The Triple Entente Survives Its First Test: Great Power Diplomacy in the Baltic, 1905-1908

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In the field of European diplomatic history, the decade preceding the outbreak of the First World War probably has received more scrutiny than any other period. Even historians only vaguely familiar with this era are doubtless knowledgeable of the two opposing constellations of the great powers: the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy, extant since 1882, and the Franco-Russian alliance with its increased co-operation with Great Britain – the Triple Entente which was virtually in being by the end of 1907. The conflicts contributing to the outbreak of the war spawned in Morocco and the Balkans between these two groups are branded indelibly into the memories of most students of modern European history. Virtually no historians, however, have realized until recently that a similar threat to world peace existed in the Baltic area. Nevertheless, a fascinating round of great power diplomacy, with important implications for the future of Europe, quietly and didactically took place.

For Russia, Germany, and Great Britain, the Baltic area possessed great strategic, and consequently much political value. The narrow straits of Denmark connecting the Baltic with the North Sea acted as a crucial lifeline for Russia, while increasingly paranoid German naval officials, whose influence after 1896 was in the ascendant at Berlin, lived in fear that Britain or any other potentially hostile power might gain a foothold there. British officials writhed at the thought of German forces performing a similar feat.[1] All remained quiescent, however, until June of 1905 when Norway declared her independence from Sweden, ending their united state which dated back to the Napoleonic Wars. This action initiated a flurry of great power activity in the area which was to end, unlike the highly publicized crises in Bosnia and Morocco of the same period, in a quiet and sane resolution.

The great power with the most to lose by change in Scandinavia was Great Britain. As a guarantor of the Swedish-Norwegian kingdom by the so-called November Treaty of 1856, she had for long maintained the confidence of both regions and stood to lose influence in one or the other upon the separation. The British Foreign Office consequently played a careful non-partisan role in ensuing developments. Germany stood to gain where Britain lost; thus her diplomats also

1. See especially Paul M. Kennedy, "The Development of German Naval Operations Plans Against England, 1896-1914," *English Historical Review*, Vol. 89 (1974), Jonathan Steinberg, "The Copenhagen Complex," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. I., No. 3 (July 1966), and David Sweet, "The Baltic in British Diplomacy Before the First World War," *Historical Journal*, Vol. XIV., (1970). See also Sir E.L. Woodward, *Great Britain and the German Navy* (Oxford: 1935).

chose a passive policy of displaying sympathy for both sides while awaiting any favorable opportunity. Russia, too, placed no obstacles in the way of Norwegian independence; such a development would only weaken her Swedish neighbor.

As a result, by 27 October 1905, Norway successfully negotiated her independence totally unhindered by great power pressure. Furthermore, although the monarchs of Britain and Germany both meddled in the Norwegian choice of their king, the people elected Prince Charles of Denmark essentially of their own volition.[2] The difficulty in Scandinavia emerged, however, when the new Norwegian foreign minister, Jörgen Lövland, successively sounded the great powers from June to September 1906 of the possibility of an international guarantee of his country's neutrality.[3]

Since such a treaty would proscribe any military actions in that area, and possibly would close the Danish straits to all warships, none of the powers felt inclined to assent to this unnecessary agreement. The new British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, who placed a far greater premium upon European affairs than did his immediate predecessors, politely dragged his feet, as did the Germans, whose foreign policy currently rested in the unstable hands of Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow and his recently handpicked foreign minister, Heinrich von Tschirschky. Also voicing disapproval was the most optimistic diplomat and the new Russian foreign minister, Count Alexander Izvolsky, an enigmatic politician who looked yearningly for a diplomatic victory to reassert Russian prestige so badly tarnished by domestic unrest and military failure in Manchuria. Izvolsky's fondest goal was to remilitarize the small Aland Islands, strategically situated at the gateway to St. Petersburg, but demilitarized since the Crimean War by the old November Treaty of 1856 which Britain and France both guaranteed.

Blocked by the British in an earlier attempt to abrogate the Aland Islands clause, Izvolsky chose the occasion of the new Norwegian treaty, which was to invalidate the 1856 agreement, to seek the secret co-operation of the Germans in his quest. This step was not a surprising one; the Baltic was one area where Germany and Russia had long shared mutual interests and a common fear of outsiders. In 1903, for example, both states jointly offered to protect Denmark and occupy her waters in the event of a general European war. The stillborn Björkö alliance of 1904 again displayed sentiment for Russo-German co-operation among influential officials of both states. In the early summer of 1907, then, the Germans consented to Izvolsky's proposed demilitarization, which the Russian minister subsequently inserted into a draft of the Norwegian treaty. Grey successfully blocked the attempt in July, as he also persuaded Lövland to drop his demand for a guarantee of Norwegian neutrality and accept a simple guarantee of integrity, which technically still permitted the freedom of military

2. The standard work on the subject is Folke Lindberg, *Scandinavia in Great Power Politics, 1905-1908* (Stockholm: 1958).

3. For more details on this diplomacy see especially Lindberg.

action the powers were loath to sacrifice.[4] All interested parties consented to the diluted terms by autumn. The new guarantors, Britain, Germany, Russia, and France subsequently signed the Treaty of Norwegian Integrity on 2 November 1907, but the diplomacy over Scandinavia was far from over. Izvolsky's unredeemed desire to demilitarize the Aland Islands led to developments of potentially far greater importance.

During a meeting of Tsar Nicholas II and Kaiser Wilhelm II at the Baltic resort of Swinemunde in the first week of August 1907, Izvolsky presented the Germans with a new offer. In return for German support in Izvolsky's quest for the abrogation of the Aland Islands Convention, he proposed that their two nations sign a secret protocol agreeing to the exclusion of all outside influence in the Baltic area.[5] A public treaty signed only by the riverain Baltic powers upholding the status quo in the area could also be added for window dressing. The exclusion of British influence would be beneficial to them both, but Izvolsky was primarily seeking German help in pressuring an isolated Sweden into accepting his demands. Not even Norway was to be included, so much was England's influence feared.

Izvolsky's move hardly befitted a loyal ally of France or an eager friend of England but showed instead a willingness to risk all friendships for minor tangible gains. Was this step taken so frivolously, however? Although Izvolsky's action perhaps resulted from the shock he received from Grey's appeal for an international conference on the Aland Islands when the subject was raised during the Norwegian negotiations that July,[6] it seems instead to have been the crystallization of a plan whose conception preceded Grey's startling suggestion. Already Izvolsky had taken steps to increase German co-operation and Sweden's isolation. Already Russia had been denied expansion in the Far East and was about to seal herself off from further conquest in Central Asia by the colonial convention with England. The Balkans and the Baltic were the only two remaining regions for possible expansion or assertion of power. Although the Austrians were sure to contest Russia in the Balkans, Germany appeared friendly in the Baltic, making that the logical focal point for Russian efforts in 1907. Exactly how much Izvolsky hoped to gain from the Swinemünde proposal remains enigmatic, however. He may have intended simply to gain the release of the Aland Islands restrictions, or he may have intended that it be a stepping stone to something much greater. In either case, the results of his offer could have

4. It was understood that one conceivably could, with Norwegian permission, still carry out military activity in Norway without violating her integrity, which was not possible under a guarantee of neutrality.

5. Tschirschky memorandum of 7 August 1907, in Johannes Lepsius, Albrecht Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, and Friedrich Thimme, eds., *Die Grosse Politik der europäischen Kabinette, 1871-1914,* Vol. XXIII., Part 2 (Berlin: 1927), pp. 463-4 (further references to this volume as *G.P.*).

6. Lindberg, p. 100.

changed profoundly the balance of all the powers. Yet he did not seem to have grasped the possible consequences if something were to go wrong with his plan, or even if all was to go correctly. His behavior was in fact strikingly similar to that displayed in his irresponsible offer of the following year to Austria-Hungary at Buchlau which permitted Austria's annexation of Bosnia for an empty promise of later support in Russia's bid to control the Dardanelles. His Baltic experience of 1907-1908 should have taught him to act more carefully, but he was not to learn from his mistake.

The original German reaction to the Swinemünde offer was one of hesitation, and her behavior in the following months actually reflected greater consideration towards the British and French than Izvolsky was ever to show. The offer did strike them as appealing, however. The format of the status quo agreement including only the riverain powers corresponded exactly to that used in a treaty France and England had signed with Spain the previous May, known as the Pact of Cartagena. Probably, Izvolsky deliberately baited his offer with the similar wording, since the Germans were slightly jealous over the ease (more apparent than real) with which those rival nations had arranged that agreement,[7] and were intrigued by the prospect of owning a similar *fait accompli* to wave under the Entente Cordiale's collective nose. There was more to Germany's attraction than vanity, however. Where their dreams of diplomatic success in the Baltic through a Danish or Russian alliance had hitherto been barren, Izvolsky's offer, although he failed to realize it, opened great opportunities for a German diplomatic coup. As Friedrich von Holstein, the eminent German diplomat only recently dislodged from power, hinted on the occasion, "interests can bind without a treaty of alliance."[8] It was time again to seek binding relations with Russia, and perhaps even with Denmark and Britain.

There is a remarkable memorandum of August 11, 1907, written by the then under-secretary at the Wilhelmstrasse, Gottlieb von Jagow which laid out the plan for Germany's subsequent Baltic policy,[9] and was endorsed specifically by Tschirschky and followed faithfully, even if unsuccessfully.[10] Jagow first stated that the Russian plan could only result in damaged Anglo-German relations if it remained as Izvolsky proposed. But if the talks were kept secret only until their completion, then Germany could spring her *fait accompli* upon the British and also offer to negotiate a similar agreement with them over the North Sea as compensation. Of course Russia had not envisioned that, but once the talks were underway Izvolsky could hardly oppose the German improvisation.[11]

7. Maurice Bompard, *Mon Ambassade en Russie, 1903-1908* (Paris: 1937), p. 266.

8. 13 August 1907 diary entry of Friedrich von Holstein, in Norman Rich and M.H. Fischer, eds., *The Holstein Papers*, Vol. IV., *Correspondence, 1897-1909* (Cambridge: 1963), p. 486.

9. Jagow memorandum of 11 August 1907, *G.P.*, pp. 464-6.

10. Tschirschky to Bülow, 13 August 1907, and Tschirschky to Schoen, 23 August 1907, *Ibid.*, pp. 466-7 and 468-70.

11. Jagow memorandum of 11 August 1907, *Ibid.*, pp. 464-6.

If Jagow's predictions materialized, then after the signing of the two envisioned agreements England and France would be excluded from the Baltic as Izvolsky suggested, but Russia and France would find themselves excluded from the North Sea as well. Germany would own agreements with both England and Russia, while concurrently splitting those two from each other and from France. The Triple Entente, even as it was being welded together, would be cracked symbolically and perhaps more profoundly at every joint. Germany could then prove to the world that she was not encircled at all. A later memorandum by Tschirschky noted that since the public wording of the agreements was to be most peaceable and benevolent, Germany could also enhance her image among such smaller powers as the Netherlands, Sweden, and especially Denmark.[12] Since such an action might win the confidence of the Danes, the elusive alliance with them would not even be necessary. The German risks involved in the plan were extremely low. Although Izvolsky could only extricate himself with damaged French and British relations once the talks were underway, the worst that could happen for Germany, who had no good French and British relations anyway, would be the mere addition of two harmless agreements to the treaty books. Besides, it was logical to seize the next opportunity after the Algeciras defeat to crack the opposition just as it was logical to use subtler tactics than the blunt ones that had failed them before.

Tschirschky gave the word on August 23 to accept Izvolsky's offer of talks about restricting the maintenance of the Baltic status quo to the riverain powers. To ensure that England knew nothing of what was afoot, he emphasized to his envoy the "incalculable importance" of secrecy.[13] He also stipulated that the wording of the public agreement not appear aimed against Britain,[14] but that could never be convincing window dressing.

At this same time Sweden began to feel the cold of isolation. True to her threats to turn elsewhere if disappointed by the British, Sweden raised the possibility of a political agreement to Russia and Germany on September 24, soon after the appearance of the final Norwegian draft.[15] Izvolsky's benevolence towards Sweden during the Norwegian diplomacy began to pay off, for she seemed to be leaning in his direction and was perhaps ready to yield on the Aland Islands issue as a result. Sweden's inclusion in the Baltic plan was applauded by Germany too, as long as all could be arranged quickly before anyone outside the Baltic found out. Both in St. Petersburg and in Berlin the diplomacy promised to be fruitful, but each nation envisioned very different fruits.

Much to the Germans' consternation, Izvolsky began his annual vacation trip through Europe during this crucial period. Found by Jagow at Karlsbad on

12. Tschirschky memorandum of 9 September 1907, U.S. National Archives, *German Foreign Ministry Archives, 1870-1920* (Microfilm), Denmark No. 37, Section A., Bund. 7, Reel 1769, frame EO29674-5 (Further references as *G.F.M.*).

13. Unsigned German Foreign Ministry memorandum of 23 August 1907, *Ibid.*, Denmark No. 37, Sect. A., Bund 8, Reel 1769, frame EO29718-20.

14. Tschirschky to Schoen, 23 August 1907, *G.P.*, p. 486.

15. Lindberg, p. 147.

September 20, he indicated little willingness to conduct diplomacy while taking the waters.[16] Tschirschky reached him in Vienna in early October, and presented him with a draft of the preliminary Baltic agreement. Things were developing smoothly, typified by an October 5 statement by a high Russian Foreign Ministry adviser to the German Chargé d'Affaires expressing the wish that their nations would always go "hand in hand," especially in the Baltic.[17]

The two went a great step further when on October 29 the Russian Undersecretary at the Foreign Ministry, Count Gubastov, and the German Ambassador, Baron Wilhelm von Schoen, signed a secret protocol maintaining the status quo in the Baltic and pledging their mutual co-operation in that area. Izvolsky himself did not sign it, for he was in Paris at the time. The protocol was only a preliminary to any greater schemes, however, and everything had to remain secret at least until the Norwegian guarantee was signed and the November Treaty abrogated. In late October that had not yet happened. Only after the French and British unwittingly had removed most of their legal justification for Baltic influence, or as Germany's ambassador in London, Count Paul von Wolff-Metternich, put it, until they no longer had "a finger in the Baltic pie,"[18] could either the Russian or German plans unfold. Yet even if Izvolsky failed to realize it, the initiative was no longer in his hands. It was Germany that now controlled the slicing of the Baltic pie.

In the meantime, Sweden had begun discussions of her own with Germany and Russia for the public Baltic status quo agreement, although she was not told by either about the secret protocol.[19] The Swedes actually hoped for German help against Russian demands concerning the Alands, while Russia had Germany's promise to back her up in that very dispute. In fact, the Germans preferred to help neither side and only wanted to complete the first phase of their plan quickly.[20] The dutiful Wilhelmstrasse clerks had even drawn up a draft of the proposed North Sea agreement, should it be needed in an emergency to show to the British.[21] It was indeed a prudent precaution.

Already by late October rumors abounded, especially among French diplomats, that Russia, Germany, and Sweden were negotiating some agreement concerning the Baltic.[22] By mid-November the British knew for sure, apparently

16. Jagow to Tschirschky, 20 September 1907, *G.P.*, p. 478.

17. Hans Miquel (First Secretary in St. Petersburg) to Berlin quoting Baron Michael von Taube of the Russian Foreign Ministry, 5 October 1907, *G.F.M.*, Norway No. 7, Sect. A., Bund. 3, Reel 1434, fr. D57751.

18. Metternich (Ambassador to Great Britain) to Bülow, 29 October 1907, *G.P.*, p. 486.

19. Lindberg, p. 161.

20. Hindenburg (Minister in Stockholm) to Bülow, 21 October 1907, *G.P.*, p. 486.

21. Tschirschky to Metternich, 4 October 1907, *Ibid.*, p. 478.

22. For examples see Sir Francis Bertie (Ambassador to France) to Grey, 1 November 1907, in G.P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, eds., *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914*, Vol. VIII., (London: 1932), p. 134 (further references as *B.D.*) and Paul Cambon (Ambassador to Great Britain) to Stephan Pichon (French Foreign Minister), 8 November 1907, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Commission de publications des documents relatifs aux origines de la guerre de 1914, *Documents Diplomatiques Francais, 1871-1914*, 2nd Series, Vol. XI. (Paris: 1948), p. 324 (further references as *D.D.F.*).

through a leak in St. Petersburg.[23] (The Germans suspected the leak as being Russian, too, while the Russians blamed it on the Swedes.[24]) Although it is not known who actually did allow the leak, it seems likely to have been Russian and may well have been intentional. Izvolsky had met with unexpected Swedish intransigence to his push to re-arm the Alands and this may have persuaded him to abort the talks then and there.[25] Or perhaps he finally realized that the Germans were using him and his plan and that the Triple Entente could be severely strained in the process. Sheer Russian carelessness seems the most likely explanation, however, for if they did sabatoge their own talks, they certainly picked a poor method. Since the French and British knew none of the details, they naturally feared the worst and suspected that some agreement was being made to close the straits against them. Grey was sincere enough in this belief to ask the Admiralty's opinion of the possible consequences.[26]

This turn of events hardly pleased the Germans, but Ambassador Metternich in London calmly assured the Wilhelmstrasse that their plans could still work out as long as the North Sea agreement was proposed to England immediately instead of after the revelation of the completed Baltic status quo treaty.[27] The British agreement would still have to be conducted separately, however, and it was essential that the secret protocol never be revealed.[28] The damage to the German plan, then, had not yet become irreparable.

Metternich officially informed the British of the Baltic negotiations on December 4. The Germans had little recourse, for it was far better for them that England heard their version rather than someone else's. Theirs did not include mention of the secret protocol, but only of separate German and Russian discussions with Sweden for a harmless Baltic status quo treaty. As he had suggested, Metternich then prematurely but necessarily put into play the second phase of Germany's plan by inviting England to join in a status quo treaty concerning the North Sea, not missing the opportunity to compare it with the Pact of Cartagena.[29] He mentioned parenthetically that the Aland Islands were being discussed in the Baltic talks but observed that that was Russia's problem. Grey's only substantive remark was that France would have to be told about the talks, and the Germans quickly decided that Russia should be given that honor.[30]

23. Hardinge (British Permanent Secretary to the Foreign Office) to Nicolson (Ambassador to Russia) 12 November 1907, *B.D.*, p. 136.

24. Memorandum by Bussche-Haddenhausen of the German Foreign Ministry, 2 December 1907, *G.P.*, p. 500, and Schoen (now Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs) to Metternich, 3 December 1907, *G.P.*, p. 501.

25. Sir James Rennell Rodd, *Social and Diplomatic Memories*, 3rd Series, 1902-1919 (London: 1925), p. 87.

26. Grey to Lord Tweedmouth (First Lord of the Admiralty) 19 November 1907, *B.D.*, p. 136.

27. Miquel to Bülow, 30 November 1907, *G.P.*, p. 498.

28. Aide-Memoir of 23 January 1908, *G.F.M.*, Denmark No. 37, Sect. A., Bund. 12, Reel 1771, fr. EO30401.

29. Conversation described by Grey to Count de Salis (Ambassador to Portugal), 4 December 1907, *B.D.*, p. 137.

30. Bülow note to Metternich report of 4 December 1907, *G.P.*, p. 504.

On December 10, the Russian Ambassador to France, Count Alexander Nelidov, faced the unenviable task of explaining his superior's actions to the French Foreign Minister Pichon. Nelidov gave assurances that Russia had held no direct talks with Germany, which was of course untrue. Once described as "a man of unreproachable honor,"[31] Nelidov was quickly losing his good reputation. In a rage, Pichon pointed out that if France were ever to attack Germany's Baltic coast, under the proposed Baltic agreement Russia would be bound to oppose her! He became even further enraged as he asked why France, a long-time guarantor of Sweden and the Aland Islands, had been told nothing of the talks revising their status. To this Nelidov could only reply that he had not actually thought deeply about it,[32] and he undoubtedly eyed the exit to the room longingly.

Back in London, Grey and Metternich met again on December 9. At this session Grey requested that in addition to their own nations, France, Belgium, and Denmark also be included in any North Sea talks.[33] At this point the German plan began to go seriously awry, for the main point of it was to align Germany with Britain in an international agreement that would exclude the latter's French ally. Metternich was visibly taken aback by Grey's alarming proposal and he naturally tried to resist it. He and Grey even stepped over to a map on the wall and haggled over whether France in any way bordered the North Sea. The issue was settled when Grey triumphantly produced an 1882 fishing treaty pertaining to the North Sea which include France as a signatory. In such a way France's vital interests in that sea were upheld, while Metternich was left to protest lamely that nothing was established besides France's fishing rights.[34]

There was little else Germany could do but invite France to join in the North Sea talks, which she did on December 13. Metternich grudgingly conceded to Grey that Germany acted most graciously by doing so and added that even so exalted a source as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* stated that France did not border the North Sea.[35] Much to the German's consternation, France did join in the talks, as eventually did Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands. "The wine was watered," said Schoen, who had by this point replaced Tschirschky as Foreign Secretary.[36] Indeed, at the Wilhelmstrasse there was very little taste in the remaining negotiations at all.

The French were grateful to Britain for sticking up for them, and just as with the First Moroccan Crisis, the Entente Cordiale emerged strengthened from

31. Baron Rosen, *Forty Years of Diplomacy*, Vol. I. (New York: 1922), p. 125.

32. Conversation described by Pichon to Paul Cambon, 10 December 1907, *D.D.F.*, Vol. XI., pp. 142-3.

33. Grey to Count de Salis, 9 December 1907, *B.D.*, pp. 142-3.

34. *Ibid.*, and Metternich to Berlin, 9 December 1907, *G.P.*, pp. 506-7.

35. Metternich to Bülow, 13 December 1907, *G.P.*, p. 509.

36. Freiherr Wilhelm von Schoen, *The Memoirs of an Ambassador*, translated by Constance Vesey (London: 1922), p. 146.

this Scandinavian experience. French and English relations with Russia, of course, did not fare so well. Izvolsky insisted that he had never held direct talks with Germany, and told Arthur Nicolson, the English ambassador, that the talks with Sweden were only begun to prevent their going over to Germany.[37] France and Britain both knew that those protestations were far from true, and the French yearned to punish the unfaithful Izvolsky in some way. Yet the British realized the foolhardiness of provoking a scene with Russia, since only Germany could benefit. This was aided by Hardinge's belief that Izvolsky's predicament was due to ineptitude rather than to deviousness.[38] Grey, in an attempt to smooth over any difficulties, only remarked publicly that he believed Izvolsky had simply been "the reverse of prompt" in informing Pichon of the talks.[39]

Publicly or not, the British assessment of Germany's policy was more correct, as they quickly recognized the status quo treaties as thinly disguised attempts to split them from France and Russia.[40] Interested Englishmen outside the Foreign Office looked upon the talks with suspicion as well. There was surprising activity in the cabinet, where the aged Lord Ripon, Lord Privy Seal, strongly objected to the proposed agreements. In a letter to Grey he soundly argued that it was little more than a German plot, that the treaty would be worthless at face value, and that "all that we need in the North Sea is to have our hands free as they now are."[41] Grey was unused to such behavior from his usually complacent colleagues, but after Ripon was struck down by a heart attack there was no further opposition from that quarter. Nevertheless, Grey and Hardinge agreed with much that Ripon argued. There was a better solution, however, and Grey replied convincingly to Ripon that as long as France was included there was no real danger in going along with Germany's game. Yet if they refused to comply, "Germany would have some pretext for saying that we aimed at her isolation."[42] Since Russia was to be taught a lesson in any event, it was inadvisable to display any ill-feelings for all the world to see. But by continuing the talks the French and English could reaffirm their Scandinavian influence, and that was what they did.[43]

The remainder of the negotiations was an anti-climax for anyone besides the Russians, Swedes, and any inhabitants of the Aland Islands. The North Sea talks were completed relatively quickly. There was a brief problem when Den-

37. Lindberg, p. 186.

38. Hardinge to Nicolson, 24 December 1907, *B.D.*, p. 155.

39. Viscount Grey of Fallodon, *Twenty-Five Years, 1892-1916,* Vol. I. (New York: 1925), p. 146.

40. Minute by Spicer of the British Foreign Office, 11 December 1907, *B.D.*, p. 146, and Hardinge to Nicolson, 11 December 1907, *Ibid.*

41. Letter of Lord Ripon to Grey of 15 December 1907 reproduced in Lucien Wolf, *Life of the First Marquess of Ripon,* Vol. II. (London: 1921), p. 294.

42. Grey to Ripon, 13 December 1907, Grey, p. 144. Note the discrepency in dates; Grey's reply could not have antedated Ripon's letter by two days.

43. *Ibid.*, and Grey to Bertie, 29 December 1907, *B.D.*, p. 138.

mark and Holland meekly suggested that there be some great-power guarantee of their own neutralities. The horrified Schoen snapped back that such a major addition would completely alter the treaty.[44] Tempers in Berlin were wearing thin enough without any additional headaches, and Schoen quickly stifled the request.[45]

The Germans also succeeded in blocking the participation of Belgium and Norway, as those states already possessed guarantees of their neutrality. In fact, Germany tried to keep the inclusion of other nations to a minimum, as if to accentuate the face value of their own participation with the Triple Entente powers. Indeed, one of their final efforts to wring some small success out of the affair was the attempt to arrange separate agreements with each individual signatory, thus creating a feeble semblance of splitting England and France.[46] From their opponents' point of view, however, the more states included in a treaty with Germany the better. The French had not signed a separate agreement with Germany since the harsh Treaty of Frankfurt in 1871, which ended the Franco-Prussian War, and were not about to do so now; the signings were performed jointly. The Germans also went to great lengths to separate the North Sea agreement from the Baltic pact to keep Russia as far removed from France and Britain as possible.[47] Evidence of this was their attempt to have the agreements signed on separate days and in separate locations, and in the latter they were successful.

Like Britain, the Germans encountered some opposition to the treaties at home, and Schoen's opponents, the entire Naval Staff, presented a more formidable obstacle than did the decrepit Lord Ripon for Grey. They offered no objections to the Baltic agreement or to the secret protocol with Russia; anything which might prevent English influence in the Baltic actually met with warm approval. But the North Sea agreement seemed to be an entirely different matter, and promises to respect the coastal integrities of Denmark and Holland – as vague as that might be – for no apparent gain in return infuriated the Admiralty.[48] This modest revolt was quelled,[49] something the Wilhelmstrasse was unable to do a decade later, but Schoen apparently did so with promises such as this one of March, 1908: "in case of war it would prove necessary to ignore treaty obligations which might interfere with Germany's military interests."[50]

44. Schoen, pp. 65-6.

45. *Ibid.* (The offending Dutch official was booted unceremoniously from office as a result.)

46. Hardinge to Nicolson, 5 February 1908, *B.D.*, p. 164.

47. Jules Cambon (Ambassador to Germany) to Pichon, 7 January 1908, *D.D.F.*, Vol. XI., p. 416.

48. Martin Jenisch (German Admiralty) to German Foreign Ministry, 20 April 1908, *G.F.M.*, Denmark No. 37, Sect. A., Bund. 16, Reel 1772, fr. EO30872.

49. Schoen to Kaiser Wilhelm II, 13 April 1908, *G.P.*, p. 558, and Schoen, p. 67.

50. Schoen to Count Karl von Pückler (Minister in Stockholm), 11 March 1908, *G.P.* p. 552.

Meanwhile, there were still fears among the British military that the straits themselves might be overlooked in the treaties and that there was still some diabolical German plot to close them. Grey assuaged them with the assurance that the two status quo treaties were to stipulate that no geographical gap existed between them, thus eliminating the chance that the straits might fail to be included on a technicality. The treaties' actual power either to open or close the straits was never more than debatable anyway.

The real problem in the negotiations lay not in the North Sea but in the Baltic, where the Swedes refused a Russian draft of January 1908, because it included a secret protocol which allowed the abrogation of the Aland Islands Convention. Izvolsky's proposal was hardly surprising, since it had been the motivation for all his Scandinavian diplomacy; to his chagrin, however, it became increasingly evident that he was not likely to attain even that modest goal. An amused but perplexed Hardinge wondered, "Why in Heaven's name did he raise such a thorny question?"[51] Germany no longer felt any compulsion to support Izvolsky's obsession with the Alands,[52] and Metternich questioned aloud why his superiors ever chose to back this step which only facilitated Russia's domination of Sweden.[53] Indeed, Schoen did toy with the idea of supporting Sweden instead, but chose not to invite the undying wrath of Izvolsky.[54]

While the Germans vacillated in their Russian support, the British assured the Swedes that they would not themselves abrogate the Aland Islands Convention unless the Swedish Government so desired.[55] Grey went so far as to repeat the statement in Parliament.[56] This greatly stiffened Sweden's resistance, and their isolation, which Izvolsky had worked so hard to maneuver, was rapidly evaporating. Sensing this themselves, the Swedes in February flatly refused to discuss any further the alteration of the Alands' status. Hardinge, noting on February 19 that he had not heard the wretched islands mentioned for some time, added "I *do* trust that Izvolsky will see that, at a moment when we are pulling together in Persia and Macedonia, it would be a false move on his part to throw between us such an apple of discord as this question might prove."[57] Indeed, the Alands were not as important to Izvolsky as the Anglo-Russian entente, and the Aland 'apple,' which had once seemed a certain and inexpensive diplomatic victory, was in reality like the fruit which Tantalus could never quite reach.

51. Hardinge to Nicolson, 3 March 1908, *B.D.*, p. 171.
52. Schoen to von Pückler, 11 March 1908, *G.P.*, p. 552.
53. Metternich to Bülow, 12 February 1908, *G.F.M.*, Denmark No. 37, Sect. A., Bund. 12, Reel 1771, fr. EO30462.
54. Lindberg, p. 215.
55. Grey to Rennell Rodd, 26 February 1908, *B.D.*, p. 167.
56. Rennell Rodd, p. 88.
57. Hardinge to Nicolson, 19 February 1908, *B.D.*, p 165.

By March, Izvolsky had surrendered any hope of gaining the abrogation of the 1856 convention, surely a bitter pill for him to swallow. But once that issue was put to rest, there was nothing else preventing the Baltic talks' conclusion – although there was also little content remaining – and an agreement was reached between Sweden and Russia in early April. On April 23 the Baltic Sea Status Quo Convention was signed in St. Petersburg by Russia, Germany, Sweden, and Denmark, while the North Sea Convention was signed at the same time by Great Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands. The agreements were simply weak declarations respecting the integrities of the Baltic and North Sea coasts and pledging to maintain the status quo in those areas. Russia and Germany had envisioned there being far more than that, but Izvolsky's desire to form a firm Russo-German entente in the Baltic and obtain the abrogation of the Aland Islands Convention and the German wish to use the status quo agreements to split the Triple Entente had been successfully repulsed by the British and the French, who were quite content with the agreements' innocuousness. When fighting broke out in 1914, it is extremely doubtful whether any of the powers gave those agreements a second thought.

After the two conventions were signed, the stage was left to the monarchs. On May 29, 1908, William II spoke solemnly on the parade grounds at Döberitz, repeating his old speech about Germany's "encirclement" by hostile powers. He had not been so bellicose since Germany's Moroccan setback.[58] At the same time Edward VII was enjoying a triumphal journey through Scandinavia, which was followed by a display of solidarity with Nicholas II at Reval on the Baltic shore.

Edward's biographer used the occasion of the Baltic trip to describe the status quo treaties as "two agreements that were likely to preserve the peace of Europe."[59] Contemporary diplomats were not so enthusiastic. While Grey believed them to be worthless, both at the time and in retrospect,[60] Hardinge called them "hardly worth the paper they will be written on."[61] Maurice Bompard, the French ambassador to Russia who was recalled soon after the secret protocol disaster, vindictively called them "a pure waste of diplomacy of many nations."[62]

In fact, the entire Scandinavian diplomacy, which was summed up by these two conventions, seems to have amounted to very little. The powers' behavior in the choosing of Norway's king and the granting of Norway's treaty of guarantee displayed sheer self-interest. As no power would allow another to gain any advantage in Norway, the treaty, which was supposedly for Norwegian

58. Geneviève Tabouis, *The Life of Jules Cambon*, translated by C.F. Atkinson (London: 1938), p. 178, and Prince Bernhard von Bülow, *Memoirs of Prince von Bülow*, Vol. II, translated by Geoffrey Dunlop (Boston; 1931), p. 352.

59. Sir Sidney Lee, *Edward VII: A Biography*, Vol. II. (London: 1927), p. 589.

60. Grey, p. 130.

61. Hardinge to Nicolson, 5 February 1908, *B.D.*, p. 164.

62. Bompard, p. 283.

protection, declined in value. Additionally, Russo-German tendencies towards a Baltic entente came to nothing. Izvolsky's secret protocol and envisioned Baltic gains ended with a hollow status quo agreement and considerable resentment towards his supposed Baltic friend, Germany. He did not even get the Aland Islands fortified.

Izvolsky's professional reputation did, however, suffer from the experience. During his Scandinavian journey, Edward VII remarked to the Danish foreign minister that Izvolsky "doesn't always tell the truth," and his host, who knew the Russian even better, refined that remark to "he only sometimes tells the truth."[63] Certainly the greatest perplexity of the entire affair was how Izvolsky ever conceived that he could reconcile his Baltic policy with his over-all plans. How could he, after negotiating the Anglo-Russian Convention and hoping for a closer entente, risk the creation of a new trouble spot in the Baltic? Why did he also risk a rupture with his only firm ally, France? Perhaps he had begun some great new plan that needed neither French nor British friendship and which never reached maturity. Or perhaps, to regain Russia's "historical role in Europe," he was simply willing to work with any power as he saw fit. In any event, he certainly displayed a pronounced lack of foresight in his Baltic diplomacy of 1906-08. But perhaps he did learn one lesson from the experience. Shortly before the agreements were completed, Hardinge remarked of Izvolsky's German relations that "he may regret that he was ever embarked upon a Baltic cruise with so impetuous and erratic a shipmate."[64] He certainly avoided any further ambitious plans with the seemingly irresolute Germans. He still had to learn a similar lesson about the Austrians, however, and the opening of that second Pandora's box at Buchlau was to be his last as foreign minister. In the meantime, any further tendencies towards a Russo-German entente were dealt a severe, if not fatal, blow in the Baltic in 1908, and the last dwindling days of those two doomed empires featured little additional friendly diplomacy between them. Germany's untrustworthy behavior towards Russia after the signing of the secret protocol and the gathering rigidity of great-power alignments helped make this so.

The Germans lost out on this occasion on any hopes they had of dissolving the Triple Entente. The nation expected to have been the weakest joint, Great Britain, turned out to be the strongest. Typically of Germany's pre-1914 diplomacy, she simply could not believe that England would remain loyally by France's side if provided with the alternative German friendship. This logic proved to be the Germans' undoing in their Scandinavian scheme as elsewhere. Once the British failed to fulfill the Wilhelmstrasse's expectations, the entire German plan collapsed, leaving them with two empty status quo agreements for their troubles. But if those documents did not help them much, they did not

63. Quoted in a memorandum by Schoen (recounting a conversation with the Danish Foreign Minister Count Raben), 1 July 1908, *G.P.*, p. 565.

64. Nicolson to Grey, 16 January 1908, *B.D.*, p. 159.

seriously hurt them either, and their international prestige emerged largely untarnished. One of Germany's motivations for prompting those vague conventions had been, after all, to show her peaceful intentions towards those small powers near her borders. In this display she was largely successful,[65] although the Danes were never quite convinced.[66] Since Germany's risks in the venture had been low, she lost little in its large degree of failure. As she had not advertised her aims so publicly in the Baltic as at Algeciras, she lost little face in the matter. That might explain why this important development, Germany's 1907-08 attempt to split the Triple Entente while winning Scandinavia's confidence as well, remains so obscure today. The wreckage of her plans, unlike the naked display in Morocco, was disguised instead as international agreements whose more ambitious intentions were never publicized. This time Germany could climb down quietly.

The power which emerged in the best light, however, was Great Britain. Sir Edward Grey had triumphed by preventing Germany from succeeding in the Baltic and Russia from straying there. He desired nothing further in the matter. Once involved in the Baltic diplomacy, England realized practically all her hopes. It was true that Admiral Sir John Fisher was left grumbling that Russia should have been allowed to fortify the Alands.[67] But there were political as well as strategic matters to weigh, and Fisher should have been content that Denmark was by 1908 under some form of international protection, vague as it was. Moreover, the Norwegian treaty of guarantee was diluted enough to minimize German influence, but not so far as to eliminate England's, and the Danish straits were kept open to Britain's fleet. Besides, the fortification of the Aland Islands would have done Fisher little good had Russia's friendship with Germany continued or increased as a result. Grey's Norwegian diplomacy had satisfied as many friendly nations as was possible without surrendering any vital British interests. He sparkled during the status quo diplomacy, where he successfully resisted all German efforts to split his nation from the other Entente powers. On the contrary, Anglo-French relations were strengthened, for once France finally perceived Izvolsky's drift in the Baltic, the French and English worked as one. Pichon held up his end well, to the point of requiring restraint of his zeal. On the other hand, Grey displayed the proper level-headedness. Even as he was able to dilute to harmlessness Germany's dealings with Russia, he chose not to reprimand too severely the wayward Izvolsky. Such an action could have brought the very results which Germany desired. That this did not happen is a credit to

65. Paul Herre, *Die kleinen Staaten europas und die Entstehung des Weltkrieges* (Munich: 1937), pp. 130-1.

66. Maurice F. Egan, *Ten Years Near the German Frontier, A Retrospect and a Warning* (New York: 1919), p. 47.

67. Letter of Sir John Fisher, Britain's highest ranking admiral, to King Edward VII of 8 March 1908, quoted in Arthur J. Marder, *Fear God and Dread Naught: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone* Vol. II. (London: 1953), p. 169.

British diplomacy. In such a way the Anglo-Russian entente survived its first test of strength, albeit shakily, while the Entente Cordiale passed its first test outside its original colonial grounds. Germany's encirclement became ever more rigid afterwards.

Shortly before the status quo conventions were signed, the London *Daily Graphic* exuberantly observed, "Confidence may be a plant of slow growth, but it will not grow at all unless the seed is first sown, and it is as such a seed that we regard the North Sea understanding."[68] Unfortunately, the *Graphic* was sadly naïve. What the paper expected to occur never did. In reality those agreements were spawned from deceit, and any victories of great-power magnitude gained by England and France were purely negative ones: preventing but not constructing. Those status quo agreements, two of the very few of that era encompassing Germany and the Triple Entente, inspired no confidence in a period which greatly needed it. Instead there was William's railing against his empire's encirclement, while the advice being heeded in London was that of Lord Fisher. In reference to Germany he warned his king, "We must never cease keeping our 'weather eye open' across the North Sea."[69]

In fact, it appears that the importance of this Scandinavian diplomacy lies not so much in the actual agreements which resulted; it has been seen that those results almost always fell far short of the instigators' plans. There had been potentially dangerous schemes in the Baltic, however, and it was important that they never saw reality and that nothing threatening the peace of the world originated there. Other German attempts at entente-splitting raised international furors, but this Scandinavian exercise is largely forgotten. Similar behavior by Izvolsky in the Balkans in 1908 resulted in a dangerous world crisis, yet his Baltic diplomacy, although equally flammable in intention, remains obscure. It may be folly to compare the Baltic with Bosnia, or to relate German diplomacy in Scandinavia with that in Morocco. But the opportunities for what could have been dangerous developments in the Baltic like those in the more storied areas did exist. Norwegian ports and Danish straits were vitally important to Britain, Germany, and Russia. Tangier, Agadir, and even Bosnia-Herzegovina were no more important than the Baltic to these powers. Besides, in those years when the Entente Cordiale was still impressionable and the Anglo-Russian entente largely fictitious, any measure of diplomatic success by Germany could have altered the 1914 alignments significantly. In fact, there may not have been in that pre-war era a more serious Russian flirtation with Germany than was shown in 1904-1908 in the Baltic. But no threatening crises occurred. The Scandinavian states felt reasonably secure and remained peaceful, while the Triple Entente remained intact, due to sound and effective Anglo-French diplomacy and German graciousness in defeat. Consequently, the thought of anything other than peace in Scandinavia prior to 1914 seems so unnatural in retrospect.

68. 12 March excerpt from the London *Daily Graphic* sent by Metternich to Berlin, *G.F.M.*, Denmark No. 37, Sect. A., Bund. 14, Reel 1771, fr. EO30707.

69. 17 March 1908, quoted in Marder, p. 170.