

“Blood is Thicker than Water”:
Anglo-American Rapprochement in the Mid-Nineteenth Century, 1823-1872

by

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ABSTRACT

Historians of Anglo-American diplomacy in the nineteenth century tend to focus on the beginning of the century, when tensions ran high, or the end, when the United States and Britain sowed the seeds that would grow into one of the most fruitful alliances of the twentieth century. This dissertation bridges the gap between the century's bookends. It employs world history methodology, giving close attention to how each nation's domestic politics and global priorities played a vital role in shaping bilateral relations. In this manner, it explains how two nations that repeatedly approached the brink of war actually shared remarkably similar visions of peace, free trade, and neutral rights throughout the world. A careful consideration of the shifting priorities of the British Empire demonstrates that London approached trans-Atlantic relations as merely one part of a worldwide strategy to preserve its prestige and economic ascendancy. Meanwhile, naval inferiority, sectional tensions, and cultural affinity ensured that American belligerence never crossed the threshold from bluster to military action. By examining a handful of diplomatic crises originating far from the centers of power in London and Washington, this study argues that disputes between the United States and Britain arose from disagreements regarding the proper means to achieve common ends. During nearly half a century between the Monroe Doctrine and the Treaty of Washington, the two countries reached a mutual understanding regarding the best ways to communicate, cooperate, and pursue common economic and geopolitical goals. Giving this period its due attention as the link between post-Revolutionary reconciliation and pre-World War I alliance promotes a more comprehensive understanding of Anglo-American rapprochement in the nineteenth century.

For Maya

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 BACKGROUND: FROM RECONCILIATION TO RAPPROCHEMENT	14
Introduction	15
Independence.....	17
The War of 1812.....	22
Rapprochement.....	25
The Monroe Doctrine	28
Latin America.....	32
Conclusions	38
3 OREGON: FROM STRATEGIC FOOTHOLD TO IMPERIAL PERIPHERY ...	40
Introduction	43
The United States Strengthens Its Claim.....	46
British Domestic Politics.....	48
British Foreign Policy in the Americas	51
British Imperial Policy in Asia.....	56
Diplomacy	62
Conclusions	73
4 CENTRAL AMERICA: EMPIRES AT ODDS?.....	77
Introduction	78

CHAPTER	Page
The Crimean War	82
Ostend Manifesto	86
Filibusters	88
Diplomacy	94
Bleeding Kansas and the Sepoy Mutiny.....	109
Resolution.....	111
Conclusions	113
5 CHINA: “BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER”	116
Open for Business	117
The <i>Arrow</i> Incident	120
Tientsin Treaties	126
Josiah Tattnall.....	128
“Blood is Thicker than Water”	130
Reaction.....	137
Conclusions	143
6 WASHINGTON: SETTLING DIFFERENCES.....	145
The Pig War.....	147
The Civil War and the <i>Trent</i> Affair.....	150
Confederate Ships in British Ports	154
British Domestic Politics.....	159
British Imperial Policies.....	161
Diplomacy	164

CHAPTER	Page
Conclusions	175
7 CONCLUSIONS	178
REFERENCES	183

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. The Oregon Territory.....	45
2. The San Juan Islands.....	146

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1776, thirteen British colonies in North America allied in rebellion against metropolitan rule, and the United States became the first sovereign nation borne of European colonization in the Western Hemisphere. Although the United States and Britain continued to share close economic ties, their diplomatic relations began on a rocky path. Britain frowned on the Franco-American friendship in the early stages of the French Revolution, British violations of American maritime rights irritated the United States, and the boundaries between British and American territory in North America remained unsettled. After the War of 1812, however, negotiation overtook military and economic pressure as the preferred means to settle disputes between the United States and Britain.

Despite the cordiality of Anglo-American relations after this “first rapprochement,” the ambitions of the two nations ensured continued diplomatic friction. At various times throughout the nineteenth century, boundary disputes, British support for the Confederacy, competition for markets, control of transportation routes in Latin America, and varying conceptions of neutrality all threatened Anglo-American reconciliation. Still, economic and cultural ties, domestic political imperatives, and a general desire to avoid war helped foster an Anglo-American relationship that led to one of the most stable and influential diplomatic alliances of modern times.

Scholarship on Anglo-American relations in the early years of American independence is rich.¹ Further, a great deal has been written about the foundations and impact of Anglo-American friendship in the twentieth century. However, Anglo-American relations during the mid-nineteenth century have yet to be treated with the same attention. Bridging the gap from the cordial but contentious relationship at the beginning of the nineteenth century to the stable and powerful alliance that emerged at its end is essential to understanding the long-term trajectory of Anglo-American relations.

Nonetheless, there are many excellent studies of Anglo-American relations in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Bradford Perkins's two books on rapprochement at the bookends of the nineteenth century remain perhaps the best explorations of trans-Atlantic cordiality, even decades after their publication. Taken together, the work of Howard Jones and Wilbur Devereux Jones provides a useful survey of Anglo-American diplomacy between the Revolutionary and Civil Wars.² A number of works also explore the British reaction to the American Civil War.³ However, in the period from the Civil

¹ Bradford Perkins, *The First Rapprochement: England and the United States, 1895-1905* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press); and Bradford Perkins, *The Great Rapprochement: England and the United States, 1895-1914* (New York: Atheneum, 1968) are two seminal works that frame much of the historiographical approach in this dissertation; Charles S. Campbell, *From Revolution to Rapprochement: The United States and Great Britain, 1783-1900* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974) agrees with the prevailing notion that Anglo-American rapprochement was cemented in the 1890s; Charles R. Ritcheson, *Aftermath of Revolution: British Policy toward the United States, 1783-1795* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1969), offers a British view of post-Revolutionary relations; H. C. Allen, *The Anglo-American Relationship Since 1783* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1959); and Howard Temperley, *Britain and America since Independence* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2002) are two good, broader surveys of the course of Anglo-American relations over the course of two centuries.

² Howard Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty: A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1843* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Wilbur Devereux Jones, *The American Problem in British Diplomacy, 1841-1861* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1974).

³ Howard Jones, *Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); and R. J. M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001) are two good, recent accounts.

War until the end of the century, research tends to focus on direct, bilateral incidents between Britain and the United States, such as the *Alabama* claims and boundary disputes in Venezuela, while more general surveys of the relationship are few and far between.

This dissertation seeks to expand and supplement the existing literature by examining a series of episodes from the enunciation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 to the 1872 arbitration of outstanding trans-Atlantic disputes. These episodes include Anglo-American reactions to the Oregon boundary controversy, attempts to prevent any one power from dominating transportation and trade in Central America, cooperation ensuring economic access to China, and a series of diplomatic crises arising from the American Civil War.

These four incidents, primarily occurring outside the sovereign territory of the United States and Britain, each provide a unique crucible in which to examine and expand the current understanding of Anglo-American rapprochement. They not only illuminate a period generally underrepresented in current scholarship, but also expand the geographical scope of the study of Anglo-American relations beyond American and British territory. Regions such as Oregon, Latin America, and China, where the United States and Britain competed to expand their territory, influence, and profits, became the crucibles in which the tenor of Anglo-American relations unfolded. Examining how the Americans and the British postured and acted when their strategic and economic interests clashed answers the question at the heart of this study: How, after two wars including the modern world's first colonial rebellion, did the close diplomatic relationship between the United States and Great Britain continue to develop during a period when the two nations' interests routinely clashed?

The examination of this question begins in the Pacific Northwest, where disagreements about the region's sovereignty took over half a century to resolve. The Oregon Territory provides a window into Anglo-American relations at the height of American expansion. The fact that James K. Polk ran a campaign demanding "all Oregon" and blustered loudly over the issue illustrates the intense desire of American policymakers to expand their territorial boundaries and the degree to which they would go to achieve their goal. However, the fact that Polk lowered his voice as soon as he learned Britain intended to send warships to Puget Sound demonstrates the continued British economic and military power vis-à-vis the United States, as well as the importance of trans-Atlantic cordiality to both countries. By viewing the Oregon boundary negotiations over a twenty year period, rather than focusing narrowly on the brief sixteen month concurrence of the terms of American President James K. Polk and British Foreign Secretary Lord Aberdeen (George Hamilton-Gordon), during which the negotiations intensified and culminated, this section adds depth to the existing scholarship by taking into consideration the place of Oregon within the larger context of the changing British Empire.

Available studies of the Oregon boundary negotiations are hard to come by. Most historians writing on Manifest Destiny-era expansion concentrate on the larger and more immediately consequential acquisitions of Texas and the Mexican cession. In the past fifty years, only two historians published monographs on the Oregon Territory.⁴ Their

⁴ Frederick Merk, *The Oregon Question: Essays in Anglo-American Diplomacy and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967); Donald A. Rakestraw, *For Honor or Destiny: The Anglo-American Crisis over the Oregon Territory* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1995).

books expertly detail the timeline of the boundary negotiations, but do not sufficiently examine the British perspective. Including British public opinion and private correspondence adds depth to historians' understanding of the Oregon boundary negotiations by considering the effect of shifts in British imperial policy on the value of Oregon for the British Empire. A unique jointly occupied territory under disputed sovereignty, Oregon provides an excellent litmus test for the rate of Anglo-American rapprochement and the shifting foreign policy goals of the two nations.

In Oregon, tension between American and British claims of sovereignty lasted decades, with American and British views of territorial sovereignty consistently at odds. Thousands of miles away, Americans and Britons sought to cooperate in Central America to ensure that neither one of their countries, nor any other, dominated the important trade routes that connected the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. On the heels of the Oregon dispute, they signed the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty in 1850, pledging not to exclude each other from economic access to the region, but problems arose immediately. The British denied that the treaty mandated the extrication of existing protectorates and colonies in Central America and maintained a presence at key points on the trade routes across the isthmus. Meanwhile, an American tycoon secured a virtual monopoly on transportation between the two oceans. Then, American filibusters invaded the region with private armies, hoping for annexation to the United States. The British preference for free trade directly confronted the American principle of European non-intervention in the Americas. Still, the fact that Americans and their government lodged little protest when British authorities turned over the most notorious American filibuster – William Walker – to a Honduran firing squad indicates that Anglo-American friendship and maintenance of

the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty were important enough on each side of the Atlantic to mandate restraint.

William Walker and his filibustering in Central America have been the subjects of a rich literature, but the study of the impact of his activities focuses on the United States and Latin America.⁵ This scholarship rarely considers how British domestic and imperial policies shifted during the decade, and how those adjustments affected the British reaction to American activities. Political instability reigned in Britain during the 1850s, as party politics, a disastrous war against Russia, and an indigenous threat to British rule in India demanded attention and distracted London from the problems in Central America. An examination of how the primary concerns of British policymakers impacted their ability to address secondary concerns in the Western Hemisphere is vital to understanding the evolution of Anglo-American relations through this period.

Although American and British sensibilities about how to maintain open economic access to Central America differed, their goals remained essentially the same. American and British interest in free trade and access to markets dovetailed in the Far East as well. The teeming population of China had enticed merchants and businessmen from the Western world since tales of Marco Polo's journeys surfaced in thirteenth century Europe. By the mid-1800s, Britain forced concessions that allowed greater access

⁵ Albert Z. Carr, *The World and William Walker* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); William O. Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers: The Story of William Walker and his Associates* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1969); and Frederic Rosengarten, Jr., *Freebooters Must Die!: The Life and Death of William Walker, The Most Notorious Filibuster of the Nineteenth Century* (Wayne, PA: Haverford House, 1976) deal directly with Walker; Charles Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny: The Life and Times of the Filibusters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Robert May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and Robert May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989) each include extensive sections on Walker, but take a wider view of the American experience with filibustering.

to the “Middle Kingdom,” and the United States also established a permanent economic presence there. Their cooperation continued in the late 1850s, as they demanded more access, rights, and privileges in the ancient empire. While Britain used the strength of her navy, the United States pushed for change through peaceful means. Although the United States remained officially neutral in the Second Opium War, she maintained a naval presence to protect her citizens involved in trade. As it turned out, one American officer found it impossible to sit idly by while Chinese forces decimated the British fleet.

A handful of books explore the Second Opium War, but it receives nothing like the attention given to the first.⁶ The American role in the conflict has been almost entirely neglected. But the willingness of American sailors and diplomats to violate neutrality in the conflict to come to the aid of the British, and the positive reaction elicited on both sides of the Atlantic, provides an untapped resource in understanding Anglo-American rapprochement. The growing friendship between the United States and Britain tends to be examined through the peaceful settlement of conflicts between the two nations. An analysis of their collaboration in China shows the other side of the coin and importantly illustrates a willingness to work together to achieve shared goals.

Soon after their cooperation in China, the United States and Britain found themselves at odds once more. The Civil War gripped the United States, causing both crises and opportunities for Britain. Washington fumed at London’s tacit support for the South early in the war, while the British economy suffered from the North’s blockade of

⁶ Douglas Hurd, *The Arrow War: An Anglo-Chinese Confusion, 1856-1860* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), provides a thorough account of the British view of the war, but barely mentions the American position; J. Y. Wong, *Deadly Dreams: Opium, Imperialism, and the Arrow War (1856-1860) in China* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), argues that economic imperatives dictated British military intervention in China, but mentions Americans and their interests on less than 20 of the nearly 500 pages of its narrative.

Southern ports. British shipbuilders provided ships for the Confederate navy despite their government's declaration of neutrality. The Union navy interfered with diplomatic relations between Britain and the Confederacy. Britain took advantage of American problems to join, however briefly, an ill-fated European military expedition in Mexico. When the Union emerged triumphant and emboldened, Britain's colonial possessions in North America seemed threatened by a renewed American impulse for expansion and the toleration of dissident groups who planned and launched military action against Canada from American soil. Despite the difficulties caused by this series of diplomatic crises, cordiality prevailed, and the controversies borne of the Civil War, along with longstanding disputes about boundaries in the Pacific Northwest and fisheries in the Atlantic Northeast, were settled by an agreement that reshaped the way Western nations conducted diplomacy.

No subject in nineteenth century American history holds such a prominent place as the Civil War, and historians have examined the conflict, including the role of Britain, from thousands of angles. Nevertheless, they neglect Anglo-American disputes during the 1860s. A renewed boundary dispute in the Pacific Northwest resulted in an obscure but important conflict called the Pig War, during which the two countries made their most extensive preparations for armed hostility since the Treaty of Ghent. Meanwhile, Washington vigorously protested as the Confederate navy secured ships from British ports. These incidents strained Anglo-American relations for over a decade, yet receive only cursory attention despite their potential to elucidate the dramatic changes in trans-Atlantic diplomacy during and after the Civil War.

Additionally, the scholarship on the subject remains decidedly American in its point of view, again neglecting to consider how the wider policy of the British Empire dictated London's relations with the United States. As new and more powerful rivals threatened British hegemony on the continent, cordial Anglo-American relations became a vital counterweight to militaristic European monarchies. In 1871, the two English-speaking nations signed the Treaty of Washington, a culmination of their efforts to foster trans-Atlantic friendship, understanding, and cooperation. In this treaty, nearly a century after the American Declaration of Independence, Britain finally recognized the United States as a nation on par with the Great Powers of Europe, herself included.

In examining these incidents, this dissertation employs world history methodology. This approach encourages a focus on connections between global regions and a comprehensive view of the factors that influence policymaking decisions.⁷ Histories of U.S. foreign relations too often concentrate on bilateral relations and crises physically located in the competing nations' territories. As discussed above, this problem appears prominently in mid-nineteenth century Anglo-American historiography, and the focus on incidents across the globe broadens the geographical scope of the study of Anglo-American relations. This dissertation also expands the view of Anglo-American relations by paying careful attention to the place of Oregon, Latin America, China, and Canada in the extremely fluid British Empire. Although American relations with Latin America in the mid-nineteenth century have been studied in great detail, a consideration

⁷ Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History*, edited, with an introduction and conclusion by Edmund Burke, III (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Ross Dunn, ed., *The New World History: A Teacher's Companion* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000) are three seminal works that help delineate the methodological approach of world historians.

of British relations with Latin America rarely appears in studies of Anglo-American diplomacy.⁸ A view of how events like the Opium Wars and the Sepoy Rebellion altered British attitudes about the American position in Oregon and Latin America enriches the history of trans-Atlantic rapprochement.

This dissertation also challenges the prevailing historiographic notion that the Anglo-Venezuelan boundary dispute constitutes the opening moment of Anglo-American rapprochement.⁹ Rather than indicating the start of rapprochement, diplomatic cooperation at the end of the nineteenth century demonstrates its consummation. Through their actions, the British showed the United States that they would henceforth abide by the principles of the Monroe Doctrine. Secret alliances entangled the nations of Europe, and the British accepted nonintervention in the Western Hemisphere as the price of securing American support they could use in the European balance of power game.

Previous historians of Anglo-American relations, concerned primarily with tracing the growth of the alliance which proved the deciding factor in two World Wars, tend to view the trans-Atlantic cooperation of the 1890s and 1900s as the first steps of two democratic nations joining forces to crush the autocratic powers of Europe. By taking

⁸ Joseph Smith, *Illusions of Conflict: Anglo-American Diplomacy Toward Latin America, 1865-1896* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979) is a notable exception that demonstrates that while the United States gave the region primacy in their foreign policy, it was of secondary importance to the British, who gave the Americans a virtual free hand there after the Civil War, so long as they did not threaten British economic interests.

⁹ Perkins, *The Great Rapprochement*, begins in 1895 and explains how the growth of American power by that point made Britain less willing to risk a trans-Atlantic conflict; Allen, *Anglo-American Relationship*, 199 refers to the Venezuela dispute “the last severe flurry in the blizzard of Anglo-American misunderstanding” at the end of a period of American isolation; Temperley, *Britain and America since Independence, 77-78* calls it a “watershed in Anglo-American relations” after which “splendid isolation was no longer possible” because the growth of the American and German navies meant: “For the first time since the defeat of Napoleon, the British felt the need for friends; each of these books entirely omit the Second Opium War or the Pig War, and only Allen mentions the Bay Islands or the Treaty of Washington, in one sentence each.

the long view of rapprochement from the Monroe Doctrine to the Treaty of Washington, this dissertation argues that British recognition of American preeminence in Latin America marks the conclusion of a seventy five year process that resulted in a reliable Anglo-American alliance cemented well before the outbreak of the Great War and that has remained robust ever since.

In this sense, this study seeks fill the gap left by the seminal works of Bradford Perkins. *The First Rapprochement* and *The Great Rapprochement* effectively framed the view on Anglo-American relations for nearly half a century, but left important parts of the evolution of trans-Atlantic friendship untold. The uneasy understanding examined in *The First Rapprochement* (1795-1805) is better understood as a period of reconciliation, as Britain continually treated the United States as a second-class nation, failed to fulfill its treaty obligations, and used its military preeminence to bully the fledgling democracy. The Jay Treaty that ushered in the period failed to ensure British respect for American sovereignty, and the incidents afterwards, which led to the War of 1812, clearly demonstrate that nothing like a harmonious relationship developed between the United States and Britain by 1805.

Likewise, this dissertation asserts that Anglo-American rapprochement solidified decades before the period scrutinized in *The Great Rapprochement* (1895-1914). That the United States could force Britain not only to basically accept the tenets of the Monroe Doctrine, but also *American* intervention in *British* affairs in the Western Hemisphere was simply unthinkable a century earlier. Perkins expertly explains the first moments of reconciliation between the United States and Britain, as well as the manifestation of their rapprochement as the world careened towards the World War I; the research presented

here seeks to fill the gap between his two seminal works and provide context necessary to understand how the United States and Britain moved beyond rapprochement to build a solid, and ultimately permanent, alliance at the dawn of the twentieth century.

This dissertation is a work of political history. Despite the derision heaped upon “Great Man History” over the last two decades, there is no doubt that white men exclusively conducted the diplomacy of the United States and Britain in the nineteenth century. Indeed, Britain’s Foreign Ministers retained remarkable personal control over the course of Britain’s foreign policy until the end of the century, exercising “authority second only to that of the Prime Minister” and enjoying a “lack of legislative and public interference with the formulation and execution of British foreign policy.”¹⁰

James Buchanan’s description of the Mosquito Indians, the British policies that inspired the Sepoy Rebellion, and the general Western sense of entitlement in China lay bare their sense of superiority over non-white peoples. Still, this project does not delve deeply into nineteenth century attitudes towards race, a project admirably undertaken by many recent historians.¹¹ According to Reginald Horsman, “By the early 1850s the

¹⁰ Muriel Chamberlain, *‘Pax Britannica’?: British Foreign Policy, 1789-1914* (London: Longman, 1988), 16; Smith, *Illusions of Conflict*, 6.

¹¹ Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Oxford University Press, 1981) traces the shift from a belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority derived from “advanced” governmental institutions to a belief in an innate, biologically superiority; Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism & Empire, Revised Edition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003) discusses the impact of racial ideology on American attitudes towards slavery and expansion; Eric T. L. Love *Race over Empire: Racism & U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) cuts against the grain of traditional interpretations, positing that race limited, rather than encouraged, expansion as the United States hesitated to incorporate non-white peoples into her territory; Stuart Anderson, *Race and Rapprochement: Anglo-Saxonism in Anglo-American Relations, 1895-1904* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press) examines the role of racial ideology in promoting the “Great Rapprochement.”

inherent inequality of races was simply accepted as a scientific fact in America.”¹²

Politicians on both sides of the Atlantic harbored racist attitudes that inevitably informed their policies, but the focus here remains on the political and economic, rather than ideological, determinants of those policies.

Despite the attention given to Anglo-American rapprochement at the beginning and the end of the nineteenth century, historians have not fully connected this scholarship. Interest in Anglo-American relations and rapprochement has dropped precipitously in the last three decades. This dissertation seeks to rejuvenate and expand the study of growing trans-Atlantic friendship by asking: What strategic advantages did territory and strategic footholds in the Western Hemisphere provide the British Empire? How did domestic reforms affect the practical and ideological goals of British Imperialism? To what degree did the American physical and economic presence in Oregon and Latin America prohibit the realization of British imperial policy goals? What was the personal impact of British policymakers on the expansion of America’s global standing? How did changes in the British Empire affect the strategic value of the Western Hemisphere? By juxtaposing these new questions about the British view of rapprochement alongside more common questions about the U.S. perspective, this dissertation expands the factors considered when understanding American and British foreign policy conflicts and cooperation and encourages a more comprehensive view of Anglo-American rapprochement in the mid-nineteenth century.

¹² Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 134.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND: FROM RECONCILIATION TO RAPPROCHEMENT

It is impossible that the allied powers should extend their political system to any portion of either continent without endangering our peace and happiness....

-James Monroe¹

With the Treaty of Paris in 1783, the United States became the first former colony to overthrow its master. Over the next forty years, the two nations reconciled their relationship through contentious diplomatic crises as the United States sought to establish the terms of their independence while Britain attempted to preserve its privileges and limit the influence of European rivals in the Western Hemisphere. When they agreed (albeit without direct British cooperation) on the principle of European non-intervention in the Americas, a policy made public by President James Monroe on 2 December 1823, the United States and Britain began moving past the settlement of post-colonial issues and began to develop a relationship based primarily on cooperation.

When the United States promulgated its Monroe Doctrine in 1823, the major foreign policy objectives of both nations and the primary methods by which they resolved their disputes had been established. At that point, U.S. expansion had begun, as Americans and their boundaries moved westward. Simultaneously, British foreign policy in the Western Hemisphere constituted but part of a global policy designed primarily to ensure the supremacy of Britain vis-à-vis the nations of Europe. These basic policy

¹ James Monroe, "Seventh Annual Message," 2 December 1823, in James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1908*, vol. 2 (Washington: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1908), 219.

objectives remained fundamental cornerstones of American and British policy and shaped the course of Anglo-American rapprochement throughout the nineteenth century.

Introduction

Well before revolutionary spirit gripped the colonies in the 1760s, the issues, ideas, and policy goals that colored Anglo-American relations in the nineteenth century already stood at the forefront of trans-Atlantic relations. Beginning in sixteenth century England, some intellectuals constructed ideas about a race that inhabited England before the Norman invasion in 1066. The Anglo-Saxons, the mythology ran, descended from the very origins of humans in the Indus Valley. The original lovers and practitioners of liberty, they migrated to Rome to rejuvenate that dilapidated empire, mixed with members of the Teutonic races in ancient Germany, and eventually settled in the British Isles. Not only were the Anglo-Saxons the only perfect practitioners of liberty, they also inevitably moved westward.² So the idea that Anglo-Saxon settlers in the New World would move westward, perfecting the state of any land or people in the way, is as old as English settlement in the Americas.

As the American colonists achieved success in the eighteenth century, policymakers and settlers alike sought new opportunities further inland from the Atlantic coast. The French presence west of the Mississippi River blocked some British

² Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981) offers a detailed discussion of the philosophical and pseudo-scientific underpinnings of the idea of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority, its roots in England, and its expansionist manifestation in the United States.

movements westward, but that barrier largely disappeared at the conclusion of the French and Indian War, before London found it expedient to limit the expansion of the colonies.

The war itself exposed a major rift between Britain and its colonists. While British commanders and army regulars battled the French and their indigenous allies as part of a global war, colonists and militiamen struggled to preserve the safety of their families and livelihoods far from the European capitals.³

The variance in objectives became even clearer at the war's conclusion. Instead of opening the western frontiers to further British settlement, the British banned it west of the Appalachian Mountains. This issue predated the infamous taxation without representation and strained trans-Atlantic relations. So before the Sons of Liberty or the Continental Congresses, British policymakers demonstrated their willingness to stem the power of European rivals anywhere around the globe without regard to the desires of the British subjects or indigenous people living where the fighting took place. Simultaneously, American settlers bristled at the idea of the British impeding their westward expansion.

During the American Revolution, some long-term patterns of Anglo-American relations also arose. French support helped ensure American victory by helping break American economic and military dependence on the British. As a foreign policy philosophy, the alliance effectively exploited Britain's European rivals. Doing so was

³ Walter L. Dorn, *Competition for Empire: 1740-1763* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940) set the standard for modern examination of the period; Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000) details the military and political aspects of the war itself, argues that colonists remained loyal to Britain as long as their London respected their rights, and concludes the episode deserves attention as more than simply a prelude to Revolution.

clearly a practical necessity, but it also demonstrates American awareness of British foreign policy priorities.⁴

Independence

Expansion remained an important goal the new republic. Congress took practical steps to establish methods to broaden its borders and govern its citizens in new territories. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 simultaneously supported expansion, rejected European notions of colonization, and established the precedent for future acquisitions. The Ordinance, most importantly, backed a plan for “the establishment of States, and ... their admission to a share in the federal councils on an equal footing with the original States.”⁵ So at this early stage, policymakers promoted a style of expansion that would adopt the best of British government (guarantees of liberties and representation) while rejecting the European model of expansion.

The American penchant for expansion and the desire to avoid European affairs already existed by the time the United States and Britain took their first major step towards reconciliation after the Revolution. Although the United States won their political independence in 1783, the American economy remained heavily dependent on British trade in the decades afterward. Large portions of the United States, especially the

⁴ Samuel Flagg Bemis, *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1935; reprint Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983) is a detailed, if whiggish, account; Lawrence S. Kaplan, *Colonies into Nation: American Diplomacy, 1763-1801* (New York: Macmillan, 1972) takes a longer view of the Revolution than most monographs that examines its diplomacy; Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985) is the most useful monograph on the subject, considering the impact across Europe and including an extensive bibliography.

⁵ “Northwest Ordinance, July 13, 1787,” *The Avalon Project*, Yale Law School, available from http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/nworder.asp, accessed 10 March 2014.

plantation South, had economies dependent on British markets. Further, despite the guarantees in the Treaty of Paris, the British maintained a military presence in U.S. territory, encouraged Native American resistance to U.S. expansion, and impressed American citizens into service in the British navy.

So the economic viability and permanence of an independent American nation remained open to question in the decade following the Treaty of Paris. The 1794 Jay Treaty marked beginning of what Bradford Perkins called the first rapprochement. The British agreed to remove its military presence from American soil, but this merely signaled a commitment to finally abide by the terms of the Treaty of Paris. Britain also granted the United States restricted rights to trade with its West Indian colonies. This concession was certainly an important win for the American economy, but it also illustrates Britain's economic dominance of the United States. Since the vast majority of their foreign trade was with Britain, the United States was also forced to grant "most-favored nation" status to Britain, ensuring that no American commercial treaty could handicap Anglo-American trade.⁶

⁶ Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Jay's Treaty: A Study in Commerce and Diplomacy*, rev. ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962) remains required reading on the subject nearly a century after its original publication; Jerald A. Combs, *The Jay Treaty: Political Battleground of the Founding Fathers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970) examines competing Federalist and Democratic-Republican views of the treaty; Reginald Horsman, *The Diplomacy of the New Republic, 1776-1815* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1985) provides a brief overview with a comprehensive bibliography; James A. Field, Jr. "1789-1820: All Economists, All Diplomats," in William H. Becker and Samuel F. Wells, Jr., eds., *Economics and World Power: An Assessment of American Diplomacy since 1789* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 1-54, examines the impact of economic considerations on diplomacy in times of peace and the ability of crises to render those considerations secondary; Walter LaFeber, "Foreign Policies of a New Nation: Franklin, Madison, and the 'Dream of a New Land to Fulfill with People in Self-Control,' 1750-1804," in William Appleman Williams, ed., *From Colony to Empire: Essays in the History of American Foreign Relations* (New York: John Wiley, 1972), 9-37, also examines how economic expansion dictated early American foreign policy; Lawrence S. Kaplan, *Entangling Alliances With None: American Foreign Policy in the Age of Jefferson* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1987) is a collection of essays dealing primarily with Franco-American relations and Jefferson's tendency to promote diplomatic isolation from European politics.

Despite these concessions, Britain refused to end the practice of impressment, the most vexing problem faced by the young American republic. Further, the United States not only recognized the British desire to remain preeminent in Europe, but also agreed not to protest against British harassment of French shipping, despite American preferences for freedom of the seas. So while the British abandoned its American forts, marking a step towards permanent American sovereignty, Britain clearly remained in a position of power. The British did not acquiesce to the most pressing demands of the United States and received as much in trade concessions as it gave.

Rather than representing a step towards true rapprochement, the Jay Treaty marked the first step in a decades-long reconciliation between Britain and her former colonies. The difference was subtle, but important.⁷ Rapprochement constituted a step beyond reconciliation, which the Jay Treaty clearly failed to achieve. True, the establishment of firm commercial ties across the Atlantic represents a step towards friendship. However, the continued harassment of American shipping precluded trans-Atlantic diplomatic relations from approaching a “harmonious” state of rapprochement.

Over the next decade, war engulfed the European continent while a fledgling United States continued its democratic experiment. Events on both sides of the Atlantic converged when Thomas Jefferson sent ministers to Paris to acquire the Floridas and restore American rights to navigation on the Mississippi River and deposit at New

⁷ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “rapprochement” as “an establishment or resumption of harmonious relations,” and “reconciliation” as “restoring estranged people or parties to friendship.” Available from <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158213?redirectedFrom=rapprochement#eid> and <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/159781?redirectedFrom=reconciliation#eid>, accessed 10 March 2014.

Orleans, which had been lost when Spain repudiated Pickney's Treaty in 1798.⁸ The move sought to secure American ships in the Gulf of Mexico, a major outlet for American trade. Upon their arrival in France, an even greater opportunity arose.

The French defeat at the Battle of Vertières in November 1803 crushed any remaining hopes for suppressing the slave-led revolution in Saint Domingue.⁹ Strapped for cash and deprived of the stepping-stone he hoped to use to launch a new French empire in the Americas, Napoleon offered to sell the whole of Louisiana, a region that stretched from the Gulf of Mexico northward to the British claims north of the Great Lakes and from the Mississippi westward to the Rocky Mountains. Jefferson, who usually applied extremely strict interpretation to the Constitution, could not resist the chance to double the amount of territory within the United States.¹⁰ Americans had

⁸ Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Pinckney's Treaty: A Study of America's Advantage from Europe's Distress, 1783-1800* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1926), explores the role of European politics in helping the United States secure the favorable terms from Spain; Ethan Grant, "The Treaty of San Lorenzo and Manifest Destiny," *Gulf Coast Historical Review* 12, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 44-57, argues that the treaty was a vital step in early American expansion.

⁹ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), is an excellent survey of the revolution; Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), examines the impact of the revolution on American politics and debates about slavery; Timothy M. Matthewson, "Jefferson and Haiti," *Journal of Southern History* 61, no. 2 (May 1995), 209-248, argues that Jefferson became antagonistic towards Haiti after the revolution as a means to curry favor with slaveholders and ensure French support for further expansion around the Gulf of Mexico.

¹⁰ Alexander DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976) provides the best overview on the Louisiana Purchase, and argues that it demonstrates the American penchant for expansion well before the period of Manifest Destiny; Everett Somerville Brown, *The Constitutional History of the Louisiana Purchase, 1803-1812* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1920); and Barry J. Balleck, "When the Ends Justify the Means: Thomas Jefferson and the Louisiana Purchase," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (Fall 1992), 679-696; and Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997) are among the many works that examine the constitutional issues of the Louisiana purchase, especially for the strict constructionist Thomas Jefferson.

already shown their proclivity for westward expansion, and the Northwest Ordinance had given policymakers a model for incorporating new territory into the growing nation.

While the Louisiana Purchase certainly illustrates the importance of expansion as an early foreign policy goal of the United States, it also demonstrates the global foreign policy goals of Britain. France had been forced to cede the Louisiana Territory to Spain at the conclusion of the French and Indian War. While France remained a threat to British hegemony in Europe, Spain's control over her American Empire weakened as the Iberian nation became the proverbial "sick man" of Europe. Spanish possession of Louisiana represented virtually no threat to Britain's position in North America. However, Spain transferred control of Louisiana back to France after Napoleon came to power. Although the transfer was kept secret through the maintenance of nominal Spanish sovereignty over the territory, word of French control leaked out shortly before the United States purchased the territory. The return of French control and the timing of the Louisiana Purchase influenced British acquiescence to the purchase.¹¹

A viable military threat across the English Channel prevented Britain from any vigorous protest across the Atlantic. Also, the fact that the Louisiana Purchase diminished the size of a strong French (as opposed to a weak Spanish) Empire made the American purchase much more palatable in Britain, as it helped to shrink the empire of an

¹¹ Peter Bakewell, *A History of Latin America: Empires and Sequels, 1450-1930* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997) provides a good, broad overview of the history before and after Spanish colonization in Latin America; John Lynch, *Spanish Colonial Administration, 1782-1810: The Intendant System in the Viceroyalty of the Rio de la Plata* (London: The Athelone Press, University of London, 1958) remains an excellent, in-depth examination of Spanish application of mercantilist ideals to one of its colonies; John Lynch, *The Spanish American Revolutions, 1808-1826* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973) paints a broad view of the colonial wars for independence from Spain; Fred J. Rippy, *Rivalry of the United States and Great Britain over Latin America (1808-1830)*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1929) remains the best monograph to examine the effects of Latin American independence on Anglo-American relations.

immediate European rival. Just as global concerns dictated British policy for its American colonies in the eighteenth century, they continued to impact Anglo-American relations in the nineteenth.

Just weeks after France sold Louisiana, she recommenced hostilities with Britain. The British fought the Napoleonic Wars with the same global sensibilities that directed all of their foreign affairs. This led to an increase in hostilities with the United States, as Britain blocked American trade with France and continued their policy of impressment with renewed vigor and disrupted efforts at reconciliation.

The War of 1812

By 1812, the very question of American independence was at stake. From the founding of the United States, American policymakers had always considered free trade and freedom of the seas vital priorities. When the HMS *Leopard* attacked the USS *Chesapeake* in 1807, killing eighteen Americans and impressing three others, the American public reacted sharply.¹² President Jefferson addressed the affront to American independence with a series of Embargo Acts designed to restrict foreign trade, particularly with Britain and France. The misguided laws intended to deal a financial blow against Britain, thereby securing more respectful treatment of American merchant ships; however, they ended up doing much more damage to the American economy.

¹² Spencer C. Tucker and Frank T. Reuter, *Injured Honor: The Chesapeake-Leopard Affair, June 22, 1807* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996) provides a good overview; James F. Zimmerman, *Impressment of American Seamen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925) is the rare monograph that focuses narrowly on the issue of impressment.

The Embargo Act may not illustrate long-term American goals, but it does reveal the global nature of British foreign policy. The British harassed American shipping not to challenge American independence, but to deplete the French war chest and prevent American supplies from reaching France. The British, more concerned with Napoleon than any potential problems across the Atlantic, barely felt the economic impact of the Embargo Act. Instead, they continued to export manufactured goods to the United States. While the failed Embargo Act constituted a mere blip in the long-term trajectory Anglo-American relations, it clearly demonstrated a lack of Anglo-American cordiality by the end of Jefferson's administration.

Lingering animosity from the *Chesapeake* Affair played a only minor role in leading Congress to declare war on Britain in 1812, but the incompatibility of American expansion and British global policy provided the primary spark. Historians have generally discounted the notion that annexation of some portion of Canada motivated the American declaration of war. It is, however, clear that the American expansionist impulse shaped decisions. By 1812, American settlers began populating the Northwest Territory, with the state of Ohio admitted to the Union in 1803. Yet settlement in the region remained sparse due to constant exposure to attacks from Native Americans. Americans believed the British encouraged the attacks and supplied a healthy portion of the Native Americans' weapons. The British, then, in collusion with Native Americans, violated the

sovereignty of the United States and blocked American settlers from moving westward, setting the stage for conflict.¹³

Despite these serious grievances against Britain, it seems unlikely that the United States would have risked war with such a powerful nation and important trading partner if not for their understanding of Britain's global position. Just before the declaration of war, the strength of the French Empire peaked. By declaring war in 1812, the Americans attacked the British in North America while the best British commanders and the bulk of the British navy focused on Europe. Britain's European military obligations opened a strategic opportunity for American policymakers to address the injustices they suffered while Britain had limited resources. After two years, the British quickly demonstrated their military superiority by burning Washington just months after exiling Napoleon and, if only temporarily, ending the war on the European continent.

The Treaty of Ghent, which ended the War of 1812, further revealed the global nature of British foreign policy. The treaty returned all territory to the *status quo ante bellum*. Both sides agreed to cease hostilities with Native Americans, and the British implied they would no longer encourage their native allies to impede American settlement in the Northwest Territory.¹⁴ However, Britain never addressed the most

¹³ J. C. A. Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic, 1783-1830* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) offers the best recent survey on the War of 1812; Reginald Horsman, *The Causes of the War of 1812* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962) focuses on how the Napoleonic Wars created the Anglo-American rift that led to war.

¹⁴ Article Nine of the treaty mandated that the "United States of America engage to put an end immediately ... to hostilities with all the Tribes and Nations of Indians with whom they may be at war," but only so long as "such Tribes and Nations shall agree to desist from all hostilities against the United States ... and shall so desist accordingly." The qualifier allowed the American military to continue its aggressive policies against Native Americans throughout the nineteenth century. "Treaty of Ghent, 1814," *The Avalon Project*, Yale Law School, available from http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/ghent.asp, accessed 22 March 2014

offensive issue to the Americans – impressments. With France defeated, the British simply no longer felt compelled to interfere with American shipping or force enlistments. So once more, Britain’s policy towards the United States shifted with the goals of the British Empire as a whole, not simply its bilateral relationship with her former colonies.¹⁵

Rapprochement

Beginning with the Treaty of Ghent, actual rapprochement between the United States and Britain became possible. The United States protected her territorial sovereignty and gained concessions (though outside the text of the treaty) that ensured their independence on the high seas. The first article of the Treaty of Ghent mandated “a firm and universal Peace between His Britannic Majesty and the United States.”¹⁶

Although the statement clearly refers specifically to the hostilities of the War of 1812, the spirit of the treaty prevailed for over two centuries. The United States and Britain never engaged in military conflict after the Treaty of Ghent, marking a starting point for “harmonious” Anglo-American relations beginning as early as 1815. Boundary disputes between the United States and Canada continued to vex trans-Atlantic relations for three decades, but the parties always worked out conflicts peacefully, despite the occasional, and usually rhetorical, threat of war.¹⁷

¹⁵ No recent monographs have been published on the Treaty of Ghent, so Frank A. Updyke, *The Diplomacy of the War of 1812* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1915) remains the most comprehensive account; more recently, James A. Carr, “The Battle of New Orleans and the Treaty of Ghent,” *Diplomatic History* 3, no. 3 (Summer 1979), 273-282, rejects the notion that a different outcome at New Orleans would have change the terms of the treaty.

¹⁶ “Treaty of Ghent, 1814,” *The Avalon Project*, Yale Law School, available from http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/ghent.asp, accessed 22 March 2014.

¹⁷ See Chapter 3.

Meanwhile, although the end of the Napoleonic Wars led Britain to abandon its practice of impressment, American sensitivities regarding the practice prevented Anglo-American cooperation in the suppression of the slave trade. The two nations banned the trans-Atlantic slave almost simultaneously in 1807-1808, but only Britain rigorously suppressed the trade and tried to convince other nations to abandon it. By the mid-1830s, Britain used its political and economic sway to secure the rights to search Spanish, Portuguese, Brazilian, and French vessels suspected of participating in the slave trade.

The United States did not agree to the same policy until 1862, a full year into the Civil War. Even if the United States stopped its active participation in the slave trade, its refusal to permit British enforcement of the ban allowed other countries to fly the American flag falsely to circumvent enforcement. Therefore, not only did the United States and Britain miss a golden opportunity to begin the process of rapprochement, but their respective bans on the slave trade produced only a temporary reduction in the number of Africans forced to endure the Middle Passage.¹⁸ In a pattern that persisted in other aspects of their relationship during the rest of the nineteenth century, the United States and Britain proved unable to agree on the best methods to achieve a common goal.

¹⁸ David Eltis, "Was Abolition of the U.S. and British Slave Trade Significant in the Broader Atlantic Context?," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, vol. 66, no. 4, Abolishing the Slave Trades: Ironies and Reverberations (October 2009), 715-736, argues that the bans were more effective in changing the patterns of the trans-Atlantic slave trade than suppressing it; Howard Temperley, *Britain and America Since Independence* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2002), 51-52, explains the role of impressment in the American refusal to allow British searches; Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), is an excellent, recent overview of the slave trade; James Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776-1838* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1986), describes the British experience in promoting abolition of the slave trade and the problems with its enforcement; Matthew Mason, "Keeping Up Appearances: The International Politics of Slave Trade Abolition in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, vol. 66, no. 4, Abolishing the Slave Trades: Ironies and Reverberations (October 2009), 809-832, discusses the global context that led various nations to sign treaties with Britain to agree to suppress the slave trade and the methods by which they avoided conforming to those agreements.

Nevertheless, the two countries continued efforts to foster a new friendship across the Atlantic. American officials arrived in London in 1818 to resolve the remaining boundary disputes in North America. They focused in the London Convention on the status of Astoria, a small American fur trading post at the mouth of the Columbia River purchased by British agents, but also formally captured by the British navy during the War of 1812. When Richard Rush, the American ambassador in London, recalled that Britain had demanded compensation from Spain when she destroyed a fort on Vancouver Island, British Foreign Minister Lord Castlereagh (Robert Stewart) immediately “admitted [the American] right to restitution.”¹⁹ The ease with which the American negotiators exacted the restoration of Astoria, which had been legally transferred to British control before its formal capture, illustrates newfound willingness to refrain from saber rattling during discussions of contentious trans-Atlantic concerns.

At the same conference, the British tried to secure rights of navigation on the Mississippi River. These rights had been assured in the Treaty of Paris (1783), but the thirty-five year interim produced more accurate maps, revealing that the source of the Mississippi was not in British territory, but rather south of the 49th parallel. The British quickly withdrew their request, as they had four years earlier at Ghent, once more demonstrating a newer, more harmonious tenor to Anglo-American relations.²⁰

The negotiations turned next to the boundary west of the Rocky Mountains, and each side proposed lines for partition. The United States suggested extending the

¹⁹ Richard Rush, *Memoranda of a Residence at the Court of London* (Philadelphia: Key and Biddle, 1833), 107. This is an excellent and thorough first-hand account of the negotiations.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 402-405.

boundary of the 49th parallel to the Pacific Ocean. The British accepted this principle as far west as the line's intersection with the Columbia River, but preferred using the river as the boundary beyond that point. When neither side budged, both agreed to preserve the status quo under friendly auspices: "any Country that may be claimed by either Party on the North West coast of America ... and the Navigation of all Rivers within the same, be free and open for a term of ten Years."²¹ The very principle of joint occupation would have been unthinkable five or ten years earlier, but the removal of the French threat to Britain's global interests and the establishment of friendly relations after the War of 1812 made this unusual arrangement possible.

The Treaty of Ghent and the London Convention of 1818 introduced rapprochement as the new pattern of Anglo-American relations. When President James Monroe outlined a seemingly bold new policy in his annual address to Congress in December 1823, it helped make that pattern permanent. That statement, which eventually became known as the Monroe Doctrine, actually had its genesis in London.

The Monroe Doctrine

A new British government took control of Parliament in 1822, and George Canning replaced Lord Castlereagh in his post at the Foreign Office. In August, Rush received an invitation to Canning's office for what he assumed was a meeting about a Russian declaration that threatened American and British claims in the Oregon Territory,

²¹ "Convention of 1818 between the United States and Great Britain," *The Avalon Project*, Yale Law School, available from http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/conv1818.asp, accessed 22 March 2014.

however, Canning seemed more interested in discussing Latin America.²² Revolutions across Central and South America freed the colonies of the Spanish Empire. British policymakers, always playing the balance of powers game on a global scale, worried about the political vacuum left by Spain's removal while eagerly seeking new economic opportunities. The United States, sympathetic with colonies seeking independence from European rule, recognized some of the new republics by 1823. Still, the precarious future of these fledgling nations prevented European nations from following suit. After a week of informal talks, Canning sent to Rush an outline of the British position on the matter:

1. We conceive the recovery of the Colonies by Spain to be hopeless.
2. We conceive the question of the Recognition of them, as Independent States, to be one of time and circumstances.
3. We are, however, by no means disposed to throw any impediment in the way of an arrangement between them and the mother country by amicable negotiation.
4. We aim not at the possession of any portion of them ourselves.
5. We could not see any portion of them transferred to any other Power with indifference.²³

These statements illustrate a narrowly constructed British response that aimed to avoid any new competition in the Western Hemisphere. Although it would later be expanded,

²² Ernest R. May, *The Making of the Monroe Doctrine* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1975), details the process by which a British proposal for European non-intervention in the Western Hemisphere became a unilateral policy statement pushed by a Secretary of State with presidential ambitions; W. R. Craven, Jr., "The Risk of the Monroe Doctrine," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 7, no. 3 (August 1927), 320-333, agrees that an understanding of British policy preferences supported the principle of non-intervention; Gale W. McGee, "The Monroe Doctrine – A Stopgap Measure," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 38, no. 2 (September 1951), 233-250, disagrees, arguing that a plan to promote nonintervention was in the works in Washington before Canning's proposal; Dexter Perkins, "Europe, Spanish America, and the Monroe Doctrine," *American Historical Review* 27, no. 2 (January 1922), 207-218, renders the point moot by arguing that no European country crafted a workable plan to intervene.

²³ Stratford Canning to Richard Rush, 20 August 1823, in *The Writings of James Monroe*, Stanislaus Murray Hamilton, ed., (G. P Putnam's Sons, 1898-1903), vol. VI, 365.

the original formulation of this policy converged with the preferences of the United States, and Canning hoped the Americans would join Britain to issue a joint declaration.

Nearly since its inception as a nation, the United States had prided itself on its abstention from European politics, and Washington found breaking with tradition difficult. Canning spent the next month trying to convince Rush of the utility of a joint declaration, but Rush stalled. As he found it more and more difficult to resist Canning's overtures, Rush agreed to the promulgation of a joint declaration contingent upon Britain's recognition of the new states, even though this went beyond what his official instructions from Washington. As expected, Canning refused, and the American minister effectively paused issue.²⁴

News of Canning's proposals did not reach Washington until October, and even then President James Monroe hesitated to make a decision. Over the course of the next month, the president's cabinet debated whether to join Canning's declaration. Secretary of State John Quincy Adams opposed the idea, knowing that any perceived "truckling" to British interests would cost him dearly in his already active presidential campaign. Another presidential hopeful, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, favored the measure, knowing it would damage the Adams's image.²⁵ Still thinking of the following year's election, Adams eventually convinced Monroe to make a unilateral statement very similar

²⁴ Canning to Rush, 23 August 1823, in *The Writings of James Monroe*, vol. VI, 369; Rush to John Quincy Adams, 28 August 1823, in *The Writings of James Monroe*, vol. VI, 370-372; Canning to Rush, 31 August 1823, in *The Writings of James Monroe*, vol. VI, 372-374; Rush to Adams, 8 September 1823, in *The Writings of James Monroe*, vol. VI, 374; Rush to James Monroe, 15 September 1823, in *The Writings of James Monroe*, vol. VI, 374-377; Rush to Adams, 19 September 1823, in *The Writings of James Monroe*, vol. VI, 377-386; Adams to Rush, 2 October 1823, in *The Writings of James Monroe*, vol. VI, 386-388; Rush to Adams, 26 November 1823, in *The Writings of James Monroe*, vol. VI, 401-405; Adams to Rush, 29 November 1823, in *The Writings of James Monroe*, vol. VI, 405-408.

²⁵ May, *The Making of the Monroe Doctrine*, 190-206.

in character to that proposed by Canning. By doing so without British concurrence, Adams hoped to demonstrate strength rather than weakness.²⁶

Monroe announced the policy in his annual message to Congress, delivered 2 December 1823. It reaffirmed the American commitment to avoid European politics and added “that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.”²⁷ The message assured European powers that the United States would continue to respect their existing colonies, a clear attempt to mollify any potential British ire at the unilateral American declaration. Although future policymakers would construe the statement far beyond its original intent, Monroe’s speech clearly articulated a vision specifically in response to the situation between Spain and her former colonies.

The tenor of these negotiations regarding British and American sentiment towards possible Spanish attempts to reconquer their American colonies revealed the progress toward rapprochement by the end of 1823. Canning merely shrugged his shoulders. Understanding the political aspects at play across the Atlantic, he took no offense to British honor and achieved his goal of American support for British foreign policy preferences. His silence after Monroe’s annual message indicates an acceptance of American independence unlike any earlier moment in trans-Atlantic relations. The British

²⁶ Samuel Flagg Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949) details Adams’s role in formulating the Monroe Doctrine and other aspects of American expansionism; William Earl Weeks, *John Quincy Adams and American Global Empire* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1992) examines his role in the acquisition of Florida.

²⁷ James Monroe, “Seventh Annual Message,” 2 December 1823, in James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1908*, vol. 2 (Washington: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1908), 219.

still formulated their foreign policy on a global scale, but they allowed a potential threat to their interests in the Western Hemisphere without protest. Just a decade earlier, Britain refused to allow Americans free use of ocean shipping lanes, but now she acquiesced to a stern American warning to the entire European continent. The silence from London indicated a new level of accord between the United States and Britain, one that can undoubtedly be described as “harmonious,” thereby making the Monroe Doctrine a major milestone in Anglo-American rapprochement.

Latin America

The opening of a long period of rapprochement, however, did not mean that the United States and Britain carried forth relations free of conflict. As the Monroe Doctrine indicated, Latin America would be a region in which British and American interests would consistently overlap. The British, always mindful of their global position, accepted a unilateral statement from the United States regarding the region, but they maintained a position of influence in many areas of Latin America to safeguard their economic and strategic interests.

Long before Monroe announced the principle of non-intervention in 1823, Britain maintained economic interests in Latin America through frequently clandestine trade with a closed Spanish Empire. Spain granted concession for British timber interests in Belize and fishing interests on the high seas in the Treaty of Paris (1763) and Nootka Sound

Conventions, respectively.²⁸ Still, Britain occasionally used force to secure further advantages, although this strategy backfired spectacularly in 1807.

In 1806, the British attempted to weaken the Spanish Empire, temporarily aligned with Napoleon, to protect and expand British trade. As a result, a force under Colonel William Beresford captured Buenos Aires. However, only six weeks later, the Argentines forced his entire army to surrender. Reinforcements under Brigadier-General Samuel Auchmuty could not extricate Beresford and his men, but in February 1807, they took control of Montevideo, on the opposite bank of the la Plata River. Sent to rectify the situation, General John Whitelocke instead suffered humiliation at the hands of the Argentine resistance, and agreed in July to a British withdrawal from both Buenos Aires and Montevideo.²⁹

The defeat of Whitelocke marked a turning point in British relations with Latin America. The success of the Argentine forces inspired their rebellion against Spanish rule beginning in 1810.³⁰ A year earlier, Spain joined Britain in the Fifth Coalition against Napoleon, and the British interest in conquest in Latin America waned. Indeed, although residents of Buenos Aires and Montevideo loathed the idea of British political domination, the ill-fated military expeditions nonetheless “disseminated a taste for ‘the thin, showy and low priced goods of English manufacture’ throughout the Plata Basin.”³¹

²⁸ Dorothy Burne Goebel, “British Trade to the Spanish Colonies, 1796-1823,” *The American Historical Review* 43, no. 2 (January 1938), 289.

²⁹ Klaus Gallo, *Great Britain and Argentina: From Invasion to Recognition, 1806-26* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2001), 36-49; Richard Gott, *Britain’s Empire: Resistance, Repression and Revolt* (London, Verso, 2011), 170-171.

³⁰ Gott, *Britain’s Empire*, 171.

³¹ Peter Winn, “British Informal Empire in Uruguay in the Nineteenth Century,” *Past & Present* no. 73 (November 1976), 101.

For the rest of the decade, London tried to project a positive image to Latin America merchants in order to preserve its newfound outlet for industrial production, and the “idea of conquest had vanished from ministerial minds.”³²

After the disaster at Buenos Aires, Britain never again attempted to assert formal control over new territory in Latin America.³³ Canning instead hoped for the development of independent republics with enough military strength to play a role in the balance of power game on both sides of the Atlantic and whose trade relations with Britain would produce strong, if informal, alliances.³⁴ The situation in Uruguay provides an apt illustration of this strategy: the British rejected overtures from the merchants to create a colony on the north bank of the la Plata in 1824, but two years later an American official in Buenos Aires complained that British economic domination of Montevideo threatened to make Uruguay “a *Colony in disguise*.”³⁵

Meanwhile, although Britain took a less active role during Chile’s struggle for independence, not all her subjects followed suit. One Briton, Thomas Cochrane, paid no heed to London’s preferences. He achieved recognition as one of the top British commanders during the Napoleonic Wars, but following his conviction for participating in a stock trading scandal, he continued his naval career in South America. Cochrane

³² William W. Kaufmann, *British Policy and the Independence of Latin America, 1804-1828* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 53.

³³ To be sure, they maintained possession of their settlement in Belize, as well as the portion of Guiana captured from the Dutch in 1803, and set up new, formal institutions for control of the Falkland Islands in the 1830s, but the British viewed themselves as re-establishing existing rights to sovereignty over the Falklands, rather than creating a new colony. See Chapter 3 for further discussion.

³⁴ Kaufmann, *British Policy*, 139, 202.

³⁵ Winn, “British Informal Empire,” 103; John Forbes to Henry Clay, 21 June 1826, in *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States Concerning the Independence of the Latin-American Nations*, vol. 1, William R. Manning, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1925), 654. Emphasis in original.

commanded the Chilean navy during its struggle for independence, and the British sailors who staffed his ships occasionally sparred with Americans in the region.³⁶

Although the British navy maintained no official presence in Chilean waters, Cochrane's navy complicated American interests. By offering good wages for mercenary services, it convinced a large portion of American merchant marines to fight for Chile. As a measure of expediency, British sailors on Chilean ships harassed American trade missions and took American ships as prizes. And through Cochrane's popularity and support for a monarchical form of government in Chile upon independence, British trade managed to squeeze Americans out of Chilean markets for years after independence.³⁷

Still, after the fiasco in Buenos Aires, Britain refrained from direct military intervention in South America until the 1840s. Throughout the mid-1820s, following the pronouncement of the Monroe Doctrine, Britain primarily used commercial treaties to initiate formal relations with the Latin American republics, illustrating the economic importance of the region to the British Empire. Usually concluded on an equal footing with the infant nations, Britain secured no special treatment for its interests. Instead, the British relied on "a happy combination of the low prices and high quality of her manufactured goods" to assure their preeminence in Latin American markets.³⁸

³⁶ See Chapter 5 for an anecdote regarding the Anglo-American rivalry in Chile.

³⁷ Dorothy Burne Goebel, "British-American Rivalry in the Chilean Trade, 1817-1820," *The Journal of Economic History* 2, no. 2 (November 1942), 190-202.

³⁸ Sir Robert Marett, *Latin America: British Trade and Investment* (London: Charles Knight & Co., 1973), 189. Kinley J. Brauer, "The United States and British Imperial Expansion, 1815-1860," *Diplomatic History* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1988), 19-38, argues that the United States sought to stem the tide of British economic expansion in Latin America, but was stymied by domestic political divisions and the issues of race and slavery.

The early relation between Britain and the new Latin American nations indicated a fundamental shift in Britain's global economic foreign policy. Although British colonies still received certain preferences within the empire, Britain scuttled the old policy of mercantilism and intervention in favor of free trade and informal empire.³⁹ The treaties, Britain's Industrial Revolution, and an economic foreign policy centered on free trade ensured that Britain's role as South America's dominant trading partner would last throughout the nineteenth century.

Ironically, far from insulting the United States, the treaties also helped push Anglo-American rapprochement forward by indicating Britain's new commitment to free trade. British mercantilism had aggravated the United States, but the new British economic policy fostered closer ties between the two nations. As Britain retreated from the mercantilist policies of the eighteenth century, she opened new markets for American businesses to exploit and became a partner in promoting freedom of the seas, a goal of American foreign policy older than independence itself.

Increased trade allowed Britain to influence Latin American politics informally, rarely employing military threats.⁴⁰ However, London hoped that these cordial relations would ensure other strategic advantages as well. The Americans remained aloof from the European balance of power game to keep Old World politics out of the Western Hemisphere. Still, the trans-Atlantic application of the concept of balance of power affected British policymakers. In his recommendation for the recognition of Mexico, for

³⁹ Marett, 5; D. C. M. Platt, *Finance, Trade, and Politics in British Foreign Policy, 1815-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 315.

⁴⁰ Marett, *Latin America*, 10.

example, Canning stressed the potential of an Anglo-Mexican alliance capable of stymieing American expansion.⁴¹ Canning even hoped that the South American republics might provide an emergency cache of power to correct potential imbalances on the European continent by lending military aid to Britain in potential armed European conflicts.⁴² So the British hoped that the alliances formed and maintained by important trade relations on friendly terms would also be manifested in terms of military support when needed. This indicates that although rapprochement advanced with all due speed, it had not reached the point where it guaranteed Anglo-American friendship over the long-term.

The preeminence of the British navy in Latin America also afforded Britain other advantages. Its presence on both coasts of South America gave it effective control of both the South Atlantic and South Pacific Oceans. Although it avoided direct intervention in Latin American affairs, it patrolled the waters of Latin America, ostensibly to protect British interests. However, its presence also reminded Americans of British military might, thus posing a constant, albeit unspoken, threat to the United States. As a precaution against the interruption of British interests in Latin America, “the British Caribbean and South Atlantic squadrons were kept at peak efficiency.”⁴³ The British naval presence acted as an indirect check on the United States, as well as European powers thinking about interfering with the young republics.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Platt, *Finance, Trade, and Politics*, 313.

⁴² Kaufmann, *British Policy*, 139.

⁴³ Norman A. Bailey. *Latin America in World Politics* (New York: Walker and Company, 1967), 41.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

Conclusions

Although the British naval presence posed a potential threat to American interests, it primarily enforced free trade policies generally supported by the United States. Meanwhile, in the two decades between the Monroe Doctrine and the re-opening of the Oregon boundary negotiations, only one contentious issue arose between the United States and Britain, and it serves to further illustrate the distinction between reconciliation and rapprochement. In 1837, a small group of rebels upset with the privileges granted to the Anglican Church in Upper Canada (Ontario) attempted to overthrow British rule. Despite being disorganized and quickly defeated, the rebels received some American material support. As a result, British forces seized and burned the American ship *Caroline* that provided supplies to the rebels on the Canadian side of the Niagara River. President Martin Van Buren lodged a formal protest with Britain, and when he received no response, Americans burned a British ship in retaliation. In 1842, at meetings aimed at ironing out the boundary between Maine and New Brunswick, the British not only offered a formal apology, but also expressed regret at waiting five years to do so.

A comparison of the *Chesapeake* and *Caroline* affairs reveals the progress toward Anglo-American rapprochement over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1807, important economic ties between the United States and Britain prevented the British attack on the *Chesapeake* from immediately escalating, but the issues highlighted by the incident remained prominent causes for the American declaration of war against the British five years later.

Thirty years after the attack on the *Chesapeake*, the assault on the *Caroline* provoked a much different response. To be sure, President Van Buren launched a formal

protest, but simultaneously sent troops to the border to prevent further American aid to the Canadian rebels. The *Caroline* affair took five years to resolve, but diplomacy, rather than a full-scale war, settled the crisis. The peaceful solution of the *Caroline* affair leaves little doubt as to the desire of both nations to retain the harmonious relations they established at Ghent in 1814 and London in 1818.

Over the first half-century of American independence, the relations between the United States and Britain progressed from serious animosity, to tentative reconciliation, to stout rapprochement. The period illustrates the early stage at which expansion became an integral part of American foreign policy as well as the global perspective that influenced the decisions of British foreign policymakers. These foreign policy priorities continued to influence the tenor of Anglo-American rapprochement into the twentieth century. As demonstrated by the joint occupation agreement in Oregon and the mutually accepted, though unilaterally declared, Monroe Doctrine, diplomatic battles between the United States and Britain continued to play out in those portions of the Western hemisphere where British and American interests clashed. Those clashes, however, were few and far between as the global interests of the two nations converged ever more closely over the second half century of American independence.

CHAPTER 3

OREGON: FROM STRATEGIC FOOTHOLD TO IMPERIAL PERIPHERY

[We have] satisfactory evidence that no compromise which the United States ought to accept can be effected. With this conviction, the proposition of compromise which had been made and rejected, was, by my direction, subsequently withdrawn, and our title to the whole Oregon Territory asserted.

-James K. Polk¹

Three captains helped solidify U.S. claims to the Oregon Territory, but only two were American. Robert Gray crossed the bar of a freshwater river in 1792 and named it for his ship the *Columbia Rediviva* to claim American discovery of the river and sovereignty over its banks. William Clark penned the famous lines “O’cean in View! O! The joy in Camp!” when he, Meriwether Lewis, and the Corps of Discovery crossed the Rocky Mountains and reached the Pacific Ocean in 1805, exploring the region before any other Europeans. And the Americans solidified their claim to the region by virtue of settlement when William Black, captain of the British sloop *Raccoon*, smashed a bottle of wine (champagne being hard to come by in Oregon) on the flagpole at Astoria.

The lone trading post of John Jacob Astor’s Pacific Fur Company, Astoria achieved little success before news of war with Britain reached Oregon in early 1813. In October, the British North West Company bought the fort at Astoria and all of the remaining American provisions. Despite the sale, Captain William Black determined to oversee the formal surrender of Astoria when he arrived at the mouth of the Columbia in

¹ James K. Polk, “First Annual Message,” 2 December 1845, in James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1908*, vol. 4 (Washington: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1908), 395 [hereafter referred to as *Compilation*].

December 1813. The formal ceremonies he directed (lowering the American flag, hoisting the Union Jack, smashing a bottle of wine on the flagpole, and renaming the site Fort George) implied that a substantial fort or settlement had been captured and lent credence to American claims that the unsuccessful trading post constituted a vital settlement and a legitimate claim to regional sovereignty.²

Rivers and counties across the Pacific Northwest bear the names of Captains Gray and Clark, but Black remains an obscure character, illustrating a perspective common in the historiography of the Oregon boundary negotiations. Over the last half-century, historians have rejected the nationalistic views written by boosters and jingoists in the nineteenth century and examined American territorial expansion and Manifest Destiny in terms of politics, economics, race, gender, and ideology. These scholars developed a nuanced view of nineteenth-century expansionist policies, but they continue to write American-centric narratives, overlooking the importance of actions of Black and others. Rarely do such historians evaluate the power of the United States versus the other European nations vying for sovereignty on the North American continent. They also

² James P. Ronda, *Astoria and Empire* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990) is the best monograph on Astoria's place in America's empire, focusing particularly on the cooperation between entrepreneurs like Astor and the federal government; Bryan Penttila, *Columbia River: The Astoria Odyssey: A Pictorial History of Life on the Columbia River Estuary* (Portland, OR: Frank Amato Publications, Inc., 2003), 12-14; Washington Irving, *Astoria, or Anecdotes of an Enterprise beyond the Rocky Mountains* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 1836) is a "historical" travelogue of the Astorians' journey from New York to the Pacific Northwest, and it left an indelible impact on American perceptions of the West.

frequently overlook the reasons other imperial nations stopped struggling for North American land to augment their empires.³

This chapter reexamines the negotiations regarding the boundary between British and U.S. possessions west of the Rocky Mountains with an emphasis on the changing shape of the British Empire. Frequently overshadowed by Texas and the Mexican cession in literature on American expansion and commonly overlooked altogether in literature on the British Empire, the Oregon boundary negotiations offer an opportunity to view the shifting foreign policy priorities of both countries and to gauge the progress of rapprochement in the decades following the pronouncement of the Monroe Doctrine. Viewing official diplomatic correspondence in conjunction with private British correspondence regarding the Oregon Country helps place Oregon within the context of the British Empire and examines why London foresaw declining value in the Pacific Northwest just as American interest in the region peaked. This focus adds the outlook of British policymakers, the importance free trade to the British Empire, and the geopolitical significance of the Pacific Northwest to the story of American territorial expansion.

It also enhances existing understandings of Anglo-American rapprochement by providing the first chance to measure British reaction to the American implementation of

³ Norman A. Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific: A Study in American Continental Expansion*, (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1955); Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963); Frederick Merk, *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism, 1843-1849* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966); Frederick Merk, *The Oregon Question: Essays in Anglo-American Diplomacy and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967); and David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973) all argue that Manifest Destiny ideology was used to justify economic motivations for expansion; Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); and Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism and Empire, Revised Edition*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985, 2003) explore the racial aspects of expansionist policies; Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005) examines the effect of gender ideals on antebellum expansion.

the policy of non-colonization in the Western Hemisphere. As discussed in the previous chapter, the British Foreign Office originally proposed ending further European colonization of the American continents. James K. Polk's expanded interpretation of the James Monroe's warning to Spain was the first challenge to Britain's tolerance of and tacit compliance with the Monroe Doctrine. Britain accepted the original pronouncement, which aimed primarily to discourage Spanish attempts at reconquest in Latin America, because it promoted a goal that the British shared. Polk's broadening of the principle of non-intervention, however, directly challenged British foreign policy goals. Therefore, the Oregon boundary negotiations, and particularly Polk's stern public position in favor of exercising control over the whole territory, provided the first challenge to what had long been a point of easy agreement across the Atlantic. The manner in which Washington and London settled the boundary dispute offers important insight regarding the commitment of both nations to continued rapprochement, as well as the reasons both nations found it politically and strategically expedient.

Introduction

When the British and U.S. governments first discussed the sovereignty of Oregon at Ghent following the War of 1812, the territory attracted both countries for similar reasons. It provided access to deep-water harbors to serve as convenient jumping-off points for Pacific trade and, for the British, possible naval posts. The location of these ports on the Pacific and their proximity to the sources of the lucrative fur trade conducted by the Hudson's Bay Company and independent American trappers made them particularly important for the China trade. Fur, one of the very few trade items Chinese

traders desired from Europeans, made it a product of strategic importance for Western nations who desired access to Chinese luxury goods. The United States and Britain were not the only nations that jealously guarded their positions in the strategic region: Spanish claims dating from the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas and active Russian fur trading along the coast complicated British and American ambitions in Oregon.⁴

Diplomatic negotiations on the fate of the Oregon Country began in earnest in London Convention of 1818, which intended to reconcile the Anglo-American conflicts left unresolved by the Treaty of Ghent. Even though the sovereignty of the Pacific Northwest took a back seat to more contentious issues, both sides put forward initial proposals (albeit informally in the case of the British) supporting the partition of the Oregon Country. The Americans offered to divide Oregon at the 49th parallel, while the British suggested a willingness to cede all territory south of the Columbia River. Contemporary diplomatic protocol dictated that any cession of sovereignty offered during formal negotiations would be included in the final settlement of the boundary. So the whole Oregon Territory, from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific and from 42° to 54° 40' north latitude, was fair game in February 1818; by the end of the London Convention, the portion that neither side would yield shrank significantly. By October, although both the United States and Great Britain still claimed the entire territory, only the small parcel

⁴ Burt Brown Baker, "National Claims in Old Oregon," in Washington (State), *United States-Canada Boundary Treaty Centennial, 1846-1946: Commemorating the Signing of the Treaty between the United States and England Fixing the Boundary from the Summit of the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean* (Olympia: Department of Conservation and Development, State of Washington, and Vancouver: Department of Trade and Industry, Province of British Columbia, 1946) is an excellent account of European claims to sovereignty in the Pacific Northwest in a collection of retrospective essays published on the 100th anniversary of the boundary settlement; Albert Gallatin, *The Oregon Question* (New York: Bartlett & Welford, 1846) is an equally useful contemporary discussion of the historical claims in Oregon.

of land north and west of the Columbia River and south of the 49th parallel, often referred to as the “Oregon Triangle,” realistically remained in dispute.⁵

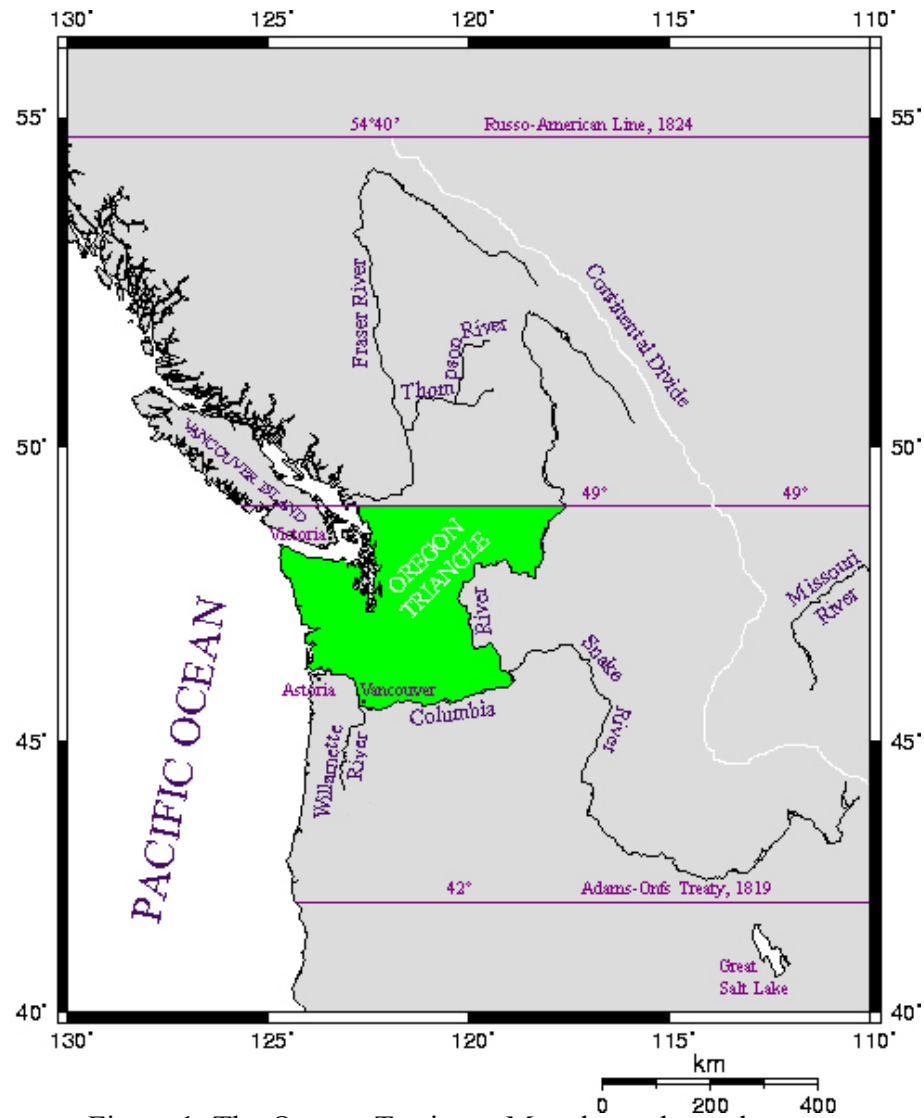


Figure 1: The Oregon Territory. Map drawn by author.

⁵ Hereafter, this parcel of land will be referred to as the “Oregon Triangle,” a term used by Frederick Merk, *The Oregon Question: Essays in Anglo American Diplomacy* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), xii.

Starting from these proposals, each nation continued to hold the same positions for nearly thirty years. When no settlement of rival claims to Oregon developed, both countries preserved the status quo under friendly auspices, agreeing that from 1818 “*the country on the north-west coast of America, westward of the Rocky Mountains, claimed by either nation, should be open to the inhabitants of both, for ten years, for purposes of trade; with the equal right of navigating all its rivers.*”⁶

The United States Strengthens Its Claim

The next year, the United States sought to better define its long-blurry boundaries with Spain’s North American possessions. Reeling from the unrest brewing in its Latin American colonies, Spain held an extremely weak position vis-à-vis the United States. This allowed U.S. Secretary of State John Quincy Adams to secure not only the purchase of the Floridas, but also a very generous settlement regarding the boundaries between the American and Spanish possessions on the continent. Signed in 1819, the provisions of the Adams-Onís Treaty included the cession of Spanish claims north of the 42nd parallel (the present day southern border of Oregon and Idaho) to the United States.⁷

Two years later, Tsar Alexander I of Russia issued an edict claiming a southern boundary of 51° for Russian claims in North America.⁸ This caused obvious conflict with both Britain and the United States. However, due to circumstances beyond Russia’s

⁶ Richard Rush, *Memoranda of a Resident at the Court of London* (Philadelphia: Key and Biddle, 1833), 407. Emphasis in original.

⁷ “Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819,” available from <http://www.tamu.edu/faculty/ccbn/dewitt/adamonis.htm>, accessed 14 March 2014.

⁸ Baker, “National Claims in Old Oregon,” 5.

borders, the Tsar recanted in just three years. In part, the decision responded to James Monroe's annual message of 1823, which declared "that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers."⁹ Britain tacitly backed Monroe's message.¹⁰ Combined with the dwindling sea otter population near the Pacific coast, the Anglo-American resolve to prevent any European nation from expanding its power through colonies in the Western Hemisphere helped convince the Tsar to relinquish his claims south of 54° 40' north latitude.

By this time, popular agitation for the extension of the U.S. government into the Oregon Territory heightened, and when the Russians dropped their claims, the Americans renewed their offer to divide Oregon at the 49th parallel. As in 1818, the British refused to yield any land north of the Columbia.¹¹ Because the 1818 joint occupation arrangement only extended ten years, another conference aimed at partitioning the Oregon Country convened in 1827.

Little had changed in Oregon since the signing of the first joint occupation agreement: American population remained thin and the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), which had procured a complete monopoly on the British fur trade in the in 1824, continued to act as the de facto administration in the region.¹²

⁹ James K. Polk, "First Annual Message," 2 December 1845, in *Compilation*, vol. 4, 398.

¹⁰ For details on Britain's involvement in crafting the Monroe Doctrine, see Ernest R. May, *The Making of the Monroe Doctrine* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1975).

¹¹ Baker, "National Claims in Old Oregon," 5-6.

¹² Gallatin, *The Oregon Question*, 30.

At the 1827 negotiations, the British made a new offer that indicated the improved understanding of regional geography. They again favored a partition along the Columbia River, but also offered an “enclave” to the Americans that would give the United States access to the harbors in Puget Sound and Juan de Fuca Strait. This enclave offered the United States deep-water ports in Puget Sound for the first time, recognizing the new understanding that a nearly impassible sandbar made the mouth of the Columbia an imperfect choice for a year-round harbor.¹³

Once made, the British tried unsuccessfully to keep their offer out of the records of negotiations; however, to the Americans they had already “formed a precedent of concession north of the Columbia” and “revealed British irresolution in defending their position north of the river.”¹⁴ Unable to reach an agreement, the United States and Britain extended the joint occupation arrangement indefinitely, with a clause allowing for its abrogation one year after either nation gave notice. The status quo would remain in force for nearly twenty years with regards to the Oregon boundary; however, the place of Oregon in the British Empire changed drastically in the intervening decades.

British Domestic Politics

The period from 1827-1846 was a turbulent one across Europe. Revolutions swept over the continent and percolated on the British Isles as well. Parliament remained aware of the threat of social revolution and took conciliatory steps to avoid it. Over the next two

¹³ For a detailed discussion of Columbia River shipwrecks, see James A. Gibbs, *Pacific Graveyard: A Narrative of Shipwrecks where the Columbia River meets the Pacific Ocean* (Portland, OR: Binfords & Mort, 1964). Gibbs counted 234 wrecks by 1964.

¹⁴ Frederick Merk, *The Oregon Question*, 69.

decades, Parliament yielded to popular demands for reform rather than face the fate of their neighbors across the English Channel.

The passage of Catholic emancipation in 1829 ultimately brought an end to the Tory government that passed it, and a Whig government under the reform-minded Lord (Charles) Grey took the Parliamentary reins. New elections in Britain and revolution in France in 1830 raised popular fervor in England for electoral reforms.¹⁵ Grey wanted Parliament to act, fearing a public uprising if the government resisted.

By May 1832, the House of Commons favored reforms, but when the British House of Lords remained strongly opposed, the Whig government resigned in protest. By this point, public opinion in Britain clearly favored electoral reform, and those members of Parliament who opposed it faced the task of forming a government to act or face rebellion. Threatened with the creation of new seats in the House of Lords to assure a majority in favor of reform, the Lords agreed to the Reform Bill of 1832 rather than having their ranks diluted.¹⁶

Although the Reform Bill of 1832 greatly expanded the franchise in Britain, some Britons insisted it did not go far enough. It failed to extend the vote to the working class,

¹⁵ Six major reforms, laid out in the People's Charter in 1838, were 1) universal male suffrage, 2) a secret ballot, 3) an elimination of property qualifications for members of Parliament, 4) the payment of Members of Parliament, 5) equal representation for districts of equal size, and 6) annual Parliaments.

¹⁶ W. N. Molesworth, *The History of the Reform Bill of 1832* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1865; reprint Clifton, NJ: Augutus M. Kelley Publishers, 1972), is an excellent contemporary account of the politics surrounding the passage of the reform bill; Michael Brock, *The Great Reform Act* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1973), is the most comprehensive modern treatment; LoPatin, Nancy D., *Political Unions, Popular Politics and the Great Reform Act of 1832* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999), add a consideration of the role of extra-parliamentary forces in promoting reform; E.P. Thompson, *The Makings of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966) is a classic work of British social history that covers popular agitation for electoral reforms in the period just prior to that examined here; Thomas William Heyck, *The Peoples of the British Isles: A New History, From 1688 to 1870* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1992) is a good survey of British social history in the period.

provide for secret ballots, or mandate annual meetings of Parliament. The short-lived Chartist movement agitated unsuccessfully for these and other electoral reforms through the late 1830s.¹⁷

Meanwhile, middle class Britons who had become politically important after gaining the vote in the Reform Bill of 1832, formed the Anti-Corn Law League (ACLL) to seek the repeal of the 1815 Corn Laws that prohibited grain importation to protect domestic cereal prices. After seven years of unsuccessfully lobbying Parliament, reports of “appalling failures” in both potato and wheat crops in the fall of 1845 forced Parliament to rescind the restrictions.¹⁸

The Chartists and the ACLL were both agitators and outgrowths of popular discontent with government policy. Neither group achieved their goals through political action, though famine prompted Parliament to address the ACLL’s concerns. The attention Parliament paid both groups, however, proved that the British public had the ability in the 1840s to influence domestic policy substantially, even without the vote. After the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832, British public opinion had to be taken into account by policymakers.

Through three decades of peace on the British Isles following the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812, policymakers found many domestic crises to

¹⁷ Richard Brown, *Chartism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998) is a good recent account of the Chartist movement. The movement took its name from the People’s Charter, a document which demanded six major electoral reforms listed in note 15.

¹⁸ Frederick Merk, “The British Corn Crisis of 1845-46 and the Oregon Treaty,” *Agricultural History* 8, no. 3 (July 1934), 95; Norman McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League, 1838-1846* (London: Unwin University Books, 1968), and Paul A. Pickering and Alex Tyrrell, *The People’s Bread: A History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000) are two good monographs on the ACLL.

confront. Social unrest at home and revolution abroad led the British government to grant political concessions that vented social pressure while preserving the power and relative autonomy of the policymaking elite. In a sort of parallel to the policies of Jacksonian Democrats in the United States, the social consequences of early industrialism caused London to focus its energy on domestic issues as the Oregon question remained unanswered, requiring a foreign policy and imperial agenda that shunned any confrontations abroad that might distract attention from urgent matters at home.¹⁹

British Foreign Policy in the Americas

The Oregon negotiations remained dormant for about fifteen years following the 1827 joint occupation treaty. In the interim, the British pursued a foreign policy designed to sustain their primacy in world politics. Following the Napoleonic Wars and the Congress of Vienna, the balance of power game played by the major European powers became more important than ever. Britain sought to prevent the expansion of rivals, especially France and Russia, and to implement and protect a system of free trade (with imperial preferences, of course). Larger imperial goals influenced the British perspective of the Oregon boundary negotiations and relations with the United States.

¹⁹ Robert V. Remini, *The Jacksonian Era*, 2d. ed. (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1997) provides a concise overview of the history of American politics from the mid-1820s to the mid-1840s; Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990) digs deeper, examining how the economic changes of the Market Revolution led to a fundamental argument about the meaning and future of republicanism, personified in the political party system pitting the Democrats against the Whigs; Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850*, 20th Anniversary Ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) takes a narrower view, examining the rise of class consciousness among Americans who grew up expecting to derive their liberties from land ownership and small scale farming, only to find themselves working for wages in an urban environment.

For Britain, the place of Oregon in this policy was peripheral, but strategic. Oregon was a key location for the British fur trade, but its profits accrued to the privately owned HBC, and London refused to forgo larger imperial objectives to help the Company fatten its coffers. Nevertheless, fur remained one of the few trade items desirable in China in 1827, giving the HBC some influence in the British government that wanted to retain access to Chinese luxury goods. Therefore, the Columbia River (still imagined in 1827 to be a viable port despite its recognized problems²⁰), Puget Sound, and the Juan de Fuca Strait represented possible jumping off points for Britain's China trade. Of course, the British also eagerly sought any possible bases expand their naval supremacy. A number of important changes to the British Empire and foreign policy took place in the "dormancy period" of the Oregon negotiations, and they relegated Oregon to a position of decreasing importance to the empire, making a cession of the British claims in the Oregon Triangle palatable to British policymakers by 1846.²¹

Early in the nineteenth century, Britain sought outlets for the increasing production of its young industries, and expansion of trade was a primary objective of British imperial policy. After years of clandestine trade, Britain gained access to the ports of Spain's colonies in the Americas when Madrid could no longer maintain a closed empire. The new markets played a major role in the British economy during the second

²⁰ See note 13.

²¹ The term "dormancy period" will be used to refer to the period from the 1827 joint occupation treaty to the opening of the Webster-Ashburton negotiations in 1842.

quarter of the nineteenth century, as the former Spanish colonies absorbed 35 percent of total British exports.²²

New economic relations with Latin America in the 1820s and 1830s allowed Britain to influence Latin American politics informally, rarely employing military threats. Meanwhile, the Americans asserted that they would remain aloof from the balance of power game played by European nations, as well as their desire that that game not be applied to politics in the Western Hemisphere in James Monroe's annual message of 1823. Still, British policymakers applied the balance of power game on both sides of the Atlantic. George Canning, British foreign secretary from 1822-1827, believed Mexico might serve as a buttress against American political and territorial expansion and that friendly South American republics could correct potential imbalances on the European continent by lending emergency military aid to Britain.²³ So the British hoped that the alliances formed and maintained by important trade relations on friendly terms would ensure military support for the British Empire when needed.

²² Muriel Chamberlain, *'Pax Britannica'?: British Foreign Policy, 1789-1914* (London: Longman, 1988), is an excellent, concise survey of British imperial policy in the nineteenth century; D. C. M. Platt, *Finance, Trade, and Politics in British Foreign Policy, 1815-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), is a good overview of British economic policies abroad; John Lynch, *Spanish Colonial Administration, 1782-1810: The Intendant System in the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata*, (London: The Athelone Press, University of London, 1958) covers the opening of the Spanish colonies, especially Argentina, to foreign trade; J. Fred Rippy, *Rivalry of the United States and Great Britain Over Latin America (1808-1830)* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1929) examines the American and British attitudes towards Spain's rebelling and newly independent colonies; Peter Bakewell, *A History of Latin America: Empires and Sequels, 1450-1930* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997) is a good survey that includes coverage of foreign trade in Latin America.

²³ William W. Kaufmann, *British Policy and the Independence of Latin America, 1804-1828* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1951), 156-157; Frederic L. Paxon, *The Independence of the South American Republics: A Study in Recognition and Foreign Policy* (Philadelphia: Ferris & Leach, 1916), 139; Sir Robert Marett, *Latin America: British Trade and Investment* (London: Charles Knight & Co., 1973), 10; Platt, *Finance, Trade, and Politics*, 313.

Although the extensive trade between Britain and the former Spanish colonies changed Britain's imperial strategies and economic policies and indicated a shift from mercantilism to free trade, it never displaced the specialized fur trade of the Pacific Northwest. In one respect, though, the British presence in the southern half of the Western Hemisphere did directly affect British designs on Oregon. The South American republics accepted the presence of the British navy much more readily than the United States did. While Oregon still represented a potential location of a British naval station, the unmolested ships stationed in the Caribbean and around South America bolstered the British position in the Western Hemisphere without arousing the suspicions that were sure to accompany British naval presence in or near American waters. Further, economic and military cooperation with the republics of Latin America set the stage for Anglo-American conflict in the region, which became the focal point of rapprochement as American ambitions expanded in the second half of the nineteenth century.

One British action, however, seem to pose a more direct threat to Anglo-American relations. On 2 January 1833, the commander of the HMS *Clio* informed Argentine authorities in the Falkland Islands of his intentions "to exercise the rights of Sovereignty over these Islands" and "to hoist, to-morrow morning, the National Flag of Great Britain on shore."²⁴ The British considered these actions the re-establishment of existing claims. Indeed, when the previous British settlers evacuated the islands in 1774, they left only under duress from the Spanish navy, and "the Marks and Signals of

²⁴ J. J. Onslow to the Commander of the Buenos Ayrean Forces at Port Louis (José María Pinedo), 2 January 1833, in *The Falkland Islands Dispute in International Law and Politics: A Documentary Source Book*, Raphael Perl, ed., with an Historic Chronology and Bibliography by Everette E. Larson (London: Oceana Publications, 1983), 296 [hereafter referred to as *Dispute*].

Possession, and of Property, left upon the Islands, the British Flag still flying, and all the other formalities observed ... were calculated not only to assert the rights of Ownership, but to indicate the intention of resuming the Occupation of the Territory at some future period.”²⁵ Despite British certitude regarding their actions, they still threatened to violate the Monroe Doctrine.

Nevertheless, the United States did not protest. In fact, the Americans had recently suffered “acts injurious to our commerce and to the property and liberty of our fellow-citizens” at the hands of Buenos Aires.²⁶ Argentine authorities seized three American ships hunting seals in the Falklands, taking all the cargo on board, bringing some Americans to trail in Buenos Aires, and marooning others in the remote archipelago. This left Washington in no mood to take any measures that might strengthen Argentine claims of sovereignty. Further, since British military protection of the islands remained a paper tiger throughout the 1830s and early 1840s, Americans continued to make use of the resources on the Falklands at will.²⁷

So the most direct British intervention in Latin America after the Monroe Doctrine and before negotiations on Oregon reopened in 1844 actually served to protect American interests. Indeed, when the United States began to consider ending joint occupation, the Falklands provided two reasons for pressing the extreme American claims. On one hand, Anglophobes in Congress feared Britain would control the entire

²⁵ Viscount Palmerston (Henry John Temple) to Don Manuel Moreno, 8 January 1834, in *Dispute*, 324.

²⁶ Andrew Jackson, “Third Annual Message,” 6 December 1831, in *Compilation*, vol. 2, 553.

²⁷ Barry M. Gough, “The British Reoccupation and Colonization of the Falkland Islands, or Malvinas, 1832-1843,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 22, no. 2 (Summer 1990), 274-277.

Pacific Ocean if she could combine ports in the Oregon Territory with her possessions near Cape Horn; on the other, British justification for reoccupying the islands rested on the principle of first discovery, which provided the strongest American claims in Oregon.²⁸ So whether Americans took a positive or negative view of the British presence in the Falklands, it ultimately helped their case in the Pacific Northwest.

British Imperial Policy in Asia

By 1827 and the start of the “dormancy period,” Britain had secured its position in Latin America, and its foreign policy establishment turned its attention back to European affairs. The so-called “Eastern Question” dominated the British policy agenda during the late 1820s and early 1830s. By this point, the decline and eventual collapse of the Ottoman Empire appeared likely. The Ottoman Empire, though, still controlled the Dardanelles, the strategically important straits linking the Black Sea, and thereby the Russian navy, to the Mediterranean. Britain used diplomatic pressure to bolster the decaying Empire due to its usefulness as a buffer to Russian power, fearing that Russia would fill the void expected upon the Empire’s collapse and suddenly assert itself as a Mediterranean naval power, threaten British interests in India, and upset the balance of power in Europe.²⁹

Following Greek independence in 1833, the Anglo-Russian rivalry subsided in intensity for a few years, but conflicting interests in Afghanistan led to renewed tension

²⁸ John McClernand, 8 January 1846, *Cong. Globe*, 29th Cong., 1st Sess., 169; Stephen A. Douglas, 27 January 1846, *Cong. Globe*, 29th Cong., 1st Sess., 260; John Wentworth, *Cong. Globe*, 28th Cong., 1st Sess., Appendix, 91; Cornelius Darragh, *Cong. Globe*, 29th Cong., 1st Sess., Appendix, 170.

²⁹ John Howes Gleason, *The Genesis of Russophobia in Great Britain: A Study in the Interaction of Policy and Opinion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), 2.

in 1838. Over the next five years, the British and Russians maneuvered to install amicable leaders in both Herat and Kabul, two cities important to Britain as choke points on the mountainous overland routes to India. The British and Russians avoided war in these strategic locations far from London and Moscow. In fact, their relations during the period remained friendly enough that when France refused to exert its considerable influence in Egypt, Russia helped Britain block an Egyptian plot to take control of Bahrain, a strategically located island in the Persian Gulf and along another of the trade routes between Britain and India.³⁰

These conflicts demonstrate important points and priorities in British foreign policy during the period. Clearly, the trade routes to India were a primary concern as the British risked challenging their strongest rivals, Russia and France (if only tangentially), to protect them. Their fear of losing influence in the regions bordering on and leading to their most prized imperial possession approached paranoia. Indeed, despite the difference in policy *implementation*, Russian and British policy *goals* in Central Asia matched nearly perfectly; that is, both nations wished peace and minimal European influence in the region.

The financial and political investment that Britain had in India caused policymakers, in the words of one historian, to believe that it was “always a short step from fear of what a powerful neighbour might do to the belief that he is already in the process of doing it, from horrified realization as to the possible effect of a neighbour’s

³⁰ G. P. Moriarty, “India and the Far East, 1833-1849,” in Sir A. W. Ward and G. P. Gooch, eds., *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy, 1783-1919*, Vol. II (New York: McMillan, 1923), 199-219; David Gillard, *The Struggle for Asia, 1828-1914: A Study in British and Russian Imperialism* (London: Methuen & Co., 1977), 43-61. The Persian Gulf was one of two sea routes through the Mediterranean to India; Egypt already controlled the Sinai Peninsula, the overland portion of the other sea route to India through the Red Sea.

increased power to the conviction that the increase in power was planned with such an effect in mind.”³¹ British concern about the frontiers of India trumped any other interpretation of their rivals’ actions. Also, British concentration in India distracted them from other concerns, including their position in Oregon.

That neither France nor Russia claimed the disputed territory inexorably shaped the tenor of the Oregon negotiations. Britain would have vigorously opposed either imperial power filling the vacuum in Oregon, demonstrated by their resistance to either nation expanding their influence in more important regions in Europe and Asia. British policymakers viewed any territorial gains for France or Russia as a threat to the European balance of power and the strong imperial economy that they labored to preserve.

That Britain managed to avoid war with any European power over the Eastern Question and the important routes to India enriches an understanding of the Oregon negotiations. It confirms the conviction that the Foreign Office acted in the “dormancy period” to “keep foreign affairs tranquil.”³² If the British could promote rapprochement with its most heated rivals in the most important parts of their empire, they would certainly strive for the same with the Americans in the much more remote Pacific Northwest.

Like the three crises on the routes to India, a fourth diplomatic incident also sprung from the British urge for access to Asian markets. The First Opium War grew out of the British desire to promote free trade around the world; that is, the British concentrated on ensuring their own freedom to trade wherever they pleased. European

³¹ Gillard, *The Struggle for Asia*, 41.

³² Chamberlain, *‘Pax Britannica’?*, 88.

nations had long imported tea, silk, and other commodities from China, but offered few products that the Chinese wanted in return. British exports were no exception. English textiles were too warm, not stylish, or more expensive than domestic alternatives in China.³³ Fur remained a possible trade item, but its actual value never rose high enough to satiate British lust for Chinese goods.

To solve this trade imbalance, the British East India Company (which had a government-sanctioned monopoly on British trade with China until 1834) and later the British government itself began trading opium. Illegal in both Britain and China, a demand nevertheless existed. The Chinese government appealed to the Queen to end the trade on moral grounds, but the British cared more about imperial commerce than the health of the Chinese population, and the pleas fell on deaf ears.

The situation reached crisis level in March 1839, when Lin Tse-hsu, a commissioner appointed by the Chinese emperor to suppress the opium trade, insisted that the foreigners surrender their opium stores. When the opium supplies were destroyed, the British government decided that the Chinese should reimburse the merchants for the loss of British “property.” They also decided that the confinement of British subjects at Canton insulted national pride and required rectification. Although these were the stated aims in sending warships to China, the British also sought to force China to institute open trading relations. It took but a small show of force for the British to extract their desired concessions from the Chinese. The Treaty of Nanking, concluded

³³ David Steeds and Ian Nish, *China, Japan and 19th Century Britain* (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1977), 22.

in 1842, secured British access to five Chinese ports in addition to Canton, as well as territorial sovereignty over the island of Hong Kong.³⁴

The Treaty of Nanking directly affected Britain's position with respect to Oregon. The acquisition of Hong Kong rendered Pacific Northwest ports suddenly inconvenient as stopping points on the route to China. The opium trade was still technically illegal in China, but the Treaty of Nanking's careful omission of regulations on its trade allowed opium to remain a profitable commodity.

Fur from the Oregon Territory simply could not compete, as there was no equivalent of the addiction that drove demand for opium. The value of the Oregon fur trade declined even further with Britain's new access to Chinese silk, which altered fashion preferences across Europe. Outside China, Britain was the only place with an appreciable demand for Pacific furs, as beaver pelt top hats were in vogue throughout the early nineteenth century. However, increased access to trade with China helped silk "replace the beaver as the fashionable man's headgear and correct wear for special occasions," a trend solidified when "Prince Albert's acceptance of a black silk hat put the seal of popularity on it."³⁵

So not only did fur become less valuable for accessing Chinese markets, but increased access to Chinese raw materials also hastened the decline of fur's profitability

³⁴ Peter Ward Fay, *The Opium War, 1840-1842: Barbarians in the Celestial Empire in the Early Part of the Nineteenth Century and the War by Which They Forced Her Gates Ajar* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), is a good overview of the conflict; Hsin-pao Chang, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), provides the Chinese view of the war; Glenn Melancon, *Britain's China Policy and the Opium Crisis: Balancing Drugs, Violence and National Honour, 1833-1840* (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), argues that diplomatic, rather than economic, imperatives led to the war.

³⁵ Elizabeth Ewing, *Fur in Dress* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1981), 86-88.

and popularity around the world. Thus, the First Opium War completely changed the shape of British imperial economic policy in the Pacific Basin and directly affected the strategic importance of Oregon within the British Empire by forcing open new trading opportunities and replacing fur from the Pacific Northwest with opium from South Asia as the most important commodity in Britain's China trade.

Meanwhile, as the British forced open new markets, the stodgy, aristocratic charter companies that had previously controlled trade throughout the empire lost influence. The HBC was essentially the only non-indigenous presence in the Oregon Triangle, even after American settlers began arriving in the Willamette Valley south of the Columbia in large numbers in 1843.³⁶ The Company appealed to the British government for a settlement of the Oregon question that would allow the HBC to maintain its prominence in the Oregon Territory, but its pleas fell on deaf ears. Large chartered companies like the HBC no longer received the same favors, and while the HBC remained profitable, few of those profits accrued to the British government. It was HBC interests, rather than purely British interests, at stake in the Oregon Triangle after the First Opium War. The continuing shift toward free trade as the primary economic objective of the British empire ensured Foreign Secretary Lord Aberdeen (George Hamilton-Gordon) would not start a war just to protect the Company's increasingly archaic monopoly of the fur trade.³⁷

³⁶ James R. Gibson, *Farming the Frontier: The Agricultural Opening of the Oregon Country, 1786-1846* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985) is an excellent account of the early settlement and farming of Oregon.

³⁷ Though few historians consider the role of the HBC in the Oregon negotiations, John S. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957); and Henry Commager, "England and the Oregon Treaty of 1846," *The Oregon Historical Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (March 1927): 18-38, both include short sections on the topic.

The goals of British foreign policy during the Oregon “dormancy period” were clear. The turbulence of reform at home made a quiet foreign scene necessary for the political survival of any government. The British implemented a policy of free trade with increasing voracity. New economic contacts and naval outposts in Latin America extended British influence into the Western hemisphere, diminishing the strategic value of Oregon. British trade with India became so lucrative that the security of the trade routes to and from the subcontinent were important enough for the British to risk offending major European rivals to protect them. The constant search for new markets culminated in the Treaty of Nanking, which granted British merchants access to and extraterritoriality in China. During the “dormancy period,” shifting imperial priorities and increased British influence in Asia relegated the Oregon Territory to the periphery of the British Empire.

Diplomacy

Most historical accounts of the Oregon boundary negotiations disregard the shifting priorities of the British Empire during the “dormancy period” and their effects on the negotiations. They continue to center on the American experience and frequently overlook the reasons the British stopped struggling for North American land to augment their empire.³⁸ Standard accounts of the negotiations describe a young American nation intent on “pulling the lion’s tail” and settling the virgin territories in the Pacific

³⁸ See note 3. Howard Jones and Donald A. Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny: Anglo-American Relations in the 1840s*, (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1997); and Donald A. Rakestraw, *For Honor or Destiny: The Anglo-American Crisis over the Oregon Territory*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1995) take effective bilateral views of the Oregon negotiations, but continue to contextualize the negotiations as a moment in Anglo-American relations rather than within the trajectory of British imperialism.

Northwest. Focusing on rhetoric such as his insistence that the United States “title to the country of the Oregon is ‘clear and unquestionable,’”³⁹ they describe President James K. Polk’s tone as brusque and aggressive; however, they rarely consider the military strength of the United States vis-à-vis the British in the early 1840s.

The size of the American army remained rather small throughout the period from joint occupation to the settlement of the Oregon question. Just over eight thousand regular soldiers served until the Mexican War caused a spike in recruits.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, throughout the Oregon negotiations, the British army was at least ten times the size of its American counterpart. Obviously, the whole force of the British army could not be brought to bear on the United States simultaneously, but its size certainly allowed reinforcements that would greatly outnumber the Americans. Also, the presence of British troops in the Caribbean meant that a reasonable force could be quickly transferred to the United States in case of hostilities.⁴¹

Of course, the real strength of the British military in the nineteenth century was its navy. In 1840, more than forty British ships patrolled in the Pacific, North America, the West Indies, and Canada, so the British navy had the ability to reach the United States in

³⁹ James K. Polk, “Inaugural Address,” in *Compilation*, vol. 4 (Washington: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1908), 381.

⁴⁰ “Organization of the Army of the United States, 1842,” in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Document no. 1, 27th Cong., 3rd sess., Ser. 413, 202-204; “Organization of the Army of the United States, 1845,” in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Document no. 1, 29th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 470, 220a; “Organization of the Army of the United States, 1846,” in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Document no. 1, 29th Cong., 2nd sess., Ser. 493, 68a.

⁴¹ House of Commons, “Average Effective Strength of the Army in each year, 1834-1843, specifying severally Dragoon Guard, Dragoons, Foot Guards, and Infantry of the Line,” Sessional Papers vol. 26 (1846), 147.

large numbers very quickly.⁴² These forty ships in the vicinity of the United States comprised a fleet larger than the entire U.S. navy. In addition to quantitative advantages, technological advancements enabled Great Britain to begin producing iron-hulled ships in the early 1840s.⁴³ The United States would not add an iron-hulled ship to its navy until 1846, after the settlement of the Oregon question. The British also added steam vessels to their navy at a much faster rate than did the United States. In 1846, when the Oregon boundary was finally settled, the U.S. navy had just seven steam-powered ships; Britain had four steamers on the Great Lakes alone and a total of more than ninety in its navy.⁴⁴ Although impossible to predict the results of a war that never happened, these statistics indicate the difficulties that the United States would face in the event of hostilities and that the prowess of the British navy provided credible support to bellicose threats from London.

The superiority of the British navy over its American rival in both quantity and quality of ships directly affected the Oregon negotiations. Considering British military superiority and imperial goals along with the private correspondence of Lord Aberdeen alters the standard account of the negotiations. This wider perspective demonstrates that Polk's blustery rhetoric did not preclude his preference for a peaceable settlement of the

⁴² House of Commons, "Ships of the Navy in Commission, 1 December 1839, 1840, 1841; of the Number of Officers and Men; and the Number of Ships of War in the Mediterranean Seas at the above dates," *Sessional Papers* vol. 27 (1842), 346.

⁴³ David K. Brown, "Wood, Sail, and Cannonballs to Steel, Steam, and Shells, 1815-1895," *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Royal Navy*, ed. J. R. Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 204.

⁴⁴ "Statement of the Vessels Belonging to the Navy Which Were in Commission on the 1st November, 1846," in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Document no. 1, 29th Cong., 2nd sess., Ser. 493, 465-467; House of Commons, "Return of Steam Vessels (bearing Captains, Commanders, Lieutenants, and Masters), their Length, Breadth, Depth of Hold, Tonnage, Number of Guns, &c.," *Sessional Papers*, vol. 26 (1846), 490-494.

Oregon boundary. More importantly, Aberdeen's pace and tone in the final stages of negotiations reflected domestic political imperatives and the difficulties of communication in a global bureaucracy more than any fear of American military aggression.

The military and naval superiority of Britain over the United States clearly existed in 1841, when new administrations took over on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, President John Tyler appointed Daniel Webster Secretary of State, while the new Prime Minister Robert Peel chose Lord Aberdeen to head the Foreign Office. With a renewed desire for cooperation, the two nations immediately met in Washington to iron out a handful of thorny diplomatic issues.

In the Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842, the British expressed regret for the burning of the American ship *Caroline* (which had been providing aid to Canadian separatists) and settled the contentious boundary between Maine and Canada. However, Peel and Aberdeen interpreted Webster's attempts to hide a map favorable to British claims as an affront to British honor. The British public, with its newfound power, felt the same about Aberdeen's apology for the *Caroline* affair.⁴⁵ Aberdeen wished to avoid a similar public outcry against a settlement of the Oregon boundary and took positive steps to prepare the public for compromise in the months leading up to the final treaty.

⁴⁵ Howard Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty: A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1843* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977) is an excellent monograph on the treaty and the issues it addressed; Wilbur Devereux Jones, *The American Problem in British Diplomacy, 1841-1861* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1974) also covers these issues.

After taking a backseat at the Webster-Ashburton talks, the Oregon boundary negotiations began again following the election of James K. Polk in 1844.⁴⁶ After being elected on a ticket that promised to fight for American sovereignty in Oregon, Polk nevertheless renewed the American offer to partition Oregon along the 49th parallel, maintaining that he did so only “in deference to what had been done by our predecessors.”⁴⁷ In reality, Polk knew that British domestic turbulence caused Aberdeen to deplore the idea of war over Oregon, allowing him to bluster with little fear of reprisal.

Polk had another opportunity to make aggressive claims on Oregon when Richard Pakenham, Britain’s Minister in Washington, rejected his renewal of earlier offers of partition without referring to Aberdeen for advice, angering negotiators on both sides of the Atlantic. The nearly six-month lull in active negotiations that followed has been interpreted as a period of British weakness during which Polk strengthened his defiant tone regarding Oregon. However, Aberdeen actually spent the last half of 1845 soothing a wounded Pakenham, who after raising the ire of both the British and the American people begged Aberdeen for “a very great favor. For God’s Sake remove me from this Country in which nothing but pain and mortification can henceforth attend my course.”⁴⁸

In December 1845, Aberdeen reassured Pakenham that both he and Peel retained faith in the minister in Washington, though he rebuked Pakenham’s unprofessionalism,

⁴⁶ Edwin A. Miles, “‘Fifty-four Forty or Fight’ – An American Political Legend,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44, no. 2 (September 1957), 291-309 is an excellent account of Polk’s campaigns for the Democratic nomination and presidency.

⁴⁷ James K. Polk, *The Diary of James K. Polk: During His Presidency, 1845 to 1849*, ed. Milo Milton Quaife (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1910), vol. 1, 2.

⁴⁸ Aberdeen to Pakenham, 3 October 1845, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. LXXXV, Add. MS 43123; Pakenham to Aberdeen, 28 October 1845, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. LXXXV, Add. MS 43123; Aberdeen to Pakenham, 3 December 1845, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. LXXXV, Add. MS 43123.

noting that he was “much more disposed to censure your suggestion of recall, as a wrongheaded proceeding” than to reprimand him for failing to refer the partition offer to his superiors.⁴⁹ Aberdeen’s quietude on the subject of Oregon in late 1845 has been interpreted as a recognition of Polk’s threats; however, the embarrassed and dejected character of Pakenham’s attempted resignation illustrates Aberdeen’s need to convince his minister to return the negotiating table, a task slowed by the pace of trans-Atlantic correspondence.

As Aberdeen soothed Pakenham’s bruised ego and sought an avenue to reopen negotiations, Polk sensed an opportunity to continue his bellicose tone on the Oregon Question. After Pakenham’s curt rejection of partition, he felt “disposed to assert our extreme right to the whole country.”⁵⁰ Despite Secretary of State James Buchanan’s consistent warnings to soften his language, Polk drafted a bellicose address for his annual message to Congress.⁵¹ On 2 December 1845, Polk suggested that Congress serve notice to Great Britain that the United States intended to end the period of joint occupation and made clear that he wanted to extend American laws and protection to the Oregon Territory, which had seen increased, through geographically limited, American settlement in the three preceding years.

Polk also made two important statements that demand immediate attention. First, after reiterating to Congress a brief history of the negotiations, Polk stated that Britain’s rejection of his latest offer was the final straw:

⁴⁹ Aberdeen to Pakenham, 3 December 1845, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. LXXXV, Add. MS 43123. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁰ Polk, *Diary*, vol. 1, 69.

⁵¹ Polk, *Diary*, vol. 1, 81, 102.

... the rejection of the proposition made in deference alone to what had been done by my predecessors ... afford[s] satisfactory evidence that no compromise which the United States ought to accept can be effected. With this conviction, the proposition of compromise which had been made and rejected, was, by my direction, subsequently withdrawn, and *our title to the whole Oregon Territory asserted*, and, as is believed, maintained by irrefragable facts and arguments.⁵²

Polk's bold assertion ignored the previous negotiation that he had just recounted to Congress, and was calculated more to push for the abrogation of joint occupation than to assert a willingness to fight for territory north of the 49th parallel. While he may have wanted the land north of 49°, and while he may have believed that the United States had a right to it, Polk could not have expected any diplomatic settlement to allot the northern portion of Oregon to the United States. Nevertheless, he likely calculated the tone of his message to put pressure on London to avoid a complete diplomatic schism, for which the blame would surely fall on Pakenham.

The other important statement in Polk's message referred to a policy pronouncement that had rested dormant for over two decades. Polk noted the United States' longstanding policy of avoiding interference in European affairs and asserted that the "balance of power" theory of foreign relations common in Europe "can not be permitted to have any application on the North American continent, and especially to the United States."⁵³ He then repeated a sentence that Monroe included in his annual message delivered on the same date twenty three years earlier: "The American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth

⁵² James K. Polk, "First Annual Message," 2 December 1845, in *Compilation*, vol. 4, 395. Emphasis mine.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 398.

not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.”⁵⁴ By restating this policy and applying it to the Oregon question, Polk widened its scope well beyond Monroe’s intentions. He therefore understated the case when he argued that this was “a proper occasion to reiterate and reaffirm the principle avowed by Mr. Monroe and to state my cordial concurrence in its wisdom and sound policy.”⁵⁵ While Polk may have restated “the principle” expressed by Monroe, he certainly took liberty to extend the application of that principle. In doing so, Polk played a key role in expanding the American rights asserted by the Monroe Doctrine.

Still, Polk’s bellicose tone did not worry Aberdeen, who understood the British preparedness for hostilities.⁵⁶ Further, in his final consolation letter to Pakenham, Aberdeen also anticipated “a strong declaration from the President in his annual Message, and even a recommendation to terminate the [joint occupation] Treaty,” demonstrating that Polk’s speech had raised more eyebrows in the United States than in London.⁵⁷ Polk did not disappoint, and Aberdeen did not worry. He had no time, for one month after he had mollified Pakenham, the Peel government lost a vote of confidence. Peel’s Tories were recalled when Lord John Russell’s Whigs failed to form a coalition.⁵⁸ Aberdeen took a break from diplomacy during the electoral crisis and concentrated on preparing the

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., vol. 4, 399.

⁵⁶ Aberdeen to Pakenham, 2 April 1845, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. LXXXV, Add. MS 43123.

⁵⁷ Aberdeen to Pakenham, 3 December 1845, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. LXXXV, Add. MS 43123.

⁵⁸ Frederick Merk, “British Government Propaganda and the Oregon Treaty,” *The American Historical Review* 40, no. 1 (October 1934), 54.

public for a settlement of the Oregon Question at the 49th parallel, the position the British had rejected for nearly two decades.

In order to avoid charges of weakness that he had suffered after the Webster-Ashburton Treaty, Aberdeen leaked information to the British press. An anonymous article in *Edinburgh Review*, a major journal for the opposition Whig Party, described Oregon as a mountainous, desert wasteland interrupted by a few fertile patches and asserted that the fur trade had passed its prime. Aberdeen's friendship with the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, Nassau W. Senior, allowed him an opportunity to quiet the shouts of the opposing party from within.⁵⁹ Edward Everett, a former American minister to England still resident in London, also waged "a clever propaganda campaign" to convince the British public of the equity of a settlement at 49°.⁶⁰ These efforts to mollify the British public are important in the context of the reform movements in Britain in the 1840s. The propaganda and news leaks demonstrate that public opinion had become an important consideration in British politics; however, the ability of Aberdeen to mold it showed that British voters still lacked influence over the conduct of foreign affairs.

After soothing Pakenham, preparing the British public for compromise, receiving a final American rejection of the long-standing British offer to settle the Oregon dispute by arbitration, and weathering an electoral storm, Aberdeen took his first aggressive step in the Oregon negotiations. In February 1846, he advised "Her Majesty's Government to

⁵⁹ Ibid., 42-47.

⁶⁰ Muriel Chamberlain, *Lord Aberdeen: A Political Biography* (London: Longman Group, 1983), 339.

consider what measures it may be expedient to adopt, in order to meet any emergency which may arise.”⁶¹

When the Americans learned of preparations for a fleet of thirty ships to sail to the Pacific Northwest, Polk’s tone immediately softened, again indicating that he intended his bellicose tone primarily for domestic consumption.⁶² In late February 1846, Polk received a letter from London that led him to believe that public opinion in Britain “was not altogether of so pacific a character as the accounts given in the English newspapers had led me to believe.”⁶³ Having learned that the British navy was on alert, Polk gently pressed Congress to pass a notice to end joint occupation, a clear prerequisite for any new British proposals.⁶⁴ When Congress agreed in late April, the blustery language of the previous December diminished, illustrating that British military preparations achieved their desired effect.

News of the abrogation reached Aberdeen in May, and he sent a fresh proposal to Washington. The offer called for partition along the 49th parallel to the sea and then through the Strait of Juan de Fuca, reserving all of Vancouver Island for Britain. It also contained stipulations allowing for HBC navigation of the Columbia south of 49° and the retention of property for British subjects in the Oregon Triangle.⁶⁵ It was Aberdeen’s last

⁶¹ Aberdeen to Pakenham, 3 February 1846, in British Foreign Office, *Correspondence Relative to the Negotiation of the Question of Disputed Right to the Oregon Territory on the North-West Coast of America; Subsequent to The Treaty of Washington of August 9, 1842* (London: T. R. Harrison, 1846), 69.

⁶² Pakenham to Aberdeen, 26th February 1846, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. LXXXV, Add. MS 43123.

⁶³ Polk, *Diary*, vol. 1, 241.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 334, 338.

⁶⁵ Aberdeen to Pakenham, 18 May 1846, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. LXXXV, Add. MS 43123.

hope for a peaceful settlement, as he privately informed Pakenham that “Without calling this Convention an ultimatum, it will in fact be so.”⁶⁶

Having declared war on Mexico a week before Aberdeen sent his “ultimatum,” and the Senate accepted Aberdeen’s treaty without revision. On 13 June 1846, Pakenham wrote to Aberdeen: “The Oregon Question is settled at last, and I for one, am heartily glad of it.”⁶⁷ The news reached Britain days before the Peel government was again swept from office, allowing Aberdeen to tie up the last loose end in the Anglo-American boundary conflicts that had plagued trans-Atlantic relations for seventy years. In his last letter to Pakenham before leaving office, he bragged, “On our retirement therefore from office, I am not aware that we leave any question behind us which is likely to grow into a serious cause of quarrel with the United States.”⁶⁸ Aberdeen immediately recognized the important role that the peaceful settlement of the Oregon boundary negotiations played in advancing Anglo-American rapprochement.

Throughout the Oregon negotiations, Aberdeen faced a set of restrictions on his tone and conduct unlike anything Polk faced in the United States. Aberdeen had to soothe the ego of a subordinate on the other side of the Atlantic, faced removal from his post twice in six months, and needed to leak information into the press to ensure the British public would accept any territorial sacrifice in Oregon. On the other hand, Polk had agreed not to run for reelection in 1848, limiting the degree to which Democratic politicians or fickle voters influenced his policy decisions. Given the military strength of

⁶⁶ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁷ Pakenham to Aberdeen, 13 June 1846, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. LXXXV, Add. MS 43123.

⁶⁸ Aberdeen to Pakenham, 30 June 1846, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. LXXXV, Add. MS 43123.

the British vis-à-vis the United States and the softening of Polk's tone at the exact moment he learned a British fleet sailed for Oregon, historians have largely overlooked the political context in which Aberdeen operated, which strongly shaped the Oregon negotiations. A focus on American expansionist motivations, Polk's aggressive discourse prior to any real threat of war, and the larger territorial acquisitions of Texas and the Mexican cession have left a piece of the narrative of the Oregon boundary negotiations untold.

Ultimately, Aberdeen did not mind sacrificing a small parcel of land to maintain peace between the United States and Britain. Aberdeen's most prominent biographer notes "one of Aberdeen's most important functions was to keep foreign affairs tranquil while Peel undertook important reforms at home."⁶⁹ Domestic affairs in Britain were certainly turbulent during the Oregon negotiations, and Aberdeen successfully kept foreign conflicts from detracting attention from politics on the British Isles. Oregon's importance to the British Empire as a whole had faded over the twenty years since joint occupation. The decline of the fur trade, American settlement in the region, new trading opportunities in Latin America and Asia, and manipulation of public opinion made it possible in 1846 for Britain to accept a settlement of the Oregon question nearly identical to a proposal turned down two decades earlier.

Conclusions

Historians of nineteenth century expansion and Manifest Destiny tend to view the Oregon negotiations from the perspective of a young, ambitious republic, rife with social

⁶⁹ Chamberlain, *'Pax Britannica'?*, 88.

and racial problems. Whether they did so for economic reasons, to distract from sectional divisions, or as a demonstration of power on the international stage, U.S. policymakers embarked on a program of rapid expansion in during the 1840s. Their motivations, accomplishments, and ideology remain at the center of the study of the decade.

Yet surprisingly little attention has been given to the same factors in British politics. In twenty-eight years of joint occupation in Oregon, the British government undertook major democratic reforms, removing numerous barriers to popular participation in government. The defeat of Napoleon and the deterioration of the Spanish monarchy made the European balance of power game more tenuous than ever. British imperial economic policy underwent a fundamental ideological shift from mercantilism to free trade, evinced by the abolition of slavery, new economic ties with Latin America, and the intensity with which the British guarded the safety of the routes to India. All of these changes that directly impact the British view of Oregon have been overlooked.

The reshaping of the British Empire and its trade by the mid-1800s rendered the Oregon Triangle ever less important in the British foreign policy agenda. None of Britain's European rivals threatened to absorb the territory. The profits from the region mainly filled the vaults of the Hudson's Bay Company, providing little direct benefit to the British government. Concessions in China devalued the trade and the ports of Oregon. Finally, Aberdeen's skillful manipulation of the British press and his unwillingness to give into the aggression of the United States ensured a sacrifice of the Oregon Triangle without a sacrifice of British national honor. The changes in British imperial priorities led London to abandon the struggle for territorial sovereignty in the Oregon Triangle.

The British acceptance of a partition at the 49th parallel indicated a fundamental reduction of the importance of Oregon to the British Empire between the indefinite extension of joint occupation in 1827 and the final settlement of the Oregon Question in 1846. Their withdrawal from the region was a prerequisite for the peaceful expansion of American boundaries to the Pacific Northwest. The story of the British withdrawal from Oregon ought to be considered an integral moment and essential part of the narrative of U.S. expansion.

Further, the Oregon boundary negotiations provide a window into the minds of the policymakers that pursued rapprochement. The Oregon dispute was the first challenge to trans-Atlantic agreement over the interpretation of the principle of non-intervention. It was therefore also an important trial of each nation's commitment to peaceful relations. It tested the patience of governments on both sides of the Atlantic, who decided that Anglo-American cordiality was worth some sacrifice of personal and national honor. It demonstrates that both nations frequently had more important items on their foreign policy agendas, making rapprochement a political necessity as well as valued policy goal.

Perhaps most importantly, the Oregon boundary negotiations demonstrate that Anglo-American diplomacy was not conducted in a vacuum. British imperial goals shifted so dramatically during the "dormancy period" of the Oregon negotiations that they allowed an acceptance of a settlement of the Oregon boundary in 1846 considered completely untenable just twenty years earlier. Political upheaval in Britain over the Corn Laws and impending war with Mexico in the United States proved to be just as important, perhaps more so, than the personalities and public statements of the officials in each

country. This holistic view of American and especially British foreign policy is vital for a comprehensive understanding of trans-Atlantic rapprochement.

The Oregon boundary negotiations hint at one other factor of growing importance in Anglo-American relations. It is clear that the independence of Spain's American colonies and their vital role in Britain's economy was a major factor in the declining value of Oregon to the British Empire. The settlement of the Oregon boundary controversy coincided with the beginning of the U.S. foray into Latin America with a war of territorial aggrandizement against Mexico. The American success in that war made the United States a major player in the quest for strategic and economic benefits in Latin America and ensured a substantial increase in the rate at which British and American foreign policy goals came into conflict. Britain established itself as a major player in Latin American politics and economics while the United States were still British colonies, which allowed tacit British acceptance of the Monroe Doctrine. When the United States acquired half of Mexico and made known their intention of excluding European influence from the Western Hemisphere, they guaranteed conflict between the long established position of the British and newly ambitious policy goals of the United States. Latin America became the stage on which the next act of rapprochement played out.

CHAPTER 4

CENTRAL AMERICA: EMPIRES AT ODDS?

[W]hilst our good mother had been all the time engaged ... in annexing one possession after the other to her dominions, until the sun now never set upon her empire, she raised her hands in holy horror if the daughter annexed territories adjacent to herself....

-James Buchanan

Well, you must admit that in this respect you are a chip off the old block.

-Earl of Clarendon¹

In the decade before the outbreak of Civil War, trans-Atlantic rivalries played out in Central America. Prior to 1850, both the United States and Britain took steps to sustain their influence in the region. In 1823, President Monroe boldly and unilaterally declared the principle of non-intervention in the Western hemisphere, and the imperial nations of Europe generally respected that position. When countries such as Britain violated these tenets, however, the United States tended not to protest. The reassertion of British sovereignty in the Falkland Islands actually removed the more troubling Argentine policies in an area important for American fishing interests.² Further, occasional British intervention elsewhere in Latin America, including the blockade of the la Plata River in

¹ James Buchanan to William Marcy, 12 November 1853, in James Buchanan, *The Works of James Buchanan, comprising his speeches, state papers, and private correspondence*, ed. John Bassett Moore (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960) [hereafter referred to as *Works*], vol. IX, 95-96.

² See Chapter 3.

the late 1840s and a brief incursion into Brazilian waters in 1850, did not threaten the American economy as seriously as a potential break with Britain.³

The British, however, dominated markets in Latin America. They held a “near-monopoly” on foreign trade through the period of Latin American revolutions, and their ascendancy only “relaxed somewhat” over the next twenty-five years.⁴ Before the Civil War, more British exports flowed to Latin America than to the United States, with the bulk going to Spanish America and Brazil as the value of goods shipped to Britain’s own Latin American possessions dropped steadily.⁵ Latin American nations also provided an important source of raw materials to British industry. Increased demands for mahogany led the British to assert themselves on the Mosquito Coast and set the stage for Anglo-American conflict in Central America.⁶

Introduction

By 1848, mahogany no longer held critical significance to the British imperial economy. However, the British experience on the Mosquito Coast opened their eyes to

³ American exports to Latin America were shipped primarily to European colonies in the Caribbean and decreased steadily until the last decade of the nineteenth century. Before the Civil War, the United States imports from Britain nearly doubled imports from Latin America, and about two-thirds of all American imports came from Europe. See Robert E. Lipsey, “U.S. Foreign Trade and the Balance of Payments, 1800-1913,” NBER Working Paper no. 4710 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1994), 39-41, available from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w4710.pdf>, accessed 14 April 2014.

⁴ Peter Bakewell, *A History of Latin America: Empires and Sequels, 1450-1930* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 406.

⁵ Manuel Llorca-Jaña, “The Impact of Early Nineteenth-Century Globalization on Foreign Trade in the Southern Cone: A Study of British Trade Statistics,” *Investigaciones de Historia Económica* 10, no. 1 (February 2014), 48.

⁶ The British furniture industry provided the impetus for this increased demand for mahogany. For a full discussion of the mahogany trade in the regions, see Craig S. Revel, “Concessions, Conflict, and the Rebirth of the Honduran Mahogany Trade,” *Journal of Latin American Geography*, 2, no. 1 (2003), pp. 1-17.

the strategic importance of the San Juan River, just south of the traditional boundaries of the Mosquito Indians, over who the British had established a protectorate in the 1840s.⁷ The river flowed some 120 miles across the Central American isthmus to Lake Nicaragua, where passengers and cargo made a short overland journey from the town of Rivas to the Pacific Ocean. The river, therefore, was of vital importance to trans-isthmian transportation and had the potential to greatly reduce travel time between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of North America. When Nicaragua refused to hand the town of San Juan del Norte at the mouth of the river over to the Mosquito Indians, the British seized it and renamed it Greytown.⁸ Not surprisingly, the United States criticized these actions for violating the Monroe Doctrine.

Events in the United States in 1848 ensured that the British seizure of Greytown constituted more than an irritating violation of American foreign policy philosophy. The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo ended the Mexican-American War and greatly expanded the Pacific shoreline of the United States. Communication between the new Pacific territories and Washington became more vital with the discovery of gold in Northern California. President Polk commented on the wealth in his final annual address to Congress: “The accounts of the abundance of gold in [California] are of such an extraordinary character as would scarcely command belief were they not corroborated by the authentic reports of officers in the public service who have visited the mineral

⁷ Michael D. Olien, “Micro/Macro-Level Linkages: Regional Political Structures on the Mosquito Coast, 1845-1864,” *Ethnohistory*, vol. 34, no. 3 (Summer, 1987), 259.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 267.

district.”⁹ The California Gold Rush began, and transportation across Central America became not only important to the U.S. government, but also for for the thousands of prospectors who sought their fortunes in the mines.

Cornelius Vanderbilt stepped in to take advantage. In 1849, he negotiated with the Nicaraguan government for exclusive rights to control the transit route from Rivas to the Pacific. The Accessory Transit Company, set up to operate stagecoach lines across the isthmus, also secured exclusive rights to construct a canal across the isthmus within twelve years. So while the British, through their protectorate over the Mosquito Indians, controlled the eastern entry to the route across Nicaragua, an American tycoon had been granted control of the western end of the route by the country through which it ran.¹⁰

Tension mounted between Greytown’s British subjects and Vanderbilt’s American employees, bringing the British and the Americans to the negotiating table to attempt to find a way to satisfy the American goal of non-interference in Latin America and the British objective of keeping trade routes open, part of a larger imperial policy of promoting free trade.¹¹ In the resultant Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, ratified in 1850, the United States and Britain pledged that neither nation “will ever obtain or maintain for itself any exclusive control over the said ship canal” connecting the Atlantic and Pacific,

⁹ James K. Polk, “Fourth Annual Message,” 5 December 1848, in James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1908*, (New York: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1909) [hereafter referred to as *Compilation*], vol. 4, 636.

¹⁰ David I. Folkman, Jr., *The Nicaragua Route* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1972) and Stephen Dando-Collins, *Tycoon’s War: How Cornelius Vanderbilt Invaded a Country to Overthrow America’s Most Famous Military Adventurer* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2008) are the best accounts of history of the Accessory Transit Company.

¹¹ The shift of British economic doctrine from mercantilism to free trade is examined in Chapter 3.

nor would they “ever erect or maintain any fortifications commanding the same or in the vicinity thereof.”¹²

Many consider the agreement a milestone in Anglo-American relations, but as historians take the long view, they frequently assume that the treaty helped solidify friendly Anglo-American relations until its abrogation in the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty over half a century later. A more focused view on the 1850s, however, reveals a decade of wrangling in which each side accused the other of violating the spirit, if not the letter, of the treaty.

From the beginning, disagreements arose regarding the application of the treaty to existing British interests in the region, especially their protectorate over the Mosquito Coast. The Americans asserted that the treaty bound the British to abandon their privileged position on the coast, but the British insisted that the treaty applied only to future settlements. For two years the two sides wrangled over the interpretation, and in particular over British control of the settlement at Greytown, at the eastern end of the transit route across Nicaragua, but no resolution could be reached.

Then, in 1852, the British took a bold step that any objective observer must view as a blatant violation of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty. They consolidated control over six islands off the coast of Honduras, Nicaragua’s northern neighbor, and created a new colony in Central America.¹³ Washington strongly objected, but had difficulty in

¹² “The Clayton-Bulwer Treaty,” *The Avalon Project*, Yale Law School, available from http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/br1850.asp, accessed 1 December 2012.

¹³ The British dubbed the islands of Ruatan, Guanaja, Barbareta, Helena, Morat, and Utila the “Bay Islands” for their location in the Bay of Honduras. Although the Bay of Honduras is more commonly referred to today as the Gulf of Honduras, and the island of Ruatan as Roatan, contemporary spellings are used throughout this study to provide consistency with the names used by diplomats at the time.

addressing the question as domestic developments on both sides of the Atlantic slowed the pace of Anglo-American discussions regarding Central America. In the United States, the election of 1852 returned the Democratic Party, generally more expansionist than the outgoing Whigs, to power. It took the new president, Franklin Pierce, months to convince his choice for Minister to Britain, James Buchanan, to accept the position. When Buchanan finally arrived in London in August 1853, the British government worried more about the “Eastern Question” than American opposition to the new colony.

The Crimean War

By 1848, European revolutions, nationalism, and politics seriously threatened the balance of power established at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. As Britain struggled to maintain its dominance over a peaceful Europe, the looming threat of Russian expansion in Eastern Europe trumped all other foreign policy concerns in London.

At first, important trade relations prevented Britain and Russia from quarrelling. In the early 1830s, trade with Britain accounted for nearly three quarters of all Russian exports. At the same time, Russian purchases totaled more than two-fifths of exports from Britain. However, the rapid growth of the Russian economy affected relations between London and Moscow. From 1825 to 1845, Russia embarked on a conscious program of industrialization. The number of Russian companies producing manufactured goods and the number of Russians employed in factories more than doubled. Exports of Russian grains in the Black Sea region grew substantially throughout the 1830s. Trade with China became so brisk that Russia became a net exporter to that country by 1840, just as the British fought a war to force concessions to expand their economic impact

there.¹⁴ As Anglo-Russian trade decreased and the Russian economy expanded, one of the major factors promoting friendly relations between the two nations eroded.¹⁵

Diplomatically, London worried most about Russian machinations in Eastern Europe. Britain supported the preservation of the weak Ottoman Empire as a geographical buffer capable of preventing a conflict between Russia and Austria that would upset the European balance of power. The British also had a stake in the preservation of the neutrality of the straits connecting the Black Sea with the Mediterranean, which checked the power of the Russian navy by denying it access to the Mediterranean. As long as the Ottomans enforced the London Convention of 1841, which banned warships from entering the straits, the British viewed them as essential partners in maintaining peace on the continent.¹⁶

In 1850, a French demand for a range of privileges for Catholics in the Ottoman controlled Holy Land offended the Russians, who protected the Orthodox population there and viewed any concessions to other Christian denomination as a threat to their influence. When the Ottoman sultan rebuffed a mission sent to formalize assurances of

¹⁴ David Wetzel, *The Crimean War: A Diplomatic History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 30; Alexis Troubetzkoy, *A Brief History of the Crimean War: The Causes and Consequences of a Medieval Conflict Fought in a Modern Age* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006), 52-53.

¹⁵ Most studies on Anglo-Russian relations in the first half of the nineteenth century are dated, as recent generations found the modern relations during the Cold War more compelling. David Gillard, *The Struggle for Asia, 1828-1914: A Study in British and Russian Imperialism* (London: Methuen & Co., 1977), is the most useful broad treatment of the relationship and focuses more closely on the period before 1860 than most surveys; Harold N. Ingle, *Nesselrode and the Russian Rapprochement with Britain, 1836-1844* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), offers a concise discussion of one Russian foreign ministers attempts to foster cooperation between the two countries and the uphill battle he faced.

¹⁶ Vernon John Puryear, *England, Russia, and the Straits Question, 1844-1856* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1931), remains an excellent examination of this important diplomatic misunderstanding between Britain and Russia. It argues that the two countries, which had agreed in 1844 to partition Turkey when it inevitably crumbled, disagreed on the extent to which the Ottoman Empire remained a feasible state; that Britain provoked controversy in the straits; and that Britain's eventual turn against Russia had as much to do with a need to appease Napoleon III as factor in Anglo-Russian relations.

Russia's role as protector of his Orthodox subjects, the tsar took bold action. On 7 July 1853, his troops invaded Moldavia and Wallachia. Located at the geographic confluence of the Russian, Ottoman, and Austrian Empires, these duchies had constituted the very buffer the British sought to preserve. Thus, the "Eastern Question" became Britain's immediate priority rather than its new colony in Central America.

From his position in the Home Office, Lord Palmerston (Henry John Temple) immediately suggested a strong show of force. But, ever the pacifist, Prime Minister Lord Aberdeen (George Hamilton-Gordon) preferred to negotiate and avoid war. By September, diplomatic attempts at resolving the crisis failed, and Aberdeen acquiesced to his Cabinet by agreeing to a show of force by sending the British fleet into the straits near Constantinople. Emboldened by what certainly seemed to be British protection, the Ottoman Empire declared war on Russia on 4 October 1853. Russia responded by destroying a Turkish fleet anchored at Sinop on 30 November 1853.¹⁷

This proved a much more dire provocation, in British eyes, than the occupation of Moldavia and Wallachia that precipitated the outbreak of war, and public opinion in Britain immediately arose to Russian aggression characterized as a massacre.

Newspapers in Lancaster and Liverpool called it a "slaughter," while the *Daily News (London)* described the "deplorable event."¹⁸ The British Foreign Secretary, the Earl of

¹⁷ Winfried Baumgart, *The Crimean War, 1853-1856* (London: Arnold, 1999), is a concise account of the military aspects of the war; J. B. Conacher, *Britain and the Crimea, 1855-1856* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan Press, 1987), zeroes in on the second half of the war, after the fall of the Aberdeen ministry; David Wetzel, *The Crimean War*, focuses on diplomacy; Troubetzkoy, *Brief History*, puts a premium on accessibility without sacrificing detail.

¹⁸ "Latest Intelligence," *The Lancaster (UK) Gazette and General Advertiser for Lancashire Westmorland, Yorkshire, &c*, 17 December 1853, 4; "Summary," *Liverpool Mercury*, 27 December 1853, 8; "The War," *Daily News (London)*, 5.

Clarendon (George Villiers), told Parliament that there had never been “a moment when it was more the duty of England and of France to stand forth firmly to oppose the aggression and to support the cause of the weak against the strong.”¹⁹ Joined by the French, the British fleet passed through the straits and into the Black Sea, hoping to check Russian aggression without using ground troops. Alas, the ploy failed, and Britain, along with her French allies, declared war on Russia on 28 March 1854.

An unmitigated disaster followed for Britain. Her military had atrophied from four decades of neglect since Waterloo. Poor training and leadership led to brutal conditions during the yearlong siege of the Russian stronghold at Sebastopol, including the infamous Charge of the Light Brigade. For the first time, the telegraph allowed nearly instant reporting of the carnage, and the British press quickly concluded, “this expedition was one of the most fruitless and lamentable that has ever occurred in the history of warfare.”²⁰ All told, more than one-fifth of the Britons sent to the Crimea died there, with disease accounting for nearly 80% of British deaths.²¹

The disastrous campaign and caustic press accounts caused one of the most spectacular downfalls of a government in British history. On 23 January 1855, John Roebuck, M.P. from Sheffield, proposed a committee of inquiry into the war. For the ministers in Aberdeen’s government most responsible for the military, such a step was

¹⁹ *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, Lords, 3d ser., vol. 130 (1854), col. 37.

²⁰ William Howard Russell, *Russell’s Despatches from the Crimea, 1854-1856*, ed. Nicolas Bentley (London: Andre Deutsch, 1966), 49. This book, first published in 1858, is a collection based on the letters Russell originally sent back to *The Times* during the war itself.

²¹ Gaston Bodart, *Losses of Life in Modern Wars: Austria-Hungary; France* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1916), 142.

tantamount to censure. Lord John Russell immediately resigned his post at the foreign office, telling Aberdeen, “I do not see how this motion is to be resisted.”²²

Some members of the House of Commons objected, claiming that such an inquiry would tie the government’s hands in continuing to conduct the war. Roebuck remained steadfast, insisting “that for every disaster which for the future may take place we shall be responsible, if the present inquiry be denied.”²³ Roebuck’s motion carried by a two-to-one majority, and Aberdeen resigned the following day.

The Crimean War directly affected Anglo-American negotiations regarding Central America in two ways. Most immediately, the war required the full energy of the British government and prevented any discussion of the interpretation of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty. Equally important, Aberdeen’s resignation paved the way for Palmerston to form his first ministry. While Aberdeen’s foreign policy included cooperation with the United States and a general abhorrence of armed conflict (the Crimean War notwithstanding), Palmerston preferred “gunboat diplomacy” and resolved not to yield to American demands in the Western hemisphere.

Ostend Manifesto

Although the disaster of the Crimean War toppled a government in London, it provided opportunities to Washington. The island of Cuba had long been important for its strategic position in the Caribbean, where it watched over American ships headed to and from the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi River. Thomas Jefferson “ever looked on

²² *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, Lords, 3d ser., vol. 136 (1855), col. 943.

²³ *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3d ser., vol. 136 (1855), col. 1229.

Cuba as the most interesting addition which could ever be made to our system of States,” and John Quincy Adams considered “the annexation of Cuba ... indispensable to the continuance and integrity of the Union itself.”²⁴ Over the next few decades, Spain lost her colonies in South and Central America and her position among the great powers of Europe. Meanwhile, the United States kept a jealous eye on the island during her outburst of continental expansion in the 1840s. In 1850, Americans backed Narciso López’s failed attempt to spark an insurrection that would lead to the island’s independence.²⁵

In March 1854, Cuban authorities briefly held an American cargo ship, the *Black Warrior*, in port at Havana for a minor violation. President Franklin Pierce protested to Spain, but also decided that as Britain drifted towards war with Russia, an opportunity opened for his administration to take bold action while the British focused on continental affairs.²⁶ He ordered his ministers to Britain, France, and Spain to meet and pen an ultimatum for Spain. The minister to Britain, James Buchanan, acquiesced despite doubting the benefit of his own attendance.²⁷

The resultant policy document, known as the Ostend Manifesto, detailed the importance of Cuba for American security and concluded that it should not be governed

²⁴ Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 24 October 1823, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Document no. 26, 57th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 4220, 3-4; John Quincy Adams to Hugh Nelson, 28 April 1823, in John Quincy Adams, *Writings of John Quincy Adams*, ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913-1917), vol. 7, 372-373.

²⁵ Tom Chaffin, *Fatal Glory: Narciso López and the First Clandestine U.S. War against Cuba* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), discusses the filibuster’s expedition to Cuba in the context of American expansionism; Charles H. Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny: The Lives and Times of the Filibusters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), includes an extended discussion of López.

²⁶ Roy Franklin Nichols, *Franklin Pierce: Young Hickory of the Granite Hills* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1958), 327-329.

²⁷ Buchanan to Franklin Pierce, 1 September 1854, *Works*, vol. IX, 251.

by a distant power. Most notoriously, the manifesto included a proposition that the United States “shall be justified in wresting it from Spain” should she be unable to purchase the island.²⁸ Buchanan opposed the statement, observing that the American press lauded the “*voluntary action*” at Ostend even though Buchanan insisted, “*Never did I obey any instructions so reluctantly.*”²⁹ Buchanan considered a friendly resolution of Anglo-American relations in Central America too important to risk tugging the British lion’s tail.

Surprisingly, the Ostend Manifesto never really rankled British diplomats. No mention of it arose in contemporary Parliamentary debates or in the diplomatic correspondence. Instead, British politicians who broached the subject of Cuba concentrated primarily on suppressing its slave trade. While American designs on the island were transparent, Britain’s European priorities superseded any fears of American intentions there.

Filibusters

While a policy drawn up by American diplomats failed to ruffle feathers in London, the adventures of private American citizens did cause consternation. Following the period of continental expansion in the 1840s, some Americans believed the country’s manifest destiny remained unfulfilled. Raising private armies to conquer foreign territory, these privateers known as filibusters aimed to further expand the boundaries of the

²⁸ “Ostend Manifesto,” available from <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/hns/ostend/ostend.html>, accessed 3 January 2014.

²⁹ Buchanan to Marcy, 22 December 1854, *Works*, vol. IX, 289. Emphasis in original.

United States. Most filibustering expeditions headed south and exacerbated conflicts on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, Southern Democrats supported the filibusters and hoped for new slave territory as a result, aggravating tensions with Northerners opposed to the spread of slavery. The filibusters also threatened the stability of Latin American nations and the British capital invested there.³⁰

The impending war with Russia caused Clarendon to view the disagreement with the United States over the Bay Islands casually when it first arose, but other American intrigues in Central America did not escape his notice. In October 1853, just before Buchanan's meetings with Clarendon, a small force of less than four dozen men, commanded by the filibuster William Walker, captured the capital of the Mexican province of Baja California and declared themselves the independent Republic of Lower California. Ultimately, his ill-conceived expedition collapsed, as he quickly ran out of supplies, retreated to the United States, and surrendered the remnants of his force at San Diego in May 1854.³¹ Despite his blatant violation of American neutrality laws, a San Francisco jury found Walker not guilty in less than ten minutes.³²

Clarendon may have been may have been distracted by the difficulties his country faced regarding Russian advances in the Crimea, but he nevertheless viewed Walker's raid into Mexico with suspicion. He instructed his minister in Washington, Sir John Crampton, to ascertain whether the U.S. government was aware of filibusters' aims before they had set out. He also insisted that the United States prevent new expeditions,

³⁰ See Chapter 1, note 5.

³¹ Albert Z. Carr, *The World and William Walker* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 80-90.

³² "Trial of Wm. Walker for Fillibustering [sic]," *Daily Alta California (San Francisco)*, 20 October 1854, 2.

lest Britain be forced to do so. Secretary of State William Marcy pled ignorance and affirmed the American desire to remain on friendly terms with Britain, as they had despite the simmering differences regarding the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty.³³

Marcy's plea of ignorance seems a bit out of place, considering the brief seizure of Walker's ship prior to his ill-fated journey into Mexico.³⁴ President Pierce likewise could not reasonably claim to have been doing everything in his power to prevent American citizens from invading peaceful nations considering his actions throughout 1854. Early that year, he was instrumental in ensuring that the treaty concluding the Gadsden Purchase remained free of any antilibustering assurances.³⁵

At this point, that grey-eyed man of destiny, William Walker, returned to the center of the Anglo-American dispute in Central America. Supported by Vanderbilt, he sailed to Nicaragua and allied with the Liberal forces fighting a civil war. He quickly established personal control of Nicaragua through Patricio Rivas, who served as president in name beginning in late 1855. Despite Pierce's blustery tone in his annual message of the previous year, he showed little sympathy for Walker and refused to receive a representative from Rivas's government, lest his actions irritate the British more than his words.³⁶

³³ Mary Wilhelmine Williams, *Anglo-American Isthmian Diplomacy, 1815-1915* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965), 189-190.

³⁴ "Seizure of the Arrow," *Daily Alta California*, 2 October 1853, 2.

³⁵ Message of Franklin Pierce to the U.S. Senate, 10 February 1854, in *Compilation*, vol. 5, 229-230.

³⁶ William Marcy to Parker H. French, 21 December 1855, in U.S. Congress, House, House Executive Document no. 103, 34th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 858, 57; Marcy to Parker, 7 February 1856, in U.S. Congress, House, House Executive Document no. 103, 34th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 858, 76.

Another filibustering expedition more directly threatened the British position in Central America, as it attempted to reconstitute in Greytown an independent government dominated by American business interests. Henry Kinney was born in Pennsylvania and settled in Texas by the late 1830s, where he became well-respected member of the community. Despite his failure at a variety of businesses, he founded a trading post that became the city of Corpus Christi, served in the legislature of the Lone Star Republic, and helped write the constitution for the state of Texas. After serving under Zachary Taylor in the Mexican-American War, he returned to Texas and his entrepreneurial nature inspired him to plan a new project.³⁷

Kinney purchased over twenty two million acres of land from a pair of Britons who had received the land in a grant from the Mosquito king, acquiring a title recognized by neither the United States nor Nicaragua. He also set up a transport company to rival Vanderbilt's and secured a prominent partner for his enterprise in Joseph Fabens, the American commercial agent at Greytown.³⁸ Kinney's adventure, however, proved extremely short lived.

When the government learned of Kinney's plans, Fabens's contacts provided no help. Authorities in New York and Philadelphia filed charges against Kinney and his partners for recruiting potential colonizers, and the U.S. Navy impounded his ship in New York. Eventually, Kinney snuck out of the United States on a small boat, but took only

³⁷ Brown, *Agents*, 155-156; Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 45-46.

³⁸ José de Marcoleta to Marcy, 9 May 1855, in *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs, 1831-1860*, vol. 4, William R. Manning, ed. (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1934), 457-458.

thirteen men with him, leaving behind hundreds of recruits. His ship wrecked on its way to Nicaragua, and by the time Kinney arrived at Greytown, he was sick and broke.³⁹

He nevertheless managed to get himself elected governor of Greytown, but a request for help from Walker elicited an angry response: “Tell Governor Kinney, or Colonel Kinney, or Mr. Kinney, or whatever he chooses to call himself, that if I ever lay hands on him on Nicaraguan soil I shall surely hang him.”⁴⁰ In February 1856, Kinney fled Nicaragua, his attempt at forming a colony too atrophied from the start to affect Anglo-American relations.⁴¹

Pierce denounced filibustering in his annual message of 1855: “the distracted internal condition of the State of Nicaragua has made it incumbent on me to appeal to the good faith of our citizens to abstain from unlawful intervention in its affairs.”⁴² He toned down his bellicose stance regarding the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty and British recruitment of soldiers on American soil for their war in the Crimea and expressed his desire “remove all causes of serious misunderstanding between two nations associated by so many ties of interest and kindred,” implying that Anglo-American relations operated as family

³⁹ Fabens was removed from his post as soon as his role in the colonizing project was known, and he eventually allied himself with William Walker, Kinney’s rival in Nicaragua. *Ibid.*, 458-459; William Walker, *War in Nicaragua* (Mobile, AL: S. H. Goetzel & Co., 1860), 144, 157-158; Brown, *Agents*, 270-272.

⁴⁰ William V. Wells, *Walker’s Expedition to Nicaragua; A History of the Central American War; and the Sonora and Kinney Expeditions, including All the Recent Diplomatic Correspondence, together with a New and Accurate Map of Central America, and a Memoir and Portrait of General William Walker* (New York: Stringer and Townsend, 1856), 95.

⁴¹ Brown, *Agents*, 310-312; Rosengarten, *Freebooters*, 114-117; William O. Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers: The Story of William Walker and his Associates* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1969), 101-107, 129-131.

⁴² Franklin Pierce, “Third Annual Message,” 31, December 1855, in *Compilation*, vol. 5, 336.

dynamics.⁴³ Considering his desire to promote trans-Atlantic friendship, Pierce's later acceptance of a representative from Walker's government should not be construed as a late endorsement of the filibuster's activity. Rather, it was a political decision calculated to show his support for expansion in an unsuccessful last-ditch effort to secure renomination for the presidency from his political party.⁴⁴

Walker gave up the pretext of the Rivas government and rigged his own election as president in June 1856. Although in the short term this moment may have made Walker the most successful of the American filibusters in the decade before the Civil War, he could not hold off the combined forces of the Central American republics and Vanderbilt, whom he double crossed. In September 1856, he reintroduced slavery in a desperate attempt to curry favor with Southerners in the United States. It proved too little, too late to save Walker's regime, helped ensure that the New Orleans jury that tried him for violation of American neutrality laws refused to convict a man so obviously guilty.⁴⁵

Walker's short-lived control over Nicaragua had resounding consequences for the trans-isthmian transportation route. The instability he fostered rendered the Nicaraguan route across the isthmus economically useless, greatly reducing if not entirely eliminating the economic advantages the British had so jealously protected on the Mosquito Coast.

Ultimately, however, Walker's impact on Anglo-American relations in Central America

⁴³ Ibid., 330.

⁴⁴ Alan Dowty, *The Limits of American Isolation: The United States and the Crimean War* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 211-212. Robert May argues that Pierce hoped recognizing Walker's government would pressure Britain into a favorable settlement in the Clayton-Bulwer dispute, but this must also be understood as a political move by a desperate lame-duck politician. See Robert E. May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 101-102.

⁴⁵ Robert E. May, *Southern Dream*, 106-109, 127.

was relatively small. By the time he became president of Nicaragua, circumstances on both sides of the Atlantic ensured that no armed conflict would occur between the United States and Britain. In the United States, the sectional rift that had been torn wide open in Kansas demanded the U.S. government focus its energies domestically. Stronger commercial ties between the two nations also demanded trans-Atlantic cordiality.⁴⁶ The brutal war in Crimea had ended, and the British feared letting a dispute of much less strategic importance to the Empire than checking Russian aggression flare into armed conflict.

Diplomacy

In this context, Buchanan arrived in London. There, he waited months for a meeting with Lord Clarendon, the British Foreign Secretary, who blamed the delay on the Colonial Office's failure to forward the proper paperwork.⁴⁷ When Buchanan pressed the issue of the Bay Islands, Clarendon shrugged it off. The "islands were of small importance," he insisted, and he told Buchanan, "we need not make a Mountain out of a Mole Hill."⁴⁸ Buchanan left the meeting upset that although he had tried "to impress his Lordship [Clarendon] with the serious & even alarming nature of the Central American questions, ... he had no just conception."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Olien, "Linkages," 281. Williams, *Isthmian Diplomacy*, 222-223.

⁴⁷ James Buchanan to William Marcy, 1 November 1853, *Works*, vol. IX, 81.

⁴⁸ Buchanan to Marcy, 12 November 1853, *Works*, vol. IX, 94.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

The war with Russia quickly put negotiations regarding the Bay Islands on the back burner in London. Buchanan recognized this early in 1854, explaining that the British slide towards war with Russia made it imprudent to broach the subject with Lord Clarendon, who expressed appreciation for the delay.⁵⁰

Less than a week later, however, Buchanan seemed to have received some good news from Clarendon. Although some details remained, Clarendon intimated that an idea Buchanan had floated the previous November to calm tensions in the Mosquito Coast might prove workable. They agreed in principle that it was possible “that Nicaragua should treat the Mosquitos within her limits as Great Britain & the United States treated their own Indians.”⁵¹ This created a dismal prospect for the Mosquitos, but it was a breakthrough in Anglo-American understanding.

However, Clarendon was not as conciliatory on the subject of Ruatan and the Bay Islands. He insisted that the British held legitimate title to those islands unaffected by the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty. He admitted, according to Buchanan, that “In the Bay Islands were but of little value; but if British honor required their retention, they could never be surrendered.”⁵² Although Clarendon underscored the defense of British honor, even in remote and trivial locales, Buchanan clearly felt the former part of the statement carried more weight than the latter. He reported, “my impression is that, in addition to the Mosquito Shore, they will finally, after a struggle, agree to abandon the Bay Islands.”⁵³ When

⁵⁰ Buchanan to Marcy, 5 January 1854, *Works*, vol. IX, 117.

⁵¹ Buchanan to Marcy, 10 January 1854, *Works*, vol. IX, 134.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 134-135.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 135.

discussions about Central America resumed after four months of a British drift towards war, Buchanan found himself sorely disappointed.

And so Buchanan continued to press the issue. He argued that since indigenous people had “no title to rank as an independent State, without violating the principles and the practice of every European nation, without exception, which has acquired territory in the continent of America,” the British protectorate over the Mosquitos amounted to *de facto* British possession and sovereignty in the territory.⁵⁴ Whether or not the British influence in Mosquito land had legitimacy, Buchanan insisted that it had no bearing on the British occupation of Ruatan.⁵⁵

In response, in a letter dated 2 May 1854, Clarendon thoroughly dismantled the American arguments for a British withdrawal from the Mosquito Coast and the Bay Islands. He denied the idea that Britain’s former treaty obligations to Spain accrued to former Spanish colonies. He provided examples of American silence to questions about the British occupation of Greytown to counter Buchanan’s position that the United States had always protested against the Mosquito Protectorate. He specifically rejected the idea that the Monroe Doctrine restricted British action in any way:

With regard to the doctrine laid down by Mr. President Monroe in 1823 concerning the future colonization of the American continents by European States, as an international axiom which ought to regulate the conduct of European States, it can only be viewed as the dictum of the distinguished personage who delivered it; but Her Majesty’s Government cannot admit that doctrine as an international axiom which ought to regulate the conduct of European States.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Buchanan to Clarendon, 6 Jan 1854, Aberdeen Papers, vol. CCCXVIII, Add. MS 43356.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Clarendon to Buchanan, 2 May 1854, Aberdeen Papers, vol. CCCXVIII, Add. MS 43356.

He insisted that protection, like that provided to the Mosquitos, never equated to occupation, colonization, or domination, and used the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty itself to illustrate the point, noting that the two nations, “by the said Treaty, bind themselves to protect certain canals, or railways, which may be formed through various independent States; Great Britain and the United States do not by this protection acquire any right of sovereignty or occupation over such canals or railways.”⁵⁷

Clarendon also claimed that British Honduras and the Bay Islands fell specifically outside the purview of the treaty, and that American negotiator John Clayton admitted as much in 1850, when he wrote that the language of the treaty did not “include the British settlement in Honduras . . . , nor the small islands in the neighbourhood of that settlement which may be known as its dependencies. To this settlement and these islands the Treaty we negotiated was not intended . . . to apply.”⁵⁸ Clarendon concluded by detailing that during the long and uninterrupted occupation of Ruatan by the British, the United States had never lodged a formal protest of the British occupation of that island.⁵⁹

The response devastated Buchanan. Deriding Clarendon’s rejection of the American position as “rambling & inconclusive,” he reported that it “put an end to any reasonable hope of arriving at a satisfactory understanding with the Government of Great Britain as to the true meaning of the Clayton & Bulwer Convention; – or even of effecting any compromise of the Central American questions which the United States

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ John M. Clayton, 4 July 1850, quoted in Clarendon to Buchanan, 2 May 1854, Aberdeen Papers, vol. CCCXVIII, Add. MS 43356.

⁵⁹ Clarendon to Buchanan, 2 May 1854, Aberdeen Papers, vol. CCCXVIII, Add. 43356.

could with honor accept.”⁶⁰ In a lengthy rebuttal of the British views of the treaty, which he sent to Clarendon in July, Buchanan boiled the dispute down to a single point: did the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty bind the British to give up their existing positions in Central America?

Buchanan noted that the British had secured a specific exemption for their possessions in British Honduras, and “no attempt was made to except any other of their possessions from its operation.”⁶¹ He insisted that the small islands referred to in the treaty were not the Bay Islands, but rather much smaller parcels of land located much closer to British Honduras. No protest over the British occupation of Ruatan was necessary, reasoned Buchanan, because, regardless of whether the British had legitimate claims to the island, they had agreed to withdraw in the treaty. He complained that rather than comply with the agreement regarding Ruatan, Great Britain had instead “taken a stride forward, and has proceeded to establish a regular Colonial government over it. But this is not all. They have not confined themselves to Ruatan alone, but have embrace within their colony five other Central American islands.”⁶² This was far more offensive to the American government than the mere failure to withdraw, in accordance with Washington’s interpretation of the treaty.

Buchanan’s reasoning regarding the Mosquito Protectorate took a different tack. Since Britain had argued that protection differed fundamentally from occupation, fortification, or colonization, he sought to explain why, at least in this case, no

⁶⁰ Buchanan to Marcy, 5 May 1854, *Works*, vol. IX, 189.

⁶¹ Buchanan to Clarendon, 22 July 1854, *Aberdeen Papers*, vol. CCCXVIII, Add. 43356.

⁶² *Ibid.*

protectorate was possible without violating injunctions against more overt forms of control. Since the Mosquito Indians were “savage,” they could not conclude a treaty with a “civilized” nation: “This nominal protectorate must therefore, from the nature of things, be an absolute submission of these Indians to the British Government....” This interpretation was of paramount importance to Anglo-American relations, Buchanan argued, as there could never be a “settlement of Central American affairs, whilst Great Britain shall persist in expressing a determination to remain in possession, under the name of a protectorate, of the whole coast of Nicaragua on the Carribean [sic] Sea.” Buchanan concluded his letter with a lengthy defense of the Monroe Doctrine, which Clarendon had summarily dismissed in his previous letter. The policies of the Monroe Doctrine, Buchanan asserted, were beneficial to the nations of Europe, whether they recognized it or not.⁶³

Buchanan’s stern retort to the British view of the treaty, and another American action about a week before he delivered it to Clarendon, further demonstrated American resolve on the Central American question. Despite American objections, the British had extended their protectorate over the Mosquito Indians to include the town of San Juan del Norte at the eastern terminus of the route across the Nicaraguan isthmus. Although the United States considered Greytown as part of Nicaragua, in reality a self-governing community of British subjects and American citizens engaged in trade and transport existed there. The independent government of Greytown was not recognized in Washington and disavowed by London. The rogue government collected taxes and tariffs, but proved powerless to prevent the theft of property from Vanderbilt’s Accessory

⁶³ Ibid.

Transit Company. Local men tried to arrest the captain of a Company steamer who had rammed the small boat of a local man and murdered him for complaining about it, but the U.S. Minister to Nicaragua, Solon Borland, protected the captain. A mob gathered, and a Borland suffered a minor injury from a thrown bottle.⁶⁴

On 11 July 1854, the residents of Greytown refused demands for redress. They would neither pay for the damages to American property nor issue an apology for the assault on an American minister. The following day, George Hollins, commander of the American sloop-of-war *Cyane*, warned the inhabitants to evacuate Greytown, as he planned to commence a bombardment the following morning. True to his word, on 13 July 1854, the *Cyane*, fired upon Greytown, completely leveling the settlement.⁶⁵

The American interpretation of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty faced new challenges after the incident at Greytown. In August, Buchanan tried to sound a hopeful note regarding the resolution of the treaty's meaning, but Clarendon rebuffed him. Buchanan feebly attempted to convince Clarendon that the biggest lesson from the Greytown bombardment should be the dire importance of coming to an understanding regarding the treaty. Privately, however, he noted the uproar it caused throughout Britain, and supposed (incorrectly) that Hollins had acted without authorization. He told Marcy that he would "await with confidence its disavowal," but none came from Washington.⁶⁶ A week later, after being informed that President Pierce would stand by Hollins's actions, he could only

⁶⁴ David F. Long, *Golden Braid and Foreign Relations: Diplomatic Activities of U.S. Naval Officers, 1798-1883* (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute, 1988), 123-126; Dando-Collins, *Tycoon's War*, 42.

⁶⁵ Dando-Collins, *Tycoon's War*, 43-44.

⁶⁶ Buchanan to Marcy, 18 August 1854, *Works*, vol. IX, 247-248.

hope that further consideration would induce the president to change his mind.⁶⁷ He remained disappointed.

Although public opinion resoundingly renounced the audacity of the attack on Greytown, Pierce remained defiant. In his annual message to Congress at the end of 1854, he insisted that the seemingly excessive force was necessary because “the arrogant contumacy of the offenders rendered in impossible to avoid the alternative either to break up their establishment or to leave them impressed with the idea that they might persevere with impunity in a career of insolence and plunder.”⁶⁸ The preoccupation of the British with the Crimean War no doubt played a role in Washington’s willingness to take such a strong stand behind the actions of the navy at Greytown.⁶⁹ Buchanan remained disappointed at Pierce’s continuing support for Hollins, but he was equally concerned that Pierce failed to explain the issues in Central American regarding the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, the seriousness of which he felt the vast majority of British politicians did not comprehend.⁷⁰

While the Greytown incident strained Anglo-American relations, Clarendon considered a response to the American position on Clayton-Bulwer, expounded by

⁶⁷ Buchanan to Marcy, 25 August 1854, *Works*, vol. IX, 249.

⁶⁸ Franklin Pierce, “Second Annual Message,” 4 December 1854, in *Compilation*, vol. 5, 284.

⁶⁹ Alan Dowty, *Limits of American Isolation*, 195. Earlier, Buchanan convinced Pierce that the Crimean distraction offered the United States leeway in acquiring Cuba writing to one Senator in May 1854 that “undoubtedly the present would seem to be a favorable moment for making the attempt” on the island. It stands to reason that a war big enough to stymie British reaction in the most important Caribbean island also hampered the British ability to respond to less important outposts in Central America. Buchanan to John Slidell, 23 May 1854, *Works*, vol. IX, 201.

⁷⁰ Buchanan to Marcy, 22 December 1854, *Works*, vol. IX, 288. In the same letter Buchanan suggested that the annual message of the president is the only U.S. document republished in Britain, and therefore played a primary role in the British understanding of the policy positions of the American administration.

Buchanan in July. In October, he drafted two letters with vastly different tones. The first professed righteous indignation at the American position. In particular, it railed against the continued American conflation of the concepts “protectorate” and “sovereignty,” which led to the view that “the protectorate of Great Britain over Mosquito [constitutes] possession of and dominion over the Mosquito coast.” Complaining that “the government of the United States should adopt this tone and language” in the course of “a discussion purporting to have a friendly object,” Clarendon offers no alternatives, only reprobation. His draft also omitted any mention of the Bay Islands.⁷¹

Another draft, penned just two days later, focused exclusively on the question of Ruatan and took a much more conciliatory tone. Regardless of the British position regarding the island, they endeavored “to make every sacrifice compatible with the honour and dignity of the British Crown, in order to preserve unimpaired the closest relations of amity with the United States....” He went even further in suggesting that, if certain conditions were guaranteed, Britain would be amenable to submitting the Ruatan issue to arbitration.⁷²

As it happened, neither draft ever emerged as a formal despatch to the United States, but taken together, they clearly illuminate the British position near the end of 1854. They demonstrate the firm British position that the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty did not apply to existing settlements, but also that the nearly yearlong British commitment to

⁷¹ Clarendon, *Draft of Statement to Mr. Buchanan’s Memorandum of July 22, 1854, respecting the Clayton and Bulwer Treaty*, 17 October 1854, Aberdeen Papers, vol. CCCXVIII, Add. 43356.

⁷² Clarendon, *Draft of Answer to Mr. Buchanan’s Memorandum of July 22, 1854, respecting the Clayton and Bulwer Treaty*, 19 October 1854, Aberdeen Papers, vol. CCCXVIII, Add. 43356.

avoid making “a Mountain out of a Mole Hill” remained intact.⁷³ The primary reason was the calming influence of Lord Aberdeen at the head of the British government. Having conducted the Oregon boundary negotiations from the Foreign Office a decade earlier, Aberdeen had intimate knowledge of American diplomatic tactics. When Clarendon confessed to being “very uneasy about our relations with the U.S.” and worried that Buchanan was “ready ... to make political capital out of a quarrel with us,” Aberdeen simply advised that the American people “were not actually desirous of quarrelling with us.”⁷⁴

As Clarendon drafted his firmly worded responses to Buchanan, Aberdeen’s tone behind the scenes was palpably softer. He told Clarendon that he “should greatly regret any extreme measures on account of Greytown or Mosquito, where our right is very questionable, and the importance of which has been much exaggerated.”⁷⁵ He went so far as to virtually confirm the American view of the controversy while simultaneously explaining the imprudence admitting so publicly:

I looked into this subject five and twenty years ago, and I never could discover on what pretext we made San Juan, or as we now call it Grey Town, a part of the Mosquito territory. As for the Bay Islands, our title is little better than manifest usurpation; and is worthy of the Government of the United States. Still, this is not the moment to abandon these claims; for it is very clear that the concession is made to Russia, and not to the United States alone.⁷⁶

⁷³ See note 45.

⁷⁴ Clarendon to Aberdeen, 14 May 1854, Aberdeen Papers, vol. CLI, Add. MS 43189; Clarendon to Aberdeen, 25 September 1854, Aberdeen Papers, vol. CLI, Add. MS 43189; Aberdeen to Clarendon, 5 November 1854, Aberdeen Papers, vol. CLI, Add. MS 43189.

⁷⁵ Aberdeen to Clarendon, 24 October 1854, Aberdeen Papers, vol. CLI, Add. MS 43189.

⁷⁶ Aberdeen to Clarendon, 2 November 1854, Aberdeen Papers, vol. CLI, Add. MS 43189.

These statements clearly demonstrate that the circumstances surrounding the Crimean War dictated the prevention of conflict with the United States over strategically unimportant and legally dubious British possessions.⁷⁷ Aberdeen may have been alone in his Cabinet in harboring such pacific tendencies, much like his stance on the Russian incursions in Moldavia and Wallachia a year earlier. Fortunately for the United States, he was the leader of the government and capable of overriding the more bellicose voices of his advisors.

Late in December 1854, Buchanan had a chance to meet with Aberdeen personally, and their conversation inspired in the American minister renewed optimism. Although Aberdeen did not agree entirely with the American position laid forth in Buchanan's note from July 22, he surprised Buchanan by having only a few objections. The razing of Greytown proved the largest remaining impediment to settling the Central American questions, Aberdeen intimated. Even regarding that event, the prime minister "did not believe that the Government of the United States could have intended any insult to the British Government," and he assumed that the ill will it created "will soon pass away & be forgotten." He even hinted that, although Hollins had gone a step too far, the tactics he used bore a striking resemblance to ones Britain found expedient on similar occasions.⁷⁸

Aberdeen proceeded to reveal to Buchanan what he had privately told Clarendon two months earlier: that the Mosquito Protectorate was not worth a fight, and "it would

⁷⁷ Buchanan's letter to John Slidell the previous summer demonstrated his awareness of the advantage the United States stood to gain during the enormous distraction the Crimean War caused in London. See note 66.

⁷⁸ Buchanan to Marcy, 30 December 1854, *Works*, vol. IX, 300.

be difficult ... to maintain that the Bay Islands were dependencies of Belize.”⁷⁹ They discussed the importance of the trade between the two nations and of the mutual benefit that would accrue from the peaceful construction of a canal across the isthmus, and Buchanan asked what roadblocks remained in the way of a settlement. Aberdeen confided that “as to thoroughfares across the Isthmus, he had never considered them of so much importance as other people had done,” whereas, on the other hand, “No man could be more anxious than himself to promote the best understanding between the two Countries.”⁸⁰ Here Aberdeen clearly broke from the majority of his Cabinet and his peers.

He then offered a surprising appraisal of the role the Crimean War played in Anglo-American negotiation regarding Central America. Rather than distracting Britain from her negotiations with the United States, to Aberdeen, the irritant of unfinished business across the Atlantic had the potential to divert Britain from her fight with Russia instead.⁸¹ For the first time in a year, Buchanan had strong reason to hope for an amicable settlement, even one favorable to the American interpretation of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty.

His hopes, however, quickly faded. As discussed above, the Aberdeen government fell just a month later. The bellicose former Foreign Secretary Viscount Palmerston took his place. Buchanan reported to Marcy that, despite further acknowledgements from Aberdeen that questions regarding the Mosquito Coast and the Bay Islands would have been settled favorably, effectively recognizing the American

⁷⁹ Ibid., 301.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 302.

⁸¹ Ibid.

interpretation of Clayton-Bulwer, the political winds in the British Isles meant no settlement would be forthcoming. Even if Palmerston shared Aberdeen's view of the Central American crises, which he clearly did not, his government focused almost exclusively on the Crimean War.⁸²

Palmerston retained Clarendon at the Foreign Office, but without Aberdeen to goad him towards a settlement, Clarendon's tone stiffened. When Buchanan told Clarendon of Aberdeen's opinions regarding Ruatan, Clarendon refused to believe him. He insisted the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty applied only to such settlements as either country might establish after the treaty's ratification.⁸³

In reporting the unhappy turn of events to Marcy, Buchanan noted the numerous ways in which Palmerston was directly associated with creating the circumstances in Central America that the United State found so odious. As Minister for Foreign Affairs, Palmerston oversaw the establishment of the Mosquito Protectorate, the seizure of Greytown from Nicaragua, and the establishment of British dominion over Ruatan. More examples existed of Palmerston's refusal to yield to American demands in Central America, but Buchanan felt he had already listed enough to demonstrate the United States would never receive satisfaction on the Clayton-Bulwer question with Palmerston in office.⁸⁴

⁸² Buchanan to Marcy, 16 February 1855, *Works*, vol. IX, 320.

⁸³ Buchanan to Marcy, 7 April 1855, *Works*, vol. IX, 341-342.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 342-343.

All hope appeared lost for the time being. In late August, Buchanan repeated his expectation that Palmerston's administration would not relent.⁸⁵ A month later, Clarendon confirmed his suspicions when he informed Buchanan that the lack of formal response to Buchanan's letter the previous summer reflected the British belief that the American position at that time suggested that "the continuation of the correspondence was not likely to lead to any satisfactory conclusion; and, ... her majesty's government are still of that opinion."⁸⁶

With the two sides deadlocked, the situation deteriorated further after Britain finally captured Sevastopol on 9 September 1855. The Russian war effort began winding down, and Britain turned its attention to the situation across the Atlantic. Throughout the autumn of 1855, Buchanan expressed concern over the increased British naval presence near the United States, going so far as to provide a list of the ships that had been recently moved.⁸⁷ Still, his experience in London told him that, although the British people would indeed prefer war to any perceived slight of their national honor, the threat of military conflict was not imminent.⁸⁸

His conversations with Clarendon supported that opinion. Wishing to ensure continued friendly relations, Clarendon proposed submitting the question to a third party for arbitration. Although Buchanan appreciated the gesture, he found two reasons to disagree. First, he argued that the language of the treaty was unambiguous and needed no

⁸⁵ Buchanan to Marcy, 31 August 1855, *Works*, vol. IX, 400-401.

⁸⁶ Clarendon to Buchanan, 28 September 1855, *Works*, vol. IX, 415.

⁸⁷ Buchanan to Marcy, 26 October 1855, *Works*, vol. IX, 436; Buchanan to Marcy, 7 November 1855, *Works*, vol. IX, 447-449.

⁸⁸ Buchanan to Marcy, 16 November 1855, *Works*, vol. IX, 461.

clarification – only British recognition of facts. Second, no world leader appeared impartial. Indeed, Clarendon failed to propose an arbitrator, and Buchanan made only jokes, rather than serious suggestions.⁸⁹

So the Central American question remained at a stalemate in early 1856, and Buchanan retired from his post as minister to return to the United States to run for, and ultimately win, the presidency. From Washington, and with more freedom to act of his own volition, Buchanan continued to push to dispose of “a bone of contention & a root of bitterness between the two Governments,” going so far as to intimate that he might favor a complete abrogation of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty.⁹⁰ The Dallas-Clarendon Treaty of 1856 attempted to resolve the issue, but British insistence on pre-conditions ensured its rejection by the U.S. Senate.

Still, from the White House, Buchanan gave the matter the attention it deserved, and detailed the situation at length in his first annual message to Congress.⁹¹ He presented his steady opinion that the American interpretation of the treaty made sense, but still allowed for the possibility of an amicable settlement.⁹²

⁸⁹ Buchanan to Marcy, 2 November 1855, *Works*, vol. IX, 445; Buchanan to Marcy, 9 November 1855, *Works*, vol. IX, 456; Buchanan to Marcy, 22 January 1855, *Works*, vol. X, 13.

⁹⁰ Buchanan to Clarendon, 9 September 1857, *Works*, vol. X, 123.

⁹¹ Having served in London, Buchanan understood the weight the British gave to the president’s annual messages and had lamented that his predecessor failed to use the medium to impress the British with the importance the United States attached to the Bay Island question. See note 67.

⁹² *Works*, vol. X, 136-139.

Bleeding Kansas and the Sepoy Mutiny

Just as the discussions over the Central American reached a lull in 1855, conditions in the United States deteriorated drastically. The acquisition of the Oregon Territory and the Mexican Cession reopened the question of slavery in the United States, particularly regarding its expansion into the newly acquired territory, and began to tear the nation apart.

For three decades, the Missouri Compromise of 1820 drew a line in the sand at 36° 30' north latitude, permitting slavery in federal territories to the south and prohibiting it to the north. Discussions about whether the line would be extended into the new territories or some other arrangement would replace it intensified in 1848, with the gold rush. Soon, the population swelled and California sought statehood. A legislative compromise in 1850 established California as a free state, but made concessions to slaveholding interests.

Four years later, as the population west of Missouri grew, Congress divided the region along north-south lines into territories called Kansas and Nebraska and seemed to signal the acceptance of slavery north of 36° 30' in the Kansas territory. Free Soil advocates lamented the specific repeal of the Missouri Compromise that had established that boundary between slave and free territories. As Kansas sought statehood, zealots from both sides of the debate flooded over the border from Missouri to vote illegally in elections for the territorial legislature that would decide whether or not to allow slavery.

Violence and political confusion followed. Kansas ended up with two different territorial legislatures and constitutions, one including slavery and the other disallowing it. With the Senate and President Pierce on one side of the issue and the House of

Representatives on the other, Kansas's application for statehood resulted only in the further fragmentation of the United States. Statehood occurred only after Southern secession had removed most of the pro-slavery votes from Congress.⁹³

At the same time, Britain suffered from one the most catastrophic rebellions in her colonial history. In the northern provinces of India, the so-called "jewel in the crown" of the British Empire, some Indian soldiers, known as sepoy, openly rebelled against British domination. There were many causes, but the mutiny resulted primarily from general resentment at British rule, distaste for recent reforms in the army, and, most notoriously, the pre-greased cartridges of the army's new rifles. Rumors indicated that the new lubricant included beef-based tallow or pork-based lard, offending the religious sensibilities of both Hindu and Muslim sepoy. British authorities tried to relieve suspicions by allowing the sepoy to grease the cartridges themselves and by introducing cartridges that could be torn by hand rather than bitten, but the efforts failed. Considering the British East India Company's drive towards Westernization, the sepoy concluded that the British wanted to root out the Hindu and Muslim religions.

Over the next year, over 11,000 British soldiers died (both from casualties and disease) suppressing the rebellion. The British reconsidered the way they governed the most important part of their empire. They disbanded the British East India Company and established an India Office with a position of viceroy of India to more directly govern

⁹³ James A. Rawley, *Race & Politics: "Bleeding Kansas" and the Coming of the Civil War* (Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1969), remains a standard narrative; Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 2004), is a recent account that examines the evolution of free soilers' defense of white political privilege to a racially inclusive view of freedom.

there. Although London became more directly involved, it also gave more weight to local customs, avoiding a repeat of the bloody incident.⁹⁴

Neither the violence in Kansas nor in India had a direct impact on the negotiations between the United States and Britain, but both seriously distracted their respective governments. Bleeding Kansas and the Sepoy Mutiny demonstrate that the Central American dispute never constituted the most important political issue in either Washington or London. The fact that their timing coincides with the period from 1856-1858 during which there was very little discussion about the Central American issues further demonstrates the importance of understanding the individual domestic and imperial policy concerns of each nation to provide proper context to their bilateral negotiations.

Resolution

Buchanan always believed that no resolution would occur with Palmerston in power, but in 1858, a window of opportunity arose when a scandal led to the prime minister's ouster. A group of Italians living in Britain hatched a plot to assassinate Louis Napoleon. They failed, but produced a rift in the newly formed Anglo-French friendship forged in Crimea. When a loophole in British law allowed the assassins to escape

⁹⁴ Christopher Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny: India, 1857* (New York: Viking, 1978), is a good overview; Timothy H. Parsons, *The British Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A World History Perspective* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), succinctly discusses the effects of the mutiny on the British Empire; Michael Edwardes, *Battles of the Indian Mutiny* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), is a good military account; Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt, 1857-1858: A Study of Popular Resistance* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), takes a "bottom-up" approach to the rebellion in limited geographical regions; Saul David, *The Indian Mutiny: 1857* (London: Viking, 2002), is a thorough account that considers the economic motivations of the sepoys; Biswamoy Pati, ed., *The 1857 Rebellion* (Oxford: University Press, 2007), is a collection of essays on the subjects by eighteen historians with varying viewpoints.

prosecution for conspiracy, Palmerston proposed an adjustment to appease France. Parliament, however, saw it as truckling, and he resigned in response.⁹⁵ He moved to the Parliamentary opposition for just fifteen months before regaining the position of prime minister, but the interim proved long enough for a settlement of the most vexing of the Central American questions.

Interestingly, the intractable issue of the British colony of the Bay Islands finally ended when a third party stepped in. It was not arbitration, however, but rather an agreement between Britain and Guatemala that returned the islands to Honduras. The Treaty of Aycinena-Wyke, agreed in April 1859, just before Palmerston retook his position, ostensibly sought to clarify an ambiguous boundary between Guatemala and British Honduras. In doing so, it declared Ruatan and the other Bay Islands as part of Honduras, removing a major impediment to Anglo-American rapprochement.

The next year, in the Treaty of Managua, the British ceded their Mosquito Protectorate to Nicaragua. In both cases, the United States remained involved only indirectly, but they ultimately accomplished their goal of evicting Britain from her position in Central America. At the same time, Britain never had to yield to the American interpretation of Clayton-Bulwer. By giving up her position on the Mosquito Coast and the Bay Islands, Britain no longer had control over any portion of the potential isthmian route across Central America, and the issue of whether the treaty applied retroactively or merely prospectively became moot.

⁹⁵ Norman McCord and Bill Perdue, *British History, 1815-1914*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 276.

Conclusions

Conflicting interpretations of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty remained an irritating factor in Anglo-American relations throughout the 1850s, but it became a secondary concern on both sides of the Atlantic. Britain suffered through a disastrous Crimean War, a rebellion in their most important colonial possession, and a fair deal of turmoil in her politics as a result. The United States meanwhile, spent the decade slipping closer to disunion, and by the late 1850s faced unparalleled upheaval.

Eventually, the British essentially acknowledged the American view without doing so officially or sacrificing their national honor. Rather than back down, they arranged treaties with the relevant Latin American republics to vacate the contested possessions in Central America. Washington may have preferred a direct recognition of their position, but the dispute dissipated when the British ceded the Bay Islands to Honduras and recognized Nicaraguan sovereignty over the Mosquito Coast while ensuring the protection of the indigenous people. The diplomatic storm of the middle of the 1850s died down quickly by the end of the decade.

In fact, an incident in 1860 symbolizes the progress of Anglo-American rapprochement through the 1850s. As Britain prepared to transfer Ruatan to Honduran sovereignty, the British subjects on the island contacted William Walker hoping he might raise an army to prevent Honduras from taking possession. Walker landed at Trujillo on the Honduran coast, captured a fort, and suspended import duties at the port. Because the tariffs were earmarked for paying a debt that Honduras owed Britain, Walker unwittingly drew the attention of the HMS *Icarus*, and the British navy joined the Honduran forces in chasing him from Trujillo. The *Icarus* eventually caught up with the filibuster, and

Walker surrendered to its captain, Norvell Salmon. Salmon turned Walker over to the Hondurans, who executed him by firing squad on 12 September 1860.

The governments of Europe and Central America were thrilled to have the filibustering thorn removed from their sides, and in his final annual address to Congress in December 1860, Buchanan applauded “the public sentiment” which had shifted against filibustering.⁹⁶ It was one of the few accomplishments Buchanan could view with pride as he exited the White House with the nation on the verge of Civil War.

The perfunctory settlement of the Anglo-American difficulties in Central America lays bare the reality of the situation during the 1850s. The two countries shared the same primary goal, embodied in the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty: to ensure that neither impeded the other’s economic opportunities. Difficulties arose only from the details. The United States only charged Britain with violating the letter of the treaty, not its spirit. Likewise, the British only felt their national pride threatened, not their imperial interests. Even though neither side backed down from its original position, their mutual understanding on the larger issues at stake ensured that they did “not make a Mountain out of a Mole Hill.”⁹⁷ The progress of rapprochement proved more important than an isolated dispute.

While their agreement over the principle of open access to isthmian transportation illustrates their continued mutual commitment to free trade, the bickering between the two countries over the exact terms of the treaty reveals their different reasons for supporting the same policy. For the United States, a weak military and sectional tension

⁹⁶ James Buchanan, “Fourth Annual Message,” 5, December 1848, in *Compilation*, vol. 5, 649; Rosengarten, *Freebooters*, 196-209.

⁹⁷ See note 45.

made free trade imperative because they did not have the means to force access to international markets. Britain, however, continued to use their military to maintain their existing colonies, settlements, and protectorates throughout the 1850s. As a result, disagreement persisted as to the acceptable political methods to achieve the neutrality envisioned by the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty.

Because he understood the importance each country attached to rapprochement, Buchanan maintained his confidence that the Central American issue would be settled in a manner favorable to the United States, even if the Crimean War, American filibusters, and bellicose British statesmen slowed progress. Ultimately, as he confided to Clarendon in March 1858, the “material interests of both [nations] are essentially involved in the welfare of the other; & according to the old Scotch proverb, ‘blood is thicker than water.’”⁹⁸ Events on the other side of the globe in 1859 served to further reinforce the idea of an Anglo-American kinship and cordiality that dictated trans-Atlantic cooperation in world affairs.

⁹⁸ Buchanan to Clarendon, 27 March 1858, *Works*, vol. X, 199.

CHAPTER 5

CHINA: “BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER”

“The veterans of the Crimea murmured that they would rather fight Balaclava over three times than again face the forts of Taku.”¹

As the controversy over the Bay Islands settled, events halfway around the globe exposed the essence of Anglo-American relations. While Britain fought wars to reduce Chinese restrictions against foreign trade, Americans tagged along to receive whatever concessions the British won. Although the United States remained officially neutral during the Second Opium War, Americans in the Far East occasionally resorted to violence, and one man took it upon himself to aid Britain in an hour of need. In an episode routinely omitted from classrooms and textbooks, Josiah Tattnall made a decision to disobey orders and saved the lives of British sailors with whom the American naval captain felt a strong kinship. He justified his actions with a phrase common in English lexicon on both sides of the Atlantic: blood is thicker than water.

A Chinese ambush at the Taku Forts on 25 June 1859 necessitated Tattnall’s aid to the overmatched British navy, and accounts of the disaster often appear in the few monographs on the Second Opium War. Scholarship on Sino-American relations,

¹ As quoted in Douglas Hurd, *The Arrow War: An Anglo-Chinese Confusion, 1856-1860* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1967), 183.

however, tends to gloss over the incident.² Studies of Anglo-American relations in the period pay it even less attention.³ Even examinations of the life of Tattnell give the episode short shrift.⁴ By overlooking the Battle of Taku Forts, historians have missed an opportunity to examine a moment of cooperation during an otherwise contentious period in Anglo-American relations, one that illustrates the commonality of American and British geopolitical goals despite their disagreement over the best methods to reach them.

Open for Business

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, American merchants participated in the opium trade in China. Moral and legal problems limited the trade in the first half of the century, but avenues to avoid both quickly arose. Beginning in 1821, American merchants offloaded their cargo on islands at the mouth of the Pearl River, avoiding enforcement of Chinese prohibitions against the drug and transferring the risk to local entrepreneurs. American missionaries opposed to the opium trade exerted an important

² John King Fairbank, *The United States and China*, 3d ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), set the standard for the study of Sino-American relations when first published over sixty years ago and does not mention the battle; Michael H. Hunt, *The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and China to 1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), is another broad history of Sino-American relations, and mentions it only in an endnote; Te-kong Tong, *United States Diplomacy in China, 1844-1860* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), is one of the few monographs focused on the period examined in this chapter and offers a brief description of the battle without delving into the issue of American neutrality; Curtis T. Henson, Jr., *Commissioners and Commodores: The East India Squadron and American Diplomacy in China* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1982), is a notable exception for its focus on the role of the U.S. Navy in Sino-American diplomacy before the Civil War.

³ Wilbur Devereux Jones, *The American Problem in British Diplomacy, 1841-1861* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1974) mentions the Second Opium War in exactly one sentence, and even then only to note its start.

⁴ M. Foster Farley, "Josiah Tattnell – Gallant American," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 58, Supplement, 172-180, includes only one sentence on the battle; Mead Smith Karras, *Commodore Josiah Tattnell: From Pirates to Ironclads, Half a Century in the Old Navy* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2011), is the only recent biography of Tattnell and spends just 5 of its 600+ pages on the Battle of Taku Forts.

influence on American policy through their role as liaisons between the two governments, but ultimately muted their criticism for fear of jeopardizing the lucrative donations given by merchants for their missionary activities. Some even supported the legalization of opium in China, hoping that regulation could mitigate the disease of addiction more effectively than Chinese officials could prevent its importation.⁵

When the British, who had more invested in the Chinese opium trade, concluded the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, the United States hoped to negotiate similar privileges.⁶ For that purpose, President John Tyler appointed Caleb Cushing ambassador to China. Cushing arrived in Macao and began discussions with representatives of the Chinese Emperor in early 1844. He contrasted the bellicose British with the peaceful Americans, attempting to gain access to the forbidden capital city of Peking and considerations beyond the British. Although rebuffed, the Chinese appreciated his dropping an insistence on traveling to the capital that they acquiesced to all other points Cushing proposed. The resultant Treaty of Wanghia not only granted Americans access to the five treaty ports Britain forced the year before, but extended extraterritoriality to civil cases, a right the British had yet to acquire.⁷

⁵ Jacques M. Downs, "American Merchants and the China Opium Trade," *The Business History Review* 42, no. 4 (Winter 1968), 418-442, details the patterns of the American opium trade in China before the First Opium War; Michael C. Lazich, "American Missionaries and the Opium Trade in Nineteenth-Century China," *Journal of World History* 17, no. 2 (June 2006), 197-223, outlines the role missionaries played in influencing the course of business and diplomacy in China before the Second Opium War.

⁶ For a brief discussion of the First Opium War and the Treaty of Nanking, see Chapter 3. Jacques Downs, "American Merchants," 429, notes, "in almost all innovations which risked confrontation with the Chinese, British private merchants led and the Americans followed – cautiously."

⁷ Hunt, *Special Relationship*, 18-19; Ping Chia Kuo, "Caleb Cushing and the Treaty of Wanghia, 1844," *The Journal of Modern History* 5, no. 1 (March, 1933), 34-54, provides a blow-by-blow of Cushing's negotiations; Richard E. Welch, Jr., "Caleb Cushing's Chinese Mission and the Treaty of Wanghia: A Review," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (December 1957), 328-357, offers less detail but more context regarding the negotiations.

Although the Treaty of Wanghia provided the United States most favored nation status and all the other rights the British secured two years prior, one glaring difference existed between the two treaties. While the Treaty of Nanking omitted any mention of the opium trade, allowing it to tacitly continue, the American treaty confronted the drug directly. Article XXXIII of the Treaty of Wanghia stipulated that American citizens “who shall trade in opium or any other contraband articles of merchandise, shall be subject to be dealt with by the Chinese Government, without being entitled to any countenance or protection from that of the United States.”⁸ Clearly, the Americans maintained an interest in presenting their own country as more peaceful than Britain and in “cultivat[ing] the friendly dispositions of the government and people [of China], by manifesting a proper respect for their institutions and manners.”⁹

The Treaty of Wanghia contained one other mechanism absent from the Treaty of Nanking. Its final article provided for a reconsideration of the commercial terms of the treaty after a dozen years. Although the Treaty of Nanking contained no such clause, the British assumed the right to negotiate their position vis-à-vis the Chinese as well, by virtue of the most favored nations status assured by the 1843 Treaty of the Bogue, a supplement to the Treaty of Nanking from the previous year.¹⁰ As it turned out, twelve

⁸ “Treaty of Wanghia, May 18, 1844,” The University of Southern California US-China Institute, available from [http://china.usc.edu/\(S\(swqn0p55xbqmsu45cwso5lzy\)A\(AHG3TvAxzgEkAAAAyZyZNTkxNTktYmNmMi00MTQ2LThiZWetYzk4OTk1ODhjMDcxsJTKO-w7NYUS7VIAWBIRUR_7f801\)\)/ShowArticle.aspx?articleID=2616\)\)/ShowArticle.aspx?articleID=2616](http://china.usc.edu/(S(swqn0p55xbqmsu45cwso5lzy)A(AHG3TvAxzgEkAAAAyZyZNTkxNTktYmNmMi00MTQ2LThiZWetYzk4OTk1ODhjMDcxsJTKO-w7NYUS7VIAWBIRUR_7f801))/ShowArticle.aspx?articleID=2616))/ShowArticle.aspx?articleID=2616), accessed 15 March 2014.

⁹ Daniel Webster to Caleb Cushing, 8 May 1843, in Daniel Webster, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, National ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1903), Vol. 12, 143.

¹⁰ Welch, “Caleb Cushing’s Chinese Mission,” 333-334; J. Y. Wong, *Deadly Dreams: Opium, Imperialism, and the Arrow War (1856-1860) in China* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

years after the signing of the Treaty of Wanghia, the Britain and the United States found themselves in similar positions as they had in the early 1840s –Britain used its navy to pry China open for more trade. Meanwhile, the Americans floated carefully in their wake, content to scoop up whatever new concessions the British secured for themselves.

The *Arrow* Incident

During the 1840s, Chinese treaties with Western powers opened five cities to foreign trade. Though the agreements succeeded in providing new access for economic penetration, the Western powers also hoped certain provisions would lead the Chinese to recognize Western government representatives as equals of Chinese officials. With this end in mind, the Treaty of Nanking specifically granted permission for British officials to live in the five treaty ports.¹¹ While the Chinese kept their promise in Amoy, Foochow-fu, Ningpo, and Shanghai, the Commissioner at Canton, Yeh Ming-ch'en, insisted that foreigners remain in their warehouses outside the city walls. The British bristled at this sign of disrespect, but London insisted that only diplomacy should resolve the issue, and sternly warned against armed conflict.¹²

In 1854, Sir John Bowring became the governor of Hong Kong and the new British ambassador to China. He found Yeh unwilling to negotiate and sailed north in an attempt to negotiate directly with the Chinese emperor. When rebuffed, Bowring sought a

¹¹ “Treaty of Nanking, 1842,” The University of Southern California US-China Institute, available from <http://china.usc.edu/ShowArticle.aspx?articleID=403>, accessed 3 April 2014.

¹² Hurd, *Arrow War*, 21- 26; Henson, *Commissioners and Commodores*, 72-73.

provocation would allow him to seek redress and supersede his government's directives against the use of force.¹³

He found the pretext he sought in October 1856, when Chinese authorities arrested a dozen men, all Chinese and at least two known for their affiliation with pirates, from aboard a ship called the *Arrow* docked in Canton. Although registered in Hong Kong as a British ship, the *Arrow* was Chinese-owned and staffed entirely by Chinese sailors, save a young Irish captain who admitted that he was on board “merely as nominal master of the vessel.”¹⁴ Further, the ship's British registration had actually expired.¹⁵ Reports that the arresting officers hauled the Union Jack down from the ship's mast provided a further slight to British national honor, and Britain demanded redress.¹⁶

Although Yeh eventually released all twelve men, he refused to publicly apologize and persisted in his contention that since it flew no British flag while docked in the harbor, the *Arrow* lacked the protections of extraterritoriality. Bowring dispensed with the formalities regarding its registration, intent on using the incident to pressure the Chinese to allow foreign access to Canton. Ultimately, British ships bombarded the city and broke its wall, and troops stormed into the commissioner's home. Without the requisite force to capture and hold the city, the British sailors returned to their ships to spend the remainder of the year harassing Chinese shipping near Canton.¹⁷

¹³ Hurd, *Arrow War*, 26-28.

¹⁴ Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, 43.

¹⁵ Hurd, *Arrow War*, 29.

¹⁶ Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, 43-66, offers the most complete examination of the claim of the removal of the British flag and finds it dubious, though most historians repeat it.

¹⁷ Hurd, *Arrow War*, 30-32. Foreigners were allowed to reside only in the trading district and were forbidden to enter the city proper.

The Chinese response came swiftly. By the end of October, Yeh placed a bounty on foreigners in Canton, and in December, he ordered the foreign factories and homes in the treaty port burned. An attempt on Bowring's life in January 1857 failed only because an overzealous assassin used so much arsenic in a loaf of poisoned bread that the governor vomited immediately. Neither side could force the other from its position: foreigners had been expelled from their factories and homes in Canton, but the British navy controlled the mouth of the Pearl River. As the British awaited a response from London to their request for reinforcements, they attempted to secure support from the handful of American ships in the vicinity.¹⁸

The request for American aid against the Chinese made sense. Both nations bristled under the restrictive treaty port system established by the Treaties of Nanking and Wanghia. They desired freer access to Chinese ports, cities, and the country's interior. Perhaps most important, they wanted permission for the permanent residence of their diplomatic representatives at Peking.

However, like Bowring, the American Commissioner Peter Parker had strict orders to preserve his country's neutrality.¹⁹ Although Andrew H. Foote, commander of the American naval force in China, reserved the right to use force to protect the rights and property of his countrymen, he imparted the importance of their neutral position in no uncertain terms: "Any fire upon the Chinese who are not invading the rights of Americans is a murderous and wanton sacrifice of human life and will be severely

¹⁸ Hurd, *Arrow War*, 33-36; Henson, *Commissioners and Commodores*, 138.

¹⁹ Peter Parker to William L. Marcy, 20 September 1855, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 22, 35th Cong., 2nd sess., Ser. 982, vol. 1, 612-613; Parker to Marcy, 8 November 1855, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 22, 35th Cong., 2nd sess., Ser. 982, vol. 1, 621-622.

punished.”²⁰ Policymakers in Washington continued to believe that positioning themselves as a peaceful nation, in contrast to Britain and France, would curry favor with the Chinese, who had indeed already agreed to renegotiate their commercial agreements with the United States.²¹ They also understood that while fostering peaceful discourse with China, they still stood to gain, by virtue of their most favored nation status, any concessions extracted by British force.

Ironically, the attempt to preserve American neutrality actually drew the United States into direct confrontation with China. As the Chinese began harassing the British merchants in the foreign quarter of Canton, Commodore James Armstrong deemed the removal of the American troops the most expedient way to avoid becoming embroiled in the Anglo-Chinese conflict. He sent Foote up the Pearl River for this purpose on 15 November 1856, and the Americans encountered resistance. They turned back and faced Chinese fire when they made another attempt to evacuate their troops the next morning. This time, an American sailor lost his life, and Armstrong became indignant. He demanded an apology from the Commissioner at Canton, who replied that the removal of foreign ships from the Pearl River would relieve the Chinese concerns that led to hostilities. Unsatisfied, Armstrong ordered the bombardment of the forts protecting Canton.²²

²⁰ Quoted in Henson, *Commissioners and Commodores*, 130.

²¹ Marcy to Parker, 27 February 1857, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 30, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1032, 5-6.

²² Marcy to Parker, 2 February 1857, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 30, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1032, 3-4.

At this point, Bowring again tried to convince the Americans to join him in forcing open the city of Canton, but Parker and Armstrong demurred, insisting that the Americans only resorted to arms to redress a direct affront and would be satisfied upon receiving an apology, yet they promised to destroy the forts if not satisfied. They eventually chose the latter option, which they accomplished in early December. When the Chinese burned the foreign quarter of Canton about a week later, no reason remained for an American naval presence at Canton, and Armstrong retired to Hong Kong.²³

Both Secretary of State William Marcy and Secretary of the Navy James Dobbin begrudgingly approved the bombardment at Canton as a necessary response to Chinese aggression, but sternly warned their charges to remain aloof from the continued British attacks. Noting the British interest in forcing access to Peking, Marcy explained that the “British government evidently have objects beyond those contemplated by the United States, and we ought not to be drawn along with it, however anxious it may be for our cooperation.”²⁴ He considered increasing the American naval presence in China, but only for “the protection and security of Americans in China and ... not ... for aggressive purposes,” insisting that “the executive branch of this government is not the war-making power.”²⁵ Washington remained interested primarily in new trade concessions and did not share the British insistence on diplomatic residency in the Chinese capital.

²³ Henson, *Commissioners and Commodores*, 131-132.

²⁴ Marcy to Parker, 2 February 1857, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 30, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1032, 3-5.

²⁵ Marcy to Parker, 27 February 1857, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 30, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1032, 5-6.

Meanwhile, in London, a brief political crisis ensued. Palmerston's opposition proposed a motion condemning Bowring's decision to commence hostilities, citing the dubious nature of the *Arrow*'s claim to British nationality. The motion carried, but when Parliament dissolved, the voters returned Palmerston with an even greater majority. Though the Sepoy Mutiny delayed the project,²⁶ the British and French agreed to join together to force revisions of their existing treaties with China, demanding greater economic access as well as the right to reside in the cities, including the capital at Peking, where the representatives of the Chinese government lived. This diplomatic concession, also sought by the United States, would strengthen the diplomatic relations between the governments and ensure Chinese recognition of the status of the Western powers as equal to her own.²⁷

As Palmerston faced his electoral challenge in Britain, a new administration took over the White House. U.S. officials recalled Parker, and President James Buchanan appointed William Reed envoy to China. Secretary of State Lewis Cass spelled out clear goals for Reed's mission: cooperate with the British and French in all negotiations to expand economic opportunities and establish permanent delegations at Peking, but offer mediation, rather than military assistance, if armed conflict ensued.²⁸ William Marcy had not considered diplomatic residency at Peking important; its inclusion in Reed's instructions indicated that the Buchanan and Cass sought greater concessions in China than their predecessors.

²⁶ See Chapter 4, note 91.

²⁷ Hurd, *Arrow War*, 39-94.

²⁸ Lewis Cass to William B. Reed, 30 May 1857, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 47, 35th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 929, 1-6.

Russia's intension to send a representative to join the Western forces in seeking new agreements with China encouraged policymakers in Washington to add this new objective. All four nations shared the same goals in China, but Cass demanded closest cooperation with the Russians, who joined the United States in forswearing armed intervention. Before, American neutrality caused isolation from Britain and France. Now, Cass advised Reed that the arrival of a second party interested in extracting concessions through peaceful means "highly advantageous in promoting the objects of your mission."²⁹ The United States found a partner with whom to share British and French displeasure over their neutrality.

Tientsin Treaties

By late 1857, the British made progress repressing the Sepoy Mutiny and brought new force to bear on China. Along with a small contingent of French ships, they completely destroyed Canton in December as the American squadron watched impatiently from the mouth of the Pearl, chafing under the neutrality dictated by Washington. After months of unsuccessful attempts at negotiation, Reed requested greater leeway from his superiors, noting that the Chinese would only make the desired concessions under the threat of force, but Cass rebuffed him once more.³⁰

In April 1858, Reed arrived at the mouth of the Peiho River, which provided access to the port of Tientsin and, by canal, to Peking, and met with his British, French,

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Lewis Cass to William B. Reed, 28 April 1858, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 30, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1032, 183-184.

and Russian counterparts. Representatives of the Chinese Emperor arrived to negotiate, but the British and French refused to parley. Reed met the Chinese diplomats, however, and they offered almost everything for which he could hope: improvements in communications, new treaty ports, reduced tariffs, and increased toleration for missionaries and the Christian religion generally. Pleased, Reed tried to convince the British and French to join the negotiations, but they refused. The absence of permission for diplomatic residency at Peking and open access to Chinese rivers, along with the insufficient credentials of the Chinese representatives, scuttled the chance for Anglo-French agreement.³¹

While the Americans hesitated, the British and French had no qualms about using force to extract all their desired concessions, and they planned an attack on the newly constructed Taku Forts near the mouth of the Peiho. Reed followed his instructions, reminding the captain of his ship “that under no circumstances ... must there be any violation of our absolute neutrality.”³² Forced once more to play the role of spectators, the Americans watched as the Anglo-French forces quickly decimated the Taku Forts on 20 May 1858. Reed then continued up the Peiho, where he, along with his British, French, and Russian counterparts, finally received the full terms they sought. By the end of June, each of the four powers signed a treaty at Tientsin securing more than what Reed nearly accepted in April. In addition to opening new ports, the Tientsin Treaties finally

³¹ Baron Jean Baptiste Louis Gros to Reed, 7 May 1858, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 30, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1032, 301-304; Tau, Tsung, and Wú to Reed, translated by S. Wells Williams, 13 May, 1858, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 30, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1032, 316-318; Reed to Cass, 15 May, 1858, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 30, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1032, 297-301.

³² Reed to Samuel DuPont, 19 May 1858, quoted in Henson, *Commissioners and Commodores*, 154.

granted the right of diplomatic residency at Peking and direct communications with the Chinese government, as well as access to the interior of China. The British, French, and Russian treaties all specified that they would exchange ratifications at Peking in one year; the American treaty included the one-year timeline, but omitted any specific location.³³

Josiah Tattnall

As Reed negotiated at Tientsin, Commodore Josiah Tattnall traveled to China to take command of the American naval forces. By this time, Tattnall already had served a long and illustrious career in the navy and developed an interesting personal relationship with the British. His father served in the Senate and as governor of Georgia and died when his son was just ten years old. After his father's death, Tattnall went to Britain to study and live under the care of his grandfather, a loyalist who had fled Georgia during the Revolutionary War.³⁴

Despite fond feelings for both countries, Tattnall fostered a loyalty to the United States and joined the American navy just before the outbreak of the War of 1812. He fought in an American victory at the Battle of Craney Island, which prevented the British from capturing Norfolk, as well as the ignominious defeat at the in the Battle of Bladensburg, which led to the burning of the White House, the Capitol, and other

³³ Reed to Cass, 21 May 1858, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 30, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1032, 318-319; Reed to Cass, 30 June 1858, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 30, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1032, 351-363.

³⁴ Published studies of Josiah Tattnall provide rich narrative detail of his life, but are flawed from an academic standpoint. Charles Colcock Jones, *The Life and Services of Commodore Josiah Tattnall* (Savannah, GA: Morning News Steam Printing House, 1878), is an invaluable source, as it includes full copies and long excerpts of relevant primary documents, but having been commissioned by Tattnall's son, its objectivity is suspect; Karras, *Commodore Josiah Tattnall*, is a recent examination, but lacks footnotes and necessarily relies heavily on Jones, *Life and Services*, as the author notes that Tattnall's "papers were said to have been destroyed many years after his death by his surviving son."

buildings throughout Washington. After the war, he participated in the suppression of piracy off the north coast of Africa.³⁵

His American patriotism led him to harbor resentment towards the British, which he expressed in a pair of incidents while assigned to the *Macedonian*, which arrived in Chile in January 1819 with orders to protect American merchants ensnared by the Spanish attempt to retain their Chilean colony, which declared its independence two years earlier. Chile contracted a former British naval officer, Thomas Cochrane, to organize and lead its navy. Insulted by a British officer of the Chilean navy, Tattall issued “a challenge ... which resulted in a quick duel with pistols,” and wounded his opponent.³⁶ Soon after, he became enmeshed in another duel when Richard Pinckney, who had enraged another British sailor in the Chilean navy by insulting Cochrane, requested him as a second. This time the few available bullets pierced only clothing, but Tattall demonstrated his bravery when he challenged one of the British seconds, who tried to affect a last minute adjustment to the terms of Pinckney’s duel, to a direct battle.³⁷

Over the next decade, Tattall married, returned to the Mediterranean to battle pirates, completed a survey of the Tortugas Islands that led to the establishment of an important fort, and earned personal praise from President Andrew Jackson. Stationed at Vera Cruz in 1832, Tattall offered protection to both American and British merchants caught in the political chaos of early Mexican independence. Tattall explained his change of heart towards the British by describing “the spirit of friendship which has

³⁵ Jones, *Life and Services*, 6-22; Karras, *Commodore Josiah Tattall*, 36-139.

³⁶ Jones, *Life and Services*, 24.

³⁷ Jones, *Life and Services*, 23-26; Karras, *Commodore Josiah Tattall*, 166-172.

happily of late years characterized the intercourse in all parts of the world of those who speak the English language,” and noting “that the protection I offered the subjects of Great Britain has been frequently extended in similar instances by His B[ritish] M[ajesty’s] officers to citizens of the United States.”³⁸ In this instance, Tattnall clearly demonstrated his understanding of the wider tenor of Anglo-American relations as well as his sense of duty in reciprocating offers of kindness from his former adversaries.

Following his service in the Caribbean, Tattnall took command of the Boston Navy Yard and returned for a third tour of duty in the Mediterranean. He distinguished himself in battle, playing a vital role in the American capture of Vera Cruz during the Mexican-American War. After being wounded in the Battle of Tuxpan, he returned to command the Boston Navy Yard. He developed a strategy to avoid direct conflict with Spain as American filibusters supported Cuban independence, took command of the Pensacola Navy Yard, and briefly served in the Pacific and on the Great Lakes before being ordered to take command of the navy’s East India Squadron off the coast of China.³⁹

“Blood is Thicker than Water”

In May 1858, with his distinguished record and long history with the British, Tattnall arrived at the mouth of the Peiho in his flagship *Powhatan*, a steam frigate over 250 feet long. He anchored among the British and French warships too large to cross the shallow bar into the Peiho, though he did not relish their company. His executive officer

³⁸ Quoted in Karras, *Commodore Josiah Tattnall*, 280.

³⁹ Jones, *Life and Services*, 46-74.

described Tattnall's dissatisfaction with the role thrust upon him: "His patriotic and professional pride revolted at the idea of appearing among the large number of English and French men-of-war anchored in the Gulf of Pechelee at the mouth of the Pei-ho, in the character of a passive spectator – or 'Jackall [sic] to the British lion.'"⁴⁰

Despite his obedience, Tattnall clearly bristled under his instructions to remain neutral in the conflict. Nevertheless, Reed managed to gain the treaty his government wanted without resort to violence – although he certainly managed to avail himself of the benefit of the force of the British navy. Having completed his mission, Reed returned to the United States, and John Ward arrived to replace him in April 1859.⁴¹ Tattnall remained in command of a reduced East India Squadron.⁴² As luck would have it, he found an opportunity to redeem his "patriotic and professional pride" in the course of exchanging the ratification of the Tientsin Treaty later that year.

The allied envoys all returned from Tientsin to the Gulf of Pechelee on 3 July 1858. The American sailors began celebrating with a drunken feast on the night of July 4 (official festivities were postponed because it was a Sunday), relishing the end of their month-long wait for Reed's return as much as the holiday itself. The next day, the Western allies joined the celebration of American independence. Each man-of-war

⁴⁰ James D. Johnson, *China and Japan: Being a Narrative of the Cruise of the U.S. Steam-Frigate Powhatan, in the years 1857, '58, '59, and '60, including an Account of the Japanese Embassy to the United States* (Philadelphia: Charles Desilver, 1861), 86.

⁴¹ John E. Ward to Cass, 13 June 1859, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 30, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1032, 569-571; Henson, *Commissioners and Commodores*, 158-162.

⁴² After the successful negotiations at Tientsin, only the frigate *Mississippi* and the sloop-of-war *Germantown* remained with Tattnall's flagship *Powhatan*. Henson, *Commissioners and Commanders*, 59-60.

hoisted the Stars and Stripes and fired a twenty one-gun salute.⁴³ The British participation in the celebration of its colonial loss poignantly illustrates the Anglo-American camaraderie off the coast of China, which prevailed despite the British distaste for American neutrality.

After the jubilation, the Western ships dispersed, and peace settled over relations with China for nearly a year, until the same navies returned to ferry their diplomats to Peking to ratify the Tientsin Treaties. Tattnall needed to secure a vessel with a shallow draft to head up the river, as his flagship *Powhatan* could not make the voyage. British Admiral James Hope, commander of the forces escorting the British delegation to Peking, offered the use of two British gunboats, but Tattnall refused, “having no desire to place himself under unnecessary obligations.”⁴⁴ Suspecting the possibility of British aggression and desirous to maintain American neutrality, he instead rented a steamer called the *Toey-wan*.⁴⁵

Stopping at Shanghai on the route to the Peiho, the American delegation met the Chinese commissioners who had negotiated the Treaty of Tientsin the year before. They haggled with Ward, first offering to ratify the treaty at Shanghai to avoid the sixty day overland journey to Peking, then refusing the Americans’ right to go to Peking until the British ratified their treaty (which specifically granted access to the capital for that purpose), and finally revoking their offer of Shanghai ratification because the treaties

⁴³ Johnson, *China and Japan*, 96.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁴⁵ Johnson, *China and Japan*, 211-213; Karras, *Commodore Josiah Tattnall*, 513.

were in Peking.⁴⁶ On 6 June 1859, the British and French ministers arrived at Shanghai, refused to meet with the Chinese commissioners, insisted on proceeding to Peking, and requested that Ward accompany them. He agreed, and the Western diplomats sailed for the Peiho.⁴⁷

When the Western fleets arrived on June 21, they found the Taku Forts rebuilt and a series of barriers erected across the entrance to the Peiho. The Chinese officials refused passage to the British and French, instead directing them to a branch of the river ten miles north, much less suitable for navigation. Indignant and arrogant, no doubt remembering the easy victory at the same forts a year earlier, they warned they would destroy the barriers and proceed to Tientsin on June 25, the day set for the ratification of the British and French treaties at Peking. Feigning ignorance of the Chinese refusal to allow foreign ships into the Peiho, Tattall entered the mouth of the river in the unarmed *Toey-wan* on June 24. Approaching the forts, they found no sign of Chinese presence or armaments.⁴⁸

As it turned out, the river itself gave the *Toey-wan* more trouble than the forts on its banks, and the Americans got stuck in the mud on the river's floor. The *Toey-wan* now faced two dangers: she could not move out of the firing range of the forts, and the steepness of the bank on which she ran aground threatened to tip her until she filled with

⁴⁶ Kweiliang, et. al. to Ward, 30 May 1859, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 30, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1032, 575-576; Kweiliang, et. al. to Ward, 11 June 1859, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 30, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1032, 579. The American treaty did not specify Peking as the place for ratification, but Ward requested that the guarantee in the British treaty accrue to the United States as a "most favored nation." The Chinese Commissioners argued that the British favors would indeed be bestowed upon the Americans, but only after the ratification of the Sino-British treaty.

⁴⁷ Josiah Tattall to Isaac Toucey, 4 July 1859, in "The American Squadron in China: Official Dispatch from Com. Tattall at the Mouth of the Pei-Ho – The Part Played by the Americans – Our Losses," *New York Times*, 1 October 1859, 2; Johnson, *China and Japan*, 223-228.

⁴⁸ Tattall to Toucey, 4 July 1859.

water. Admiral Hope observed Tattnall's troubles and made what the commodore described as "an attention and kindness which must place me under lasting obligations to him."⁴⁹ He sent a ship to attempt to tow out the *Toey-wan*. Unfortunately, the chain broke, and the Americans remained stuck in a precarious position. Still concerned for the Americans' safety, Hope offered Tattnall full use of one of his ships, "with the handsome and generous offer that I should hoist on board of her the American ensign and my own personal flag."⁵⁰ Tattnall thanked Hope for his offer, but considered himself bound to turn it down, lest American neutrality be compromised.⁵¹

As the tide rose, the *Toey-wan* eventually broke loose and moved back out to the gulf to clear the way for British preparations for an attack. The night before their ultimatum expired, they dismantled part of the first barrier in the river, only to find it repaired the next morning. Nevertheless, Hope led ten ships (nine British, one French) towards the barriers on the morning of June 25. Upon reaching the barriers, the forts suddenly buzzed with activity, and Hope quickly found himself the victim of a Chinese ambush. Within an hour, two of his ships ran aground, his flagship *Plover* sank, his backup *Opossum* suffered the same fate, and he broke three ribs after being shot off the bridge of the *Cormorant* after transferring his flag a third time.⁵²

Not only the neutral Americans watched Hope's situation rapidly deteriorate. A sizable reserve force of British marines waited in the gulf aboard vessels too large to

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Tattnall to Toucey, 4 July 1859; Johnson, *China and Japan*, 230.

⁵² Tattnall to Toucey, 4 July 1859; Johnson, *China and Japan*, 231-233; Henson, *Commissioners and Commodores*, 164.

cross the Peiho's bar. An officer from those ships called on Tattnall on the *Toey-wan*, expressed his anxiety at his inability to aid his countrymen, and "said nothing of aid, but his silent appeal was powerful indeed."⁵³ With Ward's concurrence, Tattnall resolved to tow the British reinforcements to the *Cormorant*, rebuffing warnings that the action would violate neutrality with the cry "Blood is thicker than water!"⁵⁴

Every account of the Battle of Taku Forts attributes this well-known utterance to Tattnall save the commodore's own report of events to the secretary of the navy. Some accounts go a step further, claiming that Tattnall followed his famous remark with "I'll be damned if I'll stand by and see white men butchered before my eyes."⁵⁵ It makes sense that Tattnall would omit the phrase from his own account, in which he insisted he based his decision to intervene only on "all the circumstances of our position with the English and the aid the Admiral had tendered me the day before."⁵⁶ Indeed, although he reported his visit to the *Cormorant* to pay his respects and inquire as to the admiral's health, he left out any mention of the further American actions to aid the British.

At this point, Tattnall resolved to visit Hope to acknowledge "his chivalrous kindness to me the day before."⁵⁷ The coxswain of the boat that shuttled him to the *Cormorant* became the sole American casualty of the battle when a Chinese shot struck the craft. It sunk just as the commodore disembarked, forcing the small party of

⁵³ Tattnall to Toucey, 4 July 1859.

⁵⁴ Tattnall to Toucey, 4 July 1859; Johnson, *China and Japan*, 232-233.

⁵⁵ Edgar Stanton Maclay, *Reminiscences of the Old Navy: From the Journals and Private Papers of Captain Edward Trenchard, and Rear-Admiral Stephen Decatur Trenchard* (New York and London, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1898), 83.

⁵⁶ Tattnall to Toucey, 4 July 1859.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Americans to wait until the British could provide a boat to return them to the *Toey-wan*. Tattnall's executive officer dispassionately described how they passed their time: "While the boat's crew were detained on the deck of the *Cormorant*, they observed that one of the guns was very short of men to work it, and several of them immediately stepped forward unsolicited, and rendered all the assistance in their power during the few minutes they remained on board."⁵⁸ An account based on the papers of Flag Lieutenant Stephen Trenchard, who actually accompanied Tattnall aboard the *Cormorant*, suggests the Commodore acted more deliberately, telling the Americans who joined him, "Meantime, my good fellows, you might man that gun forward till the boat is ready, just as you would on your own ship."⁵⁹

The help that Tattnall and his men provided did nothing to save the British cause. In fact, many of the six hundred reinforcements the *Toey-wan* towed into the Peiho perished almost immediately. Their ill-fated amphibious assault on the Taku Forts forced the British marines through mud and three ditches filled with water and sharpened pikes. By the end of the day, the Chinese successfully repelled the attack, killing or wounding over a third of the British forces and sinking at least six British ships. The bombardment so damaged the British fleet that it took a year to recover, return, and seek revenge.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Johnson, *China and Japan*, 235.

⁵⁹ Maclay, *Reminiscences*, 85.

⁶⁰ Tattnall to Toucey, 4 July 1859; Johnson, *China and Japan*, 238-240; Hurd, *Arrow War*, 181-184; Jack Beeching, *The Chinese Opium Wars* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 269-271.

Reaction

All corners of the British Empire immediately heaped praise on Tattnall for his bravery, however futile. Not surprisingly, the first expressions of gratefulness came directly from the officers of the British military present at the battle. Admiral Hope offered his “warmest thanks” for the assistance, “especially in the conveyance of the wounded to their vessels.”⁶¹ The commander of the Royal Marines, who the *Toey-wan* pulled into the *Peiho*, regretted that he could not meet Tattnall personally to express his gratitude, being “unfortunately prevented from doing so by a severe wound in the head.”⁶²

Upon learning of his role in aiding their countrymen, representatives of the British government also expressed their gratitude. Their minister in Washington, Lord (Richard) Lyons, expressed thanks on behalf of the Her Majesty’s Government, the Foreign Minister Lord John Russell, and the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty. Russell sought to forward copies of the letters to both Tattnall and Ward, and further directed Lyons to express London’s appreciation directly to President Buchanan and Secretary of State Lewis Cass.⁶³

While officials in London calmly recognized Tattnall, the British press printed effusive praise for the commodore, even while criticizing American policy in China. An article printed in Edinburgh bemoaned American neutrality, arguing that it amounted to a cowardly way to let the British do the fighting and then, by virtue of her most favored

⁶¹ James Hope to Tattnall, 1 July 1859, in Jones, *Life and Services*, 104-105.

⁶² W. Lemon to Tattnall, 1 July 1859, in Jones, *Life and Services*, 106.

⁶³ Lord Lyons to Lewis Cass, 10 October 1859, in Jones, *Life and Services*, 106; Lyons to Cass, 17 October 1859, in Jones, *Life and Services*, 107.

nation status, claim all the concessions she won. Still, the same article heaped lavish praise on the crew of the *Toey-wan*: “Gallant Americans! you and your admiral did more that day to bind England and the United States together, than all your lawyers and pettifogging politicians have ever done to part us.” Even while criticizing the “calculating long-backed diplomatists of the United States,” the author relished Tattnell’s words and actions.⁶⁴

The Morning Chronicle (London) noted Ward’s recollection that Tattnell’s decision to brave Chinese fire and visit Hope on the *Cormorant* intended “not to assist him in the fight – not to win glory by victory – but to give his sympathy to a wounded brother officer.” It considered Tattnell’s actions a defense of American honor, and wondered “whether all her officers would behave with similar heroism and magnanimity in a like situation.” Although the British press clearly held a low opinion of Americans generally, the *Chronicle* asserted: “From Mr. Ward and Commodore Tattnell, however, there is not a heart in this country who would withhold its tribute of gratitude and esteem for their gallant conduct in the Chinese waters.”⁶⁵

In addition to the government and press, private British subjects also expressed their appreciation. British residents in Honolulu heard of Tattnell’s aid to their countrymen, and lauded the commodore when the *Powhatan* harbored there on its cruise back to the United States. Referring to the ties of “blood, civilization, and commerce” that bound the United States and Britain together, they lamented that his early departure

⁶⁴ “The Fight on the Peiho,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 86, no. 530 (December 1859), 664.

⁶⁵ *The Morning Chronicle* (London), 3 November 1859, 4.

for San Francisco “deprives us of the honor and pleasure of offering to you a more public and fitting manifestation of the feelings of gratitude and admiration with which we regard your gallant and humane conduct.”⁶⁶

The American merchants in China, who stood the most to gain from the Treaty of Tientsin, heartily recognized Tattall’s actions as well. A letter to Ward thanking him for his role in securing new economic concessions also communicated that they “fully appreciate the motives which induced your Excellency to give your support to the assistance afforded by Commodore Tattall to the English and French forces ... and cannot refrain from here expressing our admiration of that officer’s gallantry.”⁶⁷ Ward responded coyly, “his gallantry ... have been unordered.”⁶⁸ This mirrored Tattall’s own response upon receiving notice of thanks from the British government, which he merely acknowledged without comment.⁶⁹

The mixed reaction from their superiors in Washington likely influenced the cool responses from the men involved in breaking American neutrality at the Taku Forts. Cass wrote Ward with the “assurance that your proceeding in China ... meet the approbation of the President, and I have no doubt will be equally approved by the Country.”⁷⁰ The secretary of the navy gave Tattall quite a terse appraisal in his only written reference to

⁶⁶ The British Residents to Tattall, 17 March 1860, in Jones, *Life and Services*, 121.

⁶⁷ Augustine Heard & Co., et. al. to John Ward, 11 November 1859, in “Chinese Affairs: The American Minister in China – Interesting Correspondence,” *Supplement to the New York Times*, 21 March 1860, 3 (unnumbered). Seven companies and fifteen individuals signed the letter.

⁶⁸ Ward to Augustine Heard & Co., &c., 12 November 1859, in “Chinese Affairs.”

⁶⁹ Tattall to Toucey, 28 December 1859, in Jones, *Life and Services*, 109.

⁷⁰ Cass to Ward, 28 December 1859 and 30 December 1859, quoted in Henson, *Commissioners and Commodores*, 170.

battle: “Your course as indicated in your despatch meets with the approbation of the Department.”⁷¹ In his description of the ratification of the treaty with China in the State of the Union address, Buchanan merely alluded to “events beyond his [Ward’s] control, not necessary to detail.”⁷² Clearly, Washington had less enthusiasm than London regarding American actions at Taku.

Similarly muted responses dominated the American Press. *The New York Times* reprinted expressions of appreciation from two British newspapers, but gave no editorial opinion regarding Tattall’s decisions to violate American neutrality.⁷³ A Connecticut newspaper noted the *Powhatan*’s return, but discussed the habits of the Japanese diplomats on board without mentioning Tattall.⁷⁴ Nearly a year elapsed between the Battle of Taku Forts and the arrival of the *Powhatan* back in the United States, and by that time Americans engaged in a heated campaign for the presidency cared even less than usual about events on the other side of the globe.

Not all accounts remained so dispassionate. The *Chicago Press and Tribune* criticized Ward for “hanging on the tail of the British legation” rather than exchanging ratifications at Shanghai. By doing so, Ward had sacrificed Chinese good will towards the United States, instead linking American and British policy. As a result, the author lamented, “we shall, like them, be treated as enemies.” Considering the questions of national honor and economic advantages at stake, the author urged Washington to “look

⁷¹ Toucey to Tattall, 5 October 1859, quoted in Henson, *Commissioners and Commodores*, 171.

⁷² James Buchanan, “Third Annual Message, December 19, 1859,” in John Bassett Moore, *Works*, Vol. X, 347.

⁷³ “The New China War: Movements of the American Commissioners,” *New York Times*, 5 October 1859, 1.

⁷⁴ “The Japanese,” *Hartford Daily Courant*, 14 May 1860, 2.

closely into the conduct of our minister and commanders, and if they have violated the neutrality of our flag, severe censure should be visited upon them and promptly.”⁷⁵

Nevertheless, at least one American felt moved to praise Tattnall for intervening. Stephen Greenleaf Bullfinch, a minister in Massachusetts, wrote a poem called “Tattnall’s Noble Answer,” lauding the Commodore’s disregard for his orders in his role in promoting Anglo-American friendship:

Hear what the gallant Tattnall said
At the mouth of the Chinese river,
When, through Asian balls and English dead,
He pressed on to deliver;
His starry flag, to each English heart,
Flashed hope through that darkening slaughter,
And his words – as he played his manly part –
Were, ‘Blood is thicker than water.’

Land of our sires, the strife is o’er
That armed us against each other;
We give thee the homage of sons no more,
But the love of a free-born brother.
We bid thee hail! as the noblest State
That bends to a monarch’s orders;
Prosperity dwell in thy palace gate
And peace be within thy borders!

Hear it, proud realm of the gray old past,
From our young land of the present;
Let the words ring forth like a trumpet blast,
Our greeting to prince and peasant.
And if wrathful thoughts again are stirred,
Ere we rush to fraternal slaughter,
Let the madness cease at the homely word,
That ‘blood is thicker than water.’

⁷⁵ G. W. F., “The Disastrous Engagement of the Peiho,” *Chicago Press and Tribune*, 30 September 1859, 1.

The poem includes subtle jibes at the British as old-fashioned and boldly proclaims the American ascent to a position on par with Britain. With so little commentary on the Battle of Taku Forts, the general American opinion about the incident remains elusive. However, newspapers from Britain and Hawaii to Hong Kong and Australia reprinted the poem, indicating the world's opinion that Americans proudly acknowledged Tattnall, which paralleled British gratitude.⁷⁶

Appreciation for the American role in the Battle of Taku Forts, and particularly the fascination with Tattnall's assertion that "blood is thicker than water," only increased with time. In 1894, British journalist and historian William Laird Clowes published a long poem called "In the River Pei-ho," which celebrated American heroism. The narrator, a "naval pensioner," discusses his opinion of "furriners." Listing the various characteristics of different groups of foreigners, he expresses disdain for all but one type: "But the only kind o' furriner it's a pleasure to recall/ Is the Yankee, – and, I reckon, he ain't furriner at all." He recounts the events of the battle, including two mentions of Tattnall's famous phrase, and the narrator memorializes the Commodore for saving British lives, noting "It wasn't the business of neutrals: he might have kept apart."⁷⁷

Around the same time, American writer Wallace Rice used "Blood is Thicker than Water" as the title of a poem that paints a rosy picture of the battle. In his version, "Tattnall nods and we go forward, find a gun on longer fought," and moments later,

⁷⁶ Although the original sources of the poem's publication remains obscure, it was reprinted in *The Spectator* (London), 10 December 1859, 6; *The Maitland* (New South Wales) *Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser*, 11 February 1860, 2; *Polynesian* (Honolulu), 24 March 1860, 2; Henson, *Commissioners and Commodores*, 210, nt. 11, also cites its publication in the main English language newspaper in Hong Kong, *China Mail*, 2 February 1860.

⁷⁷ William Laird Clowes, "In the River Pei-ho," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 155, no. 944 (June 1894), 856-860.

“Hands are shaken, faith is plighted.” Rice never mentions the heavy British losses; indeed, he gives the impression that Tattnall’s actions swung the battle towards a British victory. The poem twice celebrates not only Tattnall, but also the lasting Anglo-American friendship that his actions helped solidify.⁷⁸

Conclusions

Although rarely given attention by historians of Anglo-American relations, the incident in the Peiho River clearly captured the imagination of some Americans and Britons, even generations later. Most remember Tattnall for a different action scrutinized by his superiors: the destruction of the CSS *Virginia* (formerly USS *Merrimack*) and his subsequent court martial and acquittal by the Confederate navy.⁷⁹

Attention to the history of British and American relations in China reveal two different sets of means employed to reach a common end. From policies on the opium trade to access to Peking, the British used their naval might to force concessions without regard to Chinese laws or customs. Simultaneously, American policy forbade the use of force and included some recognition of the health and traditions of the Chinese. However, in this case, a lifelong naval officer risking violation of his orders to aid the forces of a country he once fought against illustrates the close concurrence of Anglo-American goals in the Far East.

⁷⁸ Wallace Rice, “Blood is Thicker than Water,” in Clinton Scollard, ed., *Ballads of American Bravery* (New York: Silver, Burdett and Company, 1900), 57-61.

⁷⁹ Karras, *Commodore Josiah Tattnall*, 583-596.

By glossing over Tattnall's role in the Battle of Taku Forts, historians miss an opportunity to examine the progress of Anglo-American rapprochement. To be sure, the mid-nineteenth century saw a great deal of tension between the United States and Britain. But in the midst of contentious relations, this moment of cooperation between the two countries demonstrates the strength of their increasingly common global interests in spite of their diplomatic disagreements. Whether Tattnall, Ward, and the rest of the crew of the *Toey-wan* deserved praise or reprimand for their actions depends on one's perspective. Regardless, the episode merits further examination by historians, as it illustrates how the mechanics of Anglo-American relations operated differently on the battlefield than in the boardroom.

CHAPTER 6

WASHINGTON: SETTLING DIFFERENCES

I am under some apprehension that collision may take place between our citizens and British subjects in regard to the occupation of the disputed points along the line between Washington Territory and the British possessions on the north of it.

-William L Marcy¹

As Tattnell provided aid to British sailors in one far-flung corner of the world, American citizens and British subjects came into conflict in another. Just as imprecise language in the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty contributed to disagreement about the sovereignty over islands off the coast of Honduras, the same type of ambiguity left confusion about sovereignty over islands on the Pacific coast of North America near the border between the United States and British Columbia.

As detailed in Chapter 3, the 1846 treaty extending the boundary along the 49th parallel provided the line dip slightly south upon reaching the sea so as not to slice off the southern tip of Vancouver Island, including the Hudson's Bay Company's headquarters at Victoria. The precise language of the agreement stipulated that the boundary would run along the "forty-ninth parallel of north latitude to the middle of the channel which separates the continent from Vancouver's Island, and thence southerly through the middle of the said channel, and of Fuca's Straits, to the Pacific Ocean."² By running the border "through the middle of the said channel," an unintentional ambiguity regarding the

¹ William L. Marcy to John F. Crampton, 18 July 1859, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 2, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1024, 40.

² "Treaty with Great Britain, in Regard to Limits Westward of the Rocky Mountains," *The Avalon Project*, Yale Law School, available from http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/br-1846.asp, accessed 26 June 2013.

sovereignty of a group of small islands between the mainland and Vancouver Island persisted.



Figure 2: The San Juan Islands. Reprinted by Permission from Pfly. Available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:San_Juan_Islands_map.png, accessed 14 March 2014.

The Pig War

In particular, confusion concerning the archipelago known as the San Juan Islands arose because more than one channel connects the Strait of Juan de Fuca south of the islands to the Strait of Georgia to the north. Haro Strait runs along the west side of the islands, while Rosario Strait flows along their eastern shores. If the “said channel” referred to Haro Strait, the United States would retain the islands; if, however, it meant to indicate Rosario Strait, the islands would rest in British territory. Although diplomats on both sides of the Atlantic noticed the ambiguity before signing the treaty, the nascent war between the United States and Mexico and the fall of the Peel Government in London necessitated quick approval of the treaty, and since the San Juans were mere “flyspecks on the great canvas of empire,” the imprecise language remained.³

Although the Hudson’s Bay Company claimed San Juan Island, the largest in the chain, prior to 1846 and established an economic presence there upon using the island as a fish salting station by 1851, little notice of the islands occurred before 1853. That year, the United States carved out the northern section of the Oregon Territory and established Washington Territory. As authorities from the newly created territory looked to extend protection to the handful of American citizens living on the islands, the HBC countered by establishing on San Juan Island, under its subsidiary the Puget Sound Agricultural Company, a sheep ranch called Belle Vue Farm. Although some posturing took place regarding whether Belle Vue Farm owed taxes to Washington Territory and whether American squatters ought to be ejected, both governments encouraged calm in the islands

³ Michael Vouri, *The Pig War: Standoff at Griffin Bay* (Friday Harbor, WA: Griffin Bay Bookstore, 1999), 22.

and sought to avoid any conflict. In 1857, the British offered to partition the islands along a “middle channel” that would have left San Juan in British hands while relinquishing claims to the smaller islands in the archipelago.⁴ The United States rejected the offer and set the stage for a most unusual skirmish.⁵

In 1859, thirteen years to the day after the U.S. Senate ratified the border treaty with the ambiguous water boundary, a pig owned by Charles Griffin, head of Belle Vue Farm, rooted up and ate some potatoes in the garden of American Lyman Cutler. It was not the first time livestock from Belle Vue Farm had availed themselves of Cutler’s potatoes, but for this pig, it proved its last. Angered that Griffin had not heeded previous warnings, Cutler shot and killed the pig. Cutler confessed his deed and offered to pay for the pig, but grew obstinate when Griffin claimed the pig was worth \$100. When Griffin and the HBC threatened to arrest and remove him, Cutler dared them to do their worst.⁶

As a result, the handful of American settlers petitioned for protection, and an army unit under the command of George Pickett headed to San Juan Island in July 1859. The British responded to the perceived invasion by sending their own military to defend their territorial claims. A month later, less than 500 American troops camped on San Juan

⁴ This “middle channel” is today called “San Juan Channel.” See map above.

⁵ Marcy to Isaac I. Stevens, 14 July 1855, in U.S. Congress, House, House Executive Document no. 65, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1051, 6-7; Vouri, *Pig War*, 26-41.

⁶ “Affidavit of Lyman A. Cutler,” subscribed by Henry R. Crosbie, 7 September 1859, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 2, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1024, 83-84; William S. Harney to Samuel Cooper, 7 August 1859, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 2, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1024, 45-47. Contemporary accounts of Cutler’s fence describe it as “three-sided,” but fail to distinguish whether the enclosure was triangular, adjacent to Cutler’s cabin, or merely open on one side. Vouri, *Pig War*, 46-47; Scott Kaufman, *The Pig War: The United States, Britain, and the Balance of Power in the Pacific Northwest, 1846-1872* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 37-38.

faced five British warships, 167 guns, and about two thousand men in the waters around the island.⁷

By September, news of the standoff reached Washington, and President James Buchanan took immediate action to forestall an armed conflict. He sent General Winfield Scott, who had by then earned a reputation for his skilled diplomacy with Britain along the U.S.-Canada border, to the Pacific Northwest to defuse tensions.⁸

Scott arrived in the Strait of Juan de Fuca in late October, and within weeks both sides had agreed to reduce their military presence to a token force and jointly occupy San Juan until negotiations could settle the boundary question under more genteel circumstances.⁹ Charles Griffin's pig proved the only casualty on San Juan, but the subject of the murky border remained a thorn in Anglo-American relations as more pressing concerns occupied politicians in Washington and, soon, Richmond as well.

Though it certainly caused a great deal of saber rattling on both sides of the Atlantic, the death of a pig on an island in the Pacific Northwest never seriously threatened Anglo-American peace. Having just ironed out a decade's worth of differences in Central America, neither side spent much energy pretending national security was at

⁷ Alfred Pleasanton to George E. Pickett, 18 July 1859, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 2, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1024, 42-43; Silas Casey to Alfred Pleasanton, 12 August 1859, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 2, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1024, 59-68; Harney to Lorenzo Thomas, 30 August 1859, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 2, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1024, 79.

⁸ W. R. Drinkard to Winfield Scott, 16 September 1859, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Document no. 2, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1024, 57-59; Scott Kaufman and John A. Soares, "'Sagacious Beyond Praise?': Winfield Scott and Anglo-American-Canadian Border Diplomacy, 1837-1860," *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 1 (January 2006), 57-82.

⁹ Scott to James Douglas, 5 November 1859, in U.S. Congress, House, House Executive Document no. 65, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1051, 71; Douglas to Scott, 7 July 1859, in U.S. Congress, House, House Executive Document no. 65, 36th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 1051, 72-73.

stake in such a far-flung outpost of empire. Very soon, however, a crisis erupted that posed a more serious threat to trans-Atlantic cordiality.

The Civil War and the *Trent* Affair

When the American Civil War began in April 1861, the British found themselves in a precarious position. The connection across the Atlantic affected the economic health of both nations. In the five years before the Civil War, two-fifths of American imports came from Britain, while fully half of American exports sailed back to the British Isles. Centuries of empire and a decade advocating free trade ensured more diverse global trading partners for Britain, but trade with the United States still accounted for nearly one-fifth of British imports and one-sixth of British exports during the same period.¹⁰

Cotton bound British economic interests to those of the Confederacy. In 1860, cotton accounted for almost three-quarters of all American exports. That same year, just over 80% of the nearly 1.4 billion pounds of cotton imported by Britain originated in the United States. The raw materials fueled an industry that generated £76 million a year—more than the sum generated by the kingdom itself—and employed twenty percent of British workers.¹¹ At the time, British politicians wondered if an independent Confederacy might counterbalance the power of the United States and lead to lower

¹⁰ H. C. Allen, *The Anglo-American Relationship since 1783* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1959), 59-61.

¹¹ Allen, *Anglo-American Relationship*, 60; R. Arthur Arnold, *The History of the Cotton Famine: From the Fall of Sumter to the Passing of the Public Works Act* (London: Saunders, Otley, and Co., 1864), 38; Muriel Chamberlain, *'Pax Britannica'?: British Foreign Policy, 1789-1914* (London: Longman, 1988), 115.

tariffs.¹² Southerners hoped their economic connection with the British textile industry would draw support for their cause and recognition of their independence.¹³

London also had common interests with the Union. By the time the Civil War began, the United States and Britain had been cooperating to suppress the trans-Atlantic slave trade for over half a century. But considering that Abraham Lincoln spent the first year of the war insisting he fought to preserve the Union, not to end slavery, it seems the sentiment most likely to bind the North to British sympathies remained unexploited. This, combined with economic connections with the Southern states, influenced Britain to recognize Confederate belligerency a month after fighting and hint that formal diplomatic recognition might follow.¹⁴

Knowing that official recognition would bolster their bid for independence, the Confederates sent two envoys, James Mason of Virginia and John Slidell of Louisiana, to Britain hoping to negotiate official recognition. They departed from Charleston in mid-October and managed to evade the Union blockade. They arrived in Havana later that month and waited for a British mail vessel, the *RMS Trent*, to ferry them to Britain.

¹² Chamberlain, *'Pax Britannica'?*, 115.

¹³ Eugene A. Brady, "A Reconsideration of the Lancashire 'Cotton Famine'," *Agricultural History* 37, no. 3 (July 1963), 156-162, demonstrates that the Civil War did not affect the supplies of raw cotton in Britain, and that overproduction of textiles prior to the war was the primary cause of the price collapse; Amos Khasigian, "Economic Factors and British Neutrality, 1861-1865," *Historian* 25, no. 4 (August 1963), 451-465, argues that the trade of Northern grain provided a counterweight to the loss of Southern cotton imports; Frenise A. Logan, "India – Britain's Substitute for American Cotton, 1861-1865," *The Journal of Southern History* 24, no. 4 (November 1958), 472-480; and Peter Harnetty, "The Imperialism of Free Trade: Lancashire, India, and the Cotton Supply Question, 1861-1865," *Journal of British Studies* 6, no. 1 (November 1966), 70-96, examine the search for alternative sources of cotton; Harold D. Woodman, *King Cotton & His Retainers: Financing & Marketing the Cotton Crop of the South, 1800-1925* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1968), includes a section on the Civil War, but is concerned with the effect of the war on cotton rather than the reverse.

¹⁴ Howard Temperley, *Britain and America since Independence* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2002) 57.

Meanwhile, an aging American navy captain, Charles Wilkes, hoped to prove himself in combat before his impending retirement. At that time, Wilkes was best known as an explorer, cartographer, and hothead.¹⁵ Spoiling for a fight, he disobeyed his orders to guide the USS *San Jacinto* directly to Philadelphia for repairs, captured Mason and Slidell, and delivered them to a Union prison in Boston.¹⁶

Reaction on both sides of the Atlantic was swift and vocal. Having suffered a series of embarrassing defeats at Bull Run, Wilson's Creek, and elsewhere, the Northern press quickly lauded the capture of the Confederate agents as a much-needed victory. A newspaper in Boston published a celebratory poem.¹⁷ Noting how the British had historically dealt with American ships on the high seas, most Northern newspapers doubted whether so much as a word of protest would emanate from London. And while Horace Greeley noted that he did not know how the British would respond, he ensured his readers that "we do not greatly care."¹⁸

Surprisingly, the reaction in the South was equally enthusiastic. Far from being upset about the capture of his envoys, the Confederate secretary of war estimated that

¹⁵ His previous experience with the navy consisted almost solely of his command of the United States Exploring Expedition, which produced a wealth of scientific information and maps, but also earned Wilkes a court martial for illegal punishments of his sailors.

¹⁶ "The Rebel Commissioners," *New York Times*, 26 November 1861, 8, offers a detailed account of the *Trent* affair; Norman B. Ferris, *The Trent Affair: A Diplomatic Crisis* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1977), is the most comprehensive account of the incident; Gordon H. Warren, *Fountain of Discontent: The Trent Affair and Freedom of the Seas* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1981), is another thorough investigation that includes a detailed examination of international law in relation to the *Trent* affair.

¹⁷ *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, 22 November 1861, 2, quoted in Ferris, *The Trent Affair*, 32.

¹⁸ "Mason and Slidell," *New York Daily Tribune*, 18 November 1861, 4; Ferris, *The Trent Affair*, 33.

Wilkes's bravado was "perhaps the best thing that could have happened."¹⁹ Unlike their Northern counterparts, Southern newspapers believed the British would respond to the affront to their sovereignty. If negotiations with the Confederacy could not produce official diplomatic recognition from London, perhaps Union obstinacy could.²⁰

Although Americans on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line cared little about the legality of Wilkes's actions, it certainly aroused a great deal of rancor across the Atlantic. The British government considered the raid on the *Trent* a violation of its neutrality and ordered its minister in Washington to demand an apology and the immediate release of the prisoners. Doubting whether they would receive a satisfactory response, London sent ships, soldiers, and arms to Halifax to bolster Canada's defenses against a possible invasion from the United States.²¹ *The Birmingham (UK) Daily Post* provided the dominant opinion of the British press when it called the seizure of Mason and Slidell an "outrage on the British flag," and noted: "There has probably never been greater unanimity of opinion on a great political event than the British press has displayed in this matter."²²

This forced President Lincoln and Secretary of State William Seward into a precarious position. They knew that the capture of Mason and Slidell violated international law and, wanting to avoid a war with Britain, that they must conform to London's ultimatum. Still, they had celebrated the Confederates' arrest and needed to

¹⁹ Quoted in Warren, *Fountain of Discontent*, 44.

²⁰ Ferris, *The Trent Affair*, 33-34; Warren, *Fountain of Discontent*, 43-45.

²¹ Ferris, *The Trent Affair*, 44-60; Warren, *Fountain of Discontent*, 120-127.

²² "News of the Day," *The Birmingham (UK) Daily Post*, 2 December 1861, 2.

craft an escape route without losing domestic support. Rather than completely disavowing Wilkes's actions, Seward acknowledged that he failed to follow procedure. The *San Jacinto*, he admitted, acted without order and erred by failing to bring the ship to the United States for proper adjudication. In fact, Seward argued, Wilkes's kindness led to the violation – had the *Trent* escaped the *San Jacinto* rather than being freed to continue her journey, the United States would feel justified in keeping their prisoners.²³

The British accepted the American response, and the Union managed to save face and deny the Confederacy their best chance for foreign recognition. Seward even managed to spin his decision to yield to the British ultimatum as an American victory: he claimed that by demanding the release of Mason and Slidell, the British recognized the American position against impressment, the practice that helped spark the War of 1812.²⁴ By insisting that the harassment of the *Trent* was illegal, Britain had come round to recognizing the long-standing American positions regarding neutrality and freedom of the seas. The Americans, however, faced disappointment as other British policies produced egregious violations of their proclaimed neutrality.

Confederate Ships in British Ports

Just as the United States took advantage of the British scuttlebutt in the Crimea to press their claims in Central America, the British understood that the American Civil War

²³ William Seward to Lord Lyons, 20 December 1861, in *New York Times*, 30 December 1861, 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.* It was clear for many reasons that the capture of Mason and Slidell was not impressment, but Seward's reasoning was calculated with an American audience in mind. His claim that the United States would be justified in keeping the two Southerners in prison if it was vital to their war effort (he wrote that Mason and Slidell were unimportant and that the strength of the Southern rebellion was fading) further demonstrates Seward's attention to his domestic audience.

provided leeway in their imperial policy. In a blatant violation of the Monroe Doctrine, Britain joined France and Spain on an expedition to Mexico where they intended to extract debt payments that Benito Juárez's Liberal government suspended after winning a costly war for control of the Mexican government. After a difficult year fighting the Confederacy, the Union was in no position to lodge anything more than a feeble protest. Indeed, Seward believed that objecting to the intervention might encourage European recognition of or aid to the South as a countermeasure to Northern opposition.²⁵ At any rate, having discovered that the true designs of the French went well beyond debt collection and into the arena of empire building, the British and Spanish forces left Mexico just months after their arrival. So the British irritation in Mexico proved short lived and far less injurious to trans-Atlantic relations than the activity of private British subjects in British ports.²⁶

Although Britain proclaimed her neutrality in the American Civil War, British businessmen did not rely on government directives regarding how to proceed in their commercial relations with the belligerent halves of the United States. In 1862, shipbuilders in Britain began producing raiders for the Confederacy. These ships were

²⁵ Howard Jones, *Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 77.

²⁶ Alfred Jackson Hanna and Kathryn Abbey Hanna, *Napoleon III and Mexico: American Triumph over Monarchy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), offers the most comprehensive narrative of the intervention, but only briefly mentions the early British participation; Thomas D. Schoonover, *Dollars over Dominion: The Triumph of Liberalism in Mexican-United States Relations* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), discusses relations between the two countries during the intervention and argues that economic factors primarily motivated American policy; Michelle Cunningham's *Mexico and the Foreign Policy of Napoleon III* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2001), focuses on Napoleon III's motives for the intervention and fails to so much as list the United States in its index.

built surreptitiously in Britain, left the ports without armament, and were refitted for military purposes in the Bahamas, the Azores, and elsewhere.²⁷

Officials in Washington took immediate notice. Seward expressed his concern to his minister in London, Charles Francis Adams: “Our commerce has suffered, and our armies have been hindered by actual co-operation of British subjects with the insurgents, while no considerable grievances of that kind have been inflicted upon us by France.”²⁸ That Seward singled out the actions of British subjects as more egregious than anything done by the French, who were occupying parts of Mexico and attempting to subjugate it to French rule in clear violation of the Monroe Doctrine, illustrates how seriously Washington viewed the construction of Confederate ships in officially neutral Britain.

Although the Union viewed the actions of British subjects and the British government’s failure to stop them as a clear violation of neutrality, London vigorously protested that interpretation. International law allowed unarmed ships to be built as legitimate items of trade between a belligerent and a party exercising neutrality in the conflict. British law maintained that so long as a ship was not armed in a British port, building a ship for or selling a ship to a belligerent did not violate neutrality.²⁹ British

²⁷ James D. Bullock, *The Secret Service of the Confederate States in Europe, or How the Confederate Cruisers were Equipped*, 2 vol. (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1883), is a first-hand account of the Confederate effort to secure ships in Britain written by the individual primarily responsible for the enterprise; Frank Merli, *Great Britain and the Confederate Navy, 1861-1865* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1970), is a thorough account of the process.

²⁸ William H. Seward to Charles Francis Adams, 8 December 1862, in U.S. Department of State, *Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs, Accompanying the Annual Message of the President to the First Session of the Thirty-Eighth Congress, Part I* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864) [hereafter referred to as *Papers*], 13.

²⁹ Adrian Cook, *The Alabama Claims: American Politics and Anglo-American Relations, 1865-1872* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 27; Frank J. Merli, *The Alabama, British Neutrality, and the American Civil War*, ed. David M. Fahey (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 47-48.

Foreign Secretary Earl Russell (formerly Lord John Russell) bluntly denied that the United States should hold the British government accountable for the unsanctioned actions of its subjects. He wrote to Adams, “that her Majesty’s government entirely disclaim all responsibility for any acts of the Alabama.”³⁰ In conversation with Adams, Russell “went so far at one time as to express regret at the failure to prevent the departure of the two privateers. But he evidently considered it as a misfortune rather than a fault....”³¹

Back in Washington, Seward was livid. He argued that even if he accepted Russell’s interpretation of the construction of the ships in British ports as a “misfortune,” the United States “must still hold that for a friendly nation to permit such a belligerent to use its ports for fitting out, supporting, and maintaining cruisers upon the high seas, amenable to no national authority whatever, is an act not warranted by the laws or customs of civilized nations.”³² The Americans noted that one of the ships used Nassau in Britain’s Bahamian colony to convert to a war vessel, violating proclaimed British neutrality even if the ship’s construction did not. Referring to the activities of the Confederate raiders as “open piracy,” Seward cautioned that the failure of the British to live up to their stated position of neutrality threatened the peaceful relations between the two nations. He told Adams “that if the practice shall be suffered to continue, it cannot fail to require such remedies as the United States shall have the ability and the lawful

³⁰ The Earl of Russell to Adams, 9 March 1863, in *Papers, Part I*, 145.

³¹ Adams to Seward, 27 March 1863, in *Papers, Part I*, 159.

³² Seward to Adams, 23 March 1863, in *Papers, Part I*, 154.

right to adopt, even if such remedies should unavoidably prove injurious to the commerce of friendly nations, or to the harmony between the two countries, so eminently desired.”³³

After the Union repelled the Confederate invasion at Antietam in September 1862, Lincoln seized the initiative to announce his intention to add the emancipation of American slaves as a goal in the war against the South, and he made good on that promise on 1 January 1863. Although few slaves immediately gained their independence by the Emancipation Proclamation, it highlighted that the Confederacy was defending slavery and influenced Britain to drop any consideration of recognizing Southern independence. In July, Union forces won decisive and strategically important victories against Confederate soldiers at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, and the Civil War took a clear turn in the North’s favor. No longer fearing British aid to the South, Seward took a firmer and more bellicose stance in protesting the ineffectiveness of British neutrality. He lamented that the United States may be “drifting, notwithstanding our most earnest and vigorous resistance, towards a war with Great Britain.”³⁴

Ultimately, Confederate agents secured five total vessels from Britain to use as commerce raiders during the war. The degrees of their success varied widely. The most successful was the *Alabama*, which claimed almost sixty prizes before being sunk in the summer of 1864. The *Shenandoah* gained notoriety as the last Confederate vessel to surrender, which she did in November 1865 after destroying a number of American

³³ Ibid, 155.

³⁴ Seward to Adams, 30 July 1863, in *Papers, Part I*, 325.

whaling ships off the coast of Alaska.³⁵ By that time, Washington was eager to hold Britain accountable for her role supporting the Southern war effort, but London was consumed with more pressing matters.

British Domestic Politics

Just as the Civil War concluded in the United States, political upheaval gripped Britain. The second half of the 1860s witnessed a generational shift in British political leadership, a quest to reduce imperial expenses, electoral reforms that reshaped the political party system, and a series of wars in Europe that entirely realigned the Great Powers. All of these shifts directly affected Anglo-American relations as the two nations began a concerted effort to settle their remaining diplomatic crises.

First, the impact of the death of Lord Palmerston (Henry John Temple) on trans-Atlantic diplomacy cannot be understated. Palmerston served in the British Cabinet almost without interruption from 1830 until his death in October 1865. Britain and the United States settled difficult boundary disputes in Maine and Oregon during his only absence longer than sixteen months.³⁶ Britain concluded the Treaty of Aycinena-Wyke, which effectively ended the Bay Islands controversy, at the end of the sixteen-month interlude between Palmerston's two stints as Prime Minister. Although by no means the only factor in preventing harmonious relations with the United States, Palmerston's preference for "gunboat diplomacy" frequently impeded the settlement of Anglo-

³⁵ "History of the Shenandoah," *New York Times*, 21 November 1865, 1, chronicles the exploits of the ship; "The Shenandoah: Surrender of the Rebel Pirate to the United States Consul at Liverpool," *New York Times*, 22 November 1865, 1, details its capture.

³⁶ See Chapter 3.

American disputes during the thirty-five years his voice dominated British foreign policy. Just as his brief stints in the opposition opened windows to resolve trans-Atlantic quarrels, new prospects for rapprochement arose after his passing.³⁷

His death also opened new opportunities in British domestic politics. As leader of the Liberal Party since its inception in 1859, Palmerston consistently worked to prevent the passage of electoral reform, a prominent subject in British politics throughout the 1850s and 1860s.³⁸ As a measure of political expediency, the Conservatives passed the Second Reform Act in 1867, which more than doubled the British franchise. The hopes that passing reform could preserve the Conservatives in power proved futile, as the Liberals won a large majority in the first general election that followed in 1868.³⁹

The results directly affected Anglo-American relations because new Prime Minister William Gladstone radically departed from Palmerston's view of empire. Gladstone rose to political prominence as Palmerston's Chancellor of the Exchequer, and

³⁷ E. D. Steele, "Palmerston's Foreign Policy and Foreign Secretaries 1855-1865," in *British Foreign Secretaries and Foreign Policy: From Crimean War to First World War*, ed. Keith M. Watson (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 25-84, offers a brief, focused view of his foreign policy philosophy during the relevant period; David F. Krein, *The Last Palmerston Government: Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and the Genesis of "Splendid Isolation"* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1978), demonstrates how failures to back up his bluster in Italy, Mexico, Poland, and Denmark doomed "gunboat diplomacy" as an effective British strategy; Muriel Chamberlain, *Lord Palmerston* (Cardiff: GPC Books, 1987), is an excellent, concise biography by a renowned scholar of British foreign policy; David Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010) is the best recent biography and focuses on Palmerston's evolving liberalism.

³⁸ Kristin Zimmerman, "Liberal Speech, Palmerstonian Delay, and the Passage of the Second Reform Act," *The English Historical Review* 118, no. 479 (November 2003), 1176-1207; Robert Saunders, "The Politics of the Reform and the Making of the Second Reform Act, 1848-1867," *The Historical Journal* 50, no. 3 (2007), 571-591.

³⁹ F. B. Smith, *The Making of the Second Reform Bill* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1966) remains the best narrative account of the debates on reform. Norman McCord and Bill Purdue, *British History, 1815-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 279-285, and Stephen F. Lee, *Aspects of British Political History, 1815-1914* (London: Routledge, 1994), 136-143, provide brief narratives along with historiographic discussions of the Second Reform Bill.

in that position he built a reputation for thriftiness. He deplored Britain's policies in North America, both in her own possessions and regarding relations with the United States, because of the expenses involved. Gladstone sought to shrink Britain's financial commitments for the defense of far-flung imperial outposts.⁴⁰

British Imperial Policies

Just before Gladstone came to power, a crisis erupted on the border between the United States and British North America.⁴¹ A group of Irish Americans called the Fenian Brotherhood determined to strike at British territory in an effort to secure Irish independence. In November 1865, a Fenian lawyer had an audience with President Andrew Johnson and Secretary of State William Seward, who intimated that although they could not support an armed invasion of British North America, they might accept a seizure of territory if it could be presented as a *fait accompli*.⁴²

Ultimately, the Fenian raids failed spectacularly in their goal of achieving Irish independence, as American officials denounced their activities, seized their weapons, and

⁴⁰ Magnus, Philip, *Gladstone: A Biography* (New York: Dutton, 1954), includes an illustrative anecdote about his frugality: in 1866, the queen requested he support the purchase of metal for a statue of her deceased husband, but Gladstone refused because £50,000 had been allotted three years earlier and should have covered the expenses. Paul Knaplund, *Gladstone's Foreign Policy* (Hamden, CT, Archon Books, 1970) the only book to focus exclusively on the subject during his first ministry, outlines his steps and opinions leading to greater autonomy and looser affiliation for Britain's colonies.

⁴¹ Before the confederation of Canada in 1867, "Canada" refers to the United Provinces of Canada West and Canada East, modern day Ontario and Quebec, respectively. Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island were known collectively as the "Maritime Provinces." The term "British North America" includes Canada, the Maritime Provinces, and the remaining British territory in North America, governed by the Hudson's Bay Company.

⁴² William D'Arcy, *The Fenian Movement in the United States, 1858-1886* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947), is filled with long quotes from primary sources and remains the most comprehensive account of the Fenians' American activities; Leon O'Broin, *Fenian Fever: An Anglo-American Dilemma* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), puts the movement in trans-Atlantic context.

arrested those that briefly occupied a small Canadian town.⁴³ They did, however, directly affect Anglo-American rapprochement. London directed the British Minister in Washington to thank Johnson and Seward for their neutrality – a subject where cooperation had proved difficult, as evinced by the *Trent* and *Alabama* affairs.⁴⁴

The Fenian raids proved a decisive factor in reducing opposition in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to Canadian confederation. By laying bare the abhorrent conditions of the Canadian defense forces and uniting Maritimers and Canadians in their fear of American expansionism, the Fenians helped unite the provinces into a new political organization called the Dominion of Canada. It was, perhaps, the most permanent legacy of the Fenian attacks.⁴⁵

The Dominion of Canada became a unique political entity. By the British North America Act of 1867, Parliament in London granted Canada greater autonomy. Britain maintained sovereignty over the new dominion, including executive powers, effective veto power over Canadian legislation, and control of foreign policy.⁴⁶ Confederation immediately impacted Anglo-American relations by introducing a third government into issues that concerned British possessions in North America, including long-standing

⁴³ To provide one example, a group affiliated with the Fenians captured an unguarded Hudson's Bay Company trading post, which turned out to be on American side of the border. So their "invasion" never actually reached Canada. D'Arcy, *Fenian Movement*, 381; Roger L. Nichols and Patrick L. Halley, *Stephen Long and American Frontier Exploration* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 201.

⁴⁴ O'Broin, *Fenian Fever*, 71.

⁴⁵ When established in 1867, the Dominion included only the Canadas, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. The other Maritime Provinces, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland, joined in 1873 and 1949, respectively. D'Arcy, *Fenian Movement*, 140; Scott W. See, *The History of Canada* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 81-84; Donald Creighton, *The Road to Confederation: The Emergence of Canada, 1863-1867* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1964), 384-385. Creighton's book is the best comprehensive study of Canadian Confederation.

⁴⁶ See, *History of Canada*, 84-85.

troubles about fishing rights in the waters near Maine and the Maritime Provinces and, after the addition of British Columbia to the Dominion in 1871, the boundary dispute in the San Juan Islands. More importantly, it indicated the continuation of larger shifts in British imperial policy, as London advocated greater self-government in British colonies, particularly in “colonies of settlement” consisting of ethnic Europeans.⁴⁷

At the same time, the desire for thrift caused the pace of colonial expansion to slow considerably. Britain scaled back its political control abroad, in no small part because her economic might enabled her to continue to exert influence around the globe while reducing the costs of operating the empire and maximizing profits.⁴⁸ British policymakers believed that removing barriers to trade between nations would not only increase the size of the imperial coffers, but could also promote global peace by opening economic systems that had required military defense to exclude rivals. Free trade attained “the status almost of a gospel in Britain.”⁴⁹

This zeal for free trade and the confederation of Canada also caused the downfall of the Hudson’s Bay Company. Its anachronistic monopoly on trade ran afoul of modern British imperial economic preferences, and its geographical location blocked Canada from acquiring Pacific ports, considered vital for the economic health of the new Dominion. In 1870, the HBC allowed Britain to annex the vast majority of its territory in

⁴⁷ This policy can be traced to the 1839 Durham Report, which recommended the unification of the Canadas and responsible government for the new province. The full report is available in Earl of Durham (John George Lambton), *Lord Durham’s Report on the Affairs of British North America*, ed. with an introduction by Sir C. P. Lucas, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912).

⁴⁸ Lee, *Aspects*, 193-196. This policy reversed after 1875, as Britain acquired 4 million square miles of territory between that date and the start of World War I, but the acquisitions occurred after the settlement of the remaining Anglo-American disputes, after Gladstone’s ouster as prime minister, and in parts of the world outside the American sphere of influence.

⁴⁹ Chamberlain, *‘Pax Britannica’?*, 123.

North America, ensuring that no extra-governmental actors had a stake in the San Juan boundary controversy.⁵⁰

One other seemingly distant event impacted Britain's global policies as the San Juan and *Alabama* crises simmered through the 1860s. As the American South tried in vain to redraw the map of North America in the 1860s, a rising power successfully altered the boundaries on the European continent. Prussia directed the unification of Germany, emasculating Austria and France and destroying the Concert of Europe in the process. By the end of the decade, Britain could no longer trust the other Great Powers to preserve the balance of power and found herself isolated from Continental politics. Along with Britain's commitment to free trade and Gladstone's support for the devolution of the British Empire, this new European rivalry provided a powerful motivation for London to cultivate friendly relations across the Atlantic.⁵¹

Diplomacy

The San Juan Islands perfectly exemplified the type of expensive, distant colonial possessions Gladstone eschewed. Undeterred by concerns over access to Puget Sound that had worried his predecessors and desirous of finding a friend to stave off the diplomatic isolation threatened by German unification, Gladstone could not muster much interest in aggravating the United States in order to press the British view of the boundary. So when the new American Minister in London, Reverdy Johnson, proposed a

⁵⁰ Hudson's Bay Company, "The Deed of Surrender," *HBC Heritage*, available from <http://www.hbcheritage.ca/hbcheritage/history/week/the-deed-of-surrender>, accessed 6 March 2014.

⁵¹ Lee, *Aspects*, 179-182, 188; Agatha Ramm, "Granville," in *British Foreign Secretaries and Foreign Policy: From Crimean War to First World War*, ed. Keith M. Watson (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 85-93.

joint commission to settle the issue of the San Juan boundary, along with the much more sensitive demand for Britain to compensate the United States for the losses suffered at the hands of the *Alabama* and other British-built Confederate ships, he jumped at the opportunity.⁵²

The proposed Johnson-Clarendon Convention suggested that two British and two American officials meet in Washington in an attempt to settle the boundary issue and the *Alabama* claims. If they could not reach an agreement, they would refer the matters for arbitration. And if the two sides could not concur on a neutral arbiter, the opportunity to choose a mediator would be determined by drawing lots. However, the fact that the effort came from the administration of Andrew Johnson, who had already been impeached by Congress and voted out of office by the American people, complicated matters. The Senate refused to act on ratification of the Convention until Ulysses S. Grant replaced Johnson in the White House, and by then the Convention faced a formidable opponent at the head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.⁵³

The man determined to stymie the Johnson-Clarendon Convention was the Radical Republican from Massachusetts, Charles Sumner. His opposition went beyond critiques of the random method of choosing an arbiter and the lack of the demand for a British apology for their violation of neutrality. The South, he reasoned, received encouragement for its rebellion from British neutrality, which allowed the Confederacy to secure supplies for the war, the blockade-runners not least among them. He then took a

⁵² Cook, *Alabama Claims*, is the most comprehensive treatment of the settlement of the claims. Kaufman, *Pig War*, also includes a detailed narrative of the negotiations at Washington.

⁵³ Kaufman, *Pig War*, 122-124; Cook, *Alabama Claims*, 52-62, 73-74.

remarkable leap forward. Figuring the *Alabama*, *Shenandoah*, and other British-built ships had allowed the South to prolong their rebellion by two years, he held Britain responsible for half the cost of the Civil War. Since the war had cost the Union \$4 billion, Sumner calculated that Britain owed the United States up to \$2.5 billion for these indirect damages.⁵⁴

Sumner hardly expected Britain to pay such a tremendous indemnity. Perhaps he hoped they might offer Canada as reparation, as some in Congress openly advocated, or simply wished to recapture the initiative in shaping American foreign policy. Whatever the reason for Sumner's extreme demand, it effectively scuttled the Johnson-Clarendon Convention. His clashes with President Grant over recognition of Cuban belligerence in what became the Ten Year War and the attempted annexation of Santo Domingo made it difficult to conduct any foreign policy at all.⁵⁵

While politics in the United States threatened to derail the settlement of the outstanding trans-Atlantic issues, events in Europe moved things in the opposite direction. Germany stunned Europe by running roughshod over the French forces in its final step towards unification. Encouraged by an emboldened Germany, Russia scrapped the provisions of the treaty ending the Crimean War that mandated neutrality in the Black Sea, further diminishing Britain's position in Europe, upsetting the balance of power on the continent, and making American friendship even more vital to Britain's global interests. When Clarendon died in the summer of 1870, Earl Granville (Granville

⁵⁴ Charles Sumner, 13 April 1869, *Cong. Globe*, 41st Cong., Special Sess., Appendix, 25.

⁵⁵ David Herbert Donald, *Charles Sumner*, With a New Introduction (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), Part II, 388-394, 433-453, considers the speech more a bid for power than for Canada, noting that Sumner always "made it his business to announce principles rather than to propose solutions."

Leveson-Gower), whose views on foreign policy aligned much more closely with Gladstone's, replaced him at the Foreign Office.⁵⁶

Secretary of State Hamilton Fish seized the initiative. Without making any formal offer, he urged the British Minister in Washington, Edward Thornton, to consider a convention to eliminate all outstanding issues between the two countries. In addition to the *Alabama* claims and the San Juan boundary, complications over the rights of Americans to fish in the waters near Canada's Maritime Provinces and the issue of naturalization might also be disposed.⁵⁷ Fish stepped back from the brink where Sumner resided, suggesting that in the settlement of the *Alabama* claims he sought compensation only for the direct damages of the British-built ships and an apology, rather than an admission of guilt, for allowing the ships to be built. In January 1871, the British agreed to the terms and made a formal recommendation for a joint commission to settle all Anglo-American disputes. Fish effectively connived to remove Sumner from his chairmanship of the Foreign Relations Committee in March, and a path opened for trans-Atlantic rapprochement.⁵⁸

The British and Americans established a Joint High Commission, consisting of six representatives from each nation, to settle lingering issues. Earl de Grey and Ripon (George Robinson) chaired the British delegation, while Fish took the lead for the

⁵⁶ Kaufman, *Pig War*, 149; Cook, *Alabama Claims*, 134-135.

⁵⁷ The naturalization issue dealt with the arrest of some of the Fenians. Although the raiders were naturalized American citizens, Britain protested their detention on the grounds of "once an Englishman, always an Englishman." Kaufman, *Pig War*, 117.

⁵⁸ William E. Gladstone, "Cabinet Minutes," 28 January 1871 and 1 February 1871, in William E. Gladstone, *The Gladstone Diaries: With Cabinet Minutes and Prime-Ministerial Correspondence*, Vol. VII, H. C. G. Matthew, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 440, 442; Kaufman, *Pig War*, 149-154; Cook, *Alabama Claims*, 140-141, 154-166.

Americans.⁵⁹ They spent two months in Washington and ultimately referred three of the four diplomatic issues to arbitration. The Americans refused to discuss any issues related to the Fenians, and although the British expressed their disappointment, they acquiesced lest the settlement of more important issues be impeded.⁶⁰

Negotiations regarding the protocols for the arbitration of the three remaining points caused a fair deal of contention. Ironically, the *Alabama* claims, which had the most potential for explosiveness, proved easiest to resolve. The British quickly rejected the idea that the Joint Commission itself determine the appropriate sum for which their country should be held liable. They did, however, issue the expression of regret (but not liability) that the Americans considered a prerequisite for moving forward with a settlement of damages.⁶¹ Fish, who fought so hard to remove Sumner from a position to influence foreign policy after his claim for indirect damages, surprised the British Commissioners by now proposing that those indirect claims should indeed be considered in arbitration. He further startled his counterparts by insisting that potential arbiters

⁵⁹ Earl de Grey and Ripon was rewarded for his negotiations at Washington with a new title: Marquess of Ripon. Although referred to as “de Grey” throughout the negotiations, his private papers are collected under the name “Ripon.” Therefore, he will be referred to hereafter as “de Grey” in the text, but as “Ripon” in the footnotes.

⁶⁰ Gladstone, “Cabinet Minutes,” 25 March 1871, in *Gladstone Diaries*, Vol. VII, 467; Kaufman, *Pig War*, 170.

⁶¹ The first article of the ensuing treaty noted that the British Government “express, in a friendly spirit, the regret felt by Her Majesty’s government for the escape, under whatever circumstances, of the *Alabama* and other vessels from British ports, and for the depredations committed by those vessels...” “Treaty between the United States and Great Britain. – Claims, fisheries, navigation of the St. Lawrence, &c., American lumber on the river St. John, boundary. – Concluded May 8, 1871,” in *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1871), 517.

should use the American view of neutrality in determining damages, including a prohibition against the construction of vessels, which ran afoul of British law.⁶²

The British Cabinet preferred the *Alabama* claims be mediated without restrictions, but de Grey convinced Gladstone that the Americans would never agree.⁶³ The Cabinet spent its energy revising the conditions that would govern the *Alabama* arbitration. The Americans accepted the British revisions, which removed the provision about construction. Further, de Grey stipulated that, although Britain allowed that the principles that a neutral power should not allow belligerent vessels in its ports and should endeavor to detain such vessels to govern the arbitration, they expressly denied that these principles were in force during the Civil War.⁶⁴ So intent were the British to revise the terms of arbitration, they never expressly refused to allow consideration of the indirect claims. So while the Commission found the conditions of the *Alabama* arbitration easiest to settle, the arbitration itself would prove less cordial.⁶⁵

As the terms of the *Alabama* arbitration were ironed out, de Grey confided to Gladstone that he expected the boundary dispute in the San Juans to cause the most difficulty in the negotiations, even potentially scuttling the whole effort.⁶⁶ The Americans tried to convince the British to simply relinquish their claims to the islands as a *quid pro quo* for agreeing to send the *Alabama* claims to arbitration, but de Grey predictably rejected the idea and suggested the Middle Channel as the boundary, which would give

⁶² Cook, *Alabama Claims*, 175-176.

⁶³ Ripon to Gladstone, 21 March 1871, Gladstone Papers, Vol. CCI, Add. MS 44286.

⁶⁴ Gladstone to Ripon, 3 April 1871, in *Gladstone Diaries*, Vol. VII, 472.

⁶⁵ Cook, *Alabama Claims*, 174-186.

⁶⁶ Ripon to Gladstone, 21 March 1871, Gladstone Papers, Vol. CCI, Add. MS 44286.

Britain San Juan Island but leave most of the rest of the archipelago under American sovereignty.⁶⁷ At an impasse, the two sides put the San Juan question, which Gladstone consider least important, on hold and tackled the issue of the fisheries.⁶⁸

Fish offered a \$1 million payment for perpetual American access to the waters off the coast of the Maritime Provinces. De Grey rejected the offer and suggested a reduction or elimination of tariffs between the United States and Canada as more appropriate compensation. The Americans agreed with the principle, but whittled the list of duty-free goods down to fish, salt, coal, and lumber. Eleven of the twelve members of the Joint Commission considered this satisfactory, but the twelfth raised serious objections.⁶⁹

That twelfth member was John MacDonald, Prime Minister of Canada, serving on the British Commission to represent his Dominion's interests. A unique situation developed, as London wanted to respect Canadian wishes regarding the fisheries question, but could not allow one of its colonies to derail the larger project of Anglo-American rapprochement. Early in the negotiations, therefore, Gladstone decided that Canadian ratification of the agreements reached at Washington would be necessary before they could be put into effect.

In response to MacDonald's objections, Fish amended the offer. He scrapped the reciprocal tariff reductions, which were considered too little in Ottawa and perhaps too

⁶⁷ Gladstone, "Cabinet Minutes," 1 April 1871, in *Gladstone Diaries*, Vol. VII, 471. The so-called "Middle Channel" was also referred to as the "Douglas Channel" during the negotiations. Today this channel is known as "San Juan Channel," and is labeled as such in Figure 2 above.

⁶⁸ Gladstone to Ripon, 3 April 1871, in *Gladstone Diaries*, Vol. VII, 472; Gladstone to Stafford Northcote, 3 April 1871, in *Gladstone Diaries*, Vol. VII, 473-474; Kaufman, *Pig War*, 161-165.

⁶⁹ Telegram of 22nd March, Ripon Papers, Vol. CXXXIII, Add MS 43623; Kaufman, *Pig War*, 166.

much in the U.S. Senate, and renewed the offer to purchase the rights for American fisherman to access the disputed waters. This time, however, he suggested that those rights extend for only a decade and that arbitration, rather than the Joint Commission, decide the sum of the payment.

MacDonald found himself in an awkward position. He informed the British delegation “that the proposed Treaty arrangement respecting the Fisheries will receive no support from any party in Canada.”⁷⁰ His Cabinet confirmed this position, arguing “to force us now into a disposal of [the fisheries] for a sum to be fixed by arbitration ... would be a breach of faith, & an indignity never before offered to a great British possession.”⁷¹ De Grey responded with uncharacteristic indignation, reminding MacDonald that the provision for Canadian ratification ensured the Dominion would not have to accept a treaty it found counter to its national interests.⁷² MacDonald contemplated withholding his signature from the final agreement, but worried that doing so might signal Canadian opposition and give the U.S. Senate a reason to refuse ratification.⁷³ He did sign the agreement upon its completion, but the unenviable task of securing its ratification by the Canadian Parliament remained.

Having secured MacDonald’s begrudging cooperation, the Joint Commission returned to the issue of the boundary in the San Juans. Fish again rejected de Grey’s offer to use the Middle Channel as the border, reminding him that the waterway was

⁷⁰ John MacDonald to Ripon, 26 April 1871, Ripon Papers, Vol. CXXXIII, Add. MS 43623.

⁷¹ Sir George Cartier to MacDonald, 22 April 1871, Ripon Papers, Vol. CXXXIII, Add. MS 43623.

⁷² Ripon to MacDonald, 27 April 1871, Ripon Papers, Vol. CXXXIII, Add. MS 43623.

⁷³ John MacDonald to Ripon, 26 April 1871, Ripon Papers, Vol. CXXXIII, Add. MS 43623.

unnavigable and that the use of that channel as a potential boundary had been instrumental in the Senate's refusal to ratify the Johnson-Clarendon Convention two years earlier. When the two sides finally agreed to submit the boundary dispute to arbitration, Fish expressly disallowed the Middle Channel to be considered. The arbiter was to choose between either the Haro Strait or the Rosario Strait, leaving the archipelago in tact under either British or American sovereignty.⁷⁴

All members of the Joint High Commission, including MacDonald, signed the Treaty of Washington on 8 May 1871. It submitted the *Alabama* claims to arbitration under the authority of five commissioners, one each chosen by the United States, Britain, Italy, Switzerland, and Brazil. American fishermen gained access to the Northeast fisheries and free navigation on the St. Lawrence River for ten years in exchange for temporary duty-free admission of certain Canadian goods and a cash sum to be decided by a committee of three: one representative appointed by the Americans, another by the British, and the third by the Austro-Hungarian minister in London. Finally, the Commission chose Kaiser Wilhelm to settle the disputed boundary in the Pacific Northwest, hinting at Germany's newfound prestige.⁷⁵

Although lively debates about the treaty erupted on both sides of the Atlantic, the Senate ratified it with nearly five Senators in support for every one in opposition. Likewise, strong opposition in the British Parliament failed to arise. In Ottawa, however, the anticipated consternation regarding the fisheries provisions delayed ratification.

⁷⁴ Kaufman, *Pig War*, 169.

⁷⁵ "Treaty between the United States and Great Britain. – Claims, fisheries, navigation of the St. Lawrence, &c., American lumber on the river St. John, boundary. – Concluded May 8, 1871," in *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1871), 516-531.

Ultimately, the Canadian Parliament also ratified the treaty after Britain loaned the Dominion £2.5 million to help build Canadian infrastructure, especially a transcontinental railroad.⁷⁶

Two of the three issues submitted to arbitration by the Treaty of Washington concluded relatively quietly. Wilhelm decided in favor of the extreme American position in the San Juans, drawing the border through the Haro Strait and leaving the United States in possession of virtually the entire chain of islands.⁷⁷ In 1877, a commission at Halifax awarded Great Britain \$5.5 million for the American fishery concessions.⁷⁸ The remaining point of arbitration, the *Alabama* claims, became complicated.

As the two sides prepared to meet in Geneva for the arbitration, they exchanged the detailed arguments of their respective governments. The inclusion of the indirect claims in the American case caught the British off guard. Although ambiguous language in the treaty lent itself to interpretation, the lack of any discussion of the indirect claims in the British press leading to the ratification of the treaty seemed to back the British belief that they were not meant to be included.⁷⁹ Gladstone maintained, “we never consciously submitted the indirect losses to arbitration.”⁸⁰ He considered withdrawing

⁷⁶ Kaufman, *Pig War*, 172; Cook, *Alabama Claims*, 187-206.

⁷⁷ Kaufman, *Pig War*, 172-178.

⁷⁸ Halifax Commission, *Record of the Proceedings of the Halifax Fisheries Commission, 1877* (Halifax: Halifax Commission, 1877), 53.

⁷⁹ “The American Case Against England,” *The Examiner (London)*, 6 January 1872, 4, argues that the fact that “no estimate was made of the indirect losses” in Washington, the American commissioners thereby implied that they would not be included in the arbitration, and that Britain would not have agreed to the treaty if they thought otherwise.

⁸⁰ Gladstone to Earl Granville, 11 February 1872, Gladstone Papers, Vol. LXXXIII, Add. MS 44168.

from arbitration, but feared the political capital the United States stood to gain by such a decision.⁸¹ Granville insisted that such claims were “unknown in jurisprudence,” and, therefore, should have been explicitly included in the Treaty of Washington if the Americans wished them to be considered.⁸² Washington refused to relent and pointed out that it was constitutionally prohibited from altering the terms of arbitration without consent from the Senate.⁸³

As both sides doubted the possibility of a resolution, the British blinked. The Cabinet drew up a supplemental article for the treaty. It outlined the American case for including the indirect damages and the British case for excluding them and tasked the arbitration commission with the final decision regarding their inclusion at Geneva. More importantly, it committed both nations to refrain from making any indirect claims in the future.⁸⁴ Fish pushed the amendment through the Senate, finally enabling the arbiters to begin their work.⁸⁵

The British Cabinet, however, did not yield in their view that the indirect claims should not be considered. Gladstone gave the British representative instructions to refuse to take part in any discussion of the indirect claims.⁸⁶ The two sides got around the difficulty by an informal agreement outside the official auspices of the commission.

⁸¹ Gladstone to Granville, 27 March 1872, Gladstone Papers, Vol. LXXXIII, Add. MS 44168.

⁸² Draft of Despatch from Granville to General Schenck, 18 March 1872, Gladstone Papers, Vol. DXXXIV, Add. MS 44619.

⁸³ Cook, *Alabama Claims*, 226-228.

⁸⁴ Memorandum of Telegram from Mr. Fish, Confidentially read to Lord Granville by General Schenck, 29 April 1872, Gladstone Papers, Vol. DXXXIV, Add. MS 44619.

⁸⁵ Cook, *Alabama Claims*, 228-231.

⁸⁶ Memorandum, 10 June 1872, Gladstone Papers, Vol. DLV, Add. MS 44640; Gladstone, “Cabinet Minutes,” 12 June 1872, in *Gladstone Diaries*, Vol. VIII, 161-162.

Without taking a direct decision on whether the Treaty of Washington compelled them to consider the indirect claims, the commission simply dismissed them as poorly founded. Ultimately, the arbitration commission found the British liable for \$15.5 million in direct damages to U.S. shipping caused by the *Florida* and *Alabama*, as well as a portion of the damages caused by the *Shenandoah*.⁸⁷

Conclusions

At last, the United States and Britain cemented their rapprochement and settled all of their outstanding diplomatic issues. The slaughter of a pig on an island in Puget Sound thirteen years earlier brought the nations to the brink of war. The *Trent* affair, British support for the Confederate navy, and the ambiguous American response to the Fenians illustrate continued disagreement over the responsibilities of neutrality. Nevertheless, despite bluster on both sides of the Atlantic, cooler heads prevailed throughout the 1860s.

The domestic concerns of each nation played a major role in mapping the course of Anglo-American relations through the 1860s. The Civil War sapped all the energy of the Union in the first half of the decade, and the politics of Reconstruction exerted their influence in the second half. Britain's continued shift away from expensive colonial administration and towards free trade dictated her policy towards the United States. The rise of Germany in Europe further pushed Britain towards rapprochement with the United States, as her allies and position on the continent weakened.

For all the squabbling across the Atlantic, both countries shared common policy goals: freedom of the seas and the protection of the rights of neutral powers during

⁸⁷ Cook, *Alabama Claims*, 236-240.

wartime. They explicitly hoped that their own example of peaceful settlement of diplomatic crises would provide an example to the rest of the world.⁸⁸ The willingness of Germany to use war as an instrument of foreign policy during her unification made the project all the more vital. Indeed, the so-called “Spirit of Washington” prevailed over two map-altering conferences held in Berlin before the end of the century: in 1878, when the Great Powers redrew the boundaries of the Balkans, and in the formal initiation of the “Scramble for Africa” in 1885. The reorganization of the world map without the violence employed as recently as 1871 paid tribute to what American historian and diplomat John Bassett Moore called “the greatest treaty of actual and immediate arbitration the world has ever seen.”⁸⁹

Nevertheless, the literature on Anglo-American relations tends to overlook the importance of the Treaty of Washington. Even as the United States and Great Britain wrangled over the ensuing arbitration, they finally came to agree on their preferred methods for adjudicating trans-Atlantic disputes. Nearly half a century after the Monroe Doctrine, they took the final step towards ensuring harmonious relations and completed the process of rapprochement.

Historians since Bradford Perkins have viewed the American intervention in the 1895 boundary dispute between Britain and Venezuela as the starting point of the “Great Rapprochement,” but they overlook the impact of the Treaty of Washington and its preference for solving diplomatic disputes through arbitration. It seems unlikely that

⁸⁸ Draft of Despatch from Granville to General Schenck, 18 March 1872, Gladstone Papers, Vol. DXXXIV, Add. MS 44619.

⁸⁹ John Bassett Moore, *American Diplomacy: Its Spirit and Achievements* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1905), 238.

Secretary of State Richard Olney's "twenty-inch gun" could have produced such pacific results had the United States and Britain not committed themselves to the principle of arbitration in 1871.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

After arbitration settled the San Juan boundary dispute and the *Alabama* claims, the United States and Britain found little reason to quarrel during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The one major exception came in South America, where a boundary dispute between Britain and Venezuela drew American attention.

In 1895, the British navy took control of a Venezuelan port to press its claims. Secretary of State Richard Olney invoked the Monroe Doctrine and argued that “the United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition.”¹ The British response denied that the United States had a right to intervene in the affairs of foreign countries “simply because they are situated in the Western Hemisphere.”² Nevertheless, London accepted an American offer of arbitration early the following year. A committee with no Venezuelan representative awarded almost all of the disputed territory to Britain, leaving the mouth of

¹ Richard Olney to Thomas Bayard, 20 July 1895, in *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, with the Annual Message of the President, Transmitted to Congress December 2, 1895, Part I* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1896), 588.

² Lord Salisbury to Julian Pauncefoot, 26 November 1895, in *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, with the Annual Message of the President, Transmitted to Congress December 2, 1895, Part I* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1896), 566.

the strategically important Orinoco River to Venezuela, but allowing Britain to maintain control of all the region's gold mines.³

The boundary dispute represents an important coda to Anglo-American rapprochement. With it, Britain "tacitly conceded the U.S. definition of the Monroe Doctrine and its hegemony in the hemisphere."⁴ This recognition of American ascendancy received further confirmation in 1901, when the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty superseded the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty and gave the United States exclusive rights to construct and manage a canal across the Central American isthmus.⁵

While historians have tended to view the Venezuelan boundary dispute and the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty as the markers of a new era in Anglo-American rapprochement, a closer examination of the mid-nineteenth century repositions these events as the punctuation of decades of steady progress towards harmonious relations between the United States and Britain. Indeed, the arbitration of the Venezuelan crisis paid homage to the Treaty of Washington, reaffirming the trans-Atlantic commitment to using peaceful methods to resolve diplomatic disputes. These two agreements confirm the stance taken by American diplomats throughout the nineteenth century and indicate a continuation of

³ R. A. Humphreys, "Presidential Address: Anglo-American Rivalries and the Venezuela Crisis of 1895," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, vol. 17 (1967), 131-164, discusses the crisis in the context of trans-Atlantic relations; Cedric L. Joseph, "The Venezuela-Guyana Boundary Arbitration of 1899: An Appraisal: Part I," *Caribbean Studies* 10, no. 2 (July 1970), 56-89; and Cedric L. Joseph, "The Venezuela-Guyana Boundary Arbitration of 1899: An Appraisal: Part II," *Caribbean Studies* 10, no.4 (January 1971), 35-74; comprise a detailed account of the arbitration.

⁴ George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 308.

⁵ "Hay-Pauncefote Treaty," in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Document no. 85, 57th Cong., 1st sess., Ser. 4226, 7-9.

British willingness to back away from gunboat diplomacy and inch towards full cooperation with the United States.

The key to understanding these events at the dawn of the twentieth century as the persistence of nineteenth century patterns rather than a radical new dimension of Anglo-American relations is a recognition that trans-Atlantic disputes in the nineteenth century originated from disagreements about diplomatic methods rather than objectives. Both nations wanted deep-water harbors in the Oregon country to foster trade with China, and Britain ceded the “Oregon Triangle” after understanding the uselessness of the Columbia River and securing sovereignty over Hong Kong. The crisis in Central America involved the letter, rather than the spirit, of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty. Britain used more aggressive means to extract trade concessions from China, but not even Washington’s insistence on neutrality could prevent certain Americans from aiding British military actions. And the boundary dispute in the San Juan Islands taught both countries that they could preserve their national honor without resorting to armed conflict.

This context provides a new interpretation of the path from a colonial relationship to a worldwide alliance between the United States and Britain. Although these diplomatic crises occurred in far-flung corners of the globe, they demonstrate that trans-Atlantic conflicts in the mid-nineteenth century involved disputes about the proper means to achieve common ends. In contrast, reconciliation at the beginning of the nineteenth century involved quarrels over the rights of nations, as the United States promoted international peace, free trade, and neutral rights at a time when Britain practiced mercantilism and impressment. Likewise, cooperation at the end of the nineteenth century illustrates agreement over the best methods to secure similar goals. The mid-

nineteenth century links the two periods and provides the best opportunity to examine true Anglo-American rapprochement. The evolution from general trans-Atlantic concurrence regarding global policy objectives to a harmonious understanding how to pursue them occurred primarily between the promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine and the ratification of the Treaty of Washington.

In 1823, a young nation flexed its muscles by demanding European nations steer clear of intervention in the affairs of the American continents, but did so with the full knowledge that the strongest European power supported their position. By 1872, the United States had worked to settle its sectional differences and grow its economy, while Britain lost its hegemonic dominance of Europe and its taste for unbridled imperial expansion. The Civil War led to an era of Republican ascendancy, dampening the influence of the more expansionist and Anglophobic Democratic Party. The death of Lord Palmerston in 1865 simultaneously eliminated the dominant, bellicose voice of more than three decades of British foreign policy, clearing the way for the final stages of rapprochement. A more careful examination of the individual histories of the United States and Britain illuminates essential components of their bilateral relations and helps explain why trans-Atlantic harmony began decades earlier than generally assumed.

Previous studies that examine the periods just after the Revolution and just before World War I remain important despite the fact that they ignore essential moments in Anglo-American rapprochement. Indeed, the scholarship focused on the bookends of the nineteenth century elucidates the most important aspects of trans-Atlantic relations. The work of Bradford Perkins and others informs the very shape and scope of this study. Rather than denigrating the valuable work of previous generations of historians, this work

adds another layer of complexity to the process of understanding Anglo-American relations. By taking a more global view of bilateral relations between the United States and Britain and examining minor incidents in a time period due for greater attention, this dissertation hopes only to make the ever-fluid understanding on Anglo-American relations a bit more comprehensive.

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