

ROYAL PAINS:
WILHELM II, EDWARD VII, AND ANGLO-GERMAN RELATIONS, 1888-1910

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Scholars view the Anglo-German rivalry of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, particularly the naval arms race between the two countries, as one of the main causes of tension which led to the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Combined with an interlocking system of alliances, the German “blank check” to Austria in July 1914, and confrontations (in the Balkans, for example) between the Great Powers, British and German antagonism helped to create a political situation in which the principals involved considered a general European war an inevitability. The question was not who the belligerents would be; most contemporary observers felt certain that the coming European war would involve Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and Austria. Rather, it was a question of when one of the increasingly frequent local crises would escalate into full-scale war.

During the 1960s, historians attempted to explain the events of World War II and the rise of Nazism, and so began revisiting the question of Germany’s “war guilt” in an effort to determine its responsibility for the outbreak of World War I. This movement developed from the work of Fritz Fischer and his assertion that Germany, particularly Kaiser Wilhelm II and his senior advisors, bore ultimate responsibility for launching a pre-emptive war for global domination.¹ Fischer saw Wilhelm as playing a

¹ Fritz Fischer, *Krieg der Illusionen: die deutsche Politik von 1911 bis 1914* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag und Druckerei, 1969).

subordinate role to industrialists and aristocratic landowners (the *Junkers*) who exerted pressure on the government and thus had more influence than the Kaiser himself. The Fischer thesis inspired a number of like-minded scholars, particularly in Germany and Great Britain, to explore other aspects and results of this German aggression. These included Hans-Ulrich Wehler, who went on to champion the *Sonderweg* theory, which stipulated that Germany somehow “deviated” from the normal course of history before 1914, ultimately resulting in the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis in 1933.² The Fischer thesis carried implications as well for the shift in the Anglo-German relationship prior to World War I as well, most notably in the work of Paul Kennedy, a member of the Fischer school who argued that pre-war British policy was largely formulated as a series of responses to more aggressive German moves. According to Kennedy, it was defensive in the case of military and foreign policy and protectionist in regards to economic and commercial policy.³ Likewise, Isabel Hull, then an American adherent of the Fischer/Wehler school, noted the “primary responsibility which Germany bears for the outbreak of war in 1914” and stressed “Wilhelm’s preference for accepting political advice from men who were his closest friends.”⁴ She argued that the aristocratic Prussian landholding class (the *Junkers*) and the military establishment manipulated Wilhelm and his entourage (the *Umgebung*) in order to resolve internal tensions through an aggressive foreign policy. Inherent in her study was the question of whether or not Wilhelm exercised strong personal rule; she argued that *Umgebung* generally worked around the weak, unstable Kaiser to preserve the *status quo*.

² Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich, 1871-1918*, 5th Ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983).

³ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914* (London: The Ashfield Press, 1980).

⁴ Isabel Hull, *The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1888-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 437.

However, these views of the Anglo-German rivalry and the outbreak of war do not take into account the strong personalities of the heads of state of the two countries: King Edward VII of Great Britain, and Kaiser Wilhelm II of the German Empire. Fischer, and the scholars whom he influenced, tended to focus on structures and social tensions in Germany, rather than on individual personalities. They were also more concerned with the aftermath of the First World War, specifically the rise of the Nazis. In the twenty-first century, we do not envision reigning constitutional monarchs, such as those in Great Britain and Japan, participating in diplomacy and foreign policy. These functions are carried out by elected prime ministers and civil service professionals (although often in the name of the monarch) while the head of state remains largely ceremonial. But prior to 1914, when there were no less than five major ruling royal dynasties⁵ and countless lesser noble families in Europe, monarchs took a far more active role. The German Emperors and the Russian Tsars in particular were authoritarian rulers who often took the lead in formulating government policy. In Great Britain, it is true that Queen Victoria relied heavily upon her Prime Ministers, especially after the death of her consort, Prince Albert, although she found ways to make her opinions and desires known to them. After Victoria's death in 1901, her son Edward would take a far more active role in foreign policy. Kennedy suggests the opposite, however, asserting that although "Kaiser Wilhelm II provides a classic example of the importance of the individual in

⁵ These were: the House of Hanover (Great Britain--Queen Victoria was the last English Hanover; Edward VII belonged to the House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, renamed the House of Windsor in 1917), the Hohenzollerns (Germany), the Hapsburgs (Austria-Hungary), the Romanovs (Russia), and the House of Savoy (Italy).

politics,”⁶ Edward VII had a lesser role, arguing that “[f]ar from the king being the clever director of British foreign policy, he was often puzzled by the course it was taking.”⁷

A number of scholars have recently re-examined the roles played by monarchs in formulating and implementing foreign policy. John C. G. Röhl in particular has refocused scholarly attention on Wilhelm’s role, arguing strongly that the Kaiser had a hand in nearly every aspect of German policy from his accession in 1888 until his abdication in 1918.⁸ His remains the most complete study of Wilhelm to date, and stresses the importance of Wilhelm’s decisions and actions in the outbreak of World War I. Other historians note the prominent role of Edward VII in British policy during the same period. Ian Dunlop argues that although Edward acted strictly within the boundaries of a constitutional monarch, he nevertheless personally created the conditions for a successful rapprochement between Britain and France through the force of his personality and diplomatic acumen.⁹ But even taking into account the constitutional differences between the two countries’ governments, one cannot have it both ways: either a monarch exerts influence over policy (directly or indirectly) or he/she does not. Likewise, David Fromkin argues that Edward VII may not have personally signed alliances between European powers, but he nonetheless was a powerful force behind the scenes. Particularly during the Russo-Japanese War and Moroccan Crisis, while the Kaiser thought he was dealing directly with the President of the United States Fromkin

⁶ Kennedy, 405.

⁷ Kennedy, 402.

⁸ John C. G. Röhl, *Young Wilhelm: The Kaiser’s Early Life, 1859-1888* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and *Wilhelm II: The Kaiser’s Personal Monarchy, 1888-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). His third volume is forthcoming.

⁹ Ian Dunlop, *Edward VII and the Entente Cordiale* (London: Constable & Robinson, Ltd., 2004).

states that the King was the invisible partner, guiding Roosevelt's actions.¹⁰ Lamar Cecil recognizes the key role of both Edward and Wilhelm in conducting diplomacy and guiding their respective countries' foreign policy. More importantly, he notes that both monarchs were keenly aware of the other's influence. He notes that "the Kaiser recognized that his uncle was a major factor in international affairs,"¹¹ and that "Edward VII took the Kaiser at his word that it was *he* who made German policy."¹² Cecil also argues that Wilhelm's view was justified; even though the civil government actually made policy, Edward's expertise aided it.¹³ Finally, Christopher Clark agrees to a point with Hull and Kennedy, arguing that Wilhelm was a marginal figure in German foreign policy, and was influenced heavily by his ministers and handicapped by the loss of Bismarck. However, Clark does not fall into the Fischer sphere, arguing instead that Wilhelm counseled caution to the Austrians in 1914, and advised to everybody who would listen to him (which by that time was indeed a small group) against war. Crucially, he advocates examining the events leading up to the outbreak of war in their proper contexts, and not through the hindsight of post-1918 interpretations.¹⁴

A major factor in monarchs' influence during this period were the interconnections of the major families; the British, German, and Russian royal lines were either intermarried or direct relatives to one another. As will be demonstrated, monarchs often used back-channel methods, circumventing their ministers and writing directly to one another in order to conduct negotiations and convey their desires. The most

¹⁰ David Fromkin, *The King and the Cowboy: Theodore Roosevelt and Edward the Seventh, Secret Partners* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2008).

¹¹ Lamar Cecil, *Wilhelm II: Emperor and Exile, 1900-1941* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 79.

¹² Cecil, *Emperor and Exile*, 127.

¹³ Cecil, *Emperor and Exile*, 127.

¹⁴ Christopher Clark, *Kaiser Wilhelm II: A Life in Power* (London: Penguin, 2009).

connected of all the monarchs was Queen Victoria; she was able to use her position as the greatest matriarch in Europe to influence other Great Powers by reminding them of their family ties and obligations. In no case was this more pronounced than with her grandson, Wilhelm, the son of her daughter Victoria (“Vicky”) and Crown Prince Frederick of Prussia.

The strained relationship—even animosity—between Edward VII and Wilhelm II has been noted many times. In most histories of the causes of World War I, their enmity has been only noted anecdotally and is overshadowed by military and political considerations; the personal relationships are downplayed and discounted. In addition, Wilhelm is usually portrayed as the instigator, and his own claims that Edward was attempting to isolate him are often ridiculed. Kennedy in particular states that even though “Edward’s dislike of Germany was chiefly rooted in personal factors, the up-and-down relationship with his nephew,”¹⁵ the king’s “influence was...both inconsistent and lacking in direction.”¹⁶ Further, he argues that “[l]east of all can it be argued that Edward was the purposeful ‘encircler’ of Germany, as the Kaiser claimed.”¹⁷ However, the family dynamic between the monarchs played a larger role in Anglo-German relations, especially between 1901 and 1909, than has been acknowledged by Kennedy and others. The friction between the two was rooted in family lineage, royal marriage, empire-building, and personal insecurities. The result was increased tension and hostility between the two most powerful empires in Europe, which would eventually end in the ruin of both.

¹⁵ Kennedy, 401.

¹⁶ Kennedy, 401.

¹⁷ Kennedy, 402.

This thesis argues that the intense personal rivalry between Edward VII and Wilhelm II became a major factor in the Anglo-German naval build-up, a shift in the balance of an already shaky alliance structure, and the political isolation of Germany in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of World War I. The death of Queen Victoria was a major turning point; by the end of the nineteenth century Britain and Germany appeared headed for alliance, but during the reign of Edward VII British policy reversed, favoring alliance with France. The Queen had exerted a stabilizing influence on both her grandson, Wilhelm II, and her own ministers through the force of her own personality. After she was gone, however, Edward VII was free to pursue a policy which pulled Britain away from Germany and closer to France, for reasons which will be explained. Another was the Russo-Japanese War, which altered the naval balance in both Europe and overseas and forced Britain to reconsider her strategic posture. The resulting “naval race” was not a reaction to any imminent threat from Germany; rather, it was a calculated decision based upon British reevaluation of its naval needs. These needs were dictated by a strong personality in the Admiralty (the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir John Fisher) who, with the king’s support, took advantage of the situation to promote a pet project.

This thesis combines evidence from secondary sources and primary source material which deal with both the personalities involved and their policies. This material includes personal correspondence of Wilhelm and Edward, reports of naval attachés in London and Berlin, and contemporary analyses of both the naval situation and the monarchs involved. This thesis is roughly divided into two sections: the first will trace the development of enmity between Edward VII and Wilhelm II, as well as compare their

relationship with their dealings with other rulers; the second will examine political and military developments during Edward's reign, and how they directly contributed to the Anglo-German naval build-up. The intent of this thesis is not to apologize for the militarism and expansionism of the Prussian-dominated German military. If at times the argument appears sympathetic to Wilhelm II, it is because he was not the power-hungry war lord with a master plan for European or world domination that Allied propaganda and subsequent biographers made him out to be; rather, a close examination suggests that he was caught between two different worlds, English and Prussian, and was constantly trying to fit into both. Wilhelm II was not a Hitler or a Stalin; he was a schoolyard bully with an identity crisis. He was never able to reconcile the transnational nature of his family with his own German nationalism and desire to be the leader of a unified German nation. With the death of his grandmother, Queen Victoria, and the accession of Edward VII to the throne, Wilhelm stopped trying to be English. It is no coincidence that Edward's reign, during the years 1901-1910, was an intense period of political and military activity aimed at isolating Germany. These were a direct result of the rivalry between Edward VII and Wilhelm II, and would guarantee that Great Britain and Germany would be opponents in the next war.

CHAPTER II

FAMILY TIES

Edward and Queen Victoria

Many contemporaries, especially Germans, saw the rivalry between Great Britain and Germany as a personal duel between King Edward VII and Kaiser Wilhelm II.¹⁸ However, the root of the rivalry really began with Queen Victoria herself. She was a scion of the House of Hanover, a German dynasty which had ruled Great Britain since George I in the eighteenth century, and was the granddaughter of George III. Born in 1819, she was raised by her German-born mother, Princess Victoria of Saxe-Coburg. Victoria herself spoke only German until age three, and later stated that “I have a feeling for our dear little Germany which I cannot describe.”¹⁹ In 1840, Victoria married a German prince from her mother’s homeland, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg²⁰, and later that year her first daughter, Victoria, was born. The Queen showed an affinity for Germany all her life, and arranged the marriage of her daughter (“Vicky”) to Crown Prince Frederick of Prussia in 1858. Frederick was handsome, if not overly intelligent, but Vicky was seen as “headstrong and purposeful” and the two would complement each other. Unspoken was Queen Victoria’s apparent hope to fulfill her husband Prince

¹⁸ Rudolf Martin, *Kaiser Wilhelm II und König Eduard VII* (Berlin: Verlag Dr. Wedefind & Co. G.m.b.h., 1907), 28.

¹⁹ Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnaught: Britain, Germany, and the Coming of the Great War* (New York: Random House, 1991), 3.

²⁰ While officially an arranged marriage, Victoria and Albert were deeply in love with each other and maintained a strong connection that lasted beyond Albert’s premature death in 1861.

Albert's vision of a liberal Europe led by England and progressive German states.²¹ Prince Albert Edward, the future Edward VII, was born in 1841. Where his sister was the darling of the royal family Edward managed to disappoint his mother from an early age. Victoria commented, "I feel very sad about him. He is so idle and weak."²² This second pregnancy had been unplanned, and the delivery was extremely difficult. Victoria blamed the difficult labor on the Edward, and never forgave him for it.²³ Bertie, as he was known to the family, was in his youth rather like Prince Harry was in the early twenty-first century: hard-drinking, gambling, a heavy smoker, and often eating to excess. In his own words, "I had no childhood,"²⁴ and rebelled against his parents' expectations. As a child, he had difficulty reading and learning, and may have suffered from either dyslexia or attention deficit disorder. He was also prone to fits of violent rage.²⁵ Bertie also engaged in illicit affairs with women outside his marriage, and it was one such affair in 1860 while he was a young army officer which permanently damaged his relationship with Queen Victoria. Ironically, Prince Albert had initially forbidden him to join the military, believing that academic pursuits were more important and fearing the "temptations and unprofitable companionships of military life."²⁶ Nonetheless, Bertie joined the army, and would remain interested in military affairs throughout his life. Indeed, this was something he shared with his nephew Wilhelm, although the latter's military leanings have received much more attention. As Prince of Wales (and later as King) Edward followed the campaigns and active operations of the

²¹ Massie, 24.

²² Massie, 8.

²³ Fromkin, 16-17.

²⁴ Miranda Carter, *George, Nicholas and Wilhelm: Three Royal Cousins and the Road to World War I* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 32.

²⁵ Fromkin, 22-23.

²⁶ J. P. C. Sewell, Ed., *Personal Letters of King Edward VII* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, 1931), 111.

British Army closely, usually through his friend and Guards officer, Arthur Paget. Also like Wilhelm, Bertie offered commentary and his advice on strategy.²⁷

Bertie's marital infidelity lasted throughout his life, even during his reign as King. His relationship with Alice (Mrs. George) Keppel was an open secret among the British Royal Family and other relatives.²⁸ He also may have maintained a long relationship with Minnie Paget (an American), the wife of a Guards officer and close friend. Bertie communicated with her by letter frequently, and she may have served as nothing more than emotional support for him. However, the King's personal carriage was often seen outside her London home.²⁹ One night while on active duty in 1860, several brother officers smuggled an Irish "actress" named Nellie Clifden (well known in the British Army for her many relationships with officers) into Bertie's tent, apparently as a prank. The Queen became convinced that the shame of Bertie's disgrace in part caused her husband Albert's death in 1861.³⁰ She told her daughter that "I never can or shall look at him without a shudder."³¹ The Queen then began nearly three decades of mourning, during which time British policy was increasingly directed by Prime Ministers, despite Victoria's inclination to personal rule. Bertie thereafter cultivated a reputation throughout Europe as a playboy, and made no secret of his preference for Paris and its reputed darker side. He enjoyed both its gentlemen's clubs and brothels, usually travelling under an assumed name (although just about everybody knew perfectly well

²⁷ Sewell, 116-120.

²⁸ Cecil, *Emperor and Exile*, 79; Carter, 235-236.

²⁹ Sewell, 79.

³⁰ Massie, 11. Prince Albert travelled to Bertie's duty station to berate him for the incident; during the trip he contracted typhoid fever and died shortly after his return to London.

³¹ Fromkin, 42.

who he really was). Bertie even briefly appeared as the “Prince of Scots” in an Émile Zola novel about a French prostitute.³²

It may have been in part due to his relationship with his mother, but Edward’s sympathies never lay with his German relations, even though his older sister was married to the Crown Prince of Prussia.³³ In fact, Edward later became so outspoken about his dislike of Germans (and Austrians) and his sympathy for France that Queen Victoria and Prime Minister Gladstone had to officially prohibit him from speaking publicly on the subject.³⁴ Edward had developed an affinity for France, especially Paris, from an early age. As a child during an 1855 state visit, he had even told the French Emperor, Napoleon III, “I should like to be your son.”³⁵ It was under the tutelage of Napoleon III that Edward had been coached in the art of diplomacy at age 14.³⁶ He was apparently coached in other things in the salons of Paris; Edward was said to enjoy the women in that city more than anywhere else, perhaps because looser morals existed there than in Victorian England. Whatever the cause of his Francophilia, his animosity towards Germany would soon fully mature. Edward, now the Prince of Wales, had married Princess Alexandra of Denmark (“Alix”) in March, 1863. At the time of their wedding, Queen Victoria had told Alix to transfer her loyalties from Denmark, but apparently not only to England: “The German element has to be maintained.”³⁷ In November 1864, using the accession of Alexandra’s father, Christian IX, to the Danish throne as a

³² Carter, 33.

³³ Martin, 25.

³⁴ Massie, 18.

³⁵ Massie, 17. Queen Victoria’s reaction to this is not recorded.

³⁶ Edward Legge, *King Edward in His True Colours* (Boston: Small, Maynard, & Co., 1913), 8-9.

³⁷ Fromkin, 47.

pretense, Prussia attacked Denmark and occupied the province of Schleswig.³⁸ The invasion caused a very public and embarrassing rift within the British royal family. Queen Victoria and her daughter Vicky, now the Crown Princess of Prussia, supported the Prussian king, Wilhelm I. The Queen was more concerned with maintaining British ties with Prussia, and did not want to involve the British royal family in Danish-Prussian antagonism. However, the Prince of Wales and his Danish-born wife naturally enough supported the King of Denmark, and were outspoken in their opposition to the invasion.³⁹ Christian IX himself angered his daughter by conceding defeat and attempted to foster friendly relations with the Hohenzollerns thereafter.⁴⁰ It would take years for the family to fully recover from the event, but Edward forever carried a grudge against Germany.

Wilhelm and Queen Victoria

Across the North Sea, the family dynamic was proving just as complicated. Many conservative Germans, most notably King Wilhelm I⁴¹ and his Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, quite understandably (and correctly) viewed the marriage of the Princess Royal of England to the Crown Prince of Prussia as an attempt by Queen Victoria to exert undue influence over the Prussian throne.⁴² Indeed, Vicky hoped to reform Germany, once her husband attained the throne, into a more liberal state based upon the British

³⁸ Austria-Hungary annexed Holstein at the same time; Prussia obtained control of that province following its 1866 war with Austria.

³⁹ Massie, 12.

⁴⁰ Cecil, Vol. I, 266.

⁴¹ Following the founding of the Second Reich in 1871, he assumed the title “Kaiser” in addition to the Prussian title.

⁴² Massie, 21.

model, and to establish an Anglo-German alliance to secure the peace of Europe.⁴³ Wilhelm II would echo this sentiment in particular on a number of occasions. As a result of this belief, however, many Germans never fully accepted Vicky, and indeed she was distrusted by the conservative establishment. It was into this environment that Prince Wilhelm, the future Kaiser Wilhelm II, was born in 1859.

Wilhelm was caught between two worlds from the moment of his birth. As he grew up he was constantly torn between his Anglophile parents, Vicky and Frederick, and the Prussian military monarchy of his grandfather, Wilhelm I.⁴⁴ Indeed, Wilhelm grew up listening to his mother whispering to herself, “Britannia rules the waves.”⁴⁵ She hoped to raise her son in the image of both her husband and her father; she wrote to Bertie that “I think he will be like his Papa, but do you know that sometimes he reminds me of you...”⁴⁶ Wilhelm’s obsession with all things naval most likely can be traced to his mother; Vicky encouraged his interest in the Royal Navy, sparked during a visit to England as a toddler, in the hope that it would lessen the Prussian influence on him. A replica of a sailing vessel mast, complete with sails and rigging, were even installed as a playground for the young prince at the palace in Potsdam.⁴⁷ Thus a certain measure of blame for the future German naval build-up can be laid squarely at the feet of the British Royal Family.

⁴³ John C. G. Röhl. “The Worst of Enemies: Kaiser Wilhelm II and His Uncle Edward VII.” In *Wilhelmine Germany and Edwardian Britain: Essays in Cultural Affinity*, edited by Dominik Geppert & Robert Gerwarth, 41-66. London: Oxford University Press, 2008, 41.

⁴⁴ Röhl, “Worst of Enemies,” 42.

⁴⁵ Röhl, “Worst of Enemies,” 42.

⁴⁶ Röhl, *Young Wilhelm*, 63.

⁴⁷ Cecil, *Prince and Emperor*, 264.

Queen Victoria urged her daughter to allow Wilhelm his independence, even though she consistently refused it to her own son.⁴⁸ She apparently realized too late that she had been too strict in Bertie's upbringing and education, and urged Vicky not to let Wilhelm's tutors to be too harsh.⁴⁹ Wilhelm succeeded at academics where Bertie had failed: he excelled in history, literature, religion, and languages.⁵⁰ However, as he grew into adolescence, Wilhelm came increasingly under the influence of Bismarck and the Prussian military establishment, and came to dislike the liberal, pro-English sentiments of his parents. He was also extremely close to his grandfather, with whom he often had private suppers.⁵¹ In addition, Wilhelm's wife Augusta (known to the family as "Dona") utterly hated England. She characterized the English as "liberals and hypocrites," and did not get along well with Vicky.⁵² The origin of Augusta's dislike of England was uncertain; she had been a princess of Schleswig-Holstein, the Danish province finally annexed by Prussia in 1866. It is possible that her animosity stemmed from failure of the British to come to Denmark's aid, but more likely that it was due to personal rivalry between Dona and Alix; both came from rival branches of the Danish royal family.⁵³ She was universally disliked by the British Royal Family, and Queen Victoria referred to her as "a poor little insignificant princess."⁵⁴

Wilhelm ascended to the German throne in 1888, the "year of three emperors." Wilhelm I had died earlier that year, succeeded by his son who became Frederick III. However, Frederick had for years been secretly suffering from cancer of the throat, and

⁴⁸ Fromkin, 43-44.

⁴⁹ Cecil, *Prince and Emperor*, 25.

⁵⁰ Fromkin, 88-89.

⁵¹ Massie, 36.

⁵² Massie, 33-34.

⁵³ Cecil, *Prince and Emperor*, 267.

⁵⁴ Cecil, *Prince and Emperor*, 84.

died only 99 days into his reign. Wilhelm II became estranged from his mother upon Frederick's death.⁵⁵ However, he made overtures of friendship with England and his grandmother, Queen Victoria, almost immediately:

I am a friend of England. The prevailing sentiment among large sections of the middle and lower classes of my own people is not friendly to England. I am, therefore, so to speak, in a minority in my own land; but it is a minority of the best elements.⁵⁶

In the meantime, Wilhelm's mother Vicky, who went into semi-seclusion, kept the British royal family informed about his official hostility to British policies.⁵⁷ For Queen Victoria herself, however, Wilhelm professed nothing but devotion. He always believed that the Queen thought of him as her favorite grandson, and said that the German "people have no idea how much I love the Queen."⁵⁸ In his youth, Wilhelm had spent a great deal of time at Osborne House in southern England,⁵⁹ where he had referred to Queen Victoria as "Granny" and played at her feet.⁶⁰ In June 1889, the Queen appointed Wilhelm II as an Admiral in the British Royal Navy.⁶¹ Wilhelm, long an admirer of the Royal Navy, was delighted, and in the words of Herbert Bismarck, became an "Anglomaniac."⁶² The Kaiser certainly lost no time in praising his adopted fleet:

The British Navy is for the German Navy not only a model of technical and scientific perfection, but its heroes also, Nelson, for instance, and others, have ever been and ever shall be, the guiding star of German naval officers and crews.⁶³

⁵⁵ *The Last of the War Lords: New Lights on the Life and Personality of Kaiser Wilhelm II, His Relations with Britons and American, with Artists and Writers, and Some Account of His Love-Affairs* (London: Grant Richards, Ltd., 1918), 157.

⁵⁶ Kaiser Wilhelm II, *My Ideas and Ideals* (Boston: John W. Luce & Company, 1914), 61-62.

⁵⁷ Röhl, "Worst of Enemies," 46.

⁵⁸ Röhl, "Worst of Enemies," 50.

⁵⁹ Röhl, "Worst of Enemies," 58.

⁶⁰ Massie, 20.

⁶¹ Exchange of military appointments was a common practice between monarchs.

⁶² Röhl, "Worst of Enemies," 49.

⁶³ Wilhelm, 62.

To the amusement and occasional irritation of Royal Navy officers, Wilhelm II began demanding salutes as befitting his rank while on board his yacht, the *Hohenzollern*.⁶⁴ While in Athens to attend his sister Sophie's wedding, the Kaiser even ordered the British Union Jack raised alongside his imperial standard on a German battleship.⁶⁵

Queen Victoria, however, had not changed; she still could not interfere with German politics but always managed to make her influence and desires felt through letters to her family members.⁶⁶ Wilhelm's relationship was never as warm with his grandmother as he claimed. Although as a child he had referred to Queen Victoria as "dear Grandmama" and a "dear duck,"⁶⁷ as he matured Wilhelm often referred to her privately as the "old hag" whenever she rebuked him.⁶⁸ As early as 1888, Wilhelm was writing that the Queen treated him "more as a grandson than the German Kaiser."⁶⁹ Retractions of official invitations were a favorite way for Victoria to show her displeasure; when in May 1899 Wilhelm was not invited to the Queen's birthday party, he wrote in a huff, "the arduous work of years was destroyed--to make the two Nations understand each other and respect their aspirations and wishes—by one blow." Not to be outdone, Victoria replied "I doubt whether any Sovereign ever wrote in such terms to another Sovereign, and that Sovereign his own grandmother..."⁷⁰ Wilhelm found other, more subtle ways to provoke his grandmother. One of his favorites was to order his envoys to appear at audiences with the Queen in full military regalia, despite her well-

⁶⁴ Legge, 53.

⁶⁵ Röhl, "Worst of enemies," 50.

⁶⁶ Massie, 37.

⁶⁷ Cecil, *Prince and Emperor*, 264.

⁶⁸ Cecil, *Prince and Emperor*, 84.

⁶⁹ Röhl, "Worst of Enemies," 48.

⁷⁰ Röhl, "Worst of Enemies," 52-53.

known standing orders to the contrary.⁷¹ To Victoria, this was proof that Wilhelm was indeed becoming the “conceited Prussian” as she had always feared.⁷²

Bertie and Willy

In stark contrast to the subtle prodding and chiding between grandmother and grandson, the rivalry between uncle and nephew was open warfare almost from the start. Indeed, the relationship between Edward and Wilhelm was only calm when they were apart, when a flurry of letters would temporarily smooth things over until the next incident.⁷³ Both men were possessed of delicate egos and of quick tempers. According to Wilhelm, it was Edward who was the initial instigator:

I was forced to cultivate this habit of chaffing in the English manner, in order to be able to give it back in change to my Uncle of England. Now it happens with King Edward...that though very fond of poking his little fun at other people, he resents very much that his victims should indulge in anything approaching retort...But I am an Emperor, and my Uncle's equal; consequently I was under no obligation to hold my tongue. At first, and as a young man, I used to sit silent, pretend to smile and to like it; but I found his weak spot by retorting once or twice, and so got to like the spot that I always welcomed the change of trying his rather irascible temper...from this change in my attitude towards him he began to dislike and to avoid my society.⁷⁴

Edward Legge notes that Wilhelm in fact took so much pleasure from provoking Edward that his “unguarded and reckless criticisms of his uncle's private life...were calculated to arise the ire and the resentment of King Edward.”⁷⁵ The ire of Edward was apparently legendary enough in English social circles; the hard part was to know where the limits were. The Prince of Wales, to put it bluntly, could dish it out but couldn't take it. On

⁷¹ Legge, 52.

⁷² Cecil, *Prince and Emperor*, 80.

⁷³ Legge, 49.

⁷⁴ War Lords, 165-166.

⁷⁵ Legge, 57.

one occasion at Sandringham, the Prince's residence, an intoxicated noble guest crossed the line and made a joking comment to Edward about his waistline, noting "Tum-Tum, you're very fat"; the offender was ejected from the house by morning, *persona non grata*.⁷⁶ Edward was even rumored to have knocked Wilhelm himself to the ground in the billiards room of Windsor Castle for some unrecorded offense.⁷⁷

From Edward's perspective, the problem with Wilhelm was not that he was right, it was that he lacked tact, and was a fussy busybody.⁷⁸ For example, in 1885, Wilhelm wrote to his grandfather, Wilhelm I, that during his annual trip to Marienbad, Prince Edward had had the "stupidity to be seen emerging from one of Vienna's most infamous brothels in broad daylight."⁷⁹ Earlier that year, Wilhelm had written Tsar Alexander III of Russia regarding Edward's impending visit to Berlin, and noted "his fake character and penchant for intrigue."⁸⁰ He also disapproved of Bertie's frequent extramarital liaisons, especially with his longtime mistress, Mrs. Keppel.⁸¹ However, Wilhelm committed a serious public insult to Edward in the summer of 1889, when both were visiting Vienna at the same time. The Kaiser adamantly refused to meet with the then-Prince of Wales, and actually demanded that he leave the city for the remainder of Wilhelm's visit. This Edward did, to avoid an incident, but the British royal family and public were incensed.⁸² Wilhelm had been retaliating against a perceived slight by Edward at his father's funeral, and raged that the Prince of Wales treated him "as an uncle treats a nephew instead of recognizing that he was an emperor who, though young,

⁷⁶ Massie, 15. "Tum-Tum" was a nickname used by Bertie's intimate circle of friends, but never to his face.

⁷⁷ War Lords, 169.

⁷⁸ Legge, 56.

⁷⁹ Röhl, "Worst of Enemies," 47.

⁸⁰ Röhl, "Worst of Enemies," 44-45.

⁸¹ Cecil, *Emperor and Exile*, 79.

⁸² Röhl, "Worst of Enemies," 48. This was the infamous "Vienna Incident" noted by many historians.

had still been of age for some time.”⁸³ As Lamar Cecil notes, this complaint was probably accurate, and could also be applied to Queen Victoria’s treatment of the Kaiser as well. As matriarch of the extended European dynastic families, she made the rules and expected everyone else to follow them.⁸⁴

In 1890, Wilhelm wrote a letter to the Prince of Wales himself in the wake of the Tranby Croft gambling scandal, in which the Kaiser criticized Edward for “holding the position of a Colonel of Prussian Hussars, embroiling himself in a gambling squabble, and playing with men young enough to be his sons.”⁸⁵ This letter had the double effect of angering not only Edward, but Queen Victoria herself, not least because she disapproved of her son’s activities and was not in a position to defend him. As it was, the incident became public, and was accompanied by an angry outcry over Bertie’s “questionable pleasures” and the “doubtful society” he was perceived to associate with.⁸⁶

One contemporary writer suggested that Wilhelm may have been trying to discredit Edward in order to position himself to wear the English crown. The theory went that as Queen Victoria’s grandson, the Kaiser was in line for the throne, and had convinced himself that if Edward was found to be unsuitable to succeed the Queen, then he would be asked to do it. To be fair there was precedent, including William of Orange and, arguably, William the Conqueror,⁸⁷ but the theory ignored Edward’s son George, who was ahead of Wilhelm in the line of succession. However, there was evidence that

⁸³ Cecil, *Prince and Emperor*, 268.

⁸⁴ Cecil, *Prince and Emperor*, 268-269.

⁸⁵ Legge, 58. Decades before it was made famous by Ian Fleming, baccarat was illegal in late-Victorian England. The cheating scandal grew from a night of gambling at the home of one of Edward’s close associates, and involved a number of Army officers. Edward became involved because he had been present, and was called upon to testify at a military court of honor.

⁸⁶ Sewell, 23.

⁸⁷ William the Conqueror was not technically “invited” but controversy exists over whether Edward the Confessor actually named him as successor or not.

reports critical of the Prince of Wales' private life which appeared in British newspapers during the years 1891 to 1903 were secretly bankrolled from Berlin.⁸⁸ For his own part, Wilhelm was convinced that Edward was behind attacks on him published in the same British press.⁸⁹ He complained bitterly to his court:

He is a Satan...You can't believe what a Satan he is...My uncle never seems to realize that I am a sovereign, but treats me as if I were a little boy.⁹⁰

After Queen Victoria appointed Wilhelm an admiral in the Royal Navy, Edward took particular pleasure in ridiculing his nephew's maritime activities. In 1893, during a visit to England, the Prince of Wales commented contemptuously to an associate that "one could not help fearing that he would do himself harm."⁹¹ It was about this time the Wilhelm began racing his yacht, the *Meteor*, at the Cowes Regatta. Ironically, it was crewed by English sailors.⁹² Edward always entered his own yacht, *Britannia*, and managed to beat his nephew for four straight years. Following his defeat in 1895, Wilhelm never personally raced again at Cowes.⁹³ He had only participated to try to best his uncle, and left in a huff when he could not. Edward added insult to injury when in 1895 he asked his nephew to postpone the carefully-planned opening of the Kiel Canal because it conflicted with Royal Ascot week! Edward's son, the Duke of York and future King George V, also got into the act, stating that he would only attend the ceremony on the condition that Wilhelm would not appoint him a German admiral.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ War Lords, 179-180.

⁸⁹ Cecil, *Emperor and Exile*, 183.

⁹⁰ Cecil, *Emperor and Exile*, 79.

⁹¹ Röhl, "Worst of Enemies," 53.

⁹² Sewell, 156. Sources differ as to whether *Meteor* was built in an English or American shipyard. See also Patrick J. Kelly, *Tirpitz and the Imperial German Navy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

⁹³ Massie, 154-155.

⁹⁴ Röhl, "Worst of Enemies," 54.

The year 1901 saw a brief warm period between Edward and Wilhelm. On 22 January 1901, Queen Victoria died, and Prince Edward ascended the throne as King Edward VII. Wilhelm attended his grandmother's funeral (he had been present at her deathbed, and was allowed five private minutes with her⁹⁵), and was received warmly by King Edward at his personal estate, Sandringham. Only seven months later Vicky died, and the Kaiser was again in London for a royal funeral.⁹⁶ However, relations between the two monarchs soon soured. In 1902, King Edward gave Osborne House, a property owned by Queen Victoria where Wilhelm had spent much of his childhood, to the Royal Navy for its use. Duchess Louise of Argyll, the King's sister and the Kaiser's aunt, petitioned Edward to present the property to Wilhelm as a summer residence, but to no avail.⁹⁷

The rhetoric between uncle and nephew began to spiral out of control. In January 1902, Edward wrote to Wilhelm in response to an anti-British speech by German Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow, which made reference to alleged British Army atrocities in the recently-ended Boer War:

Ever since my accession, now nearly a year ago, I have had but one desire, my dear William, and that is that our two Countries should 'pull well' together in spite of the strong Boer feeling in yours, which, however, they have a perfect right to express without heaping insults on my brave army, of which you are a Field Marshal.⁹⁸

The King also undoubtedly remembered the Kaiser's unsolicited military advice, in which Wilhelm had compared the war to a football match and that the British Army

⁹⁵ Fromkin, 163.

⁹⁶ Röhl, "Worst of Enemies," 54-55.

⁹⁷ Röhl, "Worst of Enemies," 58.

⁹⁸ Röhl, "Worst of Enemies," 57.

should “accept clearly its defeat with equanimity.”⁹⁹ Clearly, the King had inherited some of his mother’s knack for reminding people of their family ties, and who the senior members of the family were. At about the same time, Edward expressed his personal opinion of Wilhelm to a French journalist:

Wilhelm is captious, touchy, sensitive, incapable of swallowing an offense to his personal vanity in silence, apt to imagine insults where no insult is intended, ready for outbursts at all times, ever careless of their effect and results.¹⁰⁰

But he did not stop there. Speaking in 1904 at about the time the Anglo-French colonial treaty was signed, the King referred to the German Kaiser as “no more than a political ‘enfant terrible,’ and one can have no faith in any of his assurances. His own pleasure seems to be to set every country by the ears...”¹⁰¹ Not to be outdone, Wilhelm called Edward an “idiot” for suggesting that Germany return the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to France.¹⁰² In 1905, the Kaiser became irritated after staying with Edward at Sandringham because the King apparently did not have any interest in a reciprocal visit to Germany. So he refused to allow his son, Crown Prince Wilhelm, to accept Edward’s invitation to visit England. In retaliation, Edward refused to allow his son George, now the Prince of Wales, to attend Crown Prince Wilhelm’s wedding in Berlin.¹⁰³

Relations had reached the breaking point by 1908, when American journalist William Bayard Hale visited the Kaiser. He wrote that Wilhelm “appeared to be very bitter against his Uncle King Edward, and accused him of trying to set the other powers against Germany.” Hale noted that the Kaiser “poured a steady stream of insult upon the

⁹⁹ Cecil, *Prince and Emperor*, 327.

¹⁰⁰ War Lords, 164-165.

¹⁰¹ Peter Padfield, *The Great Naval Race: The Anglo-German Naval Rivalry, 1900-1914* (London: Hart-Davis, Macgibbon Ltd., 1974), 128.

¹⁰² Röhl, “Worst of Enemies,” 48.

¹⁰³ Röhl, “Worst of Enemies,” 59.

English.”¹⁰⁴ Edward, upon reading the journalist’s account, commented, “I know the German Emperor hates me and never loses an opportunity of saying so (behind my back), whilst I have always been kind and nice to him.”¹⁰⁵

Relations with Other Heads Of State

Wilhelm may have had a contentious relationship with Edward VII, but he had warmer dealings with his cousin, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia. The two monarchs wrote frequently to each other, and Wilhelm often expressed his innermost feelings about issues, events, other countries, and especially other monarchs. Both men preferred authoritarian rule, and shared a mutual dislike of English-style constitutional monarchy.¹⁰⁶ It appears that the two monarchs also shared similar opinions of Edward VII:

The ‘Arch-intriguer—and mischiefmaker’ in Europe as you rightly called the King of England has been hard at work in the last months...His fleet is in the act of visiting our shores and I think this will open the eyes of many Germans who are still loth [sic] to vote money for extension of our Fleet.¹⁰⁷

A great deal of Wilhelm’s personal correspondence involved military or naval subject matter; many scholars have correctly pointed out this obsession of the Kaiser. Indeed, he often gave (probably unsolicited) military advice to Nicholas during the Russo-Japanese War, working out his own plan of mobilization for the Russian war effort:

When the war broke out in February I worked out a plan of Mobilisation on my own account founded upon the number of Jap[anese] Divisions of 1st line. These being 10-12 Div. it gives 20 Russ[ian] Div[isions] absolute

¹⁰⁴ Röhl, “Worst of Enemies,” 64-65.

¹⁰⁵ Röhl, “Worst of Enemies,” 59.

¹⁰⁶ Clay, Catrine, *King, Kaiser, Tsar* (New York: Walker & Co., 2006), 173. They also agreed in hatred of socialists and their criticism of the British during the Boer War.

¹⁰⁷ Isaac Don Levine, *Letters from the Kaiser to the Czar* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1920), 184-185.

supremacy over them, that means 10 Army Corps. Of these 4 Siberian Corps may be deducted as being [sic] on the spot forming the Manchourian [sic] Army, it leaves 6 Corps to be sent from Russia...That was what I expected would be sent out and what would be sufficient to win with...¹⁰⁸

Almost as an afterthought Wilhelm rather belatedly continued:

I did not venture to write you my ideas as it is not my business to meddle with your affairs, and I was afraid of your telling me to mind my own business...¹⁰⁹

Obviously the only person whose business Wilhelm had no qualms about “meddling” in was Edward VII; here he seems genuinely concerned about remaining on friendly terms with Nicholas. For his own part, Nicholas shared Wilhelm’s belief that international crises should be kept in the family, as it were, and handled by “royal colleagues.”¹¹⁰ However, he was generally cool to Wilhelm’s overtures; even though he lacked the diplomatic skills of his dynastic relatives, he nonetheless sensed the Kaiser’s instability and unpredictability, referring to him as “nervous and ill-mannered.”¹¹¹ He also felt (probably with some justification) that Wilhelm only wanted to be friendly with Russia to cause difficulties for France and Britain. This attitude was enhanced by the fact that the Tsarina Alexandra (yet another cousin of the Kaiser, this time from a German family) despised Wilhelm and considered him “a clown.”¹¹²

Edward also devoted a great deal of his personal diplomacy towards Nicholas II, also his nephew (by marriage). His intentions were no more benevolent than Wilhelm’s, but instead of constantly pestering the Tsar with letters and visits to St. Petersburg, he

¹⁰⁸ Levine, 118-119.

¹⁰⁹ Levine, 119.

¹¹⁰ Clay, 195.

¹¹¹ Clay, 189.

¹¹² Cecil, *Emperor and Exile*, 13.

presented the image of “benign amiability”¹¹³ and described Nicholas II as “weak as water.”¹¹⁴ Bertie had first visited Russia in 1866, for the purpose of restoring friendly relations following the Crimean War. He returned in 1894 for Tsar Alexander III’s funeral, and stayed for Nicholas II’s wedding. This extended visit had had political and diplomatic purposes as well; Bertie noted that “our stay there from a political point of view has been a very useful one...”¹¹⁵ Although personally suspicious of the Russians, his visits nonetheless had the desired effect on Anglo-Russian relations: both the Russian and British press poured out praise for the then-Prince of Wales, the latter seeming to be grateful to report something other than his scandals and indiscretions. Edward himself enjoyed playing the role of diplomatic intermediary, and noted that his relationship with the new Tsar gave “assurance of the benefits which would come of an alliance between England and Russia.”¹¹⁶ For his part, Nicholas provided the King with information (often first-hand) about Wilhelm’s comments. Present to observe a mock torpedo attack in 1907, the Tsar reported that the Kaiser had commented to him that “I wish *Dreadnought* were over there and that Fisher was in the middle of it.”¹¹⁷

An interesting counterpoint to the European monarchs’ relationships might be found in examining how they viewed (and were viewed by) U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt. In particular, Edward cultivated a close relationship with Roosevelt almost as soon as both became heads-of-state in 1901. The two men seemed to share more than the year their reign and administration, respectively, began; they also had a common

¹¹³ Cecil, *Emperor and Exile*, 14.

¹¹⁴ Clay, 173.

¹¹⁵ Sewell, 224-225.

¹¹⁶ Carter, 120-124.

¹¹⁷ Perry, 283. See below for an explanation of HMS *Dreadnought* and Admiral Sir John Fisher.

worldview. Both men apparently felt that English-speaking peoples should dominate the world. Edward as much as said so in a letter to Roosevelt:

I look forward with confidence to the co-operation of the English-speaking races becoming the most powerful civilizing factor in the policy of the world.¹¹⁸

It is crucial to compare this statement by the King of England with the view held by supporters of the Fischer thesis and others that the German Kaiser was bent on world domination; clearly others were keen on achieving this goal. Edward and Roosevelt therefore can be seen as acting like *de facto* allies, even though their respective legislatures would never approve a formal one. Their “special relationship” was based upon British acceptance and recognition of the Monroe Doctrine, thus giving the United States its own sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere.¹¹⁹ This policy was tested in 1902 during a Venezuelan civil war in which German and British commerce and citizens were directly endangered. A squadron composed of German as well as British and Italian warships blockaded the Venezuelan coast, and even bombarded shore facilities. Roosevelt invoked the Monroe Doctrine and activated the United States fleet under Admiral George Dewey (the hero of Manila): London and Berlin backed down.¹²⁰ It was partly for this reason, in fact, that most of the British cabinet mistrusted Roosevelt, with Foreign Minister Lansdowne opining that “Roosevelt terrifies me almost as much as the German Emperor.”¹²¹ Roosevelt personally saw American and British interests abroad as essentially identical, including sympathy for France, something he could not publicly announce in the current isolationist climate in America. In addition, both

¹¹⁸ Fromkin, 170.

¹¹⁹ Fromkin, 174.

¹²⁰ Kelly, 234.

¹²¹ Fromkin, 171.

Edward and Roosevelt believed that the best way to ensure peace was through massive military build-ups as a deterrent. The President had always believed that war was a good thing for any country to undertake from time to time. This sentiment changed somewhat following his service during the Spanish-American War in 1898 but he still viewed it as occasionally necessary.¹²² In a speech to the (American) Naval War College in 1897, the President stated that “No triumph of peace is quite so great as the supreme triumphs of war...the minute that a race loses the hard fighting virtues, then...it has lost its proud right to stand as the equal of the best.”¹²³ Enthusiasm for martial pursuits, then, was not limited to kings and kaisers.

Roosevelt’s relationship with Wilhelm, on the other hand, was anything but straightforward. The President was in a position to compare the Kaiser with his uncle, Edward VII, and contrasted them as, as Lamar Cecil shows, “one a ‘jumpy’ troublemaker and the other an effective agent in European diplomacy.”¹²⁴ In fact, he treated the Kaiser in much the same way that Wilhelm treated Nicholas II: his standard practice in negotiations with Wilhelm was to flatter and praise him.¹²⁵ Privately, however, Roosevelt believed he was a megalomaniac¹²⁶ and that Germany posed the greatest long-term threat to world peace. He believed that much of this threat came from the person of Wilhelm himself, noting the “incommensurable vanity” and “intense egoism” of the Kaiser.¹²⁷ For his part, Wilhelm practically hero-worshipped Roosevelt. According to von Bülow:

¹²² Fromkin, 158, 169.

¹²³ Carter, 216.

¹²⁴ Cecil, 95.

¹²⁵ Fromkin, 199.

¹²⁶ Cecil, 64.

¹²⁷ Cecil, 105.

Theodore Roosevelt, the President of the United States, exercised a quite particular fascination over the Kaiser. “That’s my man!” he used to say, as soon as the name of the Roosevelt was mentioned. He read in dispatches from our ambassador that Roosevelt performed feats of riding equal to those of a cowboy, that, like Buffalo Bill, he could just hit the bull’s eye with deadly marksmanship at a prodigious distance, that his spirit was unquenchable, fearless, and ready for anything.¹²⁸

Wilhelm apparently saw a sort of kindred spirit in Roosevelt; the Kaiser was himself an avid hunter and marksman. He also probably envied the President’s frontier reputation as exactly the image he himself wished to project to the world. In this, he was not alone; Edward also shared a personal admiration for Roosevelt:

I am greatly looking forward to Roosevelt’s visit to England and to make his acquaintance, as he is certainly one of the most remarkable men of the day.¹²⁹

The King, a larger-than-life figure in English society, was himself drawn to Roosevelt’s charisma and personality. These qualities were precisely what Wilhelm desired to project, especially since he had one foot in the English world and was jealous of his uncle’s ease with people.

¹²⁸ Fromkin, 197.

¹²⁹ Sewell, 58.

CHAPTER III

PARADIGM SHIFT

Anglo-German Relations, 1888-1900

During the late nineteenth century, Germany and Great Britain appeared to some observers to be headed towards a formal alliance. Under the leadership of Chancellor von Bismarck, German policy during the 1870s and 1880s had been largely focused on the European continent, and not on maintenance of a colonial empire. German statesmen recognized that Britain ruled the waves, and that after 1870 Germany had the most powerful army in Europe. This was stressed to Wilhelm in 1885, when his grandfather Wilhelm I sent him to the German Foreign Ministry to be trained in foreign affairs. It was during this training that Wilhelm first learned of “our state of dependence on England which was principally due to the fact that we had no navy.”¹³⁰ Indeed, Germany was content to let Great Britain take the lead in international crises, as in 1887 when Britain, Germany, and Italy signed the “League of Peace” intended to curb French and Russian desires to expand their influence into the Mediterranean Sea.¹³¹ However, over the course of the subsequent ten years events would unfold that forced Wilhelm to choose once and for all between his British family and his German nationalism. The policy resulting from his decisions would have a direct and negative effect on relations between

¹³⁰ Massie, 35.

¹³¹ Raymond J. Sontag, *Germany and England: Background of Conflict, 1848-1914* (New York: Appleton-Century Company, 1938), 221.

Britain and Germany. By the time Edward took the throne in 1901, Wilhelm had begun pulling away from Britain, and the King further pushed him away through his own policies based on his Germanophobia and dislike of the Kaiser.

1890 was a pivotal year for Germany: it saw the dismissal of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck by the Kaiser, the abandonment of the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia, and a revolution in naval affairs.¹³² In that year an American naval officer, Alfred Thayer Mahan, published his book, *The Influence of Sea-Power on History*.¹³³ Mahan's central themes would have a profound effect on Wilhelm II and German naval policy: the battle fleet as deterrent to war, control of sea lanes, importance of overseas colonies, and sea power as the only guarantee of world stature.¹³⁴ Wilhelm, long enamored with naval matters, took Mahan's teachings to heart and began a long process of reorganizing and expanding the German fleet. "Imperial power means sea power, and sea power and imperial power are dependent on each other."¹³⁵

By 1890, Wilhelm showed increasing preference for personal autocratic rule and Bismarck had to go. Bismarck was no less conservative and autocratic in his policies than Wilhelm, but was hostile to Britain and tried to maintain his own political position by manipulating the Kaiser. In addition, Bismarck was alienating the very Germans whom the Kaiser needed most in order to make Germany a modern industrial state: the working class. To be a truly "national" monarch, Wilhelm needed to show that he was

¹³² The Russo-German Alliance, orchestrated by Otto von Bismarck, was allowed to expire in 1890, largely due to anti-Bismarck factions within the German Foreign Ministry. France quickly signed a treaty with the Russians in 1894, and Wilhelm spent a great deal of effort (unsuccessfully) to try and woo the Russians back into the German sphere during the late 1890s and early 1900s.

¹³³ Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 205.

¹³⁴ Holger H. Herwig, *Luxury Fleet: The Imperial German Navy, 1888-1918* (London: The Ashfield Press, 1987), 15.

¹³⁵ Wilhelm, 42.

sympathetic to the interests of ordinary Germans, but he nonetheless still desired closer relations with Britain. These conflicting priorities would plague the Kaiser right up to the outbreak of war in 1914. In any event, however, Wilhelm recognized that Bismarck was attempting to control government policy (as he had with the previous two Kaisers) and removed him from office.

With the dismissal of Bismarck, Wilhelm instituted a “new course” in foreign policy, including overtures designed to strengthen the ties between Great Britain and Germany. He expressed this hope at a banquet in honor (ironically) of Bertie, the Prince of Wales, while dressed in his British Admiral’s uniform, and suggested that together, the British fleet and the German army would ensure the peace of the world.¹³⁶ The British Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, expressed the opinion that “the natural alliance is between ourselves and the German Empire.”¹³⁷ According to Wilhelm, Chamberlain even approached the German ambassador in London in April, 1898 with an offer of alliance.¹³⁸ With this goal in mind, a colonial treaty was signed between the two countries in July of 1890. Both sides made territorial concessions, and recognized the borders of each other’s African colonies.¹³⁹ However, Wilhelm only saw colonial agreements as temporary expedients on the road to an eventual Anglo-German alliance. The Kaiser was cautiously optimistic about the prospect of such a pact, but had his own suspicions about British motivations. He noted in a letter to Nicholas II that:

England has still now and then reopened negotiations with us but has never quite uncovered its hand; they are trying hard, as far as I can make out, to find a continental army to fight for their interests!¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Sontag, 268.

¹³⁷ Fromkin, 176.

¹³⁸ Levine, 48.

¹³⁹ Sontag, 270-271.

¹⁴⁰ Levine, 53.

Wilhelm was partially correct; the most of the small (by continental standards) British Army, at the time more suited to constabulary duty than modern warfare, was committed in India or Africa. Thanks to the Royal Navy, the sea routes connecting the Empire were secure, and so the British government became increasingly focused on Europe, which it recognized as the decisive theater. Failing to obtain a “continental army” through an alliance with Germany, Britain would need to find it elsewhere.

In October 1899 Great Britain went to war against the Boers in the Transvaal of South Africa.¹⁴¹ This crisis presented Germany with an opportunity to emerge onto the world scene as a leader in naval matters. Most European powers watched the war unfold with outrage, mostly from their own inability to intervene due to the supremacy of the British Royal Navy.¹⁴² Wilhelm had recognized Germany’s own shortcomings in this regard as far back as 1896, when he felt impotent to support Paul Kruger and German interests in South Africa. Without a blue-water navy of his own, he could not project German power and diplomacy outside Europe.¹⁴³ In typical fashion, he seized the opportunity to make an impassioned public plea for naval expansion:

We are in bitter need of a strong German navy! If the increases demanded during the first years of my reign had not been continuously refused to me in spite of my continued entreaties and warnings, how differently should we now be able to further our flourishing commerce and our interests overseas!¹⁴⁴

At the same time, however, Wilhelm wrote a soothing letter to his grandmother, assuring her of his friendship, “It is simply nonsense that two great nations nearly related in

¹⁴¹ Pauline R. Anderson, *The Background of Anti-English Feeling in Germany, 1890-1902* (Washington, D.C.: The American University Press, 1939), 296.

¹⁴² Archibald Hurd and Henry Castle, *German Sea-Power: Its Rise, Progress, and Economic Basis* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913), 118.

¹⁴³ Cecil, *Prince and Emperor*, 289-290.

¹⁴⁴ Percival A. Hislam, *The Admiralty of the Atlantic: An Enquiry into the Development of German Sea Power Past, Present, and Prospective* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1908), 19.

kinsmanship and religion should...view each other askance.”¹⁴⁵ However, this friendship was sorely tested early in the war when the Royal Navy seized the German mail steamer *Bundesrat* and several other neutral ships off the South African coast, a blunder which further underscored Europe’s impotence and guaranteed the Reichstag’s passage of the second Navy Bill in 1900 and the further expansion of Wilhelm’s navy.¹⁴⁶

The German Navy of the 1890s was based upon coastal defense in the Baltic Sea, with armored cruisers for overseas commerce protection. Initially, the Kaiser was in favor of building additional cruisers, being primarily interested in obtaining “more ships.”¹⁴⁷ However, Wilhelm decided to shift his emphasis to battleship construction when he saw how successful Admiral von Tirpitz, the State Secretary of the Navy Office since 1897, was at getting money from the Reichstag. The German Naval Acts, beginning in 1898, would provide the *Kaiserliche Marine*¹⁴⁸ with a large, modern battle fleet. While home-built, it nonetheless would take inspiration from the British Royal Navy, which had traditionally served as inspiration for fledgling navies around the world including those of Russia, Japan, and Italy.¹⁴⁹

Nelson’s famous signal is no longer necessary. You all do your duty, and we, as a young naval nation, go to England to learn something from the British Navy.¹⁵⁰

These measures did not immediately cause alarm to the British. Their fleet was still largely dispersed through the empire, and what battle fleet existed was designed to counter the French and Russians.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁵ Röhl, “Worst of Enemies,” 51.

¹⁴⁶ Hurd & Castle, 119.

¹⁴⁷ Herwig, 20.

¹⁴⁸ “Kaiser’s Navy”

¹⁴⁹ Hurd and Castle, 99.

¹⁵⁰ Wilhelm, 62. Nelson’s signal, “England expects that every man will do his duty,” was hoisted on his flagship HMS *Victory* at the beginning of the Battle of Trafalgar, 1805.

King Edward's Diplomacy

By 1900, and largely due to the international response to the Boer War, England was the least popular and most politically isolated country in Europe. Germany, on the other hand, was in a position of commercial and political strength, thanks in part to its strong response to the British Navy. While Wilhelm had been as powerless to intervene on the Boers' behalf, his strong stand against the British had made him popular among other European powers. The first years of the twentieth century, however, would see a drastic reversal in these positions, as well as world opinion. Upon his accession to the throne in 1901, King Edward VII immediately began a personal campaign to improve Britain's standing in the world. Like his mother, Queen Victoria, he saw foreign policy as his personal purview to be conducted with minimal interference from his minister.¹⁵² When he occasionally consulted them, Edward still exerted considerable influence on their recommendations.¹⁵³ As the British Ambassador to Germany, Sir Frank Lascelles, noted, "King Edward is his own Foreign Minister—and a jolly good one too!"¹⁵⁴ Over the next eight years, he enjoyed a series of political successes which resulted in the complete isolation of Germany.¹⁵⁵ Especially after 1902, Edward's foreign policy began focusing on an increasingly possible war with Germany.¹⁵⁶ His decisions, while occasionally influenced by advice from his ministers, were a direct result of his poor relationship with his nephew, Wilhelm II.

¹⁵¹ John B. Hattendorf, R.J.B. Knight, A.W.H. Pearsall, N.A.M. Rodger, & Geoffrey Till, eds., *British Naval Documents, 1204-1960* (Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1993), 620-621.

¹⁵² While Victoria had gradually permitted her ministers to conduct the business of government on her behalf, she nonetheless retained a strong influence and final approval of their actions.

¹⁵³ Clay, 205.

¹⁵⁴ Cecil, *Emperor and Exile*, 127.

¹⁵⁵ War Lords, 161.

¹⁵⁶ Friedrich Von Bernhardi, *Germany and the Next War*, Trans. by Allen H. Powles (New York: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1914), 155-156.

The process began far from Europe, in the Far East. In 1902, Great Britain and Japan announced that they had signed a formal treaty of alliance in which each country pledged to come to the aid of the other in the event of war with two or more other Powers.¹⁵⁷ Of primary concern was the defense of India, which Britain continually viewed as vulnerable to a Russian attack. Following this coup, Edward embarked on a state visit to Paris in 1903 in the hopes of fostering friendlier relations with France.¹⁵⁸ His visit demonstrated to the world, and particularly to Wilhelm, that he personally was guiding British foreign policy.¹⁵⁹ The result of the Anglo-French rapprochement was the “Entente Cordiale,” signed in April 1904 and which was a colonial treaty that defined and recognized British and French spheres of influence in Africa and the Middle East. For all intents and purposes, the *entente* had the effect of removing all potential sources of friction between the two countries.¹⁶⁰ It also had the effect of limiting the possibilities for further German colonial acquisitions in Africa, since Britain and France were now unlikely to look the other way if Germany made moves into one or the other’s territories. The *Entente* was Edward’s crowning achievement, truly his diplomatic masterpiece. Under Queen Victoria and her predecessors, British interests were generally aligned against both France and Russia, while at the same time maintaining close ties with Prussia. Now, over a hundred years of policy were reversed at a stroke: France was no longer considered Britain’s main enemy on the continent. With some justification, Edward VII viewed the *entente* as a personal triumph, and to “punish the Kaiser”¹⁶¹ had ignored all requests from Wilhelm II for conciliatory meetings during the negotiations.

¹⁵⁷ Stephenson, 67.

¹⁵⁸ Legge, 166.

¹⁵⁹ Martin, 26.

¹⁶⁰ Legge, 170.

¹⁶¹ Wilhelm Widenmann, *Marine Attaché an der Kaiserliche-Deutschen Botschaft in London, 1907-1912* (Göttingen: “Musterschmidt” Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1952), 99.

According to French journalist Ernest Judet, Edward amused himself with the French desire for revenge against Germany since 1870-71¹⁶², and their wish to see Kiel destroyed and Hamburg burned.¹⁶³ The King was also undoubtedly influenced by his admiration for Emperor Napoleon III (discussed earlier), who also favored a strong, personally-guided foreign policy. However, Edward's greatest motivations must have come from his Germanophobia, which was sparked by his rebellion against his mother, and constantly fuelled by hatred of his nephew, the German Kaiser. Contemporaries even felt that the *Entente* was the political expression of Edward's feelings (as well as others in the British royal family) towards Wilhelm.¹⁶⁴ In a deliberate effort to publicly celebrate the treaty, Edward hosted the French fleet at Portsmouth, the Royal Navy's home port, in August 1905.¹⁶⁵

The German reaction to these developments was, understandably, negative. The prevailing view was that England was attempting to isolate Germany through friendship with France. It certainly appeared so; following the French fleet visit to Portsmouth, the Royal Navy paid a reciprocal visit to the French base at Brest, and the British press was increasingly pro-French. At the same time, Edward VII hosted the French Premier, M. Delcassé, at dinner in Paris, but declined to meet Wilhelm II when he travelled through Germany.¹⁶⁶ The German press even suggested that Edward wished to make France an English satellite.¹⁶⁷ Wilhelm, recognizing the potential threat, began courting Russia for

¹⁶² France was humiliatingly defeated by Prussia during the Franco-Prussian War. Paris had been occupied, and the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine were annexed formally by Prussia.

¹⁶³ Martin, 27.

¹⁶⁴ Clay, 358.

¹⁶⁵ Rüger, 227.

¹⁶⁶ Padfield, 131.

¹⁶⁷ Martin, 28.

a renewed alliance, suggesting to Nicholas II that Russia was also in danger from the *Entente*:

With regard to the Anglo-French 'Entente Cordiale' you may perhaps find in my letters to you from two years ago, where I warn you of the beginning 'Rapprochement' of the two Governments and countries...I then showed that they were resuming their old former Policy of the 'Crimean'...and are not only opposing you in foreign policy, but more hotly and open on the field of internal Russian policy.¹⁶⁸

The reference to a "Crimean" policy could only be intended to invoke Russian memories of the Crimean War during the 1850s, when it had fought unsuccessfully against a united Britain and France. Wilhelm's appraisal of the new political situation (in a 1908 interview with the British naval attaché, Reginald Allenby) was typical of his character:

I want to encourage good relations between the two countries (France and Germany), but England does her best to keep us apart...Here am I, who for twenty years have done my utmost in the cause of peace, been misrepresented in the most disgraceful way on all and every occasion. For ten years I had to face German music because I was too friendly to England, and now for the last ten years I have had to face English music because I'm a German.¹⁶⁹

This statement clearly demonstrates the essential contradiction of Wilhelm's personality: his cultural affinity for England and a desire for closer relations in spite of anti-British sentiment within Germany, and then resentment after the rejection of his overtures by the English. If one does the math, counting back ten years from 1908 brings the reader to 1898, the year in which the Reichstag passed the First Naval Law committing Germany to an expansion of its blue-water fleet. In addition, relations between Britain and Germany had begun to deteriorate by that point, especially since Wilhelm's impulsive

¹⁶⁸ Levine, 195-196.

¹⁶⁹ Matthew S. Seligman, ed., *Naval Intelligence from Germany: The Reports of the British Naval Attachés in Berlin, 1906-1914* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2007), 3.

Kruger telegram in 1896.¹⁷⁰ This suggests that Wilhelm realized that he would have to make a choice to become either English or German, and indicates a keen awareness of political reality. The world was changing, and a monarch could no longer sit on a country's throne while professing a deep admiration for another, as his grandmother had frequently done. Edward, by conducting a personal foreign policy designed to isolate Germany (and his hated nephew), forced Wilhelm to essentially abandon his English heritage, and act in accordance with his perception of German interests.

The Russo-Japanese War and Beyond

These diplomatic successes could not have come soon enough for Britain, because in 1904 Japan launched the Russo-Japanese War, which lasted until 1905. The outcome of this war would have far-reaching consequences for both England and Germany. Thanks to the terms of their alliance with Japan (at war with Russia), and the Entente Cordiale with France (allied with Russia since 1894)¹⁷¹, Britain managed to maintain official neutrality during the conflict. However, the British government did not act as a mediator, preferring to contain the conflict and wait for developments to unfold. It saw potential opportunities in the Far East to weaken the Russian threat to India. The Russians did not help matters, when in two separate incidents their fleet sank British ships. They believed that Japan had only attacked them with British approval and

¹⁷⁰ The Kaiser wrote to congratulate President Kruger (of the Transvaal Republic in South Africa) on his successful repulse of a British raid earlier that year. Wilhelm's act was wildly popular in Germany but was condemned in Britain.

¹⁷¹ Stephenson, 67.

support.¹⁷² War seemed imminent, especially since Wilhelm kept sending inflammatory letters to Nicholas suggesting Britain's true intentions:

The enclosed brochure was sent me from America, I enclose it, as I think it may interest you, especially from the point of view of the future plans England has vis-à-vis of Russia in Asia and what she is trying to use the Japanese for.¹⁷³

He also warned his cousin about possible British interference with the Russian fleet's transit to the war zone:

It is a sound military idea and will ensure victory...the best plan would be to silently and quietly prepare the fleet for its destination, not to breath [sic] a word about your intention to anybody and any other Power.¹⁷⁴

The only "other Power" that could conceivably threaten the Russian fleet was that of Britain; France's was concentrated in the Mediterranean and Germany certainly had no reason to impede it. Britain did indeed consider interfering; ever fearful that the Russian fleet posed a threat to India, the Lansdowne government briefly toyed with denying the Russians access to the Suez Canal and coaling facilities.¹⁷⁵ In addition British warships began concentrating at Gibraltar.¹⁷⁶ This may have been a legitimate threat; Wilhelm suggested to Nicholas that

...even should the forces at your disposal not suffice for a real attack on India itself they would do for Persia—which has no army—and a pressure on the Indian frontier from Persia will do wonders in England and have remarkably quieting influence on the hot headed Jingoese in London...this is the only thing they are afraid of...The Indian frontier and Afghanistan are the only part of the Globe where the whole of her Battlefleets are of no avail to England...India's loss is the death stroke to Great Britain!¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia, 1894-1917* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 248.

¹⁷³ Levine, 185.

¹⁷⁴ Levine, 121-122. Wilhelm wrote to Nicholas in English, and tended to spell unfamiliar words phonetically. As a result his letters appear to contain many spelling errors to modern eyes.

¹⁷⁵ Neilson, 250.

¹⁷⁶ T. G. Otte, "The Fragmenting of the Old Order: Britain, the Great Powers, and the war," in *The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War*, Edited by Rotem Kowner (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 98.

¹⁷⁷ Levine, 135-136.

For all his bombast, Wilhelm nonetheless displayed a shrewd understanding of British fears in this regard: India was the main reason for the Anglo-Japanese alliance in the first place, and British land forces there were barely adequate for policing and occupation, let alone fend off a full-scale Russian invasion. He also provided the Russians (through his correspondence) information about Japanese purchases of war materiel from France, Russia's erstwhile ally:

The row [sic] steel material is being produced in France (Greuzot)—your Ally!—and to be finished in Japan. To be delivered in May next.¹⁷⁸

He also implicated Britain in supplying the Japanese military:

The Japs have just ordered [in early 1905] 4 Line of Battleships in England; they are to be copies of the newest type in England between 18000-19000 Tons with 25 cm. guns as medium artillery and 30 cm. guns as heavy artillery.¹⁷⁹

In this Wilhelm was only partially correct; the technical details were accurate but the new Japanese ships were built in Japan (albeit with many British-made components) and represented an improvement on the British *Lord Nelson*-class. They were laid down before HMS *Dreadnought* and would have been the first all-big gun battleships save for a shortage of enough cannons.

The Kaiser also claimed that the *Entente* had actually prevented the French from fulfilling their alliance obligations to Russia when the Japanese attacked:

I had an interesting conversation about the war with the French Milit.-Attache who, on my remarks that I thought it most astonishing that your "Allies" did not send their fleet down to keep Port Arthur open till your Baltic Fleet had arrived, answered that it was true, but that they had to reckon with other Powers! After many hints and allusions I found out—

¹⁷⁸ Levine, 107.

¹⁷⁹ Levine, 154.

what I had always feared—that the Anglo-French agreement had the one main effect, viz: to stop the French from helping you!¹⁸⁰

There can be little debate over which “other Powers” the French military attaché was worried about offending. Only one had a navy of any appreciable size which might be threatened by major fleet moves through the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean, and only one whose strategic posture was based on French fleet dispositions: Britain. In order to reinforce the idea that Britain was manipulating the war for its own purposes, Wilhelm had this to say about the peace negotiations:

The American Ambassador...told a friend of mine that...the King [Edward VII] told [him] that there was no idea of Peace as Japan would never be allowed to give up on the demand for indemnity...it was necessary that Russia should be and remain financially helpless and crippled for a long time.¹⁸¹

It was clear to Wilhelm that Edward himself was directing the Japanese war effort against the Russians to further his own interests. Small wonder then that the Russian fleet had seemed so trigger-happy around British ships; Wilhelm’s letters to Nicholas had had an effect. The Tsar agreed in principle to a tripartite defensive treaty with Germany and France (proposed, of course, by Wilhelm); only France’s reluctance prevented its coming to fruition.

The most important event in the Russo-Japanese War occurred in the Tsushima Strait in May, 1905 when the Japanese fleet annihilated the Russian fleet that had sailed around the world from the Baltic Sea.¹⁸² The Russians lost perhaps sixty percent of their capital ships, as well as a large percentage of its officer corps.¹⁸³ The destruction of the

¹⁸⁰ Levine, 113.

¹⁸¹ Levine, 197.

¹⁸² Stephenson, 68.

¹⁸³ Rotem Kowner, “The impact of the war on naval warfare,” in *The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War*, 279.

Russian fleet set in motion events that, arguably, escalated tensions between Britain and Germany, and virtually assured a confrontation at some point in the future. Without the Russians as a counterbalance to Germany's fleet in the Baltic and North Seas, Britain confronted the possibility of dealing with the *Hochseeflotte*¹⁸⁴ on her own. The German fleet, which before the Russo-Japanese War had ranked sixth-largest among the world's navies, now became the second-largest (France had shifted priorities from its navy to its land forces following the *Entente*).¹⁸⁵ Some high-ranking British officers had considered this possibility since 1902, although at the time Germany had not been specifically mentioned. Admiral Sir John Fisher, then Commander-in-Chief of the British Mediterranean Fleet, had proposed consolidating the Royal Navy's scattered ships into five main fleets, three of which would be within striking distance of Europe.¹⁸⁶

Despite British fears, Tirpitz may never have intended to actually attack the Royal Navy. Instead, he apparently viewed the *Hochseeflotte* as performing three main functions: it would serve as a basis of strength to allow the Kaiser to pursue his overseas program, it would provide a deterrent to all-out war (through his admittedly aggressive "risk" theory), and it would enhance Germany's value as an ally.¹⁸⁷ Marketing the German fleet in this way was arguably only intended for Great Britain, and this apparently was what the Kaiser intended. Thomas Kohut suggests that Wilhelm's blue-water navy was built for the sole purpose of maneuvering the British into an alliance with Germany. The Kaiser wrote in 1904 that "[w]e will nonetheless build and increase the size of our fleet; with every additional ship of the line England's respect will increase,"

¹⁸⁴ German "High Seas Fleet"

¹⁸⁵ Kowner, 278.

¹⁸⁶ Hattendorf, et al., 751-753.

¹⁸⁷ Herwig, 36-37.

and again in 1906, “Nothing will change in England’s attitude until we are so strong on the seas that we become valuable allies.”¹⁸⁸ Of course, he had made the same suggestion to Nicholas II in 1902,¹⁸⁹ but the situation had changed after Tsushima and the Russian fleet was no longer a factor.

In any event, Edward and his government moved quickly to fill the vacuum in the North Sea. In August 1905, the Anglo-Japanese Treaty was renewed before the Russo-Japanese War had officially ended.¹⁹⁰ The renewed document stipulated mutual assistance (presumably military) in case either country was attacked, and guaranteed Japan’s territories in East Asia and Britain’s control over India.¹⁹¹ In effect, British Dominions in Asia and the Far East were to be watched over by the Japanese.¹⁹² There was even a provision in the treaty which committed Japan to send troops to defend India.¹⁹³ France herself signed an Entente with Japan in June, 1907, similarly securing Indochina.¹⁹⁴

The next piece in the diplomatic puzzle was Russia. Despite the fact that his country was allied with Japan, Edward personally had felt sympathy for Russia, and had pressured his Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour, to act to prevent the war.¹⁹⁵ He was not only the uncle of the Tsarina Alexandra (incidentally, a German princess), but also the

¹⁸⁸ Thomas A. Kohut. “Kaiser Wilhelm II and his parents: an inquiry into the psychological roots of German policy towards England before the First World War.” In *Kaiser Wilhelm II: New Interpretations (The Corfu Papers)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, 84-85.

¹⁸⁹ Levine, 85.

¹⁹⁰ The Treaty of Portsmouth was mediated by U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt and signed in September 1905.

¹⁹¹ Stephenson, 70.

¹⁹² Who, in event of war, were possibly expected to launch the same sort of surprise attack on the German East Asia Squadron, based at Tsingtao, China as they had against the Russians in Port Arthur, in 1904. In the event, it was the Japanese who played the major role in taking Tsingtao during the war.

¹⁹³ Otte, 99.

¹⁹⁴ Stephenson, 71.

¹⁹⁵ Otte, 95.

brother-in-law of the Tsar's mother.¹⁹⁶ To this end, the British government officially approached the Russians in 1906 to obtain a formal alliance, and Edward personally appealed to Tsar Nicholas II in order to "help very greatly towards the maintenance of the general peace of the world."¹⁹⁷ However this was mere rhetoric: in reality, the British were beginning to re-think their alliance with the Japanese, fearing that having an Asian power come to the defense of India might undermine British dominion over their colonial subjects. Concluding an Anglo-Russian alliance would remove the perennial threat of a Russian attack on the subcontinent, and would allow Britain to focus more fully on Europe. Edward was manipulating his Russian relation no less than Wilhelm was attempting to do, and recognized to his personal satisfaction the value of snatching Nicholas II from the Kaiser's influence. Nicholas, with his country now in a much-weakened position following the humiliating defeat by the Japanese, accepted, and the Anglo-Russian Entente was formalized in August, 1907. Wilhelm reacted to this new development by trying to remain friendly with Nicholas II:

We understand perfectly that Russia for the present must avoid getting into a conflict with Great Britain...Apart from this you have given me the formal assurance, that you would not enter upon any agreement with England of a more general nature...No my dear Nicky neither your agreement with England about Central Asia nor your meeting at Reval has produced any uneasiness or disappointment in Germany! The cause is quite a different one. It is the patent fact that for the last two years Russian Policy has been gradually drawing away from us more and more, evolving always closer toward a combination of powers unfriendly to us. The Triple Entente between France-Russia and England is beeing [sic] talked about by the whole world as an accomplished fact. English and French papers miss no opportunity of representing this alleged Triple entente as being directed against Germany, and only too often the Russian Press chimes in joining the chorus...It is surprising consequently that a certain estrangement should have grown up between our two countries?¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Martin, 26.

¹⁹⁷ Padfield, 187.

¹⁹⁸ Levine, 223-224.

Despite trying to appear upbeat and carefree, Wilhelm nonetheless betrayed frustration and sarcasm in this 1909 letter to the Tsar. It is clear that he viewed Nicholas's treaty with Edward as a personal betrayal. The situation in the Balkans further eroded their relationship. When in 1913 the small Balkan states went to war against the Ottoman Empire, Austria-Hungary feared for its territory on the Adriatic Sea and began mobilizing its army near the Russian border. Determined to support his "little brothers," Nicholas ordered the mobilization of the Russian army in response.¹⁹⁹ However, the Kaiser announced his support for the Austrians, and with the diplomatic assistance of the British forced all sides to the negotiating table.²⁰⁰ Nicholas II became increasingly resentful of what he perceived as Wilhelm's interference in Russia's ambitions for the Balkans and eastern Mediterranean.²⁰¹ Wilhelm appeared to recognize that the situation in Europe had fundamentally changed. Politically and militarily, Germany was becoming hemmed-in: by Britain on the high seas, by France to the west, and now by Russia to the east.

As British diplomacy began to isolate and encircle Germany through treaties, the Royal Navy moved quickly to consolidate its battle fleet to face the German *Hochseeflotte*. The Germans watched with concern as the British expanded and developed fleet facilities in the Home Islands at Rosyth, Harwich, and Scapa Flow, and became convinced that the only purpose for these bases was to support a war with Germany, fought in the North Sea.²⁰² In 1905, the fleet reforms proposed by Admiral Sir John Fisher in 1902 (and personally endorsed by Edward) became a reality, as battleships were concentrated in Home waters, older and slower ships were retired, and ships were

¹⁹⁹ Carter, 343.

²⁰⁰ Clay, 296.

²⁰¹ Carter, 353.

²⁰² Bernhardt, 155.

re-assigned from far-flung stations in the empire.²⁰³ Edward's diplomatic efforts had made these redeployments possible; the alliance with Japan permitted the British to pull ships from the Indian and Pacific Oceans.²⁰⁴ The *entente cordiale* meant that the Royal Navy could reduce its presence in the Mediterranean Sea, where the French fleet maintained a strong force.²⁰⁵ In addition, British and French diplomats and military officers began conducting secret meetings to coordinate the deployment of British troops to France in case of war. The presence of a strong German fleet, only hours from the English Channel via the Kiel Canal, presented a serious threat to the movement of British troops to the continent.²⁰⁶ The justification given to the British public was the imminent threat of invasion of England itself; however, the Germans viewed this as a virtual impossibility and the British knew it from their naval attachés.²⁰⁷ In any event, the German General Staff was unlikely to divert troops from its Schlieffen Plan²⁰⁸ for this sort of adventure.

Admiral Fisher, now First Sea Lord, summed up the new British naval policy in 1906:

Our only probable enemy is Germany. Germany keeps her whole Fleet always concentrated within a few hours of England. We must therefore keep a Fleet twice as powerful concentrated within a few hours of Germany.²⁰⁹

²⁰³ Archibald Hurd, *The Command of the Sea: Some Problems of Imperial Defence Considered in the Light of the German Navy Act, 1912* (London: Chapman & Hall, Ltd., 1912), 18.

²⁰⁴ However, in 1909 the British formed a "Dominion" fleet comprising a modern battlecruiser and smaller ships, operating from Australia and New Zealand (Stephenson, 77-78).

²⁰⁵ Herwig, 49.

²⁰⁶ Hislam, 76-77. Admittedly, Edward VII did not personally create this plan. However, he gave his personal approval to the Committee for Imperial Defence which formulated it.

²⁰⁷ Seligmann, 52-56.

²⁰⁸ The German Imperial General Staff's war plan envisioned a massive army sweeping through Belgium and Holland in the opening stage of a war with France.

²⁰⁹ Stephenson, 75.

It is worth highlighting that Edward was a patron and admirer of Fisher, and the two shared suspicion of Wilhelm. Fisher was even a proponent of destroying the German fleet while it lay at anchor before it could attack England.²¹⁰ In 1905, at the time of the Moroccan Crisis, he had suggested to Foreign Minister Lansdowne that:

This seems a golden opportunity for fighting the Germans in alliance with the French, so I earnestly hope you may be able to bring this about...We could have the German Fleet, the Kiel Canal, and Schleswig-Holstein within a fortnight.²¹¹

Clearly, aggressive naval posturing was not unique to Wilhelm and Tirpitz. Previously, the standard Royal Navy practice had been to maintain a fleet equal to the navies of any two other Powers;²¹² now, it was targeted specifically at the German Navy. In order to provide the powerful fleet Fisher wanted, British naval spending increased dramatically between 1900 and 1910, from £29,000,000 to £40,000,000.²¹³ Part of the cost was dictated by the *Dreadnought* revolution. This thesis will not digress into technical details, but the advent of the all-big gun, super-battleship by the Royal Navy in 1905²¹⁴ made all other navies obsolete at a stroke. However, it should be pointed out that the *Dreadnought* was launched prior to the Battle of Tsushima, which is commonly held to be the moment when naval theorists realized the need for such a change. As a result, Britain had deliberately inaugurated a brand new arms race, and foreign warship design, especially in Germany, stopped for eighteen months to catch up.²¹⁵ What is not as commonly recognized, though, is that Fischer had rendered the majority of his own navy

²¹⁰ Cecil, *Emperor and Exile*, 126. Fisher referred to “Copenhagening” the High Seas Fleet in imitation of the Royal Navy’s 1807 attack on the Danish fleet in its harbor.

²¹¹ Clay, 257.

²¹² Hislam, 21.

²¹³ Hurd, 213.

²¹⁴ The fact that it coincided with the centennial of Nelson’s victory at Trafalgar did not go unnoticed by the British.

²¹⁵ Hurd, 97-98.

as obsolete as the German Navy now was. He purposely manipulated the figures, underestimating British strength while overestimating the German. Nonetheless, Parliament appropriated funds, and the British were able to build up their forces while the German Navy completely re-tooled its shipbuilding. By 1908, they had consolidated enough force in Home waters to outnumber the Germans by 46 battleships to 24.²¹⁶

Wilhelm was quick to point this out to British naval attaché Philip Dumas:

...look at the past year. What have you done? Why, you built faster than you have ever done before; and we, why we have gone quietly on with our programme of old construction, and laid down nothing new at all. Which country has done anything? Yours or mine?²¹⁷

To provide his navy with its own *Dreadnought*-type battleships, Wilhelm II requested and received a new Navy Bill in 1906. But in justifying it, he committed a breach of protocol by circumventing Edward VII, and impulsively writing directly to the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Tweedmouth:

It is absolutely nonsensical and untrue that the German Navy Bill is to provide a Navy meant as a 'challenge to British naval supremacy'...the German Navy is not aimed at England, and is not a 'challenge to British supremacy of the sea,' which will remain unchallenged for years to come...²¹⁸

In a fit of pique, Edward VII wrote to his nephew:

Your writing to my First Lord of the Admiralty is a 'new departure,' and I do not see how he can prevent our Press from calling attention to the great increase in building of German ships of war, which necessitates us building our Navy also.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Hislam, 28.

²¹⁷ Seligmann, 58.

²¹⁸ Padfield, 181-182.

²¹⁹ Padfield, 182.

In Wilhelm's view, however, since taking the throne Edward VII had had an agenda to isolate Germany, and him personally.²²⁰ To the Kaiser, England, France and Russia all had a common interest in containing or reducing German power and influence. At the same time, Germany could not be sure about the reliability of her own allies of the Triple Alliance, particularly Italy, which had shown disturbing signs of increased friendliness to England and France.²²¹ Perhaps Edward had gotten to the Italians, too? He had certainly tried to become friendly with Franz-Joseph, the Emperor of Austria-Hungary. The King had made repeated trips to Vienna (in 1904, 1905, 1907, and 1908) to meet with the Emperor, who continually rebuffed him.²²² Wilhelm vented his frustrations in an interview in 1908:

You English are mad--mad as March hares. What has come over you that you are so completely given over to suspicions quite unworthy of a great nation? Falsehood and prevarication are alien to my nature. My actions ought to speak for themselves; but you listen, not to them, but to those who misinterpret and distort them.²²³

²²⁰ War Lords, 163.

²²¹ Bernhardt, 152-153.

²²² J.A. Farrer, *England Under Edward VII* (London: George Allen Unwin Ltd., 1922), 75-76.

²²³ Wilhelm, 63.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Edward VII died on 6 May 1910, the feud with his nephew forever unresolved.

But shortly before his death, he wrote of Wilhelm:

That fellow is foolish enough and insane enough to fight for the mastery of Europe, and to involve England among his enemies in the conflict, because he suffers from the delusion that he understands the English people better than anyone else in Europe...There was only one important person in politics who was blind to the possibilities for mischief which he was capable of, and that was my mother.²²⁴

The King's reference to Queen Victoria is intriguing. Was he jealous of her attention to Wilhelm? Did he transfer all of his resentment towards his mother onto his nephew? To be fair, Wilhelm was impulsive, ambitious, and more than a bit pompous. But then, so was Edward; and he had a tendency to hold grudges and liked to prod people with often-cruel barbs. Both men had strong personalities, and were possessed of notable stubbornness. Wilhelm was caught between two worlds, one English and one German, with no clear guidance on how to navigate them. Edward, on the other hand, was a stickler for protocol and niceties, and, like Queen Victoria, always felt the need to remind his nephew of the family pecking order, even though Wilhelm sat on a throne before his uncle did. After all, to the King the German Empire was a mere upstart compared with the global British Empire. One can imagine the two men at a family gathering: Edward the black sheep of the family, a nineteenth century wild-child who rebelled against his

²²⁴ War Lords, 181.

mother by drinking, smoking, gambling, and having multiple affairs; Wilhelm the son of Victoria's beloved eldest daughter, sitting at "Granny's" feet and playing with his toy boats.

The tragedy was that by the time both men became monarchs, they had not only continued their feud but involved whole nations in it. Edward's diplomatic odyssey to create an international coalition to politically isolate Germany was as much motivated by his simmering resentment of his nephew as it was by geopolitical concerns. Biographers of both monarchs have downplayed this rivalry, suggesting that Edward was above indulging these sorts of petty squabbles. But a close examination of his life indicates otherwise; he was certainly not above holding a grudge or retaliating against someone who had failed to show him the proper respect. His attempts at rapprochement with France as soon as he was King certainly stemmed from the anti-German, pro-French sentiments he had harbored since the 1860s. The *Entente Cordiale* was in effect a political expression of Edward's personal feelings (as well as many in the Royal Family) towards Wilhelm.²²⁵ And securing an alliance with Russia, England's other traditional continental enemy, signaled to the world that a paradigm shift had occurred in London. Long-held conceptions of Britain's traditional foes that had endured through Queen Victoria's reign were suddenly reversed. The personal efforts of Edward VII, motivated at least in part by his animosity towards Wilhelm II, were directly responsible for the interlocking system of alliances between Great Britain, France, and Russia which assured that when (not if) a war broke out, all of the major European Powers would be aligned against Germany, who could only rely upon the rotting Austro-Hungarian Empire. Instead of posing a direct threat to England, the German Navy was a convenient diversion

²²⁵ Clay, 358.

to keep the public from asking awkward questions about why British military men were suddenly holding secret, high-level meetings with their French counterparts.

On another level, Wilhelm's perceptions of Edward's foreign policies may be more critical than the King's actual intent. Because the Kaiser was so insecure due to his mixed lineage and split loyalties, he was prone to see hidden threats and secret agendas in every new treaty that was signed or crisis which erupted. Even if Edward's diplomacy was not personally motivated (although this thesis has attempted to argue that it was), Wilhelm certainly saw it that way. Upon hearing that the King had died in 1910, the Kaiser commented to Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg:

The scheming and intrigues...which for so long have caused unrest abroad and made Europe hold its breath, will hopefully come to a stop.²²⁶

Wilhelm saw promise in the new king, George V. In many ways, the situation had reversed: the Kaiser was now the elder statesman, uncle of the King of England, and took the opportunity to exert his influence in the European political scene. Attending Edward VII's funeral, Wilhelm received the adulation of the British press and public, making gestures of friendship to George V. Privately, however, he viewed the new king as nothing more than a "homebody."²²⁷ For his own part, George had no intention of playing an active role the way that his father and grandmother had done. While he shared Edward's obsession with proper decorum and wearing the correct attire, he was not effective at intervening with his ministers. Rather, George increasingly viewed himself (and the monarchy) as the symbol around which the British Empire could rally and come together.²²⁸ Indeed, he was conservative and reactionary, and if allowed would have

²²⁶ Carter, 322.

²²⁷ Clay, 286.

²²⁸ Carter, 327-328.

gladly rolled back the Edwardian social reforms of the previous ten years which he despised as socialist.²²⁹ In particular, as a traditionally-minded naval officer George violently opposed the reforms of Admiral Fisher, whom he considered “devious.”²³⁰ Unfortunately, the new king lacked the personal control that Edward had enjoyed, and as a result ministers like Edward Grey, Herbert Asquith, and David Lloyd-George increasingly dictated policy themselves and denied the King any opportunity to exert any real influence. Personally, George V did not dislike Wilhelm in the way that Edward did, instead disliking Germany in general. He remained in communication with the Kaiser even after war broke out in 1914. However, by the time of his accession to the throne George had cultivated a close friendship with his cousin, Tsar Nicholas II. The two wrote each other frequently, and managed for the most part to avoid politics until the years immediately preceding the outbreak of World War I. They, along with other European royals, considered themselves a private “club,” which spent summers together and made visits to each others’ families.

However, Wilhelm had always been excluded from the club.²³¹ Although personally on fairly good terms with his nephew George, and believing himself to be a mentor of sorts to Nicholas, the Kaiser nonetheless recognized that he was increasingly being left out of the inner circle of European monarchs. This only enhanced his perception that the Great Powers were aligning against Germany, and him personally. Writing in July 1914, just prior to the outbreak of World War I, he sensed that:

Edward VII is stronger after his death than am I who am still alive. England, Russia, and France have agreed amongst themselves...that is the real situation *in nuce*, which, slowly, and cleverly set-going, certainly by

²²⁹ Carter, 325.

²³⁰ Clay, 257.

²³¹ Clay, 268, 359.

Edward VII, had been carried on, and systematically built up by disowned conferences between England and Paris and St. Petersburg; finally brought to a conclusion by George V and set to work.²³²

History is written by the victors, and defeat in World War I meant that Wilhelm II has been remembered as a bloodthirsty, militaristic war-monger, responsible for the deaths of millions. On the other hand, history (particularly in Britain, but also in the United States where a certain degree of Anglophilia existed) would remember Edward VII as the “uncle of Europe,” the King who had recognized the German threat, and who put together a Triple Entente to oppose it. In particular, the view of the Fischer school and others that Wilhelm was bent on world domination ignores the realities of *fin-de-siecle* imperial politics. Britain and France were trying very hard to maintain their far-flung (and racially hierarchical) empires in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, while Japan and the United States were nascent world powers looking to acquire their own colonial possessions. Russia was determined to regain her position as a Great Power through expansion but realized that she could not afford war.²³³ Europe (and indeed the world) was at an impasse, no one having wanted the tense situation but by the same token no one willing to budge from their position. Christopher Clark has noted that

There is a perplexing tendency in the literature of this period—and in popular present-day awareness—to see things from the Westminster point of view, to accept implicitly the notion that British colonial expansions and British perceptions of British rights constituted a ‘natural order’, in the light of which German objections appeared to be wanton provocations.²³⁴

History often neglects the fact that monarchs are human, and sometimes have all-too-human failings. In this case, it has omitted the very personal grudge which the King of

²³² Röhl, “Worst of Enemies,” 66.

²³³ Carter, 335.

²³⁴ Clark, 133.

England had against the German Kaiser; the family squabble between uncle and nephew that would lead to war.

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