



The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935: An Interim Judgment

D. C. Watt

The Journal of Modern History, Vol. 28, No. 2. (Jun., 1956), pp. 155-175.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-2801%28195606%2928%3A2%3C155%3ATANA01%3E2.0.CO%3B2-K>

The Journal of Modern History is currently published by The University of Chicago Press.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/ucpress.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE ANGLO-GERMAN NAVAL AGREEMENT OF 1935: AN INTERIM JUDGMENT¹

D. C. WATT

THE conclusion of the Anglo-German naval agreement was one of the most startling events of 1935. Hitherto Britain had seemed outwardly resolute against nascent German militarism. It was true that there had been signs of conciliatoriness in the Anglo-French communiqué of February 2, 1935² with its offer of an air pact to Ger-

many. But the events of March and April seemed to have dismissed all possibilities of Germany being offered a second chance. The white paper published in Britain at the beginning of March³ had discussed German rearmament in very strong terms and had used it as the justification, the *raison d'être*, for the proposed scheme of British rearmament. It had so incensed Hitler that he had postponed the visit of British cabinet ministers planned, on German invitation, for the end of the first week in March, on the grounds of his having a cold, an indisposition universally recognized as of purely diplomatic origin.⁴ His answer to this

years (London, 1954) (appeared when this paper was in an advanced stage of preparation; his account has been used to check that contained in this paper; in spite of some inaccuracies in detail and tendentiousness in argument it represents the fullest defense from the British side); and the second volume of memoirs of the first sea lord of the time, Admiral Sir Erle CHATFIELD, *It might happen again* (London, 1947) (the account he gives of the origins of the agreement does not tally entirely either with that of Templewood or with the picture given in the U.S. diplomatic documents, which must be considered the most reliable of all these sources [see n. 68, below]). Other sources are noted where used.

² See *Documents*, 1935, Part I, pp. 25–26.

³ Great Britain, *Parliamentary papers*, 1935, Vol. XIII (*Accounts and papers*, Vol. II), Cmd. 4827, Air army, session of Nov. 20, 1934–Oct. 25, 1935, pp. 803 ff. Statement relating to defense issued in connection with the house of commons debate on March 11, 1935.

⁴ Except by Simon, who told the U.S. chargé d'affaires in London on March 5 that he believed Hitler's illness was far more serious than the German communiqué allowed (*U.S. F.R.*, 1935, I, 194, memorandum by U.S. chargé d'affaires in London, of Mar. 5, 1935).

¹ The main sources used in this study are as follows: (1) the reports of American diplomats in Europe in: U.S., Department of state, *Foreign relations of the United States: diplomatic papers, 1934 and 1935* (Washington, in progress) (here cited as *U.S. F.R.*); (2) the documents cited in evidence at the Nuremberg trial, printed in the two series, *Nazi conspiracy and aggression* (Washington, 1946) (cited as *NCA*), and *Trial of the major war criminals* (Nuremberg, 1949) (documents cited *ND* and Nuremberg numbering, testimony cited *IMT* and date, as pagination differs in the German and English transcripts); (3) the annual publications of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Survey of international affairs and Documents on international affairs* (London, in progress) (cited as *Survey and Documents*); (4) various volumes of memoirs—on the German side, Erich KORDT, *Nicht aus den Akten* (Stuttgart, 1950), and Paul SCHMIDT, *Statist auf diplomatische Bühne* (Bonn, 1949) (both authors took part in the negotiations of June 4–18, 1935, in London, the one as liaison officer between the German foreign ministry and Ribbentrop's office, created in his capacity of foreign affairs expert on the staff of the deputy to the Fuehrer, Hess, the other as the official interpreter); for criticism of these memoirs see E. M. CARROLL in *American political science review*, Vol. XLVI, No. 2 (June 1952), and Sir Lewis NAMIER, *In the Nazi era* (London, 1953) (Kordt's friendship with Schmidt makes it dubious whether his book, published a year later than Schmidt's, can be regarded as altogether independent testimony); also, Baron VON GEYR VON SCHWEPENBURG, *The critical years* (London, 1952) (German military attaché in London 1933–37, acting air attaché, 1933–35, a Catholic); on the British side, the fullest account is contained in Viscount TEMPLEWOOD, *Nine troubled*

white paper appeared to be couched in more striking terms in the announcement on March 11 of the existence of a German air force, followed at a week's interval by the announcement of the reintroduction of conscription in Germany. The British ministers, Simon and Eden, refused to abandon the projected visit to Berlin but publicly emphasized its purely "informative" character, and Eden extended his tour to take in Moscow, Warsaw, Prague, and Vienna. Simon was known to have been disappointed by the meager results of his mission;⁵ and all signs of willingness on Britain's part to maintain a conciliatory attitude toward Germany's new and unconventionally brusque regime seemed to have disappeared with the creation of the "Stresa Front" of France, Italy, and Britain and the firmness with which German rearmament was censured in the resolutions adopted by these powers at the Stresa meeting on April 11,⁶ and the meeting of the League of Nations council at Geneva on April 18.⁷ Simon had admitted⁸ that Hitler had claimed a navy with a strength equal to 35 per cent of the combined navies of the British Commonwealth, but it was assumed, as the *Manchester Guardian's* diplomatic correspondent had prophesied even before Simon's visit, that he had met with a "courteous rebuff."⁹

Public opinion was more agitated by Hitler's far more startling claim that Germany, in direct contradiction to the estimate of German air strength given by

Baldwin to the house of commons a month before, had already formed a Luftwaffe equal in strength to the R.A.F. The speciousness of this claim was only to become apparent much later, and British interest was fanned by the violently exaggerated picture of German air armaments painted in the Rothermere press, a picture which was based mainly on information from Nazi or pro-Nazi sources.¹⁰ British public opinion, remembering Baldwin's dictum that "the bomber would always get through"¹¹ and the terrible pictures of the effects that air raids would have on London which so often formed the perorations to his most stirring speeches,¹² was far more sensitive to German air than sea power. Some German observers were in fact sufficiently impressed to be reminded of the role played, in the decade before World War I, in exacerbating Anglo-German relations by alarm at the growth of the German navy.¹³ Hitler later claimed¹⁴ that it was British anxiety aroused by the strength of the Luftwaffe that softened the bulldog breed sufficiently to make them conclude the Anglo-German naval agreement three months later.

¹⁰ In a letter of May 13, 1935 to the Marquess of Londonderry, Rothermere cited Hitler as his source. See the Marquess of LONDONDERRY, *Wings of destiny* (London, 1942), p. 129. Londonderry states Rothermere's source to have been Hungarian (p. 168).

¹¹ Speech to the commons on the air estimates, Nov. 10, 1932.

¹² On this see G. M. YOUNG, *Stanley Baldwin* (London, 1952), pp. 175, 206.

¹³ See on this point GEYR, chap. iii, *passim*. See also, at a later date, DIRKSEN's reports of June 10, 1938, and Sept. 1939, printed in U.S.S.R., Ministry of foreign affairs, *Documents and materials relating to the eve of the second world war* (Moscow, 1938), Vol. II, *The Dirksen papers*.

¹⁴ In his conversation of November 19, 1936 with the Austrian minister, Guido Schmitt. See Great Britain, *Documents on German foreign policy*, Ser. D (cited as *G.D.*), Vol. I (London, 1949), No. 181.

⁵ From Simon's statements in the commons, March 28 and April 9, 1935.

⁶ *Documents*, 1935, Part I, pp. 80-82.

⁷ *Documents*, 1935, Part I, p. 98.

⁸ In his statement of April 9, 1935.

⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, Mar. 22, 1935. The date is of interest as it shows that there was, among those in the know, the expectation that Hitler would raise naval demands at the Berlin conversations, prior to their occurrence.

On April 26, it was announced in London that German naval experts were expected to arrive in London during the course of the next ten days,¹⁵ but this announcement was overtaken again by the German statement on April 29 that the German navy was in the process of assembling submarines from parts manufactured during the previous year. In his speech of May 2 to the commons, the British premier, MacDonald, commenting on the forthcoming visit of these naval experts, announced that the invitation to them had been issued during Simon's Berlin visit, explained that the visit was to be postponed until after the Jubilee celebrations, and censured the German unilateral decision to build submarines.¹⁶

On May 21, Hitler renewed his naval claims. In a speech to the reichstag, he described them as "final and binding," and not, as the foreign press had supposed, merely the preliminary to further demands in the colonial sphere. "Germany," he declared, "has neither the intention nor the necessity nor the means to participate in any new naval rivalry."¹⁷ These claims or "offers" (it depended on the standpoint of the listener), comprised only one part of a nine-point program of contributions toward the eventual general pacification of Europe.

¹⁵ *Survey*, 1935, Part I, p. 180. It is interesting to note that, according to the announcement in the *Times*, M. Piétri, the French minister of marine, attended the wedding of the daughter of Sir Bolton Eyres Monsell, first lord of the admiralty, on April 30. It would seem unlikely that he returned to France without making inquiries or receiving assurances as to the topics to be discussed with these German experts. On June 18, Massigli told the counsellor of the U.S. embassy that France had understood these conversations to be "purely explanatory." *U.S. F.R.*, 1935, I, 165, Paris telegram 511 of June 18.

¹⁶ See *Documents*, 1935, Part I, p. 141.

¹⁷ Norman H. Baynes (*The speeches of Adolf Hitler, 1922-39* [London, 1941], II, 1218-46) prints the sections of this speech relevant to foreign policy.

But they were alone in being translated into fact. On June 4 Ribbentrop, newly created Hitler's special ambassador, arrived in London with a staff of naval and technical experts, though without any senior representatives of the German foreign ministry among its members.¹⁸ In its leading article of the same day the *Times*, welcoming Ribbentrop, made it clear that the German "offer" (to limit their navy voluntarily to 35 per cent of that of the Commonwealth), was hardly regarded as practical. "The ratio system," it wrote, "has broken down in other countries. It will serve no useful purpose to make an agreement with Germany that would upset proportionate strengths elsewhere." Nevertheless, Ribbentrop could rest assured that "there would be little difficulty insofar as Great Britain and Germany are concerned, at arriving at an understanding on naval programmes."¹⁹ On June 18, after protests from France, the agreement was signed establishing a ratio of 100:35, valid "for ever" between the fleets of the Commonwealth and the German navy.²⁰

In the diplomatic field the effects of this signature were immediate and violent. In France the French Right were angered in the extreme. Piétri, the French minister of marine, a future officeholder under Pétain,²¹ led the storm of protest in the French press with a speech

¹⁸ The delegation consisted of Ribbentrop, Rear-Admiral Schuster, Corvette Captain Kiderlen, Erich Kordt, Interpreter Schmidt, and Counsellor Woermann of the legal department of the German foreign ministry. The inclusion of Woermann should have been a warning to France and other powers that Germany meant business.

¹⁹ The *Times*, June 4, 1935.

²⁰ Even the *Times* admitted in its editorial of June 19, 1935 that the agreement was "far more definite and comprehensive" than at first contemplated, i.e., on the British side.

²¹ He was minister of communications in the first Pétain cabinet and subsequently Vichy ambassador in Spain.

at Brest on July 7.²² The naval committee of the French senate passed a resolution reserving to France "complete liberty of action in naval matters until the conclusion of new agreements."²³ According to some reports Laval had himself been contemplating an approach to Germany and was furious to find himself thus anticipated. Among his circle it was whispered that foreknowledge of the British intentions would have enabled him to get in first with a military agreement with Germany.²⁴ The effects of the conclusion of the agreement upon the Stresa Front (upon which the French Right had set great store, both as a military restraint upon Germany and as a league of conservative governments) were particularly obnoxious to them; and their resentment of the British move combined easily with the cynicisms and suspicions to be aroused in them by the subsequent crusade of British public opinion against Italy which was to develop in the latter half of the year.²⁵

The effect upon Italian policy was less

²² For extracts see *Documents*, 1935, Part I, pp. 153-54.

²³ Text in *Survey*, 1935, Part I, p. 187. Apparently the subsequent British proposal that the French send naval experts to London to discuss the Anglo-German naval agreement, met with a curt refusal (*U.S. F.R.*, 1935, I, 74, Hull to U.S. embassy in London, citing Paris telegram 524 of June 22, 1935).

²⁴ See Alexander WORTH, *The destiny of France* (London, 1938), p. 172. Templewood (pp. 144, 146) makes Laval much more complaisant.

²⁵ See contemporary evidence in *Survey*, 1935, Part I, pp. 188-89. For a typical French reaction see René la BRUYÈRE, "Les accords navals anglo-allemands" in *Revue des deux mondes*, July 15, 1935, pp. 356-64. André GIRAUD (Pertinax), "France and the Anglo-German naval treaty" in *Foreign affairs*, Vol. XIV, No. 1 (October 1935), 51-61. On the more general development of opinion on the French Right toward Italy see C. A. MICAUD, *The French Right and Nazi Germany* (Durham, N.C., 1944), pp. 56-58. The British had added insult to injury by signing the agreement on the anniversary of Waterloo.

obvious but possibly more serious. The desertion by Britain of the Stresa Front and the concern showed by both Britain and France for the revival of German sea power in the North Sea cleared Italy of the only two restraints on her action against Abyssinia; the British navy would be distracted at least by the rising strength of the German fleet,²⁶ and France, now bereft of her ally against Germany, would hardly dare but rely on her only remaining friend, still less alienate the one power that, under Locarno, was both her guarantor against German action in the Rhineland and her protector against German action in Austria. These considerations made inevitably useless Eden's visit to Rome at the end of June to explain—or rather to explain away—the agreement.

There is a further point here. Lord Perth, then Sir Eric Drummond, ambassador to Italy, subsequently affirmed²⁷ that the subject of Abyssinia was not raised at Stresa, his efforts to secure its discussion being suppressed by the British delegation in order to avoid compromising the success of the conference. For full confirmation on these points we must await the publication of the British and Italian state documents. But if, as Lord Perth makes it appear, the subject of

²⁶ Churchill had pounced on this obvious point in his speech of July 22, 1935 to the commons, reprinted in Winston S. CHURCHILL, *The gathering storm* (London, 1947), p. 110. The Italians could not have anticipated the degree to which the admiralty would denude all other naval stations to reinforce the Mediterranean in September 1935. It could be argued that the freedom of the admiralty to take this course was one of the results of the agreement. But such freedom was only operative in the short run, as the German navy was useless against any adversary other than England. It is to the credit of apologists for the agreement that this argument has so far not been advanced.

²⁷ In a letter to the London weekly, *The Spectator*, Mar. 22, 1943.

Italian designs on Abyssinia was not firmly broached to Mussolini, he may well have derived from this the impression that, whatever English statesmen might say in public, they were in private and in policy complaisant toward treaty-breaking by major powers.²⁸ However that may be, Eden's communications, whether remonstrances on Italy's policy toward Abyssinia or apologetics for the naval agreement, were coldly received, and Mussolini continued his Abyssinian designs. To the states of central Europe, the agreement was the greatest success yet achieved by Nazi Germany and advertised to all the growth of a new power factor nearer home than France or Italy, with which they would have to come to terms.²⁹ Litvinov for Soviet Russia used very strong language in conversation with the United States ambassador in Moscow, Bullitt, referring to the British as blacklegs. In his eyes, its most important consequence was the need for Britain to concentrate her naval forces in the North Sea and to abandon any possibility of influencing Japan by sending a fleet to Singapore. He

²⁸ According to Litvinov, he, Laval, and Eden had suggested to Mussolini, at Geneva (in April), that he should not involve Italy deeply in Abyssinia. Mussolini replied that Italy had not any intention of opposing Germany in Austria unless he should receive full support from Britain and France. Mussolini said also that Germany would not be ready to attack anyone before the end of 1937 and that long before Germany should be in a condition to attack, Italy would have Abyssinia firmly in her hands (*U.S. F.R.*, 1935, I, 283-85, as reported by Bullitt, Moscow telegram 214 of May 29, 1935). This kind of conversation, if the report is true, was surely not sufficient to restrain Mussolini in his Abyssinian adventure.

²⁹ See the *Times*, Vienna dispatch, June 20, 1935. The Latvian government apparently interpreted it as a sign of British disinterest in eastern Europe and sounded Estonia on the plan of concluding a mutual assistance pact with Russia under the influence of apprehensions that Britain had "deserted Latvia" (*U.S. F.R.*, 1935, I, 304-5). Memorandum of July 18, 1935 by U.S. chargé d'affaires in Latvia.

deduced correctly that the cabinet proposed to cultivate much closer and friendlier relations with Hitler's Germany.³⁰ In Japanese eyes the agreement amounted to a tacit alliance, and (according to Kordt), in Hitler's first flush of enthusiasm after the diplomatic isolation of the previous three months, that was his reaction also.³¹

The course of events as so far sketched represents, except in a few details, the information and the picture available to contemporary public opinion.³² It seemed clear that a considerable change in direction had taken place in British policy, but the motives and reasons for this change remained obscure and its implications were only realized by degrees. Today the conclusion of the agreement appears as the first step, taken perhaps unintentionally, in the rapprochement between the British cabinet and the not yet completely Nazified government of Germany, a rapprochement that was to last nearly as long as the agreement itself. Full analysis of the motives of the two participants must wait until the relevant documents on both sides have been published. Nevertheless there is enough material now available to make a first and interim assessment possible, to indicate which questions may still be considered open and which closed.

On the German side the evidence as to long-term motives is fairly full. For Hitler the conclusion of the agreement represented the realization of a policy that must have been conceived during his broodings after the failure of the 1923

³⁰ Bullitt's report of June 28, *U.S. F.R.*, 1935, I, 168.

³¹ KORDT, p. 109.

³² From press sources Leopold Schwarzschild built up an extraordinarily accurate picture of the negotiations in an article in the emigré German Socialist periodical, published in Paris, *Das neue Tagebuch*, No. 26, Vol. III, June 29, 1935.

Putsch if not earlier. His studies of Germany's defeat had convinced him that it was first and foremost due to the inclusion of England among Germany's opponents, an inclusion motivated, according to the shallow *realpolitische* analysis which was all his political mind could attain, by the Imperial stupidity of involving Britain deliberately in a naval race. Consequently, in his program for world domination, England was to be placated by the sacrifice of the German fleet into leaving Germany a free hand for the moral and political conquest of Europe.³³

In February 1933, at Hitler's first interview after coming to power with Admiral Raeder, commander-in-chief of the German navy and head of the *Marineleitung* (the section of the German ministry of defense corresponding to the admiralty),³⁴ he had announced his intention of seeking a naval agreement with England on a ratio basis.³⁵ In January 1935 he had broached the subject to Lord Allen of Hurtwood,³⁶ a former Labor peer and a close friend of MacDonald, who seems from his reported words to have been on some kind of goodwill mission from MacDonald to Hitler

³³ See A. HITLER, *Mein Kampf* (unexpurgated translation; London, 1939), pp. 128–29.

³⁴ He was *Chef der Marineleitung* until the reorganization of the ministry of defense and its change of title to the ministry of war, in March 1935, consequent on the German proclamation of conscription. Thereafter his title was *Oberbefehlshaber der Marine*. The two positions and responsibilities appear to have been identical.

³⁵ See Raeder's testimony of May 16, 1946, at Nuremberg. *IMT*, Vol. XIV; see also n. 1 at end.

³⁶ For the German foreign ministry record of this conversation see *Deutschland-England, 1933–39, die Dokumente der deutschen Friedenswillens*, ed. F. BERBER (Essen, 1940), pp. 47–50. According to the *Daily Telegraph*, January 28, 1935, Lord Allen described his visit as "purely unofficial." He also commented upon the degree and pace of German rearmament.

to sound the latter's view on disarmament. To Hurtwood, Hitler disguised the bait as part of a general agreement on armaments between Germany and Britain, to which after its conclusion Italy might accede, and after Italy the other smaller powers of the world. He repeated his offer to the British ambassador in Berlin just before Simon's visit to Berlin³⁷ in March. Once the agreement was conceded, it was more or less faithfully observed until its denunciation in April 1939. And the attempt to convict Raeder at Nuremberg of breaches of its provisions failed in spite of the defendant's obvious antipathy, as an officer of the old Imperial German Navy, to the one country against which a German fleet had any validity. During the Simon-Eden visit in March, as has been seen, Hitler had again claimed a navy one-third as strong as those of the British Commonwealth and had even, according to the then French ambassador, François-Poncet,³⁸ pledged himself not to exceed this level.

For Hitler, the naval agreement, together with the German-Polish non-aggression pact of 1934, was to be the much-invoked proof of his will for peace and of his ability to keep his word, proof employed most notably whenever these two qualities were, or were likely to be, called into question. These two agreements marked the high tide of his rapprochement with the remainder of

³⁷ *U.S. F.R.*, 1935, I, 66, London telegram 121 of Mar. 19, 1935.

³⁸ A. FRANÇOIS-PONCET, *The fateful years* (London, 1947). I am inclined to ignore Ambassador Dodd's story (see *Ambassador Dodd's diary* [London, 1941], entry of June 15, 1935) that Sir Eric Phipps, the British ambassador, told him that in April 1935 Hitler had demanded equality with the Royal Navy. Dodd probably misunderstood the German claim for *Gleichberechtigung* as a claim for equality, whereas a more accurate translation would be "equality at law."

Europe. In the black and terrible history of the misunderstandings and persecutions his Germany had suffered at the hands of its European neighbors and rivals, the dates of these agreements were idyllic days to which he was to revert again and again as suspicion of Germany's motives returned. In his speech to the reichstag on the day he marched into the Rhineland,³⁹ in his two speeches during the crisis of September 1938 (at the Nuremberg Parteitag on September 12,⁴⁰ and at the Sportpalast on September 26⁴¹), and in the Anglo-German declaration which terminated the events of Munich (September 30, 1938)⁴² due and fitting genuflection was made to the Hitlerian will for peace enshrined in the naval agreement. Whenever Englishmen and Poles began to question his motives in public and animadvert to his preference for force rather than negotiation as the solvent for international problems, he had in these agreements an easy answer.⁴³ And if one is rash enough to believe him, it was only the obvious refusal by Poland and Britain in April 1939 to continue to reciprocate his will for peace that led Hitler, with a fine disregard for his own pledges embodied in the wording of the documents, to denounce them both on the same day, April 28, 1939.⁴⁴ Hitler, unlike his fellow Germans,

who are often suspected of being over-legal in their approach to these matters, preferred the spirit of an agreement to its letter.

On the British side there were, in theory, three types of reasoning likely to have persuaded the cabinet into the conclusion of the agreement. Firstly, that it was necessary in view of current developments in the international situation; secondly, that its conclusion would strengthen the government's hand in domestic politics; or, thirdly, that it was necessary for purposes of defense. It seems obvious that the effects of the conclusion of the Agreement on the diplomatic side were not properly considered beforehand, nor were they welcome afterward. Its reception by world opinion was in fact a matter of some surprise and aroused much indignation among those who had originated it.

It is true that European opinion misjudged the degree of hostility to Nazi Germany current in Britain in the summer of 1935. In 1934 the Roehm *Putsch*, the murder of Dolfuss, and the suspension of transfer on the Dawes and Young loans had driven British opinion to extremes of contempt and suspicion. But by the spring of 1935 a more complex pattern had set in, which was to persist until 1938. Public opinion in general is a difficult subject for analysis. But the narrower field of the variations in opinion among those who, in Lord Beveridge's phrase, wield "power and influence," is easier to analyze and yields more significant results.

Hostility to Nazi Germany persisted only among the political opposition and the small band of right-wing Conservatives for whom 1914 was still a living memory. Among the main body of Conservative supporters there were three sources of pro-German sympathies. The

³⁹ BAYNES, p. 1285.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1492.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1514.

⁴² *G.D.*, Ser. D, Vol. II, Doc. No. 676.

⁴³ See his speech in the Bürgerbräu Keller at Munich, Nov. 8, 1938, in BAYNES, p. 1557.

⁴⁴ Cf. Great Britain, *Parliamentary papers, 1939*, Vol. XXVII (*Accounts and papers*, Vol. XII), Cmd. 6106, Misc. No. 9, "Documents concerning the outbreak of hostilities between Great Britain and Germany on September 3, 1939" (commonly known as the British blue book), pp. 24-27 and 51-53, where extracts from Hitler's speech to the reichstag of that day are also printed.

authoritarian element always present in the British Conservative party welcomed the first stable, anti-Bolshevist government in central Europe. The members of the fighting services, especially the soldiers⁴⁵ and those with ties of family business or education with prewar Germany, fell easy victims to the arguments of the German nationalists on the system of inequality set up at Versailles.

But there was a third and more interesting group who succumbed to a more truly Nazi approach. To these the principal attraction of the Nazi leaders was their solution of the unemployment problem and their restoration, so it seemed, of the middle-class virtues and moralities in Germany. In this group there was a considerable dissatisfaction with the decline in morality they claimed to see in Britain. They were drawn to study the new German worship of manliness, the "volunteer" labor services, the cheap housing schemes, the "Strength through Joy" movement. In contrast to their more Tory comrades, it was the revolutionary element in nazism which attracted them, especially as this revolution had, it seemed, been carried through without damage to the traditional class structure of Germany. It is this element that brought Hitler so oddly assorted a collection of visitors from Britain in the years that followed.⁴⁶ Moreover, it was still possible to argue at this stage that resistance to German demands would only strengthen the extremist elements in nazism. To the foreign eye, the "moderate" German nationalists, who still controlled the four portfolios of defense,

finance, economics, and foreign affairs, seemed well in control of the extremists. Himmler was still an obscure figure in the background. Hess seemed a harmless crank, Goering an amiable if unstable rogue. The full degree to which Conservative opinion had been won over by German arguments was only to appear on the editorial pages of the *Times* during the Rhineland crisis.⁴⁷

This atmosphere of opinion among those from whom the cabinet, unofficially, asked advice and with whom its members would naturally discuss the issues of the day, was reinforced by two much stronger forces of pressure. The first of these arose from the parlous state of Britain's armed forces in the early thirties, the second from the need of obtaining in the international field some agreement capable of being represented to the electorate as a success for disarmament. Disarmament was a subject on which the National government at this date was almost morbidly sensitive.

After their overwhelming victory in 1931, it was only to be expected that the pendulum of electoral approval would swing against the National government.

⁴⁶ They included Lloyd George, Halifax, George Lansdowne, and the Duke of Windsor, who as Prince of Wales welcomed a proposal for a visit to Germany by the British Legion in a speech to the British Legion annual conference on June 10, 1935, "I feel there could be no more suitable body . . . to stretch forth the hand of friendship to the Germans than we ex-servicemen who fought them in the war and have now forgotten all about that" (London *Daily Telegraph*, June 11, 1935). For other evidence on the development of this kind of approach see Thomas JONES, *A diary with letters* (London, 1954).

⁴⁷ It was led by the Marquess of Londonderry, minister for air in the last MacDonalld cabinet, who had most of the arguments from Goering on a visit to Germany in January 1936. See the Marquess of LONDONDERRY, *Germany and ourselves* (London, 1938), pp. 85 ff. Londonderry was, however, an early deserter from the ranks of the appeasers. See *G.D.*, Ser. D, Vol. I, No. 104.

⁴⁵ See GEYR, pp. 34, 56. *The history of "The Times,"* Vol. IV, Part II (London, 1952), p. 893. The air ministry, by contrast, remained unmoved by service contacts (Geyr found them "cold and distant"), but certain officers fell victim, of all things, to the peculiar guff put out by Rosenberg's Nazi foreign policy office (see *ND*, PS-003).

But the line of attack chosen by the Labor opposition, then at its least responsible and most idealistic, led by the pacifist Lansbury, was one to which a Conservative-dominated coalition was peculiarly vulnerable. The famous East Fulham by-election was fought purely on the disarmament issue a month after the German withdrawal from the disarmament conference and the League of Nations. It converted a government majority of 14,000 to a Labor majority of 4,000 and was only one in a series of lost elections or greatly reduced governmental majorities ending in November 1934 with the reduction of the government's majority at East Putney from 21,000 to 2,000. An estimate prepared for the editor of the *Times* gave Labor gains at a hypothetical general election at 140-50 seats.⁴⁸ Even assuming that the Labor seats were won from Conservatives and that the National government was entirely deserted by its National, Liberal, and National Labor allies, this would still have left the Conservatives with a small working majority. But it seemed difficult to accept the prospect of such losses, especially under so divided and ineffectual a leadership as that provided by MacDonald and Baldwin. Moreover at this time preparations were going on for the great League of Nations union peace ballot. In the Market Harborough by-election where the local Conservative party organization had been wise enough to cooperate in these preparations the National candidate had doubled the governmental majority. The key to success in the next general election would obviously be an international triumph in the field of disarmament.

The cabinet's electoral troubles were reinforced by their very real anxieties on

⁴⁸ *The history of "The Times,"* Vol. IV, Part II, p. 889.

the state of Britain's defenses. By the beginning of 1933, treasury pressure for economies over the previous decade⁴⁹ and the "revolving" operation of the "ten years rule"—adjusting expenditure on the armed forces according to an assumed ten years future of peace, instituted by Churchill in 1928 and not stopped until 1932⁵⁰—had reduced these defenses to the shadow of a shadow—the more so, as much current expenditure had been deferred during the financial crisis of 1931 to achieve that balancing of the budget which was regarded as the *sine qua non* for the flow of foreign funds back to the Bank of England.⁵¹ In the frantic effort to repair this position following the investigations of the Defense Requirements Committee which was set up in the autumn of 1933, the first consideration was the restoration of British sea power. The political strength of the admiralty, representing the "senior service" and the traditional mainstay of Britain's existence in war, a position fully recognized by MacDonald,⁵² was increased by the very strong personality of the senior member of the civil service and permanent undersecretary to the treasury, Sir Warren Fisher. The degree to which Fisher was empowered to interfere and the degree to which he did interfere in the day-to-day formation of policy, in those interministerial and interdepartmental conversations without which neither the basis of decision nor the decisions of government themselves, nor

⁴⁹ On this see CHATFIELD, *passim*.

⁵⁰ See Lord Hankey's letters to the *Times*, Nov. 5 and 11, 1948.

⁵¹ Harold NICOLSON, *King George the Fifth, his life and reign* (London, 1952), pp. 462-63; CHATFIELD, p. 112.

⁵² This was as much a source of pride to the admiralty as of anxiety to the air ministry (see CHATFIELD, pp. 65, 66, 70, and LONDONDERRY, *Wings of destiny*, p. 94).

their implementation can occur, is a matter for considerable dispute. His position was based on the control of promotion throughout the civil service (which then included the diplomatic service), established by a treasury minute of 1919, which was signed by Sir Austen Chamberlain then chancellor of the exchequer. British diplomats in this period have viewed Fisher's activities with the gravest of suspicion,⁵³ seeing in him a "grey eminence," concerned to counteract their urgent reports on the dangers of a reascent and rearming Germany, unjustly personifying in Fisher that more general attitude of favor toward Nazi Germany's aspirations analyzed above. Of Sir Warren's views on Germany there is as yet no direct evidence. He was, however, a fanatical advocate of British rearmament.⁵⁴ In the words of his friend and protégé, Sir James Grigg, then in India, he was re-

⁵³ The case has been very strongly stated (overstated?) in Sir Walford SELBY's *Diplomatic twilight* (London, 1953). See also, however, F. ASHTON-GWATKIN, *The British foreign service* (Syracuse, N.Y., n.d.), pp. 26-27, and Lord Perth's more general inquiries in a house of lords debate of November 25 and 26, 1942 (Great Britain, 5 *Parliamentary debates*, CXXV [1942], 224-32). Lord Hankey's and Lord Geddes' remarks in the same debate are of interest (*ibid.*, cols. 268, 269, and 289 ff.). Lord Tyrrell (*ibid.*, col. 275) denied that Fisher had ever tried to interfere in policy during his period at the Foreign Office. In 1953 Selby's comments on the conduct of foreign office officials before 1939 were officially stated to be untrue (5 *Parliamentary debates*, DXVI [1953], 151-52). On the question of Fisher's activities the statement did not comment. Templewood (p. 137) states that Fisher never intervened. Fisher himself always regarded the foreign office as the one department least amenable to his influence.

⁵⁴ Fisher has been stated to be the signatory of the very strong letter to Baldwin on the occasion of the government white paper of March 4, 1935 on German rearmament (in G. M. YOUNG, p. 193). See also: Young (p. 199) for Fisher's concern at the state of British defenses and Baldwin's violent comments; Templewood (pp. 137-38); and Mottistone's remarks in the 1942 debate in the house of lords (5 *Parliamentary debates*, CXXV [1942], 297).

ported to have come to regard himself as "a kind of Minister without Portfolio alas, without responsibility to Parliament."⁵⁵ Both Chatfield and his deputy, Admiral Sir William James, lay great stress on his interest in naval affairs.⁵⁶ And James shows him adjudicating in a dispute between James and Craigie, the foreign office naval expert, during the preliminaries to the London Naval Conference of 1936.⁵⁷ Whatever Fisher's influence it was naturally strengthened by the position of his political chief, Neville Chamberlain, as chancellor of the exchequer, heir apparent to the Conservative party, and the strongest personality in the cabinet.

In the political climate of 1934-35, there were two possible and complementary means of increasing the strength of Britain's armed forces: first, to raise her absolute strength; second, to raise her strength relative to that of possible enemies. The first demanded a policy of rearmament to be backed by as large a budget as public opinion would stand; the second, the use of the *mystique*, the international appeal of the conception of "limitation of armaments," to make each growth in British strength doubly valid by limiting the level of armaments abroad.

The biggest threat to such a policy seemed the prospect of a new armaments race on the lines of that which had poi-

⁵⁵ P. J. GRIGG, *Prejudice and judgment* (London, 1948), p. 53.

⁵⁶ CHATFIELD, p. 79: "The Admiralty was fortunate in having in Sir Warren Fisher one of those great Civil Servants, able indeed anxious to take a far higher view of defence than a merely financial one."

⁵⁷ Admiral Sir William JAMES, *The sky was always blue* (London, 1951), p. 185. "It was to him and not to the Foreign Secretary that Craigie had mentioned our little difference." Fisher was a member of the British delegation to the 1936 Naval Conference.

soned Anglo-German relations before 1914,⁵⁸ a race in the size as well as the number of the individual fleet units. If agreed limitations on the size, displacement, and gun caliber of each category of warship could be reached, a given expenditure would produce more units. The admiralty was also under strong pressure from quasi-technical quarters⁵⁹ outside the service to reduce the size of the largest ships which were allegedly useless in the face of air attack. Naval policy, therefore, came to work for international agreement to limit size and number of the ships constructed.⁶⁰

At this date the problem of German naval rearmament was only one among many anxieties for the British admiralty. For fifteen years the strengths of the main naval powers had been regulated by the 5:5:3:1.75 relationship set up by the Washington Naval Conference of 1922 for the capital ship class.⁶¹ American agreement for the extension of this ratio to cover the cruiser class had only been secured at the London Naval Conference of 1930 by the cutting of British cruiser strengths to well below the safety level. France and Italy had refused to accept such an extension and the Japanese nego-

tiators were regarded by national opinion as having been tricked into acceptance.

With the rise of the militarist party in Japan following the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the Japanese negotiators had come to the preparatory naval conversations called by Britain in 1934 to make ready for the renewal or alteration of the 1922 treaty which was due to expire in 1936, determined to accept nothing short of parity with the fleet strengths of Britain and the United States. Failing to secure immediate acceptance of their point, they had announced on December 29, 1934 their intention of entirely abandoning the ratio system or any other system of naval limitation not common to all naval powers.⁶² The United States had answered by embarking on a large program of naval expansion. Britain was faced with the imminent loss of the prime position of British sea power, the stultification of her sacrifices in 1930, and the opening of a naval race in which her opponents had a long start. Moreover twelve out of the fifteen battleships left to her under the 1922 treaty were in need of replacement.⁶³ The extreme inadequacies of the navy in face of two potential enemies as widely separated as Japan and Italy were only to be revealed, and then only to those in the know, during the war scare of September 1935, together with the degree to which lack of money had rendered such ships as were available helpless for lack of the more obviously vital naval stores.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ By a remarkable coincidence Professor Woodward's masterly account of the role played by naval competition in exacerbating prewar Anglo-German relations, *Great Britain and the German navy*, appeared in the summer of 1935. He summarized his findings in two signed articles in the *Times*, May 9 and 10, 1935.

⁵⁹ E.g., Admiral Sir Herbert RICHMOND, *Sea power in the modern world* (London, 1934). The political use of Richmond's arguments against the admiralty is instanced in CHATFIELD, pp. 60 and 70.

⁶⁰ The United States Navy appears to have followed a similar line, though without proposing quite such drastic revisions to size as the British. See *U.S. F.R.*, 1934, I, 262, London telegram 336 of June 19, 1934.

⁶¹ The relationship allowed Britain and the United States 15 battleships each, Japan 9, and France and Italy 5 each.

⁶² The course of negotiations during 1934 may be traced in *U.S. F.R.*, 1934, I.

⁶³ CHATFIELD, p. 67. It would be interesting to discover what proportion of the terrible losses suffered by the Royal Navy during the war resulted from the high proportion of veteran ships, especially in the larger classes of warships, the navy was forced to employ.

⁶⁴ These difficulties are given in horrifying detail in Lt. Commander EDWARDS, *The grey diplomats*

Faced with these difficulties, the admiralty planned to abandon the system of limitation by ratios in view of its international unpopularity. Indeed the first lord of the admiralty proclaimed the abandonment of this system a month after the conclusion of the Anglo-German naval agreement which embodied it.⁶⁵ Their new scheme was based on the idea that there were three sources of naval competition: first, rivalry in the number of ships built, second, sudden evolution of new types (as in the appearance of the "dreadnought" class in 1906); third, secret construction. Japanese insistence on parity had spoiled any chance of avoiding competition arising from the first heading. But by reaching agreed limits in displacement and gun caliber for each category of warships and prohibiting the building of types outside these categories, it was hoped to avoid the appearance of new superbattleships or supercruisers. And to avoid the third source of naval competition, an elaborate exchange of information on building pro-

(London, 1938), chap. xii. The author apparently served during 1935 with the Mediterranean fleet. But cf. Viscount CUNNINGHAM of Hyndhope, *A sailor's odyssey* (London, 1951), pp. 173-74. The chief of staff's assessment of the situation in October 1935 contained a very pessimistic appreciation of the Mediterranean fleet's capacity to deal with the Italians. Sir William Fisher, commander-in-chief sent a signal to London saying that he disagreed with every word of "this pusillanimous document. The Mediterranean fleet is by no means as powerless as here set out." Chatfield (p. 89), states that the admiralty was anxious as to the effect of losses among the older battleships in a Mediterranean war on the British position in the Far East.

⁶⁵ Statement to the house of commons, July 22, 1935. In elucidatory statements to the U.S. naval attaché, the admiralty admitted that this was the first clear public statement that the ratio principle had been abandoned. It was, however, intended to reach substantially the same relations in strength by asking for announced programs of the new construction of each naval power (*U.S. F.R.*, 1935, I, 81-82, London telegram 333 of July 25, 1935).

grams was proposed, which, it was hoped, would lead to a growth of international confidence and perhaps to a mutual downward revision of these programs at a later date.⁶⁶ The admiralty proposed to advance this plan at the forthcoming naval conference of the Washington powers, and it seems to have been hoped that Germany could be induced to support it at the world conference on naval disarmament, which, it was hoped, would follow that of the Washington powers.

Simon went to Berlin therefore with the express intention of inviting German naval experts to come to London and of dissuading Hitler from pinning his naval plans to a ratio system.⁶⁷ Craigie had in fact communicated the cabinet's intention of opening naval discussions with the Germans to the American ambassador in London on March 1, before the German proclamation of their abandonment of the disarmament clauses of Versailles.⁶⁸ The threat of a change in the balance of sea power with the United States and an increasingly bellicose Japan must have overridden in his mind and those of his colleagues any consideration of the European balance of power. MacDonald's speech of May 2, 1935, announcing the visit of German naval rep-

⁶⁶ See Sir Robert CRAIGIE, *Behind the Japanese mask* (London, n.d.), p. 15.

⁶⁷ *U.S. F.R.*, 1935, I, 66-67, London telegram 121 of Mar. 19, 1935. Templewood (p. 141), states that Hitler was invited to send a delegation to discuss the details of a formal agreement. If this was so, which seems unlikely, it was concealed from both the Americans and the French.

⁶⁸ *U.S. F.R.*, 1935, III, 544, London telegram 84 of Mar. 1, 1935. These statements completely invalidate the picture of the origins of the agreement given by Chatfield (pp. 73-77), and James, who write as if the British government decided to negotiate with Hitler only after the news of German submarine construction and Hitler's speech of May 21, 1935, and the decision was taken as a result of anxieties on the scope of German naval rearmament.

representatives, linked it definitely with the bilateral naval conversations of 1934 with the Washington signatories. If the thought of a naval agreement with Germany crossed Simon's mind it was more probably one on the tactics to be followed at the general naval conference as a means of controlling the new factor of German sea power he proposed to introduce into an already sufficiently complicated situation.

New German naval construction was less liable to react directly on public opinion and memories of the decade before World War I than on French naval construction and so, via Italian reaction, on to British strategic requirements in the Mediterranean.⁶⁹ France had already showed her sensitivity to German naval construction by the promptness with which the construction of the German "pocket battleships" had been answered by the laying down of the two battle cruisers of the "Dunquerque" class. Excessive German construction by French standards clearly introduced the possibility of a naval race between the continental powers into the already existing potentialities of the new Japanese and American construction. It was to this

⁶⁹ Templewood states (p. 140), that when Britain asked the other four naval powers, the United States, Japan, France, and Italy, for their preliminary views as to the size of fleets they all declared they must know more of the German program before they could answer. "It was to obtain this information that Simon was authorised by the Cabinet to raise the question of naval construction with Hitler." This is highly improbable. Hull told Bullitt on May 7 that the U.S. interest in German naval rearmament was primarily indirect, first concern being with relations in the Pacific (*U.S. F.R.*, 1935, I, 162, 163, telegram 95 to Moscow of May 7, 1935). The U.S. diplomatic documents contain no evidence of such inquiries having been addressed by Britain to the United States or the other countries. France was opposed in principle to allowing German naval rearmament. In any case the matter of size of fleets was discussed in considerable detail in 1934 before the question of German naval rearmament became acute.

extent important to the admiralty to bring German naval construction under control and to enlist German support at the forthcoming conferences, as success there was essential from the strategic point of view, while providing everything that could be desired to strengthen the government's electoral position.

It is in this light that the *Times'* leader of June 4, cited above, welcoming Ribbentrop's arrival in London must be read. And it was a plan of this nature that was, according to Kordt,⁷⁰ advanced by Sir John Simon at the opening meeting with Ribbentrop on June 4. Kordt took it as meaning the abandonment of Hitler's plan for a purely bilateral relationship based on a 35 per cent ratio, though it is possible to interpret his record of Simon's subsequent remarks to imply that some kind of declaration recognizing the German claim might be made at the end of the negotiations.

This situation was rudely altered by Ribbentrop's reply. Germany could enter into no discussion of any scheme of limitation until Britain had recognized the 35 per cent ratio relationship. If Britain did not accept this demand there was, in Ribbentrop's view, no useful purpose to be served by continuing the discussions. Simon twice attempted to dissuade Ribbentrop from pressing this demand, partaking as it did so much of the nature of an ultimatum. Ribbentrop merely repeated his original statement: no discussion, no negotiation on any details until the German demand was accepted, the German offer—for so it was presented—recognized. Simon, so it is said, went red with anger, declared that such a demand belonged to the end of negotiations, not to their beginning, that its presentation at that moment was neither correct nor acceptable, pleaded another engagement,

⁷⁰ KORDT, p. 104.

and left the room. Both Kordt and Schmidt assumed that the negotiations were to be considered at an end. Sir Robert Craigie, the single foreign office representative present, seems to have attempted to carry the meeting a stage further but, finding Ribbentrop inflexible, declared that an entirely new situation had arisen, and that he must adjourn the session for new instructions from his government. The meeting was duly adjourned without a date for its reassembly being mentioned.⁷¹

The decision to accept the German demand was taken, according to Sir Bolton Eyres Monsell, "after a very careful analysis of the effects of the proposal,"⁷² between the afternoon of June 4 and the evening of June 5, when it was, according to Kordt,⁷³ communicated to the German delegation by Sir Robert Craigie. It was taken presumably at the cabinet meeting announced in the *Times* of June 6 as having occurred the previous afternoon. It was, admittedly, taken on admiralty advice.⁷⁴ Immediately after the decision was made, Sir Samuel Hoare replaced Simon as foreign secretary, and Baldwin replaced MacDonald as premier.⁷⁵ This change had been brewing for some time. It is difficult at the time of writing to extract any coherent idea of the course of development which led to this change of offices, from the few and inadequate memoirs by and of the rele-

vant statesmen that have so far appeared, nor is this the place for such an attempt. But the picture they present is relevant to the purpose of this essay in three points. Agreement seems to have prevailed on the universal disastrousness of Simon's tenure of the foreign office, on the rapidly mounting dissatisfaction within the Conservative party with both MacDonald and Baldwin, and on the need for young and fresh blood in office. The scattered references made to the matter by Viscount Simon in his memoirs⁷⁶ give the impression that Baldwin was to take the premiership to retrieve his own very precarious position, while MacDonald was to step down. His action had to appear a voluntary one, but the references in G. M. Young's biography of Baldwin⁷⁷ make it appear that what can only be described as a peculiarly despicable maneuver was employed to get rid of the "incubus." The extracts from Chamberlain's diary printed by Keith Feiling⁷⁸ and his comments on them suggest that the idea of removing both Baldwin and MacDonald was under discus-

⁷⁰ Hoare kissed hands, on the afternoon of June 7. The account he gives of his persuading the cabinet to sign the agreement in a cabinet meeting of June 11 is very difficult to accept. If there was a cabinet meeting on June 11 it was not announced in the *Times*, as is the usual custom. Moreover Ribbentrop had already been informed of the British intention to conclude the agreement, and he had left for Germany on June 8, not returning until the talks, broken off for the Whitsun holiday, were resumed on June 14.

⁷⁶ See, for example, Viscount SIMON, *Retrospect* (London, 1952), p. 205.

⁷⁷ G. M. YOUNG, *Baldwin*, p. 186. "It had to be very delicately hinted to MacDonald that by clinging to office he was inviting a revolt that might fatally harm his son's career." According to Snowden's letter to F. W. Jowett of January 1, 1936 (see Fenner BROCKWAY, *Socialism over sixty years* [London, 1946], p. 322), MacDonald insisted that his son should have a seat in the cabinet as a condition of his resigning the premiership.

⁷⁸ Keith FEILING, *Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London, 1946), pp. 242, 243.

⁷¹ KORDT, pp. 103-4; SCHMIDT, pp. 311-13. See also ND Raeder-13; the *Times*, leader of June 14, 1935; Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell's statement of June 21, 1935 to the commons, *Documents*, 1935, Part I, p. 145. Craigie told Bingham that the British were "pleasurably surprised" when the German claim turned out to be translatable into an agreement. His chief does not seem to have shared in this pleasure (*U.S. F.R.*, 1935, I, 163-64, London telegram 259 of June 7, 1935).

⁷² These are Monsell's words.

⁷³ KORDT, p. 104.

⁷⁴ CHATFIELD, p. 74; CHURCHILL, p. 107.

sion, while Lord Londonderry alleges in his autobiography that MacDonald resigned in the belief that Baldwin was to accompany him into retirement.⁷⁹

The decision to accept the German offer of an agreement was taken then within twenty-four hours. The foreign secretary responsible was on the verge of being transferred to the home office. The prime minister, at all times a strong supporter of the admiralty, was retiring, sick and deceived. Other cabinet offices were also changing hands. Everything combined to make the decision before the cabinet seem of secondary importance. Moreover it seems unlikely that the diplomatic objections to the agreement were put to the retiring foreign secretary. The principal foreign office member of the delegation, Sir Robert Craigie, was head of the American department of the foreign office which had handled questions of naval disarmament since the abortive Geneva naval conference of 1927, with its heavy repercussions on Anglo-American relations.⁸⁰ He had taken part in the London Naval Conference of 1930 and had been very prominent in the preparatory conversations of 1934.⁸¹ He was very sympathetic to the admiralty's policy,⁸² and his judgment was certainly conditioned by his understanding of the

strategic importance of the forthcoming naval conference and not by any great knowledge of the contemporary German and European diplomatic position. The permanent under-secretary of state in the foreign office, Sir Robert Vansittart, might have been expected to urge the effects the conclusion of the agreement would have on the European scene.⁸³ But he was also very strongly concerned with the weakness of Britain's defenses and had served as the foreign office representative on the Defense Requirements Committee. His attitude to the agreement remains an enigma.⁸⁴

Thus, without a minister on whom to bring pressure or a sympathizer on the delegation,⁸⁵ possible opponents of the agreement within the foreign office in a position to emphasize the inconsistency with Britain's previous pattern of international agreements, or to resist the idea of arranging for the "formal disappearance"⁸⁶ of clauses in the Versailles settlement obnoxious to German sentiment,

⁸³ That Vansittart and, with him, Wigram, head of the foreign office department dealing with Germany, were extremely anxious over Germany's warlike propensities appears in the record of a conversation between Barrington-Ward of the *Times* and "X" of the British general staff, published in *The history of "The Times,"* Vol. IV, Part II, p. 893. See also TEMPLEWOOD, p. 138.

⁸⁴ His semiautobiographical *Lessons of my life* (London, n.d. [1944?]), does not mention the naval agreement. According to Templewood (p. 145), Vansittart viewed the agreement as a means of restricting German naval rearmament.

⁸⁵ This may possibly have been an undeserved consequence of Ribbentrop's suspicion of the permanent officials of the German foreign ministry. Had he been accompanied by a more senior foreign ministry official (as, for example, Dieckhoff, who accompanied him to London during his visit of March 1936) it would seem unlikely that a parallel figure from the foreign office, more familiar with German problems than was Craigie, would have been omitted from the British delegation. This is, however, the merest speculation.

⁸⁶ The phrase was used by the *Times*, March 25, 1935. See *The history of "The Times,"* Vol. IV, Part II, p. 892.

⁷⁹ LONDONDERRY, *Wings of destiny*, pp. 143-44. Jones, who was Baldwin's confidant, learned in May that the reconstruction of the cabinet was fixed for July (letter of May 12, 1935 to Lady Grigg, JONES, p. 145). On June 1, 1935, he wrote from Cliveden to Lady Grigg that Baldwin was staying there. The new prime minister was to be announced in Saturday's papers (i.e., June 7), the new government in Sunday's. Hoare was to go to the foreign office, Eden to be in the cabinet, definitely assigned to the League of Nations. Other changes in the cabinet had still to be decided (pp. 149-53). Jones had been acting as an intermediary between Baldwin and Lloyd George.

⁸⁰ CRAIGIE, p. 13.

⁸¹ *U.S. F.R.*, 1934, Vol. I, *passim*.

⁸² CHATFIELD, p. 65.

were at a considerable disadvantage. There were such people, as is shown by the reports sent in by Sir Horace Rumbold during Hitler's rise to power⁸⁷ and by the curious episode of the reports on the German menace sent by his successor, Sir Eric Phipps, which fell into Italian hands and were shown to Hitler by Ciano in 1936.⁸⁸ But this could not lead to consideration for France, whose much vaunted naval strength was being betrayed to her hereditary enemy. French interests found little sympathy among those Englishmen whose aims and experiences lay among problems of international disarmament, least of all in naval circles. In their view it was French intransigence at successive naval conferences that had prevented the abolition of the submarine. French resistance to the proposal that Germany should be allowed a larger army than that allowed her at Versailles but still under limitations, had resulted in a German army without any limitations. French opposition to MacDonald's plan to limit all air forces to a strength of five hundred machines had resulted in a Luftwaffe equal in size to the R.A.F.⁸⁹ French refusal at London in 1930 and Geneva in 1931 to accept limitations on their cruiser fleet had largely stultified the British sacrifices by which American agreement had been won. Besides, as had been argued by Hitler in his speech of May 21,

⁸⁷ See *Documents on British foreign policy 1919-39*, ed. E. L. Woodward and Rowan Butler (London, in progress), 2d ser., Vol. III, *passim*.

⁸⁸ On this incident see *Ciano's diplomatic papers*, ed. Malcolm MUGGERIDGE (London, 1948), p. 46, n. 1. See also JONES, pp. 197, 208, and 305, for Ribbentrop's attitude to Phipps, and Jones's reactions. "If it is our policy to lay ourselves alongside Germany, then the sooner Phipps is transferred elsewhere the better" (Jones to Baldwin, JONES, entry of May 23, 1936).

⁸⁹ This argument is very strongly put in CHATFIELD, pp. 74-75.

1935,⁹⁰ on existing fleet strengths the Germans were accepting a level some 15 per cent lower than that of the French navy.⁹¹ The absence of any French equivalent of the Kiel Canal and the consequent need to denude one seacoast to obtain superiority on the other remained unmentioned. It was in this atmosphere that the French memorandum objecting to the British proposal to sign the agreement was received on the morning of June 18.⁹² In Lord Londonderry's words,⁹³ the French arguments were not considered of "such a character as would justify us in withholding our consent to an Agreement that in our view held so much promise for the peace of the world." In any case, he argued, the agreement was purely bilateral and, as such, none of France's business. In actual fact the French memorandum can barely have been read by the competent official let alone properly considered, before the signature of the agreement, a fact which added to the bitterness of subsequent French comment.⁹⁴ It was apparently

⁹⁰ And on the English side by Lord Londonderry in the lords, June 26, 1935. See *Documents*, 1935, Part I, p. 151.

⁹¹ In view of the French refusal to accept any restrictions other than those on the capital ship category. Craigie estimated that it gave France 30 per cent superiority over Germany (*U.S. F.R.*, 1935, I, 164, London telegram 259 of June 7).

⁹² The French delay in answering the British memorandum of June 12, communicating British intention to sign the agreement was apparently caused by vain efforts to get the Italian government to join them in their protests. It would otherwise seem unpardonably dilatory. The text of the French memorandum is summarized in *U.S. F.R.*, 1935, I, 165, 166, Paris telegram 511 of June 18, 1935.

⁹³ In his lords speech of June 26, 1935.

⁹⁴ See the *Times*, June 20, 1935. The real truth of the British attitude to the French memorandum is shown by Craigie's statement of June 7 that Britain had informally accepted the German proposal, regardless of the views of the continental naval powers (*U.S. F.R.*, 1935, I, 164, London telegram

understood, erroneously it would appear, that French naval circles did not share their politicians' antipathy to the agreement.⁹⁵

If the agreement's effects in the diplomatic field were disastrous, it is arguable whether it was even a success from the strategic point of view. The long-term considerations of British naval policy which made it so essential for the 1936 naval conference to be successful were blocked by the Japanese refusal to accept the naval treaty which resulted. Subsequent British attempts to further the principles of qualitative limitation and the free exchange of information on building programs resulted in a series of bilateral agreements between England and Russia, Germany, Poland, and the Scandinavian states, and in the accession to the 1936 treaty of Italy which had originally abstained from signature while sanctions were being imposed upon her. In March 1938, Japanese refusal to observe these limitations led to an upward revision of the tonnage limitations for battleships to a level too high for any but Japan and the United States to cope with, but making legitimate the German plans for the battleships "Bismarck" and "Tirpitz," which had been deliberately planned on a scale far in excess of the limitations accepted under the 1937 Anglo-German Agreement. The British attempt to make multilateral the exchange of information on building pro-

grams broke down on the German and Soviet refusals to participate.⁹⁶

The agreement is more often defended on the more narrow field of Anglo-German relations. It is argued that without the agreement Germany would have built much faster and created a navy dangerous to Britain by 1939. By contrast, German acceptance of the agreement resulted in the German navy being completely unprepared for war with Britain in 1939. It is argued that this acceptance was dictated by Hitler's desire to be on friendly relations with Britain and his decision to concentrate on the army and the Luftwaffe. Only in the autumn of 1938, "when Hitler began to feel the resistance of Britain in politics everywhere,"⁹⁷ did he begin to take an interest in the German navy. As a result of this he decided in December 1938 to avail himself of the right conceded him in the 1935 agreement to build German submarine strength up to 100 per cent of that of Britain, introduced a new construction program, and began to consider abrogating the naval agreement itself.⁹⁸

These arguments have been much used to build up the legend of Hitler's tenderness toward Britain. They are extremely misleading. Basically they consist of two assertions: first that Germany in some way retarded the speed of her naval rearmament program, and second that this can be attributed to Hitler's desire for friendly relations with Britain. Either of these is a questionable thesis, together they are unacceptable. Hitler certainly desired British goodwill in 1935 and

259 of June 7). It is hardly surprising that Paul-Boncour held Craigie responsible for "selling" the idea to his government, without consideration of the complications to which it might lead (*ibid.*, p. 167, Paris telegram 515 of June 19). Templewood (p. 140) denies that any French memorandum was received.

⁹⁵ Templewood (pp. 144, 146) alleged Laval gave the impression he was ready to accept a *fait accompli*. See also TEMPLEWOOD (p. 141) and the *Times*, June 14, Paris report of June 13, 1935.

⁹⁶ *Documents on British foreign policy*, 3d ser., Vol. IV, App. VI, No. xi.

⁹⁷ Raeder's phrase (*NCA*, Statement VII).

⁹⁸ The best statement of these arguments is to be found in F. W. HINSLEY, *Hitler's strategy* (London, 1952), chap. i, esp. pp. 5 and 7, based largely on Raeder's evidence in his own defense at Nuremberg. See also TEMPLEWOOD, pp. 145-46.

1936. Without it German rearmament, the reoccupation of the Rhineland, and Hitler's subsequent moves, would have been impossible. But he had realized by November 1937, if not much sooner (the episode of the British questionnaire after the Rhineland reoccupation, and the Phipps reports shown him by Ciano, should certainly have opened his eyes, if they were ever closed), that his plans were certain to lead to conflict with Britain. This was the burden of his remarks at the "Hossbach" conference of November 6, 1937. The autumn of 1938, after Munich, was a time when Hitler was certainly infuriated with Britain, but not one when he could be said to be meeting British resistance anywhere. As to the first assertion, if it implies that there was unused armament capacity which could have been used to increase the rate of German naval construction, this is very debatable. If it only implies that the German navy came a bad third in the order of armament priorities, this neither requires nor warrants the postulation of a desire to avoid antagonizing British susceptibilities to explain it. The navy could not secure Austria: it was useless against Czech fortifications or Polish troops. It could not overcome the Maginot Line. The navy was starved because by comparison with the army and the Luftwaffe it was a luxury. The fleet with which Raeder planned to begin war against Britain⁹⁹ could not have been built in four years. The limited number of submarines with which Germany entered the war resulted simply from the lack of the necessary dock capacity for the larger ocean-going submarines.¹⁰⁰

The importance Raeder, himself a cruiser expert,¹⁰¹ laid on the submarine

⁹⁹ For details see *Brassey's naval annual*, 1948, pp. 32-33.

¹⁰⁰ See Appendix II, below.

arm, is shown by the extra terms demanded and granted in the 1935 agreement for submarines, by the efforts to expedite submarine construction in the intervening years,¹⁰² and by the invocation of the 100 per cent clause almost as soon as the 45 per cent limit had been taken up and conditions allowed it. The inclusion of the 100 per cent clause in the 1935 agreement showed that the intention to build up to those limits was always present, and it was invoked as soon as necessary to make the continuing plan of submarine construction beyond the 45 per cent limit legitimate. The fact that Hitler embarked on war before the naval authorities in Germany regarded it as feasible does not reflect to the credit of the British admiralty nor to their wisdom in concluding the agreement. It should have been realized that the governing factor in the strategic field would not be Germany's naval inferiority but her military superiority.

From the admiralty's standpoint the agreement was unnecessary in the long run. It disposed of a minor problem, recognized only what was inevitable. It is worth considering the admiralty's defense of it as embodied in a letter from Lord Halifax to Sir Neville Henderson of August 7, 1938.¹⁰³ The admiralty was well aware that 35 per cent of British naval strength was all that Germany could achieve for some time to come. The advantages the agreement gave to Germany were apparent and there was a likelihood of Germany's ridding itself of its burdens "on a plausible excuse" if the

¹⁰¹ He published various studies on cruiser warfare in 1922-23, as part of the German official historical publications on World War I.

¹⁰² In *ND 854-D*, an order of 1936 by Raeder is cited laying stress on the expediting of submarine construction.

¹⁰³ *Documents on British foreign policy*, 3d ser. Vol. III, App. VII, No. i.

necessity should arise. Any threat that Germany would build up to 100 per cent of total British strength was clearly bluff, which could only be executed if British construction was to remain stationary over a number of years while the German navy was being built up to it. And in view of Germany's foreign exchange difficulties, raw material problems, and the necessity of giving priority to her armaments on land and in the air, it was unlikely that she could exceed 35 per cent of British strength "for the next few years" after 1938. It was admitted that the German navy had been mainly an instrument for putting political pressure on Britain.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless an end to the agreement would be extremely undesirable "from the point of view of our future naval policy and construction" inasmuch as it eliminated rivalry and introduced an element of certainty into the European situation. Furthermore, Germany had been credited with a capacity for naval construction little inferior to that of Britain.

These arguments seem to amount to the pledging of Britain to a constant source of political pressure, in return for the advantages of the introduction of one element of certainty into the many variables determining naval construction, and policy, and the avoidance of a possible source of competition where that possibility was admitted to be most unlikely in view of Germany's other commitments and logistic difficulties. The bogey of German naval competition was recognized to be the transparency it was. It is a measure of the degree to which

¹⁰⁴ As an editorial in *Das neue Tagebuch* (No. 25, Vol. III, June 22, 1935) pointed out: "Entweder es (Deutschland) will eine Riesenflotte, dann hindert dieser Vertrag nichts. Oder es will aus politischen Gründen—Abspaltung Englands von Frankreich—keine Riesenflotte, dann ist kein Vertrag nötig. Mit einem Wort, dieses Abkommen ist Schaum."

naval and strategic considerations were allowed to override considerations of foreign policy that Halifax while recognizing all the opportunities of pressure which Germany was given by the naval agreement should still attach great value to its continuation. Moreover the naval advantage obtained was recognizably small. The danger to British naval power came from the relations between the United States and Japan and the weakness of Britain's strategic position in the Pacific. These relations eventually broke the ideal of qualitative limitation, while Japan's failure to sign the 1936 treaty embodying this ideal made it worthless. Both France and Italy had reached, or were about to reach, the limits of capital ship construction that their financial position allowed them, considerations which had probably forced Italy to build her last two battleships up to the 35,000 ton limit.¹⁰⁵ By the conclusion of the agreement, which amounted in French eyes to sheer betrayal and certain ruin of French efforts to win naval independence from Great Britain throughout the 1922-34 period,¹⁰⁶ the admiralty had fatally ruined all chances of friendly co-operation with the French navy.¹⁰⁷ At one stroke all France's efforts were rendered useless. Lastly, the diplomatic effects of

¹⁰⁵ As suggested in *Survey*, 1936, p. 62, n. 1.

¹⁰⁶ There is a good statement of this point in an article in *Wissen und Wehr*, Vol. XVI (1935), entitled "Geschichtliche und militärpolitische Betrachtungen zum deutsch-englischen Flottenabkommen von 1935," pp. 671-97, esp. pp. 690-92, 695-96.

¹⁰⁷ The admiralty was well aware of French pre-occupation with German naval strength and of their moderate satisfaction at the ratio between the two fleets obtaining in 1934, also of their opposition to the idea of bringing Germany into naval discussions. See the evidence in *U.S.F.R.*, 1934, I, 292-94, London telegram 403 of July 12, 1934. For Raeder's evidence of the effect Britain's unilateral action had on Darlan see *NCA*, Vol. VIII, Statement VII at p. 687.

the conclusion of the agreement were out of all proportion to the gains achieved in the realm of disarmament. But there seems to have been no one to state these considerations until the agreement had been signed. Its effects on the German foreign ministry, where it represented the first triumph for the new methods of Nazi diplomacy and Ribbentrop over the professionals, have been witnessed to by Kordt.¹⁰⁸ The Nazis were encouraged in their belief in the weakness of the walls which had kept the Weimar state from Germany's rightful position in Europe. One trumpet blast, one ultimatum, and the walls would fall down. In the League of Nations the agreement, concluded in flat contravention of the Treaty of Versailles from which the League took its origin, was greeted with cynicism.¹⁰⁹ This was not, perhaps, the most suitable position from which to launch the crusade which occupied Britain's attentions for the second half of 1935 against Italy, the defiler of treaties, the breaker of covenants. The conclusion of the agreement is a sad comment on the order of priorities held by the Conservative government, on the admiralty's assessment of the weakness and needs of British sea power, on the failure and eclipse of the foreign office, and on the resulting lack of thought given to diplomatic considerations in the decade before the war.

APPENDIX

I

In view of Raeder's testimony (*NCA*, Vol. VIII, Statement VII, p. 685) that the original initiative in advancing the policy of a naval agreement with Britain, based on the fixing of an agreed ratio between the two fleets, came

from Hitler, and that he fixed the ratio at $33\frac{1}{3}$ per cent, which Raeder raised to 35 per cent for "technical reasons," I am inclined to question Giese's affidavit (*ND*, 722-D), to the effect that the 35 per cent figure was fixed by reference to the "capacity of German dockyards," as an argument *ex post hoc*. I am unable to give this concept of dockyard capacity as a limiting factor in the fixing of such a ratio any validity, unless a time limit is also set. This would imply that Hitler, even at this early date, had a definite year in mind when his aggressive plans would lead him into war, had then realized that he would need a navy to support himself in this war, and, after a detailed study of possible speeds of construction, availability of raw materials, dockyard capacity, etc., had decided that the largest fleet that was obtainable by that date would approximate 35 per cent of the force of the Royal Navy. There is no evidence of such an inquiry having been made, nor of such a decision having been taken, though we may safely assume that had any such evidence existed it would have been produced at Nuremberg, since it would have constituted definite proof of aggressive plans being mooted in Germany considerably prior to the "Hossbach" protocol. It seems clear that Hitler fixed the figure of $33\frac{1}{3}$ per cent quite arbitrarily and that the technical reasons adduced by Raeder to raise the figure to 35 per cent were connected with questions such as the calculation of tonnage available for new construction should such a limit be accepted by Britain.

¹⁰⁹ F. W. WALTERS, *History of the League of Nations* (Oxford, 1952), II, 613-14. The northern states which, at the risk of earning German hostility, had supported the Geneva resolution of April 19, 1935 censuring German rearmament were particularly hurt by the ease with which Britain conceded German naval supremacy in the Baltic.

¹⁰⁸ KORDT, p. 113.

II

In *ND*, 854-D, Assmann, then head of the German naval archives, stated that in December 1938 the German submarine strength consisted of 118 submarines either completed or under construction. Only 55 were allowed for under the 45 per cent ratio conceded under the terms of the 1935 Agreement. In December 1938, presumably to cover this increased construction, the German Navy invoked the right to build up to 100 per cent of the British submarine strength. This was formally invoked in a note of January 18, 1939 (see *G.D.*, Ser. D, Vol. IV, Doc. Nos. 293 and 294) after Anglo-German naval conversations in Berlin on December 31, 1938 (*ibid.*, No. 288). It is obvious that whenever the extra submarines were laid down, they were most certainly planned and designed before this date; there was no sudden decision to raise German submarine strength. The 45 per cent figure would seem to have

been chosen partly since this would provide full capacity work for the available dockyards, partly because the direct announcement of the intention to build a submarine fleet as large as that of the British Empire would have sounded inconsistent with Hitler's offer, in his speech of May 21, 1935, to agree to the abolition of the submarine arm, provided other nations would do likewise. Germany actually began the war with 57 submarines, 26 of them ocean-going. Raeder's reports to Hitler in the months after the outbreak of war (see *Brassey's naval annual*, 1948, *passim*) make it clear that the increased submarine construction program was only to be obtained by cutting army and Luftwaffe projects, abandoning much other planned naval construction, and digging deeper into the naval stockpile of raw materials than originally planned.

LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS
AND POLITICAL SCIENCE