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DÉTENTE 1914: SIR WILLIAM TYRRELL'S SECRET MISSION TO GERMANY*

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ABSTRACT. *Based on hitherto unused archival material, this article reconstructs the genesis of a clandestine mission to Germany by Sir Edward Grey's private secretary, Sir William Tyrrell, planned for the summer of 1914. The mission remained abortive, but it offers fresh insights into a growing sense of détente in Great Power relations on the eve of the First World War. Although the episode involved key officials in London and Berlin, the article emphasizes that, pace many recent scholars of the period, the Anglo-German antagonism was not the central concern of British policy-makers. Rather, relations between the two countries were a function of Anglo-Russian relations, and the revival of Russian power after 1912 provides the proper context to the attempts by British and German officials to place relations between their countries on a friendlier footing. The article thus also calls into question criticisms of the British foreign secretary as irrevocably ententiste, and provides an antidote to assumptions of the First World War as somehow inevitable.*

As the centenary of the First World War approaches, the conflict has lost none of its fascination for scholars. The origins of the conflict, and the events of the summer of 1914 more especially, remain one of the most intensely researched fields of modern international history. Given the momentous nature of these events, and their longer-term effects, it is hardly surprising that this should be so.

By its very nature, all historical writing is in a sense revisionist. In the context of 1914, the relative significance of longer-term as opposed to short-term developments, or of structural factors versus human agency, all suggest different angles on the origins of the war.[1] Perhaps surprisingly, considering how well tilled the field appears to be, new archival material – primarily of a private nature – still comes to light that suggests a yet more nuanced interpretation of the complexities of Great Power politics at the end of the long nineteenth

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* I am grateful to Zara Steiner and Keith Neilson for their constructive criticisms.
[1] For recent surveys see S. R. Williamson and E. R. May, 'An identity of opinion: historians and July 1914', *Journal of Modern History*, 79 (2007), pp. 335–87; and the thoughtful introduction by W. Mulligan, *The origins of the First World War* (Cambridge, 2010).

century. Sir William Tyrrell's clandestine mission to Germany, planned for the summer of 1914, underlines this point. Although a discrete event, it speaks to wider issues and existing trends in the historiography of the pre-1914 period.

The first of these is the phenomenon of détente that appeared to many of the key players in the chancelleries of Europe to have become a prominent feature of Anglo-German relations, and whose significance scholars have come to appreciate more fully in recent years. Intimately linked with this is the accelerated growth of Russian power in the last two years before 1914. The evidence presented here strongly suggests that the renascence of tensions with Russia on the imperial periphery, more especially in Persia, led to a subtle shift in British thinking away from firm, albeit not formalized, co-operation with France and Russia to something more open-ended. This shift in the focus of British policy reflected shifts in the constellation of the Great Powers. Détente, then, was not merely a matter of the atmospherics of bilateral relations between London and Berlin. On the contrary, it presented a potentially new departure, albeit one tragically arrested by the events of July 1914.

The driving force behind a change of policy was William Tyrrell, Sir Edward Grey's private secretary. His position and influence were first established by Zara Steiner and E. T. Corp.[2] What has received less consideration, however, is the extent to which Tyrrell sought to influence strategic decision-making. This article seeks to remedy this. In so doing, it also addresses fundamental questions about British foreign policy on the eve of war, for Tyrrell was not an isolated actor. His influence ultimately rested in about equal measure on his close relations with the foreign secretary and on the diminished presence of the Foreign Office's permanent head, Sir Arthur Nicolson. Without Grey's support, Tyrrell's ability to shape policy-making would have been severely curtailed, but the evidence presented here suggests that Tyrrell acted with the foreign secretary's consent and encouragement. This is significant on two counts. In the first instance, it calls into question those assessments of Grey that hold him to be inflexibly and unwisely committed to France and Russia. Secondly, for a policy of détente to succeed it requires reciprocity. As is shown here, the desire of some of the leading players in London for improved relations with Germany was reciprocated by Gottlieb von Jagow, Wilhelmine Germany's last and least known peace-time state secretary. This article therefore helps further to undermine the teleology, centred on 1914, that still informs much of the extant literature on the period, and so throws new light on the constellations of the Great Powers, actual and potential, on the eve of the Great War.[3]

[2] Z. S. Steiner, *The Foreign Office and foreign policy, 1898–1914* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 14 and 51–2; and E. T. Corp, 'Sir William Tyrrell: the *eminence grise* of the British Foreign Office, 1912–1915', *Historical Journal*, 25 (1982), pp. 697–708.

[3] For some thoughts on this see my *The Foreign Office mind: the making of British foreign policy, 1865–1914* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 21–2.

I

The episode reconstructed here for the first time reflected a growing sense of détente in international affairs after 1912. Although this sense grew appreciably in those years, historians have tended to emphasize those elements that made for international strife rather than co-operation. There are exceptions. R. J. Crampton was the first to emphasize Anglo-German co-operation in Balkan affairs, even if only to conclude that it amounted to little more than a limited or, indeed, a 'hollow détente'.[4] Other scholars, such as Richard Langhorne and Gregor Schöllgen, have examined the 'peripheral strategy' of co-operating in colonial questions and matters pertaining to the Near East, though their final assessments do not substantially differ from that advanced by Crampton.[5] More recently, in an important contribution to the scholarly debate, Friedrich Kiessling has argued that efforts at détente were genuine enough. At the same time, he contends that their relative success needed to be complemented by a reassurance policy within the emerging alliance blocs so as to preserve these combinations, and that this created a dynamic that could no longer be contained in July 1914.[6] Important as these studies are, they have done little to shift the quasi-teleology that is still implicit in much of the scholarly debate. Neither have they shifted the notion of the centrality of Anglo-German relations in this period.[7] Remarkably, historians are still labouring in the shadow of Fritz Fischer.

Perhaps more instructive than the labours of later historians is the testimony of contemporaries. And statements attesting to a growing sense of détente, more especially in Anglo-German relations, are not in short supply. In an interview on New Year's Day 1914, in the Radical-leaning *Daily News*, the chancellor of the exchequer, David Lloyd George, praised the now 'infinitely more friendly' relations between Downing Street and the Wilhelmstrasse. This improvement he attributed to 'the wise and patient diplomacy' of his cabinet colleague Sir Edward Grey.[8] In Germany, the foreign affairs editor of the

[4] R. J. Crampton, *The hollow détente: Anglo-German relations in the Balkans, 1911–1914* (London, 1979).

[5] R. T. B. Langhorne, 'Anglo-German negotiations concerning the future of the Portuguese colonies, 1911–1914', *Historical Journal*, 16 (1973), pp. 361–87; G. Schöllgen, *Imperialismus und Gleichgewicht: Deutschland, England und die orientalische Frage, 1871–1914* (Munich, 1992).

[6] F. Kiessling, *Gegen den 'grossen Krieg': Entspannung in den international Beziehungen, 1911–1914* (Munich, 2002). For the argument of the stabilizing function of the alliances see Mulligan, *Origins*, pp. 74–91; and H. Afflerbach, *Der Dreibund: Europäische Grossmacht- und Allianzpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Vienna, 2002).

[7] Paul Kennedy's *The rise of the Anglo-German antagonism, 1860–1914* (London, 1980) has cast a long shadow over the scholarly debate. For a recent attempt to reassert the Kennedian interpretation see J. Rüger, 'Revisiting the Anglo-German antagonism', *Journal of Modern History*, 83 (2011), pp. 579–617.

[8] 'Arms and the nation', *Daily News* (1 Jan. 1914), copy in Lloyd George MSS, Parliamentary Archives, House of Lords, C/36/2/1; see also Fleuriau to Doumergue (no. 4), 2 Jan. 1914, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, ed., *Documents Diplomatiques Français* (*DDF*), 3rd ser., IX, no. 5 (Paris, 1936).

mainstream, moderate *Preussische Jahrbücher* spoke of the 'present era of détente (*Entspannung*)'.[9] Even the conservative historian and commentator Theodor Schiemann noted the 'indications of an Anglo-German rapprochement' as the 'only satisfactory aspect of international politics'.[10]

Foreign diplomats, too, were alive to this rapprochement. Thus, Ottokar Count Czernin, Austro-Hungarian *chargé d'affaires* at St Petersburg, dismissed press rumours of an Anglo-Russian naval convention as 'absurd', more especially now 'under the auspices of an Anglo-German détente'.[11] Jules Cambon, the French ambassador at Berlin, noted the now more cordial relations between the two countries. The indications were for 'une détente et ... un rapprochement'. He also predicted that Berlin and London were anxious to settle 'des conflits d'intérêts en matière coloniale et économique'.[12] The broader implications of this were not lost on Cambon's Russian colleague, Sergei Nikola'evich Sverbe'ev. Having settled economic questions in Africa, he prognosticated, the two governments would 'in time move on to more important negotiations which ultimately may also lead to agreements on political questions'.[13] The friendly noises emanating from the Wilhelmstrasse and Downing Street, Cambon observed in June 1914, 'sembleraient indiquer une détente ..., qu'ici [Berlin] on desire rendre durable', a desire which he thought was reciprocated by Britain.[14]

II

Against this background an initiative was prepared to entrench more firmly the recent rapprochement in relations between London and Berlin. As so often in pre-1914 international diplomacy, and in Anglo-German relations more especially, informal, non- or semi-official contacts played a crucial role in the course of events. The principal *dramatis personae* were Grey's *amanuensis*, Sir William Tyrrell, Gebhard Count (after 1916 4th Prince) Blücher, a German aristocrat with good contacts in London society, and Gottlieb von Jagow, recently installed as state secretary at the *Auswärtiges Amt*.

William Tyrrell was something of an enigma. Though no friend of Tyrrell's, his Foreign Office colleague, Harold Nicolson, wrote a character sketch that remains one of the most perceptive portraits of this elusive official: 'Sir William Tyrrell was intuitive, conciliatory, elastic, and possessed a remarkable instinct

[9] E. Daniels, 'Russland – Die Republik Nordepirus – Die innere Lage der Westmächte', *Preussische Jahrbücher*, 156 (1914), p. 179.

[10] T. Schiemann, *Deutschland und die grosse Politik anno 1913* (Berlin, 1914), pp. 96 and 372.

[11] Czernin to Berchtold (no. 26E), 23 May/5 June 1914, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna, Politisches Archiv x/140.

[12] J. Cambon to Doumergue (no. 51), 4 Feb. 1914, *DDF* (3), IX, no. 220.

[13] Sverbe'ev to Sazonov, 31 Jan./13 Feb. 1914, B. von Siebert, ed., *Graf Benckendorffs Diplomatischer Schriftwechsel* (*BDS*) (3 vols., Berlin, 1928), III, no. 1036.

[14] J. Cambon to Doumergue (no. 332), 8 June 1914, *DDF* (3), X, no. 341.

for avoiding diplomatic difficulties.' His effectiveness as a diplomat stemmed from his skill in creating the right 'atmosphere'. Notoriously reluctant to put pen to paper, his conversations were 'intangible but suggestive'.[15] It is the paucity of evidence that has made Tyrrell such a mysterious figure.

Tyrrell's background also marked him out amongst his colleagues in the Foreign Office. His father, William Henry Tyrrell, was a Roman Catholic Anglo-Irish lawyer, who wound up as a district judge in the North West provinces of India. Through his mother, Julia Wakefield, he was descended of Anglo-Indian stock (contemporaries frequently referred to Tyrrell's 'small and dark' appearance).[16] Yet these maternal connections later paved Tyrrell's way into diplomacy. His mother's elder sister, Lucy Katherine, had married Count Hugo Leszczycz von Radolinski (later Prince Radolin), chamberlain to the crown prince of Prussia, the ill-fated Emperor Frederick III. Later, Radolin was to become German ambassador at Constantinople, St Petersburg, and Paris. After the death of Tyrrell senior, Radolin took care of William's education, while his mother kept the prince's household. Thus, Tyrrell was educated at a *Gymnasium* in Bonn and then at Göttingen University, before going up to Balliol in 1885. He spoke and wrote German fluently, and was well acquainted with German developments. At Oxford, indeed, he 'spoke English with a slight German accent'.[17] 'Onkel Hugo' also helped young 'Willie' onto the lowest rung of the diplomatic ladder. Through the German ambassador in London, Radolin obtained for his nephew the then still required recommendation from the foreign secretary to take the Foreign Office entrance examination in 1888. This connection proved decisive when Tyrrell failed to pass the examination that autumn and needed a further recommendation, this time from the Empress Frederick herself.[18] After he had entered the Foreign Office, the London embassy used him as a conduit for confidential information that was considered too sensitive to be transmitted through official channels.[19]

Radolin's and Tyrrell's other German connections were important also in the context of the planned mission in the summer of 1914. At its inception, the scheme revolved around Tyrrell's friendship with Gebhard Lebrecht Blücher von Wahlstatt. This Silesian magnate, a direct descendent of the Prussian field marshal, had been educated partly in England (at Stonyhurst), and was married

[15] H. Nicolson, *Sir Arthur Nicolson, Bart., First Lord Carnock: a study in the old diplomacy* (London, 1930), pp. 327–8. Richard von Kühlmann offered a similar vignette of Tyrrell, whom he described as an 'inveterate enemy of writing', idem, *Die Diplomaten* (Berlin, 1939), p. 68.

[16] H. Beaumont, 'Diplomatic butterfly', unpublished TS memoirs, Imperial War Museum, PP/MCR/113, fos. 39–40; also R. von Kühlmann, *Erinnerungen* (Heidelberg, 1948), p. 240.

[17] Beaumont, 'Diplomatic butterfly', fo. 40.

[18] Radolinski to Hatzfeldt, 27 Mar. 1888, Tyrrell to Hatzfeldt, 28 Mar. 1888, and Hatzfeldt to Empress Frederick, 27 Nov. 1888, in G. Ebel, ed., *Botschafter Paul Graf von Hatzfeldt: Nachgelassene Papiere (HatzP)* (2 vols., Boppard, 1976), II, nos. 374, 375, and 403.

[19] For instance during the Samoa negotiations to warn London that the Germans would break off the talks, see Holstein to Hermann Hatzfeldt, 12 Sept. 1899, ibid., II, no. 781.

to an English aristocrat, Evelyn Mary Stapleton-Bretherton. The couple had settled in London and were well connected in society circles. Blücher's brother Gustav, meanwhile, had been close to Tyrrell at Oxford, their Catholicism an additional bond between them. Around 1889, while preparing for his Foreign Office entrance examination, Tyrrell first met Gebhard Blücher in Berlin, and they remained in close touch, more especially so since the latter's marriage and move to London. Blücher's war-time notes suggest that the two men frequently discussed political matters.[20]

These discussions also touched on the fluctuating fortunes of Anglo-German relations. In the spring of 1914, the idea emerged of a meeting between Tyrrell and the head of the *Auswärtiges Amt*. The precise origins of this scheme remain unclear. In his posthumously published memoirs Blücher claimed that he 'formed the ... notion of somehow arranging a meeting and a good talk between Tyrrell and von Jagow', whom he counted amongst his friends.[21] His private notes of early 1918, by contrast, suggest that Tyrrell had told him, 'with great emphasis, that he was convinced that an exchange between two leading personalities from both countries was urgently required in order to attain the objective, which we then pursued – a closer rapprochement (*eine intimere Annäherung*) between the two countries'.[22]

Whatever the exact circumstances, on 8 April 1914, Blücher wrote to Jagow to suggest a meeting between the latter and Grey's influential aide. The state secretary welcomed Blücher's proposal.[23] He and Tyrrell were no strangers to each other, having previously met at Rome, where Jagow had been ambassador for three years prior to his translation to the Wilhelmstrasse. Imperial Germany's last peace-time foreign minister is also the least well known of the Kaiser's senior diplomats. This diminutive Brandenburg Junker was not especially enigmatic, however. If anything, his relative obscurity is a reflection of his bland, colourless, and self-effacing personality. No doubt, this very blandness allowed him to avoid friction with his superiors and colleagues, and so facilitated his rise within the profession.[24] No doubt also, as the liberal commentator Theodor Wolff later reflected, Jagow's was an 'ultra-conservative way of thinking ... that was trimmed and symmetrical as the box hedging in the

[20] Blücher described it as an 'intimes Freundschaftsverhältnis', memo Blücher, 25 Jan. 1918, Nachlass Jagow, The National Archives (TNA) (Public Record Office (PRO)), Kew, GFM 25/15; and E. Princess Blücher and D. Chapman-Houston, eds., Memoirs of Prince Blücher (London, 1932), pp. 116 and 201.

[21] Blücher and Chapman-Houston, eds., *Memoirs*, p. 218. The whole episode is condensed here to one sentence.

[22] Memo Blücher, 25 Jan. 1918, Nachlass Jagow, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/15.

[23] The letter has not been preserved, but its contents can be deduced from Jagow's reply of 15 Apr. 1914, ibid., GFM 25/16.

[24] L. Cecil, *The German diplomatic service, 1871–1914* (Princeton, NJ, 1976), p. 318; H. Philippi, 'Das deutsche diplomatische Korps, 1871–1914', in K. Schwabe, ed., *Das Diplomatische Korps, 1871–1945* (Boppard, 1982), p. 67.

park of Sanssouci'.[25] Yet Jagow was not entirely a nonentity. Contemporaries described him as an intelligent and cultured man, albeit of limited professional experience and even more limited physical robustness.[26] A protégé of Prince Bülow, and aided by both his membership of the exclusive 'Borussia' student fraternity and his brother's regimental connections with Bülow, he entered the diplomatic service in 1897. A long spell at Rome was followed by a brief period as a counsellor at the Wilhelmstrasse. In 1907, he was appointed German minister at Luxemburg, before being transferred to Rome as ambassador two years later.[27]

Like any of his predecessors, Jagow only reluctantly exchanged his current post at the Villa Caffarelli in Rome for the state secretaryship, the least coveted portfolio in the imperial German government. Initially, even German diplomats doubted Jagow's 'remaining long secretary of state, his health being indifferent and his determination not strong'.[28] Soon, however, 'the little man' was 'splendidly seasoned' in his new environs.[29] As a Berlin-based British journalist put it, Jagow 'does not look as if there was a Bismarck within him, but he has all the virtues which count in modern diplomacy – urbanity, industry and loyalty'.[30]

This assessment was not far off the mark, certainly in so far as Britain was concerned. This was evident from Jagow's own comments to British diplomats. He was 'an old and intimate friend' of the British ambassador at Rome, Sir (James) Rennell Rodd, their earlier careers having overlapped in the Italian capital already before 1909.[31] It was an indication of the close bond between the two diplomats that Jagow outlined the broad parameters of his foreign policy to Rodd.

[25] T. Wolff, *Der Krieg des Pontius Pilatus* (Zurich, 1934), p. 338. The book was written in exile, see B. Sösemann, ed., *Theodor Wolff, der Journalist: Berichte und Leitartikel* (Düsseldorf, 1992), pp. 17–30.

[26] See for instance O. Hammann, *Zur Vorgeschichte des Weltkrieges: Erinnerungen aus den Jahren, 1897–1906* (Berlin, 1919), p. 1; O. zu Stolberg-Wernigerode, *Die unentschiedene Generation: Die konservativen Führungsschichten am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Munich, 1968), pp. 15 and 382–3.

[27] The Bülow connection did not save Jagow from the former chancellor's vituperation, see B. von Bülow, *Denkwürdigkeiten* (4 vols., Berlin, 1931), III, pp. 31–6 and 158–9; and Jagow's riposte, 'Die Anklage des Fürsten Bülow gegen "Die Staatsmänner von 1914"', in F. Thimme, ed., *Front wider Bülow: Staatsmänner und Forscher zu seinen Denkwürdigkeiten* (Munich, 1931), pp. 210–20.

[28] Bertie to Grey (private), 30 Jan. 1913, Bertie MSS, British Library (BL), Add. MSS 63030 (reporting a conversation with Wilhelm von Stumm).

[29] Müller diary, 1 Feb. 1913, in W. Görlitz, ed., *Der Kaiser: Aufzeichnungen des Chefs des Marinekabinetts Admiral Georg Alexander von Müller über die Ära Wilhelms II.* (Göttingen, 1965), p. 202. For his reluctance to return to Berlin see Hammann, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 1–2.

[30] F. W. Wile, *Men around the Kaiser: the makers of modern Germany* (repr., London, 1914; 1st edn, 1913), p. 216.

[31] Rodd to Hardinge (private), 10 May 1909, Hardinge MSS, Cambridge University Library (CUL), vol. 16; also J. R. Rodd, *Social and diplomatic memoirs* (3 vols., London, 1922–5), III, pp. 7 and 164–7.

Jagow's exposé offers a glimpse into the new minister's strategic calculations, and these were pertinent for the Blücher–Tyrrell scheme in early 1914. The axiom of Jagow's analysis was the continued necessity of the alliance with Austria-Hungary. He was by no means uncritical of the vacillating Habsburg policy in south-eastern Europe. But he accepted that Germany was bound to support the dual monarchy. His real concern, however, was its latent fragility: 'the time is not so very far off when it may go the way of the Ottoman Empire'. Its break-up would lead to the 'Anschluss' of the monarchy's Austro-German provinces, a prospect that filled Jagow with dread: 'Germany had already too many Catholics . . . Merged with the German Empire the Austrian Catholics would enable that party to swamp the progressive Protestant elements.' He supported a rapprochement with Britain, but conceded that this could be achieved only gradually. The tensions since 1905 had 'gone too deep for a speedy improvement':

> He frankly admits that for us [Britain] the difficulty is our never having been able to know what Germany really wants, and to a greater extent the reason of this is that Germany does not know herself. Her commercial prosperity had developed with extraordinary rapidity. The desire for national expansion had grown up concomitantly with this commercial development, but there had been no preconceived scheme of expansion.

Jagow singled out for special opprobrium the head of the German Navy Office, Grand Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz and his ambitious naval programme. But he also impressed upon Rodd that, once installed at the Wilhelmstrasse, he meant to work for improved Anglo-German relations: 'and a little of the old Junker which is inherent in him came out as he said: "if only we could stand together you would see how others, Austria, Italy, and all of them, would come to heel"'.[32]

These were no mere platitudes. Jagow, indeed, was profoundly worried about Austria, as he elaborated privately to Germany's ambassador at St Petersburg, Count Friedrich von Pourtalès-Cronstern. Bellicose sentiments were on the increase at Vienna, he noted with dismay mixed with alarm:

> It is argued that, for domestic and foreign policy reasons, it is high time 'to dish the Serbs' (*mit den Serben abzuräumen*) . . . They are contemplating an invasion of Serbia and her partition between Romania, Bulgaria and Austria, in order to render the Serbs completely 'harmless'. Indeed, they even contemplate swallowing Montenegro. It is not necessary to lose a single word about the fantastic nature of such plans; they would lead Austria to trialism and therefore most probably to complete paralysis and dissolution . . . *Il y a des bêtises que seule l'Autriche est capable de faire.*

[32] Rodd to Grey (private), 6 Jan. 1913, Rodd MSS, Bodleian Library (Bodl.), Oxford, box 15. For Jagow's hopes for rapprochement see also W. von Rheinbaben, *Kaiser, Kanzler, Präsidenten* (Mainz, 1968), pp. 109–10.

Jagow was particularly concerned that Vienna might fasten on a military solution, irrespective of Russia's likely intervention in such a conflict: 'they also imagine that, even if Russia were to move, France and England would remain passive. I cannot share this belief.'[33] By the spring of 1914, Jagow's fears for the Habsburg ally had become even more acute, as was well understood in London. He could 'not unpack his mind of the fear that it was a race between the two empires (Austria-Hungary and Turkey) as to which would go to pieces first'.[34]

A rapprochement with Britain, then, made strategic sense, and Jagow set about achieving this. He even approached Rodd, trailing before his eyes the splendid cloak of the Berlin embassy, little though it was in his gift to bestow it upon him. The present incumbent of the Strousberg mansion, Sir Edward Goschen, had 'very little contact with German circles and also ha[d] no real influence in London'. Both Jagow and the Kaiser wished for Rodd as his successor when, as they expected, Goschen retired at the end of his five-year term at Berlin at the close of 1913.[35]

Ultimately, this plan came to nothing, but Jagow worked steadily for a rapprochement with Britain. And the circumstances seemed more propitious now. Anglo-German co-operation was desirable in its own right, not least because of its stabilizing effect on international relations in general. Jagow was not blind to the advantages that might accrue from working with Britain. Already, the 1912 London ambassadorial conference, he opined, had alerted Britain to 'the dangers, which Russian pretensions and the advance of the Slavic tide in the Balkans entail for Europe'. He was convinced that this concern would 'mature and lead to a further – already latent – alienation of England from Russia'.[36]

For Jagow, the two considerations were linked. Co-operation with London helped to contain the Austro-Russian antagonism in south-eastern Europe; an Anglo-German exchange of views might prepare the ground for a joint effort 'to preserve Turkey in her present configuration for as long as possible'. This he deemed better suited to preserving German commercial interests in Asia Minor and Mesopotamia.[37] In the Near East, indeed, Russia remained a disturbing

[33] Jagow to Pourtalès (*ganz geheim*), 6 Feb. 1913, Nachlass Pourtalès, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/3. After the war, Jagow commented in more circumspect language on Habsburg belligerence, idem, 'Richtigstellungen', in E. von Steinitz, ed., *Ring um Sasonow: Neue dokumentarische Darlegungen zum Ausbruch des grossen Krieges durch Kronzeugen* (Berlin, 1928), pp. 135–6.

[34] Nicolson to de Bunsen, 30 Mar. 1914, De Bunsen MSS, Bodl., box 11.

[35] Jagow to Rodd, 1 Feb. 1913, Rodd MSS, Bodl., vol. 15. This view of Goschen was widely shared among German officials, see Eisendecher to Harcourt, 14 Apr. 1913, Harcourt MSS, Bodl., MS Harcourt dep. 443.

[36] Jagow to Tschirschky, 17 Mar. 1913, J. Lepsius, A. Mendelssohn Bartholdy, and F. Thimme, eds., *Die Grosse Politik der europäischen Kabinette, 1871–1914* (*GP*) (40 vols., Berlin, 1924–6), xxxiv/2, no. 12982; for some of the background see Crampton, *Hollow détente*, pp. 75–96.

[37] Jagow to Lichnowsky, 31 May 1913, *GP*, xxxviii, no. 15317; also to Eisendecher, 24 July 1913, ibid., no. 15368, n.***, p. 115; idem, 'Richtigstellungen', p. 136.

element: 'And a reopening of the Asiatic Question would be highly inconvenient', Jagow impressed upon Pourtalès.[38]

While relations with Russia remained volatile in the wake of the Liman von Sanders crisis at the turn of 1913–14, Anglo-German relations developed more smoothly, occasional differences of opinion over the frontiers of Albania or the future of the Aegean islands notwithstanding. The talks between Richard von Kühlmann, counsellor at the London embassy, and the Foreign Office's Alwyn Parker brought five years of often fraught negotiations to a close and produced the Anglo-German convention on the Baghdad railway and other such enterprises in Asia Minor. As its preamble testified, the agreement was meant 'to prevent all causes of misunderstandings between Germany and Great Britain'.[39]

There were more favourable signs on other fronts, too. Kühlmann's parallel, but separate, talks with the colonial secretary, Lewis ('Lulu') Harcourt, about a possible partition of Portugal's colonial empire in the event of the country defaulting on its foreign debts further smoothed relations between Germany and Britain.[40] Indeed, after the war, Jagow reflected that since Britain and Germany had come to far-reaching understandings on colonial and economic questions, 'it would, without doubt, gradually have led to a political détente'.[41]

Thus, when Blücher approached him, in early 1914, with his scheme of a meeting with Tyrrell, Jagow accepted with alacrity: 'For I believe that a confidential verbal discussion is more useful than the continued exchanges by means of notes and intermediaries.' Even though such informal discussions were a little speculative, they might, Jagow thought, lay the foundations of future co-operation. However, there were logistical problems to overcome before any such meeting could take place. Jagow himself would be tied up with the forthcoming talks about his department's budget in the *Reichstag* commission until the middle of May. His own nuptials in mid-June would cause further delay, though he hoped to return to Berlin in the first week of July. An early meeting was nevertheless important, he impressed upon Blücher. Indeed, there was a hint here of an attempt to entice Tyrrell to come to Berlin, possibly *incognito*. This was in line with earlier German efforts to persuade senior British cabinet ministers to visit Germany. But, in general, Jagow was ready to

[38] Jagow to Pourtalès, 26 Sept. 1913, Nachlass Pourtalès, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/3.

[39] 'German-British Convention', 15 June 1914, G. P. Gooch and H. W. V. Temperley, eds., *British documents on the origins of the war, 1898–1914* (*BD*) (11 vols., London, 1928–38), x/2, no. 249 encl.; for some of the background see Schöllgen, *Imperialismus*, pp. 404–9; also R. P. Bobroff, *Late imperial Russia and the Turkish straits: roads to glory* (London, 2006), pp. 85–95.

[40] Harcourt to Eisendecher, 10 Mar. 1913, Nachlass Eisendecher, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/10.

[41] G. von Jagow, *Ursachen und Ausbruch des Weltkrieges* (Berlin, 1919), p. 63; for the colonial talks see J. D. Vincent-Smith, 'The Anglo-German negotiations over the Portuguese colonies in Africa, 1911–1914', *Historical Journal*, 17 (1974), pp. 620–9.

meet Tyrrell wherever it suited him.[42] For his part, Tyrrell was no less enthusiastic about his friend 'Gippy's' scheme: 'nothing would give me greater pleasure and satisfaction than to have a talk with Jagow'. He ruled out Berlin as a meeting place, and suggested 'some private house', possibly in Germany later in July. Significantly, he stressed that Grey 'approved very much of the idea'.[43]

III

The extant evidence does not corroborate Tyrrell's statement, but neither does it disprove it. In fact, Grey had earlier welcomed Jagow's appointment to the state-secretaryship: 'If we could only have ten years of a man like Jagow to deal with, really controlling the policy of Germany, we should be on intimate terms with her at the end of the time, and on increasingly good terms through it.'[44] The general improvement in Anglo-German relations seemed to support this view. Even the Foreign Office's permanent under-secretary (PUS), Sir Arthur Nicolson, not usually noted for his genial optimism, agreed that 'there is no doubt that Berlin is most pacifically disposed'.[45] Indeed, the conciliatory tone adopted by the new German ambassador, the popular and well-connected Prince Karl Max Lichnowsky, seemed to suggest brighter prospects.[46]

In mid-1914, three days before the assassination at Sarajevo, against the backdrop of Anglo-German co-operation in the Balkans, exchanges between the two governments on Near Eastern and African questions, and the friendlier relations with the Wilhelmstrasse, Grey sketched a policy of furthering détente in conversation with Sir Francis Bertie, Britain's ambassador at Paris: 'we are on good terms with Germany now and we desire to avoid a revival of friction with her, and we wish to discourage the French from provoking Germany'. In Grey's estimation, Berlin reciprocated such sentiments: 'the German Gov[ernmen]t are in a peaceful mood and they are very anxious to be on good terms with England, a mood which he [Grey] wishes to encourage'. In practice, this did not mean relinquishing the existing entente with France: 'he would continue the intimate conventions and consultations with France and to a lesser degree with Russia and consult with Germany so far as it might be expedient so as to be the

[42] Jagow to Blücher, 15 Apr. 1914 (TS copy), Nachlass Jagow, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/16. For the invitation to Churchill to come to Berlin see Nicolson to Hardinge, 1 Feb. 1912, Hardinge MSS (CUL), vol. 92.

[43] Tyrrell to Blücher (private), 18 Apr. 1914 (TS copy), Nachlass Jagow, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/16.

[44] Grey to Rodd (private), 13 Jan. 1913, Grey MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/64; see also K. R. Robbins, *Sir Edward Grey: a biography of Lord Grey of Fallodon* (London, 1971), pp. 267–71. Grey's comments nevertheless also reflected widespread concerns about 'who ruled at Berlin'.

[45] Nicolson to Cartwright, 7 Jan. 1913, Nicolson MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/362.

[46] H. F. Young, *Prince Lichnowsky and the Great War* (Athens, GA, 1977), pp. 32–48.

connecting link between Germany and the Triple Entente and a restraint on the hastiness of Austria and Italy'.[47]

There was little, then, for Grey to object to in Blücher's scheme. As for the practicalities of the projected meeting between Jagow and Tyrrell, the latter explained that pressing business would keep him in London until the close of the parliamentary session: 'you see that the internal situation [Home Rule crisis] at present makes everything so uncertain, otherwise I should have been able to suggest an earlier and more definite date'.[48] Significantly, Tyrrell's position in the Foreign Office also increased the likelihood of his having been authorized to conduct such confidential discussions. His growing influence within the Foreign Office in the last few years before 1914 was well understood by contemporaries. By the second half of 1911, he 'was rising to the position of the Grey Eminence in the Foreign Office'.[49] In the spring of 1914, *The Times*'s foreign affairs editor, Sir Valentine Chirol, recorded that 'Grey is absorbed, not unnaturally, with domestic problems and leaves things (perhaps a great deal too much) in Willie Tyrrell's hands.'[50]

Tyrrell's influence rested on a combination of factors, his genial, somewhat chameleon-like personality being one. Two of his junior colleagues, William Strang and Owen O'Malley, later recalled a 'devious' but also an 'astute and sagacious' 'little man as quick as a lizard with scintillating eyes and wit and a great aversion to any work not transacted orally'.[51] Tyrrell was a '[c]omplex, versatile, talkative, but exceedingly secretive [man] ..., amiable, and even yielding on the surface, but a stubborn fighter underneath ..., cultivating the laziness which Talleyrand enjoined on diplomats'.[52] As another diplomatist, Horace Rumbold, complained, at the Foreign Office Grey's 'very Papal Private Secretary [kept] things very dark'.[53]

Tyrrell's scintillating personality also mattered in his relations with Grey. Widowed just after assuming the seals of the Foreign Office, and having lost his last surviving brother in February 1911, the foreign secretary was a lonely man who craved company. His previous PUS, Sir Charles Hardinge, had been able to fulfil this psychological function for Grey.[54] However, Hardinge's successor since 1910, Sir Arthur Nicolson, was made of different stuff than the

[47] Memo Bertie (on conversation with Grey), 25 June 1914, Bertie MSS, BL, Add. MSS 63033. Bertie's well-known leanings towards France may well have coloured some of Grey's explanations.

[48] Tyrrell to Blücher (private), 18 Apr. 1914 (TS copy), Nachlass Jagow, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/16.

[49] Sir F. Oppenheimer, *Stranger within* (London, 1961), p. 206.

[50] Chirol to Hardinge (private), 22 May 1914, Hardinge MSS (CUL), vol. 93.

[51] Lord Strang, *Home and abroad* (London, 1956), p. 308; and Sir O. O'Malley, *The phantom caravan* (London, 1954), p. 45.

[52] L. Namier, 'The story of a German diplomatist', in idem, *Avenues of history* (London, 1952), p. 87.

[53] Rumbold to father, 15 Feb. and 10 Oct. 1908, Rumbold MSS, Bodl. Rumbold dep. 13 and dep. 14.

[54] Grey to Hardinge (private), 16 May 1911, Hardinge MSS (CUL), vol. 92.

courtier-diplomat Hardinge. Grey's senior by some fifteen years, he was too reserved to establish a close rapport with his political chief. Above all, the two men took diametrically opposed views on domestic matters. Of Hiberno-Scottish extraction, and married to the sister-in-law of the marquess of Dufferin, one of the large Ulster landlords, Nicolson took umbrage at the Asquith government's embrace of Irish devolution. This affected his standing with Grey, as Chirol observed: 'Nicolson's position seems to me quite impossible. For some reason or other – because he talks too much Ulster and his wife still more – he has absolutely lost Grey's confidence, and he does not conceal the fact that he is sick of it all.'[55] Indeed, in his conversations with the French ambassador Paul Cambon, Nicolson contemptuously dismissed the Liberal administration as 'this radical-socialist cabinet' which could not possibly last.[56] He was also physically not well, and frequently absent from Whitehall.[57]

Nicolson's diminished position at the Foreign Office provided an opening for Tyrrell. According to Blücher's notes, the future *eminence grise* of the Foreign Office initially had a low opinion of Grey: 'He knows no foreign languages, speaks, with difficulty, a few words of French, and is proud never to have left England. Besides I [Tyrrell] think him stupid (*dumm*).'[58] Nothing if not assiduous, Tyrrell nevertheless cultivated closer ties with the foreign secretary, and made himself indispensible.[59]

Tyrrell's growing influence was perhaps most obvious in the senior diplomatic appointments after 1911, the discharge of the foreign secretary's power of patronage being one of the functions of the private secretary. Indeed, given Nicolson's fading presence at the Foreign Office, there were mutterings of discontent in the upper echelons of the diplomatic service: '[Tyrrell] will be more autocratic than ever now.'[60] Crucially, however, the shuffling of the ambassadorial pack ought to be seen in the context of Tyrrell's, and to a considerable degree Grey's, evolving foreign policy ideas.

The key to their understanding lies in Tyrrell's perceptions of Britain's most recent antagonist, Germany, and his analysis of Russia, as Britain's traditional and potentially most serious future opponent. These were complex. As Blücher reflected during the war, his conversations with Tyrrell had been characterized by the 'Schwankungen', or shifts, in the latter's attitude towards

[55] Chirol to Hardinge (private), 22 May 1914, ibid., vol. 93. Lady Nicolson refused to admit Liberal politicians to her house in 1914, see H. Nicolson, *The desire to please* (London, 1943), pp. 1–18.

[56] Cambon to Poincaré, 18 Apr. 1912, *DDF* (3), II, no. 363.

[57] See tel. Benckendorff to Sazonov (no. 68), 11 Mar./26 Feb. 1914, N. M. Pokrovski, ed., *Internationale Beziehungen im Zeitalter des Imperialismus: Dokumente aus den Archiven der Zarischen und der Provisiorischen Regierung* (*IBZI*), ser. I (5 vols., Berlin, 1931), I, no. 420.

[58] Memo Blücher, 25 Jan. 1918, Nachlass Jagow, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/15.

[59] Hardinge to Chirol (private), 30 Apr. 1913, Hardinge MSS (CUL), vol. 93.

[60] MacDonald to Rumbold (personal), 5 Jan. 1912, Rumbold MSS, Bodl., MS Rumbold dep. 15.

Germany.[61] This view was shared by others. Writing at about the same time, Prince Lichnowsky, the former ambassador at London, also testified to Tyrrell's changing stance. Initially, he was somewhat anti-German, 'later to become an advocate of a rapprochement. He influenced Sir Edward Grey, with whom he was very close, in this sense.'[62]

Whatever his early connections with the country of his youth, already around 1900, Tyrrell, then a junior clerk, had become suspicious of the discrepancy between the friendly noises emanating from the embassy in Carlton House Terrace and the altogether more unfriendly attitude of the Wilhelmstrasse under Bülow.[63] For Tyrrell, the German chancellor was the *fons et origo mali* in international politics: 'The real cancer at Berlin is Bülow who lacks all moral sense in no ordinary degree. I despair of decent relations with Germany as long as he has a finger in the pie.' German clumsiness was likely 'to keep together an informal ring of the other Powers who have been brought by Germany to realize her designs & to guard them as far as their less efficient forms of Government & inferior strength or rather deficiency will permit'.[64]

Until 1909, Tyrrell regarded Bülow's apparent lack of any sense of strategic direction as the principal problem: 'Bülow's sole occupation consists in making speeches to please his Master, but disavows his Master whenever it pleases him.' The chancellor, Tyrrell wrote in 1908, was 'not the man to carry out a resolute policy: he is a second-rate wire-puller and might have been acceptable over here as a Parliamentary Whip'.[65] Tyrrell's anti-German sentiments did not abate after Bülow's fall in 1909. When 'the fat [was] in the fire' during the Agadir crisis in 1911, he argued for a hard line against German bullying of France:

> I am not sure that 'the Powers that be' appreciate the real inwardness of the German move; it is to test the Anglo-French *entente*. It should be viewed from this point of view alone! Everything else is a sideshow on this occasion . . . It is depressing to find that, after six years' experience of Germany, the inclination here is still to believe that she can be placated by small concessions and even large concessions of territory in tropical Africa. What she wants is the hegemony of Europe.[66]

[61] Memo Blücher, 25 Jan. 1918, Nachlass Jagow, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/15. This six-page dossier on Tyrrell is remarkably perceptive, and dovetails neatly with the findings of later historians.

[62] K. M. Fürst von Lichnowsky, *Auf dem Weg zum Abgrund: Londoner Berichte, Erinnerungen and sonstige Schriften* (2 vols., Dresden, 1927), i, pp. 125–6 (much of the work was written during the war).

[63] See Hermann Hatzfeldt to father, 4 Dec. 1900, *HatzP*, II, no. 838, n. 1.

[64] Tyrrell to Spring-Rice, 1 May 1906, Spring-Rice MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/241. Spring-Rice was one of Tyrrell's closest friends in the diplomatic service, and his letters to him provide some of the few insights into the thinking of this notoriously reluctant writer; see also S. Gwynn, ed., *The letters and friendships of Sir Cecil Spring-Rice: a record* (2 vols., London, 1929), II, p. 18.

[65] Quotes from Tyrrell to Spring-Rice (private), 15 May 1907 and 15 Apr. 1908, Spring-Rice MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/241.

[66] Quotes from Tyrrell to Hardinge (private), 13 and 21 July 1911, Hardinge MSS (CUL), vol. 92; also Corp, 'Tyrrell', p. 700.

For Tyrrell, Britain's eventual diplomatic intervention, in the form of Lloyd George's Mansion House speech, was a welcome tonic: 'Don't ever forget to teach your children to keep alive the memory of Lloyd George who by his timely speech has saved the peace of Europe & our good name.'[67]

By the turn of 1912–13, however, Tyrrell's outlook had changed. Berlin's loyal co-operation in the Balkans was vindication of Grey's policy towards Germany. He averred that

> I have always thought that once the two Gov[ernmen]ts could find their common field of action, they would be found acting together almost automatically. For that reason, I have always thought the efforts to create cooperation when one's interests are substantially in opposition a mistake: artificial ententes make for bad relations.[68]

Tyrrell's new views were noted: 'I confess I am alarmed at the extraordinary change which his views seem to have undergone in the last six months', observed the foreign affairs editor of *The Times*, Sir Valentine Chirol:

> W[illiam] T[yrrell] is very perky indeed – and thinks that all is for the best in the best of all possible Europes, and paints our own position as absolutely *couleur de rose*. He seems to think that we can now snap our fingers both at the Triple Alliance and at France and Russia.[69]

Perhaps mindful of Chirol's importance, Tyrrell sought to allay his apprehensions. No re-orientation of British policy was intended, he assured him. But he was 'convinced . . . that we are relieved, at least for a good time to come, from the German menace and can therefore take up a somewhat firmer line with Russia without compromising the *Entente*'. If anything, he opined, the 'cynical selfishness' of Russian policy in central Asia and the Far East was a greater danger to the policy of the ententes: 'and, in fact, to save the *Entente* he holds that Russia must be brought to her bearings'.[70] It is testimony to the effectiveness of Tyrrell's 'intangible but suggestive' conversational methods that he converted Chirol to his views, the latter now arguing along very similar lines.[71]

Whatever his accommodating noises to Chirol, Tyrrell's foreign policy ideas, in fact, had changed. This was the result of two parallel developments: the resurgence of Russian power from its nadir in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War and the diminished position of Germany. By 1912/13, faced with the pace of Russia's now much-accelerated industrialization and military

[67] Tyrrell to Spring-Rice (private), 1 Aug. 1911, Spring-Rice MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/241; see also Goschen diary, 22 Aug. 1911 (on conversation with Tyrrell), C. H. D. Howard, ed., *The diary of Edward Goschen, 1900–1914* (London, 1980), p. 244.

[68] Tyrrell to Howard (private), 28 Dec. 1912, Howard of Penrith MSS, Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle, DHW 5/33; also Otte, *Foreign Office mind*, pp. 381–2.

[69] Chirol to Hardinge (private), 10 Apr. 1913, Hardinge MSS (CUL), vol. 93.

[70] Chirol to Hardinge, 18 Apr. 1913, ibid.

[71] Chirol to Hardinge (private), 4 July 1913, ibid.

recovery and continued French rearming, the German government had begun to channel funding away from the navy to the army. The implications of the 1912 and 1913 *Wehrvorlagen* (army bills) were clearly appreciated in Britain. '[C]ompetition with France and Russia on land and Great Britain at sea', reflected the British minister-resident at Munich, 'is an expensive amusement which not only hits the individual but tends disastrously to curtail the financial resources for internal development.'[72]

The reallocation of resources in defence spending amounted to a tacit admission of defeat in the naval race. 'I am firmly convinced', minuted the assistant under-secretary and Tyrrell's closest colleague at the Foreign Office, Sir Eyre Crowe, 'that one of the reasons why Anglo-German relations are now more cordial ... is that we have entirely ceased to discuss the question of limitations of [naval] armaments'.[73] Crowe thought that the force of geopolitical circumstances would realign Britain and Germany. Recent events in the Balkans, 'with the growing risk of a weakened Austria and a strengthened Russia, are more likely to bring and keep us and Germany in touch than any amount of twaddle, Tirpitzian or otherwise, about naval standards'.[74] British diplomats monitored closely the mounting strains in Germany's fiscal system, Bethmann's precarious position in the *Reichstag*, and the incipient 'movement towards democracy' in Germany.[75] Indeed, in February 1914, Jagow had publicly stated that '[t]he relations between England and Germany had fortunately continued to develop on the lines of *détente* and a rapprochement'.[76]

All of this seemed to suggest that earlier efforts to restrain Germany had been successful; and that Berlin would now have to moderate its policy. These developments, moreover, reinforced some of Tyrrell's political views. He accepted the axioms of classic economic liberalism, and projected Britain's own post-1867 experience onto Germany. Her growing wealth, he reasoned, would deepen the existing fissures in the country's semi-authoritarian political system, and so curtail its expansionist drive: 'how long will the German people

[72] Corbett to de Bunsen (private), 20 Jan. 1914, De Bunsen MSS, Bodl., box 14; for the background see P. Gatrell, *Government, industry and rearmament in Russia, 1907–1914: the last argument of tsarism* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 161–96; D. Stevenson, *Armaments and the coming of the war, 1904–1914* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 329–408; D. G. Herrmann, *The arming of Europe and the making of the First World War* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), pp. 180–91.

[73] Min. Crowe, 17 Feb. 1913, TNA (PRO), FO 371/1649/7482; for some of the background see T. G. Otte, 'Grey ambassador: the Dreadnought and British foreign policy', in R. Blyth, A. Lambert, and J. Rüger, eds., *The Dreadnought and the Edwardian age* (London, 2011), pp. 74–6.

[74] Crowe to Oppenheimer, 25 Feb. 1913, Oppenheimer MSS, Bodl., box 17.

[75] Corbett to Grey (no. 8), 16 Jan. 1914, TNA (PRO), FO 371/1986/2529; memo Oppenheimer, 'German government finances 1913', 19 June 1913, Asquith MSS, Bodl., vol. 25. Intriguingly, Jagow saw matters in a very similar light: if 'the good Theobald [i.e. chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg]' were to fall, it would be 'a further step towards a parliamentary regime', Jagow to Pourtalès, 16 (continued 27) Jan. 1914, Nachlass Pourtalès, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/3.

[76] Goschen to Grey (no. 48), 5 Feb. 1914, TNA (PRO), FO 371/1857/5608.

put up with a form of Gov[ernmen]t which no doubt secures strength & efficiency but at the sacrifice of other things which their neighbours prize very highly, if not more than efficiency & fighting force'. Ultimately, he was optimistic that '[t]he increase & spread of wealth in Germany is bound in the long run to have the same deteriorating effect which it has had here & help to put off the crash'.[77]

Germany, however, was only one variable in Tyrrell's calculations. Given the global nature of British foreign policy it could not be otherwise. The key factor was Russia. His anti-German pronouncements between 1906 and 1912 notwithstanding, Tyrrell had been sceptical of the efforts of Hardinge and Nicolson to cultivate and maintain close ties with St Petersburg. As Blücher recorded in his notes, Tyrrell thought that 'the Russian government was unreliable and that, in general, the whole Russian empire was nothing but an uncivilized ethnic amalgam kept together only by terrorism.'[78]

Although he accepted the 1907 Anglo-Russian convention as dictated by the logic of the strategic situation in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War, it could never be more than temporary. As Tyrrell explained to Cecil Spring-Rice, then minister at Tehran and a fellow-sceptic: 'for its fulfilment we should have to rely on Russian assurances. The latter are reliable it seems to me as long as Russia continues in her present condition of impotency with regard to any offensive policy.'[79] Russian proceedings in Persia in 1911 confirmed Tyrrell in his analysis: 'The Russian proceedings are beastly. What are we to do?'[80]

The situation in Persia, and relations with Russia with it, did not improve. Tyrrell supported the vigorous 'pounding away at the Russians' by the ambassador at St Petersburg, Sir George Buchanan. It was imperative now, he impressed upon Chirol, 'to make them [the Russians] realize that in Europe they are in as much need of our cooperation as we, in Asia, are in need of theirs in regard to India'.[81] With a revived Russia reverting to her traditional policy of 'cynical selfishness',[82] and with Germany weakened and seemingly more moderate, Tyrrell pondered the possibility of a reorientation of British policy.

Tyrrell's position on Anglo-Russian relations was not an isolated one. Reviewing relations with Russia during 1913, Buchanan warned against

[77] Quotes from Tyrrell to Spring-Rice, 1 May 1906 and 15 Apr. 1908, Spring-Rice MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/241.

[78] Memo Blücher, 25 Jan. 1918, Nachlass Jagow, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/15.

[79] Tyrrell to Spring-Rice (private), 15 May 1907, Spring-Rice MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/241; also K. Neilson and T. G. Otte, *The office of the permanent under-secretary for foreign affairs, 1854–1946* (London, 2009), p. 190.

[80] Tyrrell to Spring-Rice (private), 4 Jan. 1912, Spring-Rice MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/241; Corp, 'Tyrrell', p. 701.

[81] Tyrrell to Chirol (private), 31 Jan. 1912, Grey MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/106; essential for the background to this K. Neilson, *Britain and the last tsar: British policy and Russia, 1894–1917* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 320–8; also J. Siegel, *Endgame: Britain, Russia and the final struggle for central Asia, 1907–1914* (London, 2002), pp. 117–74.

[82] Chirol to Hardinge, 18 Apr. 1913, Hardinge MSS (CUL), vol. 93.

assuming that Russian policy remained 'committed to a policy of peace at any price', as had been the case during the period of Russia's weakness. The state of affairs in Persia, meanwhile, 'divides us more than anything else'. This and St Petersburg's pressing for a conversion of the 1907 convention into something more entangling, he observed, was likely to cause difficulties in the near future.[83] The growth of Russia's power in the region, Buchanan warned privately, had 'considerably modified our respective positions in Asia', and 'awkward questions will be raised' when the convention came up for renewal in 1915.[84] The British minister at Tehran, Sir Walter Townley, shared this pessimistic view. He warned his French colleague that in light of Russian designs in Persia 'l'entente persane est en grand danger'.[85] There were other clouds on the horizon. The fall, in February 1914, of the Russian prime minister, the cautious, moderate, and pacific Vladimir Nikola'evich Kokovtsev, did not bode well, all the more so as his successor was Ivan Loginovich Goremykin, 'old, lazy, reactionary & not at all well disposed to us'.[86]

For his part, Grey shared the views expressed by Buchanan and others. He did not welcome the joint initiative by the French government and the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Dimitrievich Sazonov, to forge closer Anglo-Russian ties: 'It is a very delicate matter. I am glad to be warned.'[87] Indeed, during his talks in Paris on 23 April with his French counterpart, Gaston Doumergue and the French president, Raymond Poincaré, Grey sought to kick the scheme into the long grass. Military staff talks were not practicable, he argued; and naval talks, on the same basis as the Cambon-Grey notes of November 1912, 'could not amount to much'. Informing St Petersburg of the substance of these notes, however, might make Russian ministers understand that London and Paris 'were left entirely free to decide whether, in case of war, they would support one another or not'. It was as clear a hint as any that Grey did not intend to pursue the matter further. Privately, indeed, he informed the British ambassador

[83] Buchanan to Grey (no. 60), 4 Mar. 1914 (= Annual Report 1913), TNA (PRO), FO 371/2092/10333. French diplomats also commented on 'la réelle divergence entre les tendances russes et les aspirations anglaises', note Quai d'Orsay for Poincaré, 17 Apr. 1914, *DDF* (3), x, no. 111.

[84] Buchanan to Nicolson, 21 Jan. 1914, Nicolson MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/372.

[85] Tel. Lecomte to Doumergue (no. 6), 28 Feb. 1914, *DDF* (3), IX, no. 377. Indeed, Benckendorff, the Russian ambassador, reported that Townley had asked to be transferred because of the strained relations with Russia in Persia, tel. to Sazonov (no. 146), 27 May/9 June 1914, *BDS*, III, no. 1058.

[86] Min. Nicolson, n.d. [12 Feb. 1914], on tel. Buchanan to Grey (no. 46R), 11 Feb. 1914, TNA (PRO), FO 371/2091/6329; see also tel. Buchanan to Grey (no. 70R), 15 Mar. 1914, TNA (PRO), FO 371/2092/11456, reporting on a turf war between the minister of war and the foreign minister.

[87] Min. Grey, n.d., on memo Nicolson (secret), 17 Apr. 1914, TNA (PRO), FO 371/2092/17370; see also similar comments by Crowe and Nicolson, mins. 8 Apr. 1914 and n.d., on Buchanan to Grey (no. 100, secret), 3 Apr. 1914, ibid./15312.

at Paris that there could be no question of active naval co-operation with Russia.[88]

This was also the view of the cabinet, which decided that, if talks were to take place, it could only be on the basis 'that conventions commit us to nothing'.[89] Indeed, on 25 June 1914, the day on which he developed his détente policy to Bertie, Grey impressed on the Russian ambassador, Aleksandr Konstantinovich Count Benckendorff, that rumours of Anglo-Russian naval exchanges 'would do great harm in Germany . . . and might impair our good relations with Germany, which had improved very much during the last Balkan crisis, and which I wished to maintain'.[90]

Russia's recovery from the defeat of 1905 and her growing assertiveness after 1912 rekindled not only Tyrrell's innate Russophobia, but also his isolationist sentiments. The two were inextricably linked. Tyrrell and Spring-Rice concurred 'as regards the weakness of a policy which looks upon treaties & agreements as substitutes for armies & navies, but for better or worse that has been the drift of our foreign policy ever since we decided to renounce the policy of splendid isolation'.[91] Given the general closeness of their political views, Spring-Rice's analysis of Britain's international position in mid-1912 may be taken to mirror Tyrrell's views:

> The German people as a whole are doubtful as to the aggressive policy of the Gov[ernmen]t both against the outer and inner enemy. The gov[ernmen]t would not be well advised to push that policy too far . . .
>
> What I deduce from all of this is the avoidance of anything in the nature of an anti-German policy – a two-camp policy for instance – in European affairs – and secondly extreme caution in regard to defence preparedness à outrance.
>
> There seems on the whole a fair chance that [Germany] will remain fairly quiet until the Kiel Canal is deepened throughout. This gives us breathing space for improving our relations – every month without war should make war unlikely.[92]

In the aftermath of the First Balkan War, Spring-Rice was confident of a lasting improvement in Anglo-German relations: 'I hope & believe we are on really better terms with Germany.'[93] Tyrrell also supported Grey's efforts during the Balkan troubles to co-operate with Germany so as to restrain both Vienna and

[88] Grey to Bertie (no. 249, secret), 1 May 1914, TNA (PRO), FO 371/2092/19288. For German (mis-) perceptions, based on intelligence obtained from the Russian embassy in London, see M. Rauh, 'Die britisch-russische Marinekonvention von 1914 und der Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkriegs', *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 41 (1987), pp. 37–62.

[89] Harcourt cabinet notes, 13 May 1914, Harcourt MSS, no accession number.

[90] Grey to Buchanan (no. 213), 25 June 1914, TNA (PRO), FO 371/2092/29293; see also M. Soroka, *Britain, Russia and the road to the First World War: the fateful embassy of Count Aleksandr Benckendorff* (1903–1916) (Farnborough and Burlington, VT, 2011), pp. 246–8.

[91] Tyrrell to Spring-Rice, 2 June 1907, Spring-Rice MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/241.

[92] Spring-Rice to Tyrrell, 2 Apr. 1912 (TS copy), ibid.

[93] Spring-Rice to Oppenheimer, 22 Nov. 1912, Oppenheimer MSS, Bodl., box 18.

St Petersburg: 'the line E[dward] G[rey] has taken from the beginning of the crisis has been right & will bear good fruit'.[94]

Whatever Tyrrell's evolving views of foreign policy, he appreciated that any change of course could only be brought about gradually. His ability to affect policy decisions directly was circumscribed, subject to his personal relations with Grey and the contending influences at the Foreign Office. Where he could influence policy, he did so, as in the matter of two *dreadnoughts* under construction at the Armstrong-Vickers shipyards, originally contracted to Brazil and Chile, but now being sold on to Turkey. Concerned about the growth of Ottoman naval power in the Black Sea, Russian diplomacy sought to induce London to prevent the vessels from passing into Turkish hands.[95] Tyrrell was the point of contact between the shipbuilders and the Foreign Office, and, it seems, blocked Russian attempts to purchase the contentious warships for themselves. Ultimately, indeed, the two *dreadnoughts* were sold to Turkey.[96]

IV

Neverthesless, this was an isolated incident of Tyrrell shaping policy. His real influence *qua* office was on personnel matters. And his attempts to manipulate diplomatic and Foreign Office appointments cannot be divorced from his calculations of the shifting configurations of the Great Powers. Tyrrell's sharp clashes with Nicolson in 1913 were partly rooted in his suspicions of the PUS's 'grave disloyalty towards Grey'.[97] But more important still were the two men's profound differences as to the correct policy towards Russia.

For Nicolson, one of the architects of the 1907 convention, closer relations with Russia remained a strategic imperative. If the wire to St Petersburg ever were allowed to snap, Russia 'would be at perfect liberty to prosecute any plans which she may have both in the Middle and Far East, and we should be perfectly incapable of offering any resistance to her'.[98] Russia's economic advance in

[94] Tyrrell to Ponsonby, 10 Jan. 1913, Ponsonby MSS, Bodl., MS.Eng.his.c.659; see also to Spring-Rice, 13 Nov. 1912, Spring-Rice MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/241.

[95] Russian concerns on this issue are well documented, see Grigorevich to Sazonov (no. 39/7), 6/19 Jan. 1914, and minutes of special conference, 21 Jan./8 Feb. 1914, *IBZI*, I, nos. 50 and 295. For some further discussion see also S. McMeekin, *The Russian origins of the First World War* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), pp. 35–8, though this author does not agree with the underlying argument advanced here.

[96] Tel. Etter to Sazonov (no. 840), 23 Dec. 1913/5 Jan. 1914, and Volkov to chief of naval staff (no. 182, secret), 24 May/6 June 1914, *BDS*, III, nos. 1025 and 1058. There had been a good deal of dissimulation on Russia's part, Sazonov, for instance, pretending that, if Russia's attempt to purchase the ships were successful, the vessels were meant for deployment in the Baltic, Buchanan to Nicolson (private), 16 Apr. 1914, *BD*, X/2, no. 538.

[97] Chirol to Hardinge, 18 Apr. 1913, Hardinge MSS (CUL), vol. 93.

[98] Nicolson to Townley (private), 21 Oct. 1912, Nicolson MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/359; for Nicolson and his views on Russia the *locus classicus* remains K. Neilson, '"My beloved Russians": Sir Arthur Nicolson and Russia, 1906–1916', *International History Review*, 9 (1987), pp. 521–54.

recent years, and her growing military might, made her 'a formidable factor in European politics, and its [sic] of the highest, and indeed essential importance that we should remain on the best possible terms with her'.[99] To an extent the PUS was driven by the fear

> that if we do not try to tighten up the ties with Russia she may become weary of us and throw us overboard. I do not mean to say that Russia would necessarily become really hostile to us ... She could, without being hostile ..., cause immeasurable damage to our prestige and seriously shake our political position in India and the adjoining countries. This to me is such a nightmare that I would at almost any cost keep Russia's friendship ... As matters at present stand, with the exceedingly loose ties which bind us to France and Russia, we always run the risk of being severed by some unexpected event.[100]

Such views were not shared by a significant number of Foreign Office officials, most prominently by Tyrrell. He stood 'in direct opposition to Nicolson, who still ... wants to leave the Russians to pipe the tune and to dance to it, whatever it might be'.[101] The bitter antagonism between the PUS and Tyrrell was barely disguised. And it affected the future direction of foreign policy and personnel planning. As the intrigues of the Bertie–Hardinge clique around 1904/5 had shown, any change in policy also required to be supported by parallel changes in the diplomatic personnel.[102]

To implement a 'two-camp policy', then, Nicolson's influence needed to be eliminated. Tyrrell, therefore, intervened with Grey to block the PUS's attempts to exchange his current position for either the Constantinople or Vienna or, later still, the Paris embassy. Nicolson had long been chafing at the burdens imposed upon him in Whitehall: '[H]e really hates the Foreign Office like poison.'[103] In indifferent health, and with his relations with the foreign secretary strained to breaking point, by mid-1914, 'Nicolson [was] now of no account, having played his cards very badly.'[104]

Tyrrell hoped to keep Nicolson in Whitehall until he had reached the statutory civil service retirement age of sixty-five in 1914, as opposed to seventy in the diplomatic service. With Nicolson thus disposed of, Tyrrell could hope to scupper also the plans of Nicolson's predecessor, Hardinge, for his own eventual return to diplomacy as ambassador to France. To achieve this, Bertie,

[99] Nicolson to Buchanan (private), 11 Mar. 1913, Nicolson MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/364. [100] Nicolson to de Bunsen, 27 Apr. 1914, De Bunsen MSS, Bodl., box 15.

[101] Chirol to Hardinge (private), 23 May 1913, also 4 July 1913, Hardinge MSS (CUL), vol. 93; also P. Cambon to Doumergue (no. 115), 8 Mar. 1914, *DDF* (3), x, no. 414.

[102] Z. S. Steiner, 'The Old Foreign Office, 1898–1905', *Historical Journal*, 6 (1963), pp. 59–90; Otte, *Foreign Office mind*, pp. 240–59.

[103] Mallet to Hardinge, 27 June 1912, Hardinge MSS (CUL), vol. 93. Nicolson's hopes for Vienna are confirmed by Harold Nicolson to mother, 4 Feb. 1913, Sissinghurst MSS, box 1913–14; and Rennie to de Bunsen, 3 June 1913, De Bunsen MSS, Bodl., box 15.

[104] Chirol to Hardinge (private), 14 June 1914, Hardinge MSS (CUL), vol. 93; Otte, *Foreign Office mind*, pp. 384–8.

the current ambassador, and Tyrrell pushed for the ambassador at Vienna, Sir Maurice de Bunsen, to be appointed to Paris on Bertie's retirement, scheduled for the autumn of 1914.[105] Tyrrell's manipulations reached below the ambassadorial level. By 1912/13, the star of the assistant under-secretary Sir Louis Mallet, one of Hardinge's creatures and once favourite to succeed Nicolson as PUS, had began to wane. When Grey eventually appointed Mallet ambassador at Constantinople in 1913 it was meant 'to clear the way for the Crowe Bird when Nicolson goes'.[106] Since Eyre Crowe was Tyrrell's closest associate at the Foreign Office, this was one of the last pieces of the personnel jigsaw that had to be in place to support a 'two-camp policy'.

Another piece, and a further indication of Tyrrell's growing influence, was the appointment of one of his friends, Sir Ralph Paget, as Mallet's successor as assistant under-secretary. Shunted into the diplomatic sidings by Hardinge and Nicolson, Paget's career long seemed destined to end in the Balkans backwater of Belgrade when Tyrrell salvaged it. Paget's appointment was made for purely political reasons, for, throughout his career, Paget was not known for 'liking the routines of a hard worked chancery'.[107] He was, however, known for his more sympathetic attitude towards the two Germanic Powers: 'our whole policy is wrong; we ought to be friends with Germany instead of with Russia.'[108]

Tyrrell's moves were only partially successful. By early 1914, despite his and Bertie's entreaties, it was clear that Nicolson would not retire, but would succeed Bertie at the rue du Faubourg St. Honoré after all.[109] There now also emerged a policy dispute with Crowe. His views of Russia did not differ substantially from those held by Tyrrell. Russia's agents in Persia pursued an 'absolutely dishonest policy', he averred; and Britain's association with Russia entailed 'real danger'.[110] He was emphatic that the policy 'of relying on Russia

[105] Memo Bertie (on conversation with Grey), 2 Dec. 1913, Bertie MSS, Add. MSS 63032. For relevant section in the civil service regulations see G. E. P. Hertslet, ed., *The Foreign Office list and diplomatic and consular yearbook for 1914* (London, 1914), p. 65.

[106] Chirol to Hardinge (private), 20 June 1913, Hardinge MSS (CUL), vol. 93.

[107] De Bunsen to Spring-Rice, 12 July 1898, Spring-Rice MSS, Churchill College Archive Centre, Cambridge, CASR 1/4.

[108] Paget to Barclay (private and confidential), 13 Oct. 1912, Barclay MSS, London School of Economics Archive, 4/1. Paget's views were no secret in the service, see Paget to Nicolson (private), 7 Oct. 1912 (copy), Paget MSS, BL, Add. MSS 51253; also Steiner, *Foreign Office*, pp. 150–1.

[109] Bertie to Hardinge (personal), 19 Feb. 1914, Hardinge MSS (CUL), vol. 93; and memo Bertie, 19 July 1914, Bertie MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/188. It was, perhaps, no coincidence that, his anti-German sentiments notwithstanding, Bertie's preference had always been for a policy of 'tertius gaudens' in international politics, see Cranborne to Bertie (private), [12 Apr.] 1903, Bertie MSS, BL, Add. MSS 63015; and Bertie to Hardinge (private), 19 Jan. 1907, ibid., BL, Add. MSS 63021.

[110] Min. Crowe, ? May 1914, on Townley to Grey (no. 123), 28 Apr. 1914, TNA (PRO), FO 371/2073/22510.

to carry out the spirit of the Anglo-Russian agreement concerning Persia is bankrupt'.[111]

But Crowe and Tyrrell differed on two points. Unlike the latter, Crowe favoured a renewal of the 1907 convention, though not at all cost. Britain was not to enter into 'responsibilities more onerous than would be the menace of the Russification of the whole of Northern Persia'.[112] More substantially, Crowe did not share Tyrrell's assumption that the equilibrium between the Franco-Russian group and the German-led Triple Alliance had been restored. He had lost little of his suspicions of the ways of the Wilhelmstrasse: 'Keep up your strength and keep your eyes open; trust no one except yourself.'[113] Crowe also established his influence over British policy towards Russia and Germany more effectively than Mallet had been able to do. In consequence, Tyrrell's influence was somewhat curtailed. Indeed, their dispute about the European equilibrium led to a falling out in early 1914.

Whether the clash with Crowe encouraged Tyrrell to develop ambitions of his own to succeed Nicolson, and whether he might have regarded Blücher's initiative in that light, must be a matter of speculation. According to Blücher, there had certainly been earlier intimations at the Ballhausplatz and the Wilhelmstrasse that Tyrrell would be regarded as a suitable ambassador there. Indeed, in the autumn of 1913, his name was 'referred to in connection with Berlin'.[114]

V

There was, moreover, one recent experience which encouraged Tyrrell to take up Blücher's idea of a meeting with Jagow. In November 1913, Grey despatched him to Washington, ostensibly to provide relief for Spring-Rice, now ambassador there, whose health was failing and who required complete rest.[115] At the time, a clearly inspired article in *The Times* sought to refute rumours that attached political significance to Tyrrell's visit. For once, however, the rumours were right. Tyrrell was 'for about six weeks *de facto* Ambassador'. He had been sent to smooth Anglo-American relations, which had been disturbed by a number of disputes over the Panama Canal tolls, the previous president's arbitration legislation as well as the Mexican civil war and British commercial,

[111] Min. Crowe, 2 June 1914, on Townley to Grey (no. 143, confidential), 13 May 1914, TNA (PRO), FO 371/2059/24443.

[112] Min. Crowe, 23 July 1914, TNA (PRO), FO 371/2076/33484.

[113] Crowe to Howard, 10 Aug. 1913, Howard of Penrith MSS, DHW 4/Personal/19; also min. Crowe, 9 Mar. 1914, on tel. Buchanan to Grey (no. 67, confidential), 8 Mar. 1914, TNA (PRO), FO 371/2092/10266.

[114] Florence Spring-Rice to Chirol, 2 Sept. 1913, Spring-Rice MSS, CASR 1/24.

[115] Spring-Rice to Grey (private), 29 Sept. 1913, Grey MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/83; D. H. Burton, *Cecil Spring-Rice: a diplomat's life* (London and Toronto, 1992), p. 149.

primarily oil, interests in the Yucatan.[116] In July 1913, a trip to London by Colonel Edward M. House, right-hand man to the newly elected Woodrow Wilson, had paved the way for a solution to some of these contentious issues. But this was only a first step.[117] Spring-Rice appreciated the utility of informal diplomatic channels, and suggested that 'some responsible person (not a dip[lomat])' ought to visit Washington to expedite a settlement.[118]

Grey proved receptive to the idea, though in the end it was his private secretary, rather than a 'responsible person', who crossed the Atlantic.[119] According to Blücher, on his return to London, Tyrrell confided to him that Grey had given him 'carte blanche' for exploratory talks.[120] Tyrrell made good progress in his talks, using House as an intermediary and eventually seeing Wilson at a private meeting. His presence in the US capital, Spring-Rice observed, 'should make him [Grey] feel quite comfortable about American affairs. He [Tyrrell] gets on extremely well with everybody.'[121] After Tyrrell's departure, Spring-Rice waxed enthusiastically about his friend's success: 'I never saw any Englishman "catch on" with such rapidity . . . I want to make it plain that *politically* the visit was most salutary – indeed it came just in the nick of time.'[122] The ambassador did not exaggerate: 'if some of the veteran diplomats could have heard us', noted House, 'they would have fallen in a faint'.[123] Indeed, Frank Polk, an assistant secretary of state at the time, impressed on Grey's parliamentary aide 'in what outstanding regard Tyrrell was held as a diplomat and as a man by the US State Department'.[124]

[116] Chirol to Hardinge (private), 17 June 1914, Hardinge MSS (CUL), vol. 93; Greene to Rumbold, 9 Sept. 1913, Rumbold MSS, Bodl., Rumbold dep. 16; 'Sir W. Tyrrell's visit to Washington', *Times* (26 Nov. 1913).

[117] Tel. Spring-Rice to Grey (no. 123), 6 June 1913, TNA (PRO), FO 371/1859/26066; for some of the background see J. A. Spender, *Weetman Pearson, First Viscount Cowdray, 1856–1917* (London, 1930), pp. 163–204; and P. A. R. Calvert, 'Great Britain and the New World, 1905–1914', in F. H. Hinsley, ed., *British foreign policy under Sir Edward Grey* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 390–3.

[118] Spring-Rice to Haldane, 18 Sept. 1913, Haldane MSS, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, MS 5910. The bachelor Haldane and the widower Grey shared a house in Queen Anne's Gate, see E. Haldane, *From one century to another: reminiscences* (London, 1937), pp. 254–5. For House's visit to London see G. Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's right hand: the life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven, CT, 2006), p. 89.

[119] Grey to Spring-Rice (private), 28 Oct. 1913, Grey MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/83; Page to House, 26 Oct. 1913, in B. J. Hendrick, *The life and letters of Walter H. Page* (2 vols., London, 1923), pp. 201–2.

[120] Blücher to Jagow, 17 Oct. [1917], Nachlass Jagow, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/16.

[121] Spring-Rice to Grey, n.d. [c. 20 Nov. 1913], Grey MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/83. Tyrrell went to some lengths to keep his meeting with Wilson a secret, given the latter's difficult relations with his secretary of state, William Jennings Bryan, Tyrrell to Grey, 18 Nov. 1913, ibid.; also House diary, 13 Nov. 1913, in C. Seymour, ed., *The intimate papers of Colonel House* (4 vols., London, 1926), I, pp. 206–7.

[122] Spring-Rice to Grey, 2 Dec. 1913, Grey MSS, TNA (PRO), FO 800/83 (original emphasis); see also Bryan's fulsome tribute, to Tyrrell, 3 Dec. 1913, ibid.

[123] House diary, 13 Nov. 1913, as quoted in Hodgson, *Wilson's right hand*, p. 89.

[124] A. C. Murray, *Master and Brother: Murray of Elibank* (London, 1945), p. 192.

Tyrrell's mission did much to calm the ripples in Anglo-American relations. But it had a wider significance still. On the eve of his departure, House developed to him the notion of mediating 'an understanding between France, Germany, England and United States, regarding a reduction of armaments, both military and naval'. Tyrrell was responsive and thought that such a project had 'a good sporting chance', and that at Berlin Jagow more especially would be supportive.[125]

VI

The success of Tyrrell's mission enhanced his standing and influence with Grey. It also gave him a taste for personal diplomacy. On his return from Washington, he impressed upon his friend Blücher his and Grey's conviction that the foreign representatives of both countries, 'in consequence of their lack of impartiality and their misplaced ambitions, were not all suited to conduct important negotiations'. Later, in the spring 1914, Blücher noted the markedly warmer tone towards Germany in Tyrrell's and other officials' conversations. Tyrrell pointed to the Harcourt–Kühlmann talks as a positive omen: 'he looked fairly confidently to the future and believed that, at least for the moment, the danger of war had been averted'.[126] The Germans, meanwhile, also attached great significance to Tyrrell's Washington mission, and especially his choice of the Ballin line's *Imperator* for his Atlantic crossing in preference to a British vessel.[127]

Blücher's preparations for a clandestine meeting continued apace. With a visit by Tyrrell to Berlin out of the question, an alternative venue had to be found. Jagow suggested using the discreet services of his former colleague at the Rome embassy, Gustav von Bohlen und Halbach, head of the Krupp steel dynasty, who could be relied upon to make the family mansion above the Ruhr town of Essen available for a secret meeting.[128] But Blücher eventually settled on another of his university friends, Alfred Prince zu Salm-Reifferscheid, a prominent Rhenish-Catholic member of the Prussian upper house and representative of the high-aristocratic Berlin–Vienna alliance. Salm at once grasped the significance of what was involved. He was delighted, he observed

[125] House diary, 2 Dec. 1913, as quoted in Hodgson, *Wilson right hand*, p. 96.

[126] Memo Blücher, 25 Jan. 1918, Nachlass Jagow, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/15.

[127] Blücher to Jagow, 17 Oct. [1917], ibid., TNA (PRO), GFM 25/16; also House to Page, 4 Nov. 1913, Hendrick, *Life of Page*, II, p. 205. After the war, German diplomats came to the conclusion that Tyrrell's mission had the object of obtaining US assurances of 'benevolent neutrality' in the event of a European war, see Jagow to Bernstorff, 2 Sept. 1919, in Graf J. H. Bernstorff, *Erinnerungen und Briefe* (Zurich, 1936), pp. 116–19; and Jagow, *Ursachen*, p. 91.

[128] Jagow to Blücher, 21 Apr. 1914, Nachlass Jagow, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/16. On Salm see H. Gollwitzer, *Die Standesherren: Die politische und gesellschaftliche Stellung der Mediatisierten, 1815–1918* (Stuttgart, 1957), p. 145.

with a touch of flippancy, that 'you should wish to play "Buchlau" [at his chateau] (hopefully, of course, with better results)'.[129]

The prince and Blücher arranged matters between them. Salm's chateau at Dyck in the Lower Rhine region near the Dutch frontier to the west of Düsseldorf would be placed at the disposal of the visitors. Its geographical location made it a convenient *rendezvous*, as it was close to the main railway line that connected the Dutch ferry port of Flushing with the central European railway network. The preparations were not without a comical side. Jagow had reservations about the 'talkative' Salm. The latter had his own concerns about the risk of indiscretions on the part of his Austrian-born mother. In turn, this required an elaborate cover-story about Tyrrell and Jagow as senior bankers conducting delicate financial negotiations.[130]

With preparations in place, it was only for Tyrrell now to name the day. For the moment, Grey's involvement in the Irish crisis made it difficult for him to leave London, as he informed Blücher through Lady Tyrrell in May. Tyrrell himself was 'over-worked and over-wrought', as Grey increasingly relied on him.[131] Later in June, Lady Tyrrell wrote again that they were planning to leave London on 8 July to travel to Prince Radolin's castle at Jarotschin (Jarocin) in Prussia's Polish province of Posen, a frequent summer destination of the Tyrrells. This, however, did not materialize as Tyrrell was now on sick leave, from which he did not return until 20 July.[132] Immediately after the events at Sarajevo, Lady Tyrrell wrote again: 'Willie asked me to tell you he can fix no date yet – the minute he can you shall hear. I cannot explain in a letter – but the next few weeks will decide his movements. C'est quelque chose qui tient à son chef.'[133]

Returning from his honeymoon in early July, Jagow accepted that a meeting with Grey's private secretary was not to be expected 'for the moment'. Although he still hoped see Tyrrell in the future, he instructed Blücher not to press the matter further. This was based on tactical considerations: 'I would still be very delighted to exchange views with T[yrrell] on many questions. If however *we* keep coming back to this, the English might form the impression that we were anxious for it and were running after them.' Jagow wished to avoid giving such an impression. The abortive alliance talks around 1900 were casting a long

[129] Salm to Jagow, 18 May 1914, Nachlass Jagow, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/15. Buchlau referred to the secret Austro-Russian meeting in Sept. 1908 which led to the Bosnian annexation crisis.

[130] Salm to Blücher, 18 May and 20 July 1914, ibid.

[131] Chirol to Hardinge (private), 22 May 1914, Hardinge MSS (CUL), vol. 93.

[132] In Blücher's indelicate phrase, 'Lady Tyrrell's were in feminine manner undated', Blücher to Jagow, 6 July 1917, encl. Lady Tyrrell to Blücher, n.d., Nachlass Jagow, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/16. For Tyrrell's absence, see memo Bertie, 18 July 1914, Bertie MSS, BL, Add. MSS 63033.

[133] Lady Tyrrell to Blücher, n.d. [but before 2 July 1914], Nachlass Jagow, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/16. The date can be deduced from her opening reference to the 'ghastly time for [the] poor wonderful old emperor' and the fact that Blücher informed Jagow on 2 July, see Jagow's reply, 6 July 1914, ibid.

shadow, indeed. He still favoured a 'rapprochement with England or at least the extinction ['Ausmerzung'] of all differences' as 'the only sensible policy in the interests of *both* countries'. But he neither wished to be seen as the suitor, nor was he anxious to force a breach between Britain and Russia. Both were counterproductive. Intriguingly, Jagow also commented on the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand:

> The catastrophe of Sarajevo is terrible; this house of Habsburg–Lorraine truly is an Atridite dynasty, moving from catastrophe to catastrophe. The political impact is difficult to calculate, because one knows too little about what sort the new heir to the throne is and what he promises. The life of the old emperor is coming to an end . . . and the successor is very young. In the meantime, the empire is disintegrating more and more and loses consistency and prestige. It needs a strong hand to gather strength again; does the young prince have that?[134]

It is matter of record that Jagow did not attend the meetings on 5 July with Emperor Franz Joseph's special emissary, Count Alexander Hoyos, at which the Kaiser and Bethmann issued Vienna with a 'blank cheque'.[135] Indeed, the tenor of Jagow's letter suggests that either the state secretary was not fully aware of what had passed on the previous day; or else that he was remarkably naive. For if he had come to accept the risk of a general European war, Britain's neutrality, or even late entry, would have been to Germany's advantage. Under such circumstances, the appearance of German anxiety for some arrangement with Britain might have made the latter to stay her hand for longer.

Even so, the gathering crisis now overtook plans for a meeting with Tyrrell. Tantalizingly, however, Lady Tyrrell urged Blücher in mid-July '[d]o propose yourselves to Jarotschin beginning of September'.[136] Whether Tyrrell then thought that war could be averted after all it is impossible to ascertain, though it was common currency at the Foreign Office that he 'was at the crisis . . . for neutrality.'[137] In the end, he never met Jagow.

VII

This re-examination of British policy on the eve of the First World War has offered a view from the Foreign Office window. Written from, say, the Admiralty's perspective, a different picture would have emerged.[138] It is scarcely surprising that this should be so. It is, after all, the responsibility of admirals to

[134] Jagow to Blücher, 6 July 1914 (TS copy), ibid.

[135] F. Fischer, *Der Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland, 1914–1918* (3rd edn, Düsseldorf, 1964), pp. 60–6.

[136] Lady Tyrrell to Blücher, n.d., Nachlass Jagow, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/16.

[137] Temperley diary, 28 Mar. 1918, Temperley MSS, private; see also Tyrrell to Ponsonby, 31 July 1914, Ponsonby MSS, Bodl., MS.Eng.his.c.660.

[138] N. A. Lambert's *Planning Armageddon: British economic warfare and the First World War* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), esp. pp. 19–184, offers by far the most sophisticated analysis of pre-war admiralty planning.

prepare for war, and that of diplomats to prevent it. More significantly, and underpinning the analysis presented here, is the insight that the Foreign Office was the engine room of Britain's external policy. If international changes made it necessary for British policy to shift gears or to change course, the historical evidence of this is to be found in this part of Whitehall in the first instance.[139]

It might nevertheless be tempting to dismiss the episode as little more than amateur dramatics. That would be to miss its real political significance. The extant archival material pertaining to it is by no means complete. But historians should not be reluctant to grapple with it. Read in the round, the disparate evidence can be matched up to offer an insight into a crucial stage of pre-1914 Great Power politics. The planned mission to Germany casts into sharper relief Tyrrell's emergence as the *eminence grise* of the Foreign Office in 1913–14. Whether the initiative for a secret meeting came from him, or was the product of Blücher's fertile imagination, or was a joint effort by the two friends, Tyrrell's willingness to meet Jagow is significant. It complements the available evidence of a change in his political outlook in the last two years before the war. If read in conjunction with his efforts to manipulate senior diplomatic appointments scheduled for 1914–15, a more rounded picture of a politically motivated manoeuvre emerges. Tyrrell was convinced that Russia's military and industrial recovery had restored the balance of power in Europe, briefly disturbed by her post-1905 weakness. Russia's growing assertiveness, however, now also posed significant problems for Britain in central and north-eastern Asia. In consequence, Tyrrell saw the need to recalibrate Britain's diplomatic strategy.

Tyrrell's own recent success at Washington, and his friendly exchanges with Kühlmann since 1912, reinforced his conviction that an informal approach, bypassing the proper official channels, might pave the way for a rapprochement with Berlin. A conversational diplomat in the style of a Clarendon or Granville, he prided himself on his ability to smooth matters. As late as 1918, 'T[yrrell] believe[d] that he could arrange an acceptable peace with Kühlmann today.'[140]

The significance of this episode goes well beyond Tyrrell's career. It has profound implications for analyses of British policy at that time. For one thing, unless Tyrrell had misled Blücher, Grey clearly approved his planned visit to Germany.[141] Ever since 1906, the foreign secretary had sought ways of improving relations with Berlin. But under the circumstances of 1913/14, faced with a more assertive Russia and with France reluctant to restrain her ally and often unfriendly to Britain in overseas matters, Britain's international position

[139] This is demonstrated in exemplary fashion for relations with Russia by Neilson, *Last tsar*, passim; for further thoughts see also my *Foreign Office mind*, pp. 4–9, and '"Chief of all office": high politics, finance and foreign policy, 1865–1914', in B. Simms and W. Mulligan, eds., *The primacy of foreign policy, 1660–2000: how strategic concerns shaped modern Britain* (Basingstoke and New York, NY, 2010), pp. 232–48.

[140] Oppenheimer diary, 8 Jan. 1918, Oppenheimer MSS, Bodl., box 5.

[141] Tyrrell to Blücher, 18 Apr. 1914 (TS copy), Nachlass Jagow, TNA (PRO), GFM 25/16.

was more challenging.[142] Improving relations with Germany, then, would help to lessen the impact of the likely collapse of the Anglo-Russian talks for a renewal of the existing convention in 1915. Moreover, given the persistent, though largely unfounded, rumours of the growing influence of pro-German elements at the St Petersburg court, it would also signal to Berlin a possible British option, so blocking a possible Russo-German rapprochement.[143]

Grey had little to lose by Tyrrell's proposed confidential exchanges with Jagow. His private secretary had demonstrated his discretion and his flair for unravelling complex foreign policy problems, most recently during his visit to America. He could rely on Tyrrell to conduct talks orally, without anything compromising being recorded on paper. Grey's own planned visit to Germany later in the summer, ostensibly to consult the famous Wiesbaden oculist Dr Hermann Pagenstecher, raises the prospect of more far-reaching plans still.[144]

That Grey sought a rapprochement with Germany in early 1914 has implications for scholarly interpretations of the period. For one thing, the antagonism that had bedevilled relations between London and Berlin had receded. The short-term indicators pointed towards détente and the maintenance of peace. Détente with Germany had the potential of enabling Britain more safely to navigate the anticipated disturbances in international politics now that Russia's recovery from the nadir of 1905 was well under way. Any future complications were anticipated to emerge from that quarter. Indeed, the improvement in Anglo-German relations, and Grey's and Tyrrell's attempts to entrench it, underline the extent to which relations with Germany were a function of Anglo-Russian relations.

These relations were of a unique kind, at once European in nature and Asiatic in its focus. When Russian power was at its lowest ebb, after Russia's defeat by Japan in 1905, the European equilibrium was dislocated and Russia's challenge to British interests in central Asia blunted. With her diplomatic room for manoeuvre enlarged in consequence of this, Germany emerged as a disruptive element. Conversely, Russia's revival from about 1912 onwards left Germany in a diminished position and Anglo-Russian relations facing an uncertain future.

All of this runs counter to assumptions, still all too common in studies of the pre-1914 period, that ascribe to Anglo-German relations a central role in Great Power relations in general and for British foreign policy in particular. For Grey, as it had been for his predecessors, framing and executing foreign policy

[142] Grey to Bertie (no. 249, secret), 1 May 1914, TNA (PRO), FO 371/2092/19288.

[143] For such fears see min. Nicolson, n.d., on Buchanan to Grey (no. 75), 23 Mar. 1914, TNA (PRO), FO 371/1988/12716. For the Anglo-Russian talks see Neilson, *Last tsar*, pp. 334–40; Siegel, *Endgame*, pp. 186–96. For irritation with France see min. Crowe, 23 July 1914, on A. Hardinge to Crowe, 20 July 1914, TNA (PRO), FO 371/2045/12291.

[144] Oppenheimer diary, 8 Oct. 1914, Oppenheimer MSS, Bodl., box 5; also Oppenheimer, *Stranger within*, p. 243.

decisions was a question of striking the right balance. It meant safeguarding Britain's global interests, whilst eschewing binding commitments to any foreign powers. Over the previous three decades the focus of British diplomacy had periodically shifted in response to shifts in the international landscape. After 1905, the problems caused by Russia's weakness had required specific policy responses. But by 1913–14, international politics were approaching a new juncture. British policy was once more on the cusp of significant changes, and new policies were needed. Grey's and Tyrrell's willingness to explore the possibility of a rapprochement with Germany suggests that both appreciated this. It also underlines the extent to which recent scholarly criticisms of Grey's foreign policy are a grotesque caricature. Grey was not irrevocably *ententiste* in his foreign policy orientation. Maintaining the *entente* with France was the correct policy response in 1905 and 1911. Mending fences with Russia was possible after 1905; and seeing to it that the fence was kept in good condition after 1907 served Britain's wider interests. But he had not, in the colourful phrase of one recent writer, 'nailed his, and Britain's, trousers to the mast' of the *entente*.[145] For that, Grey had too shrewd an appreciation of the material value of his, and Britain's, garments. The evidence presented here does not suggest any intention on Grey's part to throw British policy into reverse. What it does suggest, however, is that he and his closest aide were searching for new policy options. And that, after all, is what all sensible foreign policy is about.

As the abortive plans for a clandestine meeting illustrate, Jagow and the German chancellor viewed matters in a similar light. This further underlines the authentic potentiality of détente on the international politics of the last two years before 1914. The dysfunctional nature of the imperial regime, the inability of the civilian leadership to retain control over events in July 1914, and, once the crisis was upon them, their preference for subterfuge over straight-dealing meant that hopes for an Anglo-German rapprochement remained abortive. Perhaps, as Blücher later lamented, the failure of the Tyrrell–Jagow scheme was a matter of 'Kismet' – the last refuge of the unsuccessful.[146] But, certainly, historians have no longer reason to assume that decision-makers had resigned themselves to the inevitability of war.

[145] J. Charmley, 'Traditions of Conservative foreign policy', in G. Hicks, eds., *Conservatism and British foreign policy, 1820–1920: the Derbys and the world* (Farnham and Burlington, VA, 2011), p. 224, echoing K. M. Wilson, *The policy of the ententes* (Cambridge, 1982).

[146] Blücher and Chapman-Houston, eds., *Memoirs*, p. 218.