

THE JAPANESE FACTOR IN GERMAN EAST ASIAN STRATEGY, 1895-1914: a failure of policy

'As both alliance partner of England and opponent of America, Japan can act as the wedge to split Anglo-American relations'.¹ *Friedrich von Erckert, Ambassador in Tokyo, 1906.*

The archival sources show clearly enough how intensively Germany attempted to move Japan away from its alliance with Britain in order to bolster its strategic position in China and East Asia and to realise its overall world-political goals. The entire discussion inevitably leads to 1914. German attempts to woo Japan even after the outbreak of World War I aimed to achieve a special peace arrangement or even alliance with Japan to break Entente unity, to prepare the way for a separate peace with Russia, and to weaken Britain's global strategic position.²

Until the late nineteenth century the specific Asian contribution to that region's political and strategic formation was not so obvious, given that mostly it had taken the form of resistance to European and American activity. This changed with the emergence of Japan as an economic and political power. In competition with the colonialism which turned East Asia into a periphery of a Eurocentric core, Japan succeeded in establishing itself as a regional core with a periphery of its own. It took some time for Europeans and Americans to recognise this development. The conclusion of the Sino-Japanese War and the interference of European powers in the 1895 Peace of Shimonoseki settlement to Japan's disadvantage saw the real beginning of the region's world-political significance. With its victory over Russia in 1905 Japan became the strongest naval power in the Pacific, thereby achieving a key strategic position which decisively affected not only the situation in Asia, but also the world-political situation as a whole.

The constant fluctuation of power conditions in Asia had wide-reaching consequences for the relationships between Germany, Japan, and the United States. The question arises as to whether Germany just as much as Britain based its foreign-political calculations upon an international basis spanning the globe much earlier than previously has been accepted. It was precisely the nature of Germany's involvement in Asia which makes questionable the separation of Continental policy and 'world-policy'. In the course of European expansion in Asia, seapower became one of the determining factors for strategic power relationships, and Japan also must be considered within this context. Already in 1902 by means of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Britain had elevated Japan to the quasi-protector of its interests in East Asia, in order to concentrate its

¹ Politisches Archiv im Auswärtigen Amt (Foreign Office Political Archive), Berlin, (PA-AA), R17 428, Erckert-Bülou, 31 October 1906.

² Akira Hayashima, *Die Illusion des Sonderfriedens. Deutsche Verständigungspolitik mit Japan im ersten Weltkrieg* (München, 1982); Frank W. Ikl, 'Japanese-German Peace Negotiations during World War I', *American Historical Review*, 71 (1965/66), 62-76.

forces in European waters in the face of Germany's extensive naval expansion program. From the perspective of this background, considerations arose regarding the extent Germany, like the other European powers, needed to extend its foreign policy considerations into the region. In this period of radical realignments, Kaiser Wilhelm II sought to change the direction of German policy in Asia.

In the new century was added the factor of a constant shifting of Germany's position on Asian questions in an attempt to win new allies or momentary support on particular issues.³ A manifestation of this was the Kaiser's idiosyncratic plan to forge a commonality of interests in Asia among the 'Germanic-Anglo-Saxon' powers by making use of regional tensions. Standing between the historic rivals in Asia, Britain and Russia, Germany's leaders, influenced by the prominent political economists, were convinced that in the long term it was only as a strong power that it could maintain an independent position to foster its own interests. As Bernhard von Bülow, Foreign Secretary of Wilhelm II's 'New Course' from 1897 and Chancellor from 1909 stated, 'The pre-requisite of all healthy politics is the realization that might is the essential factor in any great state'.⁴ If Germany, despite its flourishing trade and shipping, was politically powerless in Asia, it would lose every possibility of participating in deliberations on the region's future. Indeed, its very weakness would tempt others to ignore it in any arrangements.⁵

One eye on Japan: the aims of German policy in China

The discussion is of necessity closely tied to naval considerations. Germany's strategies in Asia become clear within the framework of Eurocentric issues of a naval balance of power, as well as the need to come to terms with an increasing American presence in Asia.⁶ While the original impetus for the creation of a German presence in the Shantung region came from business interests, for several years the Admiralty and Foreign Office had been seeking a suitable naval base in East Asia. This was to be developed both as a commercial centre and springboard for the extension of German political and strategic influence in East Asia more broadly. As early as the peace negotiations at the end of the Franco-Prussian War, merchant groups requested Bismarck to demand the cession of Cochin China and other French colonies.



They found a strong supporter in Admiral Prince Adalbert who noted that 'Saigon would become the central point of our Navy in the Far East, and further, Cochin China in our hands would give us a meaningful power position in East Asia in one blow...'⁷

³ See Peter Winzen, *Bülow's Weltmachtkonzept. Untersuchungen zur Frühphase seiner Außenpolitik, 1897-1901* (Boppard, 1977), 86-98.

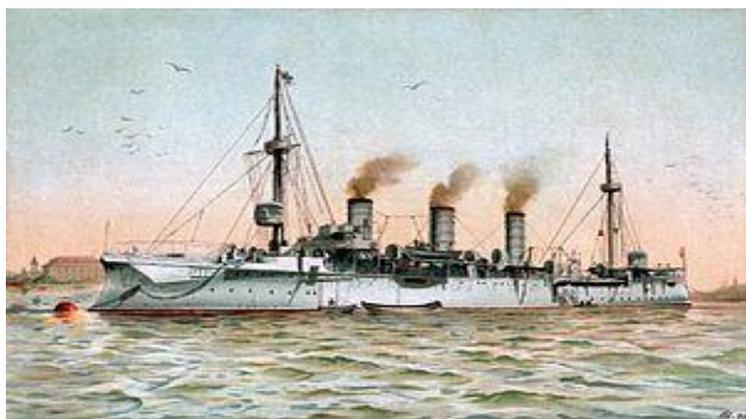
⁴ Prince von Bülow, *Memoirs* (London, 1931), II, 426.

⁵ Ernst Francke, 'Weltpolitik und Seemacht', *Nauticus. Jahrbuch für Deutschlands Seeinteressen* (Berlin, 1903), 138.

⁶ Ute Mehnert, 'Deutsche Weltpolitik und amerikanisches Zweifronten-Dilemma. Die 'japanische Gefahr' in den deutsch-amerikanischen Beziehungen 1904-1917', *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 257, Heft 3 (December 1993), 648-9.

⁷ Cited in Hermann Oncken, *Großherzog Friedrich von Baden und die deutsche Politik von 1854-1871* (Berlin, 1927), Vol. II, p. 359, quoted in Helmuth Stoecker, *Deutschland und China im 19. Jahrhundert. Das Eindringen des deutschen Kapitalismus* (Berlin, 1958), 78.

By 1895, as the Foreign Office's 'grey eminence' Friedrich von Holstein observed, the Sino-Japanese War had fostered the belief that China was disintegrating and that a strong position had to be established in order to participate in any division.⁸ German intervention (alongside France) to support Russia and prevent Japan from extracting maximum benefit from its victory in 1895 resulted in exceptional concessions from China. As a contemporary German observer noted, Germany 'secured exclusive privileges to which her former relations with China had scarcely entitled her, and she still occupies a privileged position in the eyes of the court and government at Peking'.⁹ The reply by Naval Secretary Rear-Admiral Friedrich Hollmann to a request from Foreign Secretary Adolf Freiherr Marschall von Bieberstein in April 1895 on the Navy's requirements provides a definite view of the function of naval power within *Weltpolitik*: 'The effectiveness of the warships in East Asia has to be felt from Singapore to Hakodate', and to achieve this one station would hardly suffice for Germany's needs.¹⁰



SMS *Gefion* was armed with a main battery of ten 10.5-centimeter (4.1 in) guns, had a top speed in excess of 19.5 knots (36.1 km/h), and could steam for 6,500 km, the longest range of any German warship in Asia at the time. She took part in the Battle of Taku Forts in June 1900 during the Boxer rebellion.

The minister in Peking, Edmund Baron von Heyking, commented that neither China nor Japan would take Germany seriously until there was a permanent military presence. Only then would others accept that Germany had both the will and means to participate in East Asian affairs.¹¹ Hence the German concern to gain a foothold in China and then to preserve a *status quo* which would protect it. This *Ostasienpolitik* soon brought a clash of interests with Japan.¹²

8 Observation by Friedrich von Holstein, in Norman Rich & M. H. Fisher (Eds), *The Holstein Papers: 1837-1909* (Cambridge, 1955-63), Vol. I, 179. The Military Attaché from the Tokyo embassy, Major Max von Etzel, was present on the Liaotung Peninsula from May 1895, visited Korea shortly afterward and in 1906 to observe Japanese activity.

9 Paul Reinsch, *World Politics At the End of the Nineteenth Century as Influenced by the Oriental Situation* (New York, 1900), 271.

10 J. Lepsius, A. Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, F. Thimme, *Die Große Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914. Sammlung der diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes* (Berlin, 1922-7), (hereafter GP), Vol. XIV, Part 1, Nr. 3645, Marschall-Hollmann, 11 March 1895; Nr. 3646, Hollmann-Marschall, 17 April 1895.

11 German Federal Military Archive, (Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg, BA-MA), Nachlaß Senden, N160/6, Bl. 1, Heyking-Senden, 26 March 1897. Heyking was minister in Peking 1896-9.

12 Otto Franke, *Die Großmächte in Ostasien von 1894 bis 1914* (Braunschweig/Hamburg, 1923), 125; A. Harding Ganz, 'The German Navy in the Far East and Pacific: The Seizure of Kiautschou and After', in J. A. Moses & P. M. Kennedy (Eds), *Germany in the Pacific and Far East, 1870-1914* (St. Lucia, 1977); Woodruff D. Smith, *The German Colonial Empire* (Chapel Hill, 1978), 112f.



German troops in the

Boxer Rebellion

For Germany the immediate need was to secure a strategic foothold in China. A contemporary academic wrote that 'More important is, with the assistance of this military base, to hold open the entire Chinese nation...for German business...'¹³ Repeatedly one is drawn back to the connection between economic and political-strategic issues. The architect of naval policy, head of the Navy Office Alfred von Tirpitz, stated that increased economic strength resulting from access to Shantung coal, 'must necessarily have improved our political position...'¹⁴ In the background lay the thought that should it come to a division of China in the future, Germany would have a foothold there with not just an economic base, but also a naval and thus a power-political one.¹⁵ Already Japan's suspicions had been aroused.



Die ersten Deutschen, die in Tsingtau Fuß faßten:
Offiziere des Landungskorps

Officers of the landing corps in the

acquisition of Tsingtau/Qingdao

The German occupation of Kiautschou (Jiaozhou) in 1897 had proceeded all too smoothly for the Japanese, given Russia's former interest in the port, and the influential diplomat Tadasu Hayashi suspected that there had been some secret agreement to facilitate Germany's acquisition.¹⁶

The European powers and the United States liked to view the operation of forces in Asia as their own construct, the product not of an Asian core but as the organisation of the Asian-Pacific region as an extension of a European-dominated world economy.¹⁷ However, Japan was an integral part of the equation from the beginning. With the outbreak of the the Sino-Japanese War in 1894, the German Foreign Office had considered some acquisition in China could be achieved by a policy of non-intervention

¹³ Prof. Hermann Schumacher, 'Die Politik der "offenen Thür" in China', *Die Woche*, 9 June 1900, 989-991; on German economic aims see John E. Schrecker, *Imperialism and Chinese Nationalism. Germany in Shantung* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971).

¹⁴ Alfred von Tirpitz, *My Memoirs* (London, 1919), Vol. I, 79.

¹⁵ Ernst Graf zu Reventlow, *Der Einfluß der Seemacht im Großen Kriege* (Berlin, 1918), 10; Winzen, 91.

¹⁶ A. M. Pooley (Ed), *The Secret Memoirs of Count Tadasu Hayashi* (New York, 1969), facsimile of 1915 edition, 102.

¹⁷ See Arif Dirlik, 'The Asia-Pacific Idea: Reality and Representation in the Invention of a Regional Structure', *Journal of World History*, Spring 1992, 71.

in Japan's favour. When the Kaiser proposed Formosa, this was rejected by the Foreign Office because it would cause friction with Japan.¹⁸ This Berlin had to minimise. Bülow clearly saw the dangers:

The final outcome of a German-Japanese conflict is so unpalatable that German policy must avert at every chance a disruption of German-Japanese relations, which would be a scarcely hoped for stroke of luck for our opponents...we are quite inclined to acknowledge the Japanese as co-heirs in China. This step would paralyse the work of our opponents, who now are all active in Tokio to convince the Japanese that Germany will be in its path everywhere as an enemy, and that this irreconcilable conflict of interests sooner or later must come to a head... It should not be all that difficult for German diplomacy to convince the Japanese that a war between us, whose fruits will only be enjoyed by the spectators, can easily be avoided, and that both sides can achieve their aims through peaceful co-operation.

Germany sought to encourage Japanese involvement in regions which would keep it fully occupied: '...this tendency which would bring Japan into the French sphere of influence can only be welcomed ...' There also was a common need to divert Russia. Other powers would gladly look on if Germany and Japan came to blows, and this was an eventuality in which Japanese naval and military strength could severely strain German resources.¹⁹



Japanese expansionism and the vacillation of German policy

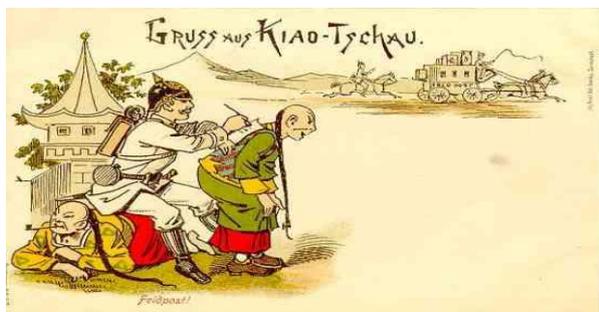
At the time when European imperialism increasingly was focusing on Asia, Japan succeeded in changing from being an object of this policy to utilising it for its own ends. Its emergence as an economic and political power in the 1890s brought to the fore a contradiction between the region's form as perceived by Europeans, and its reality. Following the European example, Japan sought to establish itself as a regional core with a periphery of its own. This meant it was a power factor which increasingly had to be considered. German policy had at its centre the similarities between the two countries. In the German view, the 'Prussia of the East' would look to the country where so many of its military officers, bureaucrats and academics had been trained.²⁰ However, policy was neither consistent nor well considered.

¹⁸ GP, Vol. 14, Pt. 1, Nr. 3686, Kaiser-Foreign Office, 6 November 1897.

¹⁹ GP, Vol. 14, Part 1, Nr. 3732, Bülow-Kaiser, 13 December 1897.

²⁰ See Masaki Miyake, 'German Cultural and Political Influence on Japan, 1870-1914', in Moses & Kennedy, 157-181.

The underlying problem in German-Japanese relations always remained the latter's resentment of Germany's part (with other powers) in forcing Japan to forego any acquisitions in the 1895 Peace of Shimonoseki after its war with China. Now there was the need to keep Russia distracted from Europe. '...it was obvious that if Muscovite ambition were finally obstructed in the Far East it would return with redoubled force upon the Balkans.'²¹ This was an important consideration in Austro-German relations. Maintaining Russian interest in possible expansion in Asia supported Austria: 'Russia is beginning to recognise that she has more to hope from expansion in the Orient than from the forcible annexation of her Balkan neighbours'.²²



Bülow stated in the Reichstag that a partition of China would not be initiated by Germany, but cagily noted that 'The traveler cannot decide when the train is to start, but he can be sure not to miss it...'²³ All of this left a sour aftertaste with the Japanese and reflected a short-sighted policy which missed the point that Japan was a nation whose friendship might be of future value to Germany. Indeed, the German press appeared more aware of the implications than the Government. The *Berliner Neueste Nachrichten* wrote that in the struggle with France and Russia, Japan would be a very useful ally. Now, however, it was to be feared that 'Germany will pay bitterly for her action, for the Japanese will eventually seek their revenge'.²⁴

The Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 considerably improved Japan's position and was a marked failure of German policy.²⁵ If Berlin had been more aware of and sensitive to Japanese concerns, there might have been the possibility of a German-Japanese-Russian understanding. While an influential group headed by Marquis Hirobumi Ito (Prime Minister 1892-6, 1900-1) favoured such an agreement, whether Russia was ready is debatable. German ham-fistedness and Russian ambition were Britain's best helpers. It could build its policy on the mistakes of others. Japanese indignation in 1895 after the Treaty of Shimonoseki was never fully appreciated in Berlin, to the extent that in 1904 Bülow wrote he could not understand Japanese mistrust, which 'finds no explanation in the history of German-Japanese relations'. Indeed, German policy had contributed to changing the world situation to Japan's benefit.²⁶ This arrogance was to cost dearly.

If Germany's leaders had taken Japanese interests and intentions more seriously, perhaps they would not have treated that nation with such diffidence. In particular, Japanese support would have put a quite different complexion on the alliance negotiations with Britain begun in the 1890s. Together with Japan, Germany could have

²¹ 'The German Danger in the Far East', op.cit., 184.

²² Reinsch, 227.

²³ Cited without reference in Reinsch, 164.

²⁴ Cited in Hayashi, 55.

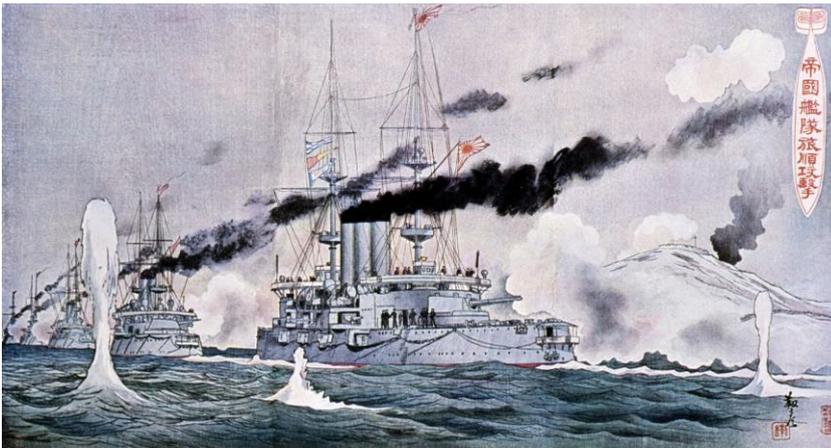
²⁵ The Anglo-Japanese Alliance was signed by Lord Landsdowne and Baron Hayashi on 30 January 1902. See Charles Spinks, 'The Background of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance', *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. VIII, 1939, 317-339; Zara Steiner, 'Great Britain and the Creation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance', *Journal of Modern History*, XXXI (1959), 27-36; Peter Lowe, *Great Britain and Japan 1911-1915. A Study of British Far Eastern Policy* (London, 1969), 278-287; Ian H. Nish, *Alliance in Decline. A Study in Anglo-Japanese Relations 1908-1923* (London, 1972). Keith Neilson maintains that it was part of an attempt to maintain the global balance of power: ' "Greatly Exaggerated": The Myth of the Decline of Great Britain before 1914', *International History Review*, XIII, 4 (November 1991), 699.

²⁶ GP, Vol. 19, Part 1, Nr. 5955, Bülow-Arco, 2 February 1904.

exercised pressure on Britain, particularly if it forged a German-Japanese-Russian understanding. The Japanese circles supporting Germany's inclusion placed greater trust in Germany than in Britain. Crucially, the Alliance did not provide for British recognition of Japan's paramount interests in Korea, and gave no assurance that it would not interfere in any Japanese action there.²⁷



Even the Germanophobe diplomat Tadasu Hayashi made it clear that in Japan there was much value placed on the inclusion of Germany to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance - 'a combination of the utmost advantage to Japan'. Unfortunately this value was not appreciated in Berlin. Hayashi commented that if Germany had shown itself seriously interested and had suggested to Japan its addition to the Alliance, with support for Japanese interests in Korea, 'a triple alliance might easily have been concluded'.²⁸ However, with policy formation divided between the inhabitants of the Neues Palais and the Wilhelmstrasse, Germany made no first move, and no Japanese invitation was forthcoming. Yet another opportunity slipped through Berlin's fingers.



By the onset of the Russo-Japanese War, Germany's position had begun to deteriorate. Bülow's policy of the 'free hand' was under strain, though he still could view the events in Asia 'as if from a box seat' in the quiet hope that Japan's alliance partner Britain would in some manner be drawn into the conflict with Russia. Then a constellation would emerge, in relation to which 'Germany as *tertius gaudens* could utilise to extend its power position in Europe and overseas'.²⁹ Japanese success was to Germany's benefit by holding Russia's attention firmly in Asia, as 'a war in the Far East removed the latent war danger for us in Europe'.³⁰ Despite Bülow's assurances in his memoirs that he would not hesitate to tell Japan the plain truth of Germany's position, he nevertheless advised the Foreign Office that he 'need hardly say that it would be useful for us if at the conclusion of the...war, Japan had been weakened at sea as much as possible'.³¹ In addition, Tirpitz

²⁷ Hayashi, 139. See 175-83 for Japan's attempt to gain British acceptance of its Korean claims and their final recognition.

²⁸ Ibid., 121, 195.

²⁹ Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv München, MA2682, Lerchenfeld-Staatsministerium, 13 February 1904, cited in Peter Winzen, 'Der Krieg in Bülow's Kalkül. Katastrophe der Diplomatie oder Chance zur Machtexpansion', in J. Düllfer & K. Holl (Eds) *Bereit zum Krieg: Kriegsmentalität im wilhelminischen Deutschland 1890-1914. Beiträge zur historischen Friedensforschung* (Göttingen, 1986), 171.

³⁰ Bülow, *Memoirs*, Vol. II, 618.

³¹ GP, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Nr. 6053, Bülow-Foreign Office, 9 September 1904.

recommended the Naval Attaché in St. Petersburg (Paul von Hintze) urge the Russians to attack the Japanese.³²

This exemplifies how German policy was characterised throughout by a public wooing of Japan and secret attempts to weaken its position. Ambassador Hermann Speck von Sternburg in Washington had reported in March 1904 that President Theodore Roosevelt told him it was in both American and German interests that the Russo-Japanese War continue for as long as possible. After any conflict it would be better that their spheres of influence remain as before, which would ensure Japan's ongoing localised preoccupation and dampen any desire for expansion. Then Japan would neither threaten Germany in China nor the United States in the Philippines, and Russia's attention would remain locked in the east. The problem was that German foreign policy was unable to determine and implement a consistent and effective policy line. Despite deeply ingrained fears, it nevertheless saw a commonality of interests with Japan: both powers stood opposed to 'Angle-Saxondom', and both required protection of their rear in order to operate freely. Germany was in the middle of its naval expansion program, and Japan needed the modernisation of its navy. In its attempts to drive a wedge between Britain and Japan, by exploiting the inherent rivalries between the two, it is quite clear that Germany deluded itself about its chances of making common cause with Japan against Britain.



Dire warnings came in November 1906 from Acting First Secretary Hans Arthur von Kemnitz in Peking upon his return from a journey to Japan. The recent victory over Russia had led to an 'extraordinary growth of self-assurance, patriotism and avarice' in Japan. The problem for Germany lay in correctly determining exactly what the Japanese might be planning. The unexpectedness of the Russo-Japanese War showed their ability to conceal their innermost intentions. One thing was clear: Japan was striving for supremacy over East Asia as far as Malaya, indeed probably the wider Pacific. What did this mean for the European powers? Germany in Kiautschou and the Pacific, America in the Philippines, and the Dutch in the Indies were primarily threatened. France in Cochin China was protected by its relationship with Japan's ally Britain. The reality of a Japanese threat to Germany was a subject of disagreement within the Tokyo Embassy.³³

If Germany had to face Japan alone, it would be in the most difficult of situations. Russia could not assist even if it wished to. What could Germany do if the Japanese Navy suddenly appeared before Tsingtau? Kemnitz commented laconically that while it was difficult to determine in what order Japan would work through its menu, it was advisable for those listed not to wait until they had been consumed, 'but to unite timely in common defence'.³⁴ He saw the real problem of German policy in the weakness of its political and military position in East Asia, which prevented it from pursuing its aims and presenting its position with appropriate emphasis not only in Japan, but also in China. The Chinese knew quite well that Germany could not make any more demands, because in the final analysis they would have Japanese backing to resist, no matter how distasteful and apprehensive this might be for them. There would be no better

³² GP, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Nr. 6054, Pourtalés -Bülow, 15 September 1904; Nr. 6057, Kaiser-Tsar, 8 October 1904.

³³ PA-AA, R17,577, Abschrift Kemnitz, 21 November 1906. Kemnitz was Acting First Secretary from July 1906, First Secretary 1907-8.

³⁴ Ibid.

pretext for Japan to move against Germany in China than a German-Chinese conflict. Wherein lay the solution?

All these difficulties would be cast aside with one move if we succeeded in gaining a secret defensive alliance against Japan with the United States, for the restricted aims of the mutual security of the possessions of both Powers in the Pacific and East Asia...

Growing American awareness of the danger posed by Japan which Kemnitz had observed on his travels there, and the reality of growing friction, spoke for the feasibility of the arrangement. However, such an alliance would of course commit Germany to fight Japan in the event of a serious development, but he believed the mere fact of the existence of a German-American coalition would 'completely secure peace in East Asia'. There was a growing American comprehension of the danger posed by Japan: the question of foreign trade in Manchuria, the immigration and school integration question in California, disagreement over the Aleutian Islands, and a mooted visit by a Japanese squadron to the North American Pacific coast were all factors which would ease Germany's position in negotiations with America. He concluded by emphasising the necessity of strengthening Germany's military-political position in Asia: 'The quill fails the most skilful diplomat if in the final analysis the strength of guns does not stand behind it'.³⁵

The Kaiser's main aim was a German-American-Chinese entente, supported by Russia, to counterbalance the Anglo-Japanese-French agreements. As Foreign Secretary Heinrich von Tschirschky indicated in mid-1907, careful consideration needed to be given to two major issues. Because of the current difficulties between Japan and the USA, 'a German-Japanese agreement obviously would not be well received at Washington'. In addition, it could only damage Germany's prestige 'if we now came limping behind seeking an agreement...We would only create the impression...that we were insecure and feared Japan'.³⁶

Ambassador Arthur Graf Rex in Tokyo expressed ongoing concern that the Franco-Japanese and Russo-Japanese agreements had considerably altered the political situation in Asia. The former unanimity on maintaining the integrity of China was gradually being whittled away. The agreements could only be seen as preparing the way for the partition of China and the signatories were delineating their prospective spheres of interest, while Germany was being excluded. Japan had good cause to feel secure and confident that it 'could sew up the Chinese question' before China could transform itself into a well-organised and armed state: 'Japanese activity in the whole of China clearly indicates that they have something great in planning', he noted ominously.³⁷ Rex also sought to bolster German influence by persuading the Chinese that the only basis for an effective foreign policy was a strong army which could protect them against Japan. The German arms industry could provide the means to this end, and Rex continually pushed the need for China to modernise its army with German assistance. This was crucial. Rex urged that Krupps be motivated to compete with the expected Japanese arms suppliers. Due to China's unsatisfactory military condition, it could not be utilised as a complete factor in Germany's Asian policy.³⁸ Germany was the only sure factor on which the Chinese could rely.

By playing the part of the passive observer, Russia hoped to obtain Mongolia and expand its influence in Manchuria. In such a process, Germany and the United States would be totally ignored as they were 'not in the club', and particularly because Britain sought to thwart any German striving to pursue a world-policy. For both it would mean

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., Nr. 8546, Tschirschky-Mumm, 5 August 1907. In any event, Tschirschky saw such an agreement as superfluous, since the Anglo-German Agreement of October 1900 which Japan later entered, guaranteed the protection of German interests in China and preservation of the 'Open Door'.

³⁷ GP, Vol. 25, Pt.1., Nr. 8552, Rex-Bülow, 31 October 1907.

³⁸ Ibid., Nr. 8547, Rex-Bülow, 4 July 1907. A general study of the issue is Richard Owen, "Military-industrial relations: Krupp and the Imperial naval Office", in R. J. Evans (Ed.), *Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany* (London, 1978), 71-89.

the loss of a huge future market, and in addition for Germany 'the complete collapse of our political prestige at home and abroad'. Germany's place in the Chinese sun, for which it had striven for a decade, would be stolen from it.

Rex saw Germany's goal being the conclusion of German-American-Chinese Treaty to secure Chinese territorial integrity, while gaining specific economic advantages. At the same time another German-American-Russian treaty, to be kept secret from China, would be concluded. Here the three powers would agree to jointly oppose Japan if it sought to occupy any part of China north of the Hoangho River, or attacked Kiautschou. Russia would accommodate American economic interests in Manchuria.³⁹ Bülow noted that with the USA joining this arrangement, Anglo-American friction would be increased, a situation which Germany could exploit.⁴⁰



The American factor

It is at this point that German relations with the United States became a significant factor in both Germany's European and Asian policy. The ramifications are considerable. There can no longer be any doubt that the causes of American entry into World War 1 lie only partly in the immediate war events. This requires a careful consideration of developments in German-American relations in the prewar period which is outside the scope of this paper.⁴¹ However the rôle of Japan as a complicating factor in German relations with the United States is an important link in the chain of geopolitical issues which created the tensions existing before 1914.

Wilhelm II saw Japan as the 'dagger... that will bring us together with America'. Great store was set by the personal friendship between President Theodore Roosevelt and Ambassador Hermann Speck von Sternburg, who was charged with fostering the President's mistrust of Japan, as '...an American-Japanese antagonism must also have a deleterious effect on Anglo-American relations'. However, this activity had to be undertaken with extreme care not to give away true German motives.⁴² Initially Wilhelm II and Bülow recognised in a drawing closer to the United States a possible strategy for a foreign-political securing of the naval construction program during the 'risk period', when Germany was vulnerable to British pressure in Europe. It is in the existing ranking of sea powers that East Asia's place in the structure of German world-policy finds its importance. With the construction of their battle fleets, both Germany and the United States were challenging Britain's premier position. The fluctuations in power relationships in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly after Japan's victory over Russia in 1905, had wide-reaching consequences for relations between Germany, the United States, and Japan, and contributed considerably to a new geopolitical factor, namely that from now on both extra-European powers would play an important part in European considerations. In particular, Germany sought to manipulate American apprehension over Japanese intentions.

Japan's aggressive political and economic penetration of Manchuria since Tadasu Hayashi had become Foreign Minister caused some alarm in the USA. The Kaiser

³⁹ GP, Vol, 25, Pt.1, Nr. 8556, Rex-Bülow, 7 December 1907.

⁴⁰ Bülow, *Memoirs*, Vol. II, 356.

⁴¹ See Hans W. Gatzke, *Germany and the United States. A Special Relationship?* (Cambridge, Mass., 1890); Manfred Jonas, *The United States and Germany. A Diplomatic History* (Ithaca/London, 1984); Reinhard Doerries, 'Imperial Berlin and Washington: New Light on Germany's Foreign Policy and America's Entry into World War 1', *Central European History*, 11 (March 1978), 23-49.

⁴² PA-AA, R17 439, concluding note by Wilhelm II on Sternburg-Foreign Office, 29 October 1906; Tschirsky-Sternburg, 12 December 1906.

noted happily that 'The aggravations between Japs and Yankees are thereby increased, and that is good'.⁴³ The German Navy was keen to bring about a splitting of American naval forces. In view of German operational plans it could only be welcomed that the Atlantic Fleet would be reshaped into a Pacific Fleet, and the former replaced by the Atlantic Reserve.⁴⁴ It was expected that the increasing movement of American policy westward would lead inevitably to a confrontation with Japan, which would cause a naval construction contest such as existed between Germany and Britain.⁴⁵ In this manner, Japan would be too occupied to pose a threat to the consolidation of Germany's influence in East Asia.

In the event, all German hopes of American cooperation foundered. It seems probable that Roosevelt never had any real intention of supporting Germany if it came to a conflict, but it suited him to cooperate Germany while awaiting the outcome of his independent policy towards Japan. For him, the 'Open Door' policy in China was an academic abstraction in the face of the Franco-Japanese-Russian entente, and he was unwilling to defend Manchuria militarily against Japanese encroachment.⁴⁶ Berlin had read too much into the possibilities of the relationship. Why had Germany failed after so much effort in support of the 'Open Door' policy championed by the USA, after its conciliatory policy towards China, and a generally cautious diplomatic approach? Primarily Wilhelm II overestimated Roosevelt's opposition to Japan. The President admired Japanese culture and the nation's military and naval success. Secondly, there was ignorance of Roosevelt's previous diplomatic commitments in the Pacific. In July 1905 a memorandum acknowledged Japanese dominance in Korea in return for withdrawal of its interest in the Philippines. In effect, this was the very kind of exclusivist agreement which the Kaiser had been trying to prevent with Roosevelt's assistance.⁴⁷ Roosevelt clearly had no real intent of limiting his freedom of action with a formal alliance but was leading Germany along a certain path while awaiting the results of his independent policy towards Japan.⁴⁸

Germany also made the mistake of thinking in terms of the probability of a Japanese-American conflict, which would necessitate an understanding with Germany in Asia. However, the very fact that in general defence terms the United States faced the dilemma of a two-front conflict - the possibility of attack on the Atlantic seaboard and against its Pacific interests - caused Roosevelt to seek a compromise with Japan rather than enter a binding arrangement with Germany. Crucially, what Germany failed to understand was that Roosevelt's goal was the establishment of a worldwide balance of power which hinged on an Anglo-American commonality of interests.⁴⁹

Walking a tightrope

By 1912 the Kaiser had become convinced that in the event of German involvement in a Continental war British neutrality was not to be obtained by way of a political understanding. Japan now appeared as a more attractive partner to assist in weakening Britain's world position and thus its position in Europe, despite his previous outbursts against the 'Yellow Peril'. However, he immediately encountered opposition from Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg who while acknowledging the possible advantages, regarded it as doubtful policy to draw too close to Japan. Such attentions would not only 'increase the self-confidence of the Japanese in an undesirable manner,

⁴³ PA-AA, R17, 578, Nr. 11,690, marginal comment, Montgelas -Bethmann Hollweg, 31 January 1910.

⁴⁴ Germany's fractured, indeed duplicitous policy towards the United States is shown in the detailed operational planning for a naval attack presented by Holger Herwig, *Politics of Frustration. The United States in German Naval Planning 1889-1941* (Boston, 1976); Peter Overlack, 'German War Plans in the Pacific 1900-1914', *The Historian*, 60,3 (Spring 1998), 579-593.

⁴⁵ BA-MA, RM3 2978, 'Marinebericht Nr. 123, 'Die Vereinigten Staaten im Stillen Ozean und die Flottenfrage'.

⁴⁶ Tyler Dennett, *Roosevelt and the Russo-Japanese War* (New York, 1925), 320.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 113-4

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 153-4; 320-1.

⁴⁹ Raymond A. Esthus, *Theodore Roosevelt and the International Rivalries* (Waltham, Mass./ Toronto/ London, 1970), 11.

but also awake England's suspicion, with whom we are now in important discussions, and certainly disturb Russia to an uncomfortable degree'. The Chancellor's chief concern was a relaxation of Anglo-German relations, and overtures to Japan probably would cause Britain only to strengthen ties with its ally. He also doubted that Japan had become sufficiently pro-German. Ignoring what he considered Bethmann-Hollweg's hypercaution, the Kaiser nevertheless persisted in support of the treaty, advising that Japan be 'inofficially suggested to move towards us'.⁵⁰

Rex saw tensions in Asia offering a host of other opportunities. Alone the Russo-Japanese agreements of 1907 and 1910 concerning their respective spheres of influence in Manchuria and Mongolia seemed destined to bring conflict with Britain and/or the USA, particularly in view of their investments in the former. A continuing Japanese advance in Manchuria was to Germany's advantage, as

The more closely the Russians and Japanese rub up against each other, the more their interests collide, the better it is for us. The sooner they receive what they regard as essential to their development as a great Power, the sooner they will believe they can dispense with the English alliance. An incorporation of southern Manchuria will make Japan less able to act...we will obtain greater freedom to manoeuvre.⁵¹

Above all Germany should refrain from assuming a leading rôle in the whole Japanese-Chinese question, rather it should go with the flow of events. Then, in emulation of the age-old Chinese example, it could shift responsibility for the loss of Manchuria onto others. In this manner it could obtain what it wanted in the way of a virtual neutralisation of Japan, the shackling of Russia's attentions in the East, and the maintenance of good relations with China.

The naval convention negotiations Britain conducted with France and Russia in 1911 moved the Kaiser to prompt Bethmann-Hollweg in the direction of a military alliance with Japan. In a telegram in mid-September 1911 to Foreign Secretary Kiderlen-Wächter the Kaiser returned to his wish expressed a year previously to enter conversations with Japan concerning a military alliance. The current naval conversations between Britain and France and the alarming friendliness of the Anglo-Russian fleets during a visit to Copenhagen gave new urgency to the plan. It was feared that the joining of the two fleets would lead to demonstrative cooperation and an Anglo-Russian naval convention. A German treaty with Japan would 'place the slippery Russians in the pincers in order to hold them free of England'.⁵² While the Japanese were unwilling to enter an alliance directed against Russia, an appropriate German policy toward Japan still could stalemate Russia in Manchuria. It is probable that the most Germany realistically could have achieved was to conclude an agreement with Japan that in the event of an Anglo-German conflict, Japan would not attack Germany. This would not have been contrary to Japan's alliance obligations to Britain if Germany agreed not to attack British possessions in East Asia. This was exactly what Germany belatedly and unsuccessfully tried to put in place to save the East Asian Cruiser Squadron in August 1914.⁵³



As long as the germanophile General Prince Katsura Taro (Prime Minister 1901-1906, 1908-1911, 1912-1913) was the most influential man in

⁵⁰ GP, Vol.32, Nr. 11,802, Bethmann Hollweg-Kaiser, 24 July 1911; Nr. 11,803, Treutler-Bethmann Hollweg, 26 July 1911.

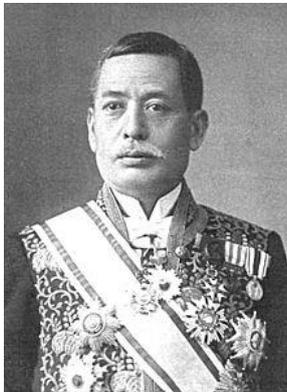
⁵¹ GP, Vol. 32, Nr. 12,022, Rex-Bethmann Hollweg, 8 July 1912. On the Russo-Japanese Agreement on Manchuria see GP, Vol.32, Chap. CCCI.

⁵² GP, Vol. 32, Nr. 12,015, Radowitz-Bethmann Hollweg, 21 September 1911.

⁵³ See P. Overlack, 'The Force of Circumstance: Graf Spee's Options for the Cruiser Squadron in August 1914', *Journal of Military History*, (October 1996), 657-682.

Tokyo the atmosphere for negotiations was favourable. However, in November 1912 the Foreign Office instructed Rex that while a move towards Japan would be welcomed, the initiative had to come from the latter. He was given strict directions to avoid the impression that Germany supported the policy of the military party at the expense of China. Germany certainly had no interest in expediting a Japanese annexation of southern Manchuria.⁵⁴ It was at this point that the inherent confusion of German policy again came to the surface. It would appear that the Kaiser was unaware of this directive to Rex. When in January 1913 Taro suggested that Prince Heinrich or one of the Kaiser's sons attend the coronation festivities in Tokyo, the Kaiser's marginal comment read 'First a military alliance with us'.⁵⁵ How could he have expected such a suggestion from Japan when Rex had been forbidden from encouraging the most pro-German element?

To some extent Rex backed the wrong horse from the start. All his political endeavours were directed towards Prince Katsura Taro, but when he had to resign after a motion of no confidence in the Japanese parliament in February 1913, access to top Japanese government levels was rather restricted. When two senior followers of the later Prime Minister Ōkuma Shigenobu were denounced in the press for bribery by the German company Siemens-Schuckert, the level of mistrust increased considerably.⁵⁶



The influential pro-British diplomat Kikujiro Ishii maintained that Germany's Asian policy from the time of Shimonoseki in 1895 had practically forced Japan to draw closer to Britain. The 'capricious Kaiser' had consistently followed a policy marked by 'shiftiness'.⁵⁷ The dismissive attitude in Berlin to the possibility of an Anglo-Japanese-German alliance, in that period prior to 1902 when British hopes of an accommodation with Germany were at their strongest, bore bitter fruit. The whole tone of German policy in these years gives the impression of one of some confusion. The subtle complexities of Asian politics are notorious, and were even more so at this time of relatively fixed cultural stereotypes. The pro-German Taro died in October 1913, Foreign Minister Aoki in February 1914, and their successors were pro-British.⁵⁸ The last opportunity had been lost.

The immediate pre-War years are littered with examples of missed opportunities to draw closer to Japan, particularly in economic issues which would have had a strategic flow-on. One example is the failure to widen the rift between Japan and Russia, which

⁵⁴ GP, Vol. 32, Nr. 12,028, Kiderlen-Rex, 14 November 1912. On Katsura Taro's aborted visit to Berlin, from which so much was hoped for, see Otto Becker, 'Deutsch-Japanische Annäherungsversuche vor dem Ersten Weltkriege', *Asien-Berichte*, Bd.17 (1943), 21-27.

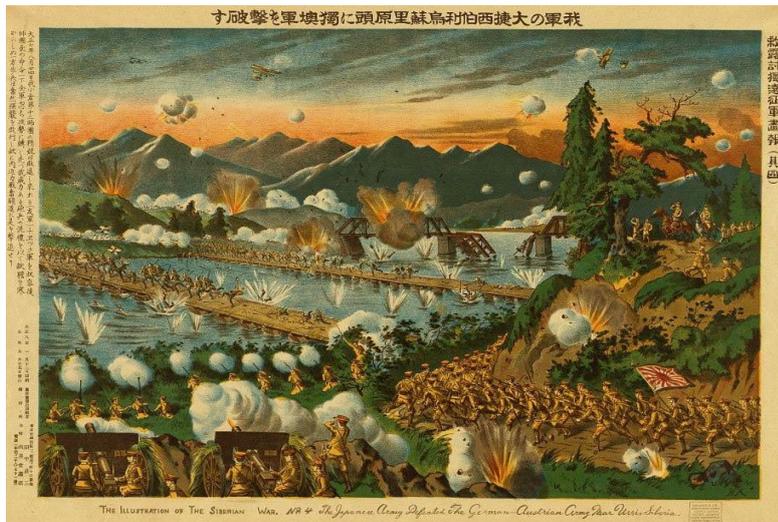
⁵⁵ Ibid., Nr. 12,030, marginal comment on Rex-Bethmann Hollweg, 28 January 1913.

⁵⁶ Hans Schwalbe, Heinrich Seemann (Hrsg.) *Deutsche Botschafter in Japan* (Tokyo: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, 1974), 59.

⁵⁷ Kikujiro Ishii, W. R. Langdon (Tr.) *Diplomatic Commentaries by Viscount Kikujiro Ishii* (Baltimore, 1936), 41-2. Ishii in 1907-8 helped negotiate the gentlemen's agreement to exclude Japanese immigrants to the United States. He was Ambassador to the United States (1918-19) and in 1917 had negotiated the Lansing-Ishii agreement with the USA. He reflected the view, widely held among Japan's liberal internationalists, that Japan and the USA should accommodate each other's interests in potential areas of friction.

⁵⁸ Rex commented that Taro's death meant a serious loss for Germany, as he had been the chief supporter of 'good, old German-Japanese relations'. GP, Vol. 32, Nr. 12,031, Rex-Bethmann Hollweg, 19 October 1913.

would have assisted Germany's strategic aim to distract Russia from Europe. Bethmann Hollweg's view was that from a political standpoint 'we could only completely wish that Russia becomes more firmly entrenched in East Asia and thereby causes more grounds for friction with Japan'.⁵⁹



Siege of Tsingtau

By 1914 the failure of Germany's Asian policy had become evident. There had always been an underlying fear that by drawing too close to Japan, moves towards the USA would suffer. In December 1914 when there had been no American objection to Japan's occupation of Kiautschou, there was a growing belief that the solution to the dilemmas faced in Asia did not lie with the USA, and that a radical re-orientation of policy was needed. A determined effort was required to win Japan into partnership.⁶⁰ Yet Germany continued under a delusion of expected Japanese neutrality if they could not be weaned from their alliance with Britain. As late as August 1916 Foreign Secretary Gottlieb von Jagow believed that

...I have the impression that in Japan one freely acknowledges the unrivalled example of Germany's achievements in both economic and military fields...indeed in the widest circles admires them. This admiration is becoming open sympathy, where next to the memory of our cooperation in the creation of modern Japan, the Bushido philosophy...may play a part.⁶¹

But simply put, Japan had its own expansionist agenda, and the British alliance better served this purpose. Over time, directly by war and indirectly by pressure and clever diplomatic manoeuvring, Japan had succeeded in negating any serious European exercise of power in East Asia. Japan, with its increasing adoption of an 'Asian Monroe Doctrine', was following its own agenda to exclude all European powers from the region and bolster its expansion into China. Germany was also suspicious of potential Japanese expansion into other areas which it considered its own, particularly Micronesia. It is clear that Japan was intent on emulating European expansion, and was seeking its own 'place in the sun'.⁶²

Conclusion

Appearances in diplomacy are always deceptive. Bülow's policy appeared to bear fruit with the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War. Germany could observe from afar and hope that Japan's alliance partner Britain would be drawn into hostilities with Russia. From this would emerge a constellation of powers which, it was thought, Germany could manipulate for the strengthening of its position in Europe and overseas.⁶³ Bülow wrote

⁵⁹ GP, Vol. 32, Nr. 11,668, Bethmann Hollweg-Kaiser, 23 December 1909.

⁶⁰ See Mehnert, 676.

⁶¹ PA-AA, Deutschland 132, Bd.11, Nr. A82, Jagow-Bernstorff, 16 August 1916.

⁶² On Japanese Pacific expansion see Mark R. Peattie, *Nan'yo: The Rise and Fall of the Japanese in Micronesia, 1885-1945* (Honolulu, 1987).

⁶³ See Winzen, 'Der Krieg in Bülow's Kalkül...' 171-2.

that its foothold in China ensured Germany's 'place in the sun in the Far East, on the shores of the Pacific which have a great future...'⁶⁴ It was to be the basis of ongoing German economic exploitation of Manchuria, and the springboard for expansion south should the future bring a division of China. Yet the underpinnings were rapidly changing. The whole political situation in Asia altered dramatically between 1895 and 1914. The region was experiencing increasing tension. Russia had been eliminated as a deciding military power, to be replaced by the United States through its acquisition of Hawaii and the Philippines, and its economic interests in China and the Asian region in general, assisted by the construction of the Panama Canal which had provided it with a significant entry point to the western hemisphere.

Germany's Asian policy foundered on the twin reefs of the pull of European concerns and defective foreign policy. The zigzag of German policy in the prewar years left the German naval presence in Asia vulnerable, and thus also the ability to have Japan regard it as a serious regional factor. As Admiral Erich Raeder later commented, real success in imprinting German policy in Asia could have been achieved only 'when the national leadership made it a task to create the indispensable foundation by a suitably earnest foreign policy'.⁶⁵ This was lacking. The limitations of German diplomacy and its inability to establish consistent priorities is clear. Germany found itself becoming isolated not only in Asia, but also in Europe. Already at the end of 1907, Wilhelm II's statements to Bülow indicate Germany's dependence on a strengthening American position in Asia as an instrument to neutralise Britain. Wilhelm II was increasingly frustrated at the impotence of German diplomacy and personally intervened to direct the drifting ship of state. This only exacerbated existing tendencies for defective coordination, contradictory actions, and diffuse decision making procedures within the leadership.



Japan out-manoeuvred its allies in 1914, obtaining not only the German leased territory and various economic interests such as mines and railways in China, but its Micronesian colonies as well. Clearly the main reason for Japan entering the War on the side of Germany's opponents was that this was the easiest path to realise its ambition to become the premier power in Asia and to reduce the European presence there. It needs to be kept in mind that Japan was following its own agenda. However, one cannot underestimate the result of the defects of German policy towards Japan: the intervention against annexation of the Liaotung Peninsula in 1895; the seizure of Kiautschou in 1897 and the formation of a sphere of influence in Shantung; support of Russia in the 1904-5 war; the attempt to bring the United States and China into coalition in 1907 to oppose the French-British-Russian entente which included Japan by virtue of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. All this placed Germany in the path of Japanese expansion. It was a delicate balancing act beyond the skill of Germany's policy makers and diplomats, who were not up to the subtleties of the

⁶⁴ Prince Bülow, *Imperial Germany* (London, 1914), 94.

⁶⁵ Erich Raeder, *Der Kreuzerkrieg in den ausländischen Gewässern*, Bd. 1, (Berlin, 1923), 146.

task of preempting Britain in relations with Japan. Policies lacking in foresight showed a complete misjudgement of long term trends in Asia.

Wilhelm II was fixated on diverting Russian attention and expansionist drives from Europe and this explained his fostering of Russian involvement in Asia. If it were involved in conflict there, France would be isolated. While the Kaiser's personal intervention in policy caused much heartburn in the Foreign Office, it had serious results, and his methods only served to highlight Germany's ulterior motives to the Japanese and Americans. As one German historian has put it, the regular necessity to counteract and recompense for the imperial *faux pas* reduced German diplomacy into a constant state of walking on eggshells.⁶⁶

Cultural factors and perceptions also had their place. Ishii drew a parallel with the legacies of Athens and Sparta: the ancient equivalents of Britain and Germany. The military state had left nothing concrete to posterity, while Athens, which fostered law and trade, had left a great heritage. The message is clear. One is drawn back to Gerhard Ritter's observation that the preponderance of military over political considerations had a particularly fateful result which effectively emasculated German diplomacy.⁶⁷ A considered and consistent foreign policy with appropriate foresight had been lacking throughout. By 1914 it was impossible for Germany to achieve any long-term success in Asia. In trying to play Japan and the United States against each other and in its duplicity and vacillation in its relations with both, the straddling of two stools only resulted in a disastrous fall between them.



The battle cruiser *Ibuki* participated in the hunt for the SMS Emden. She escorted a convoy of 10 troop transports carrying the main body of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, crossing the Tasman Sea with the British protected cruiser HMS Pyramus and armoured cruiser HMS Minotaur to Albany, Western Australia in November 1914. Together with the Australian light cruiser HMAS Sydney, *Ibuki* escorted the ANZACs, consisting of 20,000 men and 7,500 horses, across the Indian Ocean.



Armoured cruiser 'Nisshin' with captured German U-boats, Malta 1918, watercolor by Frank Henry Mason.

Armoured cruiser 'Nisshin' with captured

⁶⁶ Mehnert, 653-4.

⁶⁷ Gerhard Ritter, *The Sword and the Scepter. The Problem of Militarism and the Wilhelminian Empire, 1890-1914* (Coral Gables, 1970), Vol. II, 137.