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PREVIEW

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AMERICAN IMPERIALISM:

World Reaction to the Spanish-American War, the Acquisition of the
Philippines, the Insurrection, and the Future of the Philippines;
With Emphasis on British Interest

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I INTRODUCTION

By the spring of 1898, it was evident that the United States and Spain were on a collision course which might very well result in war. It was only natural that the world powers should begin to align themselves psychologically, if not militarily, with one side or the other. The positions taken by the various powers towards the impending conflict stemmed from their relation to the world situation at the time.

The last quarter of the eighteenth century was a period of intense colonial rivalry on the part of the European nations. China was being partitioned, Africa was the scene of bitter imperialism, and even the islands in the Pacific were being contested. Until this time, the United States had not been a serious contender in the imperial race. True, she had an interest in Samoa and had unsuccessfully attempted to acquire coaling stations in the Caribbean. The leaders of the world imperialistic movement were Great Britain, France, Germany, and Russia; Japan was soon to join the group.

Each of the colonial powers was intensely jealous of the others. When one would seize, or acquire by lease, a new area, the others immediately began to look to their own interests. This situation ultimately led to the formation of de facto alliances between powers where colonial ambitions did not overlap or where the two saw fit to enter into an agreement of sharing the spoils. Both France and Germany sought an understanding, if not an actual alliance, with Russia with the idea of establishing spheres of interest in China. Even Great Britain sought an alliance with Germany to support her colonial ambitions in the Far East. When the German alliance failed to materialize Great Britain next turned to Japan. Britain was concerned about her vast imperial holdings and was desperately in need of an ally.

II BRITAIN'S DILEMMA

In Europe in 1898, Britain was faced by two hostile combinations of powers: The Triple Alliance of Germany, Austro-Hungary, and Italy, which was dominated by Germany, and the Dual Alliance of France and Russia, both jealous of Britain's colonial supremacy in Africa and Asia. Although the two alliances were opposed to one another they seemed at the time to be more opposed to Britain. At the worst this could mean that Britain would not only be isolated but might be in danger from the combination of her political opponents of a conspiracy to despoil the British empire. At the least, it would mean that Britain could no longer manipulate the balance of power.

In Africa, the British were being threatened by French colonial ambitions. The British West African settlements consisted mainly of coastal trading ports. France occupied vast areas of the West African hinterland, which tended to isolate the British coastal settlements. The French had organized large native forces under the command of French officers. The British responded to the French threat by organizing the West African Frontier Force. The Niger Conference was called in order to decide by negotiations the division of West African territories. However, in their endeavors to occupy as much territory as possible, the rival military forces were in danger of provoking an armed collision. It was not until June, 1898, that the dispute was settled by an Anglo-French Convention.

Another trouble spot in Africa at this time was Egypt. France had evidenced colonial ambitions in Egypt since the defeat of the Turks by the Russians, which left Egypt isolated and virtually defenseless. However, the British had occupied Egypt in 1882, and had placed Egypt in the position of a protectorate. "As early as March 1895 Sir Edward Grey had announced

publically that the advance into the Nile Valley of a French expedition would be an unfriendly act and would be so viewed by England."¹ Nevertheless, in 1896, the French began a drive from the south toward the Nile Valley. At the same time, Sir Herbert Kitchener commenced his southern drive from Egypt in the North. The two forces met at Fashoda in September, 1898, and for some months there was grave danger of war between Great Britain and France. It was not until February, 1899, when Theophile Delcasse, the new French foreign minister, considered to be more friendly towards Britain, agreed to modify French claims, and in March an Anglo-French Convention decided upon the boundary which was to limit French and British ambitions along the Nile and the Congo. It was not until Paul Gambon was appointed French ambassador to London that Anglo-French relations moved toward what has been called the bonne entente which was finally achieved in 1904.²

It is ironic that of the major problems that plagued Britain in Africa, war with France (which most likely would have brought in Russia if not all of Europe) was avoided and that the problem with the Boers in South Africa was to be the most serious, resulting in war. The war was regarded as not only unnecessary but unjust by most of the world powers and by the British public as well. Support for the Boers by Germany, as made public in the famous Kaiser's telegram to President Paul Kruger of the Transvaal, destroyed any lingering belief that France alone was the enemy and that Germany, whose Kaiser was Queen Victoria's grandson, was Great Britain's friend. It demonstrated clearly that Germany, as well as France, was England's imperial rival. An attempt was made to settle the difference between the Transvaal Republic and Britain at the Bloemfontein Conference, but to no avail. War then seemed inevitable. So unpopular was the war in England that it very nearly unseated the government.³

The third theater of interest to the British at this time was the Far East. It had been British policy for nearly a century to maintain what became known as an open-door policy in China, that is to say, free trade to all nations on an equal basis. However, when some German missionaries were murdered in the province of Shantung in August, 1897, Germany used this as a pretext to force on China a ninety-nine year lease of Kiaochow. Following Germany's lead, France acquired Kwangchow and Russia seized Port Arthur and Talienwan. The British were alarmed for two reasons: First, the seizure of Port Arthur in particular threatened freedom of trade and, secondly, the territorial and administrative integrity of China was at stake.⁴

Faced with hostile alliances, challenged in Africa and the Far East, and conscious of the threat implicit in Britain's isolation, the government had two alternatives: to try to maintain the concert of Europe, or, if this proved impossible, to weaken either or both of the opposing alliances by seeking an agreement with one or more of the European powers. In 1897, and 1898, Lord Salisbury made one last effort in pursuit of the first alternative; this was the attempt to reach a settlement of Near Eastern affairs. However, due to the war between Turkey and Greece and Germany's withdrawal from the concert of Europe in March, 1898, Salisbury submitted to the Czar a detailed plan to settle all subjects of difference between Britain and Russia. This attempt was wrecked by Russia's seizure of Port Arthur, an action itself partly provoked by Germany's seizure of Kiaochow. The situation in March, 1898, then, was that Britain remained isolated, and all her attempts either to maintain the concert of Europe or to weaken the alliances opposed to her had failed.

This was the situation in 1898, which so largely determined Britain's attitude towards America during the Spanish-American War. Britain was in

desperate search of allies. Having failed with Russia and Germany and still being at odds with France, it was only logical that she should endeavor to win American support in international affairs, or, if this proved impossible, at least to ensure that American opposition to England should not be aroused.⁵

These considerations had already guided British policy towards the United States as early as 1896, with the settlement of the Venezeulan dispute. The British government had decided that it was in their best interest to settle outstanding differences with the United States in favor of the latter. The settlement of the Venezeulan Boundary dispute was the beginning of what was to be known as "The Great Rapprochement."⁶ The Spanish-American War was to provide the vehicle by which Britain was able to give strong impetus to that rapprochement.

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III PRELUDE TO WAR

In 1897, Secretary of State Richard Olney and Ambassador Pauncefoot attempted to negotiate a treaty, the object of which was to ensure the peaceful settlement of future disputes between the two nations. The United States Senate refused to ratify the treaty on two counts: it wished to assert its own predominance over the executive and the traditional antipathy to any entanglement with foreign powers which might limit America's freedom to determine its foreign policy. Despite this rebuff, the British cabinet continued to try to reach an understanding, and in March, 1898, a secret formal approach, inspired by Lord Balfour and Joseph Chamberlain, was made to President McKinley proposing that Britain and America should stand together to resist further territorial expansion in the Far East.⁷

In a note of March 17, 1898, from Secretary of State John Sherman to Henry White, First Secretary of the American Embassy in London, the United States position was stated as follows:

. . . that the President is in sympathy with the policy which shall maintain open trade in China, that all his advices up to the present time indicate no foreign occupation which interferes with that trade or aims at exclusive commercial privileges, and that he does not see any present reason for the departure of the United States from our traditional policy of respecting [sic] foreign alliances and so far as practicable avoiding interference or connection with European complications.⁸

Small wonder then when the situation between the United States and Spain began to grow serious over Cuba that Great Britain supported the United States position despite almost universal disapproval by the rest of the European powers. The cartoon taken from the March, 1898, issue of Punch which follows, portrays admirably the cordial feeling of the British for the Americans.

This is not to say that the British government was prepared to accept war as the only solution to the Cuban problem. On the contrary, the British