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The 1927 Geneva Naval Disarmament Conference: a study in failure

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The 1927 Geneva Naval Disarmament Conference:

A study in failure

by

Edward Adolph Goedeken

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of

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Signatures have been redacted for privacy

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1978

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THE CONFERENCE PRELIMINARIES

The 1927 Geneva Naval Disarmament Conference was an attempt to continue the naval disarmament policies begun in 1922. The horrors of World War I had impressed upon the leaders of Europe the need for a limitation of armaments. The first step was taken in Washington D.C. in 1921-1922. France, Italy, Japan, Great Britain, and the United States drew up an agreement limiting battleship and aircraft carrier tonnage. A ratio of 5:5:3:1.67:1.67 was placed on these vessels, giving the United States and Great Britain parity, Japan three-fifths of the Anglo-American total and France and Italy 1.67. The success of the conference in placing restrictions on tonnage levels and a holiday on construction was heralded as a great step forward in the search for permanent world peace. Unfortunately because of French recalcitrance, the Washington Conference participants failed to extend this limitation to auxiliary craft (cruisers, flotilla leaders, destroyers), or submarines. The most they could do was to place a 10,000 ton limit upon individual cruisers with a maximum of eight inches for gun calibre. The Americans suggested a limit of 450,000 tons for auxiliary vessels but Great Britain did not want numerical restrictions placed on cruisers. The British argued that their "special needs" precluded any limitation on these vessels and stressed their

desire for freedom in construction in this category.¹

During the years following the Washington Conference recommendations were made for another conference to limit auxiliary vessels. As early as January 1923 such requests had been included in naval appropriation bills submitted to Congress and subsequent bills in the ensuing years continued to express the desire for another conference.² Despite these efforts the United States continued its building program. In December 1924 Congress authorized the construction of eight cruisers. These vessels were to displace 10,000 tons, be armed with eight-inch guns, and to be completed by 1 July 1927. Although appropriations were made for these cruisers in 1925 and 1926, by 1927 the United States had completed only two of these ships, with three others under

¹For the official record of the Washington Conference see, Congress, Senate, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, Washington: 12 November - 6 February 1922, 67th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1922). A good secondary account of the conference is Thomas H. Buckley's, The United States and the Washington Conference, 1921-1922 (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1970).

²United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 42, pt. 1 (April 1921 - March 1923), 67th Congress, 4th Session (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1923), pp. 1153-54. For subsequent calls for a naval conference see Ibid., Vol. 43, pt. 1 (December 1923 - March 1925), 68th Congress, 1st and 2nd Sessions (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1925), pp. 203-205, 719, 880-881.

construction.³

The other signatories of the Washington Treaty were also busy. The British Admiralty had worked hard during the first few years after the Washington Conference to commence a program for cruiser building. By 1925 the British had plans for starting twenty cruisers, which included nine heavy cruisers of 10,000 tons and eight lighter vessels of 8,000 tons.⁴ Great Britain's activity during this period has led one historian to conclude that "in point of numbers, it was Great Britain who set the pace of cruiser construction during these years."⁵

Nor was Japan left behind. By 1924 Japan had completed six cruisers. This flurry of ship-building prompted another historian to charge that in reality it was Japan which "forced the pace in naval expansion in the early post-conference

³On 21 May 1926 Congress appropriated funds for the construction of three more of the eight cruisers authorized in December 1924. This raised the total under construction to five. Ibid., Vol. 44, pt. 2 (December 1925 - March 1927), 69th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1927), pp. 612-614.

⁴"The Naval Problem," Round Table 18 (March 1928): 235. For a discussion of the Admiralty's maneuvering to accomplish this building program see James Harold Mannock, "Anglo-American Relations, 1921-1928" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1962), pp. 235-39. Hereafter cited as Mannock, "Anglo-American Relations."

⁵Arnold J. Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs, 1927 (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), p. 30. Hereafter cited as Toynbee, Survey. For a table showing auxiliary vessel construction through 1 February 1927 see Ibid., p. 32. The table is accurate except for giving the United States five cruisers built, the correct figure is two.

period. . . ."6 During the next three years, however, the Japanese launched no additional cruisers, although they projected four more 10,000 ton cruisers.7

While the respective naval personnel of the three countries struggled for increased ship construction, important personalities sought to renew the disarmament spirit. As early as March 1924 Frank B. Kellogg, then Ambassador to Great Britain, had discussed such a possibility with Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald.8 Although nothing came of these conversations, Kellogg renewed the subject in February 1925 with Austen Chamberlain, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. During these informal talks Chamberlain intimated that Great Britain might be interested in a new naval conference. He warned, however, that if another conference were called, "it would be wise to quietly sound out the different governments in advance so that there would be no failure."9 On the strength of that information, Secretary of

⁶Hector C. Bywater, Navies and Nations: A Review of Naval Developments Since the Great War (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927), p. 205.

⁷Toynbee, Survey, p. 30.

⁸Kellogg to Hughes, 27 March 1924, State Department 500.A12/8 as quoted in Mannoek, "Anglo-American Relations," p. 249.

⁹Department of State, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1925, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1940), pp. 3-9. Hereafter cited as FRUS, 1925.

State Charles Evans Hughes solicited the sentiment of the other Washington Treaty powers. France quickly spoke out against any conference limited only to naval armaments and the matter slipped into the background.¹⁰

Six months later on 25 October 1925, President Coolidge suddenly revived the issue with the announcement at a press conference that he was willing to call a new naval conference.¹¹ Once again foreign diplomats were to ascertain the opinion of their governments. But the European powers had already started their own negotiations. During October through December 1925 Germany, Belgium, France, Great Britain, and Italy met at Locarno to thrash out some of the remaining issues of the Versailles Treaty. While the resulting pact was weak, offering only a temporary solution to Franco-German land disputes, it did represent an initial attempt by the European powers to confront their problems without the assistance of the United States. As Alanson Houghton, Kellogg's successor as Ambassador to Great Britain, aptly remarked: "The feeling is that at Locarno the European powers reached a friendly understanding without our help and that now

¹⁰Ibid., p. 10. Kellogg replaced Hughes on 4 March 1925.

¹¹Calvin Coolidge, Press Conferences (Lacrosse, Wisconsin: National Micropublishing, 1971). Hereafter cited as Coolidge Press Conferences. These may be found in the Iowa State University Library, Ames, Iowa.

they are in a position to regulate armament among themselves. . . ." Houghton stressed that since the United States was not a member of the League of Nations, the Europeans would resent American initiative in calling a new conference on land armament limitation. He believed that limitation of naval armaments as a separate subject had a better chance, but still cautioned that this also was a touchy area.¹²

With Houghton's cautious attitude in mind, President Coolidge muted his remarks. In his Annual Message to Congress in December 1925, Coolidge tactfully suggested that if the problem of land disarmament could be solved, the United States would be willing to call a conference for naval disarmament. He stated, however, that the United States would "not care to attend a conference which from its location or constituency would in all probability prove futile."¹³ Coolidge evidently hoped any future conference would be held in the United States which would, if successful, greatly add to his accomplishments. But with the advent of the Locarno meeting and the steady growth of the League of Nations, the focus of disarmament negotiations shifted to the other side of the Atlantic.

¹²FRUS, 1925, p. 12.

¹³Ibid., p. xiii.

The League, having gained in strength and prestige during the 1920's, turned its attention in 1925 to the knotty problem of disarmament. The members of the League created a Preparatory Commission to lay the groundwork for a general disarmament conference. The United States was invited, and its acceptance stemmed principally from a sense of duty. Secretary Kellogg was not greatly interested in land disarmament, which was a regional question, but naval disarmament received more attention. He was willing to hold another naval conference, preferably in the United States, but realized that the time was not right for Washington to initiate a new conference. Kellogg remained convinced, however, that the United States must "keep our skirts clear" of involvement in the Commission in such a manner that they would be blamed for any resultant failure.¹⁴

In May 1926 the first session of the Preparatory Commission began. The United States sent as its chief representative Hugh Gibson, minister to Switzerland. During the first meetings Gibson informally discussed with Viscount Robert Cecil, his British counterpart, the possibility of a separate conference where the five signatories of the Five

¹⁴Kellogg to Houghton, 11 February 1926, Frank B. Kellogg Papers. These are located at the Minnesota State Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota. For an overview of the work of the Preparatory Commission see, John W. Wheeler-Bennett, Disarmament and Security Since Locarno, 1925-1931 (New York: Howard Fertig, 1973), pp. 43-103.

Power Treaty might extend the limitation to auxiliary vessels. Cecil cautioned that such conversations should be kept quiet at the present time so as not to harm the work of the Preparatory Commission. He conceded, however, that the British would probably be willing to attend a naval conference if the Commission failed to limit naval armaments.¹⁵ In July 1926 the British Cabinet gave Cecil permission to hold more informal talks with the Americans at Geneva.¹⁶ In September Cecil and Gibson reviewed the topic,¹⁷ which resulted in the British informing Esme Howard, the United Kingdom's Ambassador in Washington, that they were willing to participate in a new naval conference if the United States were to summon one.¹⁸

While debate continued privately, Secretary of State Kellogg made the issue public in a speech given at Plattsburgh,

¹⁵Department of State, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1926, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1941), pp. 104-5. Hereafter cited as FRUS, 1927.

¹⁶Great Britain, Public Record Office, Cabinet Minutes 23, Vol. 54, 28 July 1926. The Cabinet Minutes will hereafter be cited as 23/ and the volume number.

¹⁷W. N. Medlicott, Douglas Dakin, and M. E. Lambert, eds., Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, Series IA, Vol. 2 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1968), p. 397.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 870.

New York, on 18 August 1926. "I have stated before and I reiterate that the United States would be glad to cooperate with the other naval powers in extending the principles of the Washington Treaty to other classes of naval vessels, and I earnestly hope that such a measure may soon be practicable."¹⁹

Not every one agreed with the wisdom of another naval conference. In September 1926, Lord Astor warned Kellogg that "It would be dangerous indeed, perhaps disastrous, to hold any public conference unless you were already certain that there was agreement about the fundamental basis of the solution." He noted the less cooperative climate of 1926. The growth of the League of Nations and the haggling over war debts had strained relations between the Allies. The perceptive Astor predicted that the debate would probably center on such "niggling" points as numbers of cruisers and Britain's ability to police its Empire. The Englishman concluded that all of these problems could be handled, but stated that it was the "course of statesmanship to make sure that an agreement about them" was possible prior to a public conference.²⁰

In November 1926 Hugh Gibson informed Kellogg that the time was right to summon the naval conference. After

¹⁹New York Times, 19 August 1926, p. 1.

²⁰Astor to Kellogg, 16 September 1926, Kellogg Papers.

touching briefly on problems that faced the commission, Gibson remarked that "both the British and the Japanese have shown a clear tendency to come nearer to our point of view." The American "point of view" was based on the belief that naval disarmament should be limited by total tonnage in each class of vessels; i.e., cruisers, destroyers, and submarines. France, Italy, and other small nations that favored limitation by total tonnage of the entire fleet strongly opposed this plan. They wanted each power to have the freedom to use its allotted tonnage for the construction of a single category; e.g., submarines. Gibson was pleased that the larger powers seemed to agree with the United States and intimated that now would be a good time to press for a second naval conference. "It seems to me that the next steps can best be made from Washington and that they can be made with little risk."²¹ Gibson had added an important voice to the pressure building on Coolidge to call a new conference.

Other pressures came from Congress. During 1926 men such as Congressman Thomas Butler, Chairman of the House Naval Affairs Committee, constantly pushed for more naval construction. In 1921, Butler charged, the United States had been "fooled" into relinquishing its opportunity to attain naval supremacy. Instead, it had blundered into giving the British

²¹Gibson to Kellogg, 8 November 1926, Ibid.

parity, which was now slipping away to Britain's rapid construction of cruisers. Although the Naval Appropriation Bill of 1924 had authorized building eight new cruisers, only five of these had been funded by December 1926. Butler complained that Great Britain had restored naval supremacy and the United States was now due its right to parity by building more auxiliary vessels.²² During December 1926 the navalists indicated they would not only demand appropriations for the remaining three cruisers but also press for a substantial increase in cruiser construction. President Coolidge, however, was not impressed with these arguments. He dismissed them as mere rhetoric and remained convinced that the navy was still in good shape.²³ He had supported the Preparatory Commission in the hope that international disarmament would allow him to cut United States spending in armaments.²⁴ His desire for a balanced budget did not include large expenditures for defense. He again voiced his opposition to continued naval competition in December 1926.

²²Thomas Butler, "Don't Give Up the Ships," North American Review 224 (August 1927):214-22.

²³In February 1926 Coolidge stated that the armed forces were not perfect, but were still in good condition. This was in reply to naval reports that the navy was becoming obsolete and needed replacement vessels. Coolidge Press Conferences, 2 February 1927.

²⁴New York Times, 31 August 1926, p. 17.

In his Annual Message to Congress on 7 December, Coolidge emphatically stated his opposition to "engaging in any attempt at competition in armaments." He added that at Geneva the United States had expressed its willingness to "enter into treaties for the limitation of all types of warships according to the ratio adopted at the Washington Conference. This offer is still pending."²⁵ The next day the President reiterated this point in his Budget message. "This country is now engaged in negotiations to broaden our existing treaties . . . I feel that it would . . . not [be] in keeping with our attitude toward these negotiations to commence construction of these three cruisers."²⁶

The navalists' answer was the Butler Bill. Introduced in the House on 18 December, it called for the funding and construction of ten more 10,000 ton cruisers, stating that the necessary funds would be sought from the current session of Congress.²⁷ Coolidge immediately issued a statement declaring that he was opposed to appropriations for the three cruisers left from the 1924 authorization, and he implied that he might be opposed to the Butler Bill in its original form without any appropriations attached. This

²⁵FRUS, 1926, p. xxiv.

²⁶New York Times, 9 December 1926, p. 2.

²⁷New York Times, 20 December 1926, p. 1.

action stirred the Navy Department, which attempted to convince the President that the ten cruisers were essential to the building program of the United States. Coolidge agreed that the cruisers would be necessary to "round out" the American fleet, but remained opposed to appropriating funds for any cruiser construction in 1927.²⁸ The navalists had failed to convince the President to support the cruiser program. They decided, therefore, to bypass him and have Congress approve the appropriations.

A bitter fight over the necessity of these new cruisers consumed the month of January. After extended debate the Senate voted on 1 February to appropriate 1.2 million dollars for the construction of the final three cruisers authorized in 1924. Three weeks later the House also approved the bill, but trimmed the figure to \$450,000. Faced with this situation, Coolidge accepted defeat and signed the amended bill on 2 March.²⁹

Sometime during the debate, Coolidge evidently concluded

²⁸Coolidge Press Conferences, 24 December 1927.

²⁹New York Times, 25 February 1927, p. 1; Ibid., 3 March 1927, p. 14. For the text of the 2 March 1926 Naval Appropriations Bill see United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 44, pt. 2 (December 1925 - March 1927), 69th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1927), pp. 1295-96. For an example of the Big-Navy argument see, Thomas Butler, "Don't Give Up the Ships," North American Review 224 (August 1927):214-22.

that in order for the United States to refrain from continued competition he would have to call another naval conference. The Preparatory Commission had evidenced little progress, and another method seemed necessary to limit naval expansion. One historian has stated that at a Cabinet meeting on 1 February "it was unanimously agreed that the naval powers should try to arrive at a new limitation agreement. . . ." ³⁰ It is doubtful that this meeting provided the impetus since Gibson had been hard at work drafting the proposed invitation for several weeks prior to its delivery. ³¹ Such activity by Gibson leads one to conclude that Coolidge had decided on his course sometime in December or January and the final passage of the cruiser appropriations only served as the catalyst.

The President realized that France and Italy would probably refuse a direct and public invitation. He opted for the more indirect approach and on 3 February privately notified each

³⁰Mannock, "Anglo-American Relations," p. 251. Mannock gives no source for this information and this writer was unable to find any record of this Cabinet meeting. If Mannock is correct, the Cabinet decision would coincide neatly with the Senate's decision to pass the three-cruiser appropriation bill.

³¹Gibson to his mother, 11 February 1927, Hugh Gibson Papers. Gibson's papers are located at the Hoover Presidential Library and at the Hoover Institution for War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University. For more on Gibson's diplomatic career see Ronald Emil Swerczek, "The Diplomatic Career of Hugh Gibson, 1908-1938" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1972).

participant of the Washington Treaty of his intention to call a new conference. He suggested that all of the Washington signatories informally discuss the prospects of naval disarmament at the next meeting of the Preparatory Commission scheduled for March 1927. Believing that land disarmament was a regional problem, Coolidge suggested that naval armaments could be dealt with effectively by a limited group of nations. Coolidge thus issued a formal invitation to discuss the question of naval limitation at the next meeting of the Commission. He stressed that the discussions would not be formal nor an attempt to interrupt the negotiations of the Commission, but would only serve to aid the Commission in achieving a final conference dealing with all areas of disarmament. Coolidge intimated that while the United States had no concrete proposals to this end, it would be disposed to accept an extension of the Washington Treaty ratio of 5:5:5 to auxiliary vessels.³² It is important to note that Coolidge's invitation did not suggest a separate conference. His only intention was to have informal discussions with the idea that some agreements could be made among the naval powers

³²Department of State, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1927, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1942), pp. 2-5. Hereafter cited as FRUS, 1927. This is also found in Congress, Senate, Records of the Conference for the Limitation of Naval Armament, 70th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Document No. 55 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1928), pp. 3-6. Hereafter cited as Conference Records.

that would in turn contribute to the overall success of the Preparatory Commission.

On 10 February the invitation was made public and Congress received a note explaining Coolidge's reasons for summoning the conference. Stressing that the United States had always viewed competitive armaments as "one of the most dangerous and contributing causes of international suspicion and discord . . . calculated eventually to lead to war," Coolidge added that he had become aware of sentiment in the United States urging further naval construction to keep up with the other Washington Treaty countries. "In such sentiments lies the germ of renewed naval competition," and the President decided that a frugal economy and such construction were incompatible.³³ If he could not stop Congress from passing cruiser appropriations, then he would provide an opportunity for disarmament by international conference.

During the days following the public announcement of the conference, Coolidge repeated that the conference was not to be a separate meeting, but "merely supplementary" to the Preparatory Commission.³⁴ Despite such assurances, France

³³FRUS, 1927, p. 609; Conference Records, pp. 1-3. This citation will also be found in the microfilm edition of the Calvin Coolidge Papers, Reel 170, the Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

³⁴Coolidge Press Conferences, 11 and 15 February 1927.

viewed the new conference as an unnecessary diversion from the work of the Commission and notified the United States on 15 February that it would not attend. Seeing no reason to segregate the naval from the other disarmament questions, the note stressed that the Commission had full authority to deal with all disarmament questions. A separate conference would only "weaken the authority of the League of Nations so essential to the peace of the world. . . ." ³⁵

The Japanese meanwhile gave hope for the conference by indicating on 19 February their acceptance of the invitation. They requested, however, that because of the importance of such discussions the conference should not begin until, at the earliest, 1 June. Their delegates would thus have an opportunity to confer with authorities in Tokyo before making the long trip to Geneva. ³⁶ Of course, a delay in the conference would probably make the naval discussions independent of the Commission, scheduled to adjourn in May.

On 21 February, Italy declined the invitation because its navy was "already insufficient to the needs of its defense" and it would thus be impossible to participate in any further limitation. ³⁷ The Italians were concerned about the French

³⁵FRUS, 1927, pp. 10-12; Conference Records, pp. 7-9.

³⁶FRUS, 1927, pp. 13-14; Conference Records, pp. 9-10.

³⁷FRUS, 1927, pp. 14-16; Conference Records, pp. 10-12.

Navy and the situation in the Mediterranean where both countries were vying for security and control. Any further disarmament, they felt, would only serve to weaken the Italian position in relation to France.³⁸

The British were the last to reply. The Admiralty had spent several months prior to Coolidge's invitation working on a plan for naval disarmament. William Bridgeman, First Lord of the Admiralty, had presented this plan, which included a call for another conference, to the Cabinet a week before Coolidge's announcement.³⁹ Viscount Cecil, becoming fatigued with the "interminable" discussions at Geneva, had also pressed Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin to call a "Washington-type conference" to consider extending the principles of the 1922 Treaty.⁴⁰ The Coolidge invitation rendered further consideration unnecessary. After consulting the Dominions, the British gave their acceptance on 25 February. Incorporated in the note was the following clause

³⁸Evidently Mussolini had been in favor of attending the conference, but was overruled by his naval advisors who feared further gains by the French in the Mediterranean Sea area. For more on this see William R. Castle to Hugh Gibson, 9 March 1927, William R. Castle Papers. These papers are deposited in the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa. See also FRUS, 1927, pp. 17-18.

³⁹Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th series, 210 (1927):2189.

⁴⁰Cecil to Baldwin, 4 February 1927, Stanley Baldwin Papers, Vol. 130, pp. 4-9, as quoted in Stephen Roskill, Hankey: Man of Secrets, Vol. 2, 1919-1931 (London: Collins, 1972), p. 438.

which, because of British insistence, dominated the later proceedings:⁴¹

The view of His Majesty's Government upon the special geographical position of the British Empire, the length of inter-imperial communications, and the necessity for the protection of its food supplies are well known, and together with the special conditions and requirements of the other countries invited to participate in the conversation must be taken into account.

Since Italy and France had opted out of the conference, the question was whether to proceed with a tripartite rather than the intended five-power conference. On 1 March President Coolidge "almost upset the apple cart" by telling the press corps of his serious doubts about the value of a three-power conference.⁴² This created a stir in the State Department who were having enough problems with the temporary

⁴¹W. N. Medlicott, Douglas Dakin, and M. E. Lambert, eds., Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, Series IA, Vol. 3 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1970), p. 578. See also Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th series, 203 (1927):29-30. For the British official discussion of Coolidge's invitation see Cab 23/55, 16 February 1927.

⁴²Coolidge Press Conference, 1 March 1927. For State Department reaction see Castle to Gibson, 9 March 1927, Castle Papers. On 8 March Coolidge explained that he had "really" meant that it did not seem as practical to "secure results from a three-power conference as it would from a five-power conference." Coolidge indicated that he was still in favor of holding a three-power conference. If that was the best that could be done. *Ibid.*, 8 March 1927.

absence of Secretary Kellogg.⁴³ On 5 March Assistant Secretary William Castle and Undersecretary Joseph Grew proposed to Coolidge that the governments of Japan and Great Britain be approached about the possibility of a three-power conference. Grew averred that if a three-power conference were held, Italy would probably find it difficult to resist attending.⁴⁴ On 8 March, the Japanese and British replied to Washington's overture that they would attend a three-power meeting. The Geneva Conference for the Limitation of Naval Armament had become a reality.⁴⁵

During the rest of March the State Department pressed France and Italy to participate. France was reminded that Coolidge's original intention had been only to supplement the work of the Preparatory Commission and not to undermine its authority. Italy was assured that the United States had no plans to limit the armaments of the Italians⁴⁶ and that an

⁴³Coolidge had ordered Kellogg to take a vacation and the Secretary was absent from Washington during the latter part of February and early March. L. Ethan Ellis, "Frank B. Kellogg: 1925-1929," in An Uncertain Tradition: American Secretaries of State in the Twentieth Century, ed. Norman A. Graebner (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961), p. 151.

⁴⁴Joseph C. Grew, Turbulent Era: A Diplomatic Record of Forty Years, 1904-1945, ed., Walter Johnson, 2 Vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1952), 1:694-96.

⁴⁵FRUS, 1927, pp. 26-27.

⁴⁶FRUS, 1927, pp. 28-31; Conference Records, pp. 12-14.

agreement reached at Geneva would carry provision for future reconsideration. Both governments nevertheless, remained adamant.⁴⁷

With the conference a certainty the next questions were when and where to hold it. Coolidge's original suggestion that it be held in conjunction with the meeting of the Preparatory Commission no longer seemed relevant. On 6 April Japan expressed its desire for a further postponement requesting that the meeting be delayed until after 11 June.⁴⁸ President Coolidge subsequently set 20 June as the opening date.⁴⁹

As for location, on 15 April Bridgeman had informally expressed to Gibson his preferences; Brussels or the Hague. The British argued that both cities were nearer to London and thus would facilitate communication with the British Government. Gibson, who had become Ambassador to Belgium in the Spring of 1927, offered no objections. The conferees could reduce their expenses by using his offices and accommodations during the conference. In any case, Gibson thought that the initiative for a change of site should come from either

⁴⁷FRUS, 1927, pp. 31-32, 39; Conference Records, pp. 15-16. In their reply the Italians reserved the right to send an "observer" to the conference.

⁴⁸FRUS, 1927, p. 33.

⁴⁹Coolidge Press Conferences; FRUS, 1927, p. 40.

Great Britain or Japan, so that the United States would not be blamed for trying to disrupt the deliberations at Geneva.⁵⁰ On 28 April, Chamberlain announced that his government desired the conference to remain in Geneva. The Japanese agreed and Geneva became the site.⁵¹

While the civilian members of the participating governments wrestled with these problems, the naval departments prepared for the actual negotiation. In March 1927, Secretary of the Navy, Curtis Wilbur, directed the Navy General Board to prepare a report outlining the American position to be used at the conference. By May the General Board had completed its assignment. The proposals were based on the fundamental principles developed after the Washington Conference. American naval policy was reduced to a single sentence:⁵²

⁵⁰Gibson to Castle, 15 April 1927, Castle Papers; FRUS, 1927, pp. 35-36.

⁵¹British Documents, p. 591. Chamberlain privately credited Gibson with wanting the conference moved to Belgium. "[He] is probably tired of Geneva by this time and would like to be in his Embassy again," Chamberlain to Cecil, 4 May 1927, Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Additional Manuscripts No. 51079. Cecil's Papers are deposited in the British Library, London, England. See also Great Britain, Public Record Office, Committee of Imperial Defense, Minutes, (Cab 2), Vol. 5. Hereafter cited as Cab 2/5.

⁵²For the General Board Report this writer relied on the work of William F. Trimble, "The United States Navy and the Geneva Conference for the Limitation of Naval Armament, 1927" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Colorado, 1974). Hereafter cited as Trimble, "Geneva Conference." The report may be found in the Navy Department, General Records, Confidential Correspondence, A 19, Record Group 80, Archives, as quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 126.

To create, maintain and operate a Navy second to none and in conformity with the ratios for capital ships established by the Treaty for Limitation of Naval Armaments.

The General Board stated that the 5:5:3 ratio was the only basis for a just treaty. Equality with Great Britain was to be an essential part of any disarmament treaty. The Board opposed, therefore, any revision of battleship or aircraft carrier limitation. In line with its demands for parity, the General Board also recommended that four categories of auxiliary vessels be considered: cruisers, destroyers, submarines, and vessels exempt from limitation. It suggested limitation by total tonnage in each class and emphasized that the United States would accept as low a total tonnage in each class as was agreeable to the other powers. The Board defined each class as follows: (1) cruisers were those vessels with displacement between 3,000 and 10,000 tons; (2) destroyers were those with tonnages between 600 and 3,000 tons; (3) submarines were vessels capable of submergence; (4) the exempt category were those vessels of negligible combatant value. The Board assigned to Great Britain and the United States a total cruiser tonnage of 250,000 to 300,000 tons, and to Japan 150,000 to 180,000 tons. It limited the United States and Great Britain to a destroyer displacement tonnage of 200,000 to 250,000 tons, and Japan to 120,000 to 150,000 tons. It set submarine

tonnage at 60,000 to 90,000 tons for the Anglo-Saxon powers, and 36,000 to 54,000 tons for Japan. It left exempt vessels free from limitation. The Board had thus retained the Washington Conference ratio in its recommendations, leaving the United States mathematically equal with Great Britain.

Although the Board saw parity with the British as a primary concern, it did not forget Japan. Believing that Japan's goal was the "political, commercial, and military domination of the western Pacific," the General Board recommended that the United States maintain its Pacific bases at maximum strength and retain the 5:3 ratio in ship tonnages.⁵³ The Navy was firmly convinced that Japan was the nation the United States most likely would fight in a future war.

The General Board predicted that Great Britain would probably seek a greater number of cruisers than any other power. This information had been acquired through informal discussions in November 1926 and March 1927 between Admiral Hilary Jones and members of the British Admiralty. In a secret memorandum of 10 November 1926, Jones recorded the substance of his conversation with Admiral of the Fleet Lord David Beatty. After an hour of general discussion

⁵³Trimble, "Geneva Conference," p. 128. For more on the position of the Navy prior to the conference see Gerald E. Wheeler, "The United States Navy and the Japanese 'Enemy': 1919-1931," Military Affairs, 21 (Summer 1957):62-64.

touching on all classes of vessels, Jones sought one final statement from Beatty about the vital issue of parity:

Before leaving, I said to the First Sea Lord, 'Now, let us understand each other perfectly so that there can be no doubt as far as the United States is concerned: Great Britain accepts equality in all categories. In any conference we would establish a level of armaments in all categories in which each nation would have an equality.' He agreed to that unequivocally.

Beatty then asked Jones for the American position on the issue of reducing maximum tonnage of individual cruisers. Jones replied that the United States would object to such a reduction because of its need for large cruisers to travel long distances between its bases. Jones essentially was pleased with the November talks, confident that Great Britain would grant full parity to the United States in all types of naval vessels.⁵⁴

Jones again held talks with the British in March 1927. During these discussions he had an opportunity to speak with Vice Admiral Frederick L. Field, who would be the principal British naval advisor at Geneva. In reply to Field's assertion that the British would possibly seek a greater number of cruisers than the United States, Jones reiterated that the United States must have parity in all classes with

⁵⁴Memorandum, 10 November 1927, Hilary P. Jones Papers, Box 4, Library of Congress, Military Division, as quoted in Trimble, "Geneva Conference," p. 117. For the standard biography of Lord Beatty see W. S. Chalmers, The Life and Letters of David, Earl of Beatty (London: Hodden and Stoughton, 1951).

Great Britain: "I . . . practically assured him that [parity in all classes] would be a sine qua non of any agreement to which we would subscribe."⁵⁵ Although the British had now been given a strong hint of the American attitude on cruisers, it did not seem to materially influence their plans.

The British had begun working on their plans for naval disarmament several months prior to Coolidge's invitation. In 1921 Hughes', proposals had surprised the British, and Admiral Beatty decided that at Geneva the British would have the advantage. William Bridgeman, First Lord of the Admiralty, agreed, and the Admiralty began secretly drafting their formula.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Jones to Wilbur, 9 March 1927, Navy Department, General Board Records, Conference Series, 5, pt. 4, p. 2, as quoted in Trimble, "Geneva Conference," p. 119. George Fagan asserts in "Anglo-American Naval Relations: 1927-1937" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1954), p. 22, that a copy of this letter could also be found in the personal papers of Calvin Coolidge. This is curious because the citation he gives--MS Coolidge Papers, Box 426, File 2758a, Library of Congress--does not exist. Coolidge destroyed the majority of this correspondence before he died. After checking with Dwight Miller, Senior Archivist at the Hoover Presidential Library, it was determined that Fagan's citation was either incorrect or imaginary. Dwight Miller to author, 7 November 1977.

⁵⁶When the conference bogged down after the first few meetings, Viscount Cecil complained to Chamberlain: "I am afraid the Admiralty made a mistake in insisting upon such profound secrecy about our proposals before we came. Unfortunately, as they [the Americans] had no guidance as to what we were going to propose, they arrived here [in Geneva] in a rather suspicious frame of mind. . . ." Cecil to Chamberlain, 24 June 1927, Cecil of Chelwood Papers, ADD. MSS. 51079.

On 25 May the Admiralty presented the results of their labors to the Cabinet, which approved their extensive proposals.⁵⁷ The Admiralty believed that the life of all vessels could be lengthened and that "the limitation placed on the armament and displacement of cruisers was unduly and unnecessarily large." With respect to battleships, they recommended that the gun-calibre be reduced from sixteen inches to thirteen and one-half inches, with the tonnage reduced from 35,000 to 28,500 tons. Cruisers would have their gun calibre reduced from eight inches to six inches, with individual tonnage reduced from 10,000 to 7,500 tons. The Admiralty divided cruisers into two categories: large (10,000 tons), and small (7,500 tons and lower). The large cruisers would be used in conjunction with the Fleet at a ratio of five cruisers for every three battleships. Great Britain and the United States could each possess twenty-five large cruisers, with Japan having fifteen. It specified no tonnage requirement for the smaller cruisers, but stipulated that after calculating the length of sea routes to be defended and the density of trade normally using these routes, the British would require a minimum of forty-five small cruisers. In the same manner, the United States was allotted

⁵⁷Cab 23/55, 25 May 1927. For a detailed record of the Committee of Imperial Defense discussions concerning the Admiralty proposals see Great Britain, Public Record Office, Committee of Imperial Defense, Memoranda and Miscellaneous, Cab 4/vol. 16, 14 April 1927. Hereafter cited as Cab 4/16. The Admiralty proposals may be found in the Committee of Imperial Defense Paper No. 808-B, Ibid.

twenty-two, and Japan six. This gave the British a total of seventy cruisers, large and small, the United States forty-seven, and Japan twenty-one. These totals, the Admiralty emphasized, "are absolute and not relative, and that for this reason no reduction on the forty-five for this purpose can be accepted." It also opposed any numerical limit on the smaller cruisers. Admiral Beatty stated that they would accept a limit placed on large cruisers governed by the same ratio as battleships, but as for lighter cruisers "they would prefer no limitation."⁵⁸ The Admiralty report concluded with the recommendation that the destroyer class have a numerical limit of 144 and submarines be divided into two categories: (1) 1,600 tons of surface displacement; and (2) 600 tons of surface displacement.⁵⁹

As can be seen from a comparison of the two plans, there were striking differences. The British sought to revive battleship limitation, a subject the United States did not want considered. But the most important difference was the method of limiting cruisers. The Americans had determined that a simple extension of the Washington Treaty ratio would suffice. This would leave each country free to build what size of vessel it desired. The British, on the other hand,

⁵⁸Cab 2/5, 20 May 1927.

⁵⁹Cab 4/16, 14 April 1927.

used a numerical limit for individual units and had not determined any total tonnage levels. Reconciling these two approaches would be a difficult task, and without a compromise the conference would certainly collapse.

The two countries had developed their respective proposals with an amazing lack of communication between each other. The Admiralty, of course, was determined to obtain an advantage before the conference, and had made little effort to discuss the topic with the United States. But there was also a paucity of pre-conference diplomacy by the United States. Aside from Jone's conversations, there had been informal discussions among the delegates at the Preparatory Commission, but they had not focused their attention on specific details. The Office of Naval Intelligence had made a cursory study of the Japanese, but had only concluded that they would probably desire an increase in their proportion of total tonnage.⁶⁰ These three instances constituted the majority of the pre-conference preparation, and did little to prepare each delegation for the proposals that would be presented at Geneva.

Secretary of State Kellogg had however, devoted much time

⁶⁰Navy Department, General Board Records, Conference Series, 6, Office of Naval Intelligence Report, 30 March 1927, No. 132, as quoted in Trimble, "Geneva Conference," p. 114.

during the final weeks before the conference trying to choose a delegation to represent the United States. In the original invitation, Coolidge had suggested that the representatives already in Geneva be assigned the responsibility. When the conference achieved independent status, the British and Japanese altered their representation. Japan decided to send as its principal delegate Admiral Viscount Makoto Saito, an ex-Minister of Marines and Japan's "most ancient and honored statesman." Great Britain selected William Bridgeman, a Cabinet official, to assist Cecil. With such high-ranking officials representing the other two countries, Gibson suggested to Kellogg that possibly Charles Evans Hughes should again represent the United States.⁶¹ When the Secretary of State and Coolidge tendered the offer, Hughes declined it. The former secretary explained that he was too busy, and that in any event he thought sending a "leading American statesman . . . would draw so much attention to it [the conference] that, if we failed to get a treaty, it would be considered as a

⁶¹Gibson to Castle, 15 April 1927, Castle Papers.

failure of the Administration."⁶² Kellogg and Coolidge acquiesced and decided to send Gibson and a selected group of naval advisors to Geneva.⁶³ To ease Gibson's burden, Kellogg made Admiral Jones a co-delegate. Allen Dulles became legal counsel for the American delegation, and on 2 June Coolidge gave the final list of delegates to the press.⁶⁴

On 1 June Coolidge had met with Gibson and his naval advisors to discuss the American proposals. Coolidge pointedly asked the navy members if they believed the Navy

⁶²Kellogg to Houghton, 2 May 1927, Kellogg Papers. Castle wrote Gibson on 3 May 1927, recording that Charles MacVeagh, Ambassador to Japan, had suggested another possible reason for Hughes' refusal: ". . . Mr. Hughes did not want to go himself because he was afraid the conference might be a failure and . . . detract from his glory gained in the Washington Conference, that he did not want anyone else to go because the conference might succeed and that, therefore, he would have to surrender some part of his own kudos." Castle to Gibson, 3 May 1927, Castle Papers. Merlo J. Pusey, biographer of Hughes, theorized that Hughes foresaw the failure of the conference and was simply not "inclined to beat his head against a stone wall when the possibility of accomplishment was nil." Merlo J. Pusey, Charles Evans Hughes, 2 Vols. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), 2:625.

⁶³FRUS, 1927, pp. 40-41. Under-Secretary of State William R. Castle thought Kellogg should head the American delegation. He opined that the conference would more likely be successful if Kellogg attended. Castle added that if Kellogg stayed in Washington during the heat of the summer months, he would probably become "intensely irritable and we shall have a hopeless time in trying to make him understand what you [Gibson] are driving at." Castle to Gibson, 3 May 19, Castle Papers.

⁶⁴The composition of the American delegation will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

would support a treaty based on them. Upon receiving a unanimous reply in the affirmative, Coolidge stated that the United States would not agree to a lesser number of 10,000 ton cruisers than Great Britain, but he predicted an arrangement could probably be worked out which would give the United States its tonnage requirements while still allowing the British the number they desired of small cruisers. The American delegates took this optimism to Geneva.⁶⁵

During the following days, Gibson and his colleagues made ready for their departure. Kellogg gave Gibson final instructions and a review of the American position. He stressed that the primary objective of the conference was to negotiate a treaty that could further limit naval armament "in the interest of peace and international understanding."⁶⁶ With these lofty words still echoing in his ears Gibson left for Geneva. He shared Kellogg's and Coolidge's optimism, for he wrote his mother: "I only hope it will move rapidly and that we shall be able to work out something sensible and reasonable. I think we can."⁶⁷

The historian might find Gibson's confidence to be

⁶⁵FRUS, 1927, p. 42.

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 43-45.

⁶⁷Gibson to his mother, 12 June 1927, Gibson Papers.

naive. The American and British delegations approached the conference secure in the belief that after short deliberation the other side would willingly accept the program offered, and everyone could go home. Unfortunately for all concerned, the unfolding of the conference served to emphasize the intransigence of naval planners on both sides. This unwillingness to compromise doomed the Geneva Conference to failure.

THE CONFERENCE BEGINS

The Geneva Conference opened officially at 3:15 P.M. on 20 June 1927. With the obligatory photographs taken, the three delegations seated themselves around the table and the conference began.¹ The American delegation totalled seventeen members. Eight naval officers assisted the two delegates: Rear Admiral Andrew T. Long, a long-time member of the General Board and a good friend of Admiral Jones; Admiral Frank H. Shofield, Director of the Navy's Plans Division; Captain J. M. Reeves, one of the Navy's pioneers in the development of carrier aviation; Captain Arthur J. Hepburn, Director of Naval Intelligence; Captain Adolphus Andrews, another friend of Admiral Jones; Lieutenant-Commander Harold C. Train; and Lieutenant-Commander H. H. Frost.²

Gibson had mixed feelings about his military assistants. In a letter to Undersecretary of State William Castle, he voiced his dismay at the appointment of Captain Andrews. "If they [the Navy] are determined to send over a man who has been declared unacceptable I don't propose to use up any energy fighting it." Admiral Jones was a

¹For a critical description of the First Plenary Session see Drew Pearson, "Conference First Impressions," Trans-Pacific 14 (23 July 1927):5.

²Trimble, "Geneva Conference," p. 152; Conference Records, p. 17.

"loveable old boy," but, Gibson lamented, "it takes him forever to make up his mind and somewhat longer to explain his ideas." Rear-Admiral Long was likeable, but Gibson was a little nervous about having him "charged up to my account as a capable naval expert." He considered Lieutenant-Commander Train "harmless and good-tempered--but a complete blank--hardly human." Although critical, Gibson really had no serious complaints with his naval assistants: "[I would] just feel much easier in my mind if I knew we were going to have a few wide-awake sailors who could keep me wised up and could answer questions put to them during a discussion."³

The British delegation consisted of thirty-eight members. The two chief delegates were Viscount Robert Cecil of Chelwood, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and William Clive Bridgeman, Member of Parliament and First Lord of the Admiralty.⁴ These two men were members of the British Cabinet, and Cecil had led the British at the Preparatory Commission. The head delegates were assisted chiefly by Vice-Admiral Sir Frederick L. Field, Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff; Rear-Admiral A.D.P.R. Pound, who replaced Field when he became ill in July and Captain W. A. Egerton.

³Gibson to Castle, 19 April 1927, Castle Papers.

⁴For more biographical information of Cecil see Kenneth Rose, The Later Cecils (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1975), pp. 127-85.

Each dominion sent four representatives. The Hon. Ernest Lapointe attended for Canada, and Sir J. Cook for Australia. Sir James Parr and Admiral Lord Jellicoe came from New Zealand. Jellicoe, famous for his part in the Battle of Jutland in 1916 and former Commander of the British Grand Fleet, became a major spokesman for the British naval point of view during the conference.⁵ J. S. Smith represented South Africa, and Kevin O'Higgins, who met a tragic death in early July, upheld the interests of the Irish Free State.⁶

Japan also sent a large delegation. Second in size to the British with thirty-six members, the Japanese were led by two experienced government officials: Admiral Viscount Makato Saito, Governor-General of Korea, who had served as Navy Minister from 1905-1914; and Viscount Kikujiro Ishii, a former Foreign Minister then serving as Ambassador to France. Accompanying these men were fifteen naval advisors, headed by Vice-Admiral Seizo Kobayashi, and including Rear-Admiral Kanziro Hara, Captain Teikichi Hari, and Captain Teijiro Toyoda.⁷

The delegations elected Hugh Gibson chairman of the

⁵The standard biography of Admiral Jellicoe is R. H. Bacon's, The Life of John Rushworth Earl Jellicoe (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1936).

⁶Conference Records, pp. 17-19.

⁷Ibid., pp. 19-20.

conference and drafted a message thanking President Coolidge for his "humane and wise initiative" in calling the meeting. Gibson then read a message from Coolidge calling for an end to the armaments race and thanking Japan and Great Britain for taking part in the conference.⁸

In his opening speech, Gibson declared that the conference was considering the "least intricate phase" of the armaments problem and warned that failure to make definite progress would be "a serious blow" to efforts being made to limit land and air armaments. He listed four major points that the Americans considered basic to arms limitation: (1) an end to naval competition among the three powers; (2) navies to be maintained at the lowest level compatible with national security; (3) the economic necessity for keeping armaments low; and (4) the extension of the Washington formula to all categories of combatant vessels of the three powers. Accordingly, the United States was prepared to accept as low a total tonnage in each class of auxiliary vessels as would be acceptable to the other powers represented.⁹

Gibson then outlined the specific American proposals.

⁸Ibid., p. 23.

⁹Ibid., p. 25.

The Washington Treaty ratios of 5-5-3 should be applied to cruisers, destroyers, and submarines. An "escape clause" could be added to give the participants the right to revise the treaty should an outside power begin building naval armaments excessively. In addition, the United States desired to exempt from limitation those ships of negligible combatant value. The resulting treaty would be coterminous with the Washington Treaty.

Total individual tonnage differentiated the destroyer and cruiser classes: cruisers consisting of those surface craft displacing between 3,000 and 10,000 tons, and destroyers displacing between 600 and 3,000 tons, with a speed greater than seventeen knots. All vessels designed to operate below the surface of the sea were lumped into a single submarine class. Gibson added that all naval requirements were relative, meaning that the building programs of one power could well-require corresponding programs on the part of others. The United States would thus remain flexible in its requirements.

The proposed tonnage allocations in the cruiser, destroyer, and submarine classes for each country were as follows:

<u>Cruiser class:</u>	<u>Total tonnage limitation:</u>
for the United States	250,000 to 300,000 tons
for the British Empire	250,000 to 300,000 tons
for Japan	150,000 to 180,000 tons
 <u>Destroyer class:</u>	
for the United States	200,000 to 250,000 tons
for the British Empire	200,000 to 250,000 tons
for Japan	120,000 to 180,000 tons
 <u>Submarine class:</u>	
for the United States	60,000 to 90,000 tons
for the British Empire	60,000 to 90,000 tons
for Japan	36,000 to 54,000 tons

Gibson added that if either Japan or Great Britain wanted still lower figures, his government would welcome such proposals. Also, the United States would consider the universal abolition of submarines if the other powers so desired.

In conclusion, Gibson stressed that all three powers had the right to maintain a naval force sufficient for their legitimate defense requirements. Although the difficulties of the task before them must not be underestimated, the delegates should approach them confidently and with the hope that they would find a solution.¹⁰

William Bridgeman, the next speaker, thanked the League of Nations for its hospitality and President Coolidge for

¹⁰Ibid., p. 27.

issuing the invitation. He acknowledged the work already completed at the Washington Conference and noted that prior to the Coolidge invitation he had placed before the Prime Minister similar proposals for a naval conference to further the efforts of the Washington Conference.¹¹ Bridgeman stressed the British desire for disarmament and outlined the principles upon which their proposals were predicated.

The insular character of Great Britain made it dependent on the seas for the importation of raw materials and food supplies, as well as for exports. The realities of long coast lines and trade extended routes required an extensive network of surface vessels for protection from hostile raids. Thus, Bridgeman called for the extension of shiplife for capital ships to twenty-six years; of destroyers to twenty years; and of submarines to fifteen years. He requested a reduction in the individual tonnage of the battleship from 35,000 tons to under 30,000 tons and the gun size from sixteen to thirteen and one-half inches. Aircraft carriers from 27,000 tons to 25,000 tons, and their guns from eight

¹¹There is no mention of this proposal in the Cabinet Minutes for February 1927, but one historian suggests that the idea for another naval conference originated with Cecil. Stephen Roskill, *Hankey*, p. 438. Bridgeman's speech is also printed in Command Paper 2964, *Speeches in Plenary Session by the Right Hon. W. C. Bridgeman, MP., First Lord of the Admiralty* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1927), pp. 2-7. Hereafter cited as Command Paper 2964.

inches to six inches. He proposed dividing the cruiser class into two sub-classes: 10,000 ton, eight-inch gun large cruisers, and a smaller cruiser having a maximum individual tonnage of 7,500 tons, carrying a six-inch gun. While the 5-5-3 ratio on the large cruisers was acceptable to the British, Bridgeman believed a different arrangement should be followed for the lighter cruisers.

The British also wanted to divide the destroyer and submarine into two classes: 1,750 ton destroyer leaders, and 1,400 ton destroyers with gun limited to six inches; large submarines with a maximum tonnage of 1,600 tons, and a smaller group limited to 600 tons. Bridgeman added that the British would continue their quest for the abolition of the submarine, if the others agreed.

Bridgeman concluded his remarks noting that the British also considered an "escape clause" similar to the American proposal necessary to the anticipated treaty. He added that the extension of life for ships would "obviously reduce very considerably the cost of replacement for us all." He hoped that by standardizing the size of future naval craft armaments the participants of the Geneva Conference would eliminate the danger of renewed competition.¹²

Admiral Saito spoke last. He stressed his government's

¹²Conference Records, p. 31.

desire to reach an accord with the United States and Great Britain. The Japanese based their proposals on the principle that "the requirements of each nation . . . are reflected in what that nation possesses actually or in authorized programmes. For that reason, in a discussion concerning auxiliary vessels, adequate consideration must be given the existing status of each nation in that particular respect."¹³ The Japanese thus proposed that none of the participating powers adopt any new building programs that would add to their existing "naval strength". "Naval strength" was defined as total tonnage in any category of auxiliary vessels. The Japanese desired the existing naval programs in each country to be completed as planned, but no future construction to be undertaken during the life of the treaty. They also requested that all ships less than 700 tons, those surface vessels carrying no gun over three inches, or no more than four guns between three and six inches, and aircraft carriers under 10,000 tons be exempt from limitation. Replacement age limits for surface auxiliary vessels would be set at sixteen years for those above 3,000 tons; twelve years for those under 3,000 tons; and twelve years for all submarines. Finally provision was made for the scrapping of all excess

¹³Ibid., p. 33.

tonnage, and regulations established governing the replacement of all ships.¹⁴

The proposals for the limitation of auxiliary vessels had been given and the differences between the British and American plans were obvious. The Americans had come to Geneva with the desire to extend the Washington Treaty ratio to these vessels with limitation by total tonnage in each class. The British had developed a much more detailed plan based on limitation by age, tonnage, and gun size. The British also suggested the division of the auxiliaries into two sub-classes which was not envisioned by the Americans. Another basic difference was the British suggestion to limit further battleships and aircraft carriers. This surprised the Americans who had been content to postpone consideration of this subject until 1931, when there was to be a formal review of it. The Japanese proposals were the most general of the three, calling for the maintenance of the status quo. Saito had left unsaid the Japanese quest for an increase in their share of the Washington ratios, evidently hoping to gain this during the negotiations. Another important point was the Japanese desire to keep each country at its present armament level which would aid the Japanese position

¹⁴Conference Records, 32-34.

in the Pacific, and thus placate a public unhappy about the inferior status placed upon Japan at the Washington Conference.¹⁵ Regardless of these concerns, the Japanese had come to Geneva to gain an agreement, and they worked hard during the course of the conference to effect that goal.

Although Anglo-American discrepancies were obvious, neither Gibson nor the British anticipated any insurmountable difficulties in finding a solution.¹⁶ Gibson summed up the situation at the first post-Plenary session press conference: "Well, at any rate, now we have got something we can get our teeth into."¹⁷

After the Plenary session, both the British and American delegations met to scrutinize the proposals. Admiral Field predicted that the Americans would object to any discussion of battleships. Both Cecil and Bridgeman strongly favored further limitation and stated that they would press this issue. Field added that the United States had established "arbitrary" figures for cruiser limitation which, if carried out, would limit Britain to only thirty cruisers. The American destroyer proposals also displeased the British; they considered the 3,000 ton maximum limit to be so "high as to be of little practical application to present-day

¹⁶FRUS, 1927, p. 48; British Documents, pp. 605-6.

¹⁷New York Herald Tribune, 21 June 1927, p. 1.

destroyers. . . ." But the British remained confident of success in negotiating a treaty.¹⁸

The Americans also saw problems in the British proposals. Admiral Jones was particularly upset, feeling the British had shown bad faith after giving what he believed were contrary assurances on his last trip to London. Hugh Wilson, who attended the conference as Secretariat-General, assumed the British had other proposals that were more practical than those given and would present them at the next public session.¹⁹ The Americans evidently considered the original British offer to be so impractical that they could not be taken seriously. The British, however, were quite serious, as the Americans would soon discover.

That the conference would ultimately founder on cruiser limitation should not detract from the fact that tentative agreements were reached in the Technical Committee regarding exempt vessels, destroyers, and submarines. This committee, consisting of naval experts from each delegation, also made progress on capital ships until that question was

¹⁸Great Britain, Public Record Office, Admiralty 166/2609, Minutes of the British Empire Delegation, 2nd Meeting, 21 June 1927. These records are found in the Rolls Room of the Public Record Office.

¹⁹Diary of Hugh Wilson, 21 June 1927. Wilson's diary is located in the Hugh Gibson Papers, Box 30, File 1, Herbert Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford, California. Hereafter cited as Wilson Diary.

set aside pending agreement on cruisers. Historians have largely ignored these agreements even though they reflected large concessions from all sides and were eventually embodied in the London Naval Treaty of 1930.²⁰ They represent the successful bargaining that characterized portions of the Geneva Conference. Such were the contributions of the Technical Committee.

After the delegations settled down to the business of the conference, the first problem that faced them was whether or not to review battleship limitation. The British fervently pressed for a renewal of this topic, arguing that further reduction in capital ship tonnage and armament would greatly aid the economies of all governments. The Japanese agreed that this might be a worthwhile subject, but needed official permission from their government before they could commit themselves.²¹ The Americans adamantly opposed any considera-

²⁰Armin Rappaport, The Navy League of the United States (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962), says the conference was a "total failure," p. 109; see also Gerald E. Wheeler, Prelude to Pearl Harbor: The United States Navy and the Far East, 1921-1931 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1963), p. 148; and Emma L. Ethan Ellis, Frank B. Kellogg and American Foreign Relations, 1925-1929 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1961), pp. 183-84. Ernest Andrade, Jr., "United States Naval Policy in the Disarmament Era, 1921-1937" (Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1966), p. 162, states that it is a mistake to overlook the agreements made covering classes other than cruisers.

²¹British Documents, p. 612.

tion of further capital ship limitation because the Washington Treaty had stipulated that a conference would be called in 1931 to assess its worth.²² Despite American arguments to the contrary, the British remained convinced further battleship limitation should be pursued.

As for cruisers, the Japanese initially occupied a middleground. They supported the British contention to limit large cruisers numerically, but they also saw merit in the American call for total tonnage limitation giving each country the freedom to build what it desired. This would give Japan the opportunity to build as many small cruisers as they needed. The Japanese were willing to equivocate until the other two powers could come to an agreement on cruisers.²³ How well the two Anglo-Saxon powers were able to compromise their views became the crucial question of the conference.

The Executive Committee, composed of the chief delegates, met informally on 24 June. Discussion was devoted to Technical Committee procedures. The British pressed for taking each

²²Kellogg strongly supported Gibson in this position. Press Conferences of the Secretaries of State (1922-1973), Series 1, F. B. Kellogg and H. L. Stimson: March 1927-December 1929 (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1974), Reel #3. Hereafter cited as Kellogg Press Conferences. The date for this particular item was 25 June 1927.

²³British Documents, p. 612.

class separately in a progression from exempt classes through capital ships. The Americans countered that the Technical Committee establish general guidelines for the discussion of all categories before any specific agreements were conducted.²⁴ Finally after two more days of private talks the naval assistants worked out a plan to devote each session of the Technical Committee to a specific class of vessel and reach general agreements wherever possible.²⁵

The conference had completed its first week. With the weekend approaching the delegates scattered to take advantage of the beautiful Swiss countryside. Golf was very popular among the delegates, with Gibson, Cecil, and Jellicoe avid players.²⁶ Gibson also organized a baseball game between the Japanese and the Americans, which resulted in the Americans receiving a sound thrashing, 28-8.²⁷ These activities helped to keep relations among the participants less strained as the conference grew more tense in the following weeks.

The Technical Committee resumed negotiations on 27

²⁴Conference Records, p. 77.

²⁵Trimble, "Geneva Conference," p. 173.

²⁶A. C. Temperley, The Whispering Gallery of Europe (London: Collins Publishers, 1938), p. 103. Jellicoe joked with reporters after one round of golf with Gibson: "We had a jolly good golf--ratio about 5-5." New York Herald Tribune, 23 June 1927, p. 2.

²⁷Perrin C. Galpin, ed., Hugh Gibson 1883-1954: Extracts from His Letters and Anecdotes from His Friends (New York: Belgian-American Educational Foundation, Inc., 1956), pp. 62-63.

June. With the addition of the capital ship question there were now five categories under consideration: capital ships, cruisers, exempt vessels, destroyers, and submarines. The first two raised the greatest difficulties, and will be discussed later. The last three were less troublesome, and the Technical Committee was able to reach tentative agreements. Because the Technical Committee meetings became quite tedious at times, it is best to give a summary of the provisional recommendations as they were formulated and given to the Executive Committee.²⁸

On 27 June the Technical Committee dealt with exempt vessels.²⁹ After careful deliberation, the following four categories of ships were selected as exempt from limitation: (1) all surface vessels of less than 600 tons standard displacement; (2) all surface vessels between 600 and 2,000 tons having no guns with a greater calibre than 6 inches, or mounting more than 4 guns above 3 inches in calibre, or fitted for torpedoes and traveling faster than 18 knots; (3) all ships not designed as fighting ships or having any fighting ship capabilities such as large guns, heavy armour, or

²⁸A list of these recommendations is printed in the Technical Committee Final Report issued to the Executive Committee on 8 July 1927. Conference Records, pp. 197-200.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 109-19.

the ability to lay mines or land aircraft on board; (4) certain existing vessels of special type such as minesweepers.

The Technical Committee next tackled the destroyer class.³⁰ The initial proposals divided destroyer tonnage into destroyers and destroyer leaders. The British suggested 1,750 tons and the United States expressed a desire for 2,000 tons as the maximum tonnage for destroyer leaders. The Japanese gave no recommendations for destroyer leader tonnage, but supported the British in a destroyer tonnage limit of 1,500 tons. The Americans countered with a limit of 1,400 tons. Britain alone offered a gun-calibre limit of 5 inches. Age for replacement of all destroyers was given as 16 years, 20 years, and 12 years for the United States, Britain, and Japan respectively.

The committee produced a tentative compromise setting: (1) maximum tonnage for destroyer leaders at 1,850 tons; (2) maximum tonnage of destroyers at 1,500 tons; (3) gun calibre for all destroyers not greater than 5 inches; (4) age limit for replacement of new construction at sixteen years; (5) sixteen percent of the total tonnage allotted for destroyers as applicable for the construction of destroyer leaders; (6) the dividing line between all cruiser class and the destroyer class at 1,580 tons, with the destroyer class including all

³⁰Ibid., pp. 132-47.

surface combatant vessels between 600 and 1,850 tons. Neither the United States nor Japan preferred to give definite figures for total tonnage or numbers for the destroyer class. Britain gave its tonnage requirements in the destroyer class as 221,600 tons, with no more than 29,000 tons being used for destroyer leaders.³¹

The submarine class represented the last area in which there was substantial agreement. On 1 and 2 July, the Technical Committee discussed this item.³² The United States proposed a limit of 60,000 to 90,000 tons displacement for the United States and Great Britain, between 36,000 and 54,000 tons for Japan. The British suggested a division of the class into a large type ranging in tonnage from 1,000 to 1,600 tons; and a smaller type to include all submarines under 600 tons. The British evidently were not concerned with those submarines between 600 and 1,000 tons. The Japanese strongly desired having their 700-ton submarines exempted, but indicated they would have to wait for further information from Tokyo. A few days later, after getting word from their government, they withdrew their suggestion for this exemption on the condition that special consideration be given Japan when the time came for allocating tonnage in

³¹Ibid., pp. 197-98.

³²Ibid., pp. 148-58.

this class.

The Americans suggested 1,700 tons as the maximum tonnage for individual submarines. Japan offered a limit of 2,000 tons, noting that many submarines already existed between 1,400 and 3,000 tons. The delegations finally compromised with 1,800 tons as the maximum individual tonnage for a submarine.

For replacement age the United States proposed thirteen years, the British fifteen, and the Japanese twelve. Another compromise left the replacement age at thirteen years. By the end of the second week the Technical Committee was ready with its tentative recommendations for a third class of auxiliary vessels.

Agreement on capital ships and cruisers proved to be more elusive. The British had greatly surprised the Americans with their battleship proposal. The Americans had not even considered the subject as a topic for discussion, and for that reason were totally unprepared to deal with it.³³

Britain had also surprised Japan. Viscount Ishii forthwith cabled Tokyo for instructions, and on 27 June, he informed Gibson that the delegation had received permission to discuss battleships. Dismayed by this reversal, Gibson assured Ishii that the Americans would remain firmly against

³³FRUS, 1927, pp. 30-51, 53.

including the subject at the present conference.³⁴

Gibson carefully outlined the American position to Cecil and Bridgeman in a meeting on 23 June. The United States opposed any discussion of the Washington Treaty provisions in the absence of two of the participants, Italy and France.³⁵

The British could not understand the surprise their proposal evoked. They argued that in their acceptance of Coolidge's invitation, they had indicated a desire to consider the Washington Treaty provisions. The reply included a British wish to "consider to what extent the principles adopted at Washington can be carried further, either as regards the ratio in different classes of ships between the various powers, or in other important ways."³⁶ Since the Americans had accepted the reply without comment, they had tacitly accepted the possibility of further battleship limitation.³⁷ Members of the American delegation were privately annoyed that such an inference had been drawn,³⁸

³⁴Ibid., pp. 60-61.

³⁵Ibid., p. 49.

³⁶British Documents, p. 578.

³⁷London Times, 25 June 1927, p. 12.

³⁸Toynbee, Survey, p. 49. Toynbee cited the French newspaper, Le Temps, 25 June for this insight into American thinking.

but the British nevertheless believed the battleship discussion was necessary and pressed their case.

When the United Kingdom delegation concluded that their two counterparts were not taking this subject seriously, Bridgeman urged his government to have the British ambassadors to the United States and Japan explain the importance of further limitation in battleships. The British saw advantages in extending the principles embodied in the Washington Treaty: aiding the League of Nations Preparatory Commission in achieving better results in future meetings; and reducing the burden of expenditures for each country.³⁹

Esme Howard dutifully articulated these reasons to Kellogg. At the same time however, he warned Chamberlain that "so far as I can understand the situation, we must walk very cannily if we are to avoid a failure of the conference and consequent aftermath of recrimination." If the United States threatened to terminate the conference over the subject of British insistence on battleship limitation, they should abandon the subject. The issue was not worth that.⁴⁰

Winston Churchill, Chancellor of the Exchequer, disagreed with the Ambassador. While a Royal Navy enthusiast, Churchill was also responsible for the nation's economic

³⁹British Documents, p. 617.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 619.

health. For the edification of the Cabinet, he strongly supported a further reduction of battleships. Great Britain would realize great economy if such were done. Churchill saw in the American disposition to keep the size of capital ships as large as possible a retention of the capacity of crossing the Pacific and attacking Japan.⁴¹

Secretary of State Kellogg was suspicious of the British reasons for reviewing capital ship limitation. He explained to Coolidge that the British had two new ships--the Rodney and the Nelson--nearly completed, each displacing nearly 35,000 tons. If all new capital ships would not exceed 30,000 tons, the British would have a marked advantage over the other navies. Kellogg remained convinced that the entire topic should be postponed until 1931.⁴²

On 8 July the Japanese announced that their government

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 627-28. Churchill took an active part in the Cabinet discussions pertaining to the conference. He was hesitant to support any parity plan and disliked even dealing with Coolidge, whom he described as having the "viewpoint of a New England backwoodsman." W. N. Medlicott, Douglas Dakin, and M. E. Lambert, eds., Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, Series 1A, Vol. 5 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1973), p. 884. Churchill's memorandum is also recorded in Great Britain, Public Record Office, Cabinet Memoranda, (Cab 24), Vol. 187, Confidential Print 189. This record group will hereafter be cited as Cab 24/ the volume number: the confidential print number.

⁴²FRUS, 1927, pp. 63-64; Kellogg Press Conferences, 28 June 1927.

saw merit in renewed battleship limitation, but urged that the other matters be concluded before beginning such discussions.⁴³ The United States acquiesced. It would discuss the matter, but only after the delegates had reached agreement on the other classes of auxiliary vessels. The change in American policy reflected the change in Kellogg's attitude. The Secretary had decided that the battleship issue was consuming an inordinate amount of time, and after visiting with the Japanese Ambassador, Matsudaira, who indicated Japan's intentions, he concluded that perhaps battleship discussions would have some merit in 1927. The Secretary agreed, but stipulated that such talks should be informal and not interfere with the more important tasks before the conference.⁴⁴

On 9 July the British notified the others of their decision to postpone discussion of capital ships.⁴⁵ The delegations had now agreed on tentative recommendations for limiting four classes of vessels: destroyers, submarines, exempt vessels, and capital ships.

The conference could now direct its full attention to

⁴³Conference Records, pp. 83-84.

⁴⁴British Documents, p. 654.

⁴⁵Adm 116/2609.

the vexing problem of cruiser limitation, the principal reason for convening the Geneva Conference. The question would now be answered whether these delegates could improve upon the performance of their predecessors in Washington in 1922 who could only agree upon a maximum size for cruisers and their armament.

THE CRUISER CONTROVERSY

Early in the conference the participants failed to appreciate the difficulties inherent in the cruiser issue. After the first Plenary session neither the American nor British delegates indicated any problems. Cruisers were only part of the total disarmament picture. The assumption was that limitations could be imposed here as with other classes of auxiliary vessels. At the end of the first week, however, the problem began to take form and surface as a major point of controversy.

The British had been initially shocked by the American cruisers proposals. Admiral Field had snorted that the American formula was "arbitrary" and would relegate to the British only thirty cruisers.¹ The British hoped the Japanese could be won over to their side and support a division of the cruiser class into large and small categories.² While the Technical Committee worked on reaching tentative limitation recommendations in the other areas, the cruiser issue steadily gained in importance as the major roadblock of the conference.

¹British Documents, p. 609.

²British Documents, p. 612. The Admiralty had determined prior to the conference that Japan would be allowed a maximum of nine large cruisers, Cab 4/16, 14 April 1977.

Secretary Kellogg soon recognized the importance of the cruiser issue. After Gibson reported that Admiral Jellicoe, seconded by Bridgeman, had stated the amazing British tonnage requirements of 500,000 tons for cruisers, Kellogg immediately replied that the United States must remain firm in its desire to continue the Washington Treaty ratios and its commitment to the proposed tonnages. Kellogg could not understand why Great Britain needed so many cruisers and dismissed Jellicoe's large tonnage declaration as an attempt to see how serious the Americans were about the principle of parity. The Americans were quite serious. Kellogg adamantly declared there could "be no question" about parity.³

Kellogg based the American right to parity with Great Britain on a portion of Lord Balfour's speech at the Washington Conference. Balfour had accepted the American contention for a 5-5-3 ratio for battleships and the battlefleet and had concluded with the following:⁴

Taking those two as really belonging to one subject, namely the battle fleet, taking those two, the battleships themselves and the vessels auxiliary and necessary to a battle fleet, we find the proportion between various countries is acceptable. . . .

³FRUS, 1927, pp. 55-56.

⁴Congress, Senate, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, Washington: 12 November 1921 - 6 February 1922, 67th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1922), p. 102.

The Secretary interpreted this statement to mean that parity in all classes of vessels had British approval. But the Americans were incorrect, Balfour had agreed only to parity in "battleships and the vessels auxiliary and necessary to a battle fleet," in other words, those vessels which accompanied the battleships. Balfour had said nothing about the auxiliary vessels used to maintain the British lines of trade and communication. The British thus believed they had agreed only to parity with the United States in battleships, and in the case of cruisers, only those large cruisers assisting the Fleet. They felt under no obligation to accept parity in the smaller cruisers. Unfortunately, this difference in interpretation had not been explained by the British, and the Americans thought the British were trying to relinquish the equality they had granted at Washington.⁵

The uproar over parity gained momentum during the second week of the conference. Kellogg grew increasingly concerned that the United States would not be allowed parity in cruisers.⁶ Bridgeman became upset over the American outcry

⁵For examples of American press protests over the parity issue see, Wythe Williams, foreign correspondent for the New York Times, 21-24 June 1927.

⁶Kellogg repeated his position on the parity issue at a press conference on 29 June 1927, adding that whatever Great Britain demanded for cruisers "we would, of course, demand an equal amount," Kellogg Press Conference.

and announced to a hastily gathered press conference on 29 June that Great Britain had "no intention of contesting the principle of parity between the naval strength of the United States and Great Britain. . . ." He expressed surprise that the Americans had inferred from British statements any British desire for supremacy. While Great Britain had certain naval requirements, his government did "not deny the right of the United States to build up to an equal figure in any type of warship if she thought it necessary."⁷ This statement relieved the apprehensions in Washington, with Secretary of State Kellogg expressing his gratification at the British admission of parity.⁸

Some members of the British Government were not so pleased. Winston Churchill insisted that the British

. . . ought not let ourselves be netted in a scheme of parity with the United States in cruisers and other ancillaries. There can really be no parity between a Power whose Navy is its life and a Power whose Navy is only for prestige. Parity for the former is supremacy for the latter.

He admitted that Great Britain had no desire to limit the number of cruisers built by the United States. His country was going to construct the cruisers it required, and the

⁷FRUS, 1927, p. 65. For a verbatim account of Bridgeman's statement see The Manchester Guardian, 1 July 1927, p. 15.

⁸New York Times, 1 July 1927, p. 9. Wythe Williams crowed that the American press had "forced" Bridgeman into the parity concession, *Ibid.*, p. 19.

United States could build what it wanted with no British interference.⁹ Churchill's opinions were readily seconded by the Admiralty, and the Cabinet agreed that the British government would not "adopt the principle of parity of naval strength in so many words, as this was contrary to previous policy and was believed to be strongly opposed by the Admiralty."¹⁰ The Cabinet wired the Geneva delegates an outline of the British position: the British meant to build enough cruisers to satisfy their needs and laid down no restrictions on American cruiser construction.¹¹

But problems remained with the parity question. To the Americans Bridgeman had conceded parity in all cruisers. He had said that "[Britain] has no intention of contesting the principle of parity between the naval strength of the United States and Great Britain." The Admiralty read the statement differently. Technically it had agreed only to parity with the United States in the large 10,000 ton cruisers. This was in keeping with Balfour's statement at Washington. The Admiralty had no intention of conceding equality in the

⁹British Documents, p. 627.

¹⁰Cab 23/55, 29 June 1927. The question of parity was raised by Lord Balfour without prior notice, which resulted in a discussion described by one witness as "confused." Thomas Jones, Whitehall Diary, ed. Keith Middlemas (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 104.

¹¹British Documents, p. 627.

smaller vessels because Britain needed more of these than did the United States because of their "special needs." American parity versus Britain's "special needs" became and remained the basic issue before the conference.

Bridgeman was soon distressed to learn that the Americans had interpreted his statement to mean parity in all cruisers. He realized that equality with the United States would probably result in Japan demanding a corresponding increase in these vessels. If so, Bridgeman then believed "comprehensive agreement on [the] cruiser question [would] be impossible." The best chance for success, Bridgeman proposed, would be an agreement on large cruisers, leaving each nation free to build what it desired in small cruisers.¹²

Admiral Beatty shared Bridgeman's assessment. If the Americans received absolute parity, he was certain the Japanese would increase their tonnage demands. The British could not reduce their cruiser requirements without endangering the welfare of the Empire, and if America did obtain parity it would in reality have supremacy because the United States would have no need for so many cruisers. The Admiralty was unable to divorce itself from considering the strategic results of the United States having more cruisers than they thought necessary. From the standpoint of the Admiralty, this would

¹²Ibid., p. 633.

give the United States a numerical advantage in a future war. Regardless of any future considerations, Beatty finally recommended that for the present, the entire issue be dropped; the less said, the better.¹³ By this time, however, parity had become intertwined with the whole cruiser issue and could not be disregarded.

While the higher echelons struggled with the interpretation of equality, the delegates at Geneva sought a compromise. On 28 June the Technical Committee devoted its attention exclusively to cruisers. Admiral Field restated the British proposal to divide the class into large and small vessels. Large cruisers would be limited numerically by the Washington Treaty ratio, while there would be no limit on the number of small cruisers. The Americans countered that total tonnage be assigned the entire class. The Americans dismissed the British suggestion as too costly to be practical. Field, becoming exasperated, presented his country's absolute requirements: fifteen large and sixty light cruisers. These seventy-five cruisers would total nearly 600,000 tons. Jones flatly declared that 600,000 tons was "no limitation." Field remained firm, however, stating that the British figures "had not been arrived at as something to

¹³Cab 23/55, 4 July 1927.

bargain with but definitely what had always been intended."¹⁴ The Geneva delegates, however, had changed the original plans proposed by the Admiralty before the conference. The number of large cruisers required had been reduced from twenty-five to fifteen, and that of small cruisers had increased from forty-five to sixty. This increase in the number of small cruisers can be explained by the Admiralty's desire to slowly phase out the larger cruisers and replace them with smaller vessels. Britain's adamant desire to have all future cruisers built smaller with smaller guns became the crucial point in the debate and contributed to the collapse of the conference.

Once the initial positions concerning cruisers were outlined, the delegates spent the rest of the conference struggling with various formulas in an attempt to break the deadlock. The first try occurred on 1 July. Admiral Schofield of the United States met with Captain Toyoda and Captain Egerton to discuss their differences. Egerton admitted that the British total of 600,000 tons was high, but stressed that this figure would increase to 750,000 tons if the Americans insisted that only large cruisers be built in the future. Of course, Egerton added, these cruisers would

¹⁴Conference Records, p. 123.

be just for defensive purposes serving as protection for the British lines of communication. In response to Schofield's total consternation at such high tonnage figures, Egerton calmly replied that the Americans were "welcome to criticize until they were blue in the face so far as Great Britain was concerned." Schofield then introduced a proposal calling for an agreement that would last only until 1936 the expiration date of the treaty.¹⁵

After Egerton outlined Schofield's suggestion, the British formulated their reply. They would accept Schofield's proposals if in return the Americans would "in advance wholeheartedly agree" to the following four principles: (1) the age limit to be as high as possible; (2) the armament for the new type of cruiser to be of six-inch calibre; (3) 7,500 tons to be the maximum displacement of the new cruiser; and (4) the number of 10,000-ton, eight-inch gun cruisers to be fixed by agreement. Subject to American acquiescence the British estimated their total tonnage by 1936 to be 462,000 tons.¹⁶

The British reply angered Admiral Jones and Gibson. Both men deprecated the attempt to force the Americans into

¹⁵FRUS, 1927, pp. 66-67.

¹⁶Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of the B.E.D., 1 July 1927, ADM 116/2609.

making "blind promises" in exchange for the British decision to consider "a reasonable suggestion." Gibson recorded that the Japanese, also shocked by the British tonnage figure, had urged him to convince Bridgeman to lower their tonnage demands. Gibson informed Kellogg that if the British continued to insist on such high tonnage figures, he would ask them to publish these figures along with their rationale.¹⁷ The Americans had overlooked the fact that, although still higher than they desired, the British had lowered their tonnage demands from 600,000 to 460,000 tons. Unfortunately, the British manner in presenting these proposals had made American acceptance nearly impossible.

The conference adjourned over the 4 July holiday and resumed on 5 July with another meeting of the Technical Committee. Admiral Field began the discussion by stating that the only way the American wish for a total tonnage of 300,000 tons could be attained was through the limitation of large cruisers. After setting a reasonable limit on them the committee could then establish a proportion of smaller cruisers to each country. Field emphasized that a lower tonnage would have to be set for the smaller cruiser to enable the British

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 68-69. Kellogg cabled Gibson on 5 July expressing agreement with Gibson's opinion that the British cruiser demands were "so excessive as to be beyond consideration by this Government." FRUS, 1927, p. 70. Kellogg told the press on 5 July that "two hundred and fifty or three hundred thousand tons for cruisers were adequate for my country," Kellogg Press Conferences.

to keep their small cruiser requirements and still work within the American tonnage limits. Admiral Jones agreed that an arrangement would have to be reached to compromise the two positions and presented the American answer: (1) the United States could not discuss cruiser tonnage in excess of 400,000 tons for the period ending 1 December 1936; (2) during this period the United States reserved the right to build 10,000-ton cruisers up to a total of 250,000 tons; (3) in an effort to meet the British desire for smaller vessels the United States would agree to build within the 400,000 tons a limit of smaller cruisers agreed upon by the conference; and (4) the United States saw no reason to arm smaller cruisers with guns inferior to those on large cruisers.¹⁸

The British were astounded with Jones' statement concerning the American right to build up to twenty-five large cruisers. Bridgeman refused to take this demand seriously and visited Gibson to ascertain what the Americans really wanted. Gibson, surprised by the British reaction, assured Bridgeman that the proposals were just for "some basis of discussion."¹⁹ But Bridgeman remained upset. Although

¹⁸Conference Records, pp. 160-61. Emphasis not in the original.

¹⁹Bridgeman Diary, p. 145.

Gibson discounted the significance of Jones' statement, the British interpreted it to mean an American ultimatum to build at least twenty-five large cruisers. This "ultimatum" also caused a stir in London.

Admiral Beatty flatly rejected the American claim for 400,000 tons in cruisers. He argued that Great Britain would need more than 150,000 tons for small cruisers alone to guard the Empire, and the American demand for twenty-five large cruisers was ridiculous.²⁰ The Cabinet agreed and instructed Bridgeman to "take no final decision [on the cruiser question] but ask if necessary for an adjustment of discussion in order than you [Bridgeman] may consult your government."²¹ Bridgeman quickly replied that he would "in no circumstances have taken any formal decision involving either [a] rupture of negotiations or a departure from [the] existing instructions until the government had reviewed [the] situation." Bridgeman was still hopeful that the latest proposals would result in a compromise and did not consider the situation so critical that adjournment was necessary.²²

²⁰Cab 23/55, 6 July 1927. Beatty explained his views further at the 7 July 1927 meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence, Cab 24/187:C.P. 193.

²¹British Documents, p. 639; Cab 23/55, 6 July 1927.

²²British Documents, p. 647.

In their excitement over the large cruiser issue the British overlooked two important concessions by the Americans: they had increased their total cruiser tonnage from 300,000 to 400,000 tons and they had acknowledged the British suggestion for a division of the cruiser class into small and large vessels. These two points represented the first American attempts at compromise. Unfortunately, the conference would concentrate on the composition of all cruisers, and these important concessions would be lost in the controversy.

During a meeting of the chief delegates on 6 July, the Japanese presented their first compromise plan. In summary, Tokyo recommended for Britain and the United States a limit of 450,000 tons for destroyers and cruisers combined, and for Japan, in keeping with the Washington Treaty ratio, 300,000 tons.²³ The British immediately asked how the limit of 450,000 tons for all surface auxiliary vessels would accommodate the American demand for 400,000 tons in cruisers alone. The Japanese agreed that Washington must reduce the number of large cruisers to ten or twelve. The Americans voiced no initial objection to this suggestion, probably because of Gibson's wish to placate the British.

²³Conference Records, p. 165; FRUS, 1927, p. 76; Cab 24/187:C.P. 193.

After the meeting, Gibson cabled his impressions to Kellogg. Although the British appeared unlikely to accept the Japanese proposal, Gibson wanted to give it vocal support. He hoped thereby to make the British aware that "they stand alone in their demands for a large cruiser tonnage," which would in turn force them to become more reasonable in their tonnage demands.²⁴

The next day Gibson conceded for the first time that the conference might fail. If this happened, he suggested that the conference be ended as congenially as possible with a public statement from each delegation detailing its position and explaining the failure.²⁵ Kellogg agreed, but added that before a final breakdown became inevitable it might be wise to adjourn the conference for a week in order to review progress.²⁶ Kellogg wanted to avoid the embarrassment of failure and its attendant repercussions.

Coolidge had been kept abreast of the Geneva proceedings, and upon learning of the American plan for handling failure, wrote Kellogg that "what is needed is not excuse or soft words but [a] clear strong statement of [the] American position. Let blame fall where it may. Your plan [is]

²⁴FRUS, 1927, p. 78.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 80-82.

²⁶Ibid.

approved."²⁷ Publicly Coolidge said little about the conference, but privately he showed little patience with the negotiations and refused to consider compromise.

On 9 July the Executive Committee focused on the American refusal to consider anything but total tonnage for cruisers. The British rejected the American plan because they wanted a limit on the numbers of individual vessels in each category. The Admiralty wished to know how many ships the Americans were going to build within their tonnage quota, and the Americans refused to give any definite figures until a total tonnage was determined for the whole class. The atmosphere became quite heated, and Cecil, at one point exclaimed that Admiral Jones was talking "nonsense." Gibson angrily threatened to walk out of the meeting and Cecil apologized.²⁸

The Japanese then introduced still another plan. They proposed a 10:10:7 large cruiser ratio for Great Britain, the United States, and Japan respectively. The British immediately seconded this proposal, and after initial

²⁷ Ibid., p. 89.

²⁸ For three different accounts of this incident see Wilson Diary, 9 July 1927, p. 1; Perrin C. Galpin, ed., Hugh Gibson 1883-1954: Extracts from His Letters and Anecdotes from His Friends (New York: Belgian-American Educational Foundation, Inc., 1956), pp. 62-63; Hugh Wilson, Diplomat Between Wars (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1941), p. 218.

reluctance Admiral Jones agreed to consider it. But Jones still demanded that the British produce figures showing their projected total cruiser tonnage. Bridgeman responded with the suggestion that a solution might be found in a building program planned by the three powers which would last only until 1931.²⁹ Bridgeman added that the British were willing to abandon construction of 10,000-ton cruisers, except for those now under construction, and allow the United States to build an equal number of these vessels. The Japanese voiced their approval of this plan and indicated that they would stop construction of large cruisers if the United States adhered to this plan.³⁰

Bridgeman's proposal was an important contribution to the negotiations. Instead of extending the proposed Geneva Treaty through 1936 as the Americans suggested, the British were now asking that the present agreements terminate in 1931. They would thus coincide with the Washington Treaty provisions stipulating a review of battleship limitation in 1931. The agreements reached at Geneva could then be conveniently reviewed along with battleship and aircraft limitation. Bridgeman believed this would facilitate future negotiations on naval armaments.

²⁹Conference Records, pp. 93-102.

³⁰Ibid., p. 108.

Bridgeman's proposal coupled with those of the Japanese gave new life to the conference. Prior to these new proposals the delegates had set 11 July for the next Plenary session. On 10 July the British delegation elected to postpone the public session for a few days to see if an agreement could be reached on cruisers.³¹ Bridgeman relayed this decision to Gibson, who offered no guarantee that an agreement would be found but agreed to postpone the session if Bridgeman initiated the move. Bridgeman did not want to take the responsibility for delaying the Plenary session and hoped Gibson would be gracious enough to recognize Britain's willingness to continue negotiations.³² Gibson remained convinced, however, that the decision to postpone the Plenary session was Bridgeman's.

The assassination in Dublin of Kevin O'Higgins, one of the British delegates, on 11 July broke the impasse. Bridgeman, who had become angered by Gibson's refusal to postpone the Plenary session, bitterly recorded in his diary that upon hearing the tragic news, Gibson had "daddled his ass and sent me a message to say the thought the conference had better be postponed out of respect for the memory of our

³¹Minutes of the Seventh Meeting of the B.E.D., 10 July 1927, ADM 116/2609.

³²Bridgeman Diary, p. 153.

colleague."³³ Thus the parties agreed to postpone the public meeting and continue private deliberations.

After rescheduling the Plenary session for 14 July, the delegates tried a new tactic in their search for a solution. Viscount Ishii suggested that the senior delegates absent themselves from the negotiations and give the junior delegates an opportunity to break the cruiser deadlock. The junior participants, composed of one civilian and one naval officer from each delegation, met on 11 and 12 July. After working most of the night the committee translated the 5-5-3 ratio into a combined surface auxiliary vessel tonnage of 525,000 for the United States and Great Britain, and 315,000 tons for Japan. The British senior delegates labored with these figures and produced the following formula: (1) the British Empire agreed not to exceed 550,000 tons for auxiliary surface combatant craft under the following ages: cruisers, sixteen years; and destroyers, twelve years; (2) the right to retain, in addition, twenty percent of this total in vessels above the age limit; (3) the limitation of 10,000-ton cruisers to a ratio of 12-12-8; (4) the eventual elimination of all cruisers above 6,000 tons for all three countries by 1945; and (5) no future auxiliary combatant

³³Ibid., p. 155.

vessels to be more than 6,000 tons and no gun mounted that exceeded six-inches in calibre.³⁴

The British had laid their cards on the table. All future cruisers were to be of smaller tonnage and gun calibre. Gibson immediately declared that the United States would never accept smaller guns. The Japanese were shocked by the increase in British tonnage from 525,000 to 550,000 tons and flatly rejected the proposals. Although Gibson snorted that the British plan was "really nothing more than a disguised attempt to increase total tonnage," he was privately pleased that the British had reduced their tonnage demands from 600,000 to 550,000 tons.³⁵ A careful review of the original American proposals shows that they had presented a combined cruiser and destroyer tonnage of 450,000 to 550,000 tons. The British statement coincided with the upper limit of the American proposals. It is highly likely that the Americans could have accepted the British total tonnage figure, but the added attempt to limit individual cruiser tonnage and gun calibre thwarted any chance for agreement on total tonnage.

The cruiser issue had now been reduced to differences

³⁴FRUS, 1927, p. 100.

³⁵Ibid., p. 101.

over the size and tonnage of small cruisers. Although the United States had indicated its willingness to accept a division of cruisers into two classes, it drew the line at gun calibre. The United States saw no reason to reduce the armament of smaller cruisers and staunchly supported retention of the eight-inch gun. The British hoped to phase out the large cruisers and replace them with a smaller, lighter-armed vessel.

Although the conference had been in session for over three weeks, little had been accomplished after the first two. Several proposals had been presented to resolve the cruiser impasse, but none had been initially successful. The British now hoped that the second Plenary session would help them present a clearer picture of their position, and thus break the deadlock. If the impasse were not broken soon, the Geneva Conference would collapse.

THE CONFERENCE COLLAPSES

Soon after the first Plenary session the British had begun asking for another. Although this request had been initially vetoed by the other two delegations who prepared to negotiate in private, the British had remained insistent. By the beginning of July the Americans and Japanese had decided to grant the British their wish and the second Plenary session was called. After some temporary adjustments and the death of O'Higgins, the date was set for 14 July.

Bridgeman's basic purpose in having another public session was his wish to present the British position in a manner that could not be misrepresented by the "hostile" press of the United States. Believing that the "atmosphere was being vitiated by gross misrepresentations of the British case in certain quarters" Bridgeman now had his chance to circumvent such problems. Bridgeman's reference to "certain quarters" evidently referred to Wythe Williams of the New York Times. Williams had tended to take an aggressive attitude toward the British proposals to such an extent that even Ambassador Howard had complained about the tone of William's reports from Geneva.¹ Although Kellogg had not

¹See for example Howard to Chamberlain, 23 June 1927, F.O. 800/261. In this letter Howard sighed, "There are times when I feel depressed and irritated almost beyond bearing by the tone and attitude of the Press here." On the same day Howard sent Chamberlain a telegram referring to Williams' report as "alarmist, suspicious, and unfriendly." ADM 116/2609.

taken Howard's complaints seriously, he had nevertheless forwarded them to Gibson.² Even Howard did not consistently deprecate the reports. He remarked to Chamberlain at one point that the American public would probably forget the stories in twenty-four hours if an agreement were reached.³ Gibson surmised that the British were upset only because the stories were more accurate than they cared to admit. "The British have not handled the press well throughout [the] conference, and seen unable to understand that [the] American journalists are fundamentally self-respecting and patriotic."⁴

Although correspondents such as Williams attacked the British proposals from the beginning of the conference,⁵ the press in both countries accurately reported the proceedings.⁶ One may conclude that the British were made uncomfortable by

²FRUS, 1927, p. 93.

³British Documents, p. 672.

⁴FRUS, 1927, p. 106. For more on this aspect of the conference see John Carter, "American Correspondents and the British Delegates: Some Reasons for the Failure at Geneva," The Independent 119 (13 August 1927):150-52; Silas Brent, "International Window Smashing: The Role of Our Newspapers in Foreign Affairs," Harper's Monthly 157 (September 1928):423.

⁵He charged, for example, on 21 June 1927, that the British proposals would force the United States to "completely surrender" their naval equality on paper. The next day he accused Bridgeman of asking for "unquestionable supremacy". New York Times, 21 and 22 June 1927, p. 1.

⁶Although reporting with the bias of their respective viewpoints, newspapers such as London Times and the New York Tribune accurately reported the facts of the conference throughout its existence.

the chauvanism of the American press, and sought to counter it with charges that their position was being misrepresented. No evidence was found to support their accusations.

The British had another complaint which was probably more valid. They believed that representatives of large American ship-building concerns were in Geneva stirring up bad feeling against the British. In this instance they were probably referring to William Shearer.⁷ Prior to the conference the "Big Three" shipbuilding companies had hired Shearer to lobby in their behalf. Promised a fee of \$25,000, Shearer moved to Geneva and began distributing pamphlets with an anti-British bias. Shearer soon became a convenient source of information for correspondents scrambling for the few bits of information coming out of the closed meetings. Williams was among those who turned to Shearer.⁸ Shearer's

⁷For more on this subject see, Joseph H. Kitchens, Jr., "The Shearer Scandal and Its Origins: Big Navy Politics and Diplomacy in the 1920's" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Georgia, 1968); U.S., Congress, Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee on Naval Affairs, Hearings: Alleged Activities of William B. Shearer in Behalf of Certain Shipbuilding Companies at the Geneva Conference and at the Meetings of the Preparatory Commission, Pursuant to S. Res. 114, 71st Congress, 1st Session, 1930.

⁸Kitchens, "Shearer Scandal," pp. 133,135,141. The "Big Three" shipbuilding companies consisted of the Bethlehem Shipbuilding Corporation, the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company, and the American Brown Boveri Electric Corporation. For an example of later opinion on the scandal see, "Shearer, The Newspapers, and a Betrayed Public," Christian Century 46 (30 October 1929):1335-37.

greatest impact on the conference was his discovery that the British had built larger battleships than allowed by the Washington Treaty.⁹ An embarrassed State Department received a formal protest from Ambassador Howard who charged that there had been leaks from the American delegation.¹⁰ Of course there had been no "leak" from the American delegation, only Shearer, doing his job. But the work of Shearer behind the scenes and the press stories of Wythe Williams convinced the British that another public session was necessary.

Gibson, as chairman, opened the second Plenary session and briefly described the progress of the conference. He concluded that it was "the right and duty of any of the delegates to ask for a Plenary meeting" when they believed it would contribute toward an agreement.

Bridgeman then made his statement.¹¹ He explained that the British had come to the conference with a program designed to reduce expenditures in all classes of vessels. In the area of cruisers the British were willing to adopt the

⁹Shearer caused a minor uproar with his statement that the British had a ratio of 6:5 in battleships instead of the treaty ratio of 5:5. This discrepancy had been solved at the First Technical Committee meeting, when the naval experts agreed to use as the basis of their discussion the "Washington Standard Tonnage."

¹⁰FRUS, 1927, p. 93.

¹¹Conference Records, pp. 36-37.

Washington ratio with large cruisers and refrain from building these vessels until that level was reached by the United States. In small cruisers the British desired to limit their size and gun calibre so that they would be defensive and not offensive weapons. The British Admiralty had determined that an 8-inch gun would have a fire power of two and one-half times that of the 6-inch gun, thus giving the larger gun a substantial advantage over the smaller one. Bridgeman stressed that limitation by total tonnage was a good idea in principle, but it should be known beforehand what the size of the individual vessels would be within this tonnage to make the idea practical.

Bridgeman repeated the British intention not to dispute the claim of the United States to build and possess an equal number of small cruisers. Their concern was that they would not be allowed the necessary number of these small vessels. "It is our own security with which we are concerned and our power in the future to protect our sea communication against hostile raids. . . ."12

Viscount Ishii, the next speaker, repeated the Japanese proposal. This consisted of a limit of 450,000 tons for Great Britain and the United States and 300,000 tons for

¹²Conference Records, pp. 39-40. Bridgeman's speech can also be found in Command Paper 2964, pp. 7-12.

Japan in surface auxiliary vessels. Great Britain and the United States would be limited to ten 10,000-ton cruisers, and Japan to seven. The Japanese thus hoped to limit effectively the total tonnage, while still giving each country the freedom to build what it wanted within the total tonnage allocated.¹³

Hugh Gibson then reiterated the American intention to place a total tonnage limit on surface auxiliary vessels ranging from 450,000 to 550,000 tons. This, Gibson argued, was "the fairest method of limitation," leaving each country "free to build the types and numbers of vessels" necessary for its welfare.¹⁴

In conclusion, Gibson stated that the United States believed they were near agreement with the Japanese on total tonnage and the types of cruisers within these tonnage totals. Although he admitted the inherent difficulties with a tripartite treaty, he remained confident that an agreement could still be reached if Great Britain and Japan could reconcile their differences.¹⁵

¹³Conference Records, pp. 45-48.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁵Some evidently believed the conference had ended. See e.g., George Glasgow, "Naval Disarmament," The Contemporary Review 132 (August 1927):437; Will Rogers also seemed to believe the conference had ended, remarking that "the conference is over but at least the United States didn't lose," New York Times, 16 July 1927, p. 13.

The second Plenary session produced no surprises. No new positions were advanced. An Anglo-American compromise seemed no nearer. The conference was still alive, however, and the delegates resumed their negotiations.

Although the Geneva delegates remained hopeful, officials in London were not happy with the progress.¹⁶ The Cabinet decided on 14 July to recall their delegates for consultation, believing it "essential that we should have an opportunity of consulting verbally with you before definite decisions are taken at Geneva."¹⁷ Bridgeman asked the Cabinet to reconsider its decision. The First Lord argued that a departure at that time would "seriously impair the prospect of agreement" and respectfully asked the Cabinet where the difficulty lay.¹⁸

The Cabinet acquiesced and instead of recalling them, sent the British delegates a full statement of its position on cruisers. While conceding parity in large cruisers, the

¹⁶Kellogg had been informed of such rumors at a press conference on 14 July 1927, Kellogg Press Conferences.

¹⁷British Documents, p. 679. The decision to recall the delegates had been suggested at a meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defense on 14 July 1927. After extended debate, Chamberlain and Baldwin, at the urging of Churchill and others, decided to instruct Bridgeman and Cecil to ask for an adjournment of the conference. Cab 2/5, 14 July 1927.

¹⁸British Documents, pp. 679-80.

Cabinet steadfastly refused to accept limits on small cruisers. Although quite happy to support an agreement limiting the large cruisers to a ratio among the three nations, the Admiralty would not condone any formula fixing "a permanent total tonnage limit for all classes of ships whether specified in classes or lumped together." The Cabinet, however, did endorse Bridgeman's proposal to have the Geneva agreements last only until 1931. The Admiralty reasoned that the shorter the period for the treaty, the less chance the United States would have to build cruisers up to the British level.¹⁹ They were content to maintain their numerical advantage in cruisers as long as possible.

In Geneva the British and Japanese naval personnel met in an effort to resolve their differences. On 15 July they produced a document which recommended: (1) total surface vessel tonnage for Great Britain, 500,000 tons, for Japan 325,000 tons; (2) the retention of twenty-five percent of the total tonnage in over-age vessels; (3) 10,000-ton cruisers limited in number with Great Britain and the United States each allowed twelve, Japan eight; (4) the retention of certain cruisers below 10,000 tons for each country; (5) six-inch guns placed on all future vessels; (6) an agreed maximum percentage of total tonnage divided

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 683-84.

between cruisers and destroyers; and (7) the reduction of Japanese submarine tonnage from 70,000 to 60,000 tons.²⁰

When these recommendations were presented to the chief delegates on 18 July, Gibson immediately raised questions about the proposal to limit all future vessels to six-inch guns. Although the Japanese had anticipated an American objection, they had included it to placate the British.²¹ The Japanese had also taken 10,000 tons from the submarine class and added it to the cruiser and destroyer class in an effort to maintain the Washington ratio. Despite these Anglo-Japanese efforts, the Americans maintained their reservations over the six-inch gun.²²

The next day the delegates resumed their discussion. Gibson concentrated on the gun-size issue arguing that the United States would not depart from its insistence on the large gun. Bridgeman stated they had reduced their tonnage figures to accommodate a smaller gun calibre and promised that if there was an increase in gun calibre, they would correspondingly increase their tonnage demands. Gibson,

²⁰Ibid., pp. 690-91; Minutes of the Tenth Meeting of the B.E.D., 19 July 1927, ADM 116/2609.

²¹British Documents, p. 687. The Japanese were concerned about the difficulties of men of their small stature manually loading 8-inch guns.

²²Conference Records, pp. 170-72.

becoming exasperated, speculated that British apprehensions might be based on a fear that the United States would use its eight-inch guns against the British Empire. If so, he proposed that a political clause be included in the anticipated treaty which would "permit a re-examination of the cruiser provisions in the event that the construction of 8-inch gun vessels was a cause of apprehension to any of the contracting powers." This "political clause" was Gibson's last offer.²³

Before the Geneva delegates could debate the latest development, the British were abruptly summoned to London.²⁴ Cecil, Bridgeman, and Field left for home on 20 July. Cecil's communication to the Cabinet on 18 July precipitated its sudden behavior. The Viscount had indicated that he and Bridgeman were puzzled over the latest cable from the Cabinet. The Admiralty had asserted that it would refuse to accept any treaty on small cruisers which assigned to Great Britain "a position of permanent naval inferiority." Cecil was confused and a little upset that the Cabinet had now intimated that parity with the United States in small cruisers was unacceptable. He reminded the government that at the end of June Bridgeman had committed himself to parity. If denied now, only three weeks later, the British would be "rightly

²³Conference Records, pp. 172-74.

²⁴British Documents, p. 698.

accused of vacillation amounting almost to sharp practice." Cecil maintained that the delegates had understood parity to mean ship for ship mathematical equality. Regardless of how this was figured, it still meant parity. He failed to understand how the Admiralty could worry about any "permanent" naval inferiority when the treaty being considered was to last, at the most, only a decade. Nor could he believe the United States would launch into a huge building program. Regardless of the Admiralty's opinions, Cecil insisted that at the present stage of the conference it was impossible to tell the Americans that the British would accept parity in large cruisers but not in small ones. Cecil declared that he could "conceive [of] no more disastrous termination of the present conference" than now to deny parity to the Americans in small cruisers.²⁵

The Admiralty was indeed denying the Americans parity in small cruises in the belief that mathematical parity was in reality superiority for the United States, since they could use the extra vessels to harrass the Empire, Cecil's letter disturbed the Admiralty, resulting in the government's becoming, as Bridgeman phrased it, "pissy", and hastily

²⁵Cecil to Chamberlain, 17 July 1927, Cecil Papers, ADD. MSS. 51079. Reprinted in British Documents, pp. 693-95.

recalling the British delegates.²⁶

Cecil and Bridgeman met with a committee of the Cabinet on 21 July.²⁷ Beatty objected to two particular points of the Anglo-Japanese scheme: (1) the apparent right by treaty to parity in all ships; and (2) the 5:3.25 ratio. The committee produced two alternatives for the full Cabinet to consider the next day. The first basically repeated the British position as it had been articulated throughout the conference. If the United States should reject it, "the conference would be allowed to break down." The second also reiterated the British position, but suggested that Great Britain would build a certain number of small cruisers through 1936 which could be equalled by the United States. Significantly, the proposition included the provision that parity was not applicable here. The British reserved the freedom to build as they wished after the treaty expired in 1936. If the United States and Japan agreed to this stipulation, Whitehall would give serious consideration to the Anglo-

²⁶Bridgeman Diary, p. 155. Bridgeman added that "Balfour, who had invented the word 'parity' at Washington thought we had been too final in accepting this [idea?] and ought to have explained that parity did not really mean what it seemed to mean." Ibid.

²⁷Baldwin's biographers incorrectly give 21 July as the date for this meeting. They evidently confuse this meeting with the session of the full Cabinet, held the next day, 22 July; Baldwin did not attend the 21 July committee. Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, Baldwin: A Biography (London: The Macmillan Company, 1969), p. 370.

Japanese plan.²⁸

Great Britain's insistence that small cruisers were excluded from parity was crucial. The British were saying that for a specified period of time up to 1936 they would build the number of cruisers they desired and had no objection to the number of vessels the other two countries constructed. But the British were not contractually agreeing to any long-term parity, particularly in small cruisers. With the expiration of the treaty, they would be free to build whatever size vessels they desired. Great Britain would thus avoid "permanent inferiority," the great fear of Beatty and others.

At the Cabinet meeting the next day the Admiralty un-
animously supported the second alternative. A majority of
the Cabinet rejected the first plan as certain to kill the
conference.²⁹ Attempts to shorten the period to 1931 failed,
the Cabinet deciding that any technical aspects would be left
for the determination of the Admiralty. It then directed
the Geneva delegates to present the modified plan to the other
powers in Geneva with the added stipulation that Great Britain

²⁸Cab 24/188: C.P. 211.

²⁹Although the Cabinet Minutes are vague, another source lists Churchill as one of the dissenters. Middlemas and Barnes, Baldwin, p. 370.

not be found past the expiration date of the treaty.³⁰

With the situation seemingly in hand, Prime Minister Baldwin left for an official visit to Canada on 23 July leaving Chamberlain in command.³¹ After Baldwin's departure a minority in the Cabinet won some concessions: Lord Balfour was instructed to read to Parliament a statement on 26 July. It explained why Great Britain wanted no limitation on small cruisers. The basic point of Balfour's document was the thesis that the "British Empire cannot be asked to give any . . . appearance of an immutable principle; for this is liable to be interpreted in the future as a formal surrender of the doctrine of maritime equality."³² In other words, Great Britain would not allow the United States parity in small cruisers because this would eventually place Great Britain in an inferior position. The British were willing to agree to equality for a short period, as stated in the second alternative, but refused to accept any such principle over the long-term.

³⁰Cab 23/55, 22 July 1927.

³¹Baldwin's biographers incorrectly placed Baldwin's departure on 21 July.

³²Cab 24/188: C.P. 212. For accounts in the Houses of Parliament, see Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th series, 209 (1927):1246-49; Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Lords), 5th series, 68 (1927):933-36.

Balfour's statement disturbed Cecil. He was particularly upset with its wording which "from its very point and vigor is bound to lead to a recrudescence of all the bitterest controversy." He warned that only in amended form could such a statement be accepted by the Americans as something other than obnoxious, adding that it might be a good idea if Balfour replaced him at Geneva. If the Cabinet insisted on adopting measures of which he disapproved, Cecil informed Chamberlain: "I could always consider my position."³³

Despite Cecil's objections the Cabinet committee recommended that Balfour's statement be read to Parliament on 26 July. As to whether the treaty should expire in 1931 or 1936, the Admiralty chose the later date. If, however, the Cabinet decided to choose 1931, the Admiralty then insisted that Great Britain be allowed to drop its demand for arming cruisers with six-inch guns. If Great Britain armed its new vessels with the smaller gun until 1931, it ran the risk of having these vessels outclassed after 1931 by new vessels with large guns. The Admiralty worried that after 1931 the other two powers would refuse to limit their new guns to six inches, and Great Britain would be left with cruisers equipped with guns inferior to those on post-treaty

³³Cecil to Chamberlain, 24 July 1927, F.O. 800/261. Cecil evidently meant he would resign if the conference failed. Bridgeman referred to Balfour's statement as a "casuistical essay." Bridgeman Diary, p. 157.

cruisers.³⁴

On 26 July the Cabinet met in full session to debate whether to adopt 1931 or 1936 as the expiration date. The discussion "fined down" the issue to two basic choices: (1) accept 1931 and insist on the right to arm all small cruisers with eight-inch guns; or (2) accept 1936 with the stipulation that all small cruisers be armed with a maximum calibre of six inches. The first option, avidly supported by Cecil as having the better chance of acceptance by the United States, was rejected by the Admiralty because it "would involve an increase of expenditure over our present program. . . ." ³⁵ Unfortunately, the second option would probably be rejected by the United States, resulting in the failure of the conference.

Despite Cecil's and Bridgeman's vehement support for 1931, the Cabinet remained steadfast in its desire to limit future armament to six-inch guns and adopted 1936 as the expiration date of the treaty. ³⁶ They ignored Cecil's request

³⁴Cab 24/188: C.P. 212.

³⁵Beatty argued that each 8-inch gun cruiser would cost 250,000 pounds more than those equipped with the smaller gun.

³⁶Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Lords), 5th series, 69 (1927):92.

to be replaced,³⁷ and sent the delegates back to Geneva with the modified plan.³⁸ Recognizing the possibility of an American rejection, the Cabinet stipulated that the British delegates "should insist on an opportunity to make a public statement . . . of the British proposals. . . ." ³⁹ The British hoped to explain the reasons for their decision to retain the six-inch gun. The Cabinet had drawn the line from which there would be no retreat.

The American officials also solidified their position. During the hiatus Kellogg informed Gibson to stand firm on

³⁷Cab 23/55, 26 July 1927. By the end of the session three other ministers had threatened resignation: Churchill, Birkenhead, and Bridgeman. Chamberlain to his sister, Ida, 7 August 1927, Chamberlain Papers, as quoted in David Carlton, "Great Britain and the Coolidge Naval Disarmament Conference of 1927," Political Science Quarterly 82 (December 1968): 590. Cecil later charged that Churchill had led the fight against any possible compromise on the large cruisers because "he thought such a proposal would not improbably produce an agreement with the Americans which he was determined if possible to avoid." Cecil to Baldwin, 9 August 1927, Cecil of Chelwood Papers, ADD. MSS. 51079. Reprinted in Robert Cecil, A Great Experiment (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 358-63.

³⁸These modified proposals are printed in Appendix II of Cab 23/55, also printed in Appendix I to item No. III in Command Paper 2964.

³⁹Cab 23/55, 26 July 1927.

the American right to have the eight-inch gun. The Navy had decided that the United States only needed seventy percent of its total tonnage in 10,000-ton cruisers. They wanted the freedom, however, to arm all vessels with eight-inch guns.⁴⁰

Coolidge expressed approval of the Navy opinions: "We have made a perfectly straightforward and candid presentation of a plan for limitation. I do not think we should deviate from it."⁴¹ The Coolidge Administration and the Cabinet staunchly defended their respective positions. Neither wished to compromise. Unfortunately, only a compromise could save the conference.

The British delegates returned to Geneva on 27 July and met the next day with the other two delegations. Bridgeman presented the modified British plan, which immediately drew an inquiry from Gibson who wondered if the delegates had informed the Cabinet of American thinking vis-a-vis a 6,000-ton, six-inch gun limit for small cruisers. Cecil nodded and said the Cabinet had instructed them not to deviate from their stated position. This position was final and Gibson had no choice but to communicate the substance of the new plan to his government.

Gibson decided this was a good time to reintroduce the

⁴⁰FRUS, 1927, pp. 130-31.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 133-34.

political clause. The British delegates intimated that although the clause had some good points, they would probably still have to reject it because of its silence on the eight-inch gun. When asked their opinion of the political clause, the Japanese declared that they did not intend to build any more eight-inch gun cruisers prior to 1936, but still would not like being bound by any treaty.

After brief discussion, the delegates agreed to publicize the revised British plan. They then contemplated a third Plenary session. Gibson expressed no objection to holding another session, but requested that it be delayed until August so he could consult his government on the latest developments. This request appeared reasonable to the other delegates and the third session was set for 1 August.⁴²

Cecil and Bridgeman wired the Cabinet that the American attitude had "stiffened during their absence in London." Both offered a possible way out of the impasse.⁴³ Cecil remained convinced there was still hope for success if 1931 became the terminating date. This would allow the United States to

⁴²Conference Records, pp. 174-78. For British and American accounts, see British Documents, pp. 704-705; FRUS, 1927, pp. 137-38.

⁴³British Documents, p. 705. Bridgeman also blamed the hardening of the American position on the Balfour statement, "this statement may well have been thought a recession from our former attitude." Bridgeman Diary, p. 157.

build eight-inch-gun cruisers without any objection from the British.⁴⁴ Bridgeman offered a plan compromising the gun calibre at seven inches.⁴⁵

Gibson reacted negatively to the modified British plan. Hugh Wilson recorded that upon Gibson's arrival at his hotel room, he had announced with a solemn look: "Gentlemen, the old cow is dead." The British proposals were "more unacceptable than what they went away with [to London]." Gibson informed Cecil that there probably was not a "ghost of hope" for the conference.⁴⁶ The Americans thus began preparing their final public statement.

Secretary of State Kellogg and Secretary of the Navy, Curtis Wilbur, saw an adjournment of several months as the only way to save the conference. A hiatus was better than having the conference end amidst final speeches and hardened positions, thus making it more difficult to "effect any reconciliation between divergent points of view."⁴⁷

⁴⁴British Documents, p. 705.

⁴⁵Ibid. The Cabinet hastily gathered on 29 July and voted firmly against any compromise on gun size, Cab 23/55. See British Documents, pp. 706-707 for Chamberlain's message to Bridgeman indicating the Cabinet decision. For a personal plea against the compromise, see William Joynson-Hicks (JIX) to Chamberlain, 29 July 1927, F.O. 800/261.

⁴⁶Wilson Diary, 28 July 1927.

⁴⁷FRUS, 1927, pp. 138-39. Evidently the idea for an extended adjournment had been originally suggested by Assistant Secretary of State, William Castle. British Documents, p. 706.

Gibson thought this idea had possibilities. He proposed, however, that such a suggestion should come from either the United Kingdom or Japan. If the Americans intimated a desire for adjournment, the inference might be drawn that the United States lacked confidence in its position and had elected to avoid a confrontation with the British in a Plenary session. Gibson felt that if the Japanese proposed adjournment, the Americans and British could then accept.⁴⁸

President Coolidge, when advised of the latest wrinkle, told Kellogg that "adjournment means continuing recriminations with little prospect of better results. Have [a] clear, firm statement of our position."⁴⁹ The President had run out of patience with the conference. His dream of a successful international disarmament conference had now turned into a nightmare; his only wish was to have it end as soon as possible.

The final scramble to save the conference now began. On 31 July the delegates agreed to postpone the third public session to give them more time, to negotiate.⁵⁰ The next day the Japanese produced another compromise plan: (1) the

⁴⁸FRUS, 1927, p. 140.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 141. Coolidge's position was restated in a telegram to Castle on 2 August, declaring that there was "no foundation for the reports . . . that the Geneva Conference will suspend until Fall." Kellogg Papers, 2 August 1927.

⁵⁰FRUS, 1927, p. 143.

Japanese and British would not build any further auxiliary vessels other than authorized prior to the conference; (2) after completing their allotted 10,000-ton cruisers, the British would have no limit placed on small cruisers; (3) the United States would agree not to exceed the British total tonnage before 31 December 1931; and (4) questions not decided at the present conference would be dealt with at a new conference held no later than 1931.⁵¹ The Japanese plan allowed Anglo-American parity in large cruisers, while giving the British freedom to build the small cruisers it required for national security.

Although the Americans noticed there was no mention of gun limitation, Gibson elected to say nothing because the British would probably notice it quickly enough. The word "authorized" in the first part of the Japanese proposal bothered Gibson, and he asked the Japanese to define it. He hoped that "authorized" programs meant only those vessels under construction or for which money had already been appropriated. Gibson added that he would recommend that these programs be expressed in total tonnage figures not to be exceeded by 1931. Although the Americans viewed the Japanese proposals as having a slim chance for success, they

⁵¹Ibid., p. 148.

would leave any flat rejection up to the British.⁵²

On 3 August the delegates met to ascertain the British interpretation of "authorized" programs. If the British construed it to mean only the tonnage for which money had been appropriated, the Americans estimated the British cruiser program would fall somewhere around 400,000 tons, an acceptable figure. If, on the other hand, the British construed it to mean all ships projected for the period of the treaty, the total tonnage would then be significantly above 400,000 tons and would be rejected. The British replied to Gibson's direct inquiry that they interpreted the wording to mean that they would be allowed to build their full program through 1931, which translated to 458,000 tons.⁵³ Gibson then announced that this total was unacceptable, and the United States would have to reject the Japanese proposal. After asking if there were any other propositions and receiving a negative reply, Gibson asserted that the only remaining task was to make final preparations for the Plenary session scheduled for 4 August.

Gibson stated his desire for a joint announcement,

⁵²Ibid., pp. 148-50.

⁵³On 30 July Beatty retired and was replaced by Charles Madden, brother-in-law to Jellicoe. Madden retained Beatty's position, stating that the British certainly had the right to "complete our existing program of construction, as approved by the Cabinet. Cab 24/188: C.P. 219.

instead of three separate speeches, but the British insisted on delivering a final speech. After a brief debate, Gibson finally acquiesced. The agenda for the next day was as follows: (1) an introductory statement by Gibson outlining the progress and problems of the conference; (2) final speeches by Bridgeman, Saito, and Gibson; and (3) a joint declaration recognizing the deadlock and a recommendation that the respective governments carefully study the facts of the conference with the idea of reconvening a new conference in the near future.⁵⁴ Gibson was able to fulfill his desire for a joint statement, while at the same time the British could present their final speech.

The third, and final, Plenary session on 4 August gave each delegate a chance to repeat his position. Nothing new was presented.⁵⁵ The British remained unable to understand why the Americans had remained so steadfast in their refusal to allow the British to build the cruisers it required. On the other hand, the Americans found it "incredible . . . that the British haven't seen fit to let us have our toys if we want them. . . ." ⁵⁶ Regardless of their efforts to

⁵⁴Conference Records, pp. 179-181.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 54-71. Bridgeman's speech is also printed in Command Paper 2964, pp. 12-21.

⁵⁶Wilson Diary, 4 August 1927.

stress their different positions, all three speeches were friendly in tone and maintained the fervent wish that a solution could be found to the vexing problem of auxiliary vessel limitation.

Secretary of State Kellogg and President Coolidge both made brief statements after the conference ended. Kellogg admitted the failure of the conference, but stressed that the "failure to make an agreement now" was not final. He remained confident that an agreement could be reached in the near future.⁵⁷ Coolidge also commented favorably on the outcome of the conference, emphasizing that relations among the three nations remained amiable. "I do not expect that the failure to reach an agreement at Geneva will have any serious effect upon the peace of the world . . . just because they were not able to agree . . . doesn't interfere at all with the peaceful relations that exist between the three countries."⁵⁸

The 1927 Geneva Naval Disarmament Conference was over. The first attempt to extend the provisions of the Washington Treaty to auxiliary vessels had failed. Although all concerned stressed that an agreement could be found in the

⁵⁷FRUS, 1927, pp. 155-56.

⁵⁸Coolidge Press Conferences.

future, some basic problems would have to be solved first. Great Britain and the United States would have to reconcile their differences over cruiser tonnage and armament. If these two areas could be harmonized, it was then quite possible that an agreement on auxiliary vessels could be consummated. Unfortunately, relations between the Anglo-Saxon powers became severely strained in the following year. Efforts to complete the work would have to await an improvement in that relationship.

THE REPERCUSSIONS OF THE FAILURE
AT GENEVA

Although it lasted only seven weeks, the Geneva Conference had been a grueling experience for the participants. The disappointment of failure plus the fatigue resulting from constant tension had taken its "toll with a vengeance" on Gibson. He wrote his mother after the conference that he wished he had been "like many of my dear colleagues who take things comfortably and don't take it to heart if things in general don't work out."¹ But the American was not alone in feeling the physical effects of the conference. William Bridgeman confided to Chamberlain that he was "very tired" and blamed part of his fatigue on the weather in Geneva. The climate had not been very "bracing" and the First Lord had kept going only "by eating and drinking as little as possible."² The two chief negotiators spent the weeks following the conference recuperating.

While the participants recovered from the strain of negotiations, the government officials experienced the indignity of failure. Three days after the conference ended Vice-President Charles Dawes spoke at the dedication of the Peace Bridge over the Niagara River. Kellogg and Prime

¹Gibson to his mother, 25 September 1927, Gibson Papers.

²Bridgeman to Chamberlain, 7 August 1927, F.O. 800/261.

Minister Baldwin, also in attendance, heard Dawes bluntly say that "perhaps before this conference was held there was not the preliminary careful appraisal by each conferee of the necessities of the other. . . ." ³ Kellogg was appalled at such an "indiscreet" remark, though he evidently anticipated that Dawes would do "some foolish thing." ⁴ Nonetheless, the indictment angered Kellogg, and he noted privately that the speech had been "distinctly in bad taste and a slap at his own Government but he is such an unmitigated ass that he is always doing something of the kind." ⁵ But Dawes had only repeated what he was reading in newspapers such as the New York Times, which had stated as early as 25 June that there had not been enough pre-conference preparation. The Times repeated this charge after the conference closed and listed it as the most likely reason for the failure. ⁶

Kellogg vigorously denied the charge of inadequate preparation. He reassured President Coolidge that "the most careful preparations were made. . . ." Kellogg related that

³New York Times, 8 August 1927, p. 14.

⁴Kellogg to Coolidge, 10 August 1927, Kellogg Papers.

⁵Kellogg to Phillips, 9 August 1927, Ibid. Dawes later defended his speech against charged that it had been undiplomatic, stating that, "Common sense is never undiplomatic." Charles G. Dawes, Notes as Vice-President, 1928-1929 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1935), p. 104.

⁶New York Times, 25 June 1927, p. 16; Ibid., 5 August 1927, p. 16.

Jones had written him after the conference charging that the British had gone back on everything they had agreed to during the talks in London. In Kellogg's opinion, the British had not "showed good faith at all in the conference." Although he had done everything in his power to effect some agreement, he "could not recommend an agreement that did not give us parity in fact as well as in principle. . . ." ⁷ While "irritated at the British attitude," ⁸ the Secretary had harbored "no illusions" about the success of the conference but felt it was worth trying and, if it failed, the American people should know the reasons. ⁹ Kellogg reflected the general attitude of the Navy which was determined throughout the conference to adhere to the preconceived American plan and not compromise on any of the fundamental issues. Even in failure, and during the days when criticism came frequently and stridently, the American officials remained confident that they had done the right thing in refusing to compromise.

Austen Chamberlain bore similar criticism. Admitting that the conference had worried him more "than about anything

⁷Kellogg to Coolidge, 10 August 1927, Kellogg Papers. Reprinted in FRUS, 1927, pp. 157-59.

⁸Allen Dulles to Gibson, 9 September 1927, Hugh R. Wilson Papers; Kellogg to Frank Simonds, 17 August 1927, Kellogg Papers. The Wilson Papers are deposited in the Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

⁹Kellogg to Simonds, 17 August 1927, Kellogg Papers.

which has occurred since I took my present office," Chamberlain, more willing than Kellogg to accept some of the blame for the failure, sighed: "No doubt a great mistake was made in entering upon such a conference without a preliminary exchange of ideas. . . ." The foreign minister argued, however, that the reason for the lack of such preparation lay in the British desire not to offend the Americans by delaying a reply to the invitation. The British did not want to appear unsympathetic to naval disarmament and thus replied without asking questions about the substance of the negotiations. But Chamberlain also admitted a second reason for the inadequate preparation. The Admiralty had been reluctant "to disclose their plan in advance" to the Americans, mainly because of its desire to have the advantage the Americans had enjoyed in 1921. Nevertheless, Chamberlain was still disappointed that the Americans refused to see the British viewpoint and stubbornly demanded parity in cruisers for reasons of prestige.¹⁰

William Bridgeman was more critical of the Americans. He bitterly charged that the Americans were "a terrible lot of people to deal with and Gibson is a mean and untruthful twister." The First Lord defended the pre-conference secrecy of the Admiralty, predicting that "if we had broached our

¹⁰British Documents, pp. 729-30.

scheme earlier the American Press would have been just as bad or worse. . . ." Bridgeman had a low regard for the American press, which had been "damnable from the start" and had, he was convinced, gotten "orders from Gibson the first day to discredit and misrepresent our proposals." Despite this bitterness, Bridgeman was confident that the conference had not harmed Anglo-American relations. He found pleasure that the British had not "given anything away," and predicted that although the navalists in America would howl for more cruisers, he doubted that the failure would lead to renewed naval competition. The British First Lord also noted an improvement in Anglo-Japanese relations growing out of the conference and felt this to be one of its positive legacies.¹¹

The immediate result of the failure was the resignation of Viscount Cecil from the Cabinet. On 7 August he informed chamberlain of his intention to resign.¹² Chamberlain, surprised at Cecil's seemingly abrupt decision, urged him to "rest for a week; then think it over again when you are less strained and tired."¹³ But Cecil had made up his mind and submitted his resignation to Baldwin on 9 August. In his letter of resignation Cecil stated that he had come to the

¹¹Bridgeman to Chamberlain, 7 August 1927, F.O. 800/261.

¹²Cecil to Chamberlain, 7 August 1927, Ibid.

¹³Chamberlain to Cecil, 8 August 1927, Ibid.

conclusion that he had been "out of sympathy with the instructions I received, and I believe that an agreement might have been reached on terms which would have sacrificed no essential British interest."¹⁴ In further communication with Chamberlain Cecil disclosed another reason for his decision: there were basic and "profound differences between Churchill and himself." Cecil lamented that he had no hope of ever winning over "perhaps the most forceful personality in the Cabinet" who was openly against any agreement with the United States.¹⁵

Cecil's adversary had publicly restated his opposition to parity with the United States on 7 August: "We are unable now--and I hope at no future time--to embody in a solemn international agreement any words which would bind us to the principle of mathematical parity in naval strength."¹⁶ But while Churchill was strongly opposed to any formal concession of numerical parity, he had no objections to the United States' constructing any number of vessels it desired. He simply did not want the British tied to any agreement limiting their freedom of naval construction. Although Cecil probably had a right to feel bitter over Churchill's

¹⁴Cecil to Baldwin, 9 August, Ibid. Reprinted in Viscount Robert Cecil, A Great Experiment (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 358-63. Cecil explained his decision further in Parliament on 16 November 1927, Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Lords), 5th series, 69 (1927):84-94.

¹⁵Cecil to Chamberlain, 10 August 1927, F.O. 800/261.

¹⁶London Times, 8 August 1927, p. 12.

opposition, Churchill should not be thought of as completely unreasonable in naval matters. For example, on 18 August Churchill expressed to Bridgeman his opinion that there should be a halt in British cruiser construction for the rest of 1927. Churchill recommended that the Admiralty postpone its projected building program for 1927-1928 to save money, and also equally important to Churchill: "We should give every opportunity for the Navy party in the United States to cool down. . . ." Churchill was willing to let the United States build cruisers while the British marked time in order to improve relations between the two countries and thus prevent a naval race.¹⁷

Cecil's resignation, accepted with regret by Baldwin on 29 August, was met with glee in the United States. Believing that Cecil had "administered a black eye to British Toryism," editorialists concluded that the resignation served as a further indictment of the British position at Geneva.¹⁸ Hugh Gibson wondered why Cecil had not shown more flexibility at the conference if he felt the British government had been too rigid: "He seems to be making a poor spectacle of himself

¹⁷Winston Churchill to Bridgeman, 18 August 1927, F.O. 800/261.

¹⁸The Literary Digest 94 (17 September 1927):8-10.

and [is] trying to place on others the blame for his own stubbornness."¹⁹ Cecil's resignation also added more fuel to Labor Party attacks. On 24 November 1927, Ramsey MacDonald, leader of the Labor Party, introduced in the House of Commons a motion condemning the Conservatives for their failure to carry out adequate diplomatic preparations prior to the conference. Chamberlain was called forth to explain why he evidently "forgot to scout the field" before the event. MacDonald asserted there should have been more statesmen and fewer military officers in Geneva and declared that at a conference called to discuss broad issues "the service delegation is altogether out of place."²⁰

Chamberlain defended the government. He answered MacDonald's second charge by stating that the British delegation was the least military of the three delegations, consisting of two Cabinet officials and an Admiral. Each of the other delegations contained two Admirals and one civilian. Chamberlain admitted that preparations might have been better. He argued that the opposition had repeatedly pressured him to "eschew secrecy, to trust public opinion to come frankly out into the open and in face of all the world to state our

¹⁹Gibson to his mother, 30 August 1927, Gibson Papers.

²⁰Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th series, 210 (1927):2093, 2096.

view without any previous understanding . . . or other underhanded arrangements." Now, Chamberlain asked, what had happened with this "new diplomacy"--failure. The foreign minister also stressed that the United States had called the conference, and it was thus her responsibility to initiate the diplomatic preparations. Great Britain's desire to negotiate, Chamberlain added, made them accept Coolidge's invitation without seeking information.²¹

Bridgeman was also called forth to defend the government. Staunchly supporting the foreign minister, Bridgeman declared that the British delegation had gone to Geneva "most carefully prepared." As to criticism over the composition of the British delegation, the First Lord repeated Chamberlain's statement that the British had gone with two civilians and just one Admiral, as opposed to the other delegations. It seemed to him ridiculous to attend a conference to discuss naval matters and take no naval advisors.²² Although Cecil's resignation caused the Baldwin Government problems, Chamberlain and Bridgeman asserted that in the final analysis their actions during the conference had been correct.

Of the three countries, Japan seemed to come out of the

²¹Ibid., pp. 2102-03.

²²Ibid., pp. 2187-97.

conference the least scathed. As mentioned earlier, Bridgeman had been pleased with the Japanese performance at Geneva. Kellogg echoed these sentiments in a letter to the Japanese Ambassador, adding that the United States had found little difficulty in agreeing with Japan's proposals.²³ The Japanese were disappointed with the results, but pleased in another respect--Great Britain's and America's bitter differences meant there was little chance they would ally against Japan in the near future. Admiral Saito admitted privately that he would have liked to give more support to the British position during the conference, but had maintained a neutral attitude for political reasons. Evidently the Japanese government reasoned that any appearance of support for Great Britain would antagonize the United States and worsen matters.²⁴ During the early stages of the conference the Japanese press accused the other two powers of being selfish, but later supported the British whose naval situation seemed

²³FRUS, 1927, pp. 156-57.

²⁴Malcolm D. Kennedy, The Estrangement of Great Britain and Japan, 1917-35 (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 112-13. For more on the Japanese view of the conference see, Viscount Kikujiro Ishii, Diplomatic Commentaries, Trans. by William R. Langdon (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1936), pp. 192-97. Unfortunately, Ishii's account is dissapointingly sketchy.

more similar to that of Japan.²⁵

Soon after the conference ended Churchill pressed Bridgeman to curtail the British naval building program. Bridgeman complied with Churchill's wishes and announced to the House of Commons on 16 November that the Admiralty would suspend construction on two of the three cruisers projected.²⁶

Although President Coolidge stressed his desire not to renew the naval armaments race, after the conference he once again pressed for naval construction, but in an indirect manner.

The President announced that the United States would continue its "ordinary building program" as if no conference had occurred.²⁷ On 16 August he stated that Congress should have authorized the ten cruisers he requested in December 1926. Compliance would have allowed him to include in the 1928 budget appropriations for the construction of new vessels. But Congress had chosen not to authorize any new cruisers and appropriated an insufficient amount for beginning work on three cruisers that had already been authorized.²⁸

²⁵Ibid., p. 122. For examples of Japanese press comments during and after the conference see, "Disarmament By Example," The Trans-Pacific 14 (16 July 1927):5; "Japanese Press Views," Ibid. 14 (23 July 1927): 5; Shinnosuke Tanagisawa, "The Failure at Geneva," Ibid. 15 (1 October 1927): 6.

²⁶Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th series, 210 (1927): 1013.

²⁷Coolidge Press Conferences, 9 August 1927.

²⁸Ibid., 16 August 1927.

In December Coolidge had not pressed strongly for the ten cruisers. But the failure of the conference angered him and he now sought to recover the lost time. The United States had the financial resources to construct new cruisers, while Great Britain desired a suspension of construction to ease its financial straits after the war.²⁹

In his Annual Message, delivered on 6 December 1927, the President alluded only briefly to Geneva: "While the results of the conference were of considerable value, they were mostly of a negative character." Coolidge recognized that "no agreement can be reached which will be inconsistent with a considerable building program on our part."³⁰ He was through with disarmament conferences and had decided to gain parity with Great Britain through construction instead of through limitation.

On 14 December Representative Thomas Butler, Chairman of the House Naval Affairs Committee, introduced into the House a massive naval construction bill, which called for twenty-five cruisers, five aircraft carriers, nine destroyer leaders, and thirty-two submarines, all to be begun within

²⁹Coolidge later qualified his remarks, stating that he had simply desired a continuation of the American Naval Program, but of course it was "not a matter of great consequence as it is a matter of years to build them." Ibid., 19 August 1927.

³⁰FRUS, 1927, p. viii.

the next five years and to be completed by 1937.³¹ This "71-Ship Bill" would cost an estimated \$725,000,000. The navalists were relying on presidential support and the general pro-Navy mood of the country for success in Congress. They were also relying on the work of the Navy League to apply the necessary pressure.

The Navy League had formed after the Spanish-American war. Its basic purpose was to inform the public of the necessity for a strong navy. Composed of naval veterans, arms manufacturers, and politicians with shipbuilding constituencies, the League gained in membership and strength during the first two decades of the twentieth century. During the 1920's the League fought naval disarmament and preached the importance of a large navy. After Geneva it once again geared its propaganda machine for passage of the Butler Bill.³² There were, however, equally determined pacifist

³¹New York Times, 15 December, 1927, p. 10. Arnold Toybee incorrectly dates this bill as being introduced on 14 November, Toybee, Survey, p. 81.

³²Armin Rappaport, The Navy League of the United States (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962), p. 112. Hereafter cited as Rappaport, Navy League. This author relied on Rappaport's treatment of the Navy League fight for passage of the naval appropriations bill. For further treatments of this subject see Hugh Latimer, Naval Disarmament (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1930), pp. 48-51; William H. Gardner, "Naval Parity: The Outlook After Geneva," Harper's Monthly 156 (January 1928): 211-19. Hector Bywater expressed surprise in the large cruiser demands in the "71-Ship Bill," stating this was quite an increase above the 400,000-ton limit set at Geneva. Hector Bywater, "American Naval Policy," The Nineteenth Century and After 103 (March 1928): 328.

groups. Led by the National Council for the Prevention of War, the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, and The National Education Association, these organizations joined members of Congress who refused to be swayed by "swivel-chair navalists." There soon arose such a roar of indignation over the size of the bill that Butler was forced to pare his recommendations to fifteen heavy cruisers and one aircraft carrier. The House passed the bill in this form on 17 March 1928, but the Senate adjourned in May without considering the bill. The pacifists had won a temporary victory, and the Navy League realized the difficulty of maintaining public enthusiasm for the bill when Congress was not in session. Fortunately from the "Big Navy" standpoint, Great Britain rescued the Navy League through inept diplomacy.

After a long and complicated series of diplomatic negotiations, the British and French agreed during the summer of 1928 to compromise their differences over disarmament. France yielded to the British on naval limitation in return for English withdrawal of its opposition to the French demand that reserves be omitted when calculating the strength of land forces. France further agreed to divide naval vessels into four categories: capital ships, aircraft carriers, surface vessels of below 10,000 tons, and submarines. The British won their demand that no limit be placed on cruisers mounting six-inch guns; only cruisers carrying the large guns would be

limited. Upon being informed of the Anglo-French agreement, the Coolidge Administration denounced the whole agreement saying that the British had attempted to confront the United States with a fait accompli. The Americans believed that the British had sought to pressure them into concessions which they had been unable to obtain in direct negotiations at Geneva.³³ Coolidge contributed to the decline in Anglo-American relations with a strong defense of American naval needs in an Armistice Day speech in November 1928. Emphasizing the importance of protecting the trade routes and overseas possessions of the United States, Coolidge firmly maintained that "world standards of defense require us to have more cruisers." With this outspoken support from the President, the Navy League was able to gain passage of the amended naval bill on 5 February 1929. The bill became law on 13 February.³⁴

The American resumption of Naval construction greatly concerned the British. In a Foreign Office memorandum in April 1928, Austen Chamberlain cited the Geneva Conference with accentuating the "danger to good relations arising out of naval competition." He remained hopeful, however, that

³³Rappaport, Navy League, pp. 119-20. For more on the events leading up to the Anglo-French agreement see Latimer, Naval Disarmament, pp. 23-32.

³⁴New York Times, 12 November 1928, pp. 1-2. For the text of the naval bill see United States Statutes at Large, vol. 45, part 1 (December 1927-March 1929), 70th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1929), p. 1165.

relations could be improved basing this on the belief that the "American people is, as a whole, pacific in its outlook."³⁵

It would take another year and a new president before naval disarmament was resumed. This time, however, the leaders of Great Britain and the United States played a more important part in the negotiations. Through a series of informal discussion during 1929, Herbert Hoover and Ramsay MacDonald were able to reach tentative agreements on the sticky question of cruisers. In 1930, France, Italy, Japan, Great Britain, and the United States met to renew disarmament deliberations. The Americans made a major concession and accepted 143,000 tons of smaller vessels with six-inch guns. But in return they obtained eighteen 10,000-ton cruisers, with Great Britain receiving fifteen. As compensation, the British were allowed 50,000 more total tons of the six-inch ships than the United States. Japan received a sixty percent ratio in the eight-inch gunships, a seventy percent total of the smaller vessels, and parity with America and

³⁵W. N. Medlicott, Douglas Dakin, and M. E. Lambert, eds., Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, Series 1A, Vol. 4 (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1971), p. 666. Chamberlain was still concerned a year later and noted in his report for 1929 that "it is gravely to be feared that a continuation of the present deadlock will lead to American insistence upon superiority. . .", W. N. Medlicott, Douglas Dakin, and M. E. Lambert, eds., Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, Series 1A, Vol. 6 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1975), pp. 835-36.

Britain in submarines. In the other classes the specific provisions of the London Treaty were strikingly similar to the tentative agreements reached at Geneva in 1927. Categories exempted from restriction at Geneva were closely followed by those left unlimited at London. The only change was an increase in the speed of exempt vessels from eighteen knots to twenty knots. The destroyer recommendations at Geneva were incorporated unchanged into the London agreement, and submarines were limited to 2000 tons and mounting 5.1-inch guns. This was only a minor change from the decisions at Geneva to limit submarines to 1800 tons and five-inch guns. Thus the provisions on auxiliary warships in the London Treaty were presaged in nearly every respect by the tentative arrangements concluded at Geneva in 1927.³⁶

In the years and decades since the Geneva Conference much has been written about how and why it failed. There have been nearly as many reasons given for the failure as there were writers giving them. Causes ranged from a lack of pre-conference diplomatic preparation to the composition of

³⁶The best account of 1930 London Naval Conference is Raymond O'Connor's Perilous Equilibrium: The United States and The London Naval Conference of 1930 (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1962).

the delegations attending the meeting.³⁷

One of the earliest to analyze the negotiations was the esteemed Arnold Toynbee. Toynbee produced not one, but four basic reasons for the failure. The first centered upon the inability of the negotiators to deal successfully with the problem of publicity. He concluded that the only effect of the closed sessions was inaccurate and sensational stories by an ignorant press. A second contribution was the role the Big Navy people played in influencing public opinion. Toynbee admitted that this effect was difficult to measure, but considered it an important factor. Third, the English

³⁷For examples of contemporary analysis of the conference failure see Frank Simonds, "Naval Disaster at Geneva" Review of Reviews 76 (27 September 1927): 270-75; "Geneva--and After," The Spectator 139 (13 August 1927): 244; "The Naval Conference," Round Table 17 (September 1927): 659-83; John C. Skillock, Jr., "The Post-War Movements to Reduce Naval Armaments," International Conciliation: Documents for the Year, 1928 (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1928), pp. 619-39; Rennie Smith, "The Breakdown of the Coolidge Conference," Contemporary Review 132 (September 1927): 290-95; Hugh F. Spender, "The Riddle of the Cruisers," Fortnightly Review (1 September 1927): 317-25; Richard Hooker, "The Geneva Naval Conference," The Yale Review 17 (January 1928): 263-80; K. K. Kawakami, "The Hidden Conflict at the Three-Power Naval Conference," Current History 27 (October 1927): 106-11; J. B. Atkins, "Between Geneva and the Deep Blue Sea," The Independent 120 (4 February 1928): 104-6; "The End of the Naval Conference," The Outlook 146 (17 August 1927): 497-8; Alfred C. Dewar, "The Geneva Conference, 1927," Brassey's Naval and Shipping Annual, 1928: 60-68.

historian placed blame on certain members of the Cabinet, such as Churchill, for remaining rigid in their desires not to concede parity to the Americans. Finally, and this Toynbee considered to be the major reason, was inadequate diplomatic preparation. The British and Americans brought to the conference proposals that had been drawn up with no exchange of information concerning their contents, causing a deadlock to form right from the start.³⁸

P. J. Noel-Baker, writing in 1927 and a strong supporter of the League of Nations, cited two fundamental reasons for the ultimate breakdown. Primarily, Noel-Baker considered the separation of the conference from the workings of the League to have been a great mistake. Disarmament "to be successful must be general," and decisions made at any separate conference would still affect all nations. Noel-Baker also blamed the secrecy of the meetings, saying that these closed sessions resulted only in a "multitude of varying and conflicting versions of the truth, from which distrust and misunderstanding of every kind arise."³⁹

Salvador De Madriaga, another proponent of the League of Nations, agreed with Noel-Baker that the Geneva Conference

³⁸Toynbee, Survey, pp. 73-77.

³⁹P. J. Noel-Baker, Disarmament and the Coolidge Conference (London: Leonard and Virginia Woolf, 1927), pp. 7-10.

had only been "a partial attempt" at disarmament. De Madriaga stressed that disarmament could succeed only through the efforts of all nations working together toward the same end.⁴⁰

Another writer during this post-conference period, while not an historian, was active in the naval affairs of Great Britain. Writing in 1928, Joseph Montague Kenworthy concluded that the responsibility for the failure must rest with Great Britain. The British had tried to regain supremacy of the seas, lost at Washington, but had encountered a similar American attitude. Kenworthy also urged that at the next disarmament conference, the Admirals be left home.⁴¹

Rolland Chaput, writing in the mid-nineteen-thirties, attributed to the cruiser controversy the major cause of the breakdown. The British insistence on six-inch gun cruisers for their needs, coupled with their desire to maintain an equal number of eight-inch gun vessels with the United States caused the final collapse.⁴² H. Wilson Harris

⁴⁰Salvador De Madariaga Disarmament (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1929, pp. 231-32.

⁴¹Joseph Montague Kenworthy Strabolgi and George Young, Freedom of the Seas (London: Hutchinson and Co., Ltd., 1928), pp. 183-84.

⁴²Rolland A. Chaput, Disarmament in British Foreign Policy (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1935), pp. 163-64. For similar conclusions see George T. Davis, A Navy Second to None: The Development of Modern American Naval Policy (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1940), pp. 323-34; Giovanni Engely, The Politics of Naval Disarmament, trans. H. V. Rhodes (London: Williams & Norgate, Ltd., 1932), p. 41.

dismissed the conference as "an ill-starred affair" which "began badly and ended worse." He placed the crux of the failure on the lack of preparation and the question of parity.⁴³

Benjamin H. Williams, while admitting that the conference was successful in clearing the ground for a future Anglo-American agreement, was still critical of the composition of the delegations. He placed particular blame on the American delegation, stating that while Admiral Jones was indeed an expert on naval affairs, he still "viewed the world through a porthole." Viscount Cecil was credited with being the only representative with an outstanding reputation, but was unfortunately controlled by the British Cabinet.⁴⁴

During the nineteen-forties Merze Tate produced a major monograph on disarmament. She concluded that the conference had tried to solve the problems from the technical standpoint without prior settlement of political differences. Recognizing that there had been a lack of pre-conference diplomatic preparation, Tate maintained that the fundamental cause for failure lay in Anglo-American divergence on naval

⁴³H. Wilson Harris, Naval Disarmament (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1930), pp. 35, 41.

⁴⁴Benjamin H. Williams, The United States and Disarmament (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1931), pp. 166-68.

parity. Although both nations agreed to the basic principle, they could not agree on a formula to achieve it.⁴⁵

In the last twenty years historians have been able to study the subject of disarmament in greater depth because of the availability of published and unpublished government documents. Utilizing State Department records, L. Ehtan Ellis concluded in his study of Frank B. Kellogg and American Foreign Relations, 1925-1929, that the conference failed principally because the United States and Great Britain entered the conference with "preconceived policies growing out of a conviction of naval need based on technical considerations. . . ." Since neither country would compromise its requirements for cruisers, the conference ended in deadlock.⁴⁶ In a later work Ellis added that the American delegation with its preponderance of naval personnel also contributed materially to the failure. Ellis also suggested two possible reasons for the quality of the American delegation: (1) Coolidge and Kellogg had not devoted much time to the selection of the delegates because they were too involved in other concerns, such as the continuing Nicaraguan and Mexican problems; and (2) Kellogg and Coolidge's "sheer ineptitude in

⁴⁵Merze Tate, The United States and Armaments (New York: Russell & Russell, 1948), pp. 145, 156-58.

⁴⁶L. Ethan Ellis, Frank B. Kellogg and American Foreign Relations, 1925-1929, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1961).

estimating the complexity of the problem. . . ."47 The latter explanation certainly has some merit.

In his study of the 1930 London Naval Conference, Raymond O'Connor discounted the composition of delegates as a factor and charged that the British failure to grant the United States full parity made agreement impossible. In addition, O'Connor mentioned that adverse publicity and lack of preliminary spade work also contributed to the conference failure.⁴⁸ Armin Rappaport analyzed the cruiser issue as the fundamental cause of the failure. The British desire for many small cruisers was completely unacceptable to the Americans and agreement became impossible.⁴⁹ Finally, David Carlton, writing in 1968, and having researched extensively in the personal papers of the British participants, concluded that the aims of the two Anglo-Saxon powers at the conference were "fundamentally incompatible." The American desire for large cruisers unavoidably clashed with the British insistence for unlimited numbers of cruisers. These technical considerations, Carlton states, were the bases of the negotiations at Geneva and made success highly improbable.⁵⁰

⁴⁷L. Ethan Ellis, Republican Foreign Policy, 1921-1933 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1968), pp. 141-46.

⁴⁸O'Connor, Perilous Equilibrium, p. 18.

⁴⁹Rappaport, Navy League, pp. 109-10.

⁵⁰David Carlton, "Great Britain and the Coolidge Naval Disarmament Conference of 1927," Political Science Quarterly 82 (December 1968):596-97.

During the nineteen-sixties two major works on naval policy in the inter-war period appeared, one on each side of the Atlantic. In his Prelude to Pearl Harbor Gerald Wheeler devoted an entire chapter to the Geneva Conference. Wheeler concluded that the negotiations "had little chance of success from the day of conception" and they proceeded in an "atmosphere of futility." Wheeler argued that two reasons were behind the lack of preliminary groundwork. One was the State Department's belief that the knowledge gained from Jones' informal discussions with Beatty was sufficient for the conference, and therefore little else was needed. The other related to Coolidge's initial invitation. Since the conference had been planned only to supplement the ongoing work of the Preparatory Commission, the personnel chosen for the meeting were those already at Geneva. The State Department reasoned that these individuals would simply continue the discussions already in progress at the Commission.

Wheeler also contended that the United States was forced to negotiate from weakness at the Geneva Conference. The United States had only two 10,000-ton cruisers laid down, with the other six still in the planning stages. But Great Britain had fourteen under construction, and Japan had six. Without cruisers actually under construction, the United States had a difficult task convincing the other two nations that they should limit their navies, while the United States

could then go ahead and build up hers. Wheeler also blamed the General Board for its responsibility in this respect, charging it with intransigence regarding total cruiser tonnage and the arming of all vessels with eight-inch guns.⁵¹

Wheeler based his main thesis, however, on his conviction that Anglo-American concerns over the Japanese Navy and its activities in the Far East were "the shoals upon which the conference grounded." Wheeler argued that both Great Britain and the United States had predicated their naval policy on the prospect of dealing with a belligerent Japan in the future. The United States had determined that it required the large cruisers to operate effectively in the expanses of the Pacific. Great Britain, in turn, had decided that the 5:3 ratio must be maintained with Japan, and if the United States were to require more large cruisers than Great Britain believed necessary for Japan, then the Admiralty would have to ask for a lower Japanese ratio. This would, of course, be impossible for Japan to accept, and thus, Wheeler concluded, the conference had to fail.⁵²

⁵¹Gerald E. Wheeler, Prelude to Pearl Harbor: The United States Navy and the Far East, 1921-1931 (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1963), pp. 139-45.

⁵²Ibid., p. 150.

In contrast to Wheeler, Stephen Roskill discounted the significance of the lack of preparation in causing the failure of the conference. Instead, the well-known British naval historian laid most of the blame on the American doorstep. He emphasized the American inflexibility, its "Navy second to none dogma", and its "stubborn refusal to recognize that a maritime empire dependent on seaborne commerce could reasonably claim special needs for trade defense purposes . . . since it was remotely improbable that such vessels would ever be used against the United States." While stating that the selection of Admiral Jones as a delegate "was not exactly conducive to a settlement," Roskill found nothing wrong with Bridgeman and Cecil, who were "prepared to accept any reasonable compromise in order to achieve agreement."⁵³

Roskill concluded that the fundamental cause of failure was the different strategic requirements of Great Britain and the United States in cruiser types and tonnage. Britain's stubborn refusal to accept a total cruiser tonnage of 400,000 tons, coinciding with the American insistence on settling for

⁵³Stephen Roskill, Naval Policy Between the Wars, Vol. 1: The Period of Anglo-American Antagonism, 1919-1929 (New York. Walker and Company, 1968), pp. 59, 516. For a more recent criticism of the conference that shares Roskill's opinions see Norman Gibbs, "The Naval Conference of the Inter-War Years: A Study in Anglo-American Relations," Naval War College Review 30 (Summer 1977): 52-53.

nothing less than eight-inch guns on their ships, made total failure inevitable. Roskill added several collateral reasons contributing to the breakdown: the long, hot summers in Geneva and Washington; press "leaks" from the American delegation; a lack of cordiality between Esme Howard and Kellogg, which probably hurt negotiations at the higher level; the anti-British propaganda of the Navy League; and, finally, the "back stairs activities" of William B. Shearer on the behalf of American steel and armament interests.⁵⁴

Since the publication of Roskill's work in 1968, two dissertations have appeared.⁵⁵ Michael J. Brode, a Canadian writing in 1972, concluded that the conference failed principally because of the Anglo-American decision to follow "without significant compromise" the plans drafted by their respective navies. Brode also criticized the British and American refusal to compromise in 1927 when the Japanese had been desirous of agreement. The conference failure "contributed to the weakening of civilian prestige and rise of militarism in Japan and forfeited a change to stabilize the

⁵⁴ Roskill, Naval Policy, pp. 514-18.

⁵⁵ For another view from the 1970's see Robert William Dubay, "The Geneva Naval Conference of 1927: A Study of Battleship Diplomacy" The Southern Quarterly 8 (January 1970): 177-99.

Asian situation."⁵⁶

In 1974, William Trimble expressed three basic reasons for the conference failure. Primarily, the breakdown was the result of British and American failure to conduct adequate prior political discussions. Trimble placed most of the blame on the Americans, agreeing with Chamberlain that the responsibility for such discussion lay with the United States. Secondly, Trimble cited the inability of officials to compromise on the cruiser issue. He assigned to the deadlock over the gun calibre the major stumbling block in thi issue. Finally, he scored the United States for trying to gain concessions from the other two powers when it had nothing to bargain with from the beginning. Trimble also mentioned the secrecy of the meetings and the bad press given the British, but he discounted the latter, arguing that in most cases the American press reported the facts accurately.⁵⁷

After all of the words written about the Geneva Conference in the past fifty years, one approaches with hesitation the task of adding still another interpretation. Before beginning an assessment of the conference, it should be emphasized that contrary to what some historians have

⁵⁶Michael J. Brode, "Anglo-American Relations and the Geneva Naval Disarmament Conference of 1927," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alberta, 1972), pp. 153, 162.

⁵⁷Trimble, "Geneva Conference," pp. 375-86.

claimed,⁵⁸ the Geneva Conference was not a complete failure. Tentative agreements were reached on exempt vessels, submarines, and destroyers. Even the vexatious cruiser issue was narrowed to the question of whether future vessels should be armed with 8-inch or 6-inch guns. Unfortunately, the United States and Britain remained adamant on the gun issue, and the possibility that further negotiations would have eventually solved the tonnage differences was lost. If nothing else, the conference at Geneva enabled the conflicting positions of the three countries to be placed in the open, where it soon became clear that concessions were essential on both sides if a naval arms limitation treaty was over to be consummated.

The most common reason given for the failure at Geneva was the lack of preliminary diplomatic preparation. It cannot be denied that more diplomatic discussion would have improved the chances of success, but Kellogg and the State Department believed they had done what was necessary. Kellogg and Jones were bitter after the conference charging that the British had not been honest with them after giving

⁵⁸ For examples see, Yamato Ichihashi, The Washington Conference and After: A Historical Survey (Stanford University, California: Stanford University Press, 1928), p. 147; Donald W. Mitchell, History of the Modern American Navy: From 1883 Through Pearl Harbor (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), p. 326; Rappaport, Navy League, p. 109; Ellis, Frank B. Kellogg, p. 183; Wheeler, Pearl Harbor, p. 148.

supposed assurances to Jones during his trips to London that they would agree to parity. But Admiral Field had warned Jones in March 1927 that the British were considering the possibility of having more small cruisers because of their "special needs." Jones had not heeded this warning, and the British had gone ahead and drawn up their plans with the full intention of having their small cruisers.

Contributing to the lack of diplomatic exchanges was the desire of both navies to keep their proposals secret. Both Beatty and Bridgeman wanted to have the advantage at Geneva that the Americans had enjoyed in Washington. Thus, each sought to keep their proposals secret until the first day of the conference. Although certainly a contributing factor, the lack of preparation was not the primary cause of the conference failure.

Another reason advanced was the secrecy of the conference meetings. The British charged that their views were being misrepresented by the American press. But when Bridgeman tried to set the record straight in his 30 June "parity" speech, he only succeeded in getting into trouble with the Cabinet. The secret meetings, however, did serve the interests of men like William Shearer who played on the ignorance of the press to spread propaganda about the American position. Although some historians such as Stephen

Roskill credit Shearer with causing the conference difficulties, Joseph H. Kitchens argues that "Shearer had little if any influence on the [Geneva] negotiations. The strife he fomented only added to the unpleasantness of a conference that was hamstrung by the technical pre-suppositions of the two chief participants."⁵⁹ During the conference there was little mention by the delegates of Shearer, and his importance in the final results was negligible. While recognizing that the negotiations might have been represented more correctly in the press, secrecy of the deliberations did enable the Japanese to translate the debates for those in their party who did not speak English. It is true that more diplomatic exchanges before the conference may have obviated the need for private sessions, but it is still doubtful if the secret meetings were crucial to the success of the conference.

The composition of the delegations has also been proposed frequently as a reason for the ultimate failure of the conference. The British, especially Bridgeman, criticized the American delegation for its preponderance of naval advisors.⁶⁰ Admittedly, Gibson was the only civilian of high rank in the American delegation, but Bridgeman's argument that the British had two civilians and only one naval

⁵⁹Kitchens, "Shearer Scandal," p. 233.

⁶⁰William C. Bridgeman, "Naval Disarmament," Royal Institute of International Affairs 6 (November 1927): 335.

officer is not exactly correct. While Bridgeman was indeed a member of the Cabinet and thus a civilian, his position as First Lord of the Admiralty tended to color his perception of naval matters. Bridgeman was quite close to Admiral Beatty, and in reality the British had one civilian, one Admiral, and one naval member with Cabinet rank. Chamberlain mentioned in his defense of the British delegation that the Japanese also had two Admirals and one civilian,⁶¹ Frederick Moore disputed this assertion by the British Foreign Minister, noting that although Viscount Saito did hold the title of Admiral, he had long been one of Japan's foremost civilian administrators.⁶² So, although it may be stated that the Americans had too many naval people, the other delegations also had their share of naval personnel. More important is the question of how much the final outcome of the conference would have been changed by more civilians and fewer military persons sitting at the conference table. The representatives to the conference had come with the idea that technical questions were to be considered and an abundance of statesmen would not have contributed greatly to the discussions. By 1930,

⁶¹Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th series, 210 (1927): 2102.

⁶²Frederick Moore, America's Naval Challenge (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), p. 124.

however, this attitude had changed and the negotiations once again were handled by civilians with the military personnel acting in only an advisory capacity.

Although these reasons all contributed in one way or another to the final breakdown, they were not the primary cause. The basic reason for the Anglo-American stalemate over the cruiser issue was caused by the refusal of both sides to compromise its naval policies. Although after the conference charges flew back and forth across the Atlantic, casting blame on the other nation, the fact remains that both sides were responsible for the final breakdown in the negotiations. The British Admiralty, strongly supported by Winston Churchill, was unbending in its desire for small cruisers to guard their extensive sea routes, while at the same time the Americans were equally adamant in their adherence to the General Board Report, which called for parity with Great Britain and a minimum of eight-inch guns on all vessels. Although it is quite possible that an agreement could have been reached on the total tonnage for the cruiser class, obtaining agreement on the gun calibre issue became impossible. The British were steadfast in demanding that all future ships be armed with six-inch guns, which would of course, keep the British small cruiser from becoming obsolete. But the United States refused to recognize Great

Britain's "special needs," arguing that she also had needs that required the large cruiser and gun. The Navy also feared the British would place six-inch guns on their large merchantman fleet. This would increase the number of offensive ships in the British Navy and thus threaten the security of the United States. These rigid positions made compromise at Geneva impossible.

There was another even more basic cause, often overlooked, for the failure: the Coolidge Administration was not pressed to disarm. Coolidge's wish to cut Federal spending was based mainly on his desire to have a balanced budget. He had concluded that the military was one area where spending could be curtailed. The world was at peace and there was no immediate threat to the security of the United States. The President, thereby, hoped to join in European efforts to continue disarmament while also adding prestige to his administration. When the conference broke down, he decided to continue naval construction as if no conference had occurred.

The British were more pressed for a reduction in naval armaments, but were reluctant to bargain with the Coolidge Administration on the finer points of the debate. Although needing to aid their economy wherever possible, the British were not eager to relinquish their naval security. An added factor was the British dislike for dealing with Coolidge in

foreign affairs. Churchill had described the president as having the viewpoint of a "New England backwoodsman," and in the Conservative government the Exchequer had wielded great influence. The British were content to wait for a new president before tackling the disarmament problem again with the United States.

The 1927 Geneva Naval Disarmament Conference was a perfect example of how not to conduct a conference. Begun with all proposals in the shadows, then proceeding into hopeless deadlock, the conference came to its only possible conclusion --failure. In 1927, neither the British nor the American naval personnel were willing to limit armaments in the quest of peace, and their leaders allowed them to have their way, By 1930, however, both nations were ready to take a chance to limit arms if it would help secure peace in a restless world. The negotiations had failed at Geneva, but the groundwork was laid for the successful conclusion of a naval limitation treaty in 1930.

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The official records of the conference are published in three separate sources: Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1927; Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939; and Records of the Conference for the Limitation of Naval Armament, Senate Document 55, 70th Congress, 1st Session.

The Public Record Office in London houses several record groups important to the study of the conference. Foreign Office 800/261 includes correspondence between Chamberlain and Cecil, Bridgeman, and Esme Howard. Of the Admiralty Papers, Admiralty 116/2609 consists of telegrams pertinent to the negotiations, many of which are unpublished.

The Public Record Office also contains significant material relating to the Cabinet. The Cabinet minutes are catalogued in Cab23/55, and miscellaneous memoranda is found in Cab24/188. The records of the Committee of Imperial Defence are contained in two classifications: Cab4/16 (Memoranda and Miscellaneous) and Cab2/5 (Minutes). These four sets of documents are very helpful in gaining insight into the British position at Geneva. Cab 23 and 24 are also on microfilm in the Iowa State University Library.

Two valuable unpublished sources are the press conferences

of President Calvin Coolidge and Secretary of State Kellogg: Calvin Coolidge, Press Conferences (Lacrosse, Wisconsin, 1971); and Press Conferences of the Secretaries of State (1922-73), Series 1, F. B. Kellogg and H. L. Stimson: March 1927-December 1929 (Wilmington, Delaware, 1973). These two record sets are available at the Iowa State University Library on microfilm. Selected press conferences of Coolidge--some one-fourth of the total--are published in Howard H. Quint and Robert H. Ferrell, eds., The Talkative President: The Off-the Record Press Conferences of Calvin Coolidge (Amherst, 1964), available at the Iowa State University Library on microfilm.

The Herbert Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch, Iowa contains the papers of several key participants and the Coolidge papers on microfilm. Hugh Gibson's papers include diary entries and letters to his mother recording his impressions of the negotiations. William R. Castle's papers contain communications between Castle and Hugh Gibson. The Hugh Wilson papers include correspondence between Wilson and Allen Dulles, legal representative for the United States at the conference. The Coolidge papers reveal little significant information for this study. A better source is Coolidge's press conferences.

Frank B. Kellogg's papers, located at the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul, Minnesota, give valuable insight of his views. Hugh Wilson's diary, deposited at the

Hoover Institute on War, Revolution, and Peace at Stanford, California is a rich source of anecdotes and inside information on the American viewpoint during the conference.

The British attitude is well-illustrated in the papers of Viscount Robert Cecil of Chelwood, located in the British Library, London, England. This collection contains correspondence with Chamberlain and Bridgeman and is quite helpful toward understanding Cecil's disarmament philosophy. Another profitable source is William Bridgeman's diary. This is in the possession of his son, the 2nd Viscount Bridgeman, who resides at Leigh Manor, Minsterley, Salop, England and may be obtained upon request. There is a deposit required which is refunded after the diary is returned. Although biased, Bridgeman's diary does reflect the opinions of Cecil's colleague at Geneva.

Personal reminiscences are not particularly helpful. Hugh Wilson's Diplomat Between Wars (New York, 1941), based on his diary, is largely anecdotal. Although not dealing much with the conference, Viscount Robert Cecil's two autobiographies, A Great Experiment: An Autobiography (New York, 1941), and All the Way (London, 1949), are both essential contributions to the study of his public career. Viscount Kikujiro Ishii's Diplomatic Commentaries (Baltimore, 1936), provides little additional understanding of the Japanese position.

Although most American newspapers carried the details of the conference, the New York Times is probably the best newspaper source. The New York Herald Tribune is also accurate in its reporting, but editorially is strongly against further naval reduction. The London Times best portrays the British position. Another British newspaper the Manchester Guardian, provides analysis of the various proposals during the conference from the British standpoint. As can be expected, the respective newspapers supported their nation's proposals and criticized those of the other powers. Nevertheless, the newspaper correspondents were diligent in their reporting of the conference details.

Much has been written about the conference since its conclusion in 1927. Of the numerous works devoted to the study of disarmament and naval policy between the wars, two are outstanding: Gerald E. Wheeler, Prelude to Pearl Harbor: The United States Navy and the Far East, 1921-1931 (Columbia, 1963); and Stephen Roskill, Naval Policy Between the Wars, Vol. 1, The Period of Anglo-American Antagonism, 1919-1929 (New York, 1968). Both Wheeler and Roskill used recently available documents for their studies. Although written soon after the conference, Arnold Toynbee's Survey of International Affairs, 1927 (Oxford, 1929) is an excellent analysis.

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