that mattered most to Britain.[72] From Morier's perspective, Giers at the Foreign Ministry was a reasonable man who wanted peaceful relations with Britain. He was, then, someone with whom British ministers and officials thought they could work. The Russian War Ministry, however, was much more

[70] E. Castano, 'The Perception of the Other in International Relations: Evidence for the Polarizing Effect of Christianity', *Political Psychology,* Vol. 24, No. 3 (2003), p. 450.
[71] Morier to Salisbury (private), 15 Sept. 1886, Morier MSS, Box 24 A, Item 1.
[72] Morier to Iddesleigh (confidential, no. 314), 8 Sept. 1886, FO 65/1261.

antagonistic, although there was no one man orchestrating a policy so diametrically opposed to that of the Foreign Minister. Instead, numerous officers were encouraged to expand the reach of St. Petersburg as much as they could. To Drummond Wolff, it appeared that: 'the [Russian] military party is always contemplating the possibility of war.'[73] It was this contradiction that caused Morier to write: 'the one head of the double headed eagle is visible and palpable, the other looms enveloped in darkness.'[74] This meant that it was difficult for Britain's policy makers to ascertain who was determining Russia's foreign policy, especially in Central Asia. While Lieven and LeDonne highlight the formal conduit of power from the Tsar to the Foreign Minister, Alex Marshall, in his *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1800 – 1917*, demonstrates the importance both of the Russian War Ministry and the men-on-the-spot for Russia.[75] While there remained this struggle in St. Petersburg, Britain's perception of Russian foreign policy was one of aggression and confusion.

None the less, Salisbury was confident '[that] the forces which are pushing outwards the Russian frontiers are mainly two – the religious and the military.'[76] This in itself was a suggestion that, from Britain's perspective, Russian policy in Europe was a distinct entity from Russian policy in Central Asia. In Europe, St. Petersburg sought to protect the Christians of the Ottoman Empire; in Central Asia, the Russian War Ministry sought to apply pressure on British India. It was clear that Britain's inability to understand Russia contributed to her distrust of St. Petersburg. Salisbury was certain that there was no chance of obtaining a broad Anglo-Russian agreement, and that, even if it were attainable, it would not be worth the paper it was written on. He grumbled: 'in his speech at Hackney of the bad faith shown by Russia in past negotiations with England on the Central Asian question.'[77] To Salisbury's

[73] Drummond Wolff (secret, memorandum), 22 Sept. 1889, FO 881/6145x.
[74] Morier to Iddesleigh (confidential, no. 314), 8 Sept. 1886, FO 65/1261.
[75] A. Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1800 – 1917,* (London, 2006).
[76] Salisbury to Morier (very confidential, private), 2 Oct. 1886, Morier MSS, Box 24 A, Item 2.
[77] Thornton to Granville, 20 May 1885, FO 65/1217.

mind, ‘a settlement with Russia was a protracted truce marked by isolated cases of limited co-operation in specific issues of practical interest to Britain.’[78] He further argued: ‘you can have an entente with a man or a Government but no one ... tried to have it with a tide.’[79] None the less, ‘there was not any unity of opinion about Russia at the Foreign Office. What did exist was a spectrum of opinion.’[80] Seemingly the only universally accepted conclusion was that Russia would act outside of the usual norms of international diplomacy. It was understood: ‘the weakness of the central authority over its agents at a distance enables the latter with impunity to foster small disorders and keep up a sense of alarm and insecurity.’[81] This lack of understanding contributed significantly to the fear of Russia that permeated Britain’s foreign policy. As Sir Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant Duff, the Governor of Madras (now Chennai), on the south-east coast of India, remarked: ‘the sort of antipathy which exists between the upper classes of England and Russia is the result of want of clear knowledge of the points to which their respective political aspirations are directed.’[82] ‘It was precisely the fear of Russian activities which made Britain determined to maintain influence over Afghanistan.’[83]

This chronological framework has been chosen because 1885 marks the beginning of a period of difficulty for Britain and Europe. In Britain, while events in Africa caused some concern, matters in Central Asia, where tensions had been increasing for decades, were about to create a significant war scare. The Eastern Rumelia crisis and its aftermath would cause Europe much concern. The decade to follow was a tumultuous one for Anglo-Russian relations. At the centre of these predicaments for Britain was Central Asia. The end date of 1895 marks the end of the Liberal interlude between Salisbury’s second and third terms of office, while the long running Pamirs Crisis was finally brought to a close. In addition,

[78] Soroka, *Road*, p. 8.
[79] Salisbury to Morier (private, very confidential), 2 Oct. 1886, Morier MSS, Box 24 A, Item 2.
[80] Neilson, *Last Tsar*, p. 37.
[81] Drummond Wolff (secret, memorandum), 22 Sept. 1889, FO 881/6145x.
[82] M. E. Duff (memorandum), 11 Aug. 1885, R Churchill MSS, MS Add.9248, vol. 7.
[83] G. Morgan, *Anglo-Russian Rivalry in Central Asia: 1810 - 1895*, (London, 1981), p. 191.

Russian attention moved towards the Far East with the ending of the Sino-Japanese War, just as Tsar Alexander III and Giers died within months of one another. As Russia focused on another part of the world, British India could now relax as Central Asia was no longer a source of tension.

Chapter One

‘A just and honourable settlement of every controversy’: The Penjdeh Crisis

By the 1880s the Russian Empire was reaching the border of Afghanistan, a buffer state between British India and Russia. The penultimate domino fell in March 1884 when Russia seized the Merv oasis, situated north of Herat and north-west of Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. It caused the issue of imperial security to become more significant in London.[1] This was at odds with ‘the reluctance of the second Gladstone ministry (1880-1885) to undertake expensive projects of any sort, much less those pertaining to military ... preparations.’[2] Such hesitancy meant that the government was ill prepared for a crisis. In November 1884 the Secretary of State for India, John Wodehouse, the 1st Earl of Kimberley, considered that ‘the afghan frontier question looks very troublesome. The action of the Russians in advancing ... is unfriendly and menacing, and language openly held, as we are told, by their military officers, that Herat is their object, shows an aggressive spirit, which, if not controlled from St. Petersburg, will render the position very difficult.’[3] As a result of the

[1] This chapter draws on Keith Neilson’s article ‘The British Way in Warfare and Russia’; Thomas Otte’s *The Foreign Office Mind. The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1865 – 1914*; and Malcolm Yapp’s ‘British Perceptions of the Russian Threat to India’. Neilson correctly asserts that Britain, due to a lack of European support against Russian aggression in Central Asia, was forced by circumstance to have a different foreign policy in Europe than she did in Central Asia. Yet although it may appear that there were two policies, they were in fact part of the same whole. Neilson also suggests that Britain’s response to the Penjdeh crisis highlights a lack of material force in 1885. While he goes on to praise the adaptability of Britain’s foreign policy, this argument misses the nuance of how Gladstone used the Penjdeh crisis. This was both to remove Britain from the Sudan but also to create such a strong military response that St. Petersburg had no choice but to back down. Thomas Otte, meanwhile, does demonstrate that Britain’s more forceful strategy over Penjdeh forced Russia to yield. This strategy goes some way to explaining why Salisbury was more willing than his predecessors to assert that firmness was the order of the day. Otte further suggests that Britain’s fear of Russia’s incremental advances stemmed from the reports sent to London by her diplomats posted along the edge of Russia’s empire. Such reports used local intelligence and eyewitness accounts to try and build a picture of Russia’s forward movements. Similarly, Malcolm Yapp highlights the Indian Government’s fear that Russia could cause disaffection within its borders which might lead to a repeat of the 1857 mutiny. However, Yapp also suggests that Britain’s government was most concerned with prestige during the Penjdeh crisis. While this was a factor, it misses the important point of forcing Russia to take a step back and agree to begin the process of border negotiations between Afghanistan and Russia.

[2] J. Beeler, ‘Steam, Strategy and Schurman: imperial defence in the post-Crimean era, 1856 - 1905’, K. Neilson and G. Kennedy (ed.), *Far Flung Lines. Studies in Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald MacKenzie Schurman*, (Oxon, 1997), p. 37.

[3] Kimberley to Dufferin (private), 21 Nov. 1884, Kimberley MSS, MS.Eng.d.2456.

close proximity of Russian troops to Afghanistan, Britain and Russia entered into negotiations to demarcate the Russo-Afghan boundary. For Britain, 'diplomacy had to make do where material force was lacking.'[4]

It was considered that 'the Afghan question is a grave one and the loss of that country would prove disastrous,' because of Afghanistan's importance to British India's defence strategy.[5] The guiding principle behind this approach was keeping an independent Afghanistan between Russia and British India. Prior to Russia's arrival on the Afghan border, the buffer state policy appeared the safest and most reliable means of defending British India. The flaw in this approach was that in order to defend this buffer, Britain had to oppose all Russian efforts to encroach upon Afghan territory. Thus, when in February 1885 Russian forces were reported to be pressing against the frontier near the Zulfikar Pass (north-west of Herat), Britain requested that they should be moved. In response, 'a memorandum from M[onsieur] de Giers [Nikolai Karlovich Giers, Russian Foreign Minister] ... informed that the Russian government cannot accede to the request that the advanced Russian posts at Sari-Gazi and Zulfikar Pass should be withdrawn.'[6] This was a humiliation for the Amir of Afghanistan, Abdul Rahman, and, by extension, of Britain as Afghanistan's protector. The Zulfikar Pass was a key strategic location as it gave access to 'the only place where Britain was vulnerable on land' to Russian forces, Afghanistan.[7] The pass cut through the Hindu Kush mountain range, the primary defensive barrier between Afghanistan and Russia, and was the only pass yet discovered through which a large number of men could travel at any one time. If Russia controlled this pass then her invasion route would be simplified, as it was

[4] K. Neilson, 'The British Way in Warfare and Russia', in, K. Neilson and G. Kennedy (ed.), *The British Way in Warfare: Power and the International System 1856 - 1956. Essays in Honour of David French,* (Farnham, 2010), p. 13.
[5] Henry Epsom to Granville, 3 Jan. 1885, FO 65/1235.
[6] Thornton to Granville (no. 39), 24 Feb. 1885, FO 65/1236.
[7] J. P. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World 1700 - 1917. The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment,* (Oxford, 1997), p. 133.

also one of the approaches to the strategically important city of Herat in north-western Afghanistan. As a result, the British Foreign Secretary, Granville George Leveson-Gower, Earl Granville, told General Sir Peter Lumsden, Adjutant-General of the Indian Army, to 'press the Afghans strongly not to advance.'[8] The British Empire could not have its client attacking Russian troops. Instead, Indian troops were sent to contested territories, with London receiving 'through the Russian ambassador [Baron Georges de Staal] a complaint of British officers reviewing Afghan garrisons in Afghan Turkestan, and recommending to authorities to fortify points on the left bank of the Amou Daria.'[9] The predictable reply returned to the ambassador was that 'H[er] M[ajesty's] G[overnment] cannot admit that British officers have not a perfect right to inspect Afghan troops and to give such advice with regard to frontier defences as they may think desirable.'[10] Such tit-for-tat exchanges were not likely to ease Anglo-Russian tensions. Granville therefore informed the British ambassador in St. Petersburg, Sir Edward Thornton: 'Her Majesty's Government are strongly impressed with the desirability of putting an end to the excitement with regard to the Afghan frontier which seems to be increasing both in this country and in Russia.'[11]

As Granville sought to calm matters between Britain and Russia, Kimberley understood that the precise geographical location of Russia's incursions mattered little for Britain. What did matter was 'that it is now not a mere question about a few miles more or less of afghan territory but of our whole relations with Russia in Asia.'[12] The implication of this was that the Secretary of State was seeking a more coherent policy for dealing with Russia at large. Meanwhile, Thornton suggested that there was a missed opportunity to inform the world of Britain's stance concerning Afghanistan. He argued: 'H[er] M[ajesty's']

[8] Granville to Lumsden (telegram, draft), 25 Feb. 1885, FO 65/1236.
[9] Lumsden to Morier (no. 29, draft), 24 Mar. 1885, FO 65/1238.
[10] Lumsden to Staal (draft), 24 Mar. 1885, FO 65/1238.
[11] Granville to Thornton (no. 106), 27 Mar. 1885, FO 181/671/1.
[12] Kimberley to Dufferin (private), 27 Mar. 1885, Kimberley MSS, MS.Eng.d.2456.

Gov[ernmen]t have had opportunities of disclosing in Parliament their adherence to the Imperial & traditional policy of this country with regard to India and Afghanistan ... this policy ... includes engagements to the ameer, binding H[er] M[ajesty's] Gov[ernmen]t to regard as a hostile act, any aggression upon his territory.'[13] With such various opinions amongst his Cabinet and Ambassador, the Prime Minister, William Gladstone, had to devise his own way of dealing with Russia. These differing opinions, and the mutual complaints of Britain and Russia, provide the proper context for the Penjdeh crisis. It is important to consider that this incident was neither the beginning nor the end of any particular phase of Anglo-Russian tensions in Central Asia, but simply the first time where we see a British government both threaten and be prepared to use force in order to stop Russia's inexorable march to India.

The Penjdeh incident occurred when 'Russians attacked and defeated Afghans, and occupied Penjdeh on 30 [March 1885],' a small town south of Merv and west of Kabul, on the Afghan-Russian border. Set in fertile land, this town was a valuable prize. The result of the incursion was Russia gaining a foothold on Afghanistan's border, a development that British and Indian governments had feared for decades. This was troublesome for London and Delhi as it was 'impossible to say what [the] Russians may do next, or what affect the calamity may have [had] on [the] minds of Afghans.'[14] In the aftermath of the fighting it is clear that Russia sought to calm matters, in particular British concerns over Herat, which shared a border with Persia. Herat was considered the key to Kandahar, largely because its locale meant that it was a vital way point for any army wishing to invade Afghanistan. Granville conveyed to Thornton that, according to Giers:

> Russia had no intention, either now or at any time of threatening Herat or any part of Afghanistan, and her desire was to establish between her possessions and those of the

[13] Thornton (no. 106, draft), 27 Mar. 1885, FO 65/1238.
[14] Lumsden to Thomson (telegram, no. 51), 1 Apr. 1885, FO 65/1239.

> Amir an efficient and lasting frontier which would secure the peace of those regions and strengthen her friendly relations with England ... [and that] the force hitherto maintained in those territories was no more than was absolutely necessary to keep order, and it had only been recently increased to the extent required for strictly defensive purposes.[15]

Nonetheless, London viewed this attack as part of a long-standing, coordinated Russian effort to create difficulties for Britain in Central Asia. 'Russia hoped to use its position in Asia as a bargaining point to regain access to the Straits; if the Russians were able to challenge British hegemony in Central Asia, they might impel Britain to support a revision of the hated Straits convention.'[16] It is worthwhile noting that Giers was under the impression that Britain was bent on stifling St. Petersburg's every forward move, causing Russia much distress and difficulty in fulfilling her foreign policy objectives. British obstruction to Russia's naval goals had led Giers to write 'that England had always striven to ruin Russian sea power, especially in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.'[17] It was intended that by threatening India she might force Britain to allow Russia out of the Black Sea and into the Mediterranean.

Although this collision was expected, and the reasons behind Russia's aggression understood, Britain still needed to react to the attack at Penjdeh. Whatever the response, it would determine Central Asian affairs for years to come. The government could either flex its political and military muscles, or it could shy away from reacting on financial and moral grounds. For Gladstone there was no choice: 'the Penjdeh crisis gave it [his government] a last chance to restore its ... prestige' in the wake of Britain's failure in the Sudan.[18] At the start of the Penjdeh incident, it is clear that Gladstone was trying to control the British response without the assistance of his Cabinet. Such a methodology was uncomfortable for Granville, who was keen to state: 'I do not see how you can avoid the Cabinet for which

[15] Granville to Thornton (no. 118a), 3 Apr. 1885, FO 181/671/1.
[16] J. Siegel, *Endgame. Britain, Russia and the Final Struggle for Central Asia*, (London, 2002), p. 3.
[17] W. L. Langer, *European Alliances and Alignments 1871 - 1890*, (New York, 1931), p. 309.
[18] A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848 - 1918*, (Oxford, 1954), p. 300.

Kimberley & I wish.'[19] When Gladstone still prevaricated, Granville again remarked: 'I am sorry that you doubt the necessity of a cabinet. Kimberley thought we must have one, and I agreed.'[20] Kimberley and Granville wanted a cabinet so that their opinions would be heard, and so that they could orchestrate policy. During this time the Liberal cabinet was fractured, as was the Liberal Party as a whole, so 'cabinet meetings were both too few, since Gladstone avoided summoning them whenever he could, and too many, since adjournment from meeting to meeting brought a number in succession when in more harmonious situations one would have sufficed.' When agreement could not be reached in cabinet, 'matters of first-class importance were decided in small committees.'[21] In a committee Gladstone could be persuaded or overruled, but with no recourse to ministerial meetings, he could choose how to proceed. In the Cabinet, and the government at large, there were two main schools of thought regarding British policy in Central Asia. One argued that Penjdeh should be defended simply because the Amir claimed it as his, and Britain needed his help in order to continue to defend India. It was also suggested that the government was bound by the promise, made in 1880, of Sir Lepel Griffin, the Chief Secretary of the Punjab, to protect Afghanistan from foreign aggression. It was further understood that if Britain abandoned the Amir he might turn to St. Petersburg, forcing Britain to either invade Afghanistan again or spend more money on the fortification of India's northern frontiers. The other school of thought proposed that Herat, not Penjdeh, was worthy of making a *casus belli* with Russia. Frederick Temple Blackwood, Marquess of Dufferin and Ava, Viceroy of India (1884 – 1888), supported the second school: 'we ought, in my personal opinion, to come to a compromise with Russia, as I do not think Penjdeh itself is worth fighting for.'[22] He later wrote: 'he [the Amir] attaches little importance to Penjdeh. Her Majesty's Government can, therefore, come to a compromise

[19] Granville to Gladstone, 2 Apr. 1885, Granville MSS, MS.44178.
[20] Granville to Gladstone, 3 Apr. 1885, Granville MSS, MS.44178.
[21] A. Ramm, *William Ewart Gladstone*, (Avon, 1989), p. 101.
[22] Dufferin to Kimberley (private, telegram), 4 Apr. 1885, CAB 37/15/22.

with Russia about this part of the frontier without fear by doing so of alienating the Amir.'[23] Both Granville and Kimberley sympathised with the Viceroy's opinion, while those in favour of treating the Penjdeh incident as a *casus belli* saw in Russia's financial weakness reason enough to strike now. Indeed, Griffin (now the political officer at Kabul) argued: 'if we must fight Russia, there is no time like the present.'[24]

As discussions continued regarding Britain's response to the confrontation, which side was to blame for the action became an important question. Both Russia and Afghanistan disclaimed responsibility for this incident, but for Gladstone, culpability lay with Russia. He contended to the House of Commons: 'it is stated that no forward movement of any kind was made by the Afghans before or since the 17th of March'. This paved the way for the Prime Minister to attribute guilt to Russia, which in turn would allow him to respond militarily. In addition, Gladstone also intimated that St. Petersburg was alarmed at the prospect of damaged Anglo-Russian relations over the incident: 'the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg reported to us last night (at 40 minutes past 5) in these words— "The Minister for Foreign Affairs expresses his earnest hope and that of the Emperor, that this unhappy incident may not prevent the continuance of the negotiations".'[25] That same day Kimberley reported: 'it seems evident that [the] Russians are disposed to make concessions which may lead to peaceful settlement of [the] frontier line.'[26] That St. Petersburg appeared unwilling to further antagonise London meant that the British response could be made with less trepidation than normal. It is however obvious that neither side knew with any assuredness what the outcome

[23] Dufferin to Kimberley (private, telegram), 5 Apr. 1885, CAB 37/15/22.
[24] Griffin to Churchill (private letter), 7 Apr. 1885. Churchill Papers, CUL, MS. Add.9248, vol. 5.
[25] Gladstone, HC Debate, 9 Apr. 1885, *Hansard*, vol. 296, col. 1162.
[26] Kimberley to Dufferin (private, telegram), 9 Apr. 1885, CAB 37/15/22.

of talks would be, so 'during April [1885] both Great Britain and Russia pushed ahead with preparations for war.'[27]

As negotiations between Britain and Russia continued, it is clear that for Gladstone this incident offered an opportunity to deal with two problems at once: the Sudan and the fall of Khartoum; and Penjdeh. On 1 April 1885 Gladstone had written to Granville: 'if we cannot kill the war in the Soudan it will kill us, and not with an altogether clean death.'[28] The Prime Minister wanted to withdraw from the Sudan, but could not in the face of a humiliating defeat coupled with the loss of General Gordon. But by 9 April it was apparent to Gladstone that the Penjdeh crisis afforded him a way to remove Britain from the Sudan without loss of face. He wrote: 'but for Penjdeh, we should have been ripe for considering it [the Sudan] on its merits. Query however whether Penjdeh affords improved means of considering it in connection with that particular event?'[29] Gladstone appreciated that the British public would sooner defend British India against Russia than remain concerned with African affairs. To this end, on 15 April the Prime Minister informed the Queen that:

> the Government have found it necessary to review the military position, and not [only] with reference to the Soudan, but to the general condition of foreign affairs and all the possible demands upon the military resources of the Empire. The Government feel that it is necessary to hold all those resources as far as possible, and inclusive of the force in the Soudan, available for service wheresoever they may be required.[30]

Queen Victoria was unhappy with Britain's retreat from the Sudan, particularly after such a chastening defeat, but the Prime Minister was able to use the threat of a large scale war with Russia to get British troops out of the Sudan. Such a bold move on Gladstone's part also served notice to Britain's rivals.

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[27] C. L. Smith, *The Embassy of Sir William White at Constantinople 1886 - 1891*, (Oxford, 1957), p. 8.
[28] Gladstone to Granville, 1 Apr. 1885, A. Ramm (ed.), *Political Correspondence of Mr Gladstone and Lord Granville 1876 – 1886*, (2 vols., Oxford, 1962), Vol. 2, p. 354.
[29] Gladstone to Granville, 9 Apr. 1885, Ramm (ed.), *Correspondence*, p. 356.
[30] Gladstone to Queen (cipher telegram), 15 Apr. 1885, G. E. Buckle (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria, Second Series, A selection from Her Majesty's Correspondence and Journal between the years 1862 - 1885*, (3 vols., London, 1928), Vol. 3, pp. 635 - 636.

Meanwhile, as discussions continued, Dufferin impressed on Kimberley that whatever the terms of any agreement: 'it is absolutely necessary ... that ... the passes ... at Zulficar should be preserved to the Amir.'[31] Similarly, Thornton urged that the discussions should have one 'general principle ... upon which it [the line] should be drawn: ... to leave the passes in possession of the Afghans and to secure to them a good strategical line.'[32] There was a definite aim to protect the sanctity of Afghanistan from Russian incursions, but negotiations remained as only 'friendly conversation[s] between Lord Granville and M[onsieur] de Staal, with one or two present who were competent to assist them.' As a result, on 16 April Gladstone was clear in his statements to parliament: '[that] no assurances have been given which convey the intention of either Government with respect to particular points on the Frontier.'[33] Yet given the importance of Afghanistan, and the continued independence of the Amir from Russian interference, for the defence of India, the standoff at Penjdeh could not be ignored. The phrase 'no assurances' also emphasised that the military option was still being considered. London's preferred means of defence against any Russian threat to Central Asia was attack, which, due to the strength of the Royal Navy, would necessarily mean a naval assault. An attack on Russian territory from the Black Sea was favoured, but Britain understood that the Straits of the Dardanelles had been closed to all warships by the Straits Convention (1871). As a result, in order to gain access to the Black Sea Britain would need the Sultan's permission. Hence 'the British government attempted to persuade the Turks that Russia was threatening her interests, and that the British obligation to defend Asiatic Turkey was involved.' This concept of an obligation stemmed from the Cyprus Convention (1878), where Cyprus was given to Britain by the Ottoman Empire in return for a guarantee of military support against an aggressive Russia. When Constantinople did not agree, the British contended that 'if ever the Sultan refused a request from the British to pass through the

[31] Dufferin to Kimberley (private, telegram), 10 Apr. 1885, CAB 37/15/22.
[32] Thornton to Granville (confidential, draft no. 149), 14 Apr. 1885, FO 65/1240.
[33] Gladstone, HC Debate, 16 Apr. 1885, *Hansard*, vol. 296, col. 1866.

Straits, this would be evidence that he was not 'independent' but was under Russian pressure.'[34] This was a message to the Sultan that if he did not accede to Britain's demands, she would claim he was acting under Russian pressure. In response, Britain would seek to utilise the Concert of Europe to pressure the Ottoman Empire into compliance.

It was, therefore, evident that Britain needed help in order to coerce the Sultan. In addition, London also appreciated that an Anglo-Russian war 'without allies ... would be both futile and costly: futile because it would be impossible for British troops to strike a direct blow at Moscow or St. Petersburg, and costly, because what fighting there was would have to take place either on the northern frontiers of India, or in the Crimea, provided Great Britain could gain control over the Straits.'[35] To this end, Britain needed an ally who could either persuade the Sultan to allow British ships through, or one that could apply enough pressure on St. Petersburg that British ships in the Black Sea were unnecessary. For the former, only Germany had the military capability and political influence to compel the Sultan to agree. Thus, 'when the Afghan situation grew more threatening, the need for German goodwill became greater.' Of course, in order to gain Berlin's support London needed to be able to offer a *quid pro quo*. Accordingly, Gladstone 'wrote anxiously that the government must get "out of the way the bar to the Egyptian settlement". By this he meant that they must satisfy Germany as regards New Guinea.'[36] Yet due to Germany's treaty with Austria-Hungary and Russia, the *Dreikaiserbund*, or Three Emperor's Alliance, Prince Otto von Bismarck, the German Chancellor, would not work with Britain against St. Petersburg. He feared that any such support could lead to Russia leaving this coalition and then turning her attention westward, towards Austria and even Germany herself. 'It was, then, in Bismarck's interest to perpetuate the antagonism between Britain and Russia,' as a means to keep Russia's

[34] H. Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire 1801 - 1917*, (Oxford, 1967), p. 569.
[35] Smith, *Embassy*, p. 9.
[36] P. Knaplund, *Gladstone and Britain's Imperial Policy*, (London, 1966), p. 157.

antipathy facing towards Britain.[37] Nevertheless, neither Bismarck nor Count Gustav Kálnoky, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, wanted to see an Anglo-Russian war in Central Asia. It could destabilise Europe if, as was likely, the theatre of conflict spread to the continent. In order to prevent this, Thornton reported: 'the Austrian and German governments have declared to the Porte, that if the passage of an English or Russian fleet through the Dardanelles were to be allowed they would regard it as a violation of the Treaty of Berlin.'[38] This was frustrating for Britain, as it had been hoped in London that Austria-Hungary, a traditional collaborator, could be counted on. If Austria could be persuaded, Vienna could offer political support to Britain's aims, or keep troops on her eastern border to occupy Russian troops along that frontier. However, Britain could not offer Austria-Hungary anything she was not already getting from Germany, and Vienna at no point had any reason to offer support to Britain; it especially had no desire to support Gladstone after his comments during the Midlothian campaign.*

This left Britain in a quandary, as the question was now how to intimidate St. Petersburg without friends? Devoid of the option of attacking Russia's Black Sea coastline, Britain was left with only one military option; to launch naval strikes through the Baltic Sea. She could not risk forcing the Straits; she would lose much of her naval force, leaving her vulnerable in home waters and over-seas. To this end, on 21 April Gladstone now indicated to the Commons that he would link the crises in the Sudan and Penjdeh to formulate one policy. This would both coerce the Russian Empire and rescue Britain and his government from ignominy. At this same debate, he discussed how in February 1885 his government had moved to secure funds for the effort in the Sudan, admitting: 'at that period we had in view the expenditure in the Soudan, and expenditure in the Soudan alone; but circumstances which

[37] T. G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind. The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1865 - 1914,* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 166.
[38] Thornton to Granville (no. 120), 19 Apr. 1885, FO 65/1241.

have since occurred, with the greater portion of which the House is acquainted, have obliged us to widen our investigations and greatly to enlarge our demand for funds.' He continued: '[since February] we have found it necessary to review our military position, not with reference to [the] Soudan only, but with reference to the general condition of public affairs and to all the possible demands upon the military resources of the Empire.'[39] Gladstone did not name Russia but the implication of his statement was clear, much as Sir Stafford Northcote, the leader of the Conservatives in the House of Commons, sought to suggest otherwise. 'The statement of the right honourable Gentleman, both in what it actually contains and what it implies, is so important that I do not propose to say much upon the subject at first blush.'[40] Gladstone had intended to be vague: 'I have not even attempted to sketch the policy of the Government.'[41] But the total sum asked for, some £11,000,000 in war credits, was meant to demonstrate Britain's resolve and her material power, and so to deter Russia from going any further in Central Asia.

That it was Gladstone's intent to influence St. Petersburg through this vote cannot be doubted. Just days later he remarked to Parliament: 'it must be borne in mind that every declaration made in this House in reply to a Question is virtually an announcement or a declaration to the Government of Russia.'[42] He understood that St. Petersburg was listening and used this to his advantage. His speech 'was calculated to achieve three purposes: to cover up the fact of the British retreat over the Sudan ... ; to establish, in deference to the strength of the press and public feeling over Afghanistan, the impression that Britain was standing firm

*These comments were criticisms of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for not respecting the nationalist demands in those nations it governed.
[39] Gladstone, HC Debate, 21 Apr. 1885, *Hansard*, vol. 297, cols. 317 - 318.
[40] Sir Stafford Northcote, HC Debate, 21 Apr. 1885, *Hansard*, vol. 297, col. 322.
[41] Gladstone, HC Debate, 21 Apr. 1885, *Hansard*, vol. 297, col. 322.
[42] Gladstone, HC Debate, 24 Apr. 1885, *Hansard*, vol. 297, col. 658.

over the Afghan border; and to encourage Russia to accept the arbitration proposal suggested weeks before.'[43] Gladstone proved successful on all three.

While the threat of war hung in the air, Britain had complemented this stick with the carrot of 'a proposal to Russia to refer the Penjdeh incident to the judgement of the Head of a friendly state.'[44] By choosing to do this, Gladstone sought to enlarge what had started as an Anglo-Russian quarrel in Central Asia, into a matter that involved the other European powers. This was also as a means to recover from the embarrassment he had suffered at the hands of Germany and Austria-Hungary in their refusal to allow the Sultan to admit British warships through the Dardanelles. This reversion to conference diplomacy had many benefits, such as that it virtually guaranteed the peace. Another was that, 'if the Russians wish for peace, our proposal gives the Emperor a way of settling the Penjdeh incident without loss of dignity; if they refuse and war ensues, we put ourselves right with all impartial people, and shall [have] the whole nation with us.'[45] It was also clear that Gladstone's policy had a breadth of support from his own party. Archibald Primrose, 5th Earl of Rosebery and Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, commented that:

> with our choicest army locked up in the Soudan, we were embarking on a great war with Russia. The result was not merely that the front we opposed to Russia was less formidable, but that to the world at large we opposed no front at all ... we should have embarked in one of the greatest wars of the century; and with both our arms bound, one to Afghanistan, the other to Central Africa, we should be exposed to endure what any Power might choose to lay upon us, and be compelled to forgo all voice or share in the destinies of the world ... this greater necessity; and sad as the necessary course of withdrawal [from the Sudan] might be, the other course opened an abyss which I do not like to contemplate.[46]

Rosebery's opinion mattered to Gladstone, as he was a firm favourite of the party and earmarked as a potential future leader. In addition, for all his Radical rhetoric, the Prime

[43] M. A. Yapp, 'British Perceptions of the Russian Threat to India', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1987), p. 657.
[44] Kimberley to Dufferin (private), 24 Apr. 1885, Dufferin MSS, MS.Eur.f.130.3.
[45] Kimberley to Dufferin, (private), 24 Apr. 1885, Kimberley MSS, MS Eng d.2456.
[46] Rosebery to Ponsonby, 24 Apr. 1885, Buckle (ed.), *Letters, Second Series*, Vol. 3, pp. 640 - 642.

Minister admired the Whig aristocracy of which Rosebery was a notable member. Meanwhile, with the suggestion of giving a third party a say on the matter, Britain had secured the diplomatic high ground. The key now was to not allow the pressure on St. Petersburg to ease. Hence Britain remained proactive, with Granville on 26 April noting: 'we have announced to the Chinese, Japanese, and the Coreans, that we have occupied temporarily Port Hamilton [now Geomundo] ... [but] the Admiral has orders not to hoist the flag until the Russians arrive.'[47] Port Hamilton was to rival the Russian base at Vladivostok in the Pacific; Britain was reminding St. Petersburg of her imperial strength. It was a show of force to get Russia to submit and halt her movements in Central Asia. This no doubt went some way in appeasing Rosebery, who wanted a stronger line against Russia. Concerning Penjdeh, he argued: 'our present difficulties arise from the impression that we may be safely kicked. This transaction will stereotype that impression ... The yielding every point to Russia will be a notorious fact throughout India and Afghanistan and the East ... The effect in the West will be as great as in the East. All Europe is laughing at us. Our nose has been pulled all over the world. As soon as one is pulled off we willingly present a fresh excrescence.'[48] The Queen agreed with Rosebery, commenting to Granville: 'she thinks nothing but firmness will do with Russia. The danger of delay, if we cannot agree, is very serious. We are without friends. Mr. Gladstone has alienated all other countries from us, by his very changeable and unreliable policy – unintentionally no doubt.'[49]

It is important to consider that while there appears to be a contradiction here in Britain's policy, there was none. Gladstone did not seek war with the £11 million; he sought only to leverage St. Petersburg with the threat, while simultaneously causing the British public to move on from defeat in the Sudan to face a much larger, and significantly more

[47] Granville to Gladstone, 26 Apr. 1885, Ramm, *Correspondence*, p. 363.
[48] Rosebery (memorandum), 26 Apr. 1885, Rosebery MSS, MS. 10132.
[49] Queen to Granville (confidential), 28 Apr. 1885, Buckle (ed.), *Letters, Second Series,* Vol. 3, pp. 642 - 643.

important, foe in the Russian Empire. This explains why, when considering the perceived weakness of Russian finances, Gladstone did not attack. Besides, war itself is an expensive, and unpredictable, undertaking which the Prime Minister would only choose as a last resort. It made little sense for Britain to go to war over Penjdeh in order to restore the *status quo,* when it was understood that Britain's already stretched resources would likely have to be called upon to defend British India in the not too distant future.

St. Petersburg was left with little choice but to yield to Britain's pressure. For Russia, 'war and the colonisation of Central Asia ... [was] merely a way of compensating for the fears and unrequited hopes that resulted from the internal crisis and from ... [her] limited ability to act in Europe.'[50] However, this had to be weighed against 'the economic depression of the 1880s [which] placed severe restrictions on Russia's foreign policy,' the most important of which was her own understanding that she needed to, if possible, avoid war with a first rate power or risk bankruptcy.[51] As a result, Thornton was able to write to Granville: 'he [Giers] begs you to believe that Russian government will do all they can to prevent a conflict.'[52] Just days later, on 4 May, an agreement was reached between Britain and Russia, which dispelled the imminent danger of war. It arranged that Penjdeh would be neutralised until the section of the Russo-Afghan frontier near the town was settled. This also stipulated that negotiations should be resumed at once in London with the main points of delimitation to be established there and smaller details to be agreed by men-on-the-spot. Despite the persistent perception in London that Russia would renege on any such agreements, on 6 May Gladstone was confident that 'the great Russian question is probably settled ... [and] if we stand firm on the Sudan we are now released from that embarrassment.'[53] A further agreement was reached on

[50] D. Geyer, *Russian Imperialism: The Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy 1860 - 1914*, (New York, 1987), p. 96.
[51] Ibid., p. 125.
[52] Thornton to Granville (telegram, no. 27), 29 Apr. 1885, FO 65/1241.
[53] Gladstone (memorandum), 6 May 1885, Ramm , *Correspondence*, pp. 366 - 367.

22 May whereby a general line of the frontier was agreed upon. This did not, however, answer the question of who owned the Zulfikar Pass, which the Afghans were demanding. In addition, by 1 June Thornton had heard 'on good authority that [the] Russian government are sounding the King of the Netherlands as arbitrator on Penjdeh affairs.'[54]

In mid-June the Liberal government was replaced by a Conservative ministry led by Robert Cecil, 3rd Marquis of Salisbury, who also took charge of the Foreign Office. The situation he inherited was difficult. The Liberals, the new Prime Minister suggested, had managed to unite Europe against Britain, and she would have to push her policies abroad alone. In order to rectify this, Salisbury sought to work with the German powers on a number of issues in order to bring Britain in from the cold. Meanwhile, this change of government had caused some disquiet in St. Petersburg. Thornton reported: 'Giers ... expressed to me his hope that your lordship would agree to continue the negotiations on the afghan boundary question from the point at which it was left by the late Cabinet and assured me that the Emperor sincerely wished that it might be brought to an amicable conclusion.'[55] In addition, this change of leadership prompted the head of the Indian army, General Frederick Roberts, to suggest a forward movement against Russia. He commented: 'a successful campaign would seriously injure Russia's prestige in Central Asia, while ours would be proportionately raised, it would give us time to put our permanent frontier in a proper state of defence and it would enable us to dictate such terms to Russia as would prevent a recurrence of the Afghan frontier question for many years to come.'[56] This is an example of a senior general in India trying to establish influence in London with the new Prime Minister, and seeking an aggressive action against Russia along the Afghan border. Yet while Salisbury proved

[54] Thornton to Granville (telegram, no. 32), 1 Jun.1885, FO 65/1244.
[55] Thornton to Salisbury (telegram, no. 84), 25 Jun. 1885, FO 65/1245.
[56] Roberts to Churchill (private letter), 26 Jun. 1885. Churchill Papers, CUL, MS Add.9248 vol. 5.

unwilling to accept all of the agreements made between Gladstone and Russia, he refused to act with force of arms.

'At his very first cabinet meeting, Salisbury ... cancelled Gladstone's arbitration agreement with Russia over the Zulfikar Pass.'[57] Reported movements of Russian soldiers near this strategic location had caused concern in India, where it was feared that the buffer state was again under threat. That Salisbury was determined to oppose Russian aggression may be attributed to a memorandum he received from Sir William White, the acting ambassador at Constantinople. He reported: 'the Russians tell me that what they want and seek is the cessation of all neutral zones – the disappearance of Afghanistan and to become our neighbours; they want to be coterminous with us in India – as then they can, they think – threaten our flank, at all times.'[58] Moreover, the Indian Army was also apprehensive regarding the Zulfikar Pass. Lumsden warned: 'the Russians may endeavour to secure a clause providing that no fortifications are to be constructed on the frontier by Afghanistan. Such a proposition must be entirely objected to, and Afghanistan left equally free with Russia to take any steps she pleases for the maintenance of internal security, or against external danger.'[59] The Viceroy was more cautious. Indian policies had to be subservient to wider imperial policy, and 'if war broke out, the operations conducted from hence and those directed against Russia in Europe would be necessarily inter-dependent and that the strategy of the Indian army might be subordinated by superior authority to the exigencies of the military situation on the other side of the world.'[60] He saw no reason to antagonise St. Petersburg.

[57] A. Roberts, *Salisbury Victorian Titan*, (Phoenix, 2000), p. 340.
[58] White (memorandum), 27 Jun. 1885, Salisbury MSS, 3M/E/39.
[59] Lumsden to Cabinet (secret, memorandum), 1 Jul. 1885, FO 65/1246.
[60] Dufferin to Churchill (private), 3 Jul. 1885, Churchill Papers, CUL, MS Add.9248 vol. 6.

Meanwhile, concerns over the Zulfikar Pass continued to threaten to undermine the buffer state policy. Randolph Churchill, the Secretary of State for India, wrote: 'the whole policy which is best known as the 'buffer state policy' is herein called in [to] question and Lord Randolph Churchill is possessed by the gravest doubts as to whether that policy is the best which could be adopted for the security of Your Majesty's Indian Empire.'[61] Likewise, Dufferin did 'not consider the "buffer" policy sufficiently promising to be worth the enormous sacrifices war would entail.'[62] These two men clearly regarded the Afghan factor in British imperial defence as more trouble than it was worth. Churchill, in particular, was in favour of taking a stronger line against Russia, as he was of the opinion that an Anglo-Russian war was inevitable. Britain, he thought, should therefore take the war to Russia when she held the advantage. Salisbury, however, 'favour[ed] the buffer state theory' and resolved to maintain Afghanistan, as a means both to protect India and prevent war.[63] It is worth noting that Salisbury's ascendancy over the party was under threat from Randolph Churchill at this moment in time, which perhaps explains their differences of opinion on how to proceed over Afghanistan. Salisbury would maintain his position regarding the buffer state policy, while Churchill would seek to undermine his rival and promote an alternative policy, seeking to gain popularity amongst the party.

As negotiations between Salisbury and Staal progressed, Thornton noted: 'it seems certain that the [Russian] army is being made ready ... as if for war at no very distant period. These reparations were begun when there really seemed to be a danger of a conflict with England, and they have not been discontinued.'[64] The continued aggressive nature of the Russian War Ministry may explain why the Viceroy experienced a change of heart over the

[61] Churchill to the Queen (private), 13 Jul. 1885, Churchill Papers, CUL, MS Add.9248 vol. 6.
[62] Dufferin to Churchill (private), 24 Jul. 1885, Churchill Papers, CUL, MS Add.9248 vol. 6.
[63] J. A. S. Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy and Close of the Nineteenth Century*, (London, 1964), p. 19.
[64] Thornton to Salisbury (private), 29 Jul. 1885, Salisbury MSS, 3M/A/39.

importance of Afghanistan. He wrote to the Cabinet: 'though by no means a warm advocate of the "buffer" policy, I think that it should have a fair and full trial ... we have everything to gain and nothing to lose by being friends with them [the Afghans], whereas their declared enmity and their cooperation with Russia would force upon us a policy which ... should, if possible, be avoided.'[65] He now acknowledged that maintaining the support of the Afghan people was of the utmost importance for British interests in Central Asia. They would be the last line of Afghanistan's defence should Russia invade. Of course, this change may also be accounted for with political expediency, as Salisbury was in favour of maintaining the Afghan line against Russia. As it was, in spite of Russia's military build-up, Salisbury remained adamant that the Zulfikar Pass would remain the Amir's territory. He argued: 'the Zulfikar Pass was promised to Afghanistan, and that, on the strength of that promise, the Viceroy of India promised the Ameer should have it. We held ourselves bound by that promise, and we hold Russia bound by that promise also.'[66] Salisbury also noted that, during the negotiations, it was on the basis that the Zulfikar Pass would remain in Afghan hands that Russia was allowed to keep control over Penjdeh, although it remained neutral for the time being. Russia's intransigence over Zulfikar was a pivotal moment for Salisbury, as it confirmed his conviction that Russia was untrustworthy. She was more Asian than European.

In regards to being able to hold Russia to her promises, the Prime Minister understood that Britain could not do so alone. However, he viewed the German Powers' unwillingness to open the Straits as proof that Gladstone had alienated Britain from Europe with his idea of an ethical 'Concert of Europe'. Salisbury therefore wanted to undo the damage. To this end, he sought to gain Bismarck's assistance in dealing with Afghanistan, and although he proved unsuccessful, he did start to form a relationship of sorts with the Chancellor. It is important to

[65] Dufferin to Churchill, 30 Jul. 1885, CAB 37/16/46.
[66] Salisbury, HL Debate, 4 Aug. 1885, *Hansard*, vol. 300, col. 1029.

recognise 'the significance of Lord Salisbury's approach to Bismarck in the summer of 1885, using Philip Currie as his intermediary.'[67] It represented a shift in policy to one of alignment with the Central Powers as a means to contain Russia. Currie, the Assistant Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs and protégé of Salisbury, made it clear to Bismarck 'that Britain was capable and willing to assert herself in defence of key British interests,' which, although brazen, was meant to demonstrate that Britain was a worthy ally. It was also hoped that news of this 'hard-line posturing would be leaked to St. Petersburg,' and would thus lead to her disengagement from Penjdeh.[68] However, the prospect 'of a closer and more intimate alliance' between Britain and Germany was declined.[69]

Meanwhile, Northcote, now the 1st Earl of Iddesleigh and First Lord of the Treasury, was informing Thornton about Russian tactics during the negotiations. He explained: '[St. Petersburg] continues to maintain that the Russian gov[ermen]t have used no language binding themselves to the cession of the whole of the Zulficar Pass, & that they are entitled to qualify that promise by a reference to the necessity of their own military communication.' While this played to the advantage of those who distrusted Russia's negotiating tactics, Iddesleigh was more upbeat, claiming: 'the despatch does not shut out all hope of discovering a line which shall satisfy the Russians from their point of view, & yet shall concede to the Ameer all that is important in the pass for strategical purposes.' He was, however, also aware that 'there is nothing sufficiently definite in this announcement to justify me in offering any observations upon it to Y[our] E[xcellency] nor need I on this particular occasion examine the views of the Russian gov[ernmen]t with respect to the character of the promise they made in April.' Furthermore, the optimism of the First Lord was clearly tempered by Russia's reluctance to agree over the pass. It was obvious that he was not certain that peace would win

[67] Otte, *Mind*, p. 166.
[68] Ibid., p. 167.
[69] Currie to Salisbury (private), 4 Aug. 1885, Salisbury MSS, 3M/E/Currie.

out from his comment that 'the present state of suspense upon the frontier is not entirely without peril.'[70] Iddesleigh's misgivings about Russia's trustworthiness were shared by many, including the Viceroy, who commented: 'treaties with Russia may have a less effectual force than with any other European nation.'[71] In addition, the Secretary of State for War, William Henry Smith, concurred with Iddesleigh that an Anglo-Russian war could still occur. Smith wrote to Salisbury: 'we shall, I believe, have to fight Russia, and the struggle will be a severe and a prolonged one.'[72] While such a view is to be expected from a war minister, this was an anathema to Salisbury, who viewed armed conflict as the abject failure of diplomacy.

This explains why, even with the knowledge that Britain could not rely upon European help, and his own minister's distrust of Russian intentions, Salisbury continued to tackle Giers on the matter of the Zulfikar Pass. His persistence eventually bore fruit as the two men agreed a basis for a commission to draw a 'scientific frontier' as the Russo-Afghan boundary on 20 August. That this was accomplished demonstrates that Giers had, for the moment, broken free from the War Ministry in St. Petersburg. However, it was appreciated that whatever was agreed upon could still be broken by men-on-the-spot, should the War Ministry assert itself once more. Indeed, such was the expectation that Russia may renege, Churchill argued that St. Petersburg 'should be told that [a] Russian advance into Herat valley would be act of war against this country.'[73] While no advance did occur, the 20 August agreement was followed on 7 September by the signing of a protocol to delineate the borders, with the creation of a joint Anglo-Russian Afghan Boundary Commission to demarcate the disputed frontier. In spite of mutual concessions, Britain was successful in getting everything the Amir wanted from negotiations, including the Zulfikar Pass. Demarcation began on 10 November when Sir Joseph West Ridgeway met the Russian Commissioner at Zulfikar,

[70] Iddesleigh to Thornton (no. 305, draft), 4 Aug. 1885, FO 65/1248.
[71] Dufferin to Churchill (private), 7 Aug. 1885, Dufferin MSS, MS EUR F 130/2.
[72] W. H. Smith to Salisbury (private), 9 Aug. 1885, WO 110/9.
[73] Churchill to Dufferin (secret, telegram), 25 Aug. 1885, FO 65/1249.

although the actual frontier was not agreed on until some two years later. The Penjdeh Crisis came to a true conclusion through 'the peaceful demarcation of Afghanistan's eastern frontier, formalized by a protocol signed in St. Petersburg in July 1887.'[74]

Salisbury had worked to secure an agreement with Russia because he understood the reality of Britain's position. 'To us, Russia is really invulnerable to military attack ... [which was] reason to avoid, if we can, a crisis which must lead to such terrible calamities.' However, the Prime Minister was also guilty of a suspicious perception that Russia could not be trusted to maintain her treaty stipulations. He remarked: 'I do not believe that either Berlin or Vienna admit that the recent agreement is more than the most temporary respite from the conflict between England & Russia which they look upon as certain.' This process further highlights how Salisbury sought to align Britain with the German powers against St. Petersburg, a policy that he would follow for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, although Salisbury acknowledged that this agreement may only be temporary, he understood that where Russia was concerned in Central Asia, any reprieve was worth achieving. It would give British India more time to shore up her position. Yet Salisbury also sought other means to apply pressure on Russia. He argued that:

> if Russia satisfies us that there is not room in Asia for herself & us also, our policy to her must be of a very internecine, & probably also of an effective character ... [F]inancial embarrassment must make Russia powerless before too long. It is of course easy to exaggerate the effect of financial embarrassment in preventing war; but that is her weak point, & if we become her chronic enemy it is to that weak point that our efforts must be addressed. We must lead her into all the expense that we can in the conviction that with her the limit of taxation has almost been reached, & and that only a few steps further might push her into the revolution over which she seems to be constantly hanging.[75]

[74] R. A. Huttenback, 'The Great Game in the Pamirs and the Hindu-Kush: The British Conquest of Hunza and Nagar', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1975), p. 10.
[75] Salisbury to Morier, 16 Sept. 1885, Morier MSS., Box 21, Item 1.

The Prime Minister understood that any strategy against Russia would take a long time to bear fruit, and so he was willing to remain patient in order to ensure that the Russian threat was controlled.

For Britain the Penjdeh Crisis appeared to prove her suspicions of both Russia's relentless ambitions and her questionable negotiation tactics. Yet the crisis also deepened 'the conviction that Russian expansion in Asia was insidious and surreptitious ... [but] that Russia would shy away from any open confrontation.'[76] For some, it also demonstrated that 'Afghanistan was ... an unreliable bastion in the defence of India: unstable, at times uncooperative, and too weak to defend itself against Russia but too difficult to occupy, Afghanistan exasperated the defence planners.'[77] This would create problems for British policy-makers in Central Asia for the next decade. In the short term, the issue of Afghan defence was already divisive as the Amir was an unpopular figure in London.

That war did not take place, and the incident resolved diplomatically was due to a number of reasons. The primary factor was that neither Power wanted war. Conflict would be damaging both to the victor and the loser, and London and St. Petersburg understood that neither was capable of reducing the other to such an extent that a further war would be impossible. It therefore made little sense to engage in frivolous Central Asian campaigns against one another if it could be avoided. A further aspect which contributed to the de-escalation was the involvement of Germany and Austria-Hungary. The participation of the Central Powers in what began as a Central Asian dispute demonstrates the seriousness of the matter. Neither Power had any interest in Central Asia, so they were generally content to let Britain and Russia expend their energies outside of Europe, in order to keep the continent

[76] T. G. Otte, '"A very internecine policy": Anglo-Russian Cold Wars before the Cold War', C. Baxter, M. L. Dockrill, K. Hamilton (ed.), *Britain in Global Politics,* (Basingstoke, 2013), p. 30.
[77] R. A. Johnson, '"Russians at the gates of India"? Planning the Defence of India 1855 - 1900', *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 67, No. 3 (July, 2003), p. 710.

quiet. The act of blocking Britain in Turkey does therefore suggest that the Central Powers saw in this crisis a serious threat to peace. A final factor which ensured that Britain and Russia did not go to war over Penjdeh was an event which occurred not in Central Asia, but in Europe. Dufferin remarked: 'we have just got news of the *coup d'état* in Eastern Roumelia ... it is the shadow of this event which has inspired Monsieur de Staal with the eagerness you mention to reach a settlement of the Central Asian business.'[78] St. Petersburg no longer had the time or resources to be intransigent in Central Asia while the Balkans, and more specifically a Slav territory, seemed to be slipping ever further from its grasp.

The Penjdeh crisis was more significant than historians have acknowledged. Often, it appears to have been forgotten. Kenneth Bourne, on the other hand, has proposed that 'the Penjdeh Crisis of April 1885 was the climax of a long period of concern about the continuation of Russia's advance into Central Asia after the Crimean War.'[79] However, this does not do justice to the wider significance of the Penjdeh Crisis. This crisis would have been like many of the other border skirmishes that occurred prior to it, had it not come at a time when British Imperial authority was being questioned, alongside Gladstone's political need to garner support for his government. Yet neither was it the culmination of a period of Anglo-Russian antagonism in Central Asia; rather, it represents a shift in how Britain saw her Central Asian policy and how it interacted with Russian pretensions.

The Penjdeh incident also demonstrates how the Anglo-Russian antagonism influenced European politics, and was itself influenced by Europe. For instance, once the Royal Navy was kept out of the Black Sea by the Central Powers and Ottoman Turkey, it became clear that Britain required other European powers to be at least supportive of her goals in order to bring force to bear on Russia. In addition, it is also fair to argue that Europe

[78] Dufferin to Churchill (private), 21 Sept. 1885, Randolph Churchill Papers, CUL, MS Add.9248 vol. 8.
[79] K. Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England 1830 - 1902,* (Oxford, 1970), p. 141.

could be held partly responsible for the Penjdeh Crisis. It was 'obvious that the Russians would not have moved so provocatively in Central Asia, if they had not had the security of the League of the Three Emperors.'[80] This European treaty between the rulers of Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary gave Russia a sense that her western border was secure, which therefore meant that she could afford to press Britain in Central Asia. The Central Powers were not, however, willing to side with Russia over the Penjdeh incident, and did not grant her any special treatment. They had made it clear that Russia too would not be allowed to violate the Treaty of Berlin. Europe would be kept out of this regional conflict at all costs. This point of view became even more apparent during the Eastern Rumelian crisis which began in September 1885. Furthermore, the next decade would see Britain attempt to find a means of defending her Indian interests that did not necessarily revolve around Afghanistan, or at least ensured that Britain was not beholden to the whims of the Amir.

[80] Taylor, *Struggle*, p. 300.

Chapter 2

'I have not much hope myself that a Big Bulgaria will be avoided': Eastern Rumelia

The Penjdeh incident had made it clear to Britain how difficult it was for her to protect her Central Asian interests, especially when lacking the assistance of another Great Power. Furthermore, the German Powers had forced Britain and Russia to come to terms in order to protect European security by refusing to choose between them. Yet even before the conclusion of the Penjdeh crisis, Britain and Russia had become embroiled in a separate diplomatic battle, this time over Eastern Rumelia.[1] This was a small, predominantly ethnic Bulgarian, Ottoman-ruled province on the Balkan Peninsula. This difficulty directly threatened the European peace, forcing all of the Powers to come together in order to find a solution. However, this problem would demonstrate the importance of the Balkan Peninsula

[1] William Norton Medlicott, in his work 'The Powers and the Unification of the Two Bulgaria's, 1885: Part 1,' establishes that Salisbury was not convinced by the popular idea that Russia represented a military threat to the British Empire. This was accurate as Salisbury was of the opinion that Russia's finances forbade her from attacking a fellow Great Power, no matter her threats. In addition, Medlicott also highlights Salisbury's annoyance at the Ottoman Empire and the Sultan in particular, for being too weak to deal with the Eastern Rumelia crisis on his own. However, Medlicott's assertion that Salisbury's pro-Bulgarian stance was a response to Russia's increasingly antagonistic attitude does not take into account Salisbury's deliberate manoeuvres, both to break the *Dreikaiserbund* and begin to re-establish Britain's influence on the continent. Charles Jelavich, meanwhile, in his work *Tsarist Russia and Balkan Nationalism: Russian Influence in the internal affairs of Bulgaria and Serbia, 1879 – 1886,* demonstrates that Russian policy was dominated by the desire to control Constantinople and the Straits of the Dardanelles, thereby giving St. Petersburg the warm water port it had sought for decades. As part and parcel of this movement through the Balkans, Jelavich suggests the centrality of Bulgaria to Russia's foreign policy. However, you could not, it was considered, have the former without the latter. It is, therefore, difficult to consider them as separate issues. Additionally, Jelavich indicated that the form of the union between Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia was a victory for Russia. Such a claim is not, however, borne out by the facts. Russia fought at the Constantinople Conference to avoid any form of union between the two, and then she disagreed yet further with the idea of a personal union. Moreover, the Kaulbars mission would further cement the notion that, contrary to Jelavich's claim, Russia was not at all happy with the union between Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia. Colin L. Smith, in his biography of Sir William White (*The Embassy of Sir William White at Constantinople 1886 - 1891,* (Oxford, 1957)), makes two important claims. Firstly, he demonstrates how White, more than his colleague Sir Robert Morier, the ambassador in St. Petersburg, understood the necessary breadth of Britain's foreign policy. Morier did not want Russia to be antagonised in Europe as it would make his job more difficult where Central Asia was concerned. White, meanwhile, and by extension Salisbury, knew that by challenging the *Dreikaiserbund* Britain could upset the *status quo* and readjust the balance of power. Intriguingly, Smith also suggests that there was a fear in the Foreign Office that Berlin preferred St. Petersburg over London. In truth, Salisbury did not fear Bismarck having a preference for Russia, as he understood that the Iron Chancellor only wanted to maintain the peace of Europe in order that Germany could develop.

as a defensive barrier for British interests in Central Asia, and provide a truer sense of Britain's importance to the broader system.

Bulgaria had been established in 1878 by the Congress of Berlin, in an effort to bring stability to the Balkans in the wake of another Russo-Turkish war. In the preliminary and punitive Treaty of San Stefano Russia had proclaimed a 'Big Bulgaria'. Fearful that this new state would lean towards St. Petersburg, threatening both the Austrian and Ottoman Empires, and in order to maintain the regional and wider European balance of power, the Great Powers dismantled this 'Big Bulgaria'. They did so by reducing the new state in size by separating from it Eastern Rumelia. While this territory was under the rule of the Prince of Bulgaria, it remained an autonomous Ottoman province under an Ottoman military occupation. This gave the Sultan a defensible frontier along the Balkan Mountains should Russia attack once more. In spite of this separation, it was still assumed that Bulgaria would prove to be a significant ally for Russia, as 'the main object of Russian policy at this time was to dominate the Turkish capital by securing paramount influence in Bulgaria.'[2] Additionally, aware of the humiliation they had inflicted on St. Petersburg, the Powers were careful to recognise Bulgaria as being in Russia's sphere of interest. They were equally as vigilant to agree that Serbia would fall into the Austro-Hungarian orbit, as both a counterweight to Russian preponderance and to ensure Vienna was not left jealous of St. Petersburg's gains. It was, therefore, as a result of the Treaty of Berlin that the Balkans became a fundamental factor in Great Power politics.

In 1879 Tsar Alexander II chose Prince Alexander of Battenberg as the new state's German-born and Austrian-educated ruler, convinced that he would present an acceptable figure-head both to the Bulgarian people and other European leaders. More importantly, the Tsar assumed that Prince Alexander would obey orders from St. Petersburg. Conversely, in spite of the opportunity granted to him, the Prince proved unwilling to subvert Bulgarian

[2] G. Cecil, *Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury*, (5 vols., London, Reprinted 2010), Vol. 4, p. 3.

interests to those of Russia. This was partly a consequence of his tour of the European capitals made prior to his arrival at Sofia. During this period Alexander discovered that the courts of Europe had a keen interest in Bulgaria's strategic location. The young Prince was thus made aware of the strength of his position. It was as a result of Prince Alexander's stubborn refusal to acquiesce that it soon became clear that the Bulgaria brought into existence was not the one which Russia had sought. This was a source of much annoyance at St. Petersburg, as many Russian lives and roubles had been spent in the pursuit of 'liberating' the Bulgarian people. The Prince's independence was exemplified by his dismissal of two Russian generals in 1883, who had been serving in the Bulgarian army. Acts such as this caused St. Petersburg to decide that Prince Alexander could no longer be tolerated, and plans were made to engineer his departure. Tsar Alexander III, who had come to the throne in 1881, was particularly frustrated with the actions of his cousin. However, any course of action aimed at removing Prince Alexander carried risk; St. Petersburg did not want to undermine its pan-Slav credentials by working against the will of the Bulgarian people. Pan-Slavism, a form of nationalism whereby Russia sought to spearhead a movement for the Slavs of the Balkans to join together and force the Ottoman Empire from the peninsula, was crucial to St. Petersburg's involvement with Bulgaria. Russia saw herself as the head of the Slavs, but this position depended on the Slavic peoples looking to St. Petersburg for support; if the Bulgarians suspected that the Tsar was moving against their Prince, the Tsar would lose both their collaboration and the trust of the remaining Slavic peoples. Russia therefore could not be seen to be working against the popular Prince.

In a bid to contrive Alexander's departure, 'Russian officials in Bulgaria ... began supporting clandestine operations in Eastern Rumelia which were agitating for unification.'[3] It was important to St. Petersburg that it appeared that the Eastern Rumelians had demanded

[3] M. Glenny, *The Balkans,* (London, 2012), p. 173.

the unification themselves, for this would place the Prince in a difficult position: if he failed to condemn such a move the Great Powers could dismiss him; if he sought to end the *coup* the Bulgarian people would reject him. In either instance it was considered that the result would be the removal of Alexander from office. This also offered St. Petersburg the ideal means of resurrecting a 'Big Bulgaria' without alerting the Powers to any undermining of the Berlin treaty. Subterfuge was necessary, as although the Powers had agreed that Bulgaria was in Russia's sphere of interest, they would not tolerate a Russian led *coup* against the Prince any more than the Bulgarian people would. Moreover, the Powers would move to block any Russian attempt to resurrect the 'Big Bulgaria', due to the strategic complications. Any planning was however fruitless, for in spite of Russian machinations, on 18 September 1885, the Revolutionary Central Committee in Plovdiv 'proclaimed the union of Eastern Roumelia with Bulgaria.'[4] This action was against Ottoman rule and proceeded without the approval of the Tsar. This revolution 'expelled the Turkish Governor-General and offered Alexander of Battenberg ... the Regency.'[5] Alexander was unsure of how to react, but he appreciated that the Bulgarian people were his more immediate danger. He therefore bowed to their will and declared the union.

Britain was startled by news of the revolt. Salisbury's immediate reaction was to oppose the unification. A peaceful Balkan peninsula was of a paramount importance to Britain, for it allowed the Ottoman Empire to limp along by ensuring that Russia could not make inroads into the region. Furthermore, it was through maintaining the Ottoman Empire and keeping Constantinople secure that the British Empire in India could be protected; if the Sultan fell then the Russian Black Sea fleet would threaten the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean Sea and consequently the Suez Canal. London needed the canal open in order to maintain the short route to India, which was necessary to send troops and supplies should

[4] S. K. Pavlowitch, *A History of the Balkans 1804 - 1945,* (New York, 1999), p. 139
[5] A. Roberts, *Salisbury Victorian Titan,* (Phoenix, 2000), p. 352.

they be required. As things stood, the 1878 peace had so far lasted for seven years and the calm it brought had benefited Britain. Salisbury was therefore reluctant to abandon the treaty. Nevertheless, the Prime Minster did not only seek to protect the peace; he also sought to utilise this incident to end Britain's relative isolation. He viewed Britain's position in Europe as ineffective in light of the Penjdeh crisis, and so he sought to work with the European Powers, or more accurately the German Powers, over this Bulgarian crisis as a means to gain friends. More broadly, Salisbury appreciated that in order to satisfy British interests he needed collaborators on the continent. Yet in order to achieve cooperation from the German Powers, he first needed to break up the *Dreikaiserbund.* Britain's interests could be aligned with Germany and Austria-Hungary, but not with Russia. In addition, while Berlin and Vienna were seeking to maintain their alliance with St. Petersburg, they were not interested in London's friendship. As a result, Salisbury needed to exacerbate any differences of opinion between the members of the Three Emperor's Alliance.

In seeking to align Britain with the European powers, 'Salisbury, on the 19th [September], telegraphed an invitation direct ... to the German, Austrian, and Italian governments to join with the British in making strong representations to the Bulgarian government in favour of maintaining the Treaty of Berlin.'[6] The Queen, meanwhile, was firmly against any European reaction against the unification, and equally as anxious that Prince Alexander should be protected from Russia. She wrote: '[I] am much troubled about this Roumelian rising. Might not Russia be at the bottom of this to get Prince Alexander into trouble? Trust you will discourage any violent action against him before we know what has caused this. Bismarck is not friendly to him.'[7] Salisbury's response was pragmatic: 'England

[6] W. N. Medlicott, 'The Powers and the Unification of the Two Bulgaria's, 1885: Part 1,' *English Historical Review,* Vol. 54, No. 213 (Jan., 1939), pp. 67 - 68.
[7] Queen to Salisbury (cipher telegram), 20 Sept. 1885, G. E. Buckle (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria, Second Series, A selection from Her Majesty's Correspondence and Journal between the years 1862 - 1885,* (3 vols., London, 1928), Vol. 3, p. 690.

cannot act alone in this.'[8] He recognised from the Penjdeh crisis that it was important for Britain to work with the German powers, or face being isolated on matters of importance to her. Two days later Salisbury's determination to follow a policy of cooperation appeared to have paid dividends when Bismarck enquired whether Salisbury would appeal to the Sultan to disavow the unification of Eastern Rumelia with Bulgaria. Although nothing came of this, it was a first step towards Britain's reconciliation with Germany and Austria-Hungary. That same day Salisbury sent a message to his counterparts in both France and Russia seeking to find out what action, if any, they were planning to take in order to maintain the *status quo*.

The Russian response to the *coup* was slow as both the Tsar and Giers were absent from St. Petersburg. News was first received by Alexander G. Vlangaly, Giers' deputy, and it was not until 21 September that the Tsar was made aware of the revolution. When the Tsar did respond, via a telegram to Vlangaly, he made it clear that he would not support the union. He 'ordered [Prince Mikhail] Kantakuzin to resign as Bulgarian Minister of War, and announced that all Russian officers serving in the Bulgarian army were to be recalled.'[9] The granting of leading positions in the Bulgarian army to Russian officers was a means of control, as without them 'it was expected that chaos and anarchy would ensue. The Bulgars would then be forced to plead for the return of the officers and to accept whatever terms Russia imposed.'[10] It was also thought likely that the recall would precipitate an invasion of Eastern Rumelia by the Ottoman army, with the province deemed defenceless.

This revolt applied considerable pressure on the *Dreikaiserbund* as St. Petersburg sought to lay blame for it on the Germanic powers. The uprising 'was quickly interpreted by many Russians as but another attempt of Austria, and indirectly of Germany, to reduce

[8] Salisbury to Queen (cipher telegram) 21 Sept. 1885, Ibid., pp. 691 - 692.
[9] C. Jelavich, *Tsarist Russia and Balkan Nationalism: Russian Influence in the internal affairs of Bulgaria and Serbia, 1879 - 1886* (Berkeley, 1962), p. 218.
[10] Ibid., p. 220.

Russia's position in the Balkans.'[11] It was also Dufferin's opinion that Germany was likely to have had a hand in the *coup.* He wrote: 'we have just got the news of the *coup d'état* in Eastern Rumelia. I suppose it was to this that Bismarck alluded in such mysterious terms, and from his having foreknown the event, I presume that the operation has been conducted under his auspices.'[12] This was denied, and Berlin countered such suggestions with the idea that it was in fact Britain pulling the strings. It was 'Bismarck's conviction that the Eastern Rumelian revolt was the result of 'English wire pulling'. This was unsurprising given that even Sir Robert Morier, the incoming British Ambassador at St. Petersburg, suspected that the revolt 'was due to "some action or suggestion" on the part of his own government'.[13] There is, however, no evidence suggesting that White knew anything of the *coup*, and Salisbury's immediate reaction not to support the revolt suggests that his government in London had no involvement in the matter either.

As the Powers all reacted negatively to the unification, Salisbury maintained his attitude of cooperation, and instructed White that he was to 'act with the other powers in upholding [the] Treaty of Berlin.' None the less, although Salisbury was willing to work with the Powers, he was in no hurry to define British policy. Furthermore, he commented: 'our interests are not sufficient to justify our acting alone'. As a result, he told White: 'as a general rule you may associate yourself with any advice in which your Austrian and German colleagues join.'[14] There was no similar instruction regarding Russia, a subtle but important decision. This realignment was designed to drive a wedge between the Central Powers and Russia, destabilising the *Dreikaiserbund.* However, while this was his intention Salisbury

[11] A. Dorpalen, 'Tsar Alexander III and the Boulanger crisis in France', *The Journal of Modern History,* Vol. 23, No. 2 (June, 1951), p. 122.
[12] Dufferin to Churchill (private), 21 Sept. 1885, Churchill MSS, MS Add.9248, vol. 8.
[13] C. L. Smith, *The Embassy of Sir William White at Constantinople 1886 - 1891*, (Oxford, 1957), p. 26.
[14] Salisbury to White (telegram, no. 85 A), 22 Sept. 1885, FO 78/3757.

was not willing to put British resources on the line to achieve his goal. This was proven on 23 September when he rejected Bismarck's request for a naval demonstration in Greek waters.

Meanwhile, the Queen continued to make suggestions, seeking to protect her beloved 'Sandro', Prince Alexander. She wrote: 'considering [that the] union is apparently [the] unanimous desire of the people, [and] that [the] Prince recognises [the] sovereignty of [the] Sultan, would it not be expedient to enter protest against violation of Treaty, but acquiesce in the accomplished fact?'[15] In spite of the logic of this argument, Salisbury appreciated that Britain had to go about her work patiently. He explained: '[with] the country being practically wholly inland, your Majesty's Government has very little power in the matter. It seems to Lord Salisbury important that we should uphold the Treaty ... exert what influence England has to prevent the movement spreading. But in this last matter we must be careful to act conjointly with Austria, and not separately.'[16] Britain's position was not helped by her history with the Treaty of Berlin. Salisbury reminded the Queen: 'in considering the attitude of England as to breach of Treaty of Berlin, it must be remembered that the maintenance of the Balkan frontier was the provision on which Lord Beaconsfield insisted at Berlin at the risk of war.'[17] Britain could not therefore act unilaterally over Bulgaria or compel the other powers to follow her lead. To try to do so would have entailed the risk of isolation.

A significant concern for the Powers was the possibility of the nationalist uprising in Eastern Rumelia spreading throughout the Balkan Peninsula. This risked upsetting the balance of power, threatening to break apart the Ottoman Empire while also endangering the cohesion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was therefore to Europe's great alarm that Greece sought compensation for Bulgaria's territorial gain, viewing the unification as detrimental to her interests. If this recompense was not agreed peacefully, the result could be

[15] Queen to Salisbury (cipher telegram) 23 Sept. 1885, Buckle (ed.), *Letters, Second Series,* Vol. 3, p. 692.
[16] Salisbury to Queen (cipher telegram) 23 Sept. 1885, Ibid., pp. 691 - 692.
[17] Salisbury to Queen (cipher telegram) 24 Sept. 1885, Ibid., pp. 692 - 693.

a war that threatened the integrity of the Ottoman Empire in Europe. An issue for the Great Powers was that there were no small pieces of territory adjacent to Greece that could be used to satisfy her. This meant that she could only gain new territory at the expense of the Sultan. Nevertheless, such a feat could only be achieved via the sea as the Greek army was no match for the Ottoman military. This explains why Bismarck was so keen to utilise the Royal Navy to apply pressure on Athens. Yet although Salisbury had refused to allow the Royal Navy to be used, at this moment in time Greece was still constrained, first by the pressure from the Powers but also by the time she needed in order to create a navy strong enough to attack Ottoman territory.

As September continued on, each interested party still expected the Sultan to intervene militarily, with the Great Powers agreeing that only Ottoman Turkey could legally interfere. The Sultan had retained his control over the peninsula in 1878 precisely for this purpose. If at this time the Sultan had answered Europe's call for a reassertion of his authority over Eastern Rumelia, what would have followed was this: the authority of the Berlin treaty would have been re-established; Russia would remain outside of the Balkans; and the problematic Prince would remain a Russian issue for another day. Yet when Constantinople made no move to reinstate its rights, even though the Bulgarian army had lost much of its officer corps, it was obvious that there was no simple solution to this matter. Nonetheless, it cannot have come as a surprise that the Sultan would not act, as matters were already suggesting that this would be the case prior to the Eastern Rumelia uprising. This was disheartening for London, Berlin and Vienna alike, as for Britain and the German Powers 'the original object in separating the two Bulgarias had been to enable the Turks to garrison the line of the Balkans Mountains as an effective barrier against Russia.'[18] That this had not happened was viewed as further evidence of the degradation of the Ottoman Empire, and of the Sultan's apparent disinterest in the

[18] C. J. Lowe, *The Reluctant Imperialists. British Foreign Policy 1878 - 1902*, (11 vols., Oxford, 2002), Vol. 1, p. 100.

peninsula. It was therefore as a result of a number of factors, such as the Sultan's inaction, that by 24 September Salisbury had reconsidered his policy of supporting the *status quo*. He wrote: 'if the Turks had had a spark of vitality left they would have marched in all the force at their command and stamped out this insurrection at once ... no state with any life in it would have allowed a province to be snatched from under its eyes, and stretched out no hand to save it. That Turkey has not done this spontaneously, proves that Turkey is dead.'[19] If Turkey was deceased, then a new *status quo* had to be found.

A change of policy did not, however, mean a change of strategy for Salisbury. Maintaining the Ottoman Empire and its capital Constantinople remained key British interests. In addition, while the Prime Minister would no longer support the *status quo,* he also did not seek to dismantle the Treaty of Berlin. Rather, he tried to limit the damage done to it, arguing: 'our language must be to condemn Alexander's enterprise, to adhere to the Treaty, and not to commit ourselves to the abandonment of any right or claim of the Sultan's.'[20] He further suggested: 'if the union is upheld, [the] best practical issue will be that it should be a personal union in the Prince, institutions on each side remaining the same.'[21] Salisbury was sure not to seek Prince Alexander's dismissal. His proposed censure of the young ruler was instead an attempt to limit the proliferation of nationalism in the Balkans. He hoped 'that the conflagration will not spread ... [for] if it does, we are at the beginning of the end' of the Ottoman Empire.[22] If the Sultan fell, it was feared that the Great Powers would send in their armies to aid their vassal states in a bid to secure new territory. It was clear to many observers across Europe that it would be necessary 'to keep the Bulgarian question within the domain of European diplomatic action ... [for] any bloodshed would be the signal

[19] Salisbury to White (private), 24 Sept. 1885, White MSS, FO 364/1 - 11.
[20] Salisbury to White (private), 24 Sept. 1885, White MSS, FO 364/1-11.
[21] Salisbury to Queen (cipher telegram) 24 Sept. 1885, Buckle (ed.), *Letters, Second Series,* Vol. 3, pp. 692 - 693.
[22] Salisbury to White (private), 24 Sept. 1885, White MSS, FO 364/1 - 11.

for a conflagration which it would be difficult to stop.'[23] The outcome of such an upheaval was incalculable. In order to stave off the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Salisbury asserted: 'if others try to coerce him [the Sultan], it may then be our business to interfere.'[24] Any British interference would necessarily involve the Royal Navy, the threat of which was often enough to put off would-be aggressors. Furthermore, while Salisbury was keen to emphasise that Britain had no reason to act alone, he did suggest that 'if Austria takes measures herself to prevent the conflagration spreading, we may take joint action with her,' if necessary by force.

It is necessary to remember that Salisbury had only come to terms with the unification in order to make the best of a bad situation. He did not support calls for Balkan nationalism, and was only willing to support the Bulgarians under the given circumstances. He argued that this decision was a matter of necessity: 'I have not much hope myself that a big Bulgaria will be avoided. It is an evil, and a danger to Turkey. But there seems nowhere the will to stop it: and stopping it would require measures of considerable stringency.' In order to restrict the dangers both to Europe and the Sultan, Salisbury contended: '[that] the next best thing to hope for is a personal union of the two Bulgarias in Prince Alexander, each retaining otherwise its existing institutions.'[25] If there was to be a 'big Bulgaria', the Prime Minister did not want it ruled by a pro-Russian Prince. He 'had opposed a 'Big Bulgaria' when he thought it would be a Russian tool.'[26] This unified Bulgaria would be a means to an end only, for 'what he [Salisbury] was aiming at was the construction of a new barrier against Russia with which to prop up the Sultan's control of the remainder of the Balkans.'[27] After all, 'the

[23] Grosvenor to Salisbury (draft), 24 Sept. 1885, FO 65/1215.
[24] Salisbury to White (private), 24 Sept. 1885, White MSS, FO 364/1 - 11.
[25] Salisbury to White (private), 24 Sept. 1885, White MSS, FO 364/1 - 11.
[26] J. Charmley, *Splendid Isolation? Britain, the Balance of Power and the Origins of the First World War*, (London, 1999), pp. 202 - 203.
[27] Lowe, *Reluctant*, p. 101.

key to safeguarding British interests, short of a general war, was the maintenance by international agreement of as much of Ottoman rule in Europe and in Asia as was possible.'[28]

The suggestion of a personal union demonstrates the importance of the Balkans to the British Empire, and underlines the primacy of Central Asia to British foreign policy. It must be appreciated that London needed to secure Central Asia in order to protect British India, and the best way to achieve this was through maintaining the Ottoman Empire. As matters stood, this could only be realised with a unified Bulgaria under Prince Alexander, a ruler who had already proven himself independent of St. Petersburg. This Bulgaria would thus be a buffer between the Ottoman Empire and Russia. The adoption of this policy would also take away the threat of the Sultan marching on Eastern Rumelia. In consequence, Russia could not invade Bulgaria on the pretence of protecting the Slavic population. The removal of any possibility of a military response intended that a diplomatic solution would have to be found. This meant that Constantinople would not expend what little energy it had left fighting a war in the Balkans, which would allow the Ottoman Empire to persist just a little while longer. This was imperative for Britain as from her perspective, if Constantinople was safe, then the short route to India remained open. This was vital to any defensive strategy for India. The fate of Prince Alexander was therefore of great importance to Britain. White considered: 'the Prince's elimination ... [would] mean the complete Russification of Bulgaria.' [29] This would have undermined Salisbury's entire policy in the Balkans.

Closer to home, such a policy would have received the approval of Queen Victoria. Salisbury had been 'subject to constant pressure from the Queen, who was strongly in favour

[28] T. G. Otte, ''Floating Downstream?': Lord Salisbury and British Foreign Policy 1878 - 1902', T. G. Otte (ed.), *The Makers of British Foreign Policy from Pitt to Thatcher*, (Basingstoke and New York, 2002), p. 104.
[29] White to Salisbury (no. 392), 25 Sept. 1885, FO 78/2753.

of Prince Alexander.'[30] The Prince's brother was married to one of her granddaughters, so it would have been impossible for Salisbury to allow the removal of the Bulgarian ruler. Indeed, Queen Victoria stated: '[I] trust we shall not now, when he appears only to have obeyed the dictates of such a spirit agree to his deposition ... as it would be inconsistent on our part and most dangerous to Turkey for Big Bulgaria under Russian influence w[oul]d pave way for Russia to Constantinople.'[31] In response to these concerns, Salisbury sought to reassure the monarch, informing her that:

> He has been anxious not to push matters too rapidly, because his fear was that, if the Conference of Ambassadors met before the situation had somewhat developed, if they had nothing before them but the one act of Prince Alexander, it might bring out into too great relied the illegality of his proceedings: and the effort to depose him might become very difficult to resist.[32]

This was followed by the Prime Minister's decision on 28 September to make the Great Powers aware of his decision to support unification. He informed the Queen:

> Lord Salisbury has seen to-day the French and Turkish Ambassadors, and the Charge's d'affaires of Italy, Germany and Austria. He has expressed to them all the view that the time for restoring the status quo had passed, and that the object now must be to reduce, to the smallest possible point, the necessary alteration in the Treaty of Berlin: and that that could best be effected by reducing the union of the two Bulgarias as far as possible to a personal union in the person of the present Prince. He did not hear from any of them any idea of displacing the Prince.[33]

His solution was to allow the Sultan to retain his privileges over Eastern Rumelia, save for the election of the Governor-General. This would ensure that any changes to the Berlin Treaty remained limited. The Prime Minister was adamant that he would oppose any efforts to remove Prince Alexander, and made no attempt to conceal his motive that 'any successor would certainly be more Russian than he [Prince Alexander] is.'[34] He thought that the Prince's independence from St. Petersburg would maintain the peace. To France and Austria-

[30] H. W. V. Temperley and L. M. Penson, *Foundations of British Foreign Policy 1792 - 1902* (London, 1966), p. 431.
[31] Queen to Salisbury (telegram), 26 Sept. 1885, Salisbury MSS, 3M/A/35.
[32] Salisbury to Queen, 28 Sept. 1885, Buckle (ed.), *Letters, Second Series,* Vol. 3, pp. 694 - 695.
[33] Salisbury to Queen, 28 Sept. 1885, Buckle (ed.), *Letters, Second Series,* Vol. 3, pp. 694 - 695.
[34] Salisbury to Walsham (no. 781 A), 28 Sept. 1885, FO 27/2727.

Hungary, Salisbury reiterated his view that he was 'opposed to the deposition of Prince Alexander.'[35]

The strategic imperative of security in the Balkans was weighted against the fear that confidence in Britain could be undermined if Central Asian rulers thought that London was less concerned with their troubles. Such concerns were, however, proved unnecessary when a British Agent 'asked the [Afghan] Amir if His Highness had heard of the disturbances in Rumelia ... His Highness replied he had not.'[36] This suggests that for Britain, the link between Central Asia and Europe was a construct formed for imperial security. Meanwhile, there was a dichotomy of views regarding how Britain should react to Russian moves in Europe. As Salisbury wrote:

> The situation is very difficult. The three Empires and Turkey are asking us to assent to the absolute maintenance of the Treaty of Berlin. It is awkward to refuse, but we must do so. The danger is that we may, if we put ourselves altogether aside, bring next a close alliance between Turkey and Russia. It is for this reason Lord Salisbury is avoiding pronounced action, lest England should find herself isolated.[37]

White supported the Prime Minister's policy concerning Eastern Rumelia: 'a Bulgaria consolidated on a national basis afforded the best defence against an advance on the part of Russia.'[38] White had a good knowledge of the Balkans, having worked east of Vienna for many years, although he was 'unusual in having worked his way up to that eminence from humble beginnings in the consular service.'[39] He owed his promotions to Salisbury, and his relationship with the Prime Minister was an important factor during this crisis. On the other hand, Morier viewed the problem from a Central Asian aspect when others did not. He was set against antagonising Russia over Bulgaria. He maintained: '[a] collision in Europe cannot

[35] Salisbury to Paget (telegram, no. 48), 28 Sept. 1885, FO 27/2727.
[36] British Agent at Kabul to Secretary to the Government of India, 9 Oct. 1885, FO 65/1282.
[37] Salisbury to Queen (cipher telegram) 19 Oct. 1885, Buckle (ed.), *Letters, Second Series,* Vol. 3, p. 704.
[38] A. F. Pribram, *England and the International policy of the European Great Powers 1871 - 1914: Being the Ford Lectures*, (London, 1966), p. 34.
[39] D. Steele, *Lord Salisbury: A Political Biography*, (London, 2001), p.181.

but bring forth collision in Asia.'[40] Morier was against opposing Russia in the Balkans, arguing that Britain had few interests in the region. He 'vented the opinion that it was not in England's interest to hinder the advance of pan-Slavism in Europe.'[41] If Britain opposed Russia in Europe then St. Petersburg would respond by making life difficult for British India. For instance, where the demarcation of Afghanistan's frontier was concerned, when 'Morier ... was instructed to sound out the Russians in October 1885 ... [he] decided to wait until the Russian soreness over British policy in the Bulgarian crisis had been soothed.'[42] The ambassador was correct that there was an appreciable impact on the policies of British India when Russia's concentration was focused on Europe. This meant that at this point in time British India was enjoying a period of quiet, due both to the agreement over Penjdeh and Russia's preoccupation with the Balkans. However, it was understood that the threat was only on hold. The Viceroy commented: 'you need be under no apprehension that any one of us in this part of the world looks upon the present settlement with Russia in any other light than as giving us breathing time to push forward our preparations.'[43]

In order to find a diplomatic solution to the crisis, the signatories of the Berlin treaty met at Constantinople, convening a conference on 4 October. This meeting had been suggested from the start by Bismarck, who had hoped originally to 'drown the question in ink.'[44] Prior to any discussions, in a bid to unilaterally end the matter, the Tsar had met some of the Eastern Rumelian revolutionaries at Copenhagen. Here he told them that he supported their cause, but that now was not the time to act. This was intended to undermine support for Prince Alexander, but it had no impact. The first two days would prove typical of the conference at large: Russia sought the condemnation of Prince Alexander for violating the

[40] Morier to Salisbury (private), 19 Nov. 1885, Morier MSS, Box 21.
[41] Pribram, *England*, p. 34.
[42] G. J. Alder, *British India's Northern Frontier 1865 - 95,* (London, 1963), p. 201.
[43] Dufferin to Churchill (private), 12 Oct. 1885, Churchill MSS, MS Add.9248, vol. 8.
[44] Malet to Salisbury (telegram, no. 72), 21 Sept. 1885, FO 64/1081.

Berlin Treaty and a return of the *status quo*; White, on the other hand, was under instruction both to refuse any suggestion of the Prince's dismissal and to object to anything which was already in the power of the Porte to adopt. There would be no British agreement to a return of the *status quo.* White would concur only to a condemnation of the breach itself. Due to this impasse, the Powers could only settle on a censure of recent events in a bid to halt the spread of nationalist sentiment and prevent bloodshed. Postponing any definite announcements had the added benefit of avoiding any disagreements, which allowed the conference to continue.

Having made little progress in her efforts to oust Prince Alexander so far, on 12 October Russia made another attempt. She proposed that the Powers should communicate an identical note to the Prince and the Sultan, advising the latter to demand that his rights over Eastern Rumelia be maintained. If this proved successful, the union Alexander had proclaimed would be dissolved, and if that happened then it was assumed that either the Bulgarian people or the Sultan himself would force the Prince to abdicate. This proposition set a new pattern for the conference, as St. Petersburg had gained Vienna's support as a result. Britain still refused to support anything aimed against Alexander. In order to add St. Petersburg's diplomatic weight to this proposal, later that month Giers 'spoke very strongly in favour of a return to the *status quo ante* as being the only solution which would be likely to secure peace in the Balkan Peninsula.' It is necessary to consider that Russia's negative reaction to the unification of Bulgaria was only apparently counter-intuitive. Prince Alexander had already shown himself independent of Russia. It was therefore understandable that it should be feared that, if he ruled an even larger territory, he would become more difficult still. That 'Russia would naturally view unfavourably any scheme involving the

creation of a big Bulgaria which would be opposed to the influences of Russia,' was known and understood.[45]

Yet to St. Petersburg's immense chagrin, due to a lack of progress and support for military action, by 29 October Russia was forced to accept the idea of a personal union. The caveat was that St. Petersburg rejected any such union under Prince Alexander. Further conference sessions were held during early November, with the same two distinct groups locked in disagreement. Faced with implacable opposition, White implored Salisbury to be more accommodating, but the Prime Minister refused. He replied: 'my present information points to the importance of gaining time. Do what you can to prevent them in their breaking up the conference or demanding our assent to the *status quo*.'[46] In Salisbury's opinion the longer the conference went on the better, as each passing day allowed the union between Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia to strengthen while the will of the Great Powers to enact change dwindled. It is clear that in order to achieve his combined objectives of both securing the personal union and maintaining Alexander as Prince, 'Salisbury took the calculated risk of paralysing the efforts of the ambassadorial conference at Constantinople to solve the smouldering crisis, if not to uphold the Berlin settlement in its original form.'[47] Had the other Powers come to an agreement amongst themselves, Salisbury knew that Britain could not stop them. Yet the Prime Minister's policy of stubbornness at the Constantinople Conference was also a ploy to create a divide between Russia and the Germanic powers, meaning that there was in fact little risk of the powers working cohesively. The Prime Minister appreciated that for 'as long as the Bulgarian issue was alive, a wedge was driven into Bismarck's *Dreikaiserbund*: Austria would look to England for support; Bismarck would not dare to

[45] Grosvenor to Salisbury (confidential, no. 368), 28 Oct. 1885, FO 65/1218.
[46] Salisbury to White (private, telegram), 9 Nov. 1885, Salisbury MSS, 3M/A/40.
[47] Otte, 'Floating', p. 110.

choose between his two allies; and Salisbury would gain some freedom of manoeuvre.'[48] Such freedom had been scarce for Britain, as the *Dreikaiserbund* had remained close up until this point.

Salisbury was knowingly taking a risk by opposing the alliance, and it was not long before his decision to prolong the conference began to cause difficulties for Britain. As Morier had predicted, the threat was directed at the British Empire in Central Asia. Soon after the Prime Minister had instructed White to gain time, the ambassador at St. Petersburg informed Salisbury that although Britain had wanted to 'allow matters to quieten down in Afghanistan, [he] observed today that, with the feeling aroused by the strong partisanship ... of which we are accused for Prince Alexander, it could not be doubted that care would be taken to cause us fresh trouble there.'[49] Salisbury did not, however, alter his course, and chose to remain stubbornly opposed to the *Dreikaiserbund* in spite of the ambassador's advice.

The lack of agreement had left the European Powers in a deadlock. Although the *Dreikaiserbund* remained convinced that this 'big Bulgaria' could not stand, none of them was willing or indeed able to intervene. To have done so would have both further undermined the Berlin Treaty and disrupted the balance of power. In addition, the Powers were not of the same opinion concerning the fate of Prince Alexander, so he, to Russia's dismay, remained in place. As a result it is clear that, while White had been unable to secure agreement for Salisbury's policy and was unable to break the unity of the *Dreikaiserbund*, they, in turn, proved equally incapable of securing their own interests. It was evident that 'the difficulty with respect to Eastern Roumelia lay in the difference between the views entertained by [the]

[48] Charmley, *Splendid*, p. 203.
[49] Morier to Salisbury (secret, no. 383), 11 Nov. 1885, FO 65/1219.

Russian and English governments.' Britain was affecting Great Power relations once more. Salisbury had been successful at bringing Britain back to the decision making table.

The stalemate was broken when the ruler of Serbia, King Milan Obrenović, declared war on Bulgaria (14 November). Serbia, like Greece, had been demanding compensation for Bulgaria's gains; Belgrade's own aspirations had been curtailed by the Great Powers in 1878. Since the *coup* began, Vienna, in a bid to maintain some sort of control over King Milan, had been forced to play a double game with Serbia: on the one hand seeking to restrain her; on the other supporting her cause. This suited Austria, for if Serbia attacked Bulgaria, she could step in and make peace; if Serbia did not attack, she would receive praise for having helped avert war. None the less, Austria was obliged to support King Milan whatever his decision. If Vienna did not allow the King to satisfy his peoples' wish for war, he faced the very real possibility of being deposed. This would be unwelcome for, as had been proven in Bulgaria, new rulers did not necessarily stay loyal to Great Power patrons.

Prior to the declaration of war, Morier considered that 'the collision between the Servians and Bulgarians would not be so serious, and would not awaken so much feeling in Europe, as a conflict between the Turks and the Roumelians.'[50] Salisbury himself had wanted Serbia, if she must seek compensation, to obtain it from Bulgaria and not Turkey. There was an expectation that Sofia would be defeated quickly, satisfying the Serbians and ensuring that the war stayed localised, allowing a new *status quo* to take effect. Salisbury, incidentally, was also aware that a Serb-Bulgarian war would have a negative impact on Austro-Russian relations, for it would 'revive Austro-Russian rivalries in the Balkans.'[51] This would therefore further undermine the *Dreikaiserbund,* which was crucial to Salisbury's broader objectives.

[50] Morier (memorandum, no. 416), 12 Nov. 1885, FO 65/1215.
[51] K. Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England 1830 - 1902,* (Oxford, 1970), p. 146.

While Serbia and Bulgaria went to war in Europe, the primacy of Central Asia came to the fore. In Afghanistan the usual tit-for-tat movements between Russian and British agents were again causing strife. In response, Salisbury wanted the ambassador in St. Petersburg to discuss matters with Giers. Morier, however, was:

> very anxious not to moot afghan questions here so long as it can be avoided, and to confine them to local treatment as far as that is possible, for very great soreness most undoubtedly prevails respecting the line Her Majesty's Government have taken at the Constantinople Conference which we are accused of having rendered abortive mainly out of opposition to Russia, and I have ... already been warned that this feeling will hardly fail to have its *contre-coup* in Asia. I do not therefore desire without necessity to be the first to reopen this ground.[52]

It was clear to the ambassador that Britain needed to expect ramifications in Central Asia as a direct result of her decision to oppose Russia in Europe. His opposition to Salisbury's decision to support the Eastern Rumelian revolt had been vindicated by Russia's willingness to punish Britain in Central Asia.

Meanwhile, in the Balkans the Bulgarian army, under the leadership of Prince Alexander, proved too strong for Serbia's forces. This was unexpected and caused panic amongst the members of the *Dreikaiserbund.* As a result, and against Britain's wishes, it became the 'decision of the conference to restore the legal position of the Treaty of Berlin.' Regarding this resolution, Morier commented that the Russian Tsar 'considers that it is a duty of humanity to bring about the energetic and concentrated action of the great powers and the Porte.'[53] This pronouncement, however, came too late to influence matters, with the war ending on 28 November with a Bulgarian victory. The deadlock broken, this forced the Great Powers to accept that it was now impossible for them to dissolve the union between Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia. Prince Alexander now had a battle-hardened and patriotic army at his back, while no one Power could be trusted by the others to break the union with military

[52] Morier to Salisbury (no. 389), 16 Nov. 1885, FO 65/1252.
[53] Morier to Salisbury (no. 424), 25 Nov. 1885, FO 65/1215.

force. Meanwhile, relations between Austria-Hungary and Russia were already strained, with little common ground available to bring them back together. In response to this turn of events, Giers conceded that there could be no return to the *status quo ante* and that Prince Alexander would have to stay. This acceptance was an acknowledgement that there were now no diplomatic means for the unification to be reversed and Alexander deposed. In addition, White had also been 'assured from various sources that in the best informed circles in the south of Russia as well as in Turkey there is a general opinion prevailing that Russia is not prepared for war and that any resort to arms in the East of Europe would be most unwelcome prior to 1887 or even 1888.'[54]

An unforeseen consequence of the Bulgarian victory, and subsequent conceding of the Powers that Eastern Rumelia would not be restored, was that the Government of India could plan for a period of relative calm in Central Asia. During the Penjdeh crisis the Viceroy had asked for military reinforcements when an Anglo-Russian war looked likely. This was agreed, but in January 1886, now that this crisis had ensured Russia's long-term focus would remain in Europe, Dufferin sought to delay these reinforcements. He wrote: 'from a financial point of view it would be very convenient if the despatch of the additional ten thousand men we have asked for were spread over two or three years. With this Bulgarian business on hand, it does not look as if Russia would be in a position really to do much in Central Asia.'[55] Russia was now focusing her energies on the Balkans rather than Central Asia, much to British India's relief.

As matters calmed in Central Asia, in Europe Greece continued to seek territorial compensation, in spite of the earlier successes at restraining her. In response, Britain continued her policy of not allowing Greece to seize any territory from the Ottoman Empire.

[54] White to Salisbury (secret, no. 603), 28 Dec. 1885, FO 181/674.
[55] Dufferin to Churchill (private), 5 Jan. 1886, Churchill MSS, MS Add.9248, vol. 11.

'In the hope of preventing outbreak of war, and putting the Sultan under an obligation which will dispose him to come to terms with Prince Alexander, Cabinet propose, in concert with Germany and any other Power that will join, to prohibit a naval attack by Greece upon Turkey.'[56] This allowed Russia an opportunity to restore her relations with the Great Powers, which had become strained over the past months. Regarding this matter, it appeared to Morier that 'Russia was determined to prevent a conflagration if she could.'[57]

Yet it was obvious to the ambassador that only specific elements of 'the Russian Government, i.e. the Czar and Monsieur de Giers ... [were] determined to do what they can to prevent the crisis developing into a general conflagration.' The inconsistencies of policy at St. Petersburg were visible to Morier. He was also aware of 'the apparent contradiction between her earnest endeavours to maintain the general peace, and the subterranean efforts, that I do not for one moment doubt are being strenuously carried on, to keep to her standard the various allies upon whom she hopes to be able to count when the fatal day arrives.'[58] While Russia was openly working towards a peaceful resolution for Greece, this was only to ensure that when the Ottoman Empire did finally fall Russia was the main beneficiary, not Europe.

As St. Petersburg sought to take the lead in bringing an end to the strife in Europe, Morier informed Salisbury: 'in view of the refusal ... [of] Greece to disarm, Giers informs me that he is about to address a circular telegram to the Powers.'[59] As a result of this telegram: 'the six Great Powers presented a Collective Note to Greece yesterday [24 January 1886], intimating that a naval attack by Greece upon the Ottoman Empire would not be permitted.'[60]

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[56] Salisbury to Queen (cipher telegram) 19 Jan. 1886, G. E. Buckle (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria, Third Series, A selection from Her Majesty's Correspondence and Journal between the years 1886 - 1901,* (3 vols., London, 1930), Vol. 1, p. 11.
[57] Morier to Salisbury (secret, no. 5), 7 Jan. 1886, FO 65/1256.
[58] Morier to Salisbury (confidential, no. 15), 20 Jan. 1886, FO 65/1256.
[59] Morier to Salisbury (no. 16), 20 Jan. 1886, FO 65/1256.
[60] Bourke, HC, 25 Jan 1886, *Hansard,* vol. 302, col. 319.

This was an important moment for London. Not only was Britain a part of this collective note, but it was originally Salisbury's suggestion. That Europe listened was proof that the Prime Minister had been successful in bringing Britain back to the top table of international diplomacy. He boasted: 'my Lords, there has been no isolated action on the part of Her Majesty's Government with regard to Greece; but six Powers—Russia, Austria, Germany, Prance, Italy, and England—have, at the instance of Her Majesty's Government, presented a Collective Note to the Greek Government intimating to them that, in the absence of any just cause for war between Greece and Turkey, any naval attack on Turkey will not be permitted.'[61] Salisbury's promise that the Royal Navy would form part of a coalition against the Greeks was a definite *volte face*, considering his refusal of Bismarck's request for a similar demonstration the previous year. Now, when Britain's stubbornness had born fruit, the Marquis had suggested the same action and Europe had agreed.

As the difficulty with Greece continued, in February: 'a circular was communicated ... announcing the conclusion of an arrangement between the Sultan and Prince Alexander.'[62] It is necessary to note that following the resignation of Salisbury's ministry, Gladstone succeeded to the premiership in February 1886 with Rosebery becoming Foreign Secretary. As a result, it was to Rosebery then that Morier reported that this first draft stated that Bulgarian men would be 'compelled to fight by the side of Turkey against neighbouring Christian states.' This offered Russia an opportunity to complicate proceedings. Although St. Petersburg was said to be 'sincerely desirous ... that the arrangement between the Prince of Bulgaria and the Sultan should not break down,' the idea of the Sultan forcing Christians to fight other Christians was not well-liked.[63] It went against Russia's pan-Slavic ideals and interests, while also undermining her own intentions to seek the capture of Constantinople.

[61] Salisbury, HL, 25 Jan. 1886, *Hansard*, vol. 302, col. 303.
[62] Morier to Salisbury (confidential, no. 41), 3 Feb. 1886, FO 65/1256.
[63] Morier to Rosebery (confidential, no. 49), 14 Feb. 1886, FO 65/1256.

Matters were further complicated for Britain when it became 'almost impossible to obtain any clear idea ... between the Russian government on the one hand and the German and Austrian governments on the other in reference to the opinion to be expressed on the arrangement between the Sultan and Prince Alexander.'[64] Britain did not want to end up undermining her successful realignment with the Great Powers. This explains why, when it turned out that Russia would not agree to this draft, to rescue the agreement the British government took steps to 'urge upon the Porte the abandonment of the military clause contained in the Turco-Bulgarian agreement.' Britain's success 'caused much satisfaction to Monsieur de Giers,' and 'induce[d] his Excellency to withdraw, or reduce ... the objections ... to the other points.'[65] Morier was able to report that 'the Russian government have, after an exhaustive interchange of views with the German and Austrian cabinets, reduced their objections to the Turco-Bulgarian arrangement down to a minimum.'[66]

Athens, meanwhile, remained stubborn in the face of the Great Powers demands. Greece not only refused to demobilize her army, but she also increased her naval capacity. This led the Great Powers to put pressure on Athens by sending their fleets to the Greek coast. Morier reported in late February: 'the Russian government adhere to the proposal of preventing the Greek fleet from leaving the Bay of Salamis.'[67] As discussions between Greece and the Great Powers continued, the Powers were only troubled when the Russian fleet appeared to leave Greek waters during March. While members of the government in Britain used this as further evidence that Russia could not be trusted, Morier meanwhile sought to calm opinion in London. He informed: 'His Excellency [Giers] observed that the Russian Admiral had acted in conformity with his instructions which were "to move about" but always in Greek or Cretan waters.' Morier was satisfied when Giers said that 'Russia had

[64] Morier to Rosebery (confidential, no. 58), 14 Feb. 1886, FO 65/1256.
[65] Morier to Rosebery (no. 68), 17 Feb. 1886, FO 65/1257.
[66] Morier to Rosebery (no. 70), 21 Feb. 1886, FO 65/1257.
[67] Morier to Rosebery (no. 69 A), 21 Feb. 1886, FO 65/1257.

no intention of separating herself from the other powers, and she would afford the moral support of the presence of her flag.'[68] It was thus conveyed to Parliament that 'the departure of the Russian Squadron from Suda Bay was only a temporary movement, for the purpose of obtaining provisions, and we have reason to believe that the Russian vessels will at once rejoin the Allied Squadrons.'[69]

The fate of Eastern Rumelia was settled with the signing of the Constantinople protocol of 5 April 1886, which left the government of Eastern Rumelia to the prince. Rosebery informed the House of Lords:

> We have heard to-day from Sofia that Prince Alexander, while still maintaining his objections to the condition which makes his appointment as Governor General of Eastern Roumelia subject to renewal at the end of five years with the assent of the Powers, has announced to the Grand Vizier of the Turkish Government that, in view of the unanimous decision of the Powers, he is ready to defer to the authority of the International Act signed by their Representatives.[70]

The Eastern Rumelian crisis was at an end, although this had been achieved at the cost of Russia's prestige. Morier warned Rosebery that a reprisal was probable, and that it would likely come in the Black Sea. He explained: '[it] must be borne in mind that the solution of the Bulgarian question ... with the objects desired by Her Majesty's Government, that of establishing a twin independent state to Romania, solidly built up between Russia and Constantinople, has materially added to the *raison d'être* of Black Sea armaments, by placing clearly before the Russian mind ... that the main attack upon Constantinople will have to be made from the sea.' Not only would a Russian attack upon Constantinople now come from the water, but 'the idea which is more and more gaining a hold over the Russians ... is that of

[68] Morier to Rosebery (no. 125), 31 Mar. 1886, FO 65/1258.
[69] Bryce, HC, 1 Apr. 1886, *Hansard*, vol. 304, col. 435.
[70] Rosebery, HL, 13 April 1886, *Hansard*, vol. 304, col. 1420.

the Black Sea as a Russian lake and that this idea is receiving its expression in preparations on a very large scale in the naval establishment at Sevastopol.'[71]

Although St. Petersburg had been unsuccessful in Bulgaria, it continued to cooperate with Britain over the ongoing Greek question. A blockade of Greek ports had begun on 26 April 1886, over Greece's refusal to disarm. On 6 May Gladstone explained to Parliament: 'what has happened with respect to what is known as the Greek difficulty is this. A Note was presented which required the disarmament of Greece with a view of putting an end to the state of uncertainty and expectation, attended with hazard and also with vast expense, which prevails in the East. To that Note there was returned an answer which was in the opinion of the Powers inadequate, and in its particulars not satisfactory.'[72] Due to Greece's continued intransigence, 'a further Note has been presented to the Greek Government to-day [6 May], which points out to the Greek Government that, in the opinion of the Powers, the assurances given in their reply with respect to disarmament are insufficient.' The Great Powers demanded that Greek assurances at the very least ensured 'that Turkey would be called upon, or on grounds of prudence she could venture herself, to discontinue the costly preparations which she has been obliged to make.' The Powers did 'not think that the reply of Greece is a reply on which we could found an application to Turkey to that effect, and on which Turkey could be expected voluntarily to adopt that course.' A fresh note was thus sent to Greece, although this time the Powers were more threatening about repercussions should Athens not bend. 'Should the answer of the Greek Government to that Note presented to-day not be a sufficient answer, steps will at once be taken of a nature which will, in the judgment of the Powers, tend to secure the great object we all have in view.'[73] The Powers were not willing to

[71] Morier to Rosebery (confidential memorandum, no. 166), 6 May 1886, FO 65/1258.
[72] Gladstone, HC, 6 May 1886, *Hansard*, vol. 305, cols. 377 - 378.
[73] Gladstone, HC, 6 May 1886, *Hansard*, vol. 305, col. 378.

allow the Ottoman Empire to suffer any further losses, and were threatening war to secure their aims.

The blockade provided Britain with reasons to be confident in her position once more. Firstly, the blockade proved costly to Athens without being a drain on British resources. James Bryce, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, explained to Parliament: '[the blockade] applies to the whole of the East Coast of Greece. It begins at Cape Malea and extends to Cape Colonna, and thence to the frontier between Turkey and Greece on the Northern border of Thessaly. It also covers, on the West Coast, the entrance to the Gulf of Corinth.' The blockade was further testament to Britain's restored place in the European system, for 'all the Powers ... joined in the notice of blockade except France, and no state of war exists between this country or any of the Powers and Greece. No question of war arises, as the blockade is what is known in International Law as a pacific blockade.'[74] The pressure of this blockade soon told, and the Greek government disbanded the troops and naval recruits which were being prepared for the assault on the Ottoman Empire. This was followed on 7 June by a collective note from the Great Powers that lifted the blockade.

With both the Eastern Rumelia crisis and Greek blockade at an end, Britain occupied a far more favourable position in Europe than during the Penjdeh crisis. She was once again in close contact with both Austria-Hungary and Germany, and she now 'wielded far more power on the Bosphorus than she had done in the spring of 1885. Her firm stand in defence of the union of the two Bulgarias stood out in sharp contrast to her helplessness during the Penjdeh Crisis.'[75] By comparison, Russia appeared to now be on the periphery, looking at her western borders with little confidence. Due to this, Russia effectively declared the *Dreikaiserbund* null and void when Count Shuvalov, the Russian Ambassador to Berlin, suggested that St.

[74] Bryce, HC, 10 May 1886, *Hansard*, vol. 305, col. 569.
[75] Smith, *Embassy*, p. 41.

Petersburg would be better served with a dual agreement with Germany.[76] The end of the *Dreikaiserbund* was a diplomatic success for Britain, and a justification of Salisbury's hard-nosed policy during the Congress of Berlin.

Britain was able to profit from the Eastern Rumelia crisis chiefly because she was under less geographic pressure. It was primarily a European rather than a Central Asian question which involved all the Great Powers directly. This meant that the security of the British Empire in India was not immediately at stake, as had been the case of Penjdeh. This gave Salisbury more leeway with which he could stand against the *Dreikaiserbund* without fear of a backlash. Nonetheless, it was also true that for Britain 'developments in Bulgaria worked against the conversion of the Anglo-German entente into the pact that Salisbury had himself solicited in 1885.'[77] During the crisis, 'Bismarck had been able to play the part of the silent guide and turn Russia's ill feeling away from his Austro-Hungarian ally, while the obstinate stand taken by Salisbury had made it easy for him to deflect her hostility towards Great Britain.'[78] The safety of the German Empire relied upon maintaining a cordial relationship with Russia; Germany's western borders were already under pressure from *révanchist* France. If Russia became an enemy Germany would be surrounded. It was also in Berlin's interests to ensure that Austria and Russia remained on good terms to prevent Germany becoming embroiled in an Austro-Russian war. So although Salisbury had earned Bismarck's respect for his diplomacy, this did not mean that Britain had a partner for any confrontation with Russia in Central Asia. The critical question in the wake of this crisis was how Russia would react. Contemporaries were certain that a response would occur, but were not keen to precipitate it. As a result of the unification of Bulgaria under a Prince quite willing to shun St. Petersburg, an attack on Constantinople by land was no longer an option

[76] S. Goriainov, 'The End of the Alliance of the Emperors', *The American Historical Review,* Vol. 23, No. 2 (Jan., 1918), pp. 333 - 334.
[77] Steele, *Salisbury*, p. 248.
[78] Smith, *Embassy*, p. 37.

for Russia. One option left open was to attack from the sea, and this increased threat of a naval attack left Britain at a disadvantage, for now more of the burden of defence had been placed upon her shoulders. It was this burden that triggered Russia's decision to abrogate article 59 of the Treaty of Berlin and seize the port of Batoum on the Black Sea.

Chapter 3

‘A thunderbolt in a November fog’: Batum

By the middle of 1886 Russia’s influence in Central Asia and Europe had been reduced, in spite of her position of strength prior to the Penjdeh Crisis and Eastern Rumelia uprising. Owing to a mixture of luck, good statesmanship and international factors, Britain had emerged from these events in a stronger situation than had St. Petersburg.[1] The settlement of a section of the boundary line between Afghanistan and Russia had left the latter with less than she had intended, and it had become obvious that she had over-played her hand regarding Penjdeh. The surprisingly firm British reaction had stifled St. Petersburg’s attempt to influence London, and had sent a strong signal of intent. This is not to say that the crisis was one of only good fortune for Britain, as the involvement of Europe had set an awkward precedent. It was now more difficult for London to know when, and how, the German powers might seek to intervene in matters outside of their direct spheres of influence. But this had also proven to London that Britain could not hope to succeed in any unilateral action against Russia. Instead, cooperation with the European powers was necessary to contain Russia.

It is equally necessary to consider the ramifications of the Eastern Rumelia crisis. When this question was settled to the detriment of St. Petersburg’s interests, this further ‘concentrated on Great Britain the anger of the Russian government.’[2] Not only had St.

[1] Barbara Jelavich, in her article ‘Great Britain and the Acquisition of Batum, 1878 - 1886’ suggests that European policy makers who feared a war in Europe supported Russian expansion elsewhere. This work reiterates this, although it does not agree with Jelavich’s argument that St. Petersburg’s friendship with her European neighbours allowed her to negotiate a favourable settlement over Batum. The very purpose of the abrogation was to demonstrate Russian independence *vís-a-vís* the rest of Europe; there was never a settlement to be had. Additionally, Robert Rhodes James, in his biography of *Rosebery*, appreciates that the foreign secretary, in his harsh reply to Giers over the abrogation, stepped out of line for what should have been a more considered and appropriate response. James does, however, have some sympathy, suggesting that with the Penjdeh crisis being barely a year in the past, it was understandable that the young minister would react in such a way. Yet, this does not account for Rosebery’s hawkish attitude during the Penjdeh crisis, which would suggest that the foreign secretary harboured ill feeling towards St. Petersburg.

Petersburg's intentions in Bulgaria been impeded, but the settlement moreover blocked Russia's route to Constantinople through the Balkans. A now larger and united Bulgaria stood in St. Petersburg's way. For Russia this was a humiliation, while it also prompted the realisation that if she was to take Constantinople, it could not be achieved via the Balkans. Other routes, such as through the Caucasus or across the Black Sea would have to be considered. Further, it was obvious to St. Petersburg that if there was to be a response to her predicament, it would have to be soon. For while in February 1886 'Russian officials had been delighted to see the return of a Liberal ministry which they regarded, quite correctly, as more responsive to their interests,' just months later it was clear that Gladstone would soon be replaced by Salisbury, whom, with reason, they regarded as less susceptible to Russian intrigues.[3] Any retort would thus have to be prompt otherwise it could prove less effective.

The Russian reply, when it came, was both swift and effectual. In July 1886 Tsar Alexander III issued a communication to the Great Powers, which Morier received in a 'private note from M[onsieur] de Giers ... informing me that the Emperor had decided to put an end to the free port regime which has been in force at Batoum for the last eight years.'[4] Batum was a port on the south-east coast of the Black Sea, which, according to article 59 of the Berlin Treaty (1878), was to be 'a free port essentially commercial', meaning that the signatories had granted the port and its city administrative freedom.[5] Moreover, it was ensured that the port would not be militarised. An abrogation of article 59 would leave Russia in complete control of the port, free to make any changes she considered necessary, military or otherwise. This was concerning for Britain as the importance of Batum, to British and

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[2] W. N. Medlicott, 'The Powers and the Unification of the Two Bulgaria's, 1885: Part 2', *English Historical Review,* Vol. 54, No. 214 (Apr., 1939), p. 283.
[3] B. Jelavich, 'Great Britain and the Acquisition of Batum, 1878 - 1886', *The Slavonic and East European Review,* Vol. 48, No. 110 (Jan., 1970), p. 59.
[4] Morier to Rosebery (no. 224), 3 Jul. 1886, FO 65/1259.
[5] 'Treaty between Great Britain, Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Russia, and Turkey for the Settlement of Affairs in the East: Signed at Berlin, 13 July 1878', *American Journal of International Law,* Vol. 2, No. 4 Supplement: Official Documents (Oct., 1908), pp. 401 - 424.

Russian interests, had been appreciated for some years in London. For instance, during the discussions for the Treaty of Berlin, although Salisbury signed 'a secret agreement with Russia on 31 May 1878, giving the latter Batum in exchange for St. Petersburg's surrendering the idea of "Big Bulgaria"... he [soon] checked the strategic advantage that [the] Russians had gained at Batum by obtaining the right from the Turks to maintain British forces in Cyprus in exchange for a British guarantee of Asiatic Turkey against Russia.'[6] The significance of the port to Britain was studied in more detail some years later, in 1884, by the Assistant Quarter Master General, Major J. S. Rothwell.[7] He identified the port as a target to be assaulted in the event of an Anglo-Russian war. British military planners had observed that 'only at Batoum might the British hope to attack with any real chance of affecting Russia.'[8] There a second front could be opened, forcing Russia to divert troops from the Indian or Persian theatres of war. In essence a diversionary tactic, this would give London time to reinforce Britain's troops in India. This state of affairs did, however, highlight Britain's shortcomings *vis-à-vis* Russia. Her modest army and lack of dependable allies meant that Britain would be unable to match Russian military might, even with India's forces to call upon. Britain could therefore only resort to war by attrition, seizing and holding Russian ports, with the aim of wearing down Russia's financial resources until she was forced to submit.

Such plans had already been threatened in the early months of 1885 when news reached the British government that Batum was being fortified. Sir Julian Pauncefote, the Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, noted: 'the action of the Russian government in causing the said fortifications at Batoum ... constructed in contravention of the Treaty of Berlin' 'have not escaped the attention of H[er] M[ajesty's] G[overnment]'. In spite of this, in light of the then concurrent problems in the Sudan and Penjdeh, the British government chose

[6] K. Neilson, 'The British Way in Warfare and Russia', K. Neilson and G. Kennedy (ed.), *The British Way in Warfare: Power and the International System 1856 - 1956. Essays in Honour of David French,* (Farnham, 2010), p. 10.
[7] Major J. S. Rothwell, 'England's Means of Offence against Russia', in, Neilson, 'Way', p. 12.
[8] Neilson, 'Way', p. 12.

not to respond. Pauncefote recorded: 'H[er] M[ajesty's] G[overnment] are not aware of anything having been done by the Russian government of sufficient importance to warrant a remonstrance against the proceedings on the grounds that they constitute a breach of the Treaty of Berlin.'[9] This was an admission that Britain's resources were stretched to their limits and her ability to counter Russian action was practically non-existent. The ramifications of this were made obvious when General Sir Peter Lumsden, a Commissioner on the Council of India, remarked: 'when I passed through at the end of May the Russian troops at Batoum were encamped by companies on the beach, between the ramparts of the town and the sea, and were extending the old Turkish works to the westward, so as more completely to cover the town. Another battery has been constructed at the entrance to the river.'[10] None the less, the continued strategic importance of Batum to British plans was highlighted during the Penjdeh Crisis. As matters threatened to escalate, Gladstone expressed: 'to Granville the notion of sending some secret agent into the Black Sea, and getting confidential reports on the condition as to defences & forces of the most important points such as (I suppose) Batoum, Kertch, Sebastopol, [and] Odessa.'[11] The Prime Minister had clearly understood the necessity for Britain to be able to take the fight to Russia, as a more effective means of defending the subcontinent.

It is important to understand why Russia chose to abrogate article 59, even though St. Petersburg had already been modifying the port prior to the Tsar's declaration. After all, these alterations alone meant that it was already just a matter of time before Britain could no longer use Batum in her war plans. It is also necessary to consider why the abrogation occurred when it did. From an imperial defence point of view, it made sense for Russia to abrogate: 'with the development of the railway system along the Afghan border, by the ... 1880s

[9] Granville to Mehmed Pasha, 7 Feb. 1885, FO 181/671/1.
[10] Lumsden to Churchill, 24 Jul. 1885, Churchill MSS, MS Add.9248, vol. 8.
[11] Gladstone Diary, 8 Apr. 1885, H. C. G. Matthew (ed.), *The Gladstone Diaries with Cabinet minutes and Prime Ministerial Correspondence,* (14 vols., Oxford, 1990), Vol. 11, p. 319.

Batoum was a main link in the shortest line of communications between St. Petersburg and Russia's Central Asian dominions.'[12] In addition, Batum's location would allow men and materials from St. Petersburg to be sent to Russia's Central Asian dominions in a more timely fashion, improving the inter-connectedness of the Tsar's empire. This also provided a strategic advantage, with the port facilitating a Russian push southwards. The railway could allow large numbers of Russian troops to be moved on from Batum to Central Asia with haste. From there they could attack either Persia or Afghanistan, the key states in British India's defence perimeter. This ability to apply pressure on Britain in Central Asia was linked to a further reason for Russia to abrogate, namely revenge for Britain's refusal to support her in maintaining the *status quo* at the Constantinople Conference. She was equally aggrieved by Britain allowing Prince Alexander to circumvent the Berlin Treaty without facing any consequences. Morier had warned of Russia seeking revenge for some months. He understood that with St. Petersburg's route to Constantinople through the Balkans blocked, she would turn to the Black Sea to meet her ends. Taking control of a strategically significant port such as Batum would enable Russia to plan ahead while simultaneously disrupting Britain. There were also economic benefits of abrogating for Russia, and it was these that St. Petersburg would use to justify its action. If the port's free status was removed then Batum would be absorbed into Russia's protectionist economic system. St. Petersburg could then enjoy revenue from the commercial trade at the port. The Russian Empire was notoriously strapped for cash, and any new income was to be welcomed with open arms. A final motive was the demonstration of Russia's ability to act independently of the *Dreikaiserbund,* which had failed to win out at the Constantinople Conference in the face of British stubbornness. This was a signal from Russia at her dissatisfaction with her allies in Berlin and Vienna.

[12] Jelavich, 'Acquisition', p. 63.

It was clear that the abrogation was directed against Britain; even the timing appeared premeditated to cause as much disruption as possible. 'Russia's announcement ... [had] coincided with the elections of June - July 1886, which disabled the cabinet, and it looked therefore like a calculated insult.'[13] In addition, Giers' explanations for the decision demonstrate an intention both to dominate and pacify any British reaction. The Russian Foreign Minister informed the ambassador that St. Petersburg considered the abrogation legal, as 'article fifty nine only registers a spontaneous declaration of the late emperor Alexander II and does not carry the force of a stipulation.' As a result: '[the] Russian government do not consider this as derogatory to the Treaty of Berlin.' Yet this direct approach was toned down by the conciliatory statement that, 'as Batoum will remain an essentially commercial port, the measure will in no way modify the actual state of things in the Black Sea.' This was an attempt to ease fears that this action would give Russia an advantage on that body of water. That Giers was doing this suggests that he did not favour the abrogation, but was carrying out his Tsar's command. The Russian Foreign Minister also argued for the local economic benefits of the abrogation. Indeed, it was asserted that the Tsar had received numerous local petitions protesting against the various existing tariffs. The abrogation was therefore a response made 'on account of the inconvenience caused thereby to the inhabitants of the province.'[14] Given Britain's preference for free trade, it was no doubt assumed that this would be persuasive. A final justification was that due to the increased building and use of railways, Batum's role had changed since 1878; as a result, the article was now redundant and needed amending. This interpretation of article 59 appeared to be one that was shared with other signatories, for reactions to the abrogation amongst the Great Powers were mostly ambivalent. 'Bismarck ... expressed himself to the effect that the abrogation of article 59 of the Treaty of Berlin does not involve any important German

[13] A. Ramm, *Sir Robert Morier: Envoy and Ambassador in the Age of Imperialism 1876 - 1893*, (Oxford, 1973), p. 223.
[14] Morier to Rosebery. (no. 224), 3 Jul. 1886, FO 65/1259.

interest.'[15] If Germany was willing to allow this, then Austria-Hungary would also accede to Russia's decision, if only to dampen down tensions in the aftermath of the Eastern Rumelia crisis. Only Rosebery, in spite of this acquiescence and Giers' attempts to coerce Britain's acceptance of the abrogation, refused to concede the matter.

The Foreign Secretary had many reasons to object. Although British trade at Batum was negligible, the port had a great effect upon Britain's wider imperial requirements. Russia had for decades been 'at the centre of British defence planning ... [which] was an expensive business. The needs of imperial defence seemed boundless,' and Batum was an important factor in official thinking.[16] London had gone to great lengths to ensure that all potential eventualities in connection with Russia had been examined. The abrogation undermined any British war plans related to the Black Sea, narrowing Britain's options should an Anglo-Russian war begin. Meanwhile, this issue highlighted a key aspect of British foreign policy. London's indifferent response at the beginning of the Eastern Rumelia crisis demonstrates how little she was concerned with the fate of Turkey-in-Europe, except for the Straits of the Dardanelles. By contrast, the immediate and sharp response to Russia's move on Batum makes plain how important the Caucasus region was considered to be, both for the defence of Turkey-in-Asia and for the defence of British interests in Central Asia. As the power of the Sultan waned, from Britain's perspective there was a 'sharp distinction between the controlled reduction of Ottoman power in the Balkans and the inviolability of Ottoman Asia.'[17]

It was 'the danger of a sudden Russian attack upon Turkey by way of Asia Minor' that was considered an immediate threat to British interests, as it brought the likelihood of an

[15] Morier to Rosebery (telegram, no. 90), 3 Jul. 1886, FO 65/1265.
[16] Z. S. Steiner and K. Neilson, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War,* 2nd ed., (Basingstoke and New York, 2003), p. 86.
[17] A. Cunningham, "The Wrong Horse?' Anglo-Ottoman Relations before the First World War', E. Ingram (ed.), *Eastern Questions in the Nineteenth Century. Collected Essays* (2 vols., London, 1993), Vol. 2, p. 232.

attack, on Persia in particular, closer.[18] Such a threat was only increased with the absorption of Batum in to the Russian Empire proper. Not a few in London, in fact, viewed Russia's action as part of a concerted plan to undermine British authority in the east; some even feared that the abrogation had the hallmarks of a preparation for an imminent attack on Central Asia through the Caucasus. London's key goal was to maintain the security of Constantinople. A worst-case scenario for Britain was a Russian seizure of the Turkish capital, which would enable her fleet to gain access to the Mediterranean and subsequently blockade the Suez Canal. Even just a short-term blockade could prove disastrous for Britain in India, as it would take longer for British troops to get to India while undermining the profitability of Indian trade. This also meant that if Russia launched a simultaneous invasion of India, by the time reinforcements arrived from Britain any war could be lost. It was therefore imperative that Constantinople was kept out of Russian hands. It is necessary to note that Britain was not only responding due to practical considerations. Rosebery in particular was reacting with an innate distrust of Russian intentions in Central Asia. After all, 'the Penjdeh incident was barely a year in the past, and a mistrust of Russian ambitions was deeply rooted in the Foreign Office.'[19] Whatever the action, British onlookers would necessarily view Russian manoeuvres as deceitful. Furthermore, Rosebery was convinced that, aside from the strategic implications of this abrogation, the true complication of the matter was Russia's brazen disrespect of Britain, a fellow Great Power. He wrote: '[he] cannot disguise from himself the certainty that this is meant as a slap in the face of this country. Materially, the question has no importance, as Batoum as a free port has no value. But as an act of insolent perfidy it stands almost alone.'[20]

[18] C. L. Smith, *The Embassy of Sir William White at Constantinople 1886 - 1891*, (Oxford, 1957), p. 104.
[19] R. R. James, *Rosebery* (London, 1963), p. 194.
[20] Rosebery to Queen, 3 July 1886, in, G. E. Buckle (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria, Third Series, A selection from Her Majesty's Correspondence and Journal between the years 1886 - 1901*, (3 vols., London, 1930), Vol. 1, pp. 152 - 153.

Rosebery contended that it was the unilateral nature of the Tsar's decision that was the most damaging aspect of this quarrel. From London's perspective, the recent crisis in Eastern Rumelia had come to an end with the agreement of all of the signatories of the Treaty of Berlin, Russia included. This meant that the settlement was still in force. This was a necessity for Britain as the Berlin Treaty underpinned her interests in Eastern Europe, protecting the Ottoman Empire from Russia and keeping St. Petersburg contained. Rosebery's anger at Russia's decision to abrogate was therefore a result of its threat to British imperial interests. He argued: 'it is an essential principle of the law of nations that no Power can liberate itself from the engagements of a Treaty, nor modify the stipulations thereof.' He continued: 'I could not but express my astonishment that Russia should have come forward to strike a fatal blow at that Treaty, of which she had so lately acted as the special champion.'[21] During the Bulgarian crisis Russia had been the loudest voice calling for a return to the *status quo ante,* and had argued throughout the Constantinople Conference on this point. Now that St. Petersburg was itself working against the Berlin Treaty, Britain feared that, if unchecked, Russia's action would set a precedent for others to follow. This would place all international agreements into jeopardy. If any party to an agreement could, without warning, alter said agreement unilaterally in their favour, then no future treaty would be worth anything.

Meanwhile, it was the lack of a response from the other Great Powers that shocked Gladstone the most. He insisted: 'if there is anywhere a strong interest in opposing Russia's free use of the Straits, it is an interest of Austria, or of Turkey, or of the Free States of the Danube.'[22] Once these powers had shown little interest in opposing St. Petersburg, the Prime Minister began to question whether his Foreign Secretary should offer any resistance. He was, however, unwilling, or unable, to curtail Rosebery for fear of losing his services. Moreover, there was pressure from Queen Victoria that something should be done to match

[21] Rosebery to Morier (no. 153), 3 Jul. 1886, FO 181/676/1.
[22] Gladstone to Rosebery, 4 Jul. 1886, Matthew (ed.), *Diaries*, p. 582.

this Russian move. She wrote to Rosebery, who was a firm favourite of hers, commenting: 'the astounding news of the insolent and dishonest conduct of Russia in declaring that Batoum is no longer a free port. What does Lord Rosebery intend to do?'[23] Although Gladstone anticipated that Rosebery would agree to a firm diplomatic response, the Queen's interference suggested to the Foreign Secretary that something more robust was necessary.

Morier was shocked by the Russian declaration, for it undermined everything he thought he knew about Giers. 'It seemed to reverse with one stroke of the pen the policy with which he had identified himself, of fidelity to the Treaty of Berlin, and of regarding that instrument, hateful as it was in Russian eyes, as the only bit of *terra firma* on which the European concert could be kept in equilibrium.' Furthermore, the Ambassador agreed with Rosebery that 'the one sided withdrawal seemed ... a dangerous precedent in the interpretation of treaties.' Morier further assented with the Foreign Secretary that it was the act of abrogation rather than the article being abrogated that was the issue. 'It would not I thought be so much the setting aside of the particular provision contained in article 59 of the Treaty ... as the mode and manner of the notification, which I feared would be regarded as inconsistent with the principle laid down in the protocol of the 17 January 1871.' He argued that the course that should have been taken was 'laying the case before the co-signatories of the Treaty, and calling upon them, by arguments which could not be refuted, jointly to cancel the provision respecting the freedom of the port.'[24] If this had occurred, Morier was sure that Europe would have come to an agreement regarding article 59 that benefited the majority; the Powers had just proven their flexibility over Eastern Rumelia.

Morier understood that the abrogation was Russia's reaction to her loss over Eastern Rumelia. In fact, he had been warning of such a reaction for many months by the time it occurred. He was adamant that the 'suddenness and unexpectedness of the announcement

[23] Queen to Rosebery, 4 July 1886, Buckle (ed.), *Letters, Third Series,* Vol. 1, pp. 153 - 154.
[24] Morier to Rosebery (no. 224 A), 5 Jul. 1886, FO 65/1259.

must be taken in connection with the ill humour caused by late events and the prevalent idea that Europe is ready to condone all infractions of the Treaty of Berlin as long as these are hostile to Russia.'[25] Moreover, it was understood by Morier's European contemporaries: '[that] after her recent diplomatic failures, Russia was bound to score some sort of success to satisfy the Pan-Slavists.'[26] After all, an inability to secure a foreign policy success could threaten Russia's internal solidity.

Rosebery was unsure of how to respond to Russia. He had received conflicting opinions, with his Prime Minister counselling calm while the Queen wanted tangible action. In addition, the Foreign Secretary, who was still new to his position, was surprised at the speed at which Russia had acted. He remarked: 'Batoum & the loss of its ports freedom has come ... like a thunderbolt in a November fog.' This sudden shift in international normalcy, coupled with the disparate guidance, led the Foreign Secretary to a very confused policy. He understood that there could be very little economic argument against the abrogation. It was well known that Britain's 'commercial interest in the business is small.'[27] Furthermore, Rosebery continued to seek to negate any suggestion of Britain's special interest in the affair, fearful of being accused of bitterness. He remained, however, adamant that the abrogation was illegal. Rosebery's sense of the inviolability of treaties was magnified by the fact that the fate of Batum had been decided in 1878 as a result of Britain giving her consent. The continued freedom of the port was, as a result, a matter of honour for Britain. This ensured that the crisis had been 'discussed by the newspapers as a question nearly affecting England's credit.'[28] In this context, the concept of Britain's honour means that she was certain that her efforts in 1878 should have afforded her greater respect from Russia, especially regarding article 59.

[25] Morier to Rosebery (telegram, no. 93), 5 Jul. 1886, FO 65/1265.
[26] *The Times,* 7 Jul. 1886, p. 5.
[27] Rosebery to Morier (private), 7 Jul. 1886, Morier MSS, Box 21.
[28] *The Times,* 7 Jul. 1886, p. 5.

Gladstone's reluctance to become involved with Russia over Batum only seemed more prudent as time wore on. As Britain sought to defend the Berlin treaty, it was clear that London would be alone in this. Morier reported: 'some of my colleagues speak of the matter as if it exclusively concerned Great Britain.' He further explained: 'the governments of Austria and Germany are not inclined to raise the question of form, and that, as regards the matter, both the Powers mentioned seem to consider it as of no interest to them.'[29] Neither power had any conflict of interest with Russia over Batum, and with little chance of the abrogation having any repercussions on Central Europe, neither Bismarck nor Kálnoky 'took it very seriously, the former believing it to be a step towards conciliating national opinion brooding over recent disappointments, and the latter simply saying that he did not admire the mode of proceeding, but that there was nothing to be done.'[30] It is necessary to add that for Rosebery's European counterparts, 'the distraction caused in England by the Irish question' had caused much frustration with the Liberal government. This left many hoping for the return of Salisbury. In the meantime, the German powers did not 'grudge her [Russia] this small consolation at the expense of Mr Gladstone's tottering Ministry.'[31] Indeed, the lack of sympathy for Britain's position, as *The Times* commented, meant that 'the Austrian ... newspapers almost all stigmatise Russia's action as a gross breach of faith; but contend that Mr Gladstone's late cabinet is responsible for what has happened.'

The effect of this Russian action on British policy is quite telling. It was not a uniform response, as members of the Liberal government interpreted the perceived Russian threat dissimilarly. On a practical level, the abrogation affected Britain in several ways, the most immediate being the security of the Ottoman Empire. Constantinople would become more vulnerable to a Russian attack now that Batum could 'serve as the military basis for Russia's

[29] Morier to Rosebery (no. 228), 7 Jul. 1886, FO 65/1259.
[30] Marquess of Crewe, *Lord Rosebery*, (2 vols., London, 1931), Vol. 1, p. 271.
[31] *The Times*, 7 Jul. 1886, p. 5.

future action in Asia Minor.'[32] The Foreign Office was concerned enough to ask Morier: 'do you conceive that this Batoum proceeding is the prelude to further action anywhere?'[33] This was indicative of a fear in London that this action was just the beginning of a larger Russian plan to subvert British interests in Central Asia. As a rule: 'British apprehension at Russian activities in Transcaucasia was based on the fear that they might foreshadow further moves against the main lines of communication with India or against the buffer states of Persia, Afghanistan and the Ottoman Empire.'[34] To this end, it was not only the Foreign Office that was anticipating Russian actions against British interests. The India Office was also very much alive to a perceived Russian threat. Kimberley, Secretary of State for India once more, remarked in July: 'the Emperor of Russia has evidently been touched to the quick by the recent events in Bulgaria, and, as he attributes (with truth) the failure of his diplomacy in great part to us he will do us all the harm he can elsewhere. This is the obvious meaning of his declaration as to Batoum.' The India Secretary, then, agreed with Morier that there was an undeniable influence on Anglo-Russian policy in Central Asia from European affairs. Moreover, it was Kimberley, unlike some in his party, who appreciated that Russia was a foe like no other. He commented: '[this action] ought to open the eyes of those who are deluded into the belief that all our difficulties in Central Asia would be settled by a treaty.' In addition, Kimberley acknowledged: 'it is ... in every way our interest to put off the quarrel (if come it must) as long as we possibly can.'[35] In seeking a delay for an Anglo-Russian showdown, this demonstrates that Kimberley did not think Britain was prepared for war with Russia. She needed time. Moreover, the India Secretary's lack of confidence in an Anglo-Russian treaty suggests a level of suspicion that Russia played by different rules.

[32] *The Times*, 8 Jul. 1886, p. 5.
[33] Rosebery to Morier (no. 144, draft telegram), 8 Jul. 1886, FO 65/1264.
[34] Jelavich, 'Acquisition', p. 45.
[35] Kimberley to Dufferin (private), 9 Jul. 1886, Kimberley MSS, MS Eng d.2457.

While Gladstone appreciated Kimberley's moderating counsel, he also shared Rosebery's irritation with Russia. He wrote to Granville, his former foreign secretary: 'I am afraid that her [Russia's] military party, even worse and much worse than ours, will force on a quarrel with us in another quarter.' This suggests an expectation that even if Britain had not argued with Russia over Batum, there would have been some other Russian action against British interests. Nevertheless, Gladstone remained adamant that Britain did not need to intervene. He remarked: 'I for one cannot in anyway be a party to our taking up a forward position about a matter, which Continental influences will as usual strive to force upon us as more our affair than theirs, but which in my opinion is not our affair at all, except in the point that faith is broken with us as a part of Europe.' He understood that Germany and Austria-Hungary, who had already made it clear that they would not block the abrogation, were happy for Britain to challenge Russia. This was in expectation that such inaction would strengthen the *Dreikaiserbund* in the wake of the stalemate at the Constantinople Conference. Nevertheless, this is not to say that Gladstone was unfazed by Russia's action. He was in fact quite scathing about St. Petersburg: 'the conduct of Russia about Batoum fills me with disgust. She is committing a gross and scandalous breach of faith.'[36] The Prime Minister, however, was aware that without the support of the Central Powers, Britain could do nothing to alter Russian policy in the Black Sea. There was very little to be gained from proceeding independently. However, when a report by *The Times* remarked: '[that] the Russians say that they are avenging themselves at Batoum for their Bulgarian disillusions,' this caused disquiet in London.[37] The idea that a Great Power rival had managed to gain at Britain's expense, over a matter that had been legally agreed upon with the signatories of the Berlin agreement, rankled. This stung even more as Britain had only just recovered some international prestige

[36] Gladstone to Granville (secret), 9 Jul. 1886, Granville MSS, PRO 30/29/29 A.
[37] *The Times*, 9 Jul. 1886, p. 5.

owing to her response to the Eastern Rumelia crisis. The abrogation virtually dismissed Britain's gains *vis-a-vis* the German powers as inconsequential.

Rosebery, in spite of his protestations to colleagues and subordinates, still had the problem of how to respond directly to Russia. He agreed with Gladstone that Britain could not reverse the abrogation unilaterally; recent history had proven that Britain needed allies in order to restrain Russia. Therefore, in order to garner support, Rosebery needed to frame Britain's response in terms of protecting the international order and the Ottoman Empire. Yet it is important to note that when Rosebery sent the Prime Minister a draft of his response, Gladstone could only remark: 'Rosebery sent me his draft which I thought good. I suggested a few alterations chiefly omissions.'[38] Similarly, Granville sought to curtail Rosebery, though more forcefully than had the Prime Minister. He 'caused the worst flourish to be removed, when he wrote "this is for others to judge" against the words "we would rather stand alone than be associated in any way with this step".'[39] Rosebery focused on certain factors, such as the damage done to the Treaty of Berlin while rejecting each of Russia's reasons for the abrogation. An additional facet to his argument was how keen the Foreign Secretary was to ensure that he was not accused of disagreeing with the abrogation from a financial, or indeed an imperial defence, point of view. To this end, he clarified: 'Her Majesty's Government have little or no material interest in the question.'[40] Rosebery was clear in his reasoning that it should 'be understood that Her Majesty's government cannot accept the view that this step on the part of Russia does not constitute an infraction of the Treaty of Berlin, of which, indeed, it obliterates a distinct stipulation.' Moreover, he was adamant that 'it is scarcely possible that her [Russia's] government should consider this act as having become obsolete, for it was appealed to by the Russian plenipotentiary in the recent conference at Constantinople.'

[38] Granville to Gladstone, 9 Jul. 1886, Colonial Office Add.MS.44179, FO 152.
[39] Ramm, *Morier*, p. 224.
[40] Rosebery to Morier (draft), 10 Jul. 1886, CAB 37/18/38.

Rosebery contended that any unilateral declaration abrogating any part of an international agreement, should be resisted. On top of this, although Rosebery appreciated that St. Petersburg felt aggrieved over events in Bulgaria, he argued: 'whatever infractions of the Treaty of Berlin there have been in Eastern Rumelia, they had been solemnly referred to the Powers and legalised by them.'[41] As a result, in his mind Russia had no cause for complaint. Having summarily dismissed claims that article 59 could be sidestepped or ignored, the Foreign Secretary then maintained that 'Her Majesty's Government cannot recognise any amount of commercial inconvenience as furnishing a justification for a peremptory declaration of the Russian government on its own sole authority that this portion of the Treaty is to be regarded as no longer valid.' In spite of these stark criticisms of Russia, without the support of other Great Powers, Rosebery was restricted in how far he could go in admonishing Russia. He had to make do with verbal disparagement alone. Consequently, he could only make it clear that 'in no shape or form can Her Majesty's Government consent to associate themselves with the action of Russia. They do not desire to protest or appeal against, or denounce the step which has been taken; but they feel compelled to place on record their view of this transaction as a violation of the Treaty of Berlin.'[42]

Meanwhile, Russia continued to act in a way that was viewed in London as antagonistic, and by many as in contravention of international norms. Of particular umbrage was the *ukase* released by St. Petersburg on 11 July, which stated that Batum would be closed as a free port on 17 July. This was another breach with current international practice. Knowledgeable onlookers understood: '[that] it is usual to give several months notice of the closing of a free port. [For example,] Austria-Hungary in the case of Trieste and Fiume has allowed three years.' As *The Times* reported: 'the delay allowed to consigners of merchandise is absurdly short ... As Russia has pretended that her action was dictated by purely

[41] Rosebery to Morier (confidential, no. 156 A), 10 Jul. 1886, FO 181/676/1.
[42] Rosebery to Morier (confidential, draft), 10 Jul. 1886, CAB 37/18/38.

commercial considerations, this point has to be noted, for it constitutes a flagrant violation of commercial good faith.'[43] While this did not bring about much disruption for the government in London, it could cause losses to those few British businesses which used Batum. None the less, 'the other Powers continued to propose to take no notice of the transaction.'[44]

It was against such concerns that, on 13 July, Rosebery sent his main response to Giers, via Morier. It should be understood that in his retort it is evident that 'Rosebery did not accept Morier's telegraphed advice [from July 12] that any action on the Russian announcement should be (1) collective, that is made by all the Great Powers together, and (2) mild.'[45] This matters as it means that Rosebery went against the advice of his Prime Minister, a former Foreign Secretary and the current British Ambassador to Russia. Rosebery was plainly certain in his decision. It contained many of the points he had already raised. He maintained that the act was a clear breach of international law, and he quoted the London Protocol of 1871, which stated: 'it is an essential principle of the law of nations that no Power can liberate itself from the engagements of a Treaty, nor modify the stipulations thereof, unless with the consent of the signatory Powers by means of an amicable arrangement. That consent Russia does not even seek on the present occasion.' Rosebery also reiterated that, regarding the status of article 59: 'it cannot be denied that its embodiment in the Treaty placed it on the same footing any part of that instrument.' He further restated his assertion that there was nothing spontaneous about the article, arguing that its validity could not be cast aside. In addition, Rosebery repeated the fact that the free city status of Batum 'was the condition on which they [the British Plenipotentiaries had] assented to the acquisition of Batoum by Russia.' As a result, Rosebery stated that 'Her Majesty's Government cannot accept the view that this step on the part of Russia does not constitute an infraction of the

[43] *The Times,* 12 Jul. 1886, p. 5.
[44] Rosebery to Queen, 12 July 1886, Buckle (ed.), *Letters, Third Series,* Vol. 1, p. 161.
[45] Ramm, *Morier,* pp. 223 - 224.

Treaty of Berlin, of which, indeed, it obliterates a distinct stipulation.' The most significant part of this communication, and which had not been discussed with the Prime Minister, was the declaration that 'Great Britain is ready at all times and in all seasons to uphold that principle of the binding force and sanctity of international agreements.'[46] This was tough language, but deliberately ambiguous. The principle after all could be upheld by formal protests as much as by force of arms. By not giving a clear indication of his preferred methodology, Rosebery was ensuring that Russia would be deterred from going any further. This was a result of Russia's continued intransigence in the matter, and her unwillingness to work with Britain to find an amenable solution. It is clear, however, that Rosebery did not have Gladstone's support for any action regarding Batum, let alone threatening a Great Power over a port in the Black Sea. Such was Gladstone's contempt for such an idea, he even suggested that whoever 'asks Russia for compensation re Batoum she may get a heavy snub in reply.'[47] This indicates that Gladstone understood Britain's predicament. She had no European support; she could not send ships through the Dardanelles to the Black Sea as the Straits were still closed to all warships; and there was no realistic expectation that Britain could win a war against Russia. Rosebery too understood this, but he, unlike the Prime Minister, proved willing to use the threat of force in order to push Russia back. This was much the same tactic Gladstone had used during the Penjdeh crisis. Yet this time around, with only a Black Sea port under threat, the Prime Minister was only disposed to issue a protest and then move on. He viewed the matter as European and therefore of more importance to Germany and Austria-Hungary.

Rosebery's belligerence suggests that Batum represented more than just a Black Sea port to Britain. Since the Penjdeh crisis it had seemed to Morier, and perhaps therefore to Rosebery, that 'the point of all absorbing interest to both countries was the establishment of a

[46] Rosebery to Morier (no. 157), 13 Jul. 1886, FO 65/1255.
[47] Gladstone to Rosebery, 17 Jul. 1886, Rosebery MSS, MS 10023.

solid *modus vivendi* in Central Asia.'[48] This was an acceptable state of affairs for London, which sought to maintain the *status quo* in Central Asia as it was to its benefit. This idea of cooperation was supported by a report from St. Petersburg, which suggested that Giers' plan had 'been to restore to their full, the friendly relations between the two countries, so as to enable the two Governments to come to an understanding on all the great questions which were agitating or were likely to agitate Europe.'[49] Yet it became clear that once the question of Eastern Rumelia had been answered, contrary to all of Russia's demands, Russia had no reason not to follow her usual policy. British interests in Central Asia would now once again be threatened so as to make Britain more amenable to St. Petersburg's interests. Indeed, the result of the Bulgarian crisis was that Russia was less likely than ever to want to work with Britain in Central Asia. This explains Rosebery's decision to respond in such a tough manner; he could not afford to allow Russia to dictate terms regarding any facet of Central Asia.

Giers' retort was, at first glance, angry and shocked. This was evidenced by his answer to Rosebery's letter, in which he admonished his British opposite number: '[it was] clearly ... a Blue Book despatch, [and that] it will, throughout the length and breadth of Russia, go straight to the heart of every Russian and rankle there.' Giers pointed out that no other Power had cried foul of the abrogation. '[He] asked how it came to pass that no other Power except England saw the matter in the light we did.' Morier, who had delivered the message, could only respond : 'the other Powers all believed, or affected to believe, that the matter was only a continuation of the duel between Lord Beaconsfield [Benjamin Disraeli, former Prime Minister] and Prince [Alexander] Gorchakoff [former Russian Foreign Minister] at the Congress of Berlin.' This suggests that the Ambassador was sceptical of this explanation, but would not propose an alternative. Meanwhile, Giers was keen to press home the idea that there was a conspiratorial, anti-Russia tone to international affairs. He

[48] Morier (secret memorandum), 18 Jul. 1886, FO 65/1260.
[49] Morier to Rosebery (most secret, no. 253), 21 Jul. 1886, FO 65/1260.

suggested: '[it was] natural that everyone except Russia should be considered free to tear the Treaty of Berlin to pieces, when it suited their fancy or convenience.' This suggests that Russia was still angered by the result of the Eastern Rumelia crisis, which saw Russia's *Dreikaiserbund* partners' side with Britain and not her.

It is however important to note that Giers' response was twofold, and that the outraged rebuttal was just part of a broader plan. On the one hand, he threatened that 'this is the beginning of a terrible series of misfortunes for our two countries.' From a British perspective this could only be interpreted as further pressure being applied to Central Asia. On the other, Giers was also keen to state that 'all idea of hostility against England was foreign to his thoughts, and that the measure was not political, but an administrative and economical one.' This was the Foreign Minister making it clear that he wanted good relations with Britain, in spite of what he perceived as Rosebery making a terrible mistake in opposing the abrogation so forcefully. This suggests an attempt to draw a line in the sand, but only after Rosebery had been warned against making threats. From Morier's perspective this made more sense considering his knowledge of the Foreign Minister. After all, Giers had until this point been Britain's greatest ally in St. Petersburg. This implies that the Foreign Minister may have seen this abrogation as the lesser of two evils, particularly where Russia's response to the Eastern Rumelia crisis was concerned. Consequently, Giers would have expected Britain to have been irritated at the abrogation, for, as Morier put it, the act was designed to 'shake off a shackle imposed by England in the Treaty of Berlin.' He did also reiterate that the 'restrictions placed by the article in regard to Batoum were galling to [Russia's] national pride' and therefore needed to be altered.[50] However, it is also arguable that Rosebery's response was responsible for Giers wanting to bring this issue to an end; such an unexpected reply might have caused St. Petersburg to blink first.

[50] Morier to Rosebery (most secret, no. 253), 21 Jul. 1886, FO 65/1260.

Rosebery's response demonstrates his intention to be viewed as the calm, peaceful and moderate party. He commented: 'I could not understand why M[onsieur] de Giers should exhibit such pain and astonishment and dismay at a communication which he must have more or less expected.'[51] From Rosebery's perspective, he had highlighted to Giers that it was Russia which had broken international law; some retort must have been anticipated. Giers, on the other hand, saw himself as the more restrained man and had, in his own rejoinder, questioned why Britain was over-reacting to what was an administrative measure. Both men were trying to formulate a solution on their own terms.

As was to be expected, Giers' threat of ramifications played on the minds of those in London. There was a broad acknowledgement of the mischief that Russia could cause British India. But by the end of July it seemed: '[that] there is reason to hope from the tone of the last communications from Giers that the Russians will not aggravate the Batoum affair by resenting our plain spoken remonstrance's, and will endeavour to let the incident drop.'[52] The diplomatic quarrel caused by the abrogation had fizzled out, largely because both sides wished to avoid any further escalation of the dispute. This suited London as Rosebery's response had threatened to set Anglo-Russian diplomacy back by decades. When the Liberal Government was replaced by a Salisbury ministry in late July, followed by the abduction and then abdication of Prince Alexander in Bulgaria, the issue of Batum was almost forgotten. However, there were some politicians in London who were not willing to disregard the incident. Several remarks were made to Parliament regarding the matter. On 26 August Sir Richard Temple, the Conservative MP for the Evesham district of Worcestershire and a former Governor in India, enquired of the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir James Fergusson: 'whether Her Majesty's Government will take any further steps, in concert with other Powers, regarding the recent infraction of Treaties relating to the free port of

[51] Rosebery to Morier (private), 21 Jul. 1886, Morier MSS, Box 21.
[52] Kimberley to Dufferin (private), 30 Jul. 1886, Dufferin MSS, MSS/Eur/F/130/6.

Batoum, as shown in Lord Rosebery's despatch?'[53] Fergusson responded: 'Her Majesty's Government do not propose to carry the case beyond the position taken in Lord Rosebery's Despatch of July 3.'[54] Just as the Liberal Party had wanted to move on from this, so too did the Conservative government. Indeed, John Henniker Heaton, the MP (Conservative) for Canterbury, received much the same answer when he asked: 'what steps [does] Her Majesty's Government propose to take to obtain the judgment of the Signatory Powers to the Treaty of Berlin upon this violation of that Treaty, and of the solemn contract between the Czar of Russia and the other Powers, and to prevent a condition menacing the liberty of the Black Sea?'[55] The new government did not want to re-open old wounds that would undermine its own relationship with St. Petersburg. After all, this connection was based on the premise that Salisbury was a reliable international statesman.

Morier meanwhile, perhaps stirred by news of the continued interest in Parliament, and knowing as he did that Russia kept a keen eye on statements made in Parliament, wrote to the returning Prime Minister to explain the issue of Batum as he saw it. He warned that abrogating the port offered Russia substantive advantages, both in military terms and in how it was likely to stimulate Russia's trade; it was 'the port which connects Russia proper with Central Asia.' Yet Morier did take it upon himself to impress upon Salisbury the hollowness of Rosebery's complaints. He highlighted: '[how] the possession of Batoum alone would cut this connection [between Russia and her Central Asian interests], but this state of things will only last two years more – then the railroad will be finished between Vladikavkas and Petrovsk.'[56] Consequently, had Britain engaged in a conflict with Russia over Batum, it would soon have proven inconsequential for Central Asia would still have been under threat from Russian troops. Yet Morier did understand how Rosebery had sought to change the

[53] Sir R. Temple, HC, 26 Aug. 1886, *Hansard*, vol. 308, col. 548.
[54] Sir J. Fergusson, HC, 26 Aug. 1886, *Hansard*, vol. 308, col. 548.
[55] J. H. Heaton, HC, 31 Aug. 1886, *Hansard*, vol. 308, cols. 896 - 897.
[56] Morier to Salisbury (private), 15 Sept. 1886, Morier MSS, Box 24 A.

foreign policy stance of a Gladstone government. He considered: 'though Lord Rosebery "manfully strove to introduce a strain of "Jingo" blood" into Gladstone's government "he could not in the eyes ... of the Russians make it other than the war-at-no-price administration which had lowered the Union Jack to Russia at Penjdeh and to Germany on the coast of Africa".'[57]

This question over Batum offers a key insight into the Anglo-Russian antagonism. It demonstrates: '[how] the world is tightly interconnected. What happens in one interaction influences other outcomes as each state scrutinises the others behaviour for indications of interests, strengths and weaknesses.'[58] On the one hand, Batum was the result of Russia's failure in Eastern Rumelia and Britain's success. On the other, it was a demonstration of how a Russian action on the periphery of Europe could affect British strategic thinking, which by extension affected British India's defence. Morier summed up how interconnected Britain's Central Asia policy was with Europe: '[if Britain] intend[ed] to defend Constantinople in the Balkans, I very seriously believe that if we have made up our minds (which I have not) that India must be defended in Europe and that with the fall of Constantinople our Indian Empire must collapse.'[59] But Batum was an orchestrated event, a demonstration that Russia could affect British policy, both while her financial state was perilous and after the *Dreikaiserbund* had been weakened. That St. Petersburg was able to achieve this was not only revenge for Eastern Rumelia, but also a warning to British India and the British India Office of what it could achieve in Central Asia. This warning would reverberate across India and London, maintaining concerns about Russian intentions for Delhi; this was standard policy for St. Petersburg.

[57] Ramm, *Morier*, p. 233.
[58] R. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, (Princeton, 1976), p. 61.
[59]Morier to Salisbury (private), 15 Sept. 1886, Morier MSS, Box 24 A.

For Britain the loss of Batum was an inconvenience. With Russia now firmly established at the port, Britain could pursue a diversionary and attritional type of warfare only in the Baltic Sea. In abrogating article 59, Russia had not only infringed what many considered international law, but she had also significantly diminished Britain's ability to wage war on Russia, in defence of India or otherwise. It was also clear that, although Giers would insist that the decision to abrogate was a spur of the moment act, it appears too well thought out for it to be anything but planned. This is demonstrated both by the increasing fortification of Batum prior to the declaration, and the Foreign Minister's swift attempts to smooth out any international difficulties that had been caused. Giers' was aware that an abrogation of any article of the Treaty of Berlin could be met with anger by one or all of the signatories. He therefore acted accordingly, placating the powers as soon as the abrogation was declared. This made the affair particularly significant for Britain's more Russophobic policy-makers, in that it confirmed their assumptions about Russian intentions. This matter also confirmed Britain's strength *vís-à-vís* her rival and the significance of Europe for Anglo-Russian relations. What is more, while Britain was ultimately both unable and unwilling to 'go to war with Russia over the status of a Black Sea harbour ... [where] Britain had little or no material interests involved,' this incident gave Britain a further warning that she had to find a means of defending her Central Asian interests outside of Europe.[60] The spectre of a conflict set a new tone for future Liberal governments, with 'the wholly unexpected attack "with buttonless foil" from a Gladstone government – breaking the spell of the dream that anything could be "tried on", when the Liberals were in power.'[61] This was perhaps the greatest achievement of Rosebery's decision to stand against the abrogation.

[60]A. L. Kennedy, *Salisbury 1830 - 1903: Portrait of a Statesman* (London, 1953), p. 179.
[61] Ramm, *Morier*, p. 225.
*Romania had declared her independence from Ottoman Turkey after the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878), and was declared independent at the Congress of Berlin (1878). With a German prince, Prince Karl of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, as the elected ruler, there was little pressure St. Petersburg could apply on Bucharest.

In terms of Britain's broader strategy in Europe, it was now obvious that although the Balkan Peninsula was safe, with both Bulgaria and Romania* secure against Russian incursion, the Caucasus had become an even more difficult region for Britain to deal with. This was especially true now that Russia could enjoy the benefits of the port of Batum. One significant effect of this was the increased importance of Persia as a buffer for British India. Persia was much closer to Batum than Afghanistan, and offered a much easier route through to British India, so it offered many advantages should Tsar Alexander III seek to apply pressure on Britain in Central Asia. Nevertheless, the conclusion of this matter also heralded a much quieter phase in Anglo-Russian relations. This was due to many factors, one being that Giers did not want to pursue anti-British policies in Central Asia; Russia had become preoccupied with Europe in the wake of the *Dreikaiserbund* failing in the aftermath of the Bulgarian crises. In addition, with Salisbury at the helm Britain offered a more predictable and robust international partner that others could work with, unlike the distrusted Gladstone and unknown Rosebery.

Chapter 4

‘Nothing of importance to communicate from here’: 1887 – 1892

With the resolution of the Penjdeh incident, from 1887 Britain enjoyed a period of relative calm in Central Asia, Persian difficulties notwithstanding. This was a surprising turn of events.[1] However, Spencer Compton Cavendish, the Marquess of Hartington and leader of the Liberal Unionists, continued to fear Russian pretensions in Central Asia. He ‘strongly condemned the conduct of Russia, and said he greatly dreaded their attacking us in India,’ but this appeared to be the opinion of a minority. Indeed, ‘the Queen replied [to Hartington] that she had no fear for India, but had the greatest for Europe.’[2] This greater concern for the continent was a product of the growing coolness between Russia and Europe, which was itself a result of the ongoing Bulgarian crisis. This emergency was worsened by the mission of General Kaulbars, a Russian sent to Sofia to control the election of Prince Alexander’s successor. This angered Vienna and was the subject of widespread disapproval across Europe. To contain Russian ambitions in Bulgaria, Austria-Hungary threatened war if St.

[1] Thomas Otte, in his chapter ‘‘A Very Internecine Policy’: Anglo-Russian Cold War’s before the Cold War’, demonstrates that British foreign policy was by necessity much broader than her rivals. He discusses a link between Europe and Central Asia, although he focuses, it seems, upon the strategic importance of Turkey. This work, while it acknowledges the importance of Ottoman Turkey, views this problem as a managed issue, whereas the Anglo-Russian antagonism itself was unmanageable as it vacillated between Central Asia and Europe. Richard Shannon, in his work *The Age of Salisbury 1881 - 1902*, highlights how the period 1886 – 1892 was one in which the Marquis had the ability to conduct Britain’s foreign policy with very little oversight or obstruction. However, Shannon appears to focus more upon the European problems Britain faced by the end of Salisbury’s long administration rather than how this was a period of relative calm in part of Central Asia. Agatha Ramm, in her biographical work *Sir Robert Morier: Envoy and Ambassador in the Age of Imperialism 1876 - 1893*, highlights the difficult task which Morier had in St. Petersburg. With no parliamentary proceedings to report, he was forced to use Russian newspapers to try and define the national mood. Ramm argues that Morier wanted to cooperate with Russia in ‘civilizing’ Central Asia, and while this is true to a point, it needs to be remembered that Morier acted in the best interests of Britain, not in some sense of moral duty to a civilizing cause. In addition, Ramm seems to suggest that Morier thought that Salisbury, through his policy of staying close to the Triple Alliance, was almost defying Russia to attack India. Again, this is not the case. Rather, Salisbury understood that Russia did not want war, and respected only a firm hand, so he adopted policies that would enable Britain and Russia to avoid war rather than begin one.

[2] Queen to Salisbury, 25 Nov. 1886, G. E. Buckle (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria, Third Series, A selection from Her Majesty’s Correspondence and Journal between the years 1886 - 1901,* (3 vols., London, 1930), Vol. 1, pp. 224 - 226.

Petersburg attempted to occupy the country. In time the *Dreikaiserbund* would be allowed to lapse in consequence. Britain was now no longer isolated while Russia had been pushed to the periphery, leaving her diplomatically cut off from Europe. This bred insecurity at St. Petersburg, where the War Ministry already feared a German attack. Meanwhile, events had demonstrated to London that for Russia, European matters took precedence over Central Asia. If she was engaged on the continent, then she would leave British India alone. As Henry Nevill Dering, the embassy secretary in St. Petersburg, noted: 'the chief topic of discussion [in the Russian press] still continues to be the relations between Russia and Germany.'[3] This was welcome news. The effect therefore of the second Bulgarian crisis on Austro-Russian relations cannot be understated.

Additional good news for Britain was to follow. In the wake of Kaulbars return to St. Petersburg, it was reported: '[that] the Russian Minster of War [Pyotr Semyonovich Vannovsky] has ordered the erection of a number of forts along the Austrian frontier.'[4] Although this furthered Britain's agenda in Central Asia, as it tied up Russian resources away from India, it was bad from a European perspective. Russia's failure in the Balkans had affected St. Petersburg's policy by uniting the country against European pressure. Consequently, Morier warned: '[if] circumstances should force on war, then that war would not be an Emperor's war or a minister's war, but the national war so yearned for by the patriotic party with Constantinople as its objective.'[5] War was not Salisbury's aim; to the contrary, for the Prime Minister it was 'a matter of very great importance that no conflict should break out in the Balkan Peninsula; for Austria would probably be involved in it, and would probably be overthrown.' Moreover, it was clear to Britain that Vienna, a long-standing ally against Russia in the Balkans, would need Berlin's support during any conflict

[3] Dering to Iddesleigh (no. 3), 11 Jan. 1887, FO 65/1295.
[4] Iddesleigh to Morier (no. 15, draft), 12 Jan. 1887, FO 65/1294.
[5] Morier to Salisbury (no. 26), 26 Jan. 1887, FO 65/1295.

with St. Petersburg. However, at this time Germany was focused on France, which meant that her support would not be forthcoming in the short-term. As a result, there was every 'reason for gaining time; and for avoiding any policy which would be so obviously derogatory to the Tsar in the eyes of his subjects, that it would force him into war.'[6]

It is clear that the tensions between Russia and Germany must also be considered. On the one hand, Morier reported: '[that Russian opinion had become] very hostile to Germany which is undoubtedly regarded by the Slav party as the real enemy.'[7] Yet on the other, official Russian policy was more inclined to try and gain German support than to lose it. Morier understood: '[that] the real way for Russia out of her present and future difficulties, is at once to attack England in India by the seizure of Herat, one main reason in favour of this project being that it would cause satisfaction to Germany whilst being very gratifying to France.'[8] This should then bring St. Petersburg in from the cold before its isolation took hold, while it would harm Britain in Central Asia rather than upsetting the balance in Europe. Such a result would please Bismarck, without whose support the conflict could not be settled. However, Morier did not take into consideration how an Anglo-Russian war could have only two outcomes: a Russian victory would lead to Britain withdrawing towards a greater isolation, leaving Germany without the Royal Navy's protection in the Mediterranean from the French navy; a British victory, on the other hand, would leave Britain less dependent on German support, meaning Bismarck was no longer the arbiter of Europe. This meant that France alone would gain from this conflict. Therefore, 'if such a conflict ever broke out, Germany would be forced to choose between the two belligerents and thereby lose what leverage she had. It was, then, in Bismarck's interest to perpetuate the antagonism between

[6] Salisbury to Queen, 30 Jan. 1887, Buckle (ed.), *Letters, Third Series,* Vol. 1, pp. 264 - 266.
[7] Morier to Salisbury (no. 40), 6 Feb. 1887, FO 65/ 1295.
[8] Morier to Salisbury (no. 54), 20 Feb. 1887, FO 65/1315.

Britain and Russia, whilst ensuring that it would never escalate into a real war.'[9] This period therefore highlights just how inter-woven Central Asia was with Europe, though to Britain's relief there was no Russian attack on Herat.

In early 1887 there were several factors which threatened to disturb the peace of Europe. One continued to be the future of Bulgaria, while the other was the threat of a Franco - German war. This 'double (East-West) crisis' was however a manufactured one, designed to alleviate the tensions over Bulgaria where 'the real danger of war in Europe lay.' This explains Germany's reticence to support Austria militarily in the Balkans, for to have done so would have escalated the likelihood of war. Instead, 'Bismarck's decision to generate a war scare in the West was a deliberate attempt to divert the attention of the Powers away from the Balkans.' In order to demonstrate the seriousness of the anti-French mood in Germany, on 20 February 1887 the Triple Alliance between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy was renewed. As a result of this pressure, it was soon found that 'the prospect of a further reduction, possibly the complete crushing of French power, was a sufficient inducement for Russia to disengage over Bulgaria.' [10] Indeed, Morier reported: '[that there had been an] implied assurance that there was no intention of intervention to the detriment of Austria in the Balkans.'[11] For the moment, this left Russia in a curious position. It was noted: 'Russia, from whom the most immediate danger is expected, and from whom doubtless in the long run most danger is to be anticipated, is the one of the four great continental powers which is not at present making extraordinary preparations for war.'[12] Nevertheless, Russia could not allow France to be crushed by Germany; she feared that Berlin would turn its gaze towards St. Petersburg if it no longer had concerns over Germany's western border.

[9] T. G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind: The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1865 - 1914,* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 166.
[10] Otte, *Mind*, p. 176.
[11] Morier to Salisbury (secret, no. 70), 8 Mar. 1887, FO 65/1295.
[12] Morier to Salisbury (no. 56), 21 Feb. 1887, FO 65/1295.

Given Russia's preoccupation with Europe and her diversion of resources towards protecting her western borders, this was seen as an opportunity by her opponents in Central Asia. Arthur Nicolson, the British *charge d'affaires* in Tehran, informed Salisbury: 'there can be no doubt that the great body of Merv and Sarik Turcomans are ready to revolt from the Russian rule if a favourable opportunity offers.'[13] Any such upheaval would be of great benefit to British India, tying down Russian resources which could not then be used against Afghanistan. Sir Joseph West Ridgeway, the Chief Commissioner to Afghanistan, also pointed out: 'an[y] arrangement [between Afghanistan and Russia] was hopeless so long as European politics were in their present condition.'[14] Concerns that the Amir might be persuaded to change his allegiance could therefore be put to one side for the moment, a welcomed turn of events for British India.

In April, Morier highlighted how European matters continued to affect Central Asia: 'the serious diplomatic conflict that has arisen between Her Majesty's Government and that of Russia on the Bulgarian question has exercised a most unfortunate influence on the history of the Afghan delimitation.'[15] Indeed, the Penjdeh crisis, which had been to all intents and purposes brought to an end in 1885, was only formally concluded in July 1887 with a signed protocol. This suggests that at this moment in time Anglo-Russian relations in Central Asia were calm. However, only in May Ridgeway had tried to alert London that 'it should be borne in mind that the object of Russia is not at present the invasion of India, but the establishment of herself in a position whence she can control Afghanistan and use the Afghans as a weapon against us.'[16] In addition: 'there did seem to be a danger that the Russians would, by the intensive Russification of Bukhara and the impending extension of

[13] Nicolson to Salisbury (secret, no. 45), 5 Apr. 1887, FO 65/1317.
[14] Ridgeway to Sanderson, 15 Apr. 1887, FO 65/1317.
[15] Morier to Salisbury (no. 144), 25 Apr. 1887, FO 65/1296.
[16] Ridgeway to Salisbury (confidential memorandum, no. 3), 4 May 1887, FO 65/1318.

the Trans-Caspian railway [create a military line].'[17] Yet conditions had to allow for Russia to embark on such policies and then utilise them to their advantage. These were a peaceful Europe combined with strong finances; at this moment Russia enjoyed neither. This further demonstrates how Anglo-Russian relations fluctuated, both as a result of Central Asian matters and European.

It helped Britain's cause in Central Asia that Russia was opposed to either French or German hegemony in Europe. While there remained any credible possibility of conflict between these powers, St. Petersburg was unwilling to commit extra resources to Central Asia. Morier reported: 'I cannot sufficiently impress upon your lordship my conviction that the whole situation in Asia as well as in Europe is dominated by the resolve of the Russian government to keep its hands free, so long as the great duel between France and Germany still wears a threatening aspect.' There was therefore an expectation of a hiatus in Anglo-Russian tensions in Central Asia. Indeed, with the movement of Russian troops to her western border, it was explained: 'for any operation which could remotely involve the risk of collision with Great Britain, the disposable forces in the Trans-Caspian territory are utterly inadequate.' For the immediate future Russia would avoid risking any dispute with Britain. It was also understood in St. Petersburg that, whereas if Russia opened hostilities with a European nation the fighting would stay in Europe, if Russia attacked British interests in Central Asia, the fighting would not stay localised. The British would open fronts in Europe, both in the Baltic Sea and , if possible, the Black Sea, as well as Central Asia in order to wear down and tire out the fragile Russian economy. Morier was able to inform his superiors: 'the risk of collision in Asia would involve an equal risk in Europe, the Russian government

[17] G. J. Alder, *British India's Northern Frontier 1865 - 95.A Study in Imperial Policy,* (London, 1963), p. 157.

[realised that to press in Central Asia they] might find themselves plunged into the great Eastern War to the postponement of which all their efforts have of late been directed.'[18]

Meanwhile, there were further reasons for Britain to feel upbeat about Central Asia. One was that, in the Russian press, there was 'the idea which most undoubtedly at present prevails ... [was] ... that Russia should discard all her national playthings, whether in Central Asia or the Balkans, and keep her eyes fixed on the valleys of the Oder and the Rhine as the trying ground on which her fate and with it the fate of Europe will have to be decided.'[19] The idea of expanding the Russian Empire was deemed secondary to protecting Russia from the problems of war in Europe. Coupled with this were the reports that the Tsar was 'against an increase in the war budget for next year despite the understood fact that Russia is not in a position to take an aggressive part in a great European war until her army is in a very much more advanced state of preparation than it is at present.'[20] The problem for St. Petersburg was two-fold; while the Russian army was deemed unable to fight a European power with any chance of success, the Tsar was also aware that the imperial finances were not in a position to allow the necessary military build-up. Both these issues gave Britain some prospect that the Anglo-Russian antagonism in Central Asia had entered a period of relative calm.

With Russia seeking to avoid European complications, Tsar Alexander III refused to enter any more alliances with Austria-Hungary. He was still angry with Vienna over Bulgaria. The *Dreikaiserbund* had proven unsuited to Russia's needs. Instead, Alexander III signed the Reinsurance Treaty with Germany in June 1887, a secret agreement designed to compensate both sides for the failing relations between Austria-Hungary and Russia. This was meant to aid the maintenance of peace in Europe. Yet any goodwill that this treaty was meant to foster did not materialise. Meanwhile, it became clear that, for the time being,

[18] Morier to Salisbury (very confidential, no. 168), 11 May 1887, FO 65/1318.
[19] Morier to Salisbury (no. 184), 25 May 1887, FO 65/1297.
[20] Morier to Salisbury (private), 31 May 1887, Morier MSS, Box 23.

Russia would await developments in Europe: 'the present attitude of the Russian government ... [is] one of expectancy and of waiting on events, which they have no intention of abandoning unless outstanding circumstances should compel them to do so.'[21]

Morier used this period of quiet to push his agenda further of creating a more peaceful footing for Anglo-Russian relations. He suggested that liaising with the Foreign Ministry at St. Petersburg offered mutual benefits: 'whilst the [Afghan boundary] negotiations were still pending, the observation was made to me "if you obtain a favourable result, it ought to form the point of departure for an entirely new system of policy between the two countries – that of cooperation in lieu of antagonism." I need not add that this is very strongly the view of Monsieur de Giers.'[22] The ambassador was keen to persuade Russia's detractors that the Foreign Minister and his ministry in St. Petersburg were trustworthy and wanted peace. He informed London of a translated letter that had been sent from St. Petersburg to Austria-Hungary, and printed in the Vienna *Politische Correspondenz.* Morier attached 'considerable importance to this document,' stating that 'it was directly derived from official sources here, and that it truly represents the views of that portion of the St. Petersburg Foreign Office, with M[onsieur] de Giers at its head.' The document suggested that Russia, in particular those in the government loyal to Giers, or at least sympathetic to his views, sought not to alienate Britain but wanted to work with her. It argued: 'if then, the Russian government had displayed unmistakable goodwill in thus heartily cooperating with, and holding out its hand to Great Britain for this [Penjdeh] settlement, does it not follow that there must be a desire to draw nearer to England, and ameliorate the relations between the two Great Powers all along the line, and that, in regard to European politics no less than Asiatic?'[23] Morier agreed, for it was clear to him that Giers could be trusted to work in the interests of peace. None the less,

[21] Morier to Salisbury (no. 234), 4 Jul. 1887, FO 65/1297.
[22] Morier to Salisbury (no. 262), 27 Jul. 1887, FO 65/1321.
[23] Morier to Salisbury (secret, no. 268 B), 2 Aug. 1887, FO 65/1321.

as Morier stated, 'the *raison d'être* of Russia's approach upon India is to paralyse our action in Eastern Europe.' This was the policy of the Foreign Ministry and the War Ministry in St. Petersburg, but the ambassador made obvious the differences between these parties. Primarily, Morier viewed the resolution of the Penjdeh incident as a demonstration of the Russian Foreign Office gaining a decisive victory over the military party. This could, perhaps, herald a period of greater cooperation between London and St. Petersburg. Morier commented how, 'by the demarcated frontier, on which no possible doubt or uncertainty can arise, the civil power has effectually muzzled the military power.' He continued: '[while] the frontier indeed can always be crossed; intriguing can be carried on with the Ameer, but these things can only now be done with the knowledge and the responsibility of the Imperial Foreign Office, and therefore within sight and hearing of Downing Street.' For Morier this meant that, along the Russo-Afghan border at least, there would be much less chance of conflict. Furthermore, Morier used this as proof that Giers could be trusted: 'Russia had nothing to lose by leaving the frontier undefined, for such uncertainty offered no cause of disquiet for her, whilst to British India the continuance of the present state of things would have been a source of unceasing anxiety.'[24] That an agreement was reached demonstrates a willingness on Giers' part to come to an arrangement in Central Asia, irrespective of pressure to the contrary from the War Ministry.

None the less, in the Balkans it was evident that Russia was still seeking some form of control over Bulgaria. Although 'he [ambassador Staal] did not precisely state it, [he intimated] that the Russian gov[ernmen]t were pressing the Porte to intervene in Bulgaria, but that his efforts had not hitherto been attended with success.'[25] Throughout this period Russia's unresolved claims in the Balkans remained important to her policies. For Morier, this focus upon Europe offered an opportunity to end all Anglo-Russian strife in Central Asia.

[24] Morier to Salisbury (secret, no. 268 B), 2 Aug. 1887, FO 65/1321.
[25] Salisbury to Morier (no. 225, draft), 10 Aug. 1887, FO 65/1294.

He sought a local arrangement in order to give Britain some room for manoeuvre. But Salisbury informed the Ambassador: 'I fear Her Majesty's Government cannot attempt with safety a closer understanding with the Russian Government.'[26] The Prime Minister was of the opinion that 'for as long as Russia was in a strong position, an agreement with her was not a practicable option.'[27] He also appreciated that St. Petersburg had a different form of governance, and was in the habit of pushing the boundaries of what was deemed acceptable. Further, any pact could not be relied upon as the next person to have the Tsar's ear might suggest to him that he ought to cancel any deal.

While Anglo-Russian tensions in Central Asia appeared to be quietening down in the wake of the Afghan boundary agreement, there remained some trepidation in Britain that a war with Russia may still occur. Indeed, it is clear that the War Office continued to prepare for hostilities, which demonstrates how passing the ministry expected this period of calm to be. As General Sir Garnet Wolseley (later 1st Viscount Wolseley), Adjutant-General of the Forces at the War Office, explained to Major-General John Ardagh, the assistant Adjutant-General: 'in the event of a war with France it would be essentially necessary for us to stop all navigation through it [Suez Canal], and if at war with Russia it would be of immense importance to us to keep it open.'[28] The Suez Canal was vital to British India's defence as it was the quickest route by which extra troops could be sent. Russia was the only adversary in Central Asia that may require Britain to send additional forces to the region. Morier on the other hand did not agree with the War Office, and was confident that this calm would last, at

[26] Salisbury to Morier (no. 237), 19 Aug. 1887, FO 181/685.
[27] T. G. Otte, ''A Very Internecine Policy': Anglo-Russian Cold Wars before the Cold War', C. Baxter, M. L. Dockrill, K. Hamilton (eds.), *Britain in Global Politics, From Gladstone to Churchill*, (Basingstoke and New York, 2013), Vol. 1, p. 34.
[28] Wolsesley to Ardagh (confidential), 29 Aug. 1887, Ardagh MSS, PRO 30/40/2.

least in the short term. He maintained: '[for Russia] everything fades before that terrible conflict between Germany and France which it would be absurd to suppose can be put off.'[29]

By November 1887 Morier's confidence had, however, been dealt a blow. It was now apparent that the threat of war in Europe had subsided. The Ambassador considered: 'it is impossible ... not to see that the foundations of a system have been laid which might indefinitely postpone the breaking out of that general war, the fear of which haunts every country in Europe.' The Triple Alliance, coupled with the first Mediterranean Agreement, had left 'Germany, Austria and Italy, defensively allied against attack from East and West; [with] Italy and England united for the defence of Turkey.'[30] The threat of a Franco-German war had therefore been nullified as France did not have the strength to fight three powers at once, and Bismarck had no interest in provoking war with Paris. With the European situation less volatile, St. Petersburg's attention returned to Central Asia. This occurred in a number of ways. An issue for British India was the southwest migration of Russian settlers. Morier established that while there was no overt threat of military invasion, there remained the risk of Russia 'colonis[ing] the oasis of Merv with Russian families.' Merv had been 'recognised by Napoleon I as commanding the passage to India and as affording the only solid basis of operations for a military empire in Central Asia.'[31] The oasis was therefore of a paramount strategic importance. The issue for British India was that Russian families would be followed by Russian troops charged with maintaining their safety, while various forms of infrastructure required for survival were also built. This amount of Russian activity near the border with Afghanistan was a security risk for Britain.

Europe, however, was far from calm. The Reinsurance treaty did not lead to better Russo-German relations. On the contrary, the German government's refusal to underwrite

[29] Morier to Salisbury (no. 325), 21 Sept. 1887, FO 65/1298.
[30] Morier to Salisbury (confidential, no. 364), 2 Nov. 1887, FO 65/1299.
[31] Morier to Salisbury (no. 382), 16 Nov. 1887, FO 65/1299.

any Russian loans on the Berlin Stock Exchange, the so-called *Lombardverbot*, and the subsequent imposition of tariffs on Russian grain exports to Germany soured Russo-German relations. In addition, 'relations between Germany and Russia continued to deteriorate ... [as] the Russian press continued to hammer away at Germany and Austria for their presumed intrigues against Russia in securing the election of Ferdinand and stiffening Bulgarian resistance.'[32] It was as a consequence of Russia's continued strained relations with her erstwhile conservative allies in Europe that those with France improved. After all, following the *Lombardverbot* the French began to supply what Germany's banks would not: 'within a short time Paris had taken Berlin's place as Russia's chief capital market,' and this would prove pivotal over the coming years.[33] Furthermore, on 12 December 1887 the Second Mediterranean Agreement was signed by Britain, Italy and Austria-Hungary, in response to the Russian navy's build up in the Black Sea and continued interest in Sofia and Constantinople. While the First Mediterranean Agreement, signed 12 February 1887 between Britain and Italy, had been written to maintain the *status quo* in the Mediterranean Sea, ostensibly against both France and Russia, the second was more specifically aimed against Russia. This suggests a continuing, if not growing, suspicion of Russia in spite of her peaceful remonstrances. It was also clear that 'Salisbury undoubtedly welcomed it as a step towards strengthening ties with the Triple Alliance.'[34] It should not be forgotten that, although Germany was not a signatory of either Mediterranean Agreement, she was very much a silent partner if not chief instigator. Nevertheless, although there was considerable excitement in Europe, this does not necessarily suggest a lack of international stability. To the contrary, the bringing together of the *status quo* powers meant that the 'hungry powers', as

[32] O. Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany*, (3 vols., Oxford, 1990), Vol. 3, p. 269.
[33] A. Dorpalen, 'Tsar Alexander III and the Boulanger Crisis in France', *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (June, 1951), p. 131.
[34] T. G. Otte, ''Floating Downstream?': Lord Salisbury and British Foreign Policy 1878 - 1902', T. G. Otte (ed.), *The Makers of British Foreign Policy from Pitt to Thatcher*, (Chippenham, 2002), p. 111.

Salisbury referred to Russia and France, had been isolated and could not disrupt international politics. This benefited Britain in Central Asia.

It would be accurate to suggest that 'the whole structure of Salisbury's foreign policy since the Mediterranean Agreements of 1887 depended upon the maintenance of friendly relations with Germany.'[35] This was designed to apply pressure on Russia in Europe, which would halt her forward movements in Central Asia. It must also be considered that 'the [British] realignment with the German-led continental bloc was meant to make Russia's road to the Bosphorus as long and difficult as possible.'[36] The Balkans remained a key strategic interest for Britain in her defence of India. None the less, a significant component of Britain's broader strategy was an overt 'effort to put pressure on Russia's weak finances.'[37] Britain's efforts to apply pressure on multiple fronts appeared to have paid dividends by December. Lord Randolph Churchill, on his unsanctioned visit to St. Petersburg, commented: 'he [Giers] talked about the Afghan frontier, and expressed his belief that the settlement was a durable one, and that Russia had attained her limits in that part of the world, and had no reason or desire not to keep within them.'[38] None the less, it was soon made clear that British attempts to corral Russia had only a limited affect, if any at all. It was, rather, events in Europe that caused St. Petersburg to adapt its Central Asian policy.

In January 1888 it became clear that Russia sought to utilise Britain in Europe again. Arthur Hardinge, second secretary at the Constantinople embassy, reported: 'the Russian amb[assador] informed me today that his government were desirous of removing the germs of danger that might still exist in the Bulgarian question, and that the Czar counted on the assistance of H[er] M[ajesty's] Gov[ernment] in this effort for the maintenance and assurance

[35] G. N. Sanderson, 'The Anglo-German Agreement of 1890 and the Upper Nile', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 78, No. 306 (Jan., 1963), p. 51.
[36] Otte, 'Internecine', p. 32.
[37] Ibid., p. 33.
[38] Lord R. Churchill to Prince of Wales, 29 Dec. 1887, Buckle (ed.), *Letters, Third Series*, Vol. 1, pp. 367 - 369.

of peace.' In reply, Hardinge had commented: '[we] desired nothing more earnestly than to remove from European politics all possible causes of war. But in respect to Bulgaria our course must be guided by the requirements of existing treaties, as well as by due consideration of the wishes of the population.'[39] This was typical of British official views. London wanted peace, and to secure Bulgaria against Russia, but not at the cost of enabling Russia to focus solely on her Central Asian concerns. In spite of Britain's unwillingness to cooperate, in February Morier stated that the Tsar and Giers 'are so exclusively absorbed by the present European situation that little if any time had been found to enter upon the discussion of any other subject.'[40] No news in Central Asia was preferable. In a sense, the Anglo-Russian antagonism in Central Asia had been paused. Nevertheless, with Russian troops so far from St. Petersburg and officers keen to return home as heroes, there always remained the prospect of unexpected clashes. As a means to limit this, Sir Phillip Currie, the Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, suggested: '[that] if [the] Russians hint at annexation of Herat, he [Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, the Minister at Tehran] ought to give them to understand that in his opinion any attempt in that direction would, as a matter of course, lead to immediate war with England.'[41] None the less, in reality Britain would treat each incident on its own merits. Some incursions might result in war, others would not. Currie, however, wanted to ensure that Russian officers would be too afraid of causing a war to risk overstepping their orders. British India, and therefore Central Asia, was important enough for Britain to risk war with Russia, and therefore it did not matter how quiet it seemed. There was always an element of risk.

The shift in Russia's military stance towards a defensive line on her western border continued in 1888. Captain James Wolfe Murray, the Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General,

[39] Hardinge to Salisbury (no. 5 A, draft), 9 Jan. 1888, FO 65/1328.
[40] Morier to Salisbury (no. 78), 29 Feb. 1888, FO 65/1347.
[41] Philip Currie (note), 25 Apr. 1888, FO 65/1348.

who oversaw intelligence on Russia, Central and South Asia and the Far East, noted: '[Russia's] enormous bodies of troops are maintained much more for the protection of her frontiers against her western neighbours.' This benefited Britain: 'the number of troops available in Asiatic Russia is comparatively small, and, therefore, if there be any intention of threatening the British possessions in India by operations on an extensive scale, considerable reinforcements must be drawn from European Russia.' This would take time, resources and be noticeable, allowing British India a chance to prepare. It was an additional advantage to Britain that this scenario was not likely to change in the immediate future: 'it may be assumed that, under the present condition of European politics, Russia will not withdraw any of the Army corps quartered in the immediate vicinity of the German and Austrian frontiers.'[42] As a result of this state of affairs, Salisbury commented: 'very little news comes from abroad now.'[43] Moreover, Russia's defensive posture had made it clear that 'she had made up her mind to look on passively at the *status quo* and await the turn of the wheel rather than provoke a war to which the Czar is personally averse, and for which his military and financial advisors know he is not prepared.'[44] It was Britain's gain that Russia was as risk averse in Central Asia as London was. It allowed British India some respite, though how long it would last could not be known.

By July, however, it was Britain's concern that the difficulties in Europe were about to be resolved. This would be to London's detriment. Regarding the improving Russo-German relations, Dering reported suggestions in the Russian press of 'the future isolation of England in consequence of the rapprochement between Germany and Russia, concluding with the remark that the policy of Her Majesty's Government is reaping only what it has

[42] Captain J. Wolfe Murray (memorandum), 'Russia's Power to concentrate troops in Central Asia', 4 May 1888, FO 65/1349.
[43] Salisbury to Queen, 8 May 1888, Buckle (ed.), *Letters, Third Series*, Vol. 1, pp. 152 - 153.
[44] Morier to Salisbury (most secret, no. 212), 13 Jun. 1888, FO 65/1331.

sown by its feelings of enmity to Russia.'[45] It was to be expected that some in Russia, notably the War Ministry, would seek to drive a wedge between Britain and Germany; Salisbury had done just the same in seeking to break the *Dreikaiserbund.* Nevertheless, the possibility of Russia and Germany drawing closer together led to more discussions about how Britain could curb Russia's military in Central Asia. British India's period of calm was considered likely to be at an end. Lieutenant-Colonel Ivor Herbert, the military *attaché* at St. Petersburg, suggested: 'the possibility of completely severing the Russian military line of communication to Central Asia, if England could temporarily possess herself of a steamer on the Caspian which would be the superior in speed of the other steamers on that sea.'[46] None the less, Russia's planners seem to have misread Britain's willingness to defend India. Herbert noted: 'in dealing with the Afghan or Indian question, it is a circumstance worthy of note that Prince Dondoukoff-Korsakoff [former Governor-General of Bulgaria] , like the authors of schemes for the military invasion of India, appears to assume that the occupation of Herat would be accomplished by circumstances leading to the acceptation of humiliating terms by England.' Yet it was the case that while Herat might be occupied 'without England having suffered a military defeat in Asia, it does not follow that England would accept the position and Russia's terms without something more than a diplomatic protest.'[47] There was therefore some confidence in Britain that any Russian attack could be repelled.

For Britain there was a correlation between St. Petersburg's more stable relations with Europe, and Russia's adoption of a more aggressive foreign policy. Indeed, Morier informed London that St. Petersburg had developed 'the idea of eventually pushing forward to the conquest of Constantinople via Batoum, the Black Sea, and the Bosphorus.' This had 'replaced the plan of doing so through the Balkan states,' which was a direct consequence of

[45] Dering to Salisbury (no. 241), 7 Jul. 1888, FO 65/1331.
[46] Law to Drummond Wolff (secret), 19 Jul. 1888, FO 65/1351.
[47] Lieutenant-Colonel Ivor Herbert to Mr. Dering, 22 Aug. 1888, FO 65/1460.

both Russia's failure in Bulgaria and success in Batum. This suggests that Britain's 'realignment with the German-led continental bloc [which] was meant to make Russia's road to the Bosphorus as long and difficult as possible' had proven successful.[48] As a result, Salisbury was able to persuade the Queen that there was 'no reason to think that England runs at present any special danger of being isolated,' despite Russia's machinations.[49] Nevertheless, there were ramifications for Britain in Central Asia. Morier warned: 'all her [Russia's] movements in Central Asia, and on the Persian and Afghan frontiers are made not so much with a view to consolidate her own position in her newly acquired provinces, as to create there a basis for further aggressive operations against our Indian population whenever the time may appear to her to be fitting to make a strong diversion in that quarter to assist her designs on the Turkish Empire in Europe.'[50] It was still understood, however, that this hawkish plan of the Russian War Ministry did not take into account Russia's financial difficulties at home. These alone ensured that she could not attempt to seize Constantinople. Furthermore, it was soon evident that Russia's period of stability with Europe would, at this time, be only brief. This was made clear in November when it was reported: 'at the present moment Europe is disturbed by the transfer of Russia's forces from the East to Warsaw and the Austrian frontier.' It was apparent to Morier that, even while European tensions waxed and waned during this period, there was a distinct line between Russia in Europe and Russia in Central Asia. Consequently, Morier showed little sympathy for those who anticipated a Russian attack on Afghanistan: 'it seems a pity that they [the authorities at Herat] cannot be made to understand that a sudden and unexpected raid upon Herat is as completely outside the range of practical politics as a sudden and unexpected raid upon Dover by a French army, so long as the Russian government know, as they do at present, that such an attack means war with England.' In order for Russia to threaten Britain in Central Asia: 'she [Russia] must

[48] Otte, 'Internecine', p. 32.
[49] Salisbury to Queen, 25 Aug. 1888, Buckle (ed.), *Letters, Third Series,* Vol. 1, pp. 436 - 438.
[50] Morier to Currie (private), 4 Oct. 1888, FO 65/1332.

have settled her accounts with her western neighbours, one way or another, before she can even dream of taking it in hand & must have either emerged victorious from a war of giants, or have been beaten out of all her present western entrenchments.'[51] Morier understood that for St. Petersburg to apply pressure on British India, she first needed peace in Europe.

None the less, although there was no danger of Russia invading Afghanistan, this did not mean that there was no Russian activity in the region. In January 1889, Major Herbert Sawyer of the Indian Army reported that, during the previous year: 'the Russians in Asia have in no way abated that steady activity on their borders and beyond. No overt act of aggression can be reported, but signs of development, consolidation, and augmentation of moral influence is everywhere to be seen.'[52] While irritating, ministers in London were not too perturbed since Russia's military policy continued to point westwards. However, whereas in previous years Russia had spent less money on her military than the other great powers, in 1889 St. Petersburg reversed this. It was disquieting for all that 'generally the [Russian] military budget may be said to be steadily increasing.' Nevertheless, it was reassuring for Britain that this increase appeared to be aimed against Europe. This was deduced because 'the most considerable increase is on account of the personnel of the army' rather than the navy. As the strength of European forces lay predominantly on their respective armies, an increase in the Russian army implied an intention to threaten the continental powers. Supporting evidence of this altered policy was the 'steady increase under the head of artillery which must be attributed to the increased number of horsed guns in field batteries, and to the arming of the now almost completed system of fortifications on the western frontier and coasts.' This course of action reflected the multiple threats to Russia's European interests. Yet a consequence of St. Petersburg's policy shift was that her efforts against Britain appeared diluted. However, 'the naval estimates ... [did] show a steady decrease of the

[51] Morier to Salisbury (secret, no. 407), 28 Nov. 1888, FO 65/1355.
[52] Major Sawyer, 4 Jan. 1889, FO 65/1377.

expenditure on "personnel" and a counter balancing increase in the items of "ship building" and "dockyards",' which suggests that while the numerical size of the navy was decreasing the ships being built were larger and more formidable.[53] This does therefore suggest some determination to threaten the Royal Navy. This menace contributed to the adoption, in May 1889, of the 'Two-Power-Standard' by Britain, which committed the government to provide for a Navy stronger than its two closest naval rivals combined. In reality: 'the Admiralty and the navalists regarded "equality in fighting power" as meaning not a fleet "equal in numbers" to the combined fleets of France and Russia, but one "equal to beating them," which, it was held, required a superiority in numbers.[54] 'The Naval Defence Act of 1889 [of which the Two-Power-Standard was a part] signalled a clear awareness of Britain's determination to defend its capital world interest, which was its command of the oceans and guarantee of freedom for its sea-borne commerce.'[55] It must also be considered that this Act was an attempt by Salisbury to loosen Britain's dependence on Bismarck's Germany.

Russia's difficulties in Europe, combined with Britain's communicated determination to defend Afghanistan, meant that, as Morier reported: 'the last thing the Russian government dream of is to act on the offensive against Abdul Rahman unless he attacks them which he is hardly likely to do.'[56] Britain had already ensured that the Amir could not provoke Russia, as he had given London all authority over his foreign policy in return for financial support. The Amir was, however, impossible to predict. Later the same month Morier recounted: '[how he had] found M[onsieur] de Giers today for the first time seriously preoccupied with the news received from Central Asia ... [it was] beyond a doubt that [the] Ameer of Afghanistan had ...

[53] Herbert to Morier (no. 5), 23 Jan. 1889, FO 65/1360.
[54] A. J. Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era 1880 - 1905*, (London, 1972), p. 106.
[55] R. Shannon, *The Age of Salisbury 1881 - 1902*, (London, 1996), p. 292
[56] Morier to Salisbury (cipher telegram), 22 Feb. 1889, FO 65/1377.

[assumed] the red mantle, symbolical of the holy war.'[57] Russian policy was therefore altered to meet this potential threat. Dmitri Rudolf Peacock, the British vice-consul at Batum, conveyed: 'the rumour regarding movements of troops towards the afghan frontier, tho[ugh] greatly exaggerated was not altogether without foundation.' Perhaps more alarming was Peacock's report that 'Gen[eral] Komaroff, the Governor of the Transcaspian, had received telegraphic instruction from St. Petersburg, to place all Transcaspian troops on a war footing and to concentrate a certain force near the Afghan boundary line.' Nevertheless, it is clear that this was a show of force for deterrence purposes rather than of intent to attack. This explanation is given credence by Peacock's revelation that it was 'admitted by the more considerate and competent local officials, that immediate military action in Central Asia are not desirable on account of various serious drawbacks to wh[ich] the same w[oul]d be subject at present and that time therefore should be gained at all events.'[58] So long as Russia was not attacked, St. Petersburg had no reason to strike at Afghanistan.

Confusion as to Russia's tactics in Europe, however, remained. In April, Morier was again allaying fears of a pre-emptive Russian attack on the Balkans: 'as I have repeated *ad nauseum* in my previous correspondence, I am convinced that the Russian government would at present, for their own sakes and for the purposes of their own policy, view with profound apprehension any serious movement in any portion of the Balkan states.' He feared that any crisis in the Balkans might escalate to general war, and so sought to calm matters. He did, after all, appreciate how any suggestion of Russian aggression near Constantinople would be clouded by London's misgivings about Russia. None the less, the ambassador was not blind to St. Petersburg's underhand policies. He asserted: 'I do not believe that a really serious movement in these states [Montenegro, Macedonia, Servia, Romania] is likely to take place otherwise than with the secret connivance of the Russian Government, and I therefore, in the

[57] Morier to Viceroy (confidential telegram, no. 29), 28 Feb. 1889. FO 65/1377.
[58] Peacock to White (confidential), 9 Mar. 1889, FO 65/1378.

absence, as I believe, of any such connivance, cannot but regard the alarm of some of my colleagues as exaggerated.'[59]

Morier was not alone in his opinion that Russia offered no immediate threat to British India. The Director of Military Intelligence, Major-General Henry Brackenbury, stated: 'we do not hesitate to express our opinion that Russia will not, under such conditions as regards numbers, distance, and physical difficulties, dare to attempt the invasion of India from her present base on the Transcaspian railway and the Upper Oxus.'[60] In addition, Wolseley counselled caution against over-reacting to Russian moves in Central Asia. He considered: 'if it were laid down that we were to carry out this scheme [of moving troops to British India's borders] whenever a Russian army marches upon Herat, Russia would only have to tickle us on that side during any European complication to ensure our being rendered hopelessly powerless in all other parts of the world.'[61] There were then several senior voices attempting to push British policy beyond the simplistic assumption that Russia had the singular goal of invading British India. Indeed, Russia would not, and could not, have sought a campaign against Britain at this time. Such were the financial difficulties in Russia that Morier informed London of 'General Obrucheff's [Russia's Chief of General Staff] report to the Emperor on the defenceless state of the Russian frontier, and to the persistent rumours that Russia was about to contract a war loan to meet the deficiencies to which attention was called.'[62]

As animosity towards Russia increased in Europe, it was clear St. Petersburg was under pressure. It was evident that Russian security was considered to be at risk: 'His Excellency [Giers] said, in view of the ever increasing armaments in the West, and especially

[59] Morier to Salisbury (very confidential, no. 123 A), 6 Apr. 1889, FO 65/1361.
[60] Brackenbury and Newmarch (secret memorandum), 19 Aug. 1889, WO 32/6349.
[61] Wolseley (secret memorandum, no. 22), 25 Aug. 1889, WO 32/6349.
[62] Morier to Salisbury (secret, no. 313), 14 Oct. 1889, FO 65/1363.

those of Austria-Hungary, and of the wholly exposed character of the Russian frontier on the Austrian side, it would be impossible to refuse to listen to the emphatic and unanimous opinion of the military authorities.'[63] This was Giers' way of warning Britain that the military party was now in the ascendant at St. Petersburg; and that he could not seek to stand against them for fear of appearing anti-Russian. This perhaps gives some explanation as to why Morier, in contradiction of many of his previous reports, suggested: 'Russia is bent on creating an utopia of her own within the ring fence of her Asiatic annexations by the introduction of the *Pax Romana* within her own dominions, the establishment of order in lieu of chaos, the advantages of railways and all the other great engines of civilization.'[64]

Nevertheless, even as the War Ministry began to assert itself, Giers did have one senior ally in St. Petersburg. Ivan Alekseyevich Vyshnegradsky, the Finance Minister, sought both to curtail the power of the War Ministry and stabilise Russia's finances. He was 'a powerful ally of [Monsieur] de Giers and supporter of his policy of peace.'[65] To achieve this, he managed to restrict the military party by limiting the funds that they received each year. As Morier informed Salisbury: 'it appears that the Finance Minister feels so sure of a surplus during the next five years, that he proposes to let the war minister have the money he requires not in one sum but divided into five rates to be paid year by year for those five years out of ordinary income.' Morier continued that, 'however disagreeable it was to Monsieur Vyshnegradsky to have to give money for warlike purposes, the mere fact of distributing over five years ... would contrast favourably with the action of those powers who were making loans to furnish themselves with these weapons in feverish haste and would be equivalent to a pledge of Russia's peaceful intentions for at least five years as no country could begin a war

[63] Morier to Salisbury (secret, no. 313), 14 Oct. 1889, FO 65/1363.
[64] Morier to Salisbury (very confidential, no. 330), 25 Oct. 1889, FO 65/1379.
[65] A. Ramm, *Sir Robert Morier: Envoy and Ambassador in the Age of Imperialism 1876 - 1893*, (Oxford, 1973), p. 199.

when half armed.'[66] The War Ministry could therefore not begin any aggressive actions, against a Great Power at any rate, for at least five years. It was considered that by this time Russian politics, and indeed European politics at large, would have altered. The policy of Vyshnegradsky contributed to Europe's continued peace, as it was noted: 'the extraordinary stillness in the political world has only been ruffled by the official admission of the Bulgarian loan on the Vienna Stock Exchange.'[67]

Despite Vyshnegradsky's apparent success in helping to maintain the peace in Europe, by January 1890 Morier was troubled. He was unsure 'how to reconcile the constant reports from Vienna and Berlin of the ever increasing armaments in the western provinces of Russia with the facts elicited here that no dislocations on a large scale had taken place of Russian troops from east to west.'[68] This was no doubt symptomatic of Russia's growing estrangement from the Germanic powers, and provides clues as to the prevalence of anti-Russian suspicion in those capitals. In addition, the difficulties which had been occurring in the Berlin court since the accession of Kaiser Wilhelm II came to a head when the young monarch forced his Chancellor to leave office. Concerning 'the retirement of Prince Bismarck', Morier reported, 'two opposite feelings are combined – joy at the fall of a great man, who though he kept the peace, was felt to be no real friend of Russia, and uneasiness as to what may happen next.'[69] With Bismarck gone, there was now uncertainty about what direction German foreign policy might take; in response, it was reported that 'the Russian Government are anxious to double the [railway] lines to the Austrian frontier, and also to have in their hands the line to the German frontier.'[70]

[66] Morier to Salisbury (most confidential, no. 369), 27 Nov. 1889, FO 65/1363.
[67] Morier to Salisbury (no. 380), 11 Dec. 1889, FO 65/1363.
[68] Morier to Salisbury (secret, no. 14), 9 Jan. 1890, FO 65/1381.
[69] Morier to Salisbury (no. 86), 29 Mar. 1890, FO 65/1381.
[70] Eliot (most confidential, memorandum), 29 Mar. 1890, FO 65/1381.

Uncertainty in Europe continued to ensure relative calm in Central Asia. Such was the state of affairs on the continent that Salisbury commented: 'there seems still an utter absence of movement all over Europe. There are several clouds on the horizon, and any day one of them may rise, but they are very motionless now.'[71] To this end, Morier identified: 'it is so clearly not in the interests of Russia to excite disorder on the Afghan frontier that I think we may assume as probable that the Russians would do their best to prevent a rising under Ishak Khan,' a would-be challenger to the Amir's throne.[72] Under normal circumstances, it could be expected that Russia would encourage any threat to the Amir's authority as a means to undermine Britain. Yet with Europe seemingly on the edge of conflict, St. Petersburg would not support any threat to the *status quo.* Strangely, European difficulties meant that Britain's and Russia's Central Asian policies had come into a temporary alignment. None the less, the Prime Minister seemed perturbed. As Viscount Cross, the Secretary of State for India, wrote to the Viceroy of India, Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, the 5th Marquess of Lansdowne: 'Lord Salisbury takes rather a gloomy view of matters for the immediate future: the bad health of the Amir of Afghanistan, the difficulties of the succession; - the same difficulties in Persia, should anything happen to the Shah; and the political strength of the War Department in Russia as against the Emperor.'[73]

Meanwhile, it appeared that the Prime Minister had reason to be suspicious of Germany. Audley Charles Gosling, the Embassy Secretary at St. Petersburg, remarked: 'it is thought possible that Germany may not be indisposed to bid for Russia's friendship, and to *coquette* [flirt] with her as she has *coquetted* with other powers.' A strong Russo-German bond would have been an anathema to Britain, for it would have given St. Petersburg the security in Europe it needed to focus on Central Asia. However, Gosling did offer some

[71] Salisbury to Queen, 7 Apr. 1890, Buckle (ed.), *Letters, Third Series,* Vol. 1, pp. 591 - 592.
[72] Morier to Salisbury (no. 96), 2 Apr. 1890, FO 65/1393.
[73] Cross to Lansdowne, 16 May 1890, Lansdowne MSS, MSS EUR.D/558/3.

reassurance: 'there is every reason for doubting any intention or desire on the part of the Czar to encumber himself for the present with foreign alliances.'[74] Irrespective of any suggestions of a Russo-German treaty, Salisbury similarly had no interest in an alliance with Russia. In a private letter he wrote: 'I do not say that it is not wise to ask for an agreement; but it would not be at all wise to trust to it if obtained. The Russians are deceptive in the same way that they are aggressive.' Such reluctance was born out of experience. The Russian government had made a habit of reneging on written agreements, or at least on certain aspects of treaties, such as article 59 of the Berlin Treaty. Furthermore, Salisbury commented: 'I never believed in an agreement with Russia – not because I doubted the value of such an agreement if honestly carried out, but because I thought the light of the past sufficient to show that cooperation of the most general kind was the utmost that was to be expected.' While such an opinion hints at some level of scepticism, the Prime Minister did also appreciate that Alexander III was in a difficult position. He noted: '[the Tsar] does not tell his officers to lie or to invade territory that does not belong to him ... but when they lie, or encroach, he has to approve what they have done & to accept all the responsibility for their acts.'[75] These acts, which Salisbury understood were made by Russia's generals independent of St. Petersburg, were the source of much of the enmity between Britain and Russia. It was the unpredictability of these actions that made any understanding between Russia and Britain near impossible.

By July it was Russia's turn to be concerned. Britain and Germany had signed the Heligoland-Zanzibar agreement, and this 'understanding ... entirely altered the views of the Russian Government. They had now arrived at the conviction that England had entered on the path of amicable agreements and compromises in the interests of peace. This disposition had hitherto been doubted by Russia.'[76] Yet the agreement was not an alliance. Rather it was an

[74] Gosling to Salisbury (confidential, no. 145 A), 19 May 1890, FO 65/1382.
[75] Salisbury to Drummond Wolff (private), 27 May 1890, Salisbury MSS 3M/A/71.
[76] Drummond-Wolff to Salisbury (secret & confidential, no. 233), 10 Jul. 1890, FO 65/1394.

example of Britain taking advantage of German foreign policy being more benign than it had been under Bismarck. Furthermore, this arrangement ensured that Germany was kept out of East Africa, with it representing 'recognition of an exclusive British sphere on the Upper Nile.'[77] It was an unfortunate consequence for Britain that Russia now thought London may make compromises in the interest of peace, as it supposed that Britain would come to terms if St. Petersburg pushed her far enough. This heralded a new phase in Anglo-Russian relations.

It was not long before the Government of India reported increasing Russian activity along the northern frontier of India, in particular the north eastern boundary with Afghanistan. This area, known as the Pamirs, was rugged and mountainous, and important to the security of Afghanistan and, by extension, British India. It was an ideal target for Russia: 'once through this gap the Russians would be on the northern slopes of the Hindu Kush and in practical possession of some of the passes by which this range is pierced, and in close proximity to Hunza, a position from which they might cause us considerable inconvenience [in India].' Furthermore, 'the undetermined state of the nationality of the Pamirs [mountains], and ... the existence of a gap between Afghan and Chinese territories which the Russians seemed to consider a "no man's land" that must sooner or later be included in their dominions.'[78] This served Russia's purposes well as un-demarcated land could be entered with much less political risk than land already allocated to a state. From a British perspective, steps had to be taken to secure the region against any Russian encroachment. 'In order to check any further advance of Russia towards India in this direction, the Government of Lord Lansdowne suggest[ed to London] ... that the Chinese should be invited to extend their authority up to the limits of Afghan territory on the Pamirs.'[79] This served Lansdowne's preference for, 'unlike Roberts and Mortimer Durand, Foreign Secretary of India, Lansdowne

[77] Sanderson, 'Nile', p. 72.
[78] Lansdowne to Cross (secret, no. 87), 14 Jul. 1890, FO 65/1394.
[79] Godley to Salisbury (no. 1), 14 Aug. 1890, FO 881/6131.

discouraged a Forward Policy to control Afghanistan and check any Russian threat to India, at least in the wider sense of the term.'[80] Meanwhile, Russia's motivation for this encroachment was obvious. As Captain Francis Younghusband of the Indian Army, and Political Officer in Hunza, commented: 'taken by itself the Russians would gain nothing by occupying Kudara, for the region is perfectly barren, and the climate too rigorous to allow of cultivation. But where they would look to reap their reward would be in the field for intrigue which would lay before them on the Pamirs and in Shighnan.'[81] This would give St. Petersburg ample means to apply pressure on Britain, even if, as Russia suspected, London and Berlin were drawing closer together on European matters. However, Morier was able to report that this policy of causing Britain difficulties did not have universal support in the Tsar's government, particularly as events in Persia had just lent themselves to a calming of Anglo-Russian tensions. That Giers' preferred policy was one of cooperation with Britain is demonstrated by Ivan Alekseevich Zinoviev's removal as Head of the Asiatic department; he was a foreign policy hawk and had sought to press home Russia's advantages in Central Asia. For Britain it was clear that his leaving 'the Asiatic department is an unqualified blessing. His immense powers of work in an office where horror of work of any kind is the order of the day ... his incapacity to look at the relations of Russia with other countries otherwise than through the medium of British and Russian rivalry in Central Asia, rendered him a most disagreeable person to deal with.' It should be acknowledged that Zinoviev was no doubt moved to Stockholm by the Tsar on the request of Giers. The Foreign Minister was aware that the Head of the Asiatic Department was part of a group of senior officials that were working on having him dismissed from his post. This action was not, then, a demonstration of a pro-British policy, but rather a calculated move to maintain his position. Due to Zinoviev's departure, it was hoped that Anglo-Russian relations in Central Asia may become easier, particularly as

[80] S. Kerry, *Lansdowne: The Last Great Whig*, (London, 2017), p. 67.
[81] Younghusband to Government of India, 24 Nov. 1890, FO 881/6131.

'Monsieur Kapnist [Zinoviev's successor] ... [was] a very great friend and protégé of Monsieur de Giers ... It can, therefore, be assumed that, in contradiction to the forces hitherto applied to the treatment of the Central Asian question, we shall now have to deal with a man more or less influenced by Monsieur de Giers.'[82] Nevertheless, while Kapnist was less aggressive than Zinoviev, the truth was that Russia's foreign policy had not changed. St. Petersburg still needed to apply pressure on Britain in Central Asia in order to have leverage in Europe. 'The Anglo-Indian Empire, a political factor of overwhelming importance, for on one hand it is the centre which radiates a competitive influence all over this part of Asia, and on the other, a centre through which the Russian Asiatic policy becomes linked with great European problems.'[83]

This stroke of luck in Central Asia did not however translate into benefits in Europe. By April, Morier was again imploring Salisbury to recognise that Russia offered no immediate threat to the Balkans or the Ottoman Empire: 'I have for the last five years never failed to express my conviction that for the present, Europe need have no fear of Russia's taking the initiative in a European war ... For two years Monsieur Vyshnegradsky has taken pains to explain to me his policy and to prove how completely it depends on the maintenance of peace.'[84] Yet while Salisbury himself had no particular dislike of Russia, official views remained largely Russophobic. This was in large part due to persistent reports from India highlighting the pitfalls of Russian activity on the border, as a means of securing more assistance from Britain. A warning by General Sir Frederick Sleigh Roberts, British India's Commander-in-Chief, was typical:

> it appears to me to be practically immaterial, so far as the effect on India is concerned, whether Russia commences the conflict with the idea of creating a diversion, or of making a serious attack on our Eastern Empire. In either case, unless the advance of

[82] Morier to Salisbury (secret, no. 50), 5 Mar. 1891, FO 65/1397.
[83] A. Lobanov-Rostovsky, 'Russian Imperialism in Asia. Its Origin, Evolution and Character', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 8, No. 22 (Jun., 1929), p. 40.
[84] Morier to Salisbury (secret, no. 107), 29 Apr. 1891, FO 65/1397.

> Russian troops across the Afghan frontier were promptly and vigorously repelled, our prestige would be destroyed, the Afghan border tribes would side with our opponents, the best part of the Native Army would waver in its allegiance, and our rule in India would, without doubt, be shaken to its foundations.[85]

However accurate in its particulars, Roberts's scenario was unlikely and was an example of scaremongering intended to ensure that London continued to support Delhi financially. The significant error made by the government of India was viewing Russia purely as a local threat. Salisbury, by contrast, understood that Russian policy was an imperial threat, and was not focused on invading British India, but rather on securing lands for her own defence and economic security: 'I have never seen in the Russian policy any indication of an anxiety to push their foreign trade. Their extreme protectionism is inconsistent with such a policy. They believe in Russia for the Russians of course, reserving to themselves the liberty of making Russian stand for as large a territory as they can manage.'[86] To invade British India would have worked against such a policy since London would defend the 'jewel in the crown' of its empire. Morier, like the Prime Minister, did not see Russia as an impending threat to British India. He noted how: 'we [Britain] had not during the last six years ceased for twenty four hours from practically applying the lessons taught to us by the Penjdeh incident. We had finished our whole system of railway concentration up to Quetta and could in an incredibly short space of time concentrate a powerful army at that point ready to enter the province of Kandahar.'[87] There was therefore little chance of Russia risking a full scale war with Britain by invading British India, or indeed Afghanistan, when their defences were well prepared.

This did not, however, mean that Russia would cease to probe British India and seek to cause disruption. This was especially true where the unresolved issue of the Pamirs remained. For instance, the British Embassy in Berlin informed London that 'a small

[85] General Roberts (secret, minute), 8 Jun. 1891, WO 32/6349.
[86] Salisbury to Wolff (private), 22 Jun. 1891, Salisbury MSS, 3M/A/71.
[87] Morier to Salisbury (confidential, no. 178), 4 Jul. 1891, FO 65/1415.

[Russian] expeditionary force ... had been directed upon the plateau of Pamir.'[88] This intelligence was forwarded by Cross to Lansdowne: 'information has been received by the Foreign Office from a secret source, which is believed to be worthy of credit, that Russian forces, consisting of 300 infantry, 300 cavalry, and two cannons ... are engaged in an expedition, with a view to seizing the Pamir plateau, in order to obtain possession of half a dozen of the forts which command the passes into the mountain.'[89] This was enough to cause panic in the Government of India, which resulted in orders for Younghusband to investigate.

In Europe, Britain and Russia continued to move apart due to St. Petersburg's assumptions of an impending Anglo-German alliance. Morier reported: 'I had been informed of the extraordinary excitement which the presence of the German Emperor in England, his cordial reception by all classes of society, and his intimate intercourse with your Lordship at Hatfield, had caused in Russia ... all tended in the direction of showing that the enormous power of Great Britain was drifting in a very decided manner towards the triple alliance, a combination undoubtedly directed against Russia.'[90] This contributed to an unwanted outcome from a British perspective. While it was a culmination of events such as the Bulgarian crises that led to Franco-Russian negotiations in 1891, it was St. Petersburg's fear that Britain was open to an alliance with Germany which exacerbated the need for an agreement. 'Giers suggested to the French ambassador [Antoine de Laboulaye] that the relations of Britain with the Triple Alliance were such as to make desirable a step further in the Franco-Russian entente,' which had begun in 1887.[91] The French were receptive: 'at St. Petersburg, as Morier reported, his French colleague ... had made repeated advances in the direction of establishing closer and more positive political relations than those at present

[88] French to Salisbury (secret draft, no. 138), 15 Jul. 1891, FO 65/1415.
[89] Cross to Lansdowne (secret telegram), 16 Jul. 1891, Lansdowne MSS, MS EUR D/558/8.
[90] Morier to Salisbury (secret, no. 191), 21 Jul. 1891, FO 65/1398.
[91] H. Seton-Watson, *The Decline of Imperial Russia 1855 - 1914*, (London, 1952), p. 179.

existing.'[92] A Franco-Russian agreement was signed on 27 August 1891, although it had no military component. This suggests that this was more a notice of intent, with St. Petersburg perhaps thinking that this may cause Britain or Germany to seek out the Tsar so as to avoid a Franco-Russian bloc developing. Such a strategy appears more likely considering 'the hesitancy of Giers, who seems hitherto to have hoped to use the agreement with France as a means to force Germany into concessions rather than make it the basis of Russian foreign policy.'[93] Nevertheless, in Britain this agreement 'caught diplomats by surprise. This new international factor upset foreign policy calculations. It exacerbated existing strains with France, and turned Russia into a more formidable threat in Asia;' Britain could no longer rely on being able to send ships through the Mediterranean and Suez Canal without meeting resistance.[94] London remained unsure of how to deal with this new grouping, but in the meantime Britain sought to continue her traditional policy regarding the defence of India.

Concern over Russian intentions for the Pamirs continued. Henry Howard, the embassy Secretary at St. Petersburg, informed Salisbury: '[the] Russian frontier in that district has not yet been delimited, and a detachment of eighty infantry has been sent there to shoot game for rifle practice, and to note and report what the Chinese and Afghans are doing in those regions.'[95] Younghusband, on the other hand, reported to the Foreign Department of the Government of India: 'the Russians are making an aggression on the Pamir. A party of over a hundred *pakka* [barbarous tribesmen] Russians, besides followers, have come down from the Alai.'[96] The difference between the two accounts is stark; this suggests that while Howard only sought to inform, Younghusband was intent on causing a stir. The Captain also warned: 'according to Colonel Yanoff [Yanov; Russian officer in charge of expedition] the

[92] Otte, *Mind,* p. 181.
[93] Seton-Watson, *Decline,* p. 179.
[94] Otte, *Mind*, p. 186.
[95] Howard to Salisbury (telegram, no. 35), 5 Aug. 1891, FO 65/1415.
[96] Younghusband to Cunningham, 5 Aug. 1891, FO 65/1416.

grounds upon which the Russians base their claim to the Pamirs are that the inhabitants of them come from the Alai; that they were formerly tributary to Khokand; and that therefore, as Khokand now belongs to the Russians, the Pamirs must also belong to them.'[97] As Yanov accepted Younghusband and his recently arrived colleague Lieutenant Davison, an intelligence officer of the Indian Army, as guests at his camp, the Viceroy stated to Cross: 'it would be desirable to ascertain whether the statement made to Younghusband by the Commanding Officer that he had been sent by [the] Governor General of Russian Turkestan to annex the Pamir is [correct].'[98] It was important for Britain to know who had issued the order, as this could direct her response. Just days after this query, Cross was informed that 'Younghusband has been expelled from Bozai Gumbaz [in the Pamirs] by Colonel Yanoff, under orders from the Governor General of Turkestan, and forced to retire to [the] China frontier.'[99] This caused a contradictory response from two sides of the British Empire, namely British India and the central government in London. 'When the news reached Simla the Indian government sprang into action. These Russians, said senior voices, had over-stepped the mark. They needed to be taught a lesson.'[100] That a Great Power had dared to expel an officer from another was an affront to Britain's reputation. It was a deliberate act meant to demonstrate that Britain had no authority in the Pamirs, to which Russia was now laying claim. Yet when 'Calcutta telegraphed to London for instructions ... 'where is Buzai Gambaz?' came the desperate reply from the Foreign Office.'[101] The truth of the matter for London was that 'the last thing the British Government wanted was that their frontier agents

[97] Younghusband to Cunningham, 14 Aug. 1891, FO 65/1416.
[98] Lansdowne to Cross (telegram), 29 Aug. 1891, FO 65/1415.
[99] Lansdowne to Cross (secret telegram), 3 Sept. 1891, FO 65/1415.
[100] P. French, *Younghusband. The Last Great Imperial Adventurer,* (London, 1995), p. 94.
[101] Ibid., pp. 94 - 95.

should become involved in skirmishes over remote borders. Relations with Russia were difficult enough without incidents in the Himalayas.'[102]

None the less, the Indian government saw an opportunity in this Pamirs crisis to further its own strategic interests. Durand argued: 'the last Russian move on the Pamirs seems to necessitate our strengthening our position at Gilgit [in the Kashmir province to the north], and in order to arrive at this result I would propose ... the bringing of Hunza and Nagar under complete control.'[103] In order to support this call for an aggressive foreign policy, the Viceroy also appeared to make demands of London. He contended: 'they [the Russians] forded the Panja opposite Sarhad, which is well known to be Afghan territory, and returned to Bozai-Gumbaz through Wakhan territory. They have thus entered into both Chitral and Afghan territory with armed escort ... we think that there is ground for strong remonstrance, and that apology is due from Governor General of Turkestan ... you will understand that present Russian annexation, if effected, brings Russians to crest of Hindu Koosh passes.'[104] Salisbury, while he understood both the ramifications of the expulsion and the government of India's requests, knew that any response needed to be measured and considered.

Matters worsened in September when it became 'known with tolerable certainty that Colonel Yanoff [had] expelled Captain Younghusband and Lieutenant Davison in obedience to direct instructions from the Russian War Office.'[105] This was proof that the military party in St. Petersburg was actively working against Britain and the policy of the Russian Foreign Minister. While it was encouraging that Giers remained a potential ally in the quest for a relative peace between Britain and Russia, this did still underline how the military party in St.

[102] Ibid., p. 98.
[103] Durand (memorandum), 4 Sept. 1891, FO 65/1417.
[104] Viceroy to Salisbury (telegram), 7 Sept. 1891, FO 65/1415.
[105] Unknown to Howard (memorandum, no. 154), 11 Sept. 1891, FO 65/1460.

Petersburg could influence Russia's foreign policy. With the aggression of the War Ministry confirmed, the Indian government began to increase pressure for occupying Hunza to the north. This was deemed necessary: 'the Hunza Chief has for some time past been intriguing with China and Russia. In view of the Russian position on the Pamirs, it is impossible to regard such conduct with indifference. For unless completely under our control, he might, and most likely would, introduce a Russian force into Hunza within a few marches of Gilgit.'[106] Meanwhile, in St. Petersburg there was evident annoyance at the military party, with the Foreign Ministry and the Foreign Minister in particular seeking to calm matters before they escalated. Indeed: 'Giers stated that there must be some great misunderstanding which was capable of explanation, and he did not wish that this incident should give rise to any difficulty.'[107] This further suggests that the Russian War Office had acted in isolation.

Concerns in Britain over this Pamirs crisis caused a re-entrenchment among Russia's detractors in London. Field Marshal Sir John Lintorn Simmons, for instance, wrote: 'there has been a good deal written of late about the possibility of Russia making a sudden dash at Constantinople, and although such a proceeding may not for the present [be] ... probable, I had thought that perhaps your Lordship would pardon me for placing before you the opinion ...'.[108] Salisbury remained unmoved. He responded: '[he had] some doubt of Russia returning to the bold *coup de main* of which you speak until she has made Bulgaria tolerably safe. Otherwise, in what position would her expeditionary force be if we were to get into the Sea of Marmoza [Marmora] [?]. Of course, there would then be nothing to prevent us from making ourselves masters of the only line of communication the Russians would possess – that across the Black Sea.'[109] Salisbury appreciated that if Russia did seek to take control of Constantinople, the Ottoman Empire would likely allow the British Mediterranean fleet

[106] Durand (memorandum), 14 Sept. 1891, FO 65/1417.
[107] Howard to Salisbury (telegram, no. 42), 16 Sept. 1891, FO 65/1415.
[108] Simmons to Salisbury (private), 17 Sept. 1891, Simmons MSS, FO 358/6.
[109] Salisbury to Simmons (private), 21 Sept. 1891, Simmons MSS, FO 358/6.

through the Straits of the Dardanelles in order to attack the Russian Black Sea Fleet. As a result, the Royal Navy would be in a strong position to enter the Black Sea and control those waters. The Prime Minister also knew that Russia would not move against Constantinople without ensuring that Sofia was friendly, otherwise the German powers could use Bulgaria as a route to come to the Sultan's aid. Salisbury had no sympathy with alarmist views about Russian policy. India was a different matter, however, as he explained to Sir Frank Lascelles, the minister to Persia:

> one of the most anxious cases of the Indian gov[ernmen]t for at least two generations has been to provide against the possible danger of a Russian attack upon India. But, of late years at least, they seem to have confined their apprehension to dangers connected with Afghanistan. That Russia should seduce Afghanistan for her alliance, or that she should occupy one or more important positions in the country, & and that she should, from these, operate upon the allegiance of the people of India, has been a danger ever present to the mind of the Indian gov[ernmen]t, and all their precautions have been directed to avert it.[110]

The Pamirs incident then, as Salisbury understood it, was just the latest Russian action to cause panic in the Indian government. British statesmen outside of India were alarmed about 'the imperial authorities desire to bring matters to a crisis and force the delimitation of the Pamir district on Her Majesty's government.'[111] There was a fear that British India was trying to hold the British Empire to ransom, but it was understood that there was little Britain could do to affect matters in Afghanistan, especially with any immediacy. Therefore, if British India, by accident or design, ignited an Anglo-Russian war it would of necessity not be restricted to Central Asia. Britain would have to open other fronts in order to divert Russian troops away from Central Asia. In order to avoid matters escalating, Cross informed Lansdowne: 'as soon as Morier goes back to Russia, he will press strongly for an apology for Russian action towards Younghusband and there seems no doubt as to our obtaining it.'[112] It was expected that this would be enough to calm the Indian government. By the end of

[110] Salisbury to Lascelles (private), 6 Oct. 1891, Salisbury MSS, 3M/A/71.
[111] Henry Howard to Salisbury (confidential, no. 239), 14 Oct. 1891, FO 65/1416.
[112] Cross to Lansdowne, 5 Nov. 1891, Lansdowne MSS, MS EUR D/558/4.

November 1891, it appeared to have been successful, as the Viceroy requested rather than demanded that 'Russia must, in any case, be kept to [the] north of [the] Hindu Kush, and should be kept as far north as possible.'[113] He further implored that Russia should not be allowed to reach the Yarkand River, to the east of Hunza, for fear that this would enable the movement of troops. These were not unreasonable requests and did not suggest that British India was seeking to force London's hand at this moment in time. None the less, this proved to be very short lived. 'In the winter of 1891 - 92 a small campaign was mounted against the states of Hunza and Nagar, and both were occupied' by British India, exacerbating the situation in the Pamirs.[114]

For Morier, Russia's encroachment on the Pamirs was a case of history repeating itself: 'the entire transaction is a faithful reproduction in the extreme east of the methods by which in the west they moved from stage to stage southwards till they reached the confines of Afghanistan.' But he also recognised that this affair was different. Russia had moved with more speed and less intricacy than usual. It was therefore unmistakeable that 'the [Russian] object was to make a sensational demonstration throughout the Pamir country, not in the character of influential neighbours but of proprietors and to sweep out of it all foreign elements, whether English, Chinese or Afghan that might be met with.' That Russia seemed so willing to threaten the established order in Central Asia, rather than just apply pressure on British India, emphasised the current dominance of the Russian War Ministry. This led Morier to write: 'one thing is perfectly certain – namely that we have not got to deal with the wild escapade of a Cossack ... but with a carefully elaborated scheme of the War Office, the execution of which was ... delegated to Ionov.'

[113] Lansdowne to Salisbury (secret, telegram), 22 Nov. 1891, Morier MSS, Box 25 B, Item 1.
[114] M. Edwardes, *Playing the Great Game: A Victorian Cold War*, (London, 1975), p. 135.

The New Year offered new opportunities for the other great powers, depending on their relationship with the Conservative government in London. A general election was due, so the possibility of the Liberals returning to office caused unease in some European capitals and elation in others. Morier reported 'the profound conviction which exists here [St. Petersburg] that Mr Gladstone will get back to office ... when they will be able to do what they like.'[115] On the other hand, the Liberal leader did not have a positive relationship with many in Europe and so many hoped for a Conservative victory, in order that Salisbury remained at the helm. Germany, for instance, would have preferred for the *status quo* to have remained. Salisbury shared Germany's notion of international diplomacy, whereas Gladstone might renew his previous efforts to resurrect the 'Concert of Europe'.

Meanwhile, in Central Asia the Indian Government's action against Hunza had, as planned, forced London to back Delhi. Accordingly, when Giers complained regarding British India's troop movements, the ambassador replied: 'though of course there could be no question of occupying any strategic points in the Pamir district, without previous arrangements with Russia, Her Majesty's Government would consider themselves quite as free to patrol the country with Anglo-Indian troops as Colonel Ionov'. Morier also acknowledged that 'the southern portion of the Pamirs, which is all that is important, is accessible for a far longer period of the year for us than it is to them ... nothing therefore could be more fortunate than the rapid success of our arms against the Hunza'[116] British policy had been altered to give British Indian troops the diplomatic support they needed in order to maintain their position in the region. It appeared that Morier was in favour of holding Britain's position in the Pamirs, and ensuring that Britain did not allow Russia too close to the Indian frontier: 'with regard to the Hindu Kush [south of the Pamirs], inclusive of the Mustagh mountains as the North Eastern frontier of our Indian Empire: that we have no wish

[115] Morier to Salisbury (private), 4 Jan. 1892, Salisbury MSS, 3M/A/74.
[116] Morier to Salisbury (no. 7), 6 Jan. 1892, FO 65/1434.

or intention to extend beyond that frontier, but that on the other hand we should not allow a powerful foreign state to establish itself on the northern slopes of that range immediately below the walls – so to speak – and commanding the gates of this natural fortress.'[117]

In St. Petersburg, outside of the War Ministry, the Pamirs incident was an unwelcome problem. Vyshnegradsky, for instance, 'said the matter concerned him, as, if more annexations were projected, they would cost money, and he had not got a sixpence to give anybody.'[118] However, this was 'no kind of assurance that the expedition would not take place.' Morier, often a champion of Russia's good intentions, remarked: 'we had had a long and painful experience of these promises – over and over again during the advance of Russia on the western wing of her line of march we had been assured that no further movement was contemplated, but only to learn six months later that some important strategic position had been occupied or some extensive additional tract annexed.' None the less, Morier had not altered his opinion of Giers, or even of Vyshnegradsky: 'it was they who had themselves been deliberately deceived by their Generals who thus obtained the time and secrecy required for the maturing of their plans.'[119] It was therefore expected that while Giers was telling Morier one thing, another would be happening regarding the Pamirs. It was evident that the Foreign Minister was not in control of this aspect of the Central Asian theatre.

Although Morier had secured a verbal apology for the expulsion of Younghusband, this had only been achieved at the price of agreeing in principle to the delimitation of the Pamir-Indian boundary. Salisbury refused to consent to this: 'we are in a corner. We have promised the Afghan to protect him against foreign attack, if he takes our advice, and we have allowed him to occupy Shighnan. On the other hand – as I read it – we have clearly undertaken to the Russians that Afghanistan shall not be deemed to extend beyond the Oxus.

[117] Morier to Salisbury (confidential, no. 21), 21 Jan. 1892, FO 65/1434.
[118] Morier to Salisbury (secret, no. 28), 28 Jan. 1892, FO 65/1434.
[119] Morier to Salisbury (confidential, no. 38), 4 Feb. 1892, FO 65/1435.

These two undertakings are entirely contradictory.'[120] In an 1873 agreement with Russia, Britain had established that Afghan territory would not stretch across the Oxus, meaning the Amir had no claim, as St. Petersburg saw it, to the Pamirs. In addition, St. Petersburg viewed this as 'a bilateral arrangement. Russia would keep clear of Afghanistan, about whose fate Anglo-Indian opinion was so susceptible, but in return for this favour she would expect on her side that Great Britain would cease to importune about Russia's activities in districts of Central Asia that lay far from the Afghan borders.'[121] From St. Petersburg's perspective the Pamirs was a no-man's land; Russia therefore had every right to expand there while expecting Britain not to involve herself. Salisbury could not, however, agree that the Pamirs did not involve British interests. He was adamant: 'we cannot under any circumstances break faith with him [the Amir]. It would blacken our faces in the East; and it would drive him to the side of Russia.' For Salisbury the options were clear; 'delimitation must lead either to a breach of our pledge to the Amir; or to a quarrel with Russia, in consequence of our refusal to fulfil the engagements of 1873. Of the two alternatives – if we are driven to it – we must adopt the latter.'[122] Britain could not afford to lose the patron-client relationship that had been formed with the Amir, as Afghanistan was too important to the security of British India. Russia, on the other hand, could be disappointed, because in the Pamirs and Hindu Kush it was Britain, with Afghanistan, that held the strategic advantage. Yet war was expensive and unpredictable, so it was preferable to avoid conflict. To this end, 'Lord Salisbury was explicit in his rejection of Younghusband's requests for a re-appraisal of frontier policy and retaliation against the Russians, writing that it would be better to ''ignore'' the precise nature of Yanov's offence.'[123] In order to avoid choosing between the Amir and the Tsar, Salisbury instead accepted the formation of a frontier commission: 'it would take a great deal of time

[120] Salisbury to Morier (private), 5 Feb. 1892, Morier MSS, Box 25b.
[121] A. P. Thornton, 'Afghanistan in Anglo-Russian Diplomacy, 1869 - 1873', *The Cambridge Historical Journal* , Vol. 11, No. 2 (1954), pp. 204 - 218, pp. 210 - 211.
[122] Salisbury to Morier (private) 5 Feb. 1892, Salisbury MSS, 3M/A/74.
[123] French, *Younghusband*, p. 98.

and put off the evil day of delimitation.'[124] This decision to press forward with diplomatic procedures was given support when Salisbury was able to confirm 'that Sir R[obert] Morier was received a note from M[onsieur] de Giers admitting that Colonel Yonoff's action was illegal.'[125]

By now Salisbury was losing patience with the Indian government. According to Cross: '[though] it may be the result of former experience at the India Office, but I think Lord Salisbury's views are rather that, pressed by local officials, the Government of India is apt to give greater weight to local considerations than to Imperial interests, and that, in consequence, the Foreign Office find themselves troubled with questions of boundary with such countries, for example, as Siam and China, when imperial reasons of high policy require that such states should be most friendly.'[126] Salisbury was reluctant to involve himself in Indian affairs, but he had little choice but to do so. The tension between the Home and Indian governments had been palpable for some time. Some months before, the Viceroy had complained: '[I] cannot conceal from your Majesty that the tendency shown by the House of Commons to interfere with increasing frequency in Indian Affairs, with which it has at best a superficial acquaintance, greatly impairs the efficiency of the Government of India and seriously affects the authority of your Majesty's representative.'[127] Yet, 'from the perspective of the British Foreign Office, scuffles in Central Asia merely interfered with Anglo-Russian trade and diplomacy.' Indeed, for many in the Foreign Office 'the Pamirs were a barren irrelevance in the context of pan-European politics. As far as they were concerned India's

[124] Ramm, *Morier,* p. 353.
[125] Salisbury to Queen, 22 Feb. 1892, G. E. Buckle (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria, Third Series, A selection from Her Majesty's Correspondence and Journal between the years 1886 - 1901,* (3 vols., London, 1931), Vol. 2, p. 103.
[126] Cross to Lansdowne, 25 Feb. 1892, Lansdowne MSS, MSS EUR.d.558/5.
[127] Lansdowne to Queen, 23 June 1891, Buckle (ed.), *Letters, Third Series,* Vol. 2, pp. 44 - 46.

northern edges should remain quiet but undefined, with buffer zones to prevent direct conflict with foreign powers.'[128] Such was the scale of the imperial problem for Salisbury.

As events continued to unfold, the Russian War Ministry's stance on the Pamirs was gaining popularity in St. Petersburg, due largely to simple economics. The Russian economy was protectionist and the more people under Russian rule meant more money for Russian goods. This economic perspective was however tied to nationalism, with many supporters arguing: 'we on our own side must do everything to paralyse England who, actuated by her petty commercial considerations, wishes to arrest the quiet development and civilization of our fatherland.'[129] 'The Russian response was to move forward in Central Asia, partly as a means of regaining prestige and partly in order to create an equivalent threat to the frontiers of British India.'[130] Nevertheless, it remained true that, 'as regards the actual conquest of Central Asia, however, geopolitics was a more important spur than commerce.'[131] For Britain, the most disconcerting factor was: 'at the present moment the only two strong heads in the Russian Government are struck down by illness ... it is impossible to say now who it is that is guiding that vast machine, and under such conditions, a reckless policy is quite a possibility.'[132] However, when Giers did return, it was not good news for Britain. Howard reported that Giers had informed him: 'the position in the Pamir had altered so greatly owing to the action of the Afghans and Chinese that he considered that it was positively necessary that the present expedition should be sent.'[133] This was despite having said in February that no expedition would be sent; in order to maintain his own position Giers was now working alongside the War Ministry. Salisbury for one was not surprised by the Russian Foreign Minister's *volte face*. Practical politics notwithstanding, the Prime Minister 'identified a

[128] French, *Younghusband*, p. 99.
[129] *Noyoe Vremia*, 16 Mar. 1892, FO 65/1419 (translated by Mr Mitchell).
[130] D. Lieven, *Empire. The Russian Empire and its Rivals from the Sixteenth Century to the Present,* (London, 2002), p. 211.
[131] Ibid., p. 210.
[132] Salisbury to Queen, 22 Apr. 1892, Buckle (ed.), *Letters, Third Series,* Vol. 2, pp. 110 - 111.
[133] Howard to Salisbury (confidential, no. 166), 1 Aug. 1892, FO 65/1440.

sense of messianic mission as the root cause of Russian expansionism.'[134] It was nevertheless also considered 'inconceivable that the present Tsar, who is an honest man, can know what his subordinates are doing,' which does suggest that British suspicion of Russian policy rested firmly on the War Ministry.[135]

The Conservative government left office in August 1892. The period 1887 – 1892 had been one of relative calm in Central Asia. Threats of annexation or invasion had receded. Instead, this period was characterised by incremental moves by Russian forces and people, enough that they applied pressure on British India but not so much that they risked an international incident. This was a result of the fluctuating tensions in Europe where Russia was, for the most part, forced out onto the periphery. Germany sought at various times to keep St. Petersburg close so as to avoid a Franco-Russian agreement, but this failed. The failure of both the *Dreikaiserbund* and Reinsurance Treaty served only to push Russia into the arms of France, which would have serious ramifications for Britain in Central Asia and Europe. Meanwhile, 'what Salisbury was in fact doing was keeping just clear enough of the alliance system constructed by Bismarck to obtain imperial benefits against both France and Russia without paying a European price to Germany.'[136] The Mediterranean Agreements, coupled with the Heligoland-Zanzibar agreement, demonstrated how Salisbury wanted both to isolate Russia in Europe and protect the route to India. However, he proved able to achieve only one of these. Events in the Pamirs, and the incalculability of Russia's foreign policy, had ensured that Anglo-Russian relations would become strained once more. This was, as Morier acknowledged, similar to events that had taken place regarding Penjdeh in 1885, so there was a sense of *déjà vue* for the British government.

[134] Otte, 'Internecine', p. 32.
[135] Salisbury to Queen, 22 Apr. 1892, Buckle (ed.), *Letters, Third Series,* Vol. 2, pp. 110 - 111.
[136] Shannon, *Age*, p. 306.

It is important to note, however, that Anglo-Russian relations along the Afghan border represents only part of the Central Asian paradigm. Even as matters such as the Penjdeh crisis and the Pamirs were affected by Europe, they in turn affected Anglo-Russian relations in Persia. The kingdom of the Shah was an important facet of the Central Asian paradigm due mainly to its proximity to Afghanistan, British India and to Russia. Due to many factors, geographical and political, Persia proved to be a distinct but important part of Anglo-Russian relations in Central Asia.

Chapter 5

‘Unkind fate [had] placed Persia between the Russian hammer and the British anvil’: The Persian Paradox (I)

Events during the 1880s had demonstrated to London that Central Asia was vulnerable to Russia. This led some policy-makers to suggest that Afghanistan was not the ideal collaborator for Britain. Persia, to the west of Afghanistan and ruled by the Shah Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, represented a possible substitute.[1] ‘Great Britain’s interest in Persia was [therefore] founded on the necessity to maintain and consolidate her imperial position in India.’[2] London and Delhi had, however, been assessing the strategic merits of these neighbouring states for some time. Evelyn Baring Cromer, private secretary to the then Viceroy of India, Lord Northbrook, remarked: ‘if Afghanistan as a nation from any cause assumes a hostile attitude towards us, and throws herself into the arms of Russia, the question assumes a very different aspect, and it becomes necessary to examine our military policy under these altered circumstances. Some have advocated our endeavouring to find a

[1] Archibald Paton Thornton, in his ‘‘British Policy in Persia 1858 - 1890’ Part I (and 2)’, highlights how Persia was viewed, by some, such as Arthur Currie at the Foreign Office, as important for India’s defence. However, he does also acknowledge that many of the British Empire’s elite viewed Salisbury’s Persian policy with scepticism. Arthur Nicolson’s dissenting viewpoint was just one. Moreover, this emphasis on Persia was not supported by the Indian government in Delhi, which helped to cause difficulties between the central government and the ‘jewel in the crown’. None the less, Rose L. Greaves, in her work *Persia and the Defence of India 1884 - 1892. A study in the Foreign Policy of the Third Marquis of Salisbury*, argues, quite rightly, that Persia should be viewed from her own focal point. Greaves also highlights how, for the Indian government, it really was a choice of either Persia or Afghanistan. However, it is odd that Greaves seems to suggest that there was a good working relationship between the Foreign and India Offices and the Government of India. The evidence appears to run counter to this, certainly during the period 1885-1895. Meanwhile, Jennifer Siegel, in her book *Endgame: Britain, Russia and the Final Struggle for Central Asia*, advocates how Russia’s advance, or pressure, on Persia created a Persian problem for Britain. This work seeks to demonstrate how this problem was countered, successfully or otherwise. However, Siegel does also suggest that Britain and Russia were on the brink of war over Persia and there is no evidence to suggest that this was the case.

[2] A. P. Thornton, ‘British Policy in Persia 1858 - 1890’ Part I, *English Historical Review*, Vol. 69, No. 273 (Oct. 1954), p. 554.

counterpoise by a Persian alliance, and directing our attention to that country.'[3] Three years later, Owen Tudor Burne, of the India Office, considered:

> [that] whatever faults modern Persia may have, one of them is not revolution ... a striking contrast in this respect to Afghanistan ... It is perhaps intelligible that Afghanistan has been allowed in recent years to assume a more important role in questions affecting the Indian frontier than the more distant Persia, and yet it seems regrettable that England should have relied so much on the one power, which has always been factious, treacherous, and unsafe, and should have done so little for the other, which, to say the least of it, has been united, peaceful, and safe.[4]

It stands to reason, therefore, that when Afghanistan's reliability was undermined by the Penjdeh crisis, Persia was once more suggested as an alternative. This crisis 'instigated the British Government to try again to rationalize, if indeed it may not be said to define, their policy towards Persia.'[5] A stronger relationship with Tehran would offer many benefits; Persia was, after all, a key factor in the defence of India. 'Afghanistan and India were always vulnerable through Persia; largely inaccessible to the British, Persia under Russian occupation or influence posed an effective threat to the western flank of the Amir's unruly tribal kingdom.'[6] Such a menace did not exist if Britain took a greater interest in Tehran, a city which, 'by common consent ... was the capital where Indian and European politics met.'[7] It was also argued that Persia, and not Afghanistan, represented a greater prize. According to Edward Fitzgerald Law, Britain's Commercial and Financial attaché at St. Petersburg, Persia had genuine economic opportunities: 'it is hardly necessary to dwell on the immense commercial importance to England of the establishment of the Karun route.'[8] It was the prospect of trade with Persia, as well as military aspects, which proved a significant factor in Britain's continued interest with Tehran. 'The high importance which Persia has for us from the point of view not only of the local interests of Transcaspia but also of our imperial

[3] Evelyn Baring Cromer, 'Memorandum on Military Aspect of Central Asian Question' (confidential), Private Secretary's Office, Government of India, Jun. 1876, IOR/L/PS/18/C82.
[4] Owen Tudor Burne, 'Persia' (memorandum), 1 Dec. 1879, IOR/L/PS/18/C28.
[5] Thornton, 'Policy' Part I, p. 578.
[6] D. Steele, *Lord Salisbury. A Political Biography*, (London, 2001), p. 266.
[7] Thornton, 'Policy' Part I, p. 554.
[8] E. F. Law to Drummond Wolff (confidential), 19 Jul. 1888, FO 65/1351.

policy,' was understood.[9] Afghanistan, on the other hand, did not have this commercial potential. The Amir ruled over a country fragmented along tribal lines; such instability did not offer itself to potential investors.

It is important to understand why a choice between Persia and Afghanistan had to be made. There was significant hostility between Tehran and Kabul, which was caused by both religious differences and rival territorial claims. The former was a constant problem and meant that the Shia Persians and Sunni Afghans were unlikely to ever come to terms. The latter proved to have numerous examples, as much of the Perso-Afghan border was disputed. A long-lasting example would be the village of Hashtadan, a community under Persian control but claimed 'as under Herat government' by the Afghans.[10] While competing claims for territory existed between the two, there would be no trust. This led to a deep sense of suspicion between the respective rulers. Britain could not, therefore, work with both simultaneously. It was the case, then, that 'the feelings of hostility which existed between Persia and Afghanistan were such that in those intervals when the Amir was thought reliable and when the outlook of British India and Afghanistan was identical a corresponding decline in Anglo-Persian relations ensued.'[11] None the less, Britain was hampered further by the understanding that the Shah would not work with a Gladstone government. It had been suggested to Naser that the Liberal leader had, contrary to the Shah's own declaration, alluded to 'the supposed subservience of the Shah's Government to Russia in matters connected with Central Asia.'[12] Any Anglo-Persian cooperation would therefore have to wait until a Conservative Ministry took office, or at the very least a Liberal government not under Gladstone. Until that time, Britain would only enjoy a choice of one.

[9] Lieutenant-Colonel Herbert to Mr Dering, 22 Aug. 1888, FO 65/1352.
[10] Lumsden to Granville (telegram, no. 41), 24 Mar. 1885, FO 65/1238.
[11] R. L. Greaves, *Persia and the Defence of India 1884 - 1892. A study in the Foreign Policy of the Third Marquis of Salisbury*, (London, 1959), p. 14.
[12] Thomson to Granville (no. 52), 4 May 1885, FO 65/1242.

The Conservatives returned to government in June 1885 with Salisbury as Prime Minister. The Marquis, unlike many in either London or Delhi, was certain that Persia represented a worthwhile alternative to Afghanistan. During his short ministry (1885 - 86) he demonstrated the significance with which he viewed Anglo-Persian relations. It is important to note that it would be during this period that he laid the foundations of the policy he would follow during his long administration (1886 - 92). Unlike many other Foreign Secretaries, Salisbury had also twice been the Secretary of State for India, once under Lord Derby (1866 – 1867), and then again under Benjamin Disraeli (1874 - 1878). He therefore had first-hand experience of Central Asian politics. Salisbury's broad policy was to offer targeted support to the Shah. Being a pragmatist and not a philanthropist, the Prime Minister had terms, however. For Britain to be able to help Persia, two changes had to occur in the kingdom: 'in the first place that such strategic precautions should be taken as should oppose the greatest difficulty to a Russia attack ... in the second place that the corruptions which were eating into the Kingdom ... should be attacked with a firm hand.' Strategic precautions did not mean fortifying the Persian border, or even conscripting a large army to pressure Russia. Instead, Salisbury argued that the first preventative measure should be to move the capital south: 'the dangers of Persia would be very considerably reduced if the ordinary seat of Gov[ernmen]t were at Isfahan [a city much further south, in central Persia] instead of at Tehran.' While 'Tehran was uncomfortably near to the Russian strongholds on the Caspian, and dangerously distant from the more friendly shore of the Indian Ocean,' Britain could not offer any meaningful military assistance to Persia; if the capital moved closer to the Gulf then Britain could offer more aid.[13] Furthermore, it was an issue for London that a sudden Russian attack on Tehran could leave the sovereign, his capital, government and the financial resources of Persia in the hands of St. Petersburg. Neither London nor Delhi could afford this. If Isfahan

[13] Thomson to Iddesleigh (no. 75 A, draft), 6 Aug.1885, FO 65/1248.

was made the capital, then military assurances and diplomatic agreements could be discussed without the persistent threat of Russian invasion looming. In addition, any Russian plans to seize the Persian capital would now have to include measures to deal with the soldiers of a Great Power, who were better trained and equipped than Persia's troops. This would add more risk and costs to such an enterprise for St. Petersburg. Considering Russian finances, this could be enough to reduce the likelihood of an attack considerably. It was also of great concern for Salisbury that the Shah be kept secure. The importance of Naser to the stability of his own autocracy could not be over-estimated. It was this threat to the Shah himself more than the seizure of buildings that concerned the Prime Minister. He understood: '[the] character of the Persian monarchy, and how much of its safety depended on the safety of the Shah.' If Naser was killed or captured then Persia would fall into a state of anarchy; many self-declared heirs would fight amongst themselves to replace him. The victor could well be the one who demonstrated the most subservience to St. Petersburg. Even if this was not the case, the new regime may not be as pro-British as the current one. By relocating the Shah, Britain could protect both him and the stability of his rule.

A southward movement of the capital then had many benefits. Nevertheless, Naser did not take up the idea. Salisbury's second requirement, that the Shah deal with corruption, proved equally unacceptable for the Persian government. Yet this was not because Tehran was unaware of its own shortcomings. The Persian Ambassador to Britain, Mirza Malkum Khan, discussed quite openly 'the condition of his country, on its gradual decadence, on the dangers that were now menacing it.' None the less, although authorities understood 'the necessity, if any permanent effort was to be made for arresting the decay of Persia, of grappling with the evils of a corrupt administration,' no substantive efforts were made by the Shah to adopt meaningful changes.[14] This was due in large parts to the corruption which the

[14] Thomson to Iddesleigh (no. 75 A, draft), 6 Aug. 1885, FO 65/1248.

Shah himself was engaged in, as well as the interested parties which enabled him to stay in power.

It is evident, then, that the Shah would pose a significant obstacle to Salisbury's efforts of making Persia the predominant collaborator for Britain in Central Asia. Nevertheless, Naser would not be the only difficulty for the Prime Minister; in fact, he wouldn't even be the sole stumbling block in Persia. Other groups, such as religious leaders, merchants and the general populace would all prove to be impediments for Britain. The most difficult opposition, however, would come from Russia. This was a result of many inter-connected factors, including security and trade. It is of interest that this Anglo-Russian competition over Persia demonstrates a different side to the Central Asian paradigm, namely one where Russia enjoyed such advantages that Britain was forced, more often than not, to accept defeat. Perhaps conversely, there was also resistance against Salisbury's Persian plan from the Government of India, which seemed set on maintaining Afghanistan as the preferred buffer state. The India Office, by contrast, offered Salisbury limited support for his endeavours. Meanwhile, there were also questions regarding the involvement of other Great Powers, and the advantages or not of Europe's connection with this Persian question. Persia posed an intricate problem for Salisbury where there were no easy answers.

The Shah was a significant hurdle for many reasons. While he had failed to meet either of Salisbury's demands, neither did he reject Britain altogether. On the contrary, such was his certainty that Britain needed him that he continued to seek an accord. He did so for selfish reasons. Naser was concerned that conflict in Afghanistan would spill into northern Persia. The danger for Tehran was that Russia, which had a long border with Persia, could apply pressure on her northern half with impunity. Britain, meanwhile, could only maintain influence over and therefore defend the southern half of the Shah's dominion. This was due to the presence of the Royal Navy in the Persian Gulf. The Shah, meanwhile, understood

Persia's importance to British India's defence, and sought to use this to alter London's policy. Britain would not, however, make promises to the Shah such as those made by the then Viceroy, George Robinson, 1st Marquess of Ripon, to the Amir in 1880. Moreover, Britain understood that the Shah was not interested in British imperial defence, preferring to protect his own interests first and the wider interests of Persia second. Sir Ronald Thomson, the Minister to Persia (1879 – 1887), a career diplomat who had served in Persia continuously since 1848, albeit with a brief interlude between 1855 and 1859, commented on Naser's argument: '[if London] let the first span of her [Persia's] present territory be sacrificed to the ambition of Russia ... Persia will find herself unable to retain the rest of her possessions ... [and] when Persia is reduced to such a condition, either Russia ... will become more exigent and continue to encroach, or else Persia will be obliged to throw herself helplessly at her feet.'[15] Such a threat was deemed credible: '[if] the Shah was left with the fear of Russia constantly before him, Persia's position as an independent power would be endangered, and she might before long have to resign herself altogether to Russian domination.' To avoid this fate: '[the Shah] was extremely anxious ... that Her Majesty's government should take advantage of any opportunity that might arise for obtaining a more definite and formal guarantee from Russia that the independence and integrity of Persia would be respected and maintained.'[16] How this would be achieved when Russia held such strategic advantages was not clear. What was apparent, however, was the Shah's expectation that Britain would protect him. This disparity between what the Shah wanted and what Britain could provide was caused, in part, by London's difficulty in trying to deal with a culture it did not fully understand. 'The respect of the Persians, and their co-operation in all matters, was proportionate to the firmness with which they were treated; Russian diplomacy with its strong-arm tactics scored heavily against the more patient and conciliatory attitude which the

[15] Shah to Granville (note), 30 Mar. 1885, CAB 37/16/45.
[16] Thomson to Granville (confidential, no. 44), 7 Apr. 1885, Ibid.

British tended to adopt.' Moreover, 'the British government ... should never be seen to back down.'[17] Salisbury, then, was at a disadvantage with the Shah as a result of Britain's own liberal democratic values.

Nevertheless, even with no prospect of a military agreement, it was clear that the Shah did not want to alienate the British. Rather, he never ceased in his efforts to convince London that he could be a valuable collaborator. Thomson conveyed: 'on the part of the Shah ... that Persia was in no way bound, nor was the Shah disposed to further Russian designs in the direction of Afghanistan, and that His Majesty would, in his future relations with Russia, be guided by his desire to maintain the integrity of his own country.'[18] Similarly, Arthur Nicolson, Britain's *chargé d'affaires* (1885-1886) in Persia, informed London: 'His Majesty continued to impress on me that he was determined to keep on the most intimate and friendly footing with England and that he knew well that in that direction his true interests lay.'[19] The Shah was keen to dissuade his detractors in London, and gave 'his assurance that he will never enter into any engagement with Russia opposed to the welfare of his country. As to the notion that Russian troops might be allowed passage through Persian territory the Shah remarks that such a concession could only be made as the result of a war.'[20] Although this was a welcome statement from Britain's perspective, Nicolson was concerned as to the effect this attitude might have on hawks in London and Delhi. He 'was nervous about a confrontation with Russia and concerned that Britain might ... [promise] too much in its assurances of support for Persian independence.'[21] There was a danger of Britain being pulled into a Central Asian conflict through not watching the Shah closely enough.

[17] D. McLean, *Britain and Her Buffer State. The collapse of the Persian empire, 1890 - 1914,* (London, 1979), p. 9.
[18] Thomson to Granville (no. 52), 4 May 1885, FO 65/1242.
[19] Nicolson to Rosebery (confidential, no. 49), 9 Apr. 1886, FO 65/ 1285.
[20] Nicolson to Rosebery (confidential, no. 24, draft), 10 Apr. 1886, Ibid.
[21] J. S. Galbraith, 'British Policy on Railways in Persia 1870 - 1900', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Oct. 1989), p. 489.

Salisbury was, however, aware that as he sought to cultivate an Anglo-Persian relationship, this carried with it risks. Foremost, the Prime Minister understood that London needed to be wary of Naser al-Din, as he was not without strength. It was appreciated that in order to maintain his own independence, he sought to play Russia and Britain off against one another. Both parties were aware: '[that] the Shah is ... [attempting] a Dutch auction between us & Russia & wishes to see which gives least in order that he may ride with the other – but he is playing not skilfully a double game.'[22] This would prove a recurring factor of Anglo-Persian relations. It was, as a consequence, 'pointed out to him [the Shah] that owing to geographical considerations it was almost absolutely out of our power to afford him any substantial assistance at that end of his dominions which were at present threatened with attack.' It was thus made clear that by refusing to accept Salisbury's terms, Naser risked a Russian invasion. It was also made clear that Britain would only discuss matters where London could help Persia to help herself. When Mirza Yusuf Ashtiani, the Persian Grand Vizier (or prime minister), sought a British promise of aid, Thomson requested: 'a more exact explanation of the word "counsel", and asked him whether it did not mean in some form or other financial or military succour.'[23] Nevertheless, the Shah did not abandon his strategy. Instead, when 'the Shah finally agreed to let Russia open a consulate in Meshed – [he] also asked Britain to open one, so that the Russian flag would not fly alone in one of Persia's most important religious centres.'[24] While this was another attempt to manipulate the great powers, it also gave London confidence that he remained independent. It was a limited gesture, but it was one made in the midst of increasing pressure being applied upon him from St. Petersburg. 'As a result of Russia's expansion into Transcaspia and especially its conquest of Turcoman oases on the approaches to Herat, Persia was now drawn into the theatre of conflict

[22] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (private & confidential) 4 Oct. 1888, Salisbury MSS, 3M/A/70.
[23] Thomson to Iddesleigh (no. 75 A, draft), 6 Aug. 1885, FO 65/1248.
[24] J. P. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World 1700 - 1917. The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment*, (Oxford, 1997), p. 135.

much more than before.'[25] Meanwhile, it was also clear that Naser was willing to besmirch his regional rival in order to garner favour from London. During his visit to London in 1889, Queen Victoria noted: 'the Shah had spoken at luncheon of Russia, of whom he showed great distrust, and asked if the Ameer was giving trouble, that he was a bad and cruel man.'[26] Such tendencies did not enamour Naser to Britain's elite.

Of much greater concern for Salisbury was the understanding that 'the least price he [the Shah] c[oul]d demand for an alliance would be the recovery of Herat – and any transaction on that basis would launch the whole of Afghanistan ag[ain]st us.'[27] The province of Herat, although contested, was at this point under Afghan rule. If Britain returned Herat to Persia the ramifications would be severe. The Amir could launch an attack against Persia, fortify Herat and declare a holy war against Britain, attacking troops stationed in Afghanistan and northern India. Britain could not afford the Shah's price. This left Britain in a difficult position. Although Salisbury sought the Shah's cooperation, the Amir could not be upset in consequence. Afghanistan remained a necessary part of British India's defence, whether or not she was Britain's predominant collaborator. If Britain decided to focus on Persia, British India would need to keep the Amir on side as Delhi could not risk the Amir allowing Russian troops to travel through his territory. For British India, all that mattered, irrespective of Persia's potential, was what benefits Tehran could bring to the defence of the Raj.

It was of great concern for Britain that St. Petersburg would use the Shah as an instrument for its own ends. Consequently, when Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, the Minister to Persia (1887 – 1891), suggested: 'it might be possible, & if so, convenient to induce [the] Shah to initiate [an] understanding between ourselves and Russia,' this caused some

[25] D. Geyer, *Russian Imperialism: The Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy 1860 - 1914,* (New York, 1987), translated by B. Little, p. 97.
[26] Extract from Queen's Journal, 2 July 1889, G. E. Buckle (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria, Third Series, A selection from Her Majesty's Correspondence and Journal between the years 1886 - 1901,* (3 Vols., London, 1930), Vol. 1, pp. 507 - 508.
[27] Lykins to R. Churchill (private), 18 May 1885, Churchill MSS, MS Add.9248, vol. 5.

concern.[28] Salisbury understood that Russia had no intention of coming to an amicable arrangement with Britain. He responded: 'I agree: but take care Russia does not use the Shah to ask impossible conditions from us, & put us in the wrong if we refuse.'[29] Salisbury appreciated that Russia could make bold requests that would please the Shah, but be impossible for London to agree to. This would mean that Naser would blame Britain for failing to make any arrangement with Russia. For now, the *status quo*, as difficult as it was, remained preferable.

The trustworthiness of the Shah was dealt a further blow by Persian intrigues against Britain in the Persian Gulf. It was known that there were 'plots being laid by the Malik-Et-Toojar [Haji Mahomed Mahdi, Chief of the Merchants] of Bushire [Bushehr, a Persian port city on the eastern coastline of the Persian Gulf], either to get up a revolution in Bahrain or to entrap the Sheiks on board the Persian Government steamer "Persepolis".' Britain enjoyed good relations with Sheikh Isa ibn Ali Al Khalifa, the ruler of Bahrain, and did not wish to see these undermined. Britain thus alerted him of the conspiracy. 'Now that the Chiefs are thoroughly warned and on their guard, I have not the slightest fear of any serious results from the Persian intrigues which are not wholly imaginary.'[30] However, this did not just concern British relations with another ruler in the region. This matter had ramifications for the Royal Navy. Interested parties understood that: '[it was] the preponderance [of British power] in S[outh] W[est] Persia [which] affects our position in the Central Asian question.'[31] This force was tasked with ensuring that the Persian Gulf and its coastline remained passive, so that no naval attacks against British imperial interests could originate from that sea. If the plot had proven successful, confidence in the Royal Navy's ability to protect ships travelling to and from India would have been undermined. Any failure on Britain's part would challenge the

[28] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (telegram), 30 May 1888, Salisbury MSS, 3M/A/70.
[29] Salisbury to Drummond Wolff (telegram), 30 May 1888, Ibid.
[30] Ross to Durand (confidential, telegram), 29 Oct. 1887, IOR/R/15/1/18.
[31] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (private & confidential), 4 Oct. 1888, Salisbury MSS, 3M/A/70.

assumption that London could reinforce troops in India. In consequence, St. Petersburg would have felt more able to attack Afghanistan. This Britain could not allow. There were, however, further concerns of Persian manoeuvring south of Bahrain. It was conveyed: 'our paramount position in relation to the Arab Chiefdoms of Oman, and the sacrifices of various kinds by which this position was attained and is still maintained, and when one considers how seriously the success of the insidious intrigues of the Persians would sap our authority and lower our prestige, I cannot but regard the proceedings ... as wholly unjustifiable.'[32] While Salisbury was seeking to improve Anglo-Persian relations, albeit for selfish reasons, members of Persia's elite were seeking to undermine that process for their own benefits. What made theses manoeuvres more dangerous was the Shah's inability, or perhaps his unwillingness, to curtail them.

Anti-British tendencies were not, however, restricted to Persia's elite. Such inclinations were clear amongst the country's religious leaders, as well as the general population. This was obvious in the aftermath of the tobacco concession which had, in March 1890, been granted to Major Gerald Francis Talbot. This decision proved unpopular amongst ordinary Persian business owners. In February 1891, it was reported that 'a petition from the tobacco merchants protesting against the Tobacco concession [that] has been presented to His Majesty the Shah.'[33] These objections '[were] supported by the Russians as a lever against the Anglophil[e] policies of the government.'[34] After further protests from tobacco producers, who did not want to sell their produce to Major Talbot, the Shah was concerned with how much public strife the concession had created. Furthermore, he was made uneasy by how 'in the movement against the tobacco company they [the mullahs] found formidable allies within

[32] Ross to Nicolson (telegram), 30 Oct. 1887, IOR/R/15/1/18.
[33] Kennedy to Salisbury (telegram, no. 25), 23 Feb. 1891, FO 65/1412.
[34] N. R. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran. The tobacco protest of 1891 - 92*, (New York, 1966), Digital printing (2005), perlego.com (accessed 25/02/2022), p. 1.

the discontent of the people and in the enemies' of the Shah.[35] The religious leader of Persia, Ayatollah Mirza Hassan Shirazi, was a man who the Shah had to keep onside if he wanted to avoid revolution. The Shah found himself in a difficult position, then, when a religious *fatwa* forbidding the smoking of tobacco was issued by Shirazi. This was supported by the owners of local bazaars who closed their premises. Naser was stuck. He wanted to honour the concession, as he would benefit both financially and politically if he protected this concession on behalf of the British government. Yet he was also aware that the protest represented a challenge to his authority. Britain advised Naser: 'His Majesty's sovereignty and not the Tobacco Concession was being attacked ... his yielding would be the signal for the rapid spread of the spirit of revolution throughout Persia.' Although it was revolution that concerned the Shah, he disagreed with London's assessment. Naser saw more danger from not appeasing his people. None the less, instead of simply terminating the concession in order to quell the protests, he first sought to placate Britain. 'The Shah, who was most desirous that the concession should be cancelled, [said] that he would give some other valuable concessions as an equivalent ... [he was told that] His Majesty would be politically committing suicide; that Persia would be left to decay as no capitalist would ever again enter upon enterprises in Persia ... and that no equivalent could be given.[36] Britain would not take a step back on this issue. To have done so would compromise all of her concessions in Persia. This in turn could undermine her imperial security in India. In the end, as pressure on him continued to rise, Naser cancelled the concession in January 1892 in order to maintain his position.

This was not, however, the end of Britain's difficulties in Persia. Even with the *Régie* cancelled, public disapproval of Britain continued, and shifted to the Imperial Bank of Persia. This establishment, granted in 1889 to Baron Julius de Reuter, a naturalised Briton: 'was

[35] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (private), 8 Jul. 1890, Salisbury MSS, 3M/A/71.
[36] Kennedy to Salisbury (telegram, no. 177), 1 Sept. 1891, FO 65/1415.

given the exclusive right to issue bank notes which would be legal tender throughout the country. The Imperial Bank of Persia ... became in effect the State bank of Persia and controlled the country's note circulation. In addition it was permitted to carry on normal banking business. It was exempted from all taxes and import dues in Persia.'[37] The Imperial Bank had undeniable links to London, and this caused controversy as many in Persia sought to reject British imperialism. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, a well known political activist and Muslim journalist, wrote: 'The institution of the Imperial Bank of Persia ... meant the relinquishing of government to the enemy of Islam, the enslaving of the people to that enemy, and the surrendering of them and of all dominion and authority into the hands of the foreign foes.'[38] Meanwhile, the bank was also faced with disapproval from St. Petersburg. It was argued by Russia that the bank was an arm of the British government, forcing Tehran to work to London's agenda. This view was enhanced by how the Imperial Bank had ensured that, although the tobacco concession had been lost, there was little political fallout for Britain:

> thanks to British capital, Russia has been baulked by England, who, through the Imperial Bank of Persia, has saved the Persian government from being forced into accepting a loan of half a million sterling from Russia as compensation to the Tobacco Corporation, whose concession the Shah was compelled to rescind owing to the popular clamour against it. Had England not come forward ... Persia would have fallen under the complete influence of Russia.[39]

Britain had therefore managed to retain, and in this case, strengthen her influence at Tehran. As a result, the bank faced difficulties, 'sometimes inspired by the Russians, whose own bank had the advantage of official backing from the Russian Government and was a deadly rival, both commercial and political.'[40] Nevertheless, it is enlightening that these protests did not reach the heights seen during the tobacco protests. This was a result of other factors being at play, such as Great Power involvement, rather than improving opinions of Britain. It was

[37] D. Wright, *The English Amongst the Persians*, (London, 1977), p. 104.
[38] E. G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, (Cambridge, 1910), p. 18.
[39] Diary of Russian Affairs in Asia (summary), May 1892, FO 65/1438.
[40] Wright, *English*, p. 105.

acknowledged: ‘the threat of some of the mullahs to make a crusade against the imperial bank of Persia would probably end as disastrously for us as did the collapse of the tobacco concession were it not that France has a considerable interest in the bank, for which reason Russian would not be so likely to further incite the people against the bank.’[41] This demonstrates how Europe could influence matters in Persia.

A difficult Shah might restrict Britain’s ability to defend India. This made London uncomfortable. Concerns regarding the Perso-Afghan border were prevalent, and it was deemed preferable to have some legal standing for the border. There was, however, no sense of urgency for the Shah. He saw no reason to agree to a line that he wanted moved eastwards to encompass Herat. To this end, it was understood that Persia was ‘especially unwilling to discuss the Hashtadan question.’[42] This related to a contested province on the border between Persia and Afghanistan; the former held it, and the latter claimed it. Britain wanted this issue concluded as it was ‘generally assumed that sooner or later Russia will endeavour to absorb the Khorassan province of Persia, and if that assumption be correct, the importance of having the western boundary of Afghanistan previously demarcated becomes at once apparent.’ It was anticipated that an agreement could prevent Russia from shifting the Perso-Afghan boundary eastwards; but if there were to be no agreement ‘it may well be doubted whether the existing state of the frontier would be sufficiently definite should Russia replace Persia as the neighbour of Afghanistan on this side.’ None the less, no agreement was forthcoming as Naser feared that Britain would leave him to his fate once Afghanistan’s border was secured. This was not an unreasonable assumption. Furthermore, while there were many who were ‘drawing attention to the state of the Perso-Afghan frontier ... [it] seems somewhat in danger of being overshadowed by the naturally prominent interest attaching to the northern frontier

[41] Diary of Russian Affairs in Asia (summary), Mar. 1892, FO 65/1437.
[42] Nicolson to Durand, 18 Jun. 1886, FO 65/1292.

of Afghanistan.'[43] That the security of the Amir's northern frontier was considered more pressing was shown when Nicolson enquired: 'what was being done in regard to the delimitation of the frontier to the East?' He received no satisfactory reply to his enquiry. As a result, Nicolson had to report: 'I think that the real state of the question is that nothing has been settled, and that the stretch of the line made by the Shah was based on what was arranged in 1881.'[44] This was much as Nicolson had expected. He had come 'to the conclusion that the effort to counteract Russian influence at the Shah's court and in the north of Persia generally was a waste of energy.'[45]

It is important to consider that Anglo-Persian relations did not operate in a vacuum. London could not control the actions of independent rulers like Naser-al-Din, any more than it could control the actions of another great power. The Amir, after all, only allowed Britain to orchestrate his foreign policy in return for money. With the Shah unwilling to follow Britain's advice on a number of matters, and his inability, or unwillingness, to protect British interests, London acknowledged that any solution to the Persian problem was only possible on his death. To this end, it was understood that 'Lord Salisbury seems to contemplate a break up of Persia after the Shah's death as the most likely solution.'[46] Upon the Shah's demise it was considered probable that Britain would assume control of the south while Russia took the north. This would allow both Britain and Russia to secure their respective economic ends. This idea of partitioning was aired in April 1890, although it was not received well by St. Petersburg. Wolff reported: '[the Russian representative] had informed the Persian Government that Russia entirely repudiated the idea of a division of influence and that as she possessed such a long line of frontier Russian influence should be preponderate

[43] Murray to Brackenbury (confidential) 19 Jul. 1886, FO 65/1288.
[44] Nicolson to Iddesleigh (confidential, no. 1), 2 Jan. 1887, FO 65/1314.
[45] Thornton, 'Policy' Part I, p. 578.
[46] Hardinge to Morier (private), 23 Apr. 1889, Morier MSS, Box 22, Item 2.

both in the north and the south.'[47] This assertion also emphasised how Russia enjoyed numerical and geographical advantages in Persia that Britain could not compensate for. The statement that 'in Iran the weak part of our blade was pressed against the strong part of Russia's' was undeniable and a consistent source of discomfort.[48] None the less, London did not consider it likely that St. Petersburg would seek to annex all of Persia. Russia did not have the capital to back one warring faction against all others, so it would make more sense to settle for diplomatic control of northern Persia. As a result, it was considered more likely: '[that] under present circumstances the Russians would not go out of their way to promote or interfere in a succession quarrel in Persia, unless they were forced to; and they would probably continue the quieter and wiser plan of working against us by other means.'[49]

Persia, then, was not the ideal alternative to Afghanistan as had been envisaged. This was a result of the internal problems within Persia, which revolved around the Shah's rule and the pervasive anti-British sentiments in the country. Nevertheless, Britain did enjoy some success in Persia. One man who became synonymous with this was Drummond Wolff, as he managed, unlike his predecessors, to gain some favour with the Shah. However, his achievements proved to be a poisoned chalice for Salisbury's Persian plan.

Drummond Wolff aimed to tap into Persia's economic potential for the benefit of the British Empire and Europe at large. The minister had received instructions before his departure: 'the principal Persian questions that Lord Salisbury had mentioned to me were as follows: the integrity of Persia; the development of its resources, and the maintenance of a strong, independent, friendly government.'[50] By October 1888: 'he had already induced the Shah to issue a proclamation protecting rights in property – a prerequisite if foreign capital

[47] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (secret & most confidential, no. 105), 1 Apr. 1890, FO 65/1393.
[48] M. A. Yapp, 'British Perceptions of the Russian Threat to India', *Modern Asian Studies,* Vol. 21, No. 4 (1987), p. 653.
[49] Hardinge to Morier (private), 23 Apr. 1889, Morier MSS, Box 22, Item 2.
[50] H. D. Wolff, *Rambling Recollections,* (2 vols., London, 1908), Vol. 2, p. 337.

was to be attracted towards Persia.'[51] His next concern was opening up the Karun River for trade; this river (via the River Tigris) flowed into the Persian Gulf at its northern edge. Drummond Wolff wrote: 'I consider the freedom of the Karun as most important ... it will give us ... commercially & politically' a distinct advantage.[52] 'All the British mercantile interests in Persia were anxious for the opening of this stream.'[53] Drummond Wolff's plan to utilise the Karun River offered Britain an opportunity to move her sphere of influence northwards. In order to be successful, Drummond Wolff understood that he would have to satisfy the Shah, who had demands that needed to be met. Salisbury, however, remained against offering inducements to Naser. Nevertheless, 'Drummond Wolff took the matter into his own hands, giving the Shah 'conditional assurance' of support if trouble brewed.' Although this did not have backing from London, it proved sufficient: 'on 30 October the Shah consented to open the Karun River; thus giving Britain the first diplomatic *coup* in Persia since ... 1853.' Salisbury had wanted to avoid making any promises to the Shah, for good reason. He understood that it would not benefit Britain in the long run to owe anything to such a desperate ruler. He feared Britain becoming involved in a Russo-Persian dispute that had been caused by an over-confident Shah. To this end: 'he used the disingenuous argument that, as the opening of the Karun to the mercantile marine of all countries would in no way come under the head of the construction of railways or waterways, it would not affect the Shah's engagement with Russia – and therefore there was no need for us to give him any further assurances than those that had already been made.'[54] This did not mean that Salisbury had changed his mind regarding Persia's importance for British India; merely that he had no intention of tying Britain down with international arrangements. The Prime Minister had been caught off balance by Drummond Wolff, who acted in the interests of his own reputation,

[51] A. P. Thornton, 'British Policy in Persia 1858-1890' Part II, *English Historical Review*, Vol. 70, No. 274 (Jan. 1955), p. 61.
[52] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (private & confidential), 4 Oct. 1888, Salisbury MSS, 3M/A/70.
[53] Wolff, *Recollections*, p. 343.
[54] Thornton, 'Policy' Part II, p. 61.

urging ‘upon the Shah’s Government ... the opening of the Karun River.’[55] This did not follow Salisbury’s instructions. The minister knew that Russia would not approve of such a measure, which could threaten Persia’s integrity. Prince Dolgoruky had spoken to Drummond Wolff, stating: ‘where British commerce flourished, Russian trade failed.’[56]

The Shah’s decision to open the Karun to trade was an unexpected break from the *status quo*. ‘Formerly the Ministers of the Shah had always counselled submission to Russia, and had thus damaged the interests and alienated the sympathies of the population.’[57] Although the opening did offer some prospect of trade for Persia, more importantly it put the Shah on a collision course with St. Petersburg. This decision was arrived at in spite of Russian pressure and she ‘naturally took a serious view of this opening of the Karun.’[58] St. Petersburg viewed this action as a threat to its primacy over Persia’s northern provinces. To Russia’s mind, it also made an Anglo-Persian alliance appear that much more likely. The Russian response was to attempt to reverse, or at least mitigate, the opening of the Karun. This resolve caused concern for British India. The main unease pertained to ‘the concessions which Russia has obtained, or is likely to obtain, from Persia, in compensation for the opening of the navigation of the Karun ... [which might be] exclusive permission to construct railways in Persia for five years.’[59]

There were concerns that in his efforts to prioritise commercial questions in Persia, Drummond Wolff was in danger of precipitating a Russian invasion of India. It was considered that Britain’s overseas representatives should work towards the best interests of the British Empire; Drummond Wolff was thought to be failing to look at the bigger picture. This may well have been accurate; Sir Henry was a political appointee rather than a career

[55] Wolff, *Recollections,* p. 342.
[56] Ibid., p. 346.
[57] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (most confidential, no. 244), 5 Nov. 1888, FO 65/1355.
[58] Thornton, ‘Policy’ Part II, p. 62.
[59] Lansdowne to Cross, 24 May 1889, Lansdowne MSS, MSS EUR D 558/2.

diplomat, so he had no formal training for his role. A key difference of opinion was between Drummond Wolff and Morier. The latter went so far as to argue that the former's success had provoked St. Petersburg: 'the time was past when he [Giers] could hope to continue with his policy of not waking the sleeping dog [Persia]. Sir Henry had woken him with a vengeance and it was evidently in His Excellency's mind that something would have to be done in view of the rapid strides with which English capital and English enterprise were taking possession of Persia.'[60] This conflicted with Morier's opinion that Britain should not seek to compete with Russia over Persia. He feared that Drummond Wolff's actions would only complicate his already difficult job. This did prove to be the case. Forced by London to defend Drummond Wolff's actions, 'Morier's argument that both England and Russia had their separate commercial spheres of interest in Persia did not commend itself to Giers, nor did his stress on the fact that the Karun was open to the shipping and commerce of all nations help the case.'[61]

This negative opinion of Drummond Wolff was shared by Richard Assheton Cross 1st Viscount Cross, the Secretary of State for India (1886 - 1892): '[he was] not at all easy about our Persian negotiations; if we were dealing with any other Power than Russia, it would be a different thing. Lord Salisbury is, however, quite alive to all the dangers, and will, I have no doubt, keep a very wholesome control over our Representative at Teheran.'[62] None the less, in spite of this trust in Salisbury, concerns would not go away: 'no one knows whether Sir H[enry Drummond] Wolff desires to push on railways, mainly to anticipate the Russians, or whether he wishes to do it in any case.' There was a sense that Drummond Wolff was unpredictable and that this made him dangerous to Britain's security. It is necessary to note that Drummond Wolff was not well-liked by his peers, so estimations of him were mostly

[60] Morier to Salisbury (secret, no. 113 A), 22 Apr. 1890, FO 65/1393.
[61] Thornton, 'Policy' Part II, p. 62.
[62] Cross to Lansdowne, 12 Dec. 1889, Lansdowne MSS, MSS EUR D 558/2.

negative. The son of a German Jew, there was an element of anti-Semitism that coloured many people's opinion of him. Yet in spite of his unpopularity, Drummond Wolff retained the Prime Minister's support. It was known: 'Lord Salisbury wishes to keep Sir H[enry Drummond] Wolff in good humour & says I believe, that he has done so much in re-establishing our influence in Persia, that if he deliberately recommends any policy, he would not like to oppose him.'[63] This support was, however, self-serving for Salisbury. Drummond Wolff had been an ally of Randolph Churchill during the Conservative leadership struggle, so while 'reining Drummond Wolff back was to be a recurrent problem for Salisbury ... it was felt that he could do less damage' abroad than in London. For this reason 'Salisbury contrived to keep [Wolff] out of Britain for much of his career.'[64] On the other hand, the Prime Minister did appreciate that the minister had been successful where others had not, in gaining any sort of concession from the Shah. Nevertheless, although his methods were disapproved of, Drummond Wolff did not seek to ferment war. While returning to Persia after having accompanied the Shah on his visit to London, on the advice of the Prince of Wales, he had an audience with Tsar Alexander III at Berlin. After this meeting the minister reported: 'His Imperial Majesty is most desirous of an understanding with England in respect of Persia, which may cement the friendly relations of the two countries.'[65] In addition, contrary to what Morier thought, the minister for Persia was not blind to the military ramifications of his policies in Persia. He understood that 'the Government of Russia may contemplate a military danger from the spread of railways in Persia as opening out roads for [a] British invasion towards the Caspian.'[66] However, he only sought to open Persia up for trade. He did not want to cause conflict between Britain and Russia, even if his actions appeared to be inflammatory.

[63] E. F. Law to Morier (private & personal), 24 Feb. 1890, Morier MSS, Box 23, Item 3.
[64] A. Roberts, *Salisbury. Victorian Titan*, (London, 2000), p. 232.
[65] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (secret & confidential), 14 Oct. 1889, FO 65/1379.
[66] Drummond Wolff (secret memorandum), 22 Sept. 1889, FO 881/6145x.

None the less, Morier was correct; Drummond Wolff's success did provoke Russia to work harder to restrain Britain in Persia. His actions gave St. Petersburg every reason, and every opportunity, to oppose London. As Britain worked to identify ways in which Persia could be opened up, she consistently came up against Russian interests. It was now understood, if it had not been before, that any Anglo-Russian understanding in Persia would have to be based on the *status quo*. This favoured St. Petersburg. Britain could either continue to seek to bring about change in Persia, being hampered at every turn, or stand by as Russia curtailed Persia's development while focusing Anglo-Russian tensions elsewhere. Russia, then, was the greatest hurdle for Salisbury's Persian plan.

Russia was interested in Persia due to her proximity to British India. It was asserted: '[that] all her [Russia's] movements in Central Asia, and on the Persian and Afghan frontiers are made not so much with a view to consolidate her own position in her newly acquired provinces, as to create there a basis for further aggressive operations against our Indian population whenever the time may appear to her to be fitting to make a strong diversion in that quarter to assist her designs on the Turkish Empire in Europe.' As a result, it appeared that 'Russian policy in Persia seems from all accounts to be especially open to suspicion,' as it always gave the impression of seeking to undermine British interests in Central Asia.[67]

It is obvious that for Russia, much like Britain, there were differences between Persia and Afghanistan. These points of divergence ensured that St. Petersburg could defend her influence over Persia more resolutely. For instance, while the creation of forts along the Russo-Afghan border had proven useful for British India, both as a means of deterrence and as lookout posts, St. Petersburg ensured that the Russo-Persian border could not be fortified. It irritated Russia that she could not stop the construction of the Afghan borders forts, but she did not have the same difficulty along the Persian border. Sir Frank Lascelles, the Minister to

[67] Morier to Currie (private), 4 Oct. 1888, FO 65/1332.

Persia (1891 – 1894) reported: 'the Russian government would regard it as a mark of hostility of Persia to Russia if any English officials visited these parts' of the country.[68] Persia required British support in order to build forts capable of withstanding Russian attacks. Consequently, St. Petersburg did not want British engineers near the border. It was obvious that Russia would not allow any measures to be taken that might hinder her ability to invade Persia. The Moscow Gazette reported: 'Russia cannot suffer in a neighbouring state, owing to weakness of government or rather of criminal connivance, the increase of the influence of a foreign state, which has for its sole object the injury from that quarter of Russia, and that such influence should serve as a constant source of popular disturbance, necessitating constant and strained vigilance on the part of Russia.'[69]

Russia did not, however, want to invade Persia in the immediate future. St. Petersburg understood that, as the head of a Shia Muslim nation, Naser could, by working with Ayatollah Shirazi, 'threaten the Russian hold over her Muslim subjects in the Caucasus and Turkestan.'[70] The Shah therefore had to be dealt with more subtly. It was also appreciated that it is easier and cheaper to dominate a country without resorting to open conflict. Russia would not want to compromise its finances any further by embarking on an unnecessary offensive. Her goals could be achieved by other means. It was therefore unsurprising when Lascelles reported: '[he had been told] by the Amin-el-Sultan that Monsieur [Eugéne] de Bützow [Russian Minister to Tehran, 1889 - 1897] has had interviews with the Shah and himself at which he gave assurances that Russia did not desire to annex any portion of the Shah's dominions, and that should any complications occur in Russia's Asiatic politics they would be outside the sphere of interests of Persia.'[71] Russia had much to gain from Persia,

[68] Lascelles to Salisbury (telegram, no. 3), 2 Jan. 1892, FO 65/1434.
[69] Mitchell (translation of Moscow Gazette), 21 Jan. 1892, FO 65/1419.
[70] M. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East 1792 - 1923*, (London, 1987), p. 172.
[71] Lascelles to Salisbury (secret telegram, no. 25), 12 Feb. 1892, FO 65/1435.

and could achieve her goals with guile rather than conflict. Not all success for Russia entailed new territory.

Nevertheless, although Russia did not want to use force, she was more than willing to use the threat of force to manipulate the Shah. This proved very effective. St. Petersburg regularly used the threat of invading Naser's northern and north-eastern provinces to achieve her objectives. This was often used as a means of control, particularly when the Shah had made a decision in Britain's favour. 'When the question of opening the Karun was being actively discussed, the Russian Government had got wind of the matter, and had threatened in the event of the Shah ever conceding our [Britain's] demands that they would enter the Gulf of Enzelli [on Persia's frontier on the Caspian Sea]. His Majesty feared that this menace was still impending' throughout his reign.[72] Russia also used the threat of force to inhibit Britain. Of concern to London was St. Petersburg's supposed plan to threaten the western Afghan town of Herat. This settlement was of some significance to the Central Asian question. It had been 'the cause of two British wars with Persia, and long regarded as the "gate" or "key" to India.'[73] London feared that if Herat was lost to Russia, then she would be able to fortify that position and ready her forces for a full scale attack on British India. This matter was complicated, however, in that it was acknowledged that 'the shortest and best route to Herat lay through Persia.'[74] Consequently, Britain determined both to prevent Russia from using Persian territory as a route to Herat and from actually controlling the town itself. The issue for London was, once St. Petersburg knew of Herat's importance to Britain, this was a pressure point that could be readily used to complicate India's security. Another example of Russia's willingness to use intimidation was the Astrabad incident. It is worth noting that this incident was later than the concerns over Herat, which demonstrates that this was a strategy

[72] Nicolson to Iddesleigh (confidential, no. 128), 19 Oct. 1886, FO 65/1292.
[73] Greaves, *Persia*, p. 74.
[74] Nicolson to Salisbury (secret, no. 9), 5 Jan. 1888, FO 65/1347.

St. Petersburg was willing to use whenever necessary. 'The Russian Government had landed troops [on Persian territory] without asking permission,' at an area north-east of Tehran and close to the Caspian Sea. It was a warning that Russia could do as she pleased while Persia had to accept her dominance. What impressed London, however, was that 'a show of resistance was made by the Persian frontier guards.' None the less, Britain was still grateful that 'they gave way when the Cossacks showed signs of fighting, and a collision was therefore avoided.'[75] While this might appear juxtaposed, it was not. London did not want war with Russia over this matter, as it did not constitute a *casus belli*, but it gave supporters of Persia reason for renewed effort. It appeared that Persia remained committed to her own independence.

Russia's threats of force were difficult for Britain to manage as she had few means of countering them. One method was 'to state that in the view of Her Majesty's Government the integrity of Persia was a matter of serious importance to Great Britain.'[76] This was designed to warn Russia off, reminding her that London would not stand idly by should Persia be invaded. It was also a means to galvanise the Shah in his support for Britain, and his rejection of Russia. This was to the delight of a 'certain school of English politicians ... [which had] always considered [Persia] a sort of *protégé*.'[77] Another approach was to utilise the Royal Navy in the Persian Gulf. Drummond Wolff suggested: 'I am very strongly of [the] opinion that an occasional visit by some of Her Majesty's ships of the Persian Gulf would prove of considerable use. It would serve both as a warning and a reassurance and would not fail to strengthen our hands in our dealings with the Russian government.'[78] The threat of the Royal Navy, and its image, was a powerful symbol. Nevertheless Russia was invulnerable to any immediate pressure from the Royal Navy in Central Asia. Although Britain could land troops

[75] Lascelles to Salisbury (telegram, no. 122), 18 Aug. 1892, FO 65/1444.
[76] Thornton to Salisbury (no. 266), 10 Aug. 1885, FO 65/1248.
[77] M. E. Grant Duff (memorandum), 11 Aug. 1885, Churchill MSS, MS Add.9248, vol. 7.
[78] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (confidential, no. 166), 3 Sept. 1888, FO 65/1353.

on Persia's coastline, or send them up the Karun River, they would still be many miles, and therefore many days, from the Shah's northern territories. Russia meanwhile could threaten Persia with impunity on the Caspian Sea and also along the entire length of the Russo-Persian border. 'The extent of the Russo-Persian frontier was so great that without an actual declaration of war Russia could always be doing something to the detriment of Persia.'[79] This could be forcing locals to part with their animals or some of their produce, or it could be moving troops just across a disputed border to apply pressure on Tehran. There was therefore little Britain could do from the sea, which was the source of British imperial power.

Britain did not, however, want to precipitate a war over Persia as a means to counter Russia in that country. Any Anglo-Russian war would not remain localised, as both empires had a global reach and came into contact with one another at various points. Each side, therefore, had reason to try and de-escalate any conflict over Persia. Foremost of all was the understanding that the consequences of war are incalculable. Furthermore, from Britain's perspective any military clash over Persia would limit her options for protecting British India. It was understood that 'in the event of [an Anglo-Russian] war [over Afghanistan], Persia will be an important factor.'[80] British war plans suggested that 'forces based on the Persian Gulf could advance to Russia either by way of the Tigris and Euphrates Valley or by way of Tehran,' opening a second front away from Afghanistan, forcing Russia to redirect some of her forces away from India.[81] It was as this second front that Persia offered the greatest opportunity for Britain. During the Penjdeh crisis, the Liberal Secretary of State for India, John Wodehouse, 1st Earl of Kimberley, noted: 'if we are to attack Russia with effect I hardly see where we can get at her except through Persia, if the Black Sea is closed.'[82] Attacking Russia through Persia could be the answer to the British government's fear that 'in Central

[79] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (most secret & confidential, no. 171) 5 Sept. 1888, Ibid.
[80] Kimberley to Dufferin (private), 24 Apr. 1885, Dufferin MSS, MSS/EUR/F/130/3.
[81] Greaves, *Persia*, p. 40.
[82] Kimberley to Dufferin (private), 1 May 1885, Kimberley MSS, MS Eng. D.2456.

Asia Russia is now not only impregnable but inaccessible and we are powerless.'[83] It was for this reason that the War Office considered that: 'if an active alliance with Persia were possible, we should then be in a position to strike at Russia in a very vital quarter.'[84]

None the less, British war plans which utilised Persia were dependent on the agreement of the Shah to allow British troops across his territory. Due to Russian pressure this was unlikely to be forthcoming. There was little chance the Shah would willingly accede to British demands since Persian acquiescence might invite Russian retaliation at a later date. This was an important factor to be considered: '[the] Shah's government [was vital] to Russia in matters connected with Central Asia, and to the position which Persia might consequently be expected to occupy in the event of further serious complications between England and Russia.'[85] The Shah therefore had to consider that his actions were always under scrutiny by his northern neighbour. It was of no surprise then that, during the Penjdeh crisis, while it was 'presumed that the Persian government was in a position to state what course would be pursued by them in the event of war being declared and hostilities taking place in the vicinity of their frontier ... it had been determined [by Persia] ... to maintain a strict neutrality towards both belligerents.'[86] Although this was disappointing for Britain's military planners, such a statement gave London confidence. If the Shah would not help Britain, at least he would not help Russia either.

Force, or the threat of force, was not the only means of control utilised by Russia. 'The main feature of Russia's policy in Persia ... was massive Russian penetration carried out by versatile means: economic, political, and military. Russian economic weakness and non-competitiveness was supposed to be compensated by its political influence and military

[83] Lykins to Churchill (private), 18 May 1885, Churchill MSS, MS Add.9248, vol. 5.
[84] Wolseley (secret memorandum. no. 22), 25 Aug. 1889, WO 32/6349.
[85] Thomson to Granville (no. 52), 4 May 1885, FO 65/1242.
[86] Thomson to Granville (no. 52), 4 May 1885, FO 65/1242.

presence.'[87] Economics was a key factor for Russian involvement in Persia. A significant issue for Anglo-Russian relations were the contradictory views of Persia's future held by both powers. London sought to 'civilize' Persia and open her up to the modern world for trade. Edmund Neel, the Assistant Secretary for the Political and Secret Department, India Office, stated that: '[it was the case that] the trade of England with Persia exceeded in value that of India with that of country, and showed that Imperial political interests predominated in Persia.'[88] Russia, by contrast, wanted to maintain the *status quo*, maintaining Persia's markets for herself. Giers: 'urged that, with our [Britain's] enormous superiority in the means of introducing material civilization into a country like Persia, for Russia to enter into competition with us would be to doom herself to certain defeat.'[89] A prime example of this was the Russian government's objection to the Tobacco *Régie*, claiming that it violated the freedom of trade in the region as stipulated by the Treaty of Turkmanchai (1828). With such a stark difference, there could be no compromise. 'The Persian markets importance for Russia was not on a quantitative level; rather, it was Persia's role as an outlet for Russian manufactures incapable of competing on the European market that made the development of the Persian trade a vital Russian economic interest.'[90] Furthermore, it was appreciated that 'so long as they [Russia] can prevent Persia assuming any higher civilization than that of Merv or Bokhara they think they can justify a similar policy towards her;' Russia would therefore oppose at every opportunity any means of investment in the country, unless it was Russian in origin.[91] If Russia had control, she could, and would, restrict Persian progression for as long as was possible.

[87] D. V. Volkov, 'Persian Studies and the Military in Late Imperial Russia (1863 - 1917): State Power in the service of knowledge?' *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 6 (2014), p. 920.
[88] Edmund Neel, (memorandum), 25 Mar. 1890, IOR/L/PS/18/C76.
[89] Morier to Salisbury (very confidential, no. 330), 25 Oct. 1889, FO 65/1379.
[90] J. Siegel, *Endgame: Britain, Russia and the Final Struggle for Central Asia*, (London, 2002), p. 52.
[91] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (private), 25 Nov. 1888, Salisbury MSS, 3M/A/70.

St. Petersburg, in order to maintain its economic advantages, wanted to push Britain out of Tehran for good. In order to achieve this: 'the Russians contended that Persia should not permit any voice but that of Russia to be heard at Tehran; that every effort should be made, in the interests of Persia, to encourage Russian trade and exclude British commerce.' While this irritated the Shah, Russia contended: '[while] they did not assume a right to interfere in the internal affairs of Persia ... at the same time the Persians must understand that they must not conduct their internal affairs in such a manner as in any way to clash with or injure Russian policy in Central Asia.' St. Petersburg continued: 'whatever affected Persia was a matter of concern to Russia in regard to her political position in Asia, and that therefore the right of Persia to direct her own internal affairs was subject to certain limitations.'[92] This the Shah could not agree with, but he did not have the strength to dismiss Russian demands. Meanwhile, in a bid to strengthen her hold over Persia during border discussions in March 1888, Russia had no intention of allowing Britain to be party to these discussions. Although Morier reported that 'Giers ... was very warm about the Persian entente,' it was clear that St. Petersburg considered that the Shah would concede to all of St. Petersburg's demands. Russia suggested:

> "measures for accomplishing at an early date the complete demarcation of the Russo-Persian frontier [were] accompanied by an assurance of the Emperor's desire to treat the Persian gov[ernmen]t with equitable consideration" ... He [Giers] said that the phrase itself contained an ambiguity for to whom was the Emp[eror] to give assurances that he meant to treat Persia with equitable consideration? We could hardly expect that these should be given to us, as we have no different position ... in regard to Persia than Russia, all three of us being independent sovereigns.[93]

Drummond Wolff remarked: '[it was clear that] as to the last point – that of the frontier – Monsieur de Giers considered that it was one to be dealt with between Russia and Persia alone and without the intervention of a third power.' It is apparent that St. Petersburg wanted to separate the Shah from Britain. Without London he could not stand against Russia. Britain

[92] Nicolson to Salisbury (secret, no. 12), 10 Jan. 1888, FO 65/1347.
[93] Morier to Currie (private & confidential), 2 Mar. 1888, Morier MSS, Box 23, Item 2.

would not, however, allow herself to be shut out of the negotiations: 'with regard to the frontier ... this consideration vitally concerned the integrity of the Persian Empire, and affected in a great measure the guarantees given in 1834 and 1838.'[94] These guarantees had been jointly made by London and St. Petersburg to ensure the independence of Persia. Britain therefore had every right, as London saw it, to participate in these discussions.

Russia, in order to secure Persia as an outlet for her goods, therefore sought to undermine Britain at every opportunity. Nicolson observed: 'my impression is that an effort is being made to induce His Majesty [the Shah] to believe that we [are] anxious to obtain a footing on the Persian Gulf of a more pronounced character that has hitherto been the case, and by this means to sow the seeds of distrust in His Majesty's mind in regard to any cession ... to British capitalists.'[95] There was little Britain could do other than object and disagree. British statesmen, although irritated by Russia's methods, understood that while 'the real object of the Shah was to regain his liberty ... His Majesty was perfectly helpless in promoting the civilization of his country and all progress was hopelessly blocked.'[96] At the same time, Russian agents had great success in gaining influence over large swathes of northern Persia. Nicolson conveyed: 'on the north Persia was threatened in a more serious manner. She was bowing under the pressure exercised by her northern neighbour whose aims and desires were too patent to deceive anyone.' Matters were made more arduous as although 'the Shah knew well that England was his true and only friend ... to speak quite frankly, he had not absolute confidence in her.'[97] This only made it more difficult for the Shah to resist Russian aggression. Russia also sought to convince the Persian people that Britain could not be trusted. Nicolson was aware that 'a hundred thousand copies of a ... pamphlet will also be sent to Persia ... which extols the blessings of Russian administration and the superiority of

[94] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury, 3 Mar. 1888, FO 65/1348.
[95] Nicolson to Iddesleigh (confidential, no. 115), 27 Sept. 1886, FO 65/1291.
[96] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (most secret & confidential, no. 174), 6 Sept. 1888, FO 65/1353.
[97] Nicolson to Salisbury (secret, no. 9), 5 Jan. 1888, FO 65/1347.

Russia over other European countries.'[98] It was St. Petersburg's plan to convince the Persian people that they would be better off under Russian control rather than that of Britain or even the Shah. Such propaganda proved effective as Britain did have to contend with local opposition to a number of her plans, such as the tobacco concession to Major Talbot.

Of great significance to the Central Asian paradigm was control of the railways. It was clear that when Salisbury became Prime Minister in July 1886, and Sir Stafford Northcote, 1st Earl of Iddesleigh, took over as Foreign Secretary, the Anglo-Russian dispute over Persia would change. There was a greater tenacity as the two Great Powers competed over Persia. The construction of railways, and the right to do so, was a key battleground. Sir Rowland MacDonald Stephenson, the eminent railway engineer, explained: 'railways will play a more important part than ever in Central Asia and those who secure them will virtually rule the country. The command of Persia will constitute the safeguard of India, and an effective bulwark against foreign aggression – Persia has to choose between English and Russian friendship, and if Russia has not already obtained too strong a hold, it may yet not be too late to avert the impending dangers rapidly maturing in Central Asia.'[99] Railways allowed goods and people to travel across a country with greater speed and ease, giving marked economic benefits. But they also had military benefits, allowing troops and equipment to be moved to the front line with haste.

It would prove to be a combination of Russian and local resistance that meant Britain was unable to develop Persia's railway network. 'His Majesty feared that the introduction of railway undertakings in Persia would revolutionise the country; would produce a rivalry between Russian and British enterprise and that his position would be seriously shaken in

[98] Nicolson to Iddesleigh (no. 133), 26 Oct. 1886, FO 65/1292.
[99] Stephenson to Iddesleigh, 24 Aug. 1886, FO 65/1290.

consequence.'[100] The Shah was correct that the issue of railways would cause competition between Britain and Russia, but he could not have foreseen how this antagonism would set a pattern for ongoing Great Power disputes in Persia. The blueprint for such struggles entailed Britain requesting a dispensation, or be about to secure an agreement, when St. Petersburg would seek to block London or demand an alternative. The Reuter Concession is a prime example of this. In 1872 the Shah had granted to Baron Reuter a concession that had at its core the planned construction of railways. This was cancelled after significant resistance from elements inside both Persia and Russia.

It was British India's fear that 'Persia, reduced to "Russian vassalage", with her resources exploited and railways built by Russian capital, would provide an easier invasion route into Afghanistan and India than the northern approach to which so much attention had been paid.'[101] Major-General Sir Henry Brackenbury, the Director of Military Intelligence, understood that: 'the absorption of Khorassan into the Russian Empire, or even its control by means of railways in Russian hands, will compel India to add to her already heavy military burdens.'[102] The Major-General also appreciated that even with Britain's diplomatic successes Russia could invade northern Persia with impunity. From the perspective of imperial defence, Britain sought to secure contracts from the Shah for British companies to build railways in his country. This way the security of British India could be maintained. In addition, it was anticipated that these contracts would bring with them a form of soft power with which Britain could exercise some control over the Shah. Russia could not, however, allow Britain to make any gains at Tehran. Advantages for London were disadvantages for St. Petersburg.

[100] Nicolson to Iddesleigh (no. 133), 26 Oct. 1886, FO 65/1292.
[101] Steele, *Salisbury*, p. 258.
[102] Brackenbury Memorandum (secret & confidential, no. 13), 9 Feb. 1889, FO 181/695.

The issue of railways was a consistent source of tension in Persia. Even as Europe focused on Eastern Rumelia, efforts to control Persia's railways continued. Nicolson reported: 'during the past two months, the Russian Legation have been energetic in their efforts to obtain a concession for a railway from Meshed [east of Tehran, south-west of Merv] to the Russian frontier.'[103] It was clear that Russia's object 'was a rectification of the frontier and the subjection of the Turkomans in Persian districts to Russian dominion – the Russians were there protecting their advance on Merv.'[104] This oasis town had been captured by Russian forces in 1884, and was north of the important Afghan town of Herat. Anglo-Russian relations were therefore further complicated by Morier's report concerning St. Petersburg's intentions: 'it is desirable to at once colonise the oasis of Merv with Russian families.' While Merv was not Persian territory, it was still of significant strategic importance: 'Merv was recognised by Napoleon I as commanding the passage to India and as affording the only solid basis of operations for a military empire in Central Asia.'[105] If Russia was intending to invade Afghanistan or Persia, Merv would be involved. It was therefore a cause for concern if Russia intended to build a railway near this strategic point.

It was the case that when Russian intelligence suggested that Britain was to receive dispensation towards a railway project, St. Petersburg responded. After the arrival, in March 1886, of Monsieur Sapienza, a *chambellan de la cour* at St. Petersburg, Nicolson noted: '[he had] visited Teheran with the object of obtaining the concession for a railway from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf.' It was the *chargé's* impression that 'the mission of Monsieur Sapienza has been hastily decided upon on intelligence having been received that an English project was under the serious consideration of His Majesty the Shah.'[106] If this method of seeking a *quid pro quo* or the cancellation of Britain's dispensation yielded

[103] Nicholson (Tehran) to Rosebery (no. 32), 2 Mar. 1886 FO 65/1284.
[104] Nicolson to Rosebery (confidential, no. 49), 9 Apr. 1886, FO 65/ 1285.
[105] Morier to Salisbury (no. 382), 16 Nov. 1887, FO 65/1299.
[106] Nicolson to Iddesleigh (confidential, no. 128), 19 Oct. 1886, FO 65/1292.

unsatisfactory results, then Russia would use the threat of force to gain the upper hand. In September 1888: 'the Russian Legation had informed the Shah that the object of my [Drummond Wolff's] mission was the extension of railways in Persia. His Majesty had then been told positively that a concession for railways granted to a foreigner of any nationality whatever would be looked upon as a blow given to Russia and would entail reprisals. The reason alleged for this threat was that whatever European obtained a concession it could only be carried out by English capital.'[107] Such direct Russian pressure on the Shah over the railways was, however, nothing new. Naser had already in 1887 issued a moratorium on the construction of railways in Persia due to Russian insistence. In another ploy to persuade Naser not to accept British money, Russia stated: 'railways are a bad thing for Persia as they will bring Englishmen into the country.'[108] This was a deliberate attempt to suggest that the English could hasten revolution.

The Shah, however, proved more resilient than Russia had anticipated. He did not want to be subjugated to St. Petersburg any more than he did London. To this end, St. Petersburg's patience was tested when, in 1889, Naser revived the Reuter Concession. Drummond Wolff had obtained a special dispensation: '[where] the Shah signed a preliminary concession in the Baron's favour on 30 January 1889, repaying him, as a token of goodwill, the £40,000 confiscated in 1872; this money he borrowed from the [Imperial] Bank [of Persia].'[109] Britain sought to press home this advantage when the bank was granted a royal charter some months later. It was due to Russia's incessant pressure that Britain felt compelled to offer such support. This was not out of liberal idealism, but imperial necessity.

As a result of the difficulties Britain faced, by October 1889 Salisbury's positive attitude regarding Persia was weakening. There was little opportunity for London to devise

[107] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (most secret & confidential, no. 171) 5 Sept. 1888, FO 65/1353.
[108] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (private), 25 Nov. 1888, Salisbury MSS, 3M/A/70.
[109] Thornton, 'Policy' Part II, p. 64.

any policy with the Shah that could be achieved without Russia achieving a similar objective, or undermining Britain's position. 'In respect to railways we are terribly hampered. We have not yet been able to induce capitalists to make them, as Persia is not able to offer any security, or to provide a guarantee which can be relied on.' He continued: '[that] the gov [ernmen]t of India & the gov[ernmen]t of England decline to have anything to do with them on the grounds that it is against ... to give any pecuniary support to the making of railway lines.'[110] While neither London nor Delhi could interfere with these private companies and individuals, for fear of being seen to be acting improperly, there still remained the Shah's moratorium on railway building. This meant that there could be no immediate financial benefits for anyone involved. If London could not secure an agreement on railways, then Britain could not garner enough private investment to build the railways in Persia that were needed for Central Asian security and trade.

From April 1890 Russia became more aggressive in her relations with Persia. Alexei Speyer, Russia's *chargé d'affaires* at Tehran: 'warned the Persian Gov[ernmen]t against attempting to be friends with both Russia and with England, and had declared Russia would not tolerate a railway in Persia on which Russian goods did not enjoy a preferential rate of 50% over all other foreign goods.' St. Petersburg had tired of the Shah's policy of attempting to play Britain and Russia off against one another. Morier referenced: 'a telegram [he had received] informing me that the Russian Chargé d'affaires at Tehran had, in language described as menacing, insisted on the Shah's gov[ernmen]t granting to Messers [Boris] Poliakhoff [sic] and [Lev] Raffaelovitch the railway concessions asked for by them, engaging that the Russian gov[ernmen]t would sanction these explanations when obtained.'[111] This contrasted starkly with Drummond Wolff's attempts to win concessions for Britain with diplomacy. None the less, there was little Morier could do to adjust the situation. Although he

[110] Salisbury to Morier (private), 30 Oct. 1889, Morier MSS, Box 22, Item 2.
[111] Morier to Giers (private), 13 Apr. 1890, FO 65/1393.

complained at St. Petersburg, in response: 'Speyer ... denied "in toto" having used threatening language or engaged the Russian government to the railway scheme.'[112] This was to be expected, as the Russian War Office routinely denied knowledge of any small gains in Central Asia until its objectives were achieved. Nevertheless, this did not mean that Speyer did not have the support of his government. Morier was aware that as a consequence of Sir Henry's success, Giers had to act in Russia's best interests. This would, by default, be detrimental to Anglo-Russian relations. To this end, St. Petersburg remained unrelenting: 'if Russia did not make them [railways] then none should be made, and if the Shah wanted to construct them himself, he must borrow money in Russia. No English capital should be employed on them in any shape.'[113] None the less, it was evident that Russia's Foreign Minister did not support Speyer's heavy-handed approach. 'Giers disavows Messers. Poliakoff and Rafalovitch and strongly recommended the Persian Government not to enter into any railway negotiations until the arrival of Monsieur de Bützow,' the new Russian minister.[114]

While Morier could do little to stop Speyer from St. Petersburg, more broadly Drummond Wolff was similarly limited in his ability to stop Russia from building railways in Persia. While a Russian railway posed a threat to British India, this was not enough to force the Shah to block concessions for Russia. Furthermore, Britain could not dismiss Russia's plans on economic grounds; after all, Britain had been trying to build railways in order to open the country up to trade:

> Except the strategical danger to ourselves we have no argument to allege against it [the railway] being made ... What will be the result of the construction of a line from Sarakhs to Meshed? Khorassan will be literally at the mercy of Russia and morally in her possession with the long frontier along the whole of Afghanistan. The road from Meshed to Tehran is I am informed by military authorities perfectly practicable for

[112] Morier to Salisbury (secret, no. 113 A), 22 Apr. 1890, FO 65/1393.
[113] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (secret & confidential, no. 120), 12 Apr. 1890, FO 65/1393.
[114] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (telegram, no. 124), 7 May 1890, Ibid.

> the march of an army, and the capital will therefore also be under the domination of the Power that holds Meshed, while the possession of that city would open out a second road to Herat and give a fresh base of supplies for an invasion of afghan territories.[115]

It is clear therefore why Britain wanted to build Persia's railways. As it was, Britain had to try and compete with Russia rather than stymie her; this was not a problem that St. Petersburg shared.

Russia gained the upper hand when Drummond Wolff experienced a period of ill health. 'The closing months of 1890 saw the clock put back in Persia' as by November Bützow had proven successful in securing his nation's railway requirements.[116] Morier remarked: 'information which had reached Her Majesty's Government [meant] they had reason to believe that M[onsieur] de Bützow had been endeavouring to induce the Persian Government to bind themselves to construct no railways for ten years, and at the end of that period to determine, in conjunction with Russia, whether they would prolong this system of inactivity.'[117] Salisbury had been caught off guard by these reports, and such was his shock that he 'in his haste so far forgot himself as to talk to a Shah of Persia about *allies*.'[118] The Prime Minister argued: 'in his [the Shah's] own interests as well as in those of his Allies it would be most unwise for His Majesty to pledge his freedom of action except for a limited and definite period.'[119] In spite of this, the Shah agreed to the extended moratorium. 'Undoubtedly the Russian Government had scored a victory in Persia.' This would not, however, threaten Britain's broader interests. 'It was fortunate [for Britain] that they [Russia] intended to put that victory to a negative use. They had no capital themselves with which to

[115] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (secret & confidential, no. 229), 4 Jul. 1890, FO 65/1394.
[116] Thornton, 'Policy' Part II, p. 67.
[117] Morier to Salisbury (confidential, no. 283), 12 Nov. 1890, FO 65/1395.
[118] Thornton, 'Policy' Part II, p. 68.
[119] Salisbury to Kennedy (telegram, no. 107), 27 Oct. 1890, FO 65/1395.

build railways: therefore, nobody should build them. That was an irritating policy, but it could not be called dangerous.'[120]

While this was a local defeat for Drummond Wolff, more broadly it came as a relief. At St. Petersburg: '[when Morier] had got as far as to say that Her Majesty's Government were ready to accept the ten years period, he [Giers] gave an exclamation of pleased surprise ... a very great load had been taken off his mind ... This was all he had striven for, and all he wished to accomplish ... [to] bring about a *modus vivendi* between our legations at Tehran, and to remove irritating topics in that part of the world.'[121] This also benefited Britain in that she no longer had to concern herself with the railway question. Moreover, British India need not feel threatened either. In spite of these advantages, there were some who did view this as a defeat and sought to orchestrate a rebuttal. Morier did not agree:

> I cannot but deprecate the outburst of fresh activity, recommended by Mr Kennedy ... I believe that to make new demands at the present time ... would be the signal for a great period of agitation and for a conflict in which, as matters stand, I doubt whether we would be likely to succeed ... The Shah, Monsieur de Giers, and, from what I know of him, I should think Monsieur Bützow also, all wish to rest and be thankful. Monsieur Zinoviev in the background chafes and wishes to fight ... I cannot but think it would be the better policy to encourage the sleepers whilst actively cultivating our concessions during their slumber.[122]

Salisbury concurred that to do nothing was the best course of action. He considered it 'evident that nothing more is to be obtained by negotiating at Teheran;' Morier was thus instructed to accept the matter at St. Petersburg.[123] Now that the railways were unobtainable, it made more sense to increase Britain's control in the south rather than seek to push Russia back in the north, which was an almost impossible task.

Russia, then, was a consistent hindrance to Salisbury's efforts. Through various policies St. Petersburg had ensured that London could not gain the ascendancy at Tehran.

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[120] Thornton, 'Policy' Part II, p. 69.
[121] Morier to Salisbury (confidential, no. 283), 12 Nov. 1890, FO 65/1395.
[122] Morier to Salisbury (no. 291), 26 Nov. 1890, FO 65/1395.
[123] Salisbury to Morier (telegram, no. 34), 10 Nov. 1890, Ibid.

After Bützow's success on the railway question, Russia would also have a hand in Britain's difficulties regarding the Tobacco *Régie* and the Imperial Bank of Persia. These factors all contributed to Britain's decision from 1892 not to focus so much energy on Tehran. It was clear that Russia could not threaten British India from Persia without railways. Meanwhile, it was equally obvious to Britain's capitalists that their money was not safe if invested in Persia.

Salisbury's Persian plan was also inhibited by his inability to gain widespread approval for his methods from the Government of India. This was a result of the 'rivalry between London and India for control over policy towards Persia – a rivalry that was to persist for many years.'[124] 'The Imperial government and the Government of India viewed Persia from different standpoints. For India it was a matter of frontier defence. The 'buffer state' existed for the benefit of India and not as a factor in European diplomacy. For the Foreign Office Persia was really a diplomatic backwater. Tehran merited only a legation, not an embassy.'[125] London and Delhi, then, agreed that Persia had some importance for the British Empire; they just disagreed over the extent of this importance, and how best to manage the Shah.

Considering that the security of British India was a fundamental part of the Prime Minister's Persian plan, it seems converse that Delhi would want to be an obstacle. Yet it was for the benefit of India, as he saw it, that Frederick Hamilton-Temple-Blackwood, 1st Marquess of Dufferin and Ava, Viceroy of India (1884 – 1888), conceded: 'with regards to Persia ... I am afraid I have very little to say that can be of any service.' Although this appears incongruous, Dufferin's ambiguity was politically motivated. 'If the Persians would encourage trade between England and their southern provinces, something effectual might be

[124] Wright, *English*, p. 6.
[125] McLean, *Buffer*, p. 29.

done towards a better stand being made against Russia.'[126] Dufferin did not want Persia to be granted any support unless Britain, and the Raj, received something in kind. In particular, Dufferin wanted to strengthen ties with southern Persia. 'The south-east corner of Persia attracted the attention of the British and Indian authorities. The Seistan basin was one of the gates to India. Unless the Russians advanced through Herat in Afghanistan their only route for an invasion of India lay through the Persian province of Seistan. The importance of keeping that province free from Russian control was therefore enormous.'[127] The Foreign Office agreed with this, on a practical level at least: 'steps should be taken to encourage the Shah to offer some effective resistance to Russian aggression.'[128] However, this was a discouraging turn of events for Salisbury, as he had previously been given 'the support of the Government of India which indicated it was prepared to share in providing financial guarantees.'[129]

In addition, when London would have preferred to foster some mutual cooperation between Tehran and Kabul, in the expectation that border questions might have been resolved more easily, Delhi openly sought to keep Persia and Afghanistan apart. 'Of late years it has been the policy of the Government of India to discourage the maintenance of direct relations between the Amir and Persia or other foreign countries, and the Amir has agreed to abstain from such relations.'[130] While such a demand could be made of the Amir, the Indian government could not dictate terms to the Shah. British India, however, was fortunate that 'the Persian Government are not at all disposed to open direct relations with Afghanistan on any subject whatever.'[131]

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[126] Dufferin to Churchill (private), 30 Jul. 1885, Churchill MSS, MS Add.9248, vol. 6.
[127] McLean, *Buffer*, p. 24.
[128] FO to IO (secret, draft), 3 Aug. 1885, FO 65/1248.
[129] J. S. Galbraith. 'British Policy on Railways in Persia 1870 - 1900', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Oct., 1989), p. 490.
[130] Durand to Nicolson, 20 May 1886, FO 65/1292.
[131] Nicolson to Durand, 18 Jun. 1886, Ibid.

Much of Delhi's animosity towards Salisbury's plan stemmed from a disagreement as to whether Persia was worth cultivating. Militarily, Dufferin contended that the Shah's domain was too exposed to Russia to be of any use. 'Persia', he argued, 'or at least its northern half, must inevitably go, in which case Herat becomes outflanked and the Amir's supremacy over the valley of the Hari Rud more precarious than ever.'[132] It was considered senseless to offer the Shah support when he would likely fall whenever Russia chose to advance, even with British help. Dufferin simply did not agree that Persia could become a worthwhile collaborator. He confessed: 'with regards to Persia I am almost hopeless. I learnt too well at Constantinople the fruitlessness of endeavouring to persuade an Eastern potentate to reform his administration, to believe that any diplomat, no matter how eminent he may be, will succeed in inducing the Shah to re-organise his Government.'[133] Such an outlook did not favour the Viceroy to the Prime Minister. Salisbury viewed the Indian government as quite short-sighted over Persia. 'I do not think they have done wisely to neglect the Persian danger to the extent to which they have done. The same circumstances & motives which might carry Russia into Afghanistan, might, if she finds it too dangerous a venture, carry her into Persia.'[134] None the less, the obstructionism of the government in Delhi did not change Britain's policy. Indeed, Cross informed Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, 5th Marquess of Lansdowne, the Viceroy of India (1888 – 1894): 'Lord Salisbury is still full of Persia and a railway from the Gulf.'[135]

Closer to home, the India Office proved more supportive of Salisbury's plan. There was also an appreciation that 'the difficulty of supporting Persia against Russia lies in the fact that the Persian regions, in which Russian encroachments are likely to be made, lie wholly

[132] Dufferin to Churchill (private), 14 Aug. 1885, Churchill MSS, MS Add.9248, vol. 5.
[133] Dufferin to Cross (private), 2 Apr. 1887, Dufferin MSS, MSS/EUR/F/130/8A.
[134] Salisbury to Lascelles (private), 6 Oct. 1891, Salisbury MSS, 3M/A/71.
[135] Cross to Lansdowne, 25 Nov. 1891, Lansdowne MSS, MSS EUR D 558/4.

beyond the reach of any material assistance.'[136] None the less, Randolph Churchill, the India Secretary (June 1885 – January 1886), proved to have a difference of opinion as to how best improve relations with the Shah. He was against any form of trade deal with Persia. He argued that if the Shah relied on British generosity, he would limit his capacity to defend Persia. 'Any promises ... of assistance which H[er] M[ajesty's] G[overnmen]t might make to the Shah would incur the danger of inducing the Persian G[overnmen]t to rely upon support which, should the occasion arise, it would be probably impracticable for H[er] M[ajesty's] G[overnmen]t to give.' The India Office had identified that Britain could not offer the Shah what he wanted, namely a means of defending his territory from Russian aggression. Even so, Churchill was a strong supporter of the Persian plan. He shared Salisbury's conviction that Persia was an important factor in British India's security. The 'advantage to Indian interests to which the integrity of Persia or at any rate the independence of Persia from Russian influence, is as essential as the integrity of Afghanistan and the independence of that country from Russian influence.' He continued: 'considering how much we are doing and risking for the latter [Afghanistan], our policy will be seriously incomplete if we are not prepared under reasonable and favourable circumstances to do a good deal more and risk something for the former [Persia].'[137] This was very much in line with Salisbury and the Foreign Office. Both wanted the Shah to continue preventing Russian encroachment into northern Persia as far as he was able, in spite of Britain's lack of material support. It should be remembered that at this moment in time Churchill and Salisbury were in the midst of a battle for the leadership of the Conservative party. The former was always likely to oppose the incumbent's methods as a means to differentiate his position on the matter, even though they agreed on much.

Matters became much easier for Salisbury during his long administration with Richard Assheton Cross, 1st Viscount Cross, as India Secretary. An ally of Salisbury, his 'policy was

[136] India Office to Foreign Office (secret, draft), 3 Aug. 1885, FO 65/1248.
[137] Churchill to Salisbury, 16 Aug. 1885, Salisbury MSS, 3M/A/36.

to consolidate Great Britain's position in southern Persia by stationing an officer at Istafan, promoting the Karun river and railway schemes, encouraging trade, and cultivating the Zil-es-Sultan [Masud Mirza, eldest son of the Shah], who as the de facto ruler of southern Persia,' offered Britain a worthwhile collaborator.[138] Meanwhile, 'the India Office in London had no policy of its own for Persia. It freely admitted that the Government of India depended entirely upon the Foreign Office for guidance.' This was as a result of Salisbury's broader foreign policy: 'the home government saw Persia primarily as part of Anglo-Russian rivalry on a global scale.'[139]

Although the India Office proved a valuable asset, Salisbury was clearly in a difficult position regarding Persia. Considering the obstacles Britain faced, it was considered necessary for her to look for help abroad if she was ever going to be able to utilise Persia. This had long been Britain's intention. From her perspective, 'the real safety of Persia lay in her ... developing her resources, and in combining her interests commercially with those of European countries.' If this was achieved: '[then while] it was true there was a long frontier on which Russia might create dangers for Persia ... on the other hand, the frontier was a weakness for Russia if Persia were in strict alliance with another country, and of this possibility Russia was fully aware.'[140] Engaging the aid of a great power was therefore considered to be an acceptable way of mitigating any risk of dealing with Persia. It was considered: 'if ever Persia was to be delivered from the embraces of her "good-tempered tiger," it would not be effected by British diplomacy alone, but would require the commercial and political co-operation of other Powers that had surplus capital to invest, such as Germany.'[141] Berlin was the preferred choice amongst Salisbury's contemporaries due to Germany's financial power and military strength. W. H. Smith, the Secretary of State for

[138] Greaves, *Persia*, p. 34
[139] McLean, *Buffer*, p. 30.
[140] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (most confidential, no. 244), 5 Nov. 1888, FO 65/1355.
[141] Thornton, 'Policy' Part I, pp. 578 – 579.

War, impressed on Salisbury: 'there is evidence that Russia is disposed to encroach on Persian territory and the development of the resources of the country by English and German capitalists would be a great check to Russian ambition.'[142] Away from the War Office, however, there was some reluctance to obtain German support. 'Because financial interests gave an opportunity for political activity by foreign powers, the British government took the view that the less other foreigners were involved in the economic affairs of Persia the better.'[143] Nevertheless, although Nicolson 'had suggested inducing Germany to take a greater financial and commercial interest in Persia ... Persia lay well beyond Bismarck's diplomatic horizon. German support for Britain there was not forthcoming.'[144] Such a move would have buoyed British Germanophiles and horrified Russia to an equal extent. An Anglo-German combination in Persia was too strong a test for Russia's resources. None the less, in reality such cooperation over Persia was unlikely. Only Britain could benefit from such an arrangement. London could not offer Berlin a *quid pro quo* on this matter.

Despite having no interest in working with Britain in Persia, the German government kept itself informed of events. It was feared that actions in Central Asia could cause problems in Europe. Herbert von Bismarck, Germany's State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, was aware: '[that] negotiations have been going on for some weeks past between England and Persia concerning certain Afghan-Persian frontier questions.'[145] Regarding these discussions, it was obvious that Otto von Bismarck did not want to see St. Petersburg retaliate in Europe. Yet neither could Bismarck allow Britain to utilise Europe in response to St. Petersburg's threats either.

[142] W. H. Smith to Salisbury, 24 Aug. 1885, Salisbury MSS, 3M/A/36.
[143] McLean, *Buffer*, p. 12.
[144] T. G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind. The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1865 - 1914*, (Cambridge, 2011), p. 184.
[145] German Foreign Office to Mr. Bashford (*communiqué*), 19 Mar. 1887, FO 65/1316.

The defence of Persia and Europe were interconnected from London's perspective. It was obvious to Morier that Germany, even though she at present had no interest in alignment with London, offered a solution if Russia lost patience with Britain over Persia. 'It is quite on the cards that if the big bears tantrums get the better of him he may make a *coup* in Persia e.g. occupy Khorassan, which might force us to give material assistance to the Shah i.e. declare war to Russia. This danger if it flew by might be at once averted by a whisper in Giers ear to the effect that the entrance of a ... Cossack into Persia would be the signal for our formally joining the Triple Alliance.'[146] While this was unlikely to occur, the threat of an Anglo-German alliance would be a helpful addition to Britain's armoury.

It was of some concern to St. Petersburg that its failures in Europe would have consequences in Persia. The German Foreign Office suggested: 'the prestige of Russia has suffered in Persia by the failure of her policy in Bulgaria.'[147] It could be considered that, following this, the Shah might be more willing to work with Britain as he feared Russia less. If Germany could foresee positive ramifications for Britain in Central Asia, then so could St. Petersburg. None the less, from St. Petersburg's perspective the fate of Bulgaria mattered more than her reputation in Persia. For this reason, Russia made a bold but near impossible request of Britain. Prince Nikolai Dolgoruky, the Russian Minister to Persia (1886 – 1889), asserted that:

> I perceive that all your [Britain's] foreign policy is based on India. You have held it more than a century – as is natural you desire to retain it, and you are in constant belief that we [Russia] wish to take it. Your only motive in your Mediterranean policy, on the Suez Canal or at Constantinople is to protect India from Russia. I look on the Balkans as an Indian question. If we come to such an arrangement as will relieve England of her *nervosité* regarding India; surely in return you should do something to meet our views in Bulgaria. England is very powerful in this question. We know it cannot be solved without her.

[146] Morier to Goschen, 13 Dec. 1888, Morier MSS, Box 41, Item 2.
[147] German Foreign Office to Mr. Bashford (*communiqué*), 19 Mar. 1887, FO 65/1316.

This was an innovative tit-for-tat suggestion whereby Russia was intimating that if Britain helped her cause in Bulgaria, she would reciprocate in Central Asia. That it was the Russian Minister to Persia delivering this message would imply that it was in Persia where Britain would receive her half of the deal. It is clear that St. Petersburg's foreign policy-makers had noted that Persia was of some significance to Britain. This conclusion was drawn both as a result of Drummond Wolff's determined actions, as well as the obvious implications for British India's defence. Nevertheless, London could not make such a deal. Bulgaria, and the Balkans at large, provided London with some comfort, knowing that there was a great landmass between Russia and her ultimate prizes, Constantinople and the Ottoman Empire. Salisbury would not assist Russia in breaking up the Sultan's Empire. He understood that it would be catastrophic for both the balance of power and British imperial security. There remained, however, the 'great difficulty in uniting the two questions or making one dependent on the other. Russia and England were the only two powers who had assured the integrity of Persia, and they ... alone ... [could] come to an arrangement about this country. But Bulgaria was mixed up with the whole of the arrangements of Berlin and affected all the Great Powers who were parties to that Treaty.'[148] Britain had no authority over Bulgaria and therefore could not act unilaterally. This does, however, demonstrate Russia's preoccupation with Bulgaria, and her willingness to make sacrifices in Central Asia in order to counter Britain's successes in Europe.

After Bützow's arrival in Persia, Russia again attempted to combine Persia with Europe. The Russian minister had been instructed: 'to discuss abstract questions of foreign policy with Drummond Wolff – such as squaring the Anglo-Russian account in Bulgaria.'[149] The proposal was similar to the one suggested in 1888, although it had been enlarged: 'Bützow asked if an arrangement could not be made along the whole line including Turkey

[148] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (no. 104), 6 Jul. 1888, FO 65/1351.
[149] Thornton, 'Policy' Part II, p. 67.

and Bulgaria.' It is of interest that Bützow had been given such a broad mandate, as this suggests concern in St. Petersburg that matters were not under their control. Nevertheless, the British response remained the same: '[Drummond Wolff] had always disclaimed any idea of connecting Persia with Bulgaria. In Persia we were two alone. In Bulgaria we were two of a larger party. Monsieur de Bützow rejoined that England was mistress of the situation in Bulgaria and was really the leader in all the opposition to Russia.' Salisbury's refusal, at the onset of the Bulgarian crisis, to remove Prince Alexander of Battenberg from the Bulgarian throne, was still a source of discontent in Russia. Meanwhile, contrary to this suggestion of British control over Bulgaria: 'I scarcely thought she [Britain] could go to the other Great Powers and say that having settled matters with Russia in Persia they must now accept an Anglo-Russian settlement of Bulgaria'.[150] This was an unrealistic proposal, and St. Petersburg knew it. Furthermore, any linking of Persia with Bulgaria meant Britain sacrificing more and gaining less than has Russia. This London could never agree to. In addition, there remained much distrust of Russian diplomacy. It was considered that there was no guarantee that Russia would fulfil her end of the bargain. Nevertheless, in spite of the futility of this suggestion, it demonstrated that the Balkans remained where Russian policy was directed. It also revealed that she was working to gain time in Persia.

A conversation between Wolff and Bützow, in September 1890, would demonstrate the differences between British and Russian policies in Persia. It would also highlight how these distinctions frustrated the British minister. 'Bützow ... spoke generally of Persian affairs, and regretted that England and Russia could not come to terms. I replied that my efforts had been directed to nothing else, but it appeared to me that, while we desired an understanding, Russian statesmen wished to continue the system of misunderstandings ... the refusal to treat about Persia on the Bulgarian grounds was merely the creation of a vicious

[150] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (secret, no. 250), 31 Jul. 1890, FO 65/1394.

circle.'[151] It is clear, therefore, that Britain and Russia were beginning their diplomacy from different starting points. In order to get good terms, Russia needed Anglo-Russian problems to be solved together. For Britain, it was the opposite. This discrepancy created the Central Asian paradigm in Anglo-Russian relations.

It was therefore also the case that, even though Persia and Europe were inextricably linked, due to the interests of Britain and Russia, there was little the Great Powers could, or were willing, to do. Salisbury had, in many ways, failed. However, any renewed Conservative endeavours were forgotten as the Liberals returned to office in August 1892. The Salisbury ministry had worked hard to try and offer Persia as a feasible alternative to Afghanistan as a partner in Central Asia, but had been unsuccessful. 'One of the main problems underlying British policy in the Persian question was the difficulty in interpreting the motives of Russia. Some observers believed that she hoped to obtain a port on the Gulf. Others held that she aimed at incorporating the four northern provinces in order to enhance her wealth – but others again that the Shah's kingdom might be used as a convenient route for the eventual conquest of India.'[152] Furthermore, it was an over-simplification to claim, as many of Russia's detractors in Britain did, that 'the principal object of Russia's Persian policy was to gain access to the Persian Gulf, or, failing that, "the possession of the Caspian provinces of Persia and very possibly of Khorassan".'[153] Without a fuller understanding of Russia's plans, London could not adopt a Persian policy designed to stop, or at least frustrate, St. Petersburg's schemes. Moreover, while the Shah remained unwilling to meet Salisbury's demands in return for help, there was little practical support the Prime Minister could, or was willing, to offer. His frustration with the Shah was summed up in 1889: 'Lord Salisbury succinctly articulated the British position with his observation that, "were it not for our

[151] Drummond Wolff to Salisbury (very secret & confidential, no. 271), 3 Sep. 1890, FO 65/1394.
[152] Greaves, *Persia*, pp. 10 - 11.
[153] Otte, *Mind*, p. 164.

possession of India, we should trouble ourselves but little over Persia".'[154] It was clear that 'capital investment was not safe in Persia; and the City of London preferred to put its money to work in other fields.'[155] Moreover, it was the case that any British gains made by men-on-the-spot, such as Drummond Wolff, were soon undermined by Russia. By 1892 little actual progress had been made, although 'Salisbury had clearly established the principle that Persia should be maintained as a buffer state.'[156] None the less, war had not broken out and there did not appear to be much chance of this happening in the immediate future, so although matters had not improved, from a British perspective they had not worsened either. Nevertheless, it was as a result of Russia's strategic advantages that British resistance had to remain diplomatic. She did not have the means to militarily support the Shah. Moreover, any Anglo-Russian war would, by its very nature, be a global rather than a local war. Both empires were vast and came into contact with one another at various points across the globe. With war being so incalculable, both sides had an incentive to deescalate tensions through diplomacy. With the inward-looking Gladstone returned as Prime Minister, it would now be Rosebery's and Kimberley's decision regarding Persia's place in Britain's Central Asian policy. Concurrently they would also have to settle on which broader policies they wanted to pursue in the region, which at this time centred on difficulties in the mountains of Afghanistan. Furthermore, there remained restrictions on Britain in Europe due to the never-ending changes in the balance of power. As a result of these, London's ability to ensure its success over St. Petersburg was limited.

[154] C. N. B. Ross, 'Lord Curzon and E. G. Browne Confront the "Persian Question"', *Historical Journal,* Vol. 52, No. 2 (Jun., 2009), p. 390.
[155] Thornton, 'Policy' Part II, p. 70.
[156] McLean, *Buffer*, p. 27

Chapter 6

"The Russians have shown remarkable astuteness": Times of Change 1892 - 1895

The Liberal Party returned to office in August 1892 as a minority government backed by the Irish nationalists. They had to contemplate an international landscape that had changed a great deal since 1886.[1] This government differed from previous Liberal ministries, the significant variance being that Gladstone entrusted all foreign policy decisions to Rosebery. 'Gladstone had promised him a free hand in foreign policy,' a promise on which the Earl had insisted. This was welcomed on the continent where Rosebery was popular, the Batum debacle notwithstanding. His foreign policy can be defined as 'liberal imperialism, a departure from the more idealistic, non-interventionist Gladstonian stance on foreign affairs.'[2] This meant that there would be a broad continuation of Salisbury's foreign policy. Continuity was important for Rosebery. He considered: 'that continuity in foreign policy would place it above party politics. The Foreign Secretary, he said, should speak "with the

[1] Russ Foster, in his article 'Lord Rosebery: The Paradoxical Prime Minister', published in the *History Review,* highlights how the Earl was received in a good fashion as foreign secretary by his European contemporaries upon the Liberals victory in the general election. This was, in the main, a result of Rosebery's determination to continue the foreign policy of Salisbury. This he was largely successful in accomplishing. However, Foster suggests that this was a result of his statesmanlike handling during the closing stages of the Eastern Rumelia crisis; this assessment may be true, but his actions during the Batum crisis left much to be desired. His generally positive reception was due solely to his policy of continuity rather than any preceding actions. Meanwhile, Thomas Otte, in his work, *The China Question. Great Power Rivalry and British Isolation, 1894 - 1905,* correctly identifies how British foreign policy decisions were the responsibility of the almost exclusively male elite, based in London. Other centres of imperial power, such as Delhi, although allowed to largely self-govern, were still required to follow the foreign policy of the imperial centre in London. This was a system which was, however, open to failure if the Government of India chose to follow its own foreign policy, as it did when it invaded Hunza territory. Otte goes on to suggest that Russia's eastern expansion into Asia and China threatened the Anglo-Indian strategic bloc. While this work does not look past 1895, the movement of Russia's interest to the Far East was seen as a positive development by the government of India, so it seems unlikely that Delhi felt threatened by Russia's moves against China. Nevertheless, Otte is correct that the China question did reinforce the state of flux between Britain and Russia, although it did move its geographic location to an area much less sensitive for the British Empire. A further work of note is Garry John Alder's *British India's Northern Frontier 1865 – 95: A Study in Imperial Policy,* which highlights the difficulties experienced by policy makers in London when dealing with the government of India. He reiterates the point that the invasion of Hunza and Nagar were solely Indian advances that London reluctantly sanctioned after the fact. Alder also states that observers should not believe a quarter of the rumours which India spread about Russian movements, but that Delhi's concerns were understandable.

[2] R. Foster, 'Lord Rosebery: The Paradoxical Prime Minister', *History Review,* (1 Mar., 2012), p. 9.

united voice of the English nation without distinction of party".'[3] This would facilitate the cooperation of the Powers, whichever party formed Britain's government. Rosebery, however, conducted his foreign policy with a more aggressive tone than Salisbury, preferring to take the defence of the Empire to Britain's enemies rather than follow his predecessor's more modest strategy of 'putting out fires'. It is accurate to say that for Rosebery, 'as with so many of his generation, imperialism had a strong appeal.'[4] This does not mean, however, that the Marquis was averse to expanding Britain's political reach. Indeed, although 'Salisbury did not regard imperial expansion as especially desirable ... he accepted imperial defence as central to foreign policy,' meaning the British Empire's defence came first, irrespective of the policy.[5] The Earl was also considered 'both more pro-German and more anti-French ... than his predecessors.'[6] Nevertheless, in reality there was little difference in policy between the two men. Salisbury simply had a more nuanced approach to foreign affairs, where there was no preconceived notion of which states were more or less threatening. Rosebery, on the other hand, did differentiate. None the less, it was in the relationship between London and Delhi where Rosebery, and the Liberal Government, sought to make a distinction between itself and Salisbury's second ministry. Neither Rosebery nor the Earl of Kimberley, who had also returned to his previous role as Secretary of State for India, were willing to allow Delhi as much free reign as had, in their view, been enjoyed under the Conservatives. India was now viewed as a danger to the peace. London did not want the Government of India to pursue a forward policy which could lead to conflict with Russia, and sought to restrain it.

Rosebery, like Salisbury, regarded European cooperation as essential to Britain's ability to protect her interests. Then again, he had returned to office as the European system

[3] M. E. Chamberlain, '*Pax Britannica'? British Foreign Policy 1789 - 1914,* (New York, 1988), p. 156.
[4] T. G. Otte, *The China Question. Great Power Rivalry and British Isolation, 1894 - 1905,* (Oxford, 2007), p. 13.
[5] Ibid., p. 18.
[6] Foster, 'Paradoxical', p. 9.

evolved into something new. This change was due, in part, to the Franco-Russian understanding which would become the Franco-Russian alliance in 1894. Such 'a Russian rapprochement with France in 1892 changed the situation in Europe not only for Berlin but also for Britain where it created fears that the new grouping would make difficulties for the empire in the Far East ... [as well as] Central Asia and also make the control of the Straits practically out of reach for the British navy owing to the presence of the French navy in the Mediterranean.'[7] A coming together of France and Russia had perhaps only been a matter of time since May 1887, when Bismarck told Count Paul Shuvalov, Russia's ambassador to Berlin, of the Dual Alliance with Austro-Hungary.* Rosebery was therefore faced with the issue of how to maintain the dominance of the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean Sea. Such a change to the *status quo* would undermine Britain's value to the Triple Alliance, as the Royal Navy would be unable to protect Italy. Germany and Austria-Hungary may then seek to recreate the *Dreikaiserbund,* in order to draw Russia away from France. This would protect Italy in the Mediterranean, but more importantly for Berlin it would allay fears of a two-front war. For Britain a new *Dreikaiserbund* would be detrimental to her Central Asian interests, as Russia would be free once more to focus on pressuring the Raj. The political revival of France therefore was a source of annoyance for Rosebery, as it was her opportunistic alliance with Russia that was the cause of Britain's foreign policy difficulties, both in Europe and Central Asia.

Salisbury had left office in August 1892, observing: 'matters are in the main very quiet, & though they may at any moment cease to be so, as yet no complication has arisen.' This does not, however, appear to take into consideration the ongoing Pamirs incident, which suggests that Salisbury perhaps did not see this incident as troubling. He remarked: 'we have

[7] M. Soroka, *Britain, Russia, and the Road to the First World War – The Fateful Embassy of Count Aleksander Benckendorff 1903 - 16*, (Farnham, 2011), p. 9.
*L. B. Packard, 'Russia and the Dual Alliance,' *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Apr., 1920), pp. 391 - 410, p. 397.

not got information sufficient to know exactly what is going on at the head waters of the Oxus. The [Russian] military department is probably a little out of hand, & is carrying matters rather further than the Central gov[ernmen]t at St. Petersburg desires.' Salisbury clearly expected the Tsar and Giers to reassert control and close the matter. Meanwhile, the outgoing Prime Minister also observed that 'the position of Italy is the key of the present arrangement of Europe.'[8] He understood that if Britain did not protect Italy, she would be forced to ally herself with France, leaving Germany's southern border unprotected from *revanchist* France. Both Germany and Austria-Hungary therefore supported Britain maintaining her strength in the Mediterranean as a means to hold back Paris. Of course, the matter of supporting Britain in the Mediterranean contributed to the broader division between Germany and Russia. It was factors such as this which had caused St. Petersburg to draw closer with Paris, in order to prevent her total European isolation. This resulted in Germany and Russia being pushed even further apart diplomatically. As a consequence, Britain had, for the moment at least, become the lynchpin of the European peace due to the Royal Navy's ability to protect Italy. In spite of this success, the Liberal government was now part of a more unpredictable European system. This would become clear as 'developments of British policy in this period [1892-1902] ... [demonstrated that] the era of cooperation between Britain and the members of the Triple Alliance was' ending.[9]

To preserve Britain's position in this European system, which was an important factor in Britain's imperial defence of India, the Liberals first needed to ensure that Central Asia did not cause any unwanted issues. For Rosebery, this meant curtailing the Indian Government's aggressive foreign policies. In order to achieve this de-escalation: 'the [Liberal] cabinet overruled the Government of India and instructed them that no more should be done than

[8] Salisbury to Currie, 18 Aug. 1892, Rosebery MSS, MS 10132.
[9] L. M. Penson, 'The new course in British Foreign Policy, 1892 - 1902', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*: 4th Series, Vol. 25, (1943), p. 121.

keeping the Amir in good humour ... and defining the North-West frontier of India ... [Furthermore] the Amir's complaints of Russian acts of aggression were to be ignored.'[10] Of course, this would prove a difficult policy to fulfil owing to the ongoing Pamirs question. Afghanistan, on the borders of the Pamirs region, was fundamental to the defence of British India. It was evident that this question was important to the Government of India, as Lansdowne wasted no time in contacting Kimberley. He remarked: '[regarding the Pamirs question] the Gov[ernment] of India will require all the support you can give it during the next few months, and I shall do my best to deserve it.'[11] Rosebery, for his part, was keen to secure a quick agreement with Russia over the issue, with the Foreign Secretary 'very strong for delimitation; with the Russians if possible, but, if not, without them.'[12] Britain was aware that China also bordered the Pamirs; London was willing to work with Peking to secure the Pamirs against Russian incursion if St. Petersburg proved unwilling to negotiate.

A perception of Liberal weakness on foreign affairs would explain an increase in Russian pressure on Afghanistan in August 1892. During previous terms of office, the Liberal party had proven to be less successful than Salisbury's conservatives at managing Britain's foreign policy. It was 'while Granville was at the Foreign Office, [that] the St. Petersburg government had jumped a claim to Penjdeh'[13] Gladstone, meanwhile, was known on the continent for his focus on the Home Rule debate over Ireland.* Moreover, it was considered that 'although the new Liberal government had sought to continue the policy of its conservative forerunner ... it had shown itself weaker.'[14] This meant that Russia would test the new government's mettle. This came to pass with a skirmish at Somatash, a small town

[10] S. Gopal, *British Policy in India 1858 - 1905,* (Cambridge, 1965), p. 217.
[11] Lansdowne to Kimberley (confidential), 22 Aug. 1892, Kimberley MSS, I.2.3 MS End D.2466.
[12] Godley to Kimberley, 29 Aug. 1892, Kimberley MSS, MS Eng c.4320.
[13] A. L. Kennedy, *Salisbury 1830 - 1903. Portrait of a Statesman*, (London, 1953), p. 164
*The Home Rule debate was a long-running campaign for self-government for Ireland. It was this question which preoccupied Gladstone's terms of office in 1886 and 1892-1894, which left the directing of foreign policy in Rosebery's hands.
[14] B. Jelavich, 'Great Britain and the Acquisition of Batum, 1878 - 1886', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 48, No. 110 (Jan., 1970), p. 59.

on the western edge of the Pamirs. This was no full scale attack, but rather a reminder that Russia would have her say on all matters in Central Asia. From Britain's perspective, the incursion at Somatash was at most an assessment of how Rosebery would react. Unlike in 1886 during the Batum crisis, the Foreign Secretary did not overreact. To the contrary, as Sir Arthur Godley, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the India Office, noted: 'I saw Lord Rosebery ... & was glad to find that he did not think much of the "incident" at Somatash.'[15] Lansdowne concurred: 'both sides are to blame, the Amir for going where we had always told him he had better not go, the Russians for provoking ... a collision with the Afghans, and for bringing a needlessly large force onto the Pamirs with the avowed intention of giving the Afghans what they are pleased to call a "tap".'[16] By remaining resolute Rosebery ensured that this incident did not escalate.

By September, it was evident that St. Petersburg sought to conclude its own negotiations with China regarding the Pamirs. The intention was to keep Afghanistan, and therefore Britain, out of the mountain range. Howard commented that Xu Jingcheng, a Chinese diplomat, 'had been informed by Count [Pyotr Alekseyevich] Kapnist [a Russian diplomat] that China must deal direct with Russia, without any interference on the part of Her Majesty's Government on the matter.' Concerned that China could not risk conflict with Russia, Jingcheng informed Howard that 'his Government did not wish to provoke a quarrel over the question and that he personally would wish to see the disputed territory neutralised.'[17] Morier's response to Russia's demands was to quash any suggestion that Britain could be sidestepped on this issue. He adamantly argued the 'contention of the equality of our status in the Pamirs,' refusing to back down on this point. Meanwhile, although the Ambassador was sure to defend Britain's position, he was scathing in his

[15] Godley to Kimberley, 29 Aug. 1892, Kimberley MSS, MS Eng c.4320.
[16] Lansdowne to Kimberley, 30 Aug. 1892, Kimberley MSS, MS Eng d.2466.
[17] Howard to Rosebery (confidential, no. 201), 1 Sept. 1892, FO 65/1441.

remarks about the Government of India, blaming them for all of the troubles in the Pamirs. 'It was the Indian gov[ernmen]t with their man Younghusband who set the ball rolling & that the two Ionov expeditions are a reply to the double action of that officer.'[18] It was clear that Morier, much like the Foreign Secretary, thought that the Indian Government should show more restraint. He was of the opinion that India was willing to take such risks in Central Asia only because she was confident that London would come to her aid. Morier complained of the Indian government's 'extraordinary counter proposal that we should do an impossible thing to save them the inconvenience of doing a difficult thing. We are to obtain the total evacuation of the Pamirs ... & to compel the Russian gov[ernmen]t to accept satisfactory arrangements for joint delimitation, & we are to do this after the Indian gov[ernmen]t have refused us the use of the only tools with which the work can be done & stand by doing nothing.' This irritation only intensified Morier's opinion that British India was incapable of managing any role in negotiations with St. Petersburg. He argued: 'if at this early date their teeth begin to chatter & they already see ghosts, their chances of a successful negotiation at St. Petersburg are cast to the winds & this naturally concerns me closely.' He further remarked: '[peace] depends on the Indian gov[ernmen]t growing or borrowing a backbone, following your lead & not trying to meddle with international business of which they don't know the A.B.C.'[19]

The Foreign Secretary, much like Morier, reacted to Russia's insistence that Britain could not be involved in the Pamirs negotiations with incredulity. He responded: 'the adjacent powers, China and Great Britain, both in her own right and that of Afghanistan, have a geographical, political, and strategical interest in this region, to say nothing of a natural anxiety that the iron commercial wall of the Russian Empire shall not be too far extended.' His belligerent attitude was a consequence of two policy decisions. Rosebery maintained: 'we

[18] Morier to Rosebery (very private), 2 Sept. 1892, Morier MSS, Box 25 B.
[19] Morier to Rosebery (very private), 2 Sept. 1892, Morier MSS, Box 25 B.

are bound to maintain the lawful dominions of the Amir of Afghanistan, and we are anxious to preserve a sphere of influence outside our immediate boundaries so as to deaden the stock of contact between two colossal Empires.'[20] The former had a direct correlation with the latter, for it was meant to ensure that the Amir would remain a useful collaborator for Britain, with his country continuing to provide a buffer between the Russian and Indian Empires. It was therefore a means to an end that the Viceroy was instructed: 'to assure His Highness [the Amir] that Her Majesty's Government are occupying themselves with the question of the settlement of the north eastern frontier of Afghanistan.'[21] However, a difficulty for Britain in seeking to retain Afghanistan as a buffer state was Russia's determination to share a border with the British Empire in Central Asia. Indeed, from Persia Lascelles informed Rosebery that Speyer had 'observed that the existence of buffer states was a mistake and that we ought to have a coterminous frontier.' While Lascelles could agree that 'a buffer state became necessarily a hotbed of intrigue,' he did not suggest any adjustments to London's policy. Speyer further 'observed that it would be very desirable if England and Russia could come to some distinct understanding with regard to their policy in Asia.'[22] Of course, this was what London was seeking to achieve through its negotiations concerning the Pamirs. What Speyer was referring to was an agreement in which Russia would gain a free hand in Europe in return for Britain having security for British India.

Kimberley, like Morier, agreed with Rosebery that British India needed to be restrained. For Wodehouse a key component of the problem was the leadership of the Indian army. He therefore wrote to Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the Secretary for War: 'I do not wish [General Frederick] Roberts to stay longer in India ... he is the powerful representative of a forward policy which has gone very far already and if it goes on, may involve us in

[20] Rosebery to Morier (secret, no. 157 A), 6 Sept. 1892, FO 881/6281.
[21] Russell to Grey, 24 Sept. 1892, FO 65/1441.
[22] Lascelles to Rosebery (confidential, no. 149), 30 Sept. 1892, FO 65/1442.

serious dangers. More especially is his continued presence in India undesirable, because he has, I believe, got command of the Indian frontier policy and carries the Foreign Office (Indian) & [Viceroy] Lansdowne too much with him.'[23] Moreover, whereas Rosebery and Kimberley were both in favour of cooperating with the Amir, there were accusations that the Government of India had not done enough to strengthen relations with him. Lansdowne disagreed. He maintained that he did 'not believe that anything we could have done, or can do, in order to ingratiate ourselves with the Amir, would have the object of converting him into a really trustworthy ally.'[24] This highlights the Indian government's tendency to perceive local rulers as inferior and unreliable. Despite this denial, Kimberley remained steadfast in his conviction. He wrote to the former viceroy, Earl Dufferin, suggesting to him that 'the Gov[ernmen]t of India have a tendency to underrate the importance of being on cordial terms with the Amir, and in their eagerness to control all of the avenues to India to overlook the danger of alienating him from our alliance.'[25] Kimberley was certain, then, that the Indian government needed to be restrained where her foreign policy was concerned. They were too quick to react and refused to work with the Amir, who was regarded with suspicion and a lack of respect. Such factors increased the pressure to follow a forward policy, which was what the Liberal government in London wanted to avoid.

Regarding the Pamirs negotiations, it was the accepted wisdom in London that it was necessary for Britain to continue working towards some delimitation. Godley expressed his view: 'so long as a great debatable land exists, the result must be a sort of race between the Russian & Indian governments to occupy the advantageous positions which it contains – but when once the frontier is fixed, we shall I am convinced see a relaxation of energy on both sides.' He used Penjdeh as an example of what could be achieved if a border was agreed:

[23] Kimberley to Campbell-Bannerman (private), 7 Oct. 1892, Kimberley MSS, MS Eng c.4218.
[24] Lansdowne to Kimberley, 23 Nov. 1892, Kimberley MSS, MS Eng c.4325.
[25] Kimberley to Dufferin (private), 13 Dec. 1892, Kimberley MSS, MS Eng c.4218.

'since the [North West Afghan frontier] was defined (seven years ago) I can hardly recall a single question that has arisen in relation to it.'[26] It was for that reason expected that if Britain could reach an agreement with Russia, it would calm tensions in Central Asia between the two powers. This policy would work, it was thought, as although it is possible to cross a disputed border with little fear of reprisal, crossing an agreed border could lead to war. This the Russian Empire would not risk. It was also considered, or at least hoped for, that for 'as long as delimitation negotiations were in train there would be no further direct action by the Russian soldiers.'[27]

In early 1893 it was becoming clear that Russian pressure on Central Asia was mounting, as it had done prior to the Penjdeh crisis. In January, the Government of India reported: 'Russia has throughout the past year been steadily continuing to consolidate her power in Central Asia by improving her lines of communication.' One reason for this was that 'the famine in Russia in the end of 1891 gave a great stimulus to the emigration of Russian peasants and Cossacks into Central Asia and Siberia.' As a result, St. Petersburg, under the guise of protecting its people, sought to improve standards in Russia's Central Asian dominions, building infrastructure and defence posts. Moreover, it was acknowledged: 'in Europe also Russia has not been idle ... the port of Batoum has been placed in a complete state of defence, and the railway from Vladikavkaz to Petrosk on the Caspian has been commenced. In Europe the whole tendency has been to mass on the western frontier.'[28] There was therefore an expectation in Britain, and in India, that Russia would continue to press forward and apply pressure in Central Asia. Where the Pamirs were concerned this was demonstrated by St. Petersburg's continued refusal to work with Britain to delimit the boundary. Regarding this, it was evident to London that whatever argument was put forward

[26] Godley to Kimberley (private), 30 Dec. 1892, Kimberley MSS, MS Eng c.4320.
[27] G. J. Alder, *British India's Northern Frontier 1865 - 95. A Study in Imperial Policy*, (London, 1963), p. 247.
[28] Annual Summary of Events in Central Asia, Intelligence Branch, Simla, 1 Jan. 1893, FO 65/1461.

to secure a successful agreement, it would be unsuccessful. Kimberley typified this perception. 'The answer of the Russian Government to Morier as to the Pamirs ... is ... most characteristic ... They evidently mean to postpone agreeing to any delimitation until they have established themselves on the line they have determined to occupy,' and only then would they reach any agreement with Britain.[29] None the less, London would not allow St. Petersburg to expand her frontiers with impunity. A memorandum, concerning the cause of the Pamirs incident, 'described these arrests [of Younghusband and Davison] as acts of lawless violence, ascribed them to Colonel Yonoff acting without authority, and stated that it must be well understood that the submission of the two British officers was made entirely under protest.' Russia was thus put on notice that Britain was aggrieved over this matter and would not allow it to go unpunished. That same memorandum stated that 'it was known with tolerable certainty that Colonel Yonoff expelled Captain Younghusband and Lieutenant Davison in obedience to direct instructions from the Governor General of Turkestan, and that these instructions were given with the approval of the Russian War Office.'[30] Strikingly, however, when this was put to Giers he appeared to know nothing of these instructions. This further highlighted to London how Russia's foreign policy was not the sole preserve of the Foreign Ministry. Nevertheless, considering that the action was premeditated by a government ministry in St. Petersburg, this ensured that the diplomatic response from London would be strong.

One such diplomatic means was Britain's corralling of China to offer opposition to Russian pressure in the Pamirs. 'The English were pushing China from behind & telling her to maintain her position. It was not solicitude for China's integrity that animated the English, but concern for India's frontier, and it was hypocrisy to pretend otherwise. This being so [Viceroy] Li [Hung-Chang] thought that the English should make a show of resistance as

[29] Kimberley to Lansdowne, 19 Jan. 1893, Lansdowne MSS, MS EUR d/558/6.
[30] Bertie (confidential memorandum), 24 Jan. 1893, FO 881/6281.

well as China,' reported Byron Brenan, the Consul-General at Guangzhou.[31] For Britain, such resistance could only be diplomatic or strategic, remaining steadfast. She proved unyielding even as 'Russia frequently insisted that the Pamir question affected China and Russia only, and that Her Majesty's Government had nothing to say in the matter.'[32] None the less, there was no intention of using Britain's military to strengthen her position. This meant that it proved difficult to keep China on side. London and Peking viewed the Pamirs from opposite perspectives. 'The possession of the Pamirs region is of small importance to China as she is already exposed to Russia along a frontier of several thousand miles, and that a few miles more or less is of no consequence; but to England the move forward on the part of Russia is of serious import.'[33] It was then perhaps as an acknowledgement of the importance of the Pamirs, and in spite of a preference for a diplomatic solution, that Rosebery began to suggest an alternative methodology. The Foreign Secretary was concerned that Britain increased the risk of Russian aggression in the Pamirs if she did not at least give the appearance of preparing for war. He wrote to Morier: 'the net result is that it is the 22nd March, and that in April a new expedition may be launched against the Pamirs. Meanwhile our threat of a counter expedition necessarily loses some of its force with each day that passes, as the Russians must be perfectly aware that no counter force is being prepared in India.'[34] This appeared to be the case just two days later when the Viceroy conveyed: 'the British agent at Gilgit telegraphs on the 2nd March that the Russians evidently mean a further forward movement, and that the Chinese are making no serious preparation to resist Russian aggression.'[35] In response to such predicted movement, it was the Viceroy's 'immediate object ... to prevent Russians establishing themselves on north-eastern slope of the Hindu Kush.' It was deemed militarily 'important to prevent [the] Russians from establishing

[31] Brenan to O'Conor, 3 Feb. 1893, FO 65/1461.
[32] Morier to Rosebery (confidential, no. 55), 20 Feb. 1893, FO 65/1461.
[33] O'Conor to Rosebery (confidential, no. 57), 22 Feb. 1893, FO 65/1461.
[34] Rosebery to Morier (private), 22 Mar. 1893, Morier MSS, Box 25 A.
[35] Lansdowne to Kimberley (telegram), 24 Mar. 1893, FO 65/1462.

themselves on low ground fitted for winter quarters and grain growing within striking distance of Hindu Kush.'[36] By doing so, it was intended that Russia should not be able to gain an advantage in the Pamirs by sending men into the region earlier than Britain or China. This would be achieved through both diplomacy and the mobilisation of some Indian troops to the region. Although Russia was now taking part in delimitation discussions, Kimberley shared Lansdowne's distrust of St. Petersburg. He commented: 'the Russians *seem* to be inclined to act fairly about the Pamirs ... They have, however, so often deceived us by illusory assurances that I cannot feel any confidence in these promises that they will not send any expedition this year.'[37]

There were differing opinions regarding Russia's movements on the Pamirs. Brackenbury argued: 'her [Russia's] policy is one of bluff. She will push her claims to their extreme limits, in hopes that Her Majesty's Government will give way; but if she finds that Her Majesty's Government are firm ... she will herself give way.' He also dismissed thoughts that Russia would launch an invasion: 'we make a great mistake in attaching any serious importance to the advance of small detachments of Russian troops to the Hunza frontier. In showing alarm at this, we are playing the Russian's own game.' Brackenbury suggested that 'excitement and alarm as to Russia are the normal conditions of mind in India, and [that this] should be combated.'[38] This fear of Russian intentions was not, however, easily removed. Reports tended to reinforce British and Indian fears of St. Petersburg's intentions. An example of such a report came from Patrick Stevens, the British Consul at Batum, who detailed: 'considerable activity has been taking place in the movements of troops in Central Asia during the past two months.'[39]

[36] Lansdowne to Kimberley (secret, telegram), 27 Mar. 1893, FO 65/1462.
[37] Kimberley to Lansdowne (private), 30 Mar. 1893, Lansdowne MSS, MSS EUR d/558/6.
[38] Brackenbury (minute), 30 Apr. 1893, FO 65/1465.
[39] Stevens to Rosebery (no. 13), 6 May 1893, FO 65/1464.

Meanwhile, discussions continued between Britain and Russia of how best to solve the Pamirs question. During these talks, St. Petersburg remained adamant that its territory far exceeded the limits suggested by London. In spite of the Russian governments' intransigence on the matter, Britain was aided by Staal's 'admission [during talks] that what is outside the limits of Afghanistan on the Pamirs is not necessarily Russian.'[40] This was the Foreign Secretary's position, and he had the support of Lansdowne. The Viceroy wrote: '[the Government of India's] view is that Rosebery is right in contending that even if [the agreement of] 1873 ... be literally accepted, country beyond the Oxus does not thereby fall to Russia, but is matter for discussion and division.'[41] Now that London had secured Staal's concurrence that St. Petersburg was unable to unilaterally demand territory, this made Britain even less willing to go to war with Russia over the Pamirs. Kimberley wrote: 'it is, I assure you, altogether out of the question that this country should engage in a serious quarrel with Russia about the trans-Oxus territory, and we must make the best we can of the very uncomfortable situation made for us by the Agreement of 1873.'[42] While this may appear counter-intuitive, it is not. It demonstrates the realisation that Russia was not willing to risk war over the Pamirs either. Staal had, to all effects and purposes, confirmed that Russia was willing to discuss delimiting the Pamirs, and would not be seeking to annex the region by force. Britain therefore knew that the matter would be settled diplomatically, which took the pressure of a military confrontation off the table. Furthermore, this is not an example of Staal criticising his government. Rather, 'he [Staal] was generally on the side of Giers, and that for three main reasons: he believed that the military policy merely attracted British attention to an area which Russia could always occupy in time of trouble anyway; he felt that the military claims were in themselves based on no right; and he feared the wider repercussions of the

[40] Lansdowne to Kimberley, 27 Jun. 1893, Kimberley MSS, MS Eng. d.2467.
[41] Lansdowne to Kimberley, 4 Jul. 1893, Lansdowne MSS, MSS Eur d/558/10.
[42] Kimberley to Lansdowne (private), 14 Jul. 1893, Lansdowne MSS, MSS Eur d/558/6.

resulting British hostility in Europe.'[43] The admission was therefore designed to promote better Anglo-Russian relations, as far as the more peacefully minded Giers and Staal could go.

Concerning the ongoing Pamirs negotiations, in August 1893 the Foreign Secretary informed Lansdowne: 'a very unsatisfactory despatch from M[onsieur] de Giers has just been communicated to Lord Rosebery by [the] Russian ambassador, proposing to draw [the] line east of Lake Victoria, so as to leave Bozai Gumbaz to Russia.'[44] This is an example of what Brackenbury termed Russia pushing her claims to the extreme limits. The Indian government, however, took the bait once more. The Viceroy responded: 'we trust ... that Her Majesty's Government will on no account agree to Russian proposal.'[45] In addition, Robert Horace Walpole, 5th Earl of Orford, the Assistant Under-Secretary for India, at the request of Kimberley, forwarded a message from Lansdowne to Sir Edward Grey, the Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs: '[that he] and his colleagues unanimously urge that the Russian proposal should be strenuously resisted. They point out that Russia, while yielding nothing of her claims to the whole territory which is in question north of the Oxus, now claim in addition that the line to the east of Lake Victoria should be drawn entirely to their advantage so as to include territory which can be of no value to Russia except for the purpose of enabling her to threaten the passes of the Hindu Kush.'[46] This was telling London nothing that had not already been deduced, but exemplified the fragility of India's composure in the face of perceived Russian aggression. 'The Indian Government [had therefore, through its actions]

[43] Alder, *Frontier*, p. 248.
[44] Rosebery to Lansdowne (telegram), 23 Aug. 1893, FO 65/1467.
[45] Lansdowne to Kimberley (telegram), 27 Aug. 1893, FO 65/1467.
[46] Walpole to Sir Edward Grey (no. 30), 29 Aug. 1893, FO 65/1467.

made it quite clear ... that as far as the Pamirs were concerned, it pinned all its hopes on delimitation and diplomatic action in Europe.'[47]

London could not, however, appreciate how concerned the Indian government, and the India office, were regarding the impact of Russian actions on the minds of the local population. Kimberley informed Gladstone: 'there are signs of disturbance in India which cause me much anxiety. Lansdowne writes that there is a widespread organisation ... political in its object, aimed at weakening our hold on India.'[48] Much of this was blamed on agents of the Russian Empire. Additionally, Kimberley later complained that he was experiencing problems in London: 'I have never known so much hostility against the India Office, and there are loud complaints that its expenses are not reduced.'[49] The primacy of India to the British Empire, and the issues this brought the government finances, were beginning to take their toll. This again was attributed to the constant pressure that was being applied on India from Russia, causing huge sums of money to be spent on maintaining and protecting the Raj.

It had been the Liberal government's intention to control Indian foreign policy more successfully than its predecessor. Yet by October 1893 it was apparent that they had not accomplished this. The Earl of Ripon, a former Viceroy of India who served as the Secretary of State for the Colonies (1892 – 1895), remarked: 'the Government of India are greatly irritated against the Amir, and that they do not realise what, as it seems to me ought to be the guiding principle of our policy at the present moment, that it is of first rate importance to us, important beyond everything else; keep our hold on Abdur Rahman and to prevent him throwing himself into the arms of Russia.'[50] If the Amir sided with Russia, India would in effect be bordered by the Tsar's empire, something on which a great deal of money and

[47] Alder, *Frontier*, p. 250.
[48] Kimberley to Gladstone (private), 19 Sept. 1893, Kimberley MSS, MS 10244.
[49] Kimberley to Gladstone (private), 2 Oct. 1893 NLS MS 10244.
[50] Ripon to Kimberley (confidential), 5 Oct. 1893, Kimberley MSS, MS 10246.

manpower had been spent to prevent. If this occurred then it was feared that the strategic pitfalls that had so worried British strategists for so long would come true. As a result, London wanted Delhi to work with the Amir rather than around him, so as not to irritate him.

A significant issue for Britain during the Pamirs negotiations was navigating the tactics used by Russia. On the one hand, Russia consistently admonished Britain for participating in the discussions, to which 'Lord Rosebery insisted that England must be party to any delimitation, as the protector of Afghanistan, and as interested [party] in the Chinese boundary, and because England must have control over the northern slopes of the Hindu Kush.'[51] On the other, when she did work with Britain, she made little attempt to meet London halfway. Henry Howard, the Secretary to the Legation at St. Petersburg, informed the India Office that he had 'always understood from ... Staal in our various conversations on this question that the Russian Government was now strongly averse to the idea of a neutral zone.' This Howard did not understand, primarily because 'the Pamirs ... appears to offer all the necessary elements of such a zone; for these mountains are always barren and often impassable. If then in a large sense they should be constituted such a zone, H[er] M[ajesty's] G[o]v[ernmen]t believe that this neutralised region would offer the best solution of the question and that most likely to conduce to permanent peace.'[52] This was a further example of Russia's intention to lengthen negotiations for as long as possible. It also demonstrates that it remained St. Petersburg's other object to move Russia's border as close to British India as possible in order to apply more pressure on London.

While Ripon had acknowledged that the Indian government was not following imperial policy regarding the Amir, a solution to this problem was hard to come by. The Secretary advocated London taking charge of the Pamirs negotiations and forcing Delhi to

[51] Bertie (memorandum), 15 Oct. 1893, IOR/L/PS/18/C80.
[52] Howard to India Office (draft, no. 295), 16 Oct. 1893, FO 65/1469.

step back. He also concurred with Brackenbury's conclusion that India was not acting in the interests of the British Empire at large:

> I need not say to you that I am no advocate of undue interference on the part of the Home Government with the Government of India. But it is scarcely possible to conceive a question which falls more plainly within the sphere of the administration at home than this question of Frontier policy. It has always been dealt with at home. It involves very grave considerations of Foreign Policy and military expenditure and it is precisely the kind of question upon which the Sec[retary] of State for India and the Cabinet are entitled, and indeed are bound, to guide and to control the Indian Gov[erment].[53]

It is clear that Ripon's words found their mark. It was soon evident that the Home Government would have to take greater responsibilities, both due to Russia's unceasing pressure on India and the related strain of Russo-French naval power in the Mediterranean. The latter had become apparent in October with 'the visit of the [Russian] imperial fleet to Toulon, and the simultaneous appearance of the British squadron in Italian ports.'[54] In response to these difficulties there were demands for tangible action to protect British interests. One such action would be to increase the power of the Royal Navy, a stance which had the support of the Foreign Secretary. He wrote to the Prime Minister: 'I think possible ... you are prepared to fall in with the general anxiety for the increase of our fleet, I would most earnestly urge you to let this be plainly evident in your speech tomorrow, & I do this on the sole ground of the interests of peace. Prevention is better than cure, & I firmly believe that the spontaneous expenditure of a few millions now may prevent the compulsory expenditure of many hundreds of millions later.'[55] The use of speeches in the House of Commons to nullify Anglo-Russian tensions had proven successful during the Penjdeh crisis. Rosebery, some years later, was hoping for a similar success. Of course, a further feat required to protect India would be the securing of a settlement over the Pamirs.

[53] Ripon to Kimberley (confidential), 28 Oct. 1893, Kimberley MSS, MS 10246.
[54] Howard to Rosebery (no. 263), 26 Oct. 1893, FO 65/1447.
[55] Rosebery to Gladstone (confidential), 18 Dec. 1893, Rosebery MSS, MS 10027.

As negotiations over the Pamirs continued, Sir Nicholas O'Conor, the British envoy to China, was compelled to remind Rosebery: '[of] the importance of not losing this opportunity of settling a question which, as long as it remained open, entailed a heavy financial burden upon China as probably also upon the resources of India, besides the risk of ultimate complications.'[56] This was no doubt one reason why, in a bid to move the Pamirs negotiations along at a greater pace, Rosebery sought to cajole the Russian ambassador. He remarked: 'Her Majesty's Government, like that of the Emperor, have throughout the discussions aimed solely at removing all causes of future misunderstanding, and of definitely establishing solid and cordial relations between the two Empires in Asia.'[57]

Conversely, while matters in Central Asia continued along cordial lines, in Europe there remained much suspicion about Russian motives. In January 1894 it was asserted by Sir Edmund John Monson, the British ambassador to Austria-Hungary, that Russia again wanted to gain access to the Mediterranean Sea from the Black Sea. To achieve this, St. Petersburg had the support of Paris, which would gladly see Russian ships applying pressure against the Royal Navy in the eastern Mediterranean. It was understood: 'the object of Russia is to arrive in the Mediterranean without a war, that is, with all her naval and military force intact. The passage of the Straits is only a means to an end. That end is the establishment of her influence, backed by all the force of the Empire, in the eastern waters of the Mediterranean.' However, in order to arrive in the Mediterranean without having used force 'requires ... the pacific attainment of the freedom of passage.' This could be achieved only by convincing the European powers to allow Russian ships out from the Black Sea. This objective itself could only be accomplished by persuading the Great Powers that St. Petersburg did not seek to attack Constantinople. To this end, Russia sought to assure Europe that 'it is not a question of preparing for war, because ... the object of Russia is to attain her [objective] without resorting

[56] O'Conor to Rosebery (no. 293), 27 Dec. 1893, FO 65/1470.
[57] Rosebery to Staal, 23 Jan. 1894, FO 539/71.

to end force.' This would create a moral obligation for Europe to allow the entry of Russian ships into the Mediterranean. Monson argued that 'the moral effect of that liberty on both sides of the Straits will very soon make itself felt'. Of course, due to the predominance of the Royal Navy in the eastern Mediterranean, it was clear that 'the policy of this [Austro-Hungarian] Empire, as well as that of Italy and Spain, depends upon the attitude of Her Majesty's Government.'[58] Britain did not want Russia to gain access to the Mediterranean due to the threats she could pose, but without international support of the Straits convention her ability to halt Russia was limited, short of war. Yet to oppose Russia in Europe did risk retaliation in Central Asia. In addition, it was pointed out to Rosebery that 'the fear of external complications arising out of the recent crisis in Servia [Serbia] has been the cause of no little anxiety to the Imperial Government' in St. Petersburg.[59] Such complications, London feared, might be mitigated against with an aggressive foreign policy, which could mean more pressure on Europe or Central Asia, or both.

Gladstone retired as Prime Minister on 8 March 1894, to be replaced by Rosebery while Kimberley became Foreign Secretary. The latter proved 'a competent manager of Foreign Office business, but largely continued the policy he had inherited from Rosebery and indirectly from Salisbury.' It would be accurate to suggest that 'in so far as Russia was concerned, he desired to maintain the link with St. Petersburg, and to improve, if possible, relations.'[60] It is of note, that 'on first learning [of] the retirement of Mr Gladstone the Russian press expressed the fear that the foreign policy of England with Lord Rosebery as Premier might prove to be less pacific than was the case during the administration of His Lordship's predecessor.' However, it was soon observed that 'these fears seem to have been

[58] Monson to Rosebery (secret), 24 Jan. 1894, Kimberley MSS, MS Eng C.4449.
[59] Howard to Rosebery (confidential, no. 26), 1 Feb. 1894, FO 65/1472.
[60] Otte, *China,* pp. 11 - 12.

dispelled.'[61] Conversely, this was followed by suggestions that the Franco-Russian agreement was coming under strain. Indeed, there was a 'general feeling of late that the relations between France and Russia are no longer as ... cordial as they were a few weeks ago. Probably the main reason for this change is the necessity felt by Russia for a decade of peace for the development of the country and the knowledge that to secure this, it had become imperative "to restrain the French" as Monsieur Vsyshnegradsky [Russian Finance Minister] told' a British diplomat.[62] This was good news for Britain, strategically and financially. William Harcourt, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, commented to Rosebery about the 'evidence of the cooling down of the Franco-Russian alliance,' as it bode well for London. More broadly, Harcourt remarked: '[the] conclusion of the Russo-German commercial treaty promises a decade of peace for Europe.'[63] Of course, such a partnership could leave Britain out of decision making on the continent, but this was of a secondary importance at this moment in time.

Meanwhile, the Pamir negotiations continued to drag on as Russia argued for special privileges. Rosebery sought to dissuade Russia from haggling over every inch of ground, stating: 'we are not settling this question in the spirit of bargain: we are not seeking to extract from each other a few square miles of worthless territory: what we are doing is to endeavour to arrange in a large spirit of statesmanship the future relations of the two Empires which seem to hold the destiny of Asia.'[64] This was less a moralistic appeal and more of an argument for the completion of negotiations on an even footing with Russia. Indeed, this sense of fair play was a critical feature of the Liberal stance on the Pamirs. By the same token, Kimberley pointed out to Staal: 'there is no apparent reason why Russia should require, as a matter of self-defence, to advance her posts ... which would be in close

[61] Howard to Kimberley (no. 60), 14 Mar. 1894, FO 65/1472.
[62] Howard to Kimberley (confidential, no. 73), 29 Mar. 1894, FO 65/1472.
[63] Harcourt to Rosebery and Kimberley, 5 Apr. 1894, Rosebery MSS, MS 10143.
[64] Rosebery to Staal, 24 Apr. 1894, Morier MSS, Box 25 A.

proximity to the line of demarcation, nor why she should stipulate for the right to send officers and military detachments up to that line, if she considers such a proceeding inadmissible on our part.' Indeed, Staal was reminded that 'the Imperial Government have on several occasions stated ... that the appearance of a British force to the north of the Hindu Kush would be considered by them as an act of hostility directed against Russia.' Similarly, it was made known to St. Petersburg that Britain would not stand by and accept Russian troops on the Pamirs either. Kimberley remarked: 'Her Majesty's Government wish to meet this declaration in an equally frank and friendly spirit.'[65] Meanwhile the Indian authorities continued to interfere, with the Viceroy stating that 'the most important point of all is that no gap should be left open to Russia between Chinese and Afghan territories.' In addition, the Viceroy conveyed to the Secretary of State for India, Henry Hartley Fowler, that 'we deny the Russian assertion that we have no right to send troops into Afghanistan. We must retain our right of sending troops into any part of Afghanistan under agreement with the Amir.'[66] On this Delhi and London could agree, although the latter was concerned the former may push the envelope too far.

By May 1894 it appeared that attention had begun to move away from Central Asia, both in London and St. Petersburg. In a message to Queen Victoria, 'Lord Rosebery ... reports that there was a meeting of the Cabinet today. The subjects discussed were entirely African.'[67] This concentration upon Africa was perhaps initiated by Russia's moving focus as well. As Howard suggested:

> the seeming indifference of the Russian government to events in the Balkan countries has been the subject of much comment in the foreign press and in diplomatic circles ... Russia's views respecting Balkan affairs remain the same, but she considers that to attempt to enforce them at the present time would not be remunerative. She has more pressing matters to attend to, such as the development and consolidation of the

[65] Kimberley to Staal, 28 Apr. 1894, FO 539/71.
[66] Lansdowne to Fowler (secret, telegram), 3 May 1894, Elgin MSS, MS EUR F 84/17.
[67] Rosebery to The Queen, 8 May 1894, Rosebery MSS, MS 10066.

> Empire, the rehabilitation of her finances, the perfecting of her military preparations, and the building up of her fleet, which can only be accomplished within a certain period of peace.[68]

It was this pursuit of peace that led to 'a conference ... assembled of representatives from the great European powers, having for its object the relief of Europe from its terrible war burdens.' Most striking for Britain was, as Rosebery commented, it seemed that it was 'the Emperor of Russia by his high, pure character and his single minded desire for peace is the sovereign who appears ... to be marked out as the originator of such a meeting.'[69] While St. Petersburg was focused on limiting the chances of a European war, London was able to concentrate on other aspects of the British Empire. Yet for both there was an increase in interest in the Far East. With Japan threatening China over Korea, it was clear to O'Conor that 'the Russian game is evidently to make China or rather the Viceroy believe that their pressure upon Japan has solved the difficulty [over Korea] and relieved him from a serious difficulty. If they can do this they will want something in return.'[70] Britain did not want to see the regional *status quo* altered and would not willingly allow Russia to do so. In order to protect her commerce, London would seek to act on China's behalf if this was possible. It was, however, understood that 'the interference of H[er] M[ajesty's] G[overnment] on the side of China will react on the Pamir and Siam questions.' Britain therefore had to bide her time, which was O'Conor's 'object in pressing to forestall the Russian interference.'[71]

In spite of St. Petersburg's, and London's, increasing focus on the Far East, the Pamirs negotiations in Central Asia remained incomplete. Nevertheless, it was thought that Russia would be more willing to reach an agreement now that the Far East was becoming the centre of her attention. To this end, 'His Excellency [Staal] remarked that the Russian maps were approximate and only gave with exactness the position of certain localities, and that this

[68] Henry Howard to Kimberley (most confidential, no. 93), 10 May 1894, FO 65/1472.
[69] Rosebery to Lascelles, 6 Jun. 1894, Rosebery MSS, MS 10135.
[70] O'Conor to Bristow (private), 28 Jun. 1894, O'Conor MSS, OCON 4/1/9.
[71] O'Conor to Sanderson (private), 4 Jul. 1894, O'Conor MSS, OCON 4/1/10.

was one of the reasons for some of the previous Russian proposals.'[72] This suggests that St. Petersburg was now willing to offer sensible lines for the frontier through the Pamirs. Britain could thus agree to them without forsaking the security of British India. Despite this, the Government of India remained sceptical of Russia. Victor Bruce, 9th Earl of Elgin, who would become the Viceroy of India in October 1894, wrote in July that 'so long as Russia is our neighbour – especially so long as our relations with her are undefined – there must be elements of disquiet, though, for my part, I do not believe in any possibility of actual invasion.'[73]

Staal's comment also demonstrated the success of Russia's Foreign Ministry in taking back control of foreign affairs away from the War Ministry. As a result, when in August there were suggestions of Russian troop advances, it was reported: '[the] Russian Government deny rumoured movement on the Pamirs ... [while] their Ministry of War have been reminded of the agreement between the two Governments.'[74] This was given further credence in September when Major W. H. H. Waters, the military attaché at St. Petersburg, reported: 'I had a long interview today with General Vannovsky, the Minister of War, and my belief that the Russian War Office knew nothing, before the event, of the late Russo-Afghan collision in Shighnan, is strongly confirmed.'[75] It was now clear that, should there be any border skirmishes, they were a result of insubordinate officers or unforeseen circumstances, rather than an overbearing war ministry. By October, Giers was able 'to speak of the question of the Pamirs and he trusted that Staal's new instructions would lead to the conclusion of the

[72] Kimberley to Howard (confidential, no. 184 B), 11 Jul. 1894, FO 65/1487.
[73] Elgin to Fowler, 31 Jul. 1894, Elgin MSS, MSS EUR.F.84/12.
[74] Fowler to Lansdowne (telegram), 9 Aug. 1894, FO 65/1487.
[75] Major Waters (confidential, memorandum), 1 Sept. 1894, FO 539/71.

agreement. Staal had been pressing him most urgently to settle the question and he had been most anxious to do so.'[76]

As 1894 came to an end, planning was underway for a new phase in Anglo-Russian relations. This was due in part to the illness of Tsar Alexander III. The question for Britain was, 'what will happen when the Emperor dies? The *Csarevitch* is amicable and well intentioned, but he is young and inexperienced and everything will depend upon the powers who obtain influence over him.'[77] Concern that the more conciliatory Foreign Ministry would be unable to retain its hard won influence over the War Ministry was also evident. When Tsar Alexander III died on 1 November 1894, St. Petersburg halted its foreign operations for the time being. Harcourt was thus able to remark: 'Russia is not (for the moment at least) a disturbing factor.'[78] One impact of this disturbance to Russia's governance was the confidence it instilled in London. As the Chancellor of the Exchequer observed: 'I have always been of the opinion that it is the Russians who have need to fear from the opening of the Dardanelles to the fleets of Europe and that they have much more to lose by an admission to the Black Sea than they have to gain by access to the Mediterranean.' He continued: 'a British fleet in the Black Sea would open Russia to an attack and make her far more vulnerable than she is now.'[79] Meanwhile, although Harcourt had identified strategic advantages for Britain, these were at odds with how Anglo-Russian relations appeared to improve as a result of:

> the excellent impression which had been created by the deep sympathy which His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales had displayed and he [Lascelles, now Ambassador to Russia] is now happy to state that this impression has been heightened by a visit which His Royal Highness has paid to Monsieur de Giers, who has been deeply touched by this attention. The action of His Royal Highness and the general sympathy which has been expressed throughout Your Majesty's dominions has strengthened the position of Your Majesty's ambassador, who ventures to hope that

[76] Lascelles to Kimberley (no. 58), 25 Oct. 1894, FO 800/17.
[77] Lascelles to Gosselin (no. 60), 25 Oct. 1894, FO 800/17.
[78] Harcourt to Kimberley. 16 Nov. 1894, Rosebery MSS, MS 10143.
[79] Harcourt to Kimberley, 21 Nov. 1894, Rosebery MSS, MS 10143.

> the more friendly feeling, which has been created on the part of the Russians may eventually develop into a cordial understanding to the great advantage of Your majesty's and the Emperor's peoples.[80]

Moreover, 'the sympathetic utterances of Lords Salisbury and Rosebery' only added to the good sentiment that was manifesting between St. Petersburg and London.[81] Nevertheless, this goodwill did not mean that there was any likelihood of predicting the new Tsar's foreign policy. It was, for instance, 'not easy to make out what attitude will be taken up here towards Bulgaria ... My impression is the Emperor will try to follow as closely as possible in the footsteps of his father and that any changes which may be necessary will be made gradually.'[82] Furthermore, it was noted that though 'the Russians are very friendly ... with a new and inexperienced Emperor and a Foreign Minister seriously ill, it is difficult to get any business done with them at St. Petersburg.'[83]

By the beginning of 1895 it seemed that, although relations between London and St. Petersburg remained amenable, old tensions were re-emerging in Central Asia. For example, Lascelles wrote to Sir Mortimer Durand, his replacement at Tehran, that 'he [Aleksey Kuropatkin, Russian Governor of Transcaspia] said that he was glad that a more friendly feeling prevailed between England and Russia but that it would be impossible to establish really friendly relations until the question of the Turcoman Sowers attached to our Meshed [North East Persia] consulate was settled.'[84] Such a small detail had little bearing on broader Anglo-Russian relations, but was an instance of Russian awkwardness that was designed to delay formal agreements. Meanwhile, an example of where broader Russian policy had not changed was highlighted in a letter from Lascelles to Sir Thomas Sanderson, the Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs. He wrote: 'I quite understand that the question of a

[80] Lascelles to Queen Victoria, 22 Nov. 1894, FO 800/17.
[81] Mitchell to Lascelles, 14 Dec. 1894, FO 65/1473.
[82] Lascelles to Nicolson (no. 42), 20 Dec. 1894, FO 800/17.
[83] Kimberley to Harcourt (private), 23 Dec. 1894, Rosebery MSS, MS 10143.
[84] Lascelles to Durand (no. 1), 3 Jan. 1895, FO 800/17.

coterminous frontier between England and Russia presents very great difficulties, but it is one which I am afraid will one day have to be dealt with and it is as well that we should be alive to the fact that the Russians in Asia look upon it as eventually inevitable and not altogether undesirable.'[85] Even with Tsar Nicholas II now on the throne, Russian foreign policy remained designed to pressure Britain in Central Asia.

None the less, Russian policy continued to shift eastwards away from Central Asia to the Far East. The construction of the Trans-Siberian railway had begun in the early 1890s with Sergei Witte, Russia's Minister of Finance, favouring this change of direction. Meanwhile, the Sino-Japanese War (July 1894 – April 1895) was underway. It was soon the case that an overwhelming victory for Japan expected by Russia and Britain alike. St. Petersburg was keen to ensure that Tokyo could not threaten its territory in the Far East, while it was just as eager to gain as much market share of China as possible. To these ends, the War Ministry and Russian Navy were keen that the Tsar support an 'annexation by Russia of Port Lazaneff, or some other port which is never frozen, and points out that Russia must not allow a strong independent Corea, under the protection of Japan and of Europe, to grow up, which would render the realisation of the scheme in question very much more difficult.'[86] It was therefore necessary for St. Petersburg to inhibit Japan's success, by restricting her negotiations for peace with China. This allowed Britain an opportunity to work with Russia in the Far East, primarily to protect British interests in China but also to allow the stronger Anglo-Russian relations in Central Asia to persist a little longer. The Pamirs negotiations were not quite at an end. Therefore, 'with regard to the peace negotiations between China and Japan ... They [the Russian government] desired especially to ascertain whether we agreed in

[85] Lascelles to Sanderson (no. 3), 16 Jan. 1895, FO 800/17.
[86] Lascelles to Kimberley (no. 33), 31 Jan. 1895, FO 65/1490.

the importance of securing the independence of Corea. I said that we took the same view as the Russian gov[ernmen]t on this point.'[87]

The death of Giers on 26 January 1895 meant that Britain had to observe St. Petersburg closely, in case Russia took a more aggressive turn in her foreign policy. Yet this period of uncertainty appeared to offer Britain some advantages. Kimberley was able to suggest that 'the protracted negotiations with Russia as to the territory in the Pamirs have, he has every reason to believe, at length arrived at a conclusion.' It was further reported that Staal had 'expressed his willingness not to press further a modification in the proposed agreement, which had been suggested at the last moment from St. P[etersburg].'[88] There was clearly some forces in Russia that were seeking to draw a line under Anglo-Russian tensions in Central Asia.

It was of great interest for Britain to learn of the identity of the new Russian Foreign Minister, as this could give clues as to how Anglo-Russian relations may unfold. When Alexei Lobanov-Rostovsky, Russian Ambassador to Austria-Hungary, was chosen by Tsar Nicholas II as Foreign Minister, Lascelles commented: 'Lobanoff's appointment is an excellent one. At one moment it looked as if Staal would be the man, and I am inclined to think that the appointment was offered to him and he refused ... Lobanoff seems charming but I am told that he is extraordinarily lazy and that a great deal will depend on his adjoint. Bützow has been mentioned for the post and in any case I am told it will not be Chikine.'[89] It had been feared that the death of Giers, a conciliatory official determined to keep the peace with Britain, may mean that difficulties lay ahead for Anglo-Russian relations, particularly in Central Asia. Yet with this appointment it did not appear that there would be much deviation

[87] Lascelles to Rosebery (no. 54 A, draft), 27 Feb. 1895, FO 65/1489.
[88] Kimberley to Queen, 15 Feb. 1895, G. E. Buckle (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria, Third Series, A selection from Her Majesty's Correspondence and Journal between the years 1886 - 1901,* (3 vols., London, 1931), Vol. 2, pp. 477 - 478.
[89] Lascelles to Wodehouse (no. 30), 28 Feb. 1895, FO 800/17.

in Russian policy in Central Asia. It had also become clear that Russia did not want tensions to remain in Central Asia. Indeed, while there always remained the fear that Russia could become embroiled in a European conflict, the evidence 'point[ed] to the conclusion that Russia, should she become involved in a European war will take no serious action in Central Asia or Caucasia.'[90] Furthermore, to Britain's great relief by March the Foreign Secretary was able to inform Rosebery: 'I write one line to say that at last the text of the Pamir notes is finally settled, and we are to sign immediately.'[91] The last serious border disagreement between Britain and Russia in Central Asia had thus been resolved. This meant that, while tensions between the two would remain, there was now much less chance of actual conflict arising in this region. As Sanderson commented, this would impede Russia 'so that they might not keep our frontier tribes in a constant state of intrigue and effervescence.'[92] To cross an agreed border would risk war, which St. Petersburg was not willing to do in its perilous financial state. London and St. Petersburg could now focus their attentions elsewhere, and British India could rest a little easier. The ending of the Pamirs question marked the end of a distinct phase of Anglo-Russian relations, while the new phase in the Far East was just beginning. Lascelles noted with evident satisfaction: 'tomorrow is his [Lobanoff's] first reception day and I shall be able to begin by congratulating him upon the signature of the Pamir agreement, the news of which reached me by telegraph this morning. I suppose we shall soon know what the Japanese demand as the conditions of peace. It seems to me that people do not quite realise that the appearance of a new Great Power in the East completely alters the state of things which has hitherto existed and may have very far reaching consequences.'[93]

[90] Maclean (confidential), 7 Mar. 1895, FO 181/726.
[91] Kimberley to Rosebery, 8 Mar. 1895, Rosebery MSS, MS 10069.
[92] Sanderson to Lascelles (private), 20 Mar. 1895, FO 800/16.
[93] Lascelles to Durand (no. 24), 12 Mar. 1895, FO 800/17.

The impact of the Far East on Anglo-Russian relations, both broadly and more specifically in Central Asia, soon became apparent. It was clear that Russia would react negatively when 'Prince Lobanoff had learnt with much regret the decision of Her Majesty's Gov[ernmen]t not to interfere with regard to the Japanese conditions of peace.' Indeed, 'Staal added that for his own part he could not but foresee that our withdrawal from co-operation with Russia in the affairs of the Far East must have a prejudicial effect on the relations between our two governments.'[94] This forced Lascelles to write: 'I think we may congratulate ourselves upon the fact that the Pamir agreement has been concluded, because the Russians are at this moment so sore with us for refusing to join in a friendly representation to Japan that they might have vented their bad humour in prolonging the Pamir negotiations.'[95] The Foreign Secretary could only agree: 'Lord Kimberley cannot conceal from himself that our separation from Russia in this matter [China] must have a prejudicial effect on the understanding which had just been established between the two countries. He greatly regrets this, but he is convinced that it would be a fatal mistake to deprive Japan of the fruit of her victories.'[96]

In order for Britain to protect her Far Eastern assets in this new phase, Monson suggested to Kimberley that policy should be to 'divert attention from the well worn topics of the future of Constantinople and of the Balkan peninsula, the development in the Far East has come to the front, and will share with the partition of Africa and the future destinies of the Nile valley the task of occupying the anxious attention of most of the Continental powers.'[97] Nevertheless, there did still remain pressure points for Britain in Central Asia. The British Resident in Kashmir, H. S. Barnes, wrote: 'the border of the Indian Empire is on the Hindu Kush; and Russia is in *de facto* possession of the territory on the northern border of a portion

[94] Lascelles to Kimberley (no. 98 a, draft), 10 Apr. 1895, FO 65/1489.
[95] Lascelles to Sanderson (no. 29), 11 Apr. 1895, FO 800/17.
[96] Kimberley to Queen, 23 Apr. 1895, Buckle, *Letters, Third Series*, Vol. 2, pp. 496 - 497.
[97] Monson to Kimberley (most confidential, no. 119), 18 Apr. 1895, Kimberley MSS, MS Eng c.4449.

of Chitral and Kanjut [north east of Kabul]; and it only remains to be seen whether British diplomacy can cause her to retreat somewhat from her position.' Barnes also reminded the Indian government: 'Kashgaria is a barrier between Russia and India just as much as is Afghanistan; and we should have a policy to pursue with regard to the former as well as with regard to the latter.'[98] This makes it clear that there remained the potential for Anglo-Russian difficulties in Central Asia, in spite of the recent success over the Pamirs. This suggests that local British diplomats were not confident in the longevity of the agreements.

On 25 June Salisbury returned as Prime Minister of a Unionist coalition. There would therefore be a continuation of Britain's foreign policy. None the less, it was reported in July that 'the excellent impression, which was created here by the sympathy expressed in England on the death of Alexander III and which was increased by the visit of the Prince of Wales, has worn off.'[99] Nevertheless, as matters in the Far East continued to take precedence for St. Petersburg, Edward Goschen, the British Secretary to the Embassy in St. Petersburg, passed a message from the military attaché to London that: '[the] Russians will not, he believes, attempt anything against us in Central Asia yet awhile.'[100] By November it appeared that Anglo-Russian tensions would also continue in Europe. It was reported: 'the [Russian] Ministry of Finance has allowed a considerable supplementary credit for the more rapid mobilisation of the Russian Mediterranean and Black Sea squadrons. The latter is reported to be ready to go to sea in 24 hours.'[101] However, by December it had become clear that there would remain some lower level tensions between Britain and Russia in Central Asia after all. The new Secretary of State for India, Lord George Hamilton, informed Elgin: 'information came to me from Lansdowne, who got it from a reliable source. Gerard tells me that Russians

[98] Barnes (resident in Kashmir) to Foreign Secretary of Indian Government (no. 2363), 7 Jun. 1895, FO 181/728/1.
[99] Lascelles to Salisbury (no. 55), 3 Jul. 1895, FO 800/17.
[100] Goschen (decipher, no. 103), 25 Oct. 1895, FO 65/1507.
[101] Goschen to Salisbury (confidential telegram, no. 112), 17 Nov. 1895, FO 65/1494.

are profuse in decorating natives on their side of the frontier for small services. It is undesirable that an invidious contrast should be created.'[102] Britain was again feeling pressure in India due to Russian attempts to undermine her government, and the confidence and acceptance of the local population.

Thus, when 'the Pamir boundary dispute came to an end, and the spheres of influence of England and Russia were definitely mapped out in that region,' much of the Anglo-Russian antagonism in Central Asia had been resolved.[103] Matters were at a stalemate in the region, but it was no longer the centre of Anglo-Russian relations. However, this did not mean that Britain and Russia became partners in the region. Nor did this mean that there were no longer any Anglo-Russian difficulties in Central Asia. To the contrary, at most it could be said that 'the Pamirs agreement [had] steered Anglo-Russian relations into calmer waters.'[104] It was a demonstration of the 'pragmatic acceptance of the need to treat with Russia – despite all reservations about Russian methods.'[105] In addition, while it has been suggested that it was 'the Franco-Russian Alliance of 1893 [that] afforded the protection Russia considered necessary when it began to give its major attention to the Far East,' this was unimportant compared to the necessary tranquillity in Central Asia that Russia needed.[106] This was what Russia was working towards since the outbreak of war in the Far East.

[102] Hamilton to Elgin (private, telegram), 2 Dec. 1895, EUR MSS D 508.
[103] C. C. Davies, *The Problem of the North West Frontier 1890 - 1908,* (Cambridge, 1932), p. 87.
[104] T. G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind. The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1865 - 1914,* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 205.
[105] K. Neilson and T. G. Otte, *The Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 1854 - 1946,* (Oxon, 2012), p. 106.
[106] H. Holborn, 'Russia and the European Political System', I. Lederer (ed.), *Russian Foreign Policy Essays in Historical Perspective,* (London, 1966), p. 404.

Chapter 7

‘The state of affairs in Persia was quite hopeless’: The Persian Paradox (II)

When in August 1892 the Liberal Party returned to office, it was obvious to Lord Rosebery and the Earl of Kimberley, Foreign Secretary and India Secretary respectively, that Salisbury had been unsuccessful in his attempt to utilise Persia as an alternative to Afghanistan.[1] Even the former Prime Minister: ‘[had] by the time he left office in 1892 ... certainly abandoned any real hope he might have had of transforming Persia into a flourishing state.’[2] There was, therefore, a decision to be made over how the Liberal government would deal with the Persian problem. Although it was clear that ‘the change of government shifted policy away from any notion of forward movement,’ matters were not that simple.[3] ‘During the Liberal administration of 1892 – 95 neither Rosebery nor Kimberley was able to make up his mind on the course to be pursued in Iran.’ This was for a number of reasons. Firstly, ‘the Liberals’ hold on the government was shaky.’ Backed by the Irish nationalists, bold foreign policies could not be followed for fear of breaking this unlikely combination. Consequently, Rosebery and his ministers ‘were not at all interested in new confrontations with Russia, nor were they willing to spend more money in the pursuit of foreign political goals than was absolutely necessary.’[4] For instance, ‘in the 1890s British road enterprise in Persia was severely

[1] Rose L. Greaves, in her article ‘British Policy in Persia, 1892 - 1903 (I)’, reiterates how the Earl of Kimberley, and the Liberals in general, viewed Persia as hopeless, and therefore thought the Shah should be left largely to his fate. By contrast, upon his return to office in 1895, Greaves does highlight how Salisbury continued to try and seek improved relations with the Shah. The Conservative Prime Minister urged the India Office to persuade the Indian government to maintain its payments to ensure that shipping could continue on the Karun river in the north west of Persia. Meanwhile, Firuz Kazemzadeh, in *Russia and Britain in Persia 1864 - 1914. A study in Imperialism*, suggests that there was in fact no agreement on how to deal with Persia from the Liberals. This thesis disputes this assertion, for although there may not have been unanimous support for the policy adopted by the Liberal government, this mattered little. Both Rosebery and Kimberley agreed that Persia was not worth much to the British Empire, and these were the two men tasked with the foreign policy of the British Empire as Gladstone once again focused on domestic problems.

[2] R. L. Greaves, ‘British Policy in Persia, 1892 - 1903 (I)’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1965), p. 35.

[3] R. L. Greaves, ‘Sistān in British Indian Frontier Policy,’ *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (1986), p. 93.

[4] F. Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia 1864 - 1914. A study in Imperialism*, (New Haven, 1968), p. 287.

restricted by want of funds.'[5] Furthermore, it was obvious to the Liberals that St. Petersburg held the advantages in Persia, such as proximity and a willingness to invest financial capital. St. Petersburg also maintained a monopoly over northern Persia, ensuring that Russian goods could be sold without competition. Other factors to consider resulted from the actions of Salisbury's Conservative government. It was the case that, with the failure of Britain's designs on Persia's railway network, as well as the loss of the *Tobacco Régie,* Britain's hands were tied in Persia. 'When the weapon of finance broke in [Drummond] Wolff's hands, the legation was left defenceless, and Russia resumed her sway at the capital.'[6] This was the Liberals inheritance.

There was, as a result, a marked contrast between how the Liberals would deal with Persia compared with how the Conservatives had done so. The policy that the Liberals settled on was to do the minimum required to ensure that Persia did not become a liability, to Afghanistan or British India. Rosebery 'avoided diplomatic and military trouble by carefully negotiating the settlement of potential disputes in Persia and the Pamirs on the Afghan border.'[7] In truth, 'the importance and intricacy of this problem [Pamirs] inevitably meant that Persian affairs receded into the background. [None the less] this might have happened anyway because the Liberals attached less importance to Persia than did the Conservatives, and were also more disillusioned by its government.'[8] Rosebery was supported in this hands-off approach by Kimberley. 'Lord Kimberley had long held that the state of affairs in Persia was quite hopeless.'[9] He would not support any policy that involved investing time or effort in the Shah's kingdom. Wodehouse 'explained that "cautious assurances" would be given,

[5] D. McLean, *Britain and Her Buffer State. The collapse of the Persian empire, 1890 - 1914*, (London, 1979), p. 64.
[6] T. P. Brockway, 'Britain and the Persian Bubble, 1888 - 1892', *The Journal of Modern History,* Vol. 13, No. 1 (Mar., 1941), p. 46.
[7] L. McKinstry, *Rosebery. Statesman in Turmoil*, (London, 2017), p. 302.
[8] Greaves, 'British Policy in Persia', p. 41.
[9] Ibid., p. 45.

but in his words of 1884, "the Persians are so corrupt, cowardly and treacherous, that it is most difficult to give them support".'[10]

For the Liberals, it was the case that while 'there was limited room for manoeuvre in Persia, the 'Foreign Office Mind' was imbued with a strong sense that Russia's expansion elsewhere in Central Asia could be tackled more directly.'[11] The Pamirs mountain range, to the north of Afghanistan, was the most obvious place. Persia, on the other hand, did not provide such a possibility of defending British interests head on. The *status quo* that had been arrived at in the wake of Drummond Wolff's failings would therefore have to be maintained. This impression that matters were at an impasse in Persia appears to have been shared with St. Petersburg. Sir Frank Lascelles, Minister to Persia (1891-1894), had an important conversation with Alexei Speyer, Russia's *charge d'affaires* at Tehran, soon after Rosebery returned as Foreign Secretary. From this discussion it was apparent that St. Petersburg, much like London, wanted to move on from Persia and focus its energies elsewhere. Speyer remarked: 'it would be very desirable if England and Russia could come to some distinct understanding with regard to their policy in Asia.' It was clear that: 'at present each country seemed to be suspicious of the other and he feared that if by any accident it became necessary for the protection of British interests to send a gun boat to a Persian port, a Russian force would immediately be sent to the borders of Khorassan or Azerbaijan.' Speyer blamed men-on-the-spot: 'that these suspicions existed was to some extent the fault of the agents of the two countries, who were apt on the one hand to attribute any want of success they might meet with to the intrigues of their rivals, and on the other to claim as a diplomatic victory any advantage they might obtain for their country.' Nevertheless, it was clear that neither power wanted war in Persia. To avert this, Speyer: 'observed that the existence of buffer states was a

[10] Ibid., p. 46.
[11] T. G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind. The Making of British Foreign Policy 1865 - 1914*, (Cambridge, 2011), p. 204.

mistake and that we ought to have a coterminous frontier.' This was not, however, a new idea. Ever since Russia had begun expanding southwards in the aftermath of the Crimean War, British India had been afraid of sharing a border with her regional rival. The fear was that this would mean consistent pressure upon her security, leading to a demand for greater defences. This would entail overstretching resources and greater taxation. None the less, Lascelles responded: 'in principle I was inclined to agree with him, as a buffer state became necessarily a hotbed of intrigue.' This was not government policy, however. The minister may have been able to give his own opinion, rather than following London's policy, because he understood the impossibility of the suggestion. The 'jewel in the crown' would not be put in harm's way like this.

In spite of Speyer's claims, there remained a fear that Russia may still try to expand into Persia. Lascelles knew that St. Petersburg had an aim far greater than doing away with buffer states. 'I [Lascelles] had always understood from my conversations with Russian diplomatists, and also from the language of the Russian press, that it was the desire of Russia to have an outlet on the Persian Gulf, and I was of [the] opinion that such an idea would be strongly opposed by England.'[12] To this end, Lascelles knew that he could not afford to take Speyer at his word. No government in London, Liberal or Conservative, would consent to any measure which appeared to give Russia access to a warm water port. However, this fear of Russian encroachment was also symptomatic of Britain's inability to determine Russian policy. Such a sentiment was exacerbated by London's knowledge that little could be done to stop this from happening. Lascelles considered: 'the time has come when H[er] M[ajesty's] Gov[ernmen]t should be prepared with a decided policy in the event of the disappearance of Persia as a state. The Shah seems to have lost all his energy, and like most weak men gives

[12] Lascelles to Rosebery (confidential, no. 149), 30 Sept. 1892, FO 65/1442.

way when he ought to resist and *vice versa*.'[13] Such a policy was not, however, likely to come from London. For this reason, 'Persian officials were beginning to suspect that Britain had lost interest in Persia or, even worse, that the British government had accepted defeat in the struggle against Russia's gradual advance. The hands of successive British Ministers in Persia were effectively tied.'[14]

This position seemed vindicated in early 1893. An intelligence report noted: 'being desirous of an outlet for her [Russia's] commerce in Persia ... the sentiments of some Russian statesmen, who see that she has much more to gain in Persia, than in the Pamirs and that therefore it is more important for her to check our influence in Persia, than to attempt any forcible annexation of territories up to the Hindu Kush in Central Asia.' It was therefore suspected that Russia was playing a different game. 'By her present action in the Pamirs, Russia hopes to lull our suspicions of her intentions in Persia and on the North West Frontier of Afghanistan'[15] This prompted discussions as to what could, and should, be done to prevent Russia from endangering British India through Persia. It was understood that there would be numerous difficulties, 'should we find ourselves obliged to occupy the whole of southern Persia in order to guard against Russia's sworn advance to the head of the Persian Gulf, which is as much her goal in Asia as Constantinople is in Europe.' The main geographical issue for Britain, namely that the Persian Gulf, and therefore the Royal Navy, was too far from Persia's northern provinces, remained. This had prevented Salisbury in the 1880s from being able to offer more support to the Shah, and it was the case for the Liberals in the 1890s.

Henry Charles Keith Petty-Fitzmaurice, 5th Marquess of Lansdowne, Viceroy of India, was caught in a quandary. 'I have felt for some time past that we might, at any moment, be confronted with a serious crisis in Persia.' He asserted that: 'Russia can, I

[13] Lascelles to Morier (private), 23 Nov. 1892, Morier MSS, Box 25 B, Item 1.
[14] McLean, *Buffer*, p. 19.
[15] Intelligence Branch (summary), 1 Jan. 1893, FO 65/1461.

believe, at any moment take Khorassan, whether we like it or not.' As a result, for Lansdowne it made little sense to back Persia when her northern provinces remained independent only for as long as Russia allowed. In addition, the Pamirs crisis vindicated the Viceroy in his certainty that 'a serious Russian encroachment upon Afghanistan ... concerns us more immediately than that of Persia.'[16] Much like Rosebery and Kimberley, Lansdowne considered that Persia was too far gone to consider helping. This notion 'prompted the Viceroy to address the Secretary of State for India about Persia early in 1893. Lord Lansdowne wrote: "The condition of affairs in Persia, is, I am afraid, becoming critical. Lascelles evidently thinks so. It has, of course, been obvious for some time past that things were going from bad to worse".'[17] Being so close to the problem, the Indian authorities had a tendency to take a pessimistic view of things.

It was clear that 'British officials in London, in Calcutta, and in Tehran differed considerably about Britain's capacity to stem Russia's advance and they were lavish in their criticisms of each other's opinions.'[18] For civil servants in London, the scale of the problem in Persia was obvious. In a letter between Arthur Godley, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for India, and Edward Grey, the Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the former wrote:

> it is evident from these reports that the state of affairs in Persia is assuming a very serious aspect, and that no hope can be entertained that she can ever recover the position of a strong and really independent power. An actual collapse of the Shah's government may be further off than is apprehended by some observers, but it cannot be doubted that there is danger of an acute crisis on the death of the present ruler. In any case it seems to be inevitable that increasing weakness will throw Persia more and more into the hands of Russia, and that either the northern Persian provinces will be annexed by that Power, especially Khorassan, or that they will, as is perhaps more probable, be for some years under the virtual domination of Russia.[19]

[16] Lansdowne to Lascelles, 7 Jan. 1893 Kimberley MSS, I.2.3 MS Eng d.2466.
[17] Greaves, 'British Policy in Persia', p. 41.
[18] McLean, *Buffer*, p. 71.
[19] Godley to Grey, 1 Feb. 1893, FO 65/1461.

It was of little consolation to observers that Persia might remain intact until the death of the Shah. This was akin to pushing the problems down the road. Moreover, there was some concern that as his power dwindled, he might fall back on Russian support in order to maintain his position. This seemed a likely outcome as Britain was reluctant to invest, either time or money, in the country. Kimberley shared this view. 'Persia is completely moribund, but moribund Eastern states are wonderfully long in dying, and the final catastrophe may yet be distant. My impression is that Russia will, without actually taking possession of the north eastern provinces, control them virtually, and that the Shah will become a vassal of the tsar in reality tho[ugh] not in name. I cannot see what we can do to avert it.'[20] While this prospect was an anathema to Salisbury during his long administration, it was both an expected, and accepted, outcome for the Liberals.

The difficulties of Britain's relations with Russia in Central Asia had only hardened the anti-Russian stereotypes that permeated official circles. This ensured that, while observers deemed it inevitable that Russia would control northern Persia, they also remained certain that Russia would not play by the rules. This added to the sense that Persia was beyond Britain's assistance. Lascelles acknowledged: 'no doubt Russia can take possession of Khorassan if she chooses to violate her treaties, and it would not be difficult to find [an excuse].'[21] Liberal policy was, therefore, determined not to waste resources in the defence of this province. This was demonstrated during discussions between Russia and Persia regarding a territorial agreement. This deal was concluded on 27 May 1893. 'The latter cedes to the former Firuzeh, in Khorassan, in exchange for Hissar and a strip of land on the right bank of the River Aras.' Rosebery, 'on being appealed to by the Shah for advice, stated that if His Majesty was convinced that the cession of Firuzeh would not endanger the safety of

[20] Kimberley to Lansdowne (private), 3 Feb. 1893, Kimberley MSS I.2.3. MS ENG d.2469.
[21] Lascelles to Viceroy (telegram, no. 23), 8 Apr. 1893, FO 65/1463.

Khorassan, he was not prepared to question the wisdom of an exchange.'[22] This was a marked change in British policy, and demonstrates the Liberals' unwillingness to become embroiled in Persian affairs. There were some, however, that remained persuaded by Salisbury's arguments, so they opposed the Shah being allowed to give up part of Khorassan. Lascelles, to the contrary, argued: 'I think there is exaggeration in ... fears ... I see no sufficient reason why we should object to the proposed arrangement if it satisfies the Persians.'[23] Northern Persia was not in Britain's sphere of interest, and never would be, so the Shah was left to make his own choices in that region. Furthermore, even though it was expected that Russia may violate treaties, this was discussed as if unavoidable and considered to be par for the course. This was much changed from Rosebery's reaction to Russia's abrogation of article 59 of the Treaty of Berlin, as Batum was annexed.

This acknowledgement that the northern half of Persia wasn't in Britain's sphere of interest led to more discussions regarding the future of Persia. Prior to his departure from St. Petersburg, 'Morier ... received instructions to sound [out] the Russian government about concerted action in the event of the Shah's demise. This action would be based on the understanding between Russia and Great Britain of 1834, subsequently renewed, for maintaining the independence and integrity of Persia. M[onsieur Nikolai Pavlovich] Chichkine [Deputy Foreign Minister] assured Morier that the Russian government had not changed their views.'[24] It was understood that the Shah was one of the few forces in Persia keeping its at times disparate elements together. It was feared that upon his death a civil war would break out, causing problems for both Britain and Russia. It was in both powers interests that there was an understanding to maintain the *status quo* was in place prior to his death. None the less, it was also in Britain's interest that Persia remained independent for as

[22] Bertie (memorandum), 15 Oct. 1893, IOR/L/PS/18/c81.
[23] Lascelles to Rosebery (telegram, no. 28), 8 Apr., 1893, FO 65/1463.
[24] Greaves, 'British Policy in Persia', p. 43.

long as was possible, due to her security concerns for British India. That this discussion occurred during the Pamirs negotiations also demonstrates the significant differences between Afghanistan and Persia for Britain. Although they were both part of the defence of British India, they were treated in separate ways. In Afghanistan there was no sense of compromise with Russia; the northern border of Afghanistan would not be moved south. In Persia there was no willingness to stand up to St. Petersburg, just an impression that the best that could be achieved was the slowing of Russia's encroachment. Nevertheless, that Chichkine did not dispute the validity of the earlier agreements suggests that St. Petersburg was, for the moment at least, content with the current *status quo* in Persia. This was of some relief to British India's defence planners. Additionally, it also ensured that Britain would not have to invest any more time or effort in Persia than was necessary. It was assumed that, 'if the worst happened, the British should insist upon privileges in the south corresponding to any which Russia might exercise in the north.'[25] Such a stance would only add to Britain's difficulties, which was the opposite of what the Liberal government wanted.

The Liberals decision to not interfere in the foreign affairs of Persia was demonstrated across the Foreign Office. Francis Bertie, Senior Clerk at the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office (1889 – 1894), noted in late 1893 how Britain refused to get involved in a quarrel between Persia and Turkey. London knew that 'there have been differences between [them] ... in regard to the occupation of places the right to which is in dispute between the two countries.'[26] Rosebery considered that it would have been foolhardy to side with either power. Britain could not support Persia against Turkey, for fear of alienating the Sultan and losing security in the eastern Mediterranean. The Shah could not be snubbed for fear of his allowing Russia to cross his territory to invade Afghanistan.

[25] Greaves, 'British Policy in Persia', p. 42.
[26] Bertie (memorandum), 15 Oct. 1893, IOR/L/PS/18/C81.

This hands-off policy towards the Shah did, however, contribute to growing Russian self-confidence. It was known that 'the Russians were giving insidious advice to the Shah with the object of damaging Persian credit.'[27] By keeping the Shah financially weak he could not hope to modernise his country or adopt measures that could allow capitalists from other countries to invest. 'Persia should be for her the sick man of the Middle East, as Turkey had long been in the Near East.'[28] It had been Salisbury's intention to do just the opposite. That the Liberals were standing by as this occurred, demonstrates just how diametrically opposed their policy was. Then again, not only did St. Petersburg seek to undermine Persia economically, but it also sought to intimidate the Shah with the threat of force. During the Pamirs crisis to the north of Afghanistan, 'his Majesty the Shah has evinced some uneasiness of late at the increase in the Russian forces on the Persian and Afghan frontiers which he fears indicates the intention of Russia to advance upon Herat.'[29] Britain was in a bind. While the Liberals did not want to be constrained by a Persian policy, if they did nothing then Russia could continue to apply pressure on British India through Persia. London had expended so much energy already on Persia, without seeing favourable results, that there no longer remained the will to keep fighting on the Shah's behalf. While there persisted the 'earnest desire of Her Majesty's Government that Persia should be strong and independent ... Unfortunately Persia was neither strong nor independent, and the state of the country was such as to inspire considerable apprehension as to its future.'[30]

The Shah was the weak link from Britain's perspective. He had been unable to remain independent of Russia, and for William Conyngham Greene, the Secretary of Legation at Tehran, too quick to seek selfish ends. '[Naser] resisted any attempt to improve the country and refused to take any thought for what might happen after his death. So long as His Majesty

[27] Lascelles to Rosebery (very confidential, no. 43), 11 Jan. 1894, FO 181/721/1.
[28] Greaves, 'British Policy in Persia', p. 47.
[29] FO to Kimberley (secret, memorandum), 10 Jan. 1894, FO 65/1484.
[30] Lascelles to Rosebery (very confidential, no. 42), 11 Feb. 1894, FO 65/1484.

was provided with money and could dispose of Governorships and public offices to the highest bidder, he asked nothing better than to leave matters as they were.'[31] This of course tallies with discussions between Britain and Russia regarding Persia's future after Naser's death; he had failed to make posthumous plans for Persia, so the Great Powers did it for him. None the less, there was a measure of appreciation from some members of Persia's elite for Britain's support. The *Sadr Azam,* or Grand Vizier, remarked: 'there could be no doubt that had it not been for the support which Persia had received from Her Majesty's Government, Russia would have long ago taken possession of the northern provinces.'[32] However, Lascelles commented that: 'many Persian gentlemen came to the conclusion that an arrangement already existed between Great Britain and Russia for the partition of Persia when the time should be ripe.'[33] Although this was incorrect, it does demonstrate the impact of the Liberals' more aloof policy. This only worsened with time. When in 'early ... 1894 Sir Frank Lascelles was appointed Ambassador to Russia ... immediately rumours spread through Tehran of a secret agreement between the two powers for the partition of Persia.'[34] This did nothing to help improve the Persian people's opinion of Britain, in the face of Russia's agents and propaganda.

The Shah complained about the moving of Lascelles, which had been arranged somewhat underhandedly. Lascelles had been recalled to London for discussions with no hint to the Shah as to what was about to happen. Although Rosebery was not obliged to discuss such matters with the Shah, it was custom. Naser further complained about Lascelles' replacement, even though he did not withhold his agreement. He wanted a man of importance, to ensure that Persia was not be viewed as an unimportant point on a map. It was

[31] W. C. Greene to Kimberley (secret, no. 67), 13 Mar. 1894, FO 65/1485.
[32] Lascelles to Rosebery (very confidential, no. 42), 11 Feb. 1894, FO 65/1484.
[33] A. P. Thornton, 'British Policy in Persia 1858 – 1890' Part II, *English Historical Review,* Vol. 70, No. 274 (Jan., 1955), pp. 70 - 71.
[34] Kazemzadeh, *Imperialism,* p. 285.

necessary, the Shah observed, to remind Britain of Persia's importance to the region. This conflicted with the perspective of the Foreign Office, for which 'Teheran ... [was] a backwater once more.'[35] It was the case that 'a man might have to serve there for a few years while awaiting a more comfortable appointment in Europe; but the climate, the state of the country, and the need to deal with orientals made it a spot to be avoided. Certainly the appointment to Tehran mattered rather more after the mid-1890s.'[36] Arguably, 'no first-rate men came to succeed Drummond Wolff,' although this was disingenuous to Lascelles, who must have impressed to have been given the Ambassador's role at St. Petersburg.[37] Rosebery sought to appease the Shah when he grumbled about Sir Mortimer Durand being proposed as Lascelles replacement. It was: 'explained to the Shah that Sir Mortimer Durand's nomination was intended as a special compliment to His Majesty, and that in appointing a Minister who was not only intimately acquainted with the East, but also an accomplished Persian scholar, Lord Rosebery had desired to mark the lively interest which Her Majesty's Government took in the prosperity of Persia.'[38] It did not help, however, that Durand had served for so long in India. This made the Shah suspicious of him from the outset. In addition, the minister was accused of treating foreign officials and potentates as if they were Indian underlings. This was not the behaviour of a British diplomat abroad.

Rosebery became Prime Minister in March 1894 upon the retirement of Gladstone. Kimberley assumed the role of Foreign Secretary. This change had little impact on the Central Asian question, as Rosebery had been given a free hand by Gladstone. Kimberley sought only to follow the Prime Minister's lead. Following on from Speyer's conversation with Lascelles, it was soon obvious that Russia wanted a period of peace in order to solve her financial difficulties. This was evident in May when Henry Howard, Secretary to the

[35] Thornton, 'Policy' Part II, p. 70.
[36] McLean, *Buffer*, p. 29.
[37] Thornton, 'Policy' Part II, p. 70.
[38] W. C. Greene to Kimberley (secret, no. 67), 13 Mar. 1894, FO 65/1485.

Legation at St. Petersburg, informed Kimberley: 'Russia's views respecting Balkan affairs remain the same, but she considers that to attempt to enforce them at the present time would not be remunerative. She has more pressing matters to attend to, such as the development and consolidation of the Empire, the rehabilitation of her finances, the perfecting of military preparations, and the building up of her fleet, which can only be accomplished within a certain period of peace.' Such an interlude would have been welcomed by British India. As was seen during the Eastern Rumelia crisis, when Russia was focused elsewhere or on other matters, the security burden on Delhi was lessened. Such calm in Anglo-Russian relations was, however, a double-edged sword. Howard feared: '[that] should Russia be granted this necessary period of peace ... she will be in a position to make her immense power felt in almost any part of the globe ... should she contemplate any annexation of territory, I am inclined to believe it will be in the direction of the East, notably Persia and Asiatic Turkey.'[39] This would be all the more dangerous as Britain would remain reluctant, and unable, to defend Persia whenever Russia decided to re-engage with Central Asia. Liberal and Conservative governments alike had proven unwilling to spend money on defence until the very last minute, by which time it was very nearly too late.

For the Liberals there was a definite reluctance to spend money on the Central Asian question. By 1894 Sir William Harcourt, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 'had to meet a deficit of nearly £5 million, large by the standards of those days, but arising almost entirely from increasing defence (mainly naval) expenditure, and therefore non-controversial with the Conservatives.'[40] Money would not therefore be spent on, as the Liberals saw it, unnecessary foreign policy initiatives. Harcourt remarked: '[any suggestion of] our taking some steps to protect Turkey from Russia ... [it] seems to me that we have nothing to do with that. This was very much a step away from Salisbury's focus on keeping Constantinople free in order to

[39] Howard to Kimberley (most confidential, no. 93), 10 May 1894, FO 65/1472.
[40] R. Jenkins, *The Chancellors*, (London, 1998), p. 62.

protect the eastern Mediterranean. However, supporting Ottoman Turkey was impossible at this moment in time, with the British public agitating against that country for its atrocities against the Armenian people. Meanwhile, any support for the Sultan would have been viewed by the Shah with disdain, as they were on opposite sides of a religious conflict spanning centuries. Britain could not afford to antagonise the Shah. Harcourt understood: '[that] it is highly in our interest that we should not in any way alienate Persia which if it joined with Russia would envelope Afghanistan.'[41] None the less, although Harcourt appreciated the Shah's importance to British India's security, this did not mean that he was willing to spend money on Persia. There remained little interest in the Shah's kingdom by August 1894. Lascelles, who was frustrated by a lack of commitment to Persia from the Foreign Office, conveyed to Durand: 'our position in Persia is at the best a ticklish one and it is made none the easier by the fact that neither London nor India are prepared with a policy in the event either of the breakup of Persia or of the annexation of the northern provinces by Russia.'[42] While 'British envoys at Teheran did their best to maintain an equilibrium ... Whitehall's attention had swung elsewhere.'[43]

Events conspired in Britain's favour to remove Anglo-Russian tensions from Central Asia. In July 1894 the Sino-Japanese War had begun. Russia was taking a firm interest in this conflict due to the Trans-Siberian railway, and her concerns that Japan might push her out of China if she was not checked. This was followed by the death of Tsar Alexander III on 1 November, which sparked an upsurge in Anglo-Russian relations. The Russian public and government appreciated the Prince of Wales's condolences. Finally, on 26 January 1895 Giers also died, his legacy being his success in calming Anglo-Russian relations in Central Asia by the time of his passing. With events in the Far East now taking precedence for St.

[41] Harcourt to Rosebery, 12 Jul. 1894, Rosebery MSS, MS 10143.
[42] Lascelles to Durand (private), 30 Aug. 1894, FO 800/17.
[43] Thornton, 'Policy' Part II, p. 70.

Petersburg, with much improved Anglo-Russian relations, Russia was now more willing to work with Britain in Persia. Meanwhile, it was still understood that Russia was sure to send capable men to ensure its interests were maintained at Tehran, irrespective of a renewed willingness to work with Britain rather than against her. Speaking of the appointment of General Aleksey Kuropatkin as Russia's *chargé d'affaires* to Persia, Durand remarked: 'altogether the Russian government has done well in selecting General Kuropatkin for this mission, as his personality and his military reputation both tell in his favour.' It was made known that Kuropatkin 'professes the greatest goodwill toward England, and declares that he has always been opposed to a forward policy in Asia, as not unlikely to end in disaster.' This was as close to an assurance from St. Petersburg, that Britain would get, that Russia would not be seeking to expand further in to Central Asia in the immediate future. Durand, of course, lauded this as proof of the success of British policy. He wrote disparagingly: 'I think he [Kuropatkin] does really understand how exceedingly dangerous to the existence of the Russian power in Central Asia would be a war with us.'[44] In spite of the difficulties Russia had caused Britain in Persia there still remained a sense of British superiority.

Even with the lack of support from the Liberal government, 'there were those who cherished the idea of a stronger and more prosperous Persia ... Durand ... was one of them.'[45] He wanted to improve Britain's standing with the Shah and facilitate trade, while the government in London wanted to maintain the *status quo*. 'The British Minister at Tehran [had] assured his chief in 1895 that the Shah would do anything provided that the price was right. An annual subsidy from the British treasury could produce the reforms, the commercial expansion, and the administrative improvements which the Foreign Office wanted to see; but he presumed, quite correctly, that no such measures would be entertained in London.'[46]

[44] Durand to Kimberley (secret, no. 15), 19 Feb. 1895, FO 65/1504.
[45] McLean, *Buffer*, pp. 8 - 9.
[46] Ibid., p. 3.

'Persia [had] lapsed out of diplomatic sight, while Anglo-Russian rivalries transferred themselves to the Pamir plateau and then to the Far East.'[47] There was neither the will nor the money for a repeat of Salisbury's endeavours.

In June 1895 Salisbury began his third ministry, but he did not return to his former Persian plan. His optimism regarding the Shah's kingdom was spent. At the same time, British angst over the fate of Persia had subsided as it was clear that Russian interests lay elsewhere. Thoughts of the Shah faded into the background. There did, however, remain some concern for British India regarding her border with Persia, but this was resolved by December. 'The line which they [Persian Government] accept as a basis for delimitation secures to the Gov[ernmen]t of India what they required in the neighbourhood of Kohuk and Persia is excluded from all the Mashkel district or nearly all of it.'[48] However, although Delhi had been able to secure this agreement, it was not so forthcoming with support for a policy which Salisbury championed:

> The Government of India had refused to continue its payment of a moiety of the Karun river subsidy by which Messrs. Lynch and Company operated a fortnightly steamer service on the lower river between Basra and Ahwaz. Lord Salisbury sent a strongly worded message to the India Office asking that the Government of India be urged to reconsider its decision ... Already Russia had the paramount influence in the north. The end of the Karun service would make an opportunity for the Russians in the south by the consequent decline of the British position there.

Salisbury, like Rosebery, did not want to see Russia extend her influence into southern Persia, and certainly not to the Persian Gulf. Lord George Hamilton, the Secretary of State for India, 'in several private letters ... took up the question, successfully, with [the Viceroy of India, Victor Bruce, the 9th Earl of] Elgin.'[49] This demonstrated how British policy had become much like Russia's policy; based upon a reactionary footing, designed to maintain the *status quo* and not give the opponent any advantages. While this benefited Persia little, it

[47] Thornton, 'Policy' Part II, p. 70.
[48] Durand to Salisbury (cipher, no. 51), 17 Dec. 1895, FO 65/1507.
[49] Greaves, 'British Policy in Persia', p. 46.

ensured Britain's continued control of the Persian Gulf, and all the advantages for British India that the *status quo* entailed.

Britain had been unable to reform Persia because 'any basic reorganisation of the system of government could only follow on the exercise of real authority over Persia. This the British did not have, were not likely to acquire, and really did not want.'[50] Moreover, 'Persia was of no immediate value to Britain. The British had no desire for territorial acquisitions, nor any real wish to become involved in the affairs of the Persian empire.'[51] Russia, on the other hand, had power in northern Persia due to force of arms and the persistent threat that more soldiers would arrive should the Shah displease St. Petersburg. London could, therefore, do little to cause change at Tehran nor halt Russian policy. The capital was too far from the Persian Gulf and the Shah too reticent to listen to British advice. Britain and Russia were diametrically opposed in Persia, even more so than on the Russo-Afghan border. While 'the task of the British in Persia was ... to sponsor and to encourage those measures that might reasonably lead to improvements in government, in the army, and in the life of the people so that the Persians themselves would not welcome the Russians as liberators,' Russian policy was to stall all advancement, keeping the Shah financially and militarily weak.[52] Britain sought a trading partner, Russia sought a colony. It proved the case that 'the rapid growth of Russian power in Persia in the 1890s required a reappraisal of British attitudes. It called into question the feasibility of preserving Persia as a buffer state at a time when Britain's military and financial resources were already strained'[53] For the Liberals the answer was to leave Persia alone, maintain the *status quo* and face Russia elsewhere across the globe, where London perhaps did not have such a disadvantage. But

[50] Greaves, 'British Policy in Persia', p. 40.
[51] McLean, *Buffer*, p. 19.
[52] R. L. Greaves, *Persia and the Defence of India 1884 - 1892. A study in the Foreign Policy of the Third Marquis of Salisbury*, (London, 1959), p. 20.
[53] McLean, *Buffer*, p. 29.

'there was no appetite for a "forward policy" in the region around India's security glacis.'[54] 'The Persian debate was a reassessment of Britain's role as a world power, and a reconsideration by the Government of India of frontier defence.'[55] Furthermore, the period 1892 – 1895 in Anglo-Persian relations represented a precursor for Britain's relationship with Central Asia as a whole from 1895. Once the Pamirs agreement was signed, creating a legally binding end to Russia's southwards encroachment into Central Asia, St. Petersburg turned its attention towards the Far East. Britain could, therefore, rest easy that British India was not under any immediate threat. This hands-off approach was what the Liberals had exercised over Persia upon their return to government in 1892.

[54] Otte, *Mind*, p. 205
[55] McLean, *Buffer*, p. 29.

CONCLUSION

This work has broken new ground in several ways. Primarily, it has filled a gap in the study of Anglo-Russian relations prior to the turn of the century. This work has shown how Central Asia, during the period of 1885 – 1895, was of vital importance to British foreign policy. More specifically, it has been demonstrated that the pressure applied on British India by Russia left a definite impression on British foreign policy. It has also been established that there was a significant link between Central Asia and Europe regarding this Anglo-Russian antagonism. The two should not, therefore, be dealt with separately, as one informs the other and *vice versa*. While securing British India against Russia was the priority of British foreign policy, this was necessarily informed by matters on the continent. This work has also added weight to the growing body of literature seeking to counter the numerous volumes identifying Germany as Britain's most important adversary before the outbreak of the First World War. It was in fact the policy of Russia that British foreign policy was aimed against.

The phrase 'Central Asian paradigm' is illusive. While Central Asia can be identified geographically as the region to the north of India, in particular the states of Afghanistan and Persia, the expression 'Central Asian paradigm' does suggest a pattern of action in this locale. This work has demonstrated how both British foreign policy and British India faced pressure at regular intervals in Central Asia, as a result of Russian interference. This work has also shown how Anglo-Russian relations in Central Asia altered British, and Russian, foreign policies elsewhere, most notably in Europe. From a Russian perspective, the involvement of Europe was used as a means to gain the upper hand in Central Asia. It is clear that 'as a global power ... Britain had to adjust how she dealt with Russia according to power-political circumstances that were constantly changing yet in an unvarying geographical context.'[1] This

[1] K. Neilson, 'The British Way in Warfare and Russia', K. Neilson and G. Kennedy (ed.), *The British Way in Warfare: Power and the International System 1856 - 1956. Essays in Honour of David French*, (Farnham, 2010), p. 27.

link between Central Asia and Europe was pivotal for both Britain and Russia, although both viewed Europe differently.

There are various threads that are entwined through Anglo-Russian relations in Central Asia during the period 1885 – 1895. One such thread was Britain's threat to use force. Just twice did she threaten war to counter Russia, as a result of both the Penjdeh incident and, to a lesser extent, the Pamirs Crisis. That these two emergencies occurred at the beginning and end of the period under investigation demonstrates the cyclical nature of the Central Asian paradigm. For Britain to threaten Russia with war was considered a warning, and it was one which St. Petersburg took heed of. London did not make such threats lightly. Both decisions were telling Russia that she had come so far but would not be allowed to come any closer to British India. Each predicament, after the initial sabre rattling from London, was eventually settled through dialogue and patience.

The prospect of actual war between these two powers was always slim, but this does not negate the impact of Russia on Britain's foreign policy. Neither power wanted to risk a full-scale confrontation with the other, as it would leave them open to attack from other powers. In addition, wars are expensive and unpredictable; neither Salisbury nor Giers wanted to roll the dice. Rosebery did not deviate from this standpoint. It is evident that there is not much to differentiate between Salisbury and Rosebery in terms of policy. Where Salisbury was more nuanced in his decision making, Rosebery was perhaps more overtly aggressive, but he did not lead Britain to war. This was largely a difference between political generations. 'Political 'generations' ... are formed by common, formative social or political experiences.'[2] The Marquis was more confident in the ability of the British Empire to always come out on top. The Earl, being younger and having had different experiences while in

[2] T. G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind. The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1865 - 1914,* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 19.

office, was not as confident in Britain's position. His generation had experienced multiple challenges to the British Empire on various fronts. 'Different generational cohorts had divergent political outlooks.'[3] None the less, Rosebery continued Salisbury's foreign policy effectively.

A further thread demonstrates the strength of the connection between Central Asia and Europe. During the Penjdeh incident, Britain needed European consent to gain access to the Black Sea in order to attack Russia from that body of water. When this was not forthcoming, London acceded to requests for peace, but only after St. Petersburg had already began to back down. Russia, on the other hand, required European security from her membership of the *Dreikaiserbund* in order to threaten Britain in Central Asia. Once this alliance was broken and Russia's western border was threatened, there was an appreciable drop in St. Petersburg's aggression towards Central Asia. Britain could bring about such difficulties for Russia by drawing closer to the Central Powers. In addition, it was obvious at the Constantinople Conference that, although the members of the *Dreikaiserbund* were all conservative, two of the three feared the expansionism of the third. This distinction was exploited by Britain. None the less, it is clear that for Britain, her Central Asian interests came before her European concerns; for Russia, this was *vice versa*. This explains why Russia sought to apply pressure on British India as a means to gain a free hand in eastern Europe. Britain, meanwhile, could not afford to give in to this pressure, as giving Russia a free hand in Europe meant her consenting to further difficulties in Central Asia. There was therefore only one policy left for Britain; to maintain her buffer states and protect British India.

Anglo-Russian relations in Persia offer a role reversal. In Afghanistan Russia had been attempting to move borders closer to India; in Persia it was Britain trying to alter the

[3] Ibid., p. 18.

status quo. As she did so, she was invariably blocked by Russia or the Persian people. This was frustrating for Salisbury, who had viewed Persia as a better collaborator in Central Asia than Afghanistan. None the less, Russian success at holding Britain back in Persia did not garner her significant gains at her enemy's expense. She merely managed to maintain a *status quo* that would be formalised in 1907. In Persia it was made obvious how much Britain's authority rested on the compliance of the local ruler. While the Shah of Persia proved an obstacle, the Amir of Afghanistan had been a useful collaborator in British India's defence. It was also demonstrated how the Government of India could be a hindrance to London's policies. Anglo-Russian relations in Persia were also an important demonstration of the cyclical nature of the Central Asian paradigm. As Britain gained one success, Russia either took it back or bettered it.

A key factor in Anglo-Russian relations was Britain's inability to agree on what was Russia's policy. A significant reason for this was the various perceptions of Russia, her intentions and her ability to achieve them. An 'important feature in the perception of a foreign country's actions is its strength. Clearly, a strong enemy is more threatening than a weak enemy,' but this is open to interpretation.[4] British India always considered Russia as very strong and as an immediate threat. During the Pamirs crisis Victor Alexander Bruce, 9th Earl of Elgin and Viceroy to India, argued that: 'the most important point of all is that no gap should be left open to Russia between Chinese and Afghan territories.'[5] Yet Viceroys had always had a very negative view of St. Petersburg and its methods. Frederick Temple Hamilton-Temple-Blackwood, 1st Marquess of Dufferin and Ava, Viceroy from 1884 until 1888, claimed: 'no promise, assurance, undertaking, convention or treaty would have the slightest effect in permanently arresting the advance of Russia eastwards, and that her

[4] E. Castano, 'The Perception of the Other in International Relations: Evidence for the Polarizing Effect of Christianity', *Political Psychology*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2003), p. 450.
[5] Elgin to Kimberley (telegram), 3 May 1894, Elgin MSS, MSS Eur F 84/17.

progress could only be stopped by the exhibition of physical force.'[6] London and Delhi had conflicting views and therefore were often in disagreement. On more than one occasion Delhi relied upon London to extricate British India from difficult positions. This was very much to the annoyance of Sir Robert Morier, the Ambassador to Russia. Morier did not share Delhi's view. Although he acknowledged Russia's aggression in Central Asia, he saw the threat as less impending. 'We have virtually for the last 33 years been *de facto* at war with her, though only *de jure* for a few years, and we had in this position to deal with an Asiatic foe, not different in kind from the Amir of Afghanistan and his like'[7] Considering Russia was a Great Power, this demonstrates how ineffective Morier considered St. Petersburg's policy to be. He was equally disparaging about Tsar Alexander III. 'I am really fighting the battle with the Emperor in person & a more unenviable task than fighting a stupid autocrat cannot be imagined.' In addition, during the Pamirs crisis Morier acknowledged: 'we have everything in our favour. They not only dare not risk war, but they dare not risk the faintest rumour of it.'[8] At this time Russia was experiencing a terrible famine that meant she could not have launched the large-scale war that India feared. This work has shown the numerous opinions on Russia that were held by those who influenced British foreign policy, but also why they were held. This is an important part of the decision making that went on. None the less, Salisbury's definition offers the best insight into the problems London faced: 'it is very difficult to come to any satisfactory conclusion as to the real object of Russian policy. I am more inclined to believe that there are none, that the Emperor is really his own minister, & so bad a minister, that no consequent or coherent policy is produced; but that each influential

[6] Dufferin to Kimberley (private), 30 Mar. 1885, Dufferin MSS, MSS Eur F130/2.
[7] Morier to Salisbury (private), 28 Oct. 1886, Morier MSS, Box 24 A, Item 1.
[8] Morier to Salisbury (private, draft), 28 Jan. 1892, Morier MSS, Box 24 B, Item 5.

person, military or civil, snatches from him as opportunity offers the decisions which such persons at the moment wants.'[9] This made Russian policy difficult to predict.

By 1895 Central Asia had lost its significance to British foreign policy. This was due to the relative success of her foreign policy in the region. The goal of British policy in Central Asia had been to secure British India, this had been achieved. Events during the 1880s and 1890s had secured London's imperial interests. A border between Russia and Afghanistan had been drawn and the Balkans made secure against Russian invasion. Although the perceived threat to Constantinople remained, Salisbury had at least slowed down Russia's further encroachment on Turkey. He had argued in 1886: 'let her take as long on the road to Constantinople as we can possibly contrive. We have everything to gain and nothing to lose by the delay.' This Fabian policy was designed to protect Afghanistan, as Salisbury was convinced that 'Russia must go to Constantinople first, the religious tide dictates that condition.'[10] As a result, British India no longer had to fear an imminent Russian incursion. This was welcomed by British India: 'the moment is fortunately favourable as regards reduction of the expenditure on military works ... what I mean is that there is a will, of which we may take advantage by holding our hand as regards expenditure on our defences, so as to enable us to tide over our pressing financial difficulties.'[11] Nevertheless, authorities in Delhi remained on the alert. It was known, for instance, that 'Russians are profuse in decorating natives on their side of [the] frontier for small services. It is undesirable that an invidious contrast should be created.'[12] An unforeseen consequence of Britain's success was, however, that it helped to precipitate Russia's shift to the east.

[9] Salisbury to Morier, 16 Sept. 1885, Morier MSS, Box 21, Item 1.
[10] Salisbury to Morier (private & very confidential), 2 Oct. 1886, Morier MSS, Box 24 A, Item 2.
[11] Kimberley to Elgin, 9 Feb. 1894, Elgin MSS, MSS.Eur.F.84/12.
[12] Hamilton to Elgin, (private, telegram), 2 Dec. 1895, Hamilton MSS, EUR MSS D/508.

From the mid-1890s the focus of Anglo-Russian relations moved eastwards, away from Central Asia to the so-called 'China Question'. This was as a result of the Central Asian question ending. Russia turned 'eastwards in search of a proxy proving ground for its imperial prowess. The Far East and Persia were the only remaining large areas where Russia could play the role of a great power.'[13] With Russia at a virtual stalemate with Britain in Persia, the Far East became the next objective. This was not, however, a sudden change. While 'Russian foreign policy in the [eighteen] nineties was concentrated on [Central] Asia,' an interest in China was long held.[14] 'Ever since members of the Russian government acquired accurate maps of Siberia (from mid-nineteenth century geographic expeditions), they had become concerned about the security of their long and vulnerable Far Eastern frontier.'[15] To this end, the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway had been begun in 1891, which would allow Russia to defend her eastern borders more effectively. When this line was finished, St. Petersburg would be able to send troops and arms to the Far East at a greater rate and speed. For St. Petersburg it remained obvious that 'the solution to Russia's security concerns would be territorial expansion,' which meant that the railway would be used as a means to expand the Russian Empire yet further.[16] Such military successes would boost morale at home while bringing economic benefits to the Romanov dynasty. As was witnessed during Russia's push through Central Asia, new territories became part of a Russian protected economic zone. For this reason, Sergei Yulevich Witte, the Russian Finance Minister, was a key supporter of this move eastwards. He sought expansion in a part of the world far removed from Central Asia and Europe.

[13] S. C. M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894 - 1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy*, (Cambridge, 2002), p. 73.
[14] H. Seton-Watson, *The Decline of Imperial Russia 1855 - 1914*, (London, 1952), p. 192.
[15] Paine, *Perceptions*, p. 8.
[16] Ibid., p. 284.

The British perception of Russia's move eastwards was one of irritation and Russophobic distrust. The significant issue for Britain was that she was already the dominant force in China, which, until 1895, had proven the perfect commercial asset. The Far East, then, risked replicating Britain's difficulties in Central Asia which she had just managed to end. Indeed, the closest Britain had come to feeling threatened in the Far East was during the Penjdeh incident, when the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg alarmed London by 'reporting the erection of batteries by the Russians at Vladivostok.'[17] This was in spite of the fact that 'during the second half of the nineteenth century, the Russians in the north, the Japanese in the east, and the French in the south, each began to make encroachments on Chinese imperial territory.'[18] Due to such an assurance in her position, it seemed as if 'the traditional British policy had been devised by importers and exporters of consumer goods. China was regarded as a market.'[19] British confidence in her position seemed well founded. It was understood that 'China was [both] too weak to affect the European balance of power, [and that] she was too remote to be of strategic importance,' which meant that for decades there appeared to be little chance of an enemy intruding on this Far Eastern market. In short, China was an example of British imperialism just as London wanted it. 'The British Government's interest in China had from the start been exclusively for the advantage of British commerce ... [whilst] Britain had no territorial aspirations there.'[20]

Frustration at St. Petersburg's bid to undermine her Far Eastern market notwithstanding, there was a consideration in Britain that the move was strategic, a bid to 'divert attention from the well-worn topics of the future of Constantinople and of the Balkan

[17] Thornton (secret draft, no. 287), 29 Jul. 1885, FO 65/1214.
[18] E. Luard, *Britain and China*, (London, 1962), p. 33.
[19] A. E. Campbell, 'Great Britain and the United States in the Far East, 1895 - 1903', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1958), p. 157.
[20] Luard, *China*, pp. 32-33.

peninsula.'[21] By occupying the European powers outside of Europe, Russia would then be able to complete her plans for seizing Constantinople and gaining access to the Mediterranean for her Black Sea fleet. This was a feature of the anti-Russian suspicions that had been building in Britain since at least the end of the Crimean War, if not before. Such an outlook had only been reinforced by the abrogation of article 59 of the Treaty of Berlin in 1886. Salisbury, however, did not share this view. Nevertheless, with his 'general *status quo* policy in foreign affairs, but also growing in hostility towards Germany, and convinced of the need for *rapprochement* with Russia, Salisbury evidently had no great enthusiasm for any specific sort of Japan policy.'[22] Salisbury wanted any Anglo-Russian antagonism in the Far East to end much as the one in Central Asia had; through diplomatic understandings that, while they may not last, would give Britain breathing space to fortify her position. The upside for Britain was, as Russia sought to exercise control in the Far East, both her Central Asian and European exploits were put on hold, ushering in a new period of Anglo-Russian antagonism.

Britain, during this paradigm shift, benefited from Salisbury's return to office in July 1895 at the head of a Unionist government. He enjoyed a much stronger domestic position than previously and was therefore an even more formidable opponent, to St. Petersburg and others, than before. His success during his long administration (1886 - 92) had proven that he was capable of matching any intrigues that St. Petersburg wished to employ. This had also been sufficient to create the illusion of calm between the two powers, even when, as has been shown, this was not the case. With the border of Afghanistan and the status of Persia settled, Salisbury was able to shift British policy away from the eastern Mediterranean. 'In 1895 his main objective was to guard British interests in the Ottoman Empire. In 1896, when the

[21] Monson to Kimberley (most confidential, no.119), 18 Apr. 1895, Kimberley MSS, MS Eng c.4449.
[22] N. Brailey, 'Sir Ernest Satow, Japan and Asia: The Trials of a Diplomat in the Age of High Imperialism', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (1992), p. 129.

Cabinet had, as he saw it, refused him the means of following a resolute policy in Turkey, the mastery of the valley of the Nile became the first objective of his policy.'[23] The security of Constantinople, and therefore access to the Straits of Dardanelles, were no longer British priorities. This was demonstrated by 'Lord Salisbury's intimation to the German Emperor that we favoured a policy of opening the Straits to vessels of all nations.'[24] To this end, not only were there growing concerns over Russian involvement in the Far East, but Africa was now starting to take prominence as well. This 'Scramble for Africa' involved vying with both France and Germany to retain her imperial security. Salisbury had shown concern about Africa for some time. It was reported in 1890: 'I learn that Moscow was put in the estimates for £300 or £400 but that Lord Salisbury put his pen through the figures because the money was "wanted for Africa".'[25] This makes evident that Salisbury's imperial policy was focused more upon maintaining the route to British India, as he was certain that Russia did not offer a realistic threat to Britain's control of the subcontinent.

It is obvious, then, that by 1895 Central Asia was no longer the centre of British foreign policy decisions. Yet this is not to say that British India was no longer the 'jewel in the crown'; it was simply that the defence of India was now in the eastern Mediterranean and the continent of Africa. Moreover, other imperial security issues were coming to the fore. The period of 1885 – 1895 had proven difficult for Britain, but she had maintained her position globally. As had been Salisbury's intention, Britain had been able 'to float lazily downstream, occasionally putting out a diplomatic boat-hook to avoid collisions.'[26]

[23] J. A. S. Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy: the close of the nineteenth century,* (London, 1964), p. 130.
[24] Lansdowne to Ardagh, 24 Sept. 1896, PRO 30/40/2.
[25] Layall to Morier, 7 Dec. 1890, Morier MSS, Box 25A, Item 1.
[26] T. G. Otte, ''Floating Downstream?' Lord Salisbury and British Foreign Policy 1878 - 1902', T. G. Otte (ed.), *The Makers of British Foreign Policy from Pitt to Thatcher*, (Chippenham, 2002), p. 98.

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