

emerged with a strong sense of national identity. Relations between these two states were to remain peaceful until the 1950s but the animosities that had culminated in the Greek-Turkish War of 1919–22, together with the severity of its impact, would ensure that this would be a tense relationship for the remainder of the century. In the Middle East Britain and France emerged as the predominant powers but, although they remained cooperative on many issues elsewhere, in the Middle East they would remain regional rivals. Both Britain and France had been severely drained by the war and they had few resources to spare for these newly acquired Middle Eastern realms. The mandates would increasingly become a drag on Britain and France as they were confronted by a rising tide of opposition from the inhabitants. The eastern Mediterranean world would remain a problem area in international relations as much after the war as it had during the century which had preceded it. In many ways the postwar settlement only marked a new phase of the old Eastern Question.

Note

- 1 A. Mango, *Atatürk* (London, 2000), p. 217.

CHAPTER SEVEN

NAVAL RIVALRY AND EAST ASIAN STABILITY

One of the most serious areas of international tension after the First World War was East Asia. Very little relating to it had actually been resolved at the Paris Peace Conference and the trajectory of conflicting ambitions and naval rivalry in the Pacific, abetted by mounting political turmoil in China, made this a potential area of conflict between some of the Great Powers. Japan's growing strength was bringing it increasingly into conflict with the other rising non-European power, the United States. Britain was caught in the midst of this friction as it was allied, on the one hand, to Japan but, on the other, seeking a closer relationship with America. The immediate cause for concern was the growing likelihood of a naval arms race involving these three states. After the destruction of the German navy only these three countries possessed navies with significant power. All were Pacific basin states and, thus, the questions of naval strength and the Pacific balance of power became inextricably linked. The problem was solved, at least for much of the decade of the 1920s, through the favored mechanism of postwar diplomacy, the holding of a conference. The Washington Conference of 1921–22, through a network of agreements, established a framework for naval arms control, the first ever voluntary agreement for such a purpose, and established parameters for the Great Powers' relations with China.

THE RISE OF JAPANESE POWER

Just as the war in Europe had seen a change in the relationship of the traditional regional actors, so the war had also affected the balance of power in East Asia. Japan took the opportunity to continue its drive for regional dominance that had been slowly increasing since its dramatic and rapid modernization in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1895 it had defeated China and taken the island of Taiwan. In 1902 it had formed an alliance with Britain, the first such peacetime alliance concluded by either state. In 1905 it had inflicted a stunning defeat on the Russian Empire, seizing control of Port Arthur (Lushun), a key Russian naval base leased from

China. The defeat of Russia and the growing weakness of China opened the way for Japan to annex Korea in 1910. During the First World War, true to its alliance with Britain, Japan declared war on Germany in 1914. Its fleet played an important part in driving German power from the Pacific and, in return, it was able to seize the German-ruled Shantung (Shandong) peninsula and the German Pacific islands north of the equator. China had been forced to grant Germany a ninety-nine year lease on the Shantung peninsula in 1897. At its tip lay the great German-built fortress of Tsingtao (Qingdao) which guarded the entrance to Kiaochow bay, home to the German Pacific fleet. Among its many assets was one of the largest dry docks in the world. The siege of Tsingtao in 1914 was the only major land battle in East Asia during the war and gave Japan a prize strategic asset.

Japan had gradually been strengthening its position in China. China had historically been the regional great power, but it had been in decline for much of the last century. The 1911 Chinese Revolution had left an already weakened country in turmoil. In 1915 Japan presented the Chinese government with an ultimatum, the 'twenty-one demands', that would give Japan control of Shantung, southern Manchuria, inner Mongolia, and various mineral exploitation rights. The coast along Fukien would become a Japanese sphere of influence and China would utilize Japanese political, military and financial advisers. The Chinese government, powerless to resist, was compelled to agree to all but the last point. Japan further extended its regional hegemony when Russia withdrew from the war after the Bolshevik seizure of power. Japan was able to take control of Russia's Pacific maritime provinces as part of the Allied intervention into Russia. After the war ended and the other Allies withdrew their forces Japan remained, strengthening its hold on the region. The growth of Japan's power had been such that by the time of the First World War it was viewed as a Great Power and at the Paris Peace Conference it was accorded that status, being treated on equal terms with Great Britain, France, Italy, and the United States.

China, at this time, was in a state of flux. A revolution in 1911 led by Sun Yat-sen had ended the monarchy and attempted to establish a republic. By 1915, however, China was dissolving into political chaos, with various local figures effectively controlling their own regions. In 1917 the political crisis in China had reached the stage that there were rival governments, which split the country between north and south, with one government based at Peking (Beijing) and a rival parliamentary government at Canton. In addition local warlords emerged who would come to control many parts of the country, though it should be noted that none of these were separatist groups and the idea of a single China never disappeared. In 1918, as the First World War was drawing to a close, the officially recognized government based at Peking entered the war on the side of the Allies, largely to

assure itself of a place at the eventual peace conference. As an indication of some national unity the Canton government indicated its support of this action a month later.

Japan's bid to become the regional hegemon was opposed by the United States. In 1917, after American entry into the war, Japan sent a mission to Washington to see if an understanding on this matter could be reached. The Japanese representative, Viscount Ishii, and the American secretary of state, Robert Lansing, reached an accord that became known as the Lansing-Ishii agreement, recognizing that Japan did have special interests in China. This agreement was interpreted differently by both parties, with Lansing believing that it applied to economic interests, while Japan viewed it as an acknowledgement of a Japanese sphere of influence over southern Manchuria. It is possible that Lansing acted as he did believing it to be necessary to keep Japan in the war and on the side of the Allies. The contradictory interpretations of the parties, however, further worsened relations.

After the war Japan continued an active naval building programme that looked likely to make it the regional maritime power, something which concerned the United States as it had its own regional presence based in the Philippines, which it had captured from Spain in 1899. By 1920 military expenditure constituted 48 per cent of Japanese governmental expenditure. As Japan continued its naval construction, while simultaneously building up its presence on the mainland, the twin issues of the future of China and the potential naval arms race came to dominate international concerns over East Asia in the years immediately after the war.

THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE AND THE SIBERIAN AFFAIR

Japan's representative to the Paris Peace Conference was Saionji, the youngest of its recognized elder statesmen. Although included in the discussions of the Council of Ten, he limited his interventions to issues of specific interest to Japan: the future of Shantung, the control of Germany's Pacific island possessions, and racial equality. Shantung proved to be a significant issue. China's delegation, led by Wellington Koo, argued that the 1915 agreement, by which Japan had taken Shantung, was invalid as it was made under the threat of force. While legally dubious China's argument attracted sympathy from the United States. Britain attempted to find a solution that kept both its important allies happy by proposing that Japan control Shantung as a League of Nations mandate. Japan rejected this and, in the end, succeeded in establishing in the Treaty of Versailles its succession to Germany's former rights in China, subject to any arrangements it subsequently made with China. News of the rejection of Chinese aspirations led to public protests in China, which became known from the date of this as the May 4th movement. The public outcry was sufficient to lead to the Cabinet in Peking

resigning and China's refusal to sign the treaty. As a result this left Japan in control of Shantung *de facto* but not *de jure*.

During the war, when British naval forces were seriously stretched, it had requested Japanese assistance, which led to Japan sending destroyers to the Mediterranean. In return Japan received a promise of support from Britain, France, and Italy for Japan's ambition to gain permanent control of Germany's former Pacific island possessions, north of the equator. The United States had not been party to this understanding and refused to be bound by any of the wartime secret treaties. A compromise was finally agreed at the peace conference that these islands would be awarded to Japan as a League of Nations mandate, while those south of the equator were also assigned as mandates to Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand.

One area in which Japanese hopes failed was its desire for a racial equality clause to be incorporated in the Covenant of the League of Nations. One of the issues confronting Japan in the early part of the twentieth century was the treatment of its emigrants. Australia and the United States had imposed targeted restrictions on immigration from Japan. Population pressure in Japan had led many Japanese to seek opportunities overseas and restrictions such as these were a matter of concern to the Japanese government. In February 1919 Baron Makino, Japan's member of the committee drafting the covenant, proposed such a clause and received support from China, Czechoslovakia, France, Greece, and Poland. The Australian prime minister, Hughes, strongly objected and in April 1919 both Australia and the United States (the latter because of pressure primarily from California) ensured its defeat. Although Japan went on to be a permanent member of the League Council this defeat remained an irritant.

An issue that caused some tension with Japan's allies was the Siberian affair. Within weeks of the Bolshevik seizure of power the Japanese army was preparing plans to intervene in Siberia to prevent the spread of communist influence to China, which it feared could undermine its influence there. The foreign ministry quite independently evolved similar plans, though in this instance out of concern about German intentions. This incident shows some of the problems of decision-making in Japan, with difficulties of coordination. Once a common plan was agreed Japan sought the support of its allies, but the United States objected, convinced that Japan was intending to use this opportunity to extend its sphere of influence. It was only when the Czech Legion had fought its way across Siberia and seized the port of Vladivostok that Wilson, reluctantly, agreed to a limited intervention in order to extricate the Czechs. The Japanese government agreed, promising to limit its deployment to one or possibly two divisions. The army, however, planned on seven divisions and despite assurances to the contrary the army plan is what occurred. By the 1930s the

inability of the Japanese government to control the army would become a serious issue, but this move, unpopular both at home and abroad, provides an illustration of what would become a growing problem for the control of Japan's external policy. Japanese forces fanned out to take control of a vast area. Eventually branches of Japan's large industrial concerns, the *zaibatsu*, were opened in this region and some 50,000 Japanese settlers began to arrive. This growing presence increasingly became a problem for Japan with its wartime allies, who ended their military intervention in early 1920.

NAVAL ARMAMENTS AND STABILITY IN EAST ASIA

Among the three powerful naval states, the United States, Britain, and Japan there was a looming naval arms race that would have dwarfed the proportions of the prewar Anglo-German naval arms rivalry. Given the technology of the period the heart of this rivalry lay in the construction of huge capital ships, that is those ships that displaced more than 10,000 tons and carried guns of calibres in excess of eight inches. Ships of this type were usually termed either battleships or battle cruisers. In 1918 Britain had launched HMS *Hood* which displaced 41,200 tons and, despite its size, could also move with remarkable speed. Both the United States and Japan were at work on similar monster-sized capital ships.

The United States was deeply concerned by the Anglo-Japanese alliance, which fell due for renewal in 1921. There was concern in Washington at the potential security threat posed by a combination of these two great naval powers. Between 1917 and 1921 Japanese naval expenditure had almost tripled and was still increasing, while Britain's Royal Navy remained the world's largest. If, for any reason, the Anglo-Japanese alliance turned on the United States their fleets would pose a deadly threat to American security. President Wilson had already begun to build the basis for American maritime security in the 1916 Navy Bill, when he called for a navy second to none. This bill initiated the construction of 156 ships, including 16 battleships or battle cruisers. Priority was given during the war to construction of the smaller categories of ships. As a result, capital ship construction was only reaching its peak in 1921 when 15 of the 16 envisaged capital ships were under construction.

The incoming Republican administration of President Harding was confronted by a number of issues. While the Republicans had attacked membership of the League of Nations due its collective security obligations, they did want to be seen dealing positively with matters for which the League might have provided a venue for negotiation, in particular arms control. The new administration was under strong pressure to lower taxes which, in turn, would require less government expenditure. As a result, there was growing opposition in the Congress to paying for the expensive

naval construction programme. After the 1920 election one of the leading opponents of membership of the League, Senator Borah, proposed a resolution for a 50 per cent reduction in the naval construction of the United States, Britain, and Japan. The Borah resolution received a tidal wave of public support and was passed unanimously by the Senate, placing great pressure on the administration to find a way to reduce spending while assuring security.

For Britain one of the most satisfying outcomes of the First World War was the destruction of Germany's navy, which had once seemed to pose a great threat. By November 1918 the Royal Navy had achieved a tonnage and number of ships nearly equal to all the remaining major fleets of the world. The Royal Navy, now at the apogee of its power, numbered 61 battleships, a navy greater than that of the United States and France combined, and double that of Japan's and Italy's. British naval doctrine called for a navy based on a two-power standard, that is a navy greater than the next two largest navies combined. The American building programme threatened this. Financial constraints prohibited Britain from attempting to maintain a two-power standard against the United States and the doctrine was downgraded to a one-power standard. Britain, in considering its own security, could not accept the United States creating a larger navy than its own. As a result the British government, in March 1921, reluctantly authorized a new building programme. It was anxious, however, not to embark on a new naval arms race if it could possibly be avoided. It had stopped large-scale naval construction with the end of the war and had tried to reach an arms control agreement with the United States on several occasions. It was only when confronted with the spectre of continued American construction that a decision was taken to embark on construction of a new generation of super battle cruisers.

The United States and Britain, therefore, were facing an expensive naval arms race if they maintained their existing plans. Neither, however, expected to face immediate conflict with the other, especially in the aftermath of their close relationship during the war. Both governments also faced strong domestic pressure to cut defence spending in order to reduce taxes and to focus on domestic concerns. American hesitation turned on the Anglo-Japanese alliance. While not viewing an attack by Britain as likely, the United States did believe that it provided important support for Japanese expansionism. The issue of whether or not to renew the alliance became the chief topic for the 1921 Imperial Conference, a gathering that brought together all the prime ministers of the British dominions.

This was the first gathering of the leaders of the British Empire's dominions since the Paris Peace Conference. In considering the world situation two years on they were confident of the empire's strong position. The ebullient Billy Hughes of Australia exclaimed, 'We are like so many

Alexanders. What other worlds have we to conquer?', while the more judicious Jan Smuts of South Africa observed that the British Empire 'emerged from the war quite the greatest Power in the world, and it is only unwisdom or unsound policy that could rob her of that great position.'¹ The looming crisis over the renewal of the Japanese alliance, and the potential impact on Anglo-American relations was one of the few immediate issues which might threaten that hard-won security. The alliance with Japan had first been concluded in 1902 out of common concern over the growth of Russian power in East Asia, it had been renewed in 1911 out of concern about the growing German role in the region. The alliance had served both partners well during its life, but now the interests of the partners were more clearly divergent than previously. It was clearly an unsympathetic alliance, with little sense of common purpose. Britain, too, was concerned at Japan's move towards regional hegemony as well as growing economic competition. There was concern over Japanese envy of Britain's worldwide empire, which invited comparison to Germany's prewar jealousy that had caused so much friction. Some members of the Imperial Conference argued that the alliance provided Britain with some measure of influence and control over Japan. Others pointed out that the growing divergence of Japan and the United States made renewal a potential further cause of difficulty with the United States [*Doc. 13*]. The Imperial Conference split along regional lines, with the Australian and New Zealand premiers wanting to do nothing to antagonize Japan, while Canada was concerned not to alienate the United States.

British links with the United States had been growing for a number of years. The interconnections of the two countries were among the most complex of the great powers, bound not only by language and a shared history, but also by financial ties and networks of personal friendships and family bonds. Britain may have sought amity and cooperation with the United States in principle, but in practice there were many obstacles. One concern was the financial problem between the two countries. The Wilson administration in its last days had been adamant on repayment of Britain's war debt. The Harding administration had only taken office in March 1921, and Britain hoped to take the opportunity to establish a good relationship that could lead to a resolution of the current set of problems between them and later, during the Washington Conference period, it never forgot the need to try to ameliorate the debt question.

An important step in working with the new administration in Washington was to ascertain its view about the Anglo-Japanese alliance. The message from Washington was clear, with the new Secretary of State, Charles Evans Hughes, informing the British ambassador that he viewed any renewal of the alliance with 'disquietude'. For Britain the conundrum lay in the reality that, as the United States traditionally avoided peacetime

alliances (and continued to do so until the 1949 NATO treaty), there was little possibility of replacing the Japanese alliance with an American one. Britain, therefore, had to decide between retaining the reality of its relationship with Japan, despite its growing concerns about the increasingly predatory nature of Japanese diplomacy, and the danger inherent in antagonizing the United States, which at the very least would result in an expensive naval arms race which Britain could not hope to win. It was projected that by 1923 America, at its current construction rate, would possess a larger navy than Britain's. Under severe economic pressure after the war, Britain could ill afford unnecessary military expenditure.

The Imperial Conference agreed, being unable to decide otherwise, to leave the issue of the Anglo-Japanese alliance open for the moment and, in the meantime, to make a further effort with the United States. In the light of a new administration and clear American public sentiment for arms reduction, Britain hoped that a solution could be negotiated. The problems of the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese alliance and the naval arms race now converged. Britain approached the American government and suggested the United States convene a conference on naval arms control, and this came to be broadened out to cover the linked issues of East Asia and the Pacific.

THE WASHINGTON CONFERENCE

It is often argued that the United States became isolationist after the First World War and the rejection of membership in the League of Nations. In fact the United States remained an active international actor, as witnessed by its hosting a major international conference only a little over two years after the signature of the Treaty of Versailles. The Washington Conference convened in November 1921 and was dominated from the start by Secretary of State Hughes. He dramatically seized the initiative in the opening session by proposing a definite plan for naval arms reduction [Doc. 14]. He suggested that the navies of the great maritime powers be governed by a ratio in order to avoid future expensive arms races, a ten-year naval building holiday, and an agreement on the total naval shipping tonnage to be allowed and to be achieved, if necessary, by the scrapping of ships to achieve those totals. The Hughes plan would have resulted in the scrapping of 66 ships by the United States, Britain, and Japan. In a modified form the Hughes plan would ultimately be adopted by the conference.

Hughes had suggested a ratio of 5-5-3 between the United States, Britain, and Japan, with 1.7 each for France and Italy. This was based, roughly, on existing naval strengths. Japan protested at what it considered the implied inferiority, with one Japanese delegate stating that to him it sounded like 'Rolls Royce, Rolls Royce, Ford.' The rationale behind Hughes's suggestion was that both the United States and Britain maintained

two-ocean navies, while Japan was only deployed in the Pacific. Japan, though, successfully demanded as concessions that the United States promise not to build any new fortifications west of Hawaii, and that Britain not construct any new bases north of Singapore. This provided an ample security buffer around Japan and made it potentially the predominant naval power in the waters off China.

Japan was also reluctant to scrap the *Mutsu*, the world's largest battleship and an object of national pride that had been paid for largely by public subscription. Under the Hughes scheme it would have to be scrapped. A compromise was reached whereby Japan would instead scrap an older ship, which would leave it with two new battleships and an increased tonnage. As a result, the United States would be allowed to complete construction of two new battleships and Britain would be allowed to build two new battleships.

France and Italy were both angered by the suggested ratio assigned to them of 1.7, arguing that the need to maintain large armies during the First World War had necessitated that their naval building plans languish. France demanded, at the very least, the right to have twice as many auxiliary ships as it possessed at present. Hughes had also proposed that the United States and Britain reduce their submarine inventories to a total of 60,000 tons each, and that the other three naval powers would be allowed to maintain their current levels, that is 31,500 tons each for France and Japan, and 21,000 for Italy. France, however, demanded the astonishing total of 90,000 and, as a result, attempts to limit submarines failed. French intransigence caused the ratio to be applied only to capital ships, that is the largest ships, but not to such categories as cruisers, destroyers or submarines. These results were embodied in what became known as the Five Power treaty.

The Five Power treaty, concluded by the United States, Britain, Japan, France, and Italy established the Hughes ratio of 5-5-3-1.7-1.7 for their respective strength in capital ships. Aircraft carriers were not to exceed 27,000 tons each, battleships 35,000 tons, and cruisers 10,000. The maximum calibre of guns to be carried was limited to a maximum of 8 inches for aircraft carriers and cruisers, and 16 inches for battleships. The use of poison gas was also prohibited. As a result of these decisions the United States scrapped 26 ships either already built or under construction, Britain 24, and Japan 16. With a few agreed exceptions a ten-year ban was placed on new naval construction. In a separate treaty these five states agreed to ban the use of poison gas.

The success of the Five Power treaty concluded at Washington has been much debated. It is notable for being the first successful arms control treaty and it did, for a number of years, halt the naval arms race. Britain and the United States at the time welcomed the outcome as enhancing security while

removing the spectre of a wasteful armaments race. Some historians have argued, however, that for Britain in the long run it was a disaster, citing for example that the ten-year naval building holiday caused the loss of critical skills and personnel. In this early attempt at arms control there were problems of implementation to overcome. Even in the arms control talks of the 1970s and 1980s verification remained a difficulty. The limitation per ship of a 35,000 ton displacement depended on the honesty of the signatories. Finally, as the treaty only applied to capital ships, it simply shifted naval construction to other categories.

In discussing problems relating to China the parties to the Five Power treaty were joined by another four states with interests there, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal and, of course, China. The results would be embodied in the Nine Power treaty. There were fears that China would repeat the role of the Ottoman Empire in becoming the new sick man of the international system and thereby become the cause of potentially dangerous rivalries between competing powers. In the Nine Power treaty the signatories agreed to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China and to maintain the principle of the Open Door, that is an equal opportunity for all states to trade and invest in China. This was no more than an expression of good intentions, without any mechanism for enforcement and little was done when Japan violated its terms when it seized Manchuria in 1931. China was also given greater control of its own customs revenue, which the foreign powers had taken control of to repay debt owed to them, in order to alleviate the Chinese government's severe financial problems.

There were also minor agreements, resolving issues between various parties to the conference, made in the environment of the Washington Conference. Japan agreed to American cable rights on the disputed island of Yap, Japan also agreed to liquidate its military presence in Siberia, no doubt to the relief of both Tokyo and Washington if not the Japanese army; and most importantly, with American and British prodding, Japan agreed to relinquish the Shantung peninsula to China, in return for retaining for a period of years some economic presence. The problem of the Anglo-Japanese alliance was resolved by the Four Power treaty, between Britain, Japan, the United States, and France which terminated the Anglo-Japanese alliance. The signatories agreed to respect each others' existing rights in the Pacific region and to refer future disputes to a joint conference. It was, in essence, a goodwill agreement with a promise to try negotiations rather than force to resolve disputes.

Hughes also attempted to raise the issue of military disarmament. Both the United States and Britain had reduced their armies to prewar levels. The peace treaties already controlled the size of the armies of the former Central Powers, but France had only made a small reduction. France pointed to its continuing concerns about a German threat and the French premier, Briand,

argued that moral disarmament, that is a clear disinclination to go to war, would have to precede military disarmament. As a result nothing was achieved in this area.

For Japan what became known as the Washington System marked an important shift in its approach to foreign policy. The dominant figure of Japanese foreign policy during much of the 1920s was its representative at the Washington Conference, Shidehara. He saw in the complex of treaties and agreements negotiated at Washington the basis for a stable East Asian and Pacific international order. With its security safeguarded by general naval arms reduction Japan could now turn to economic concerns. Shidehara's diplomacy saw Japan becoming an increasingly cooperative international actor. Although it succumbed to militaristic elements in the 1930s Shidehara's diplomacy would prove an important intellectual influence in Japanese diplomacy after the Second World War.

At the time the Washington Conference was widely hailed as a significant step towards international stability. The prospect of a financially crippling naval arms race had been prevented, the first substantive arms control treaty had been agreed, the navies of the great powers were to be limited, a clash between the major powers for dominance in east Asia and the Pacific had been avoided, and the Anglo-Japanese alliance that had filled other states with such unease had been replaced by a broader agreement. It would prove to be only a short-term solution. Within ten years the Washington system had collapsed, largely due to the renewed Japanese bid for regional hegemony.

Note

- 1 Imperial Conference, 2nd meeting, 21 June 1921. Minutes of the Imperial Conference, CAB 32/2, Public Record Office, Kew, London.