REASSESSING THE GERMAN CHALLENGE: GERMAN AND UNITED STATES MILITARY CAPABILITIES AND THE POSSIBILITY OF WAR IN THE CARIBBEAN DURING THE VENEZUELAN BLOCKADE 1902-1903

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PREFACE

This study was inspired by the German gunboat *Panther*. During the reading of a textbook discussing the Agadir Incident, the *Panther* first came to my attention. In researching the history of this particular warship, its participation in the Venezuelan Blockade of 1902-1903 was mentioned. After reading a few accounts of this incident, I came to the realization that all of the books that I was reading made the assumption that the German Imperial Navy was stronger than the United States Navy at the time of the Venezuelan Blockade. After years of interest in naval history, I was positive that this was not true. This paper is the result.

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INTRODUCTION

"Developing nation" is the term used today. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the terms most often used were "backwards" or "primitive" nations. It was a common practice for the more highly developed powers to view less "civilized" countries as open areas for economic exploitation and sometimes, colonial expansion. As more industrial powers emerged in the late 1800's, competition for the world's markets often became intense. England, the first country to industrialize, led all countries in overseas investment. Germany and the United States, both of whom were rapidly growing industrial powers, were beginning to compete with Great Britain in the world economy. As both countries strove to expand their economic power throughout the world, it was inevitable that conflicts of interest would arise. As naval power commonly protected overseas interests, these disputes could be very dangerous situations.

Under Kaiser Wilhelm II, Germany wanted to create its own empire and eventually challenge England's status as the world's leading economic and naval power. Germany looked to Great Britain as a model. British economic strength was based on their empire, which provided raw materials for industry and markets for its products. The Kaiser wanted to create a shift in Germany's power status from a continental power to a world power. An adherent of the theories of Alfred T. Mahan, Wilhelm II thought that a strong navy was the only method of obtaining such power. Germany already possessed arguably the strongest

army in Europe. Under the leadership of Admiral Alfred Tirpitz, they set out to build a fleet that would pose a threat to the British Royal Navy. This plan, however, was a long-term arrangement. Only through a buildup of ships, at the rate of approximately three battleships a year, for a twenty year period, could they finish the proposed fleet. Until that point, serious efforts at empire building would have to wait.[1]

This did not mean that Germany lay idle. They established colonies in Africa, China and most important, on islands in the Pacific. It was here that German and United States' interests first conflicted in the late 1800's and these problems carried over into the new century. Problems that had arisen in Samoa and the Philippines had left many Americans suspicious of Germany. Some, including Theodore Roosevelt, believed that Germany posed the only immediate threat to the security of the United States. Any German actions came under scrutiny by observers in the United States. When Germany joined England in a blockade against Venezuela in December 1902, the United States immediately began to question German intentions.

During the 1890s, the United States began to assert its power in the western hemisphere. Isolation had typified American foreign policy to date. The United States did not want to embroil themselves in European affairs and the Monroe Doctrine expressed their wish that Europe stay out of American affairs. As the United States industrialized, its economic interests began to expand outside the country. In the 1880s, the United States began to construct a modern navy, and by the early 1890s its warships were equal in ability to any in the world.[2] As American commercial interests grew throughout the world, the need to protect these interests became more vital. The navy was responsible for protecting these

interests, but had to operate in two oceans to do so. A need for rapid deployment to either ocean increased the need for a canal, under United States control, through Central America. Thus, control of the Caribbean became critical to the security of the United States. In 1898, the United States fought Spain in a short war that removed Spain from the region and gave the United States a small "empire" in the Pacific and Caribbean. The United States was rapidly establishing hegemony over this area.[3]

Joining with Great Britain to coerce the Venezuelan government into the repayment for debts, Germany created difficulties for itself, its British allies, and the United States. When Venezuela, after years of civil war, fell into arrears with these powerful European nations in the early 1900s, Germany and Great Britain decided to cooperate in a joint blockade against Venezuela. Although the Roosevelt administration agreed to allow the action at the beginning, it soon became wary of allowing these countries to remain in the area. The United States government percieved a threat to the Monroe Doctrine and its position in the Caribbean. The Roosevelt administration intervened to end the blockade and submit the grievances of the interested powers to an international tribunal at the Hague.

The threat percieved by the Roosevelt administration had no basis in fact. Germany was not going to take territory in Venezuela. This would have meant war with the United States. As this study will show, neither the United States nor Germany could wage war on the other country. The vast separation of the two nations by the Atlantic Ocean made any conflict a naval contest by default. The naval construction programs of both countries produced vessels well-suited to the policies that created them, but left each navy without the capability to make a transoceanic voyage to attack the opposing side. The logistics involved

made such an adventure completely out of the question. The best the two countries could have done in the event of hostilities is glare at each other across the ocean.

When Germany and Great Britain joined in the blockade against Venezuela, the United States immediately concluded that Germany desired territory in the region. Despite the British being the major force in the action, Germany became the focus of American concerns. American newspapers of the period show that the biggest fear was that Germany wanted to gain territory in the region and was using the blockade as a pretext for just such a move. The Germans, however, had too small a force (four ships) to take and hold even a small piece of land in the face of the United States' naval strength in the area. The German lack of ability to support fleet operations in the Caribbean region ruled out any possibility that they could take any territory and keep in defiance of the Monroe Doctrine.

Nonetheless, the Roosevelt administration and the American and British Press remained skeptical of German motives. All were certain that the Kaiser was interested in more than debt collection. This was the stated purpose of the blockade, but this explanation is suspect. There is another possibility. It was Germany's purpose to create problems between the United States and England. If Germany could achieve a split between these two countries, it would greatly benefit them in their rivalry with England for naval and economic superiority. The plan failed because Germany underestimated the anti-German sentiment that existed in the United States and Great Britain.

Every major work regarding the Venezuelan blockade cites indisputable facts on the subject. The actual problems arose from the instability of the Venezuelan Government, led by the President/Dictator Cipriano Castro. After years of an ongoing civil war, the country

had fallen into arrears with several large European nations that had invested heavily in the region. Three of the concerned parties were Germany, Great Britain and Italy. Castro and his government were unable to meet the demands for payment and Germany was the first country to react.

In December 1901, Germany announced its intention to collect the money owed to its citizens. The first measure prescribed was a blockade of the major Venezuelan ports. If this did not bring Castro to terms, Germany suggested that the temporary occupation of the Venezuelan customs houses at these harbors might be necessary to recover the necessary funds. The leading proponent of German action was the German Chancellor, Bernhard von Bülow. He advocated commencing action on Venezuela in the summer of 1902. Kaiser Wilhelm II decided against this, postponing any action until after a goodwill trip by Prince Heinrich to the United States in early 1902.[4]

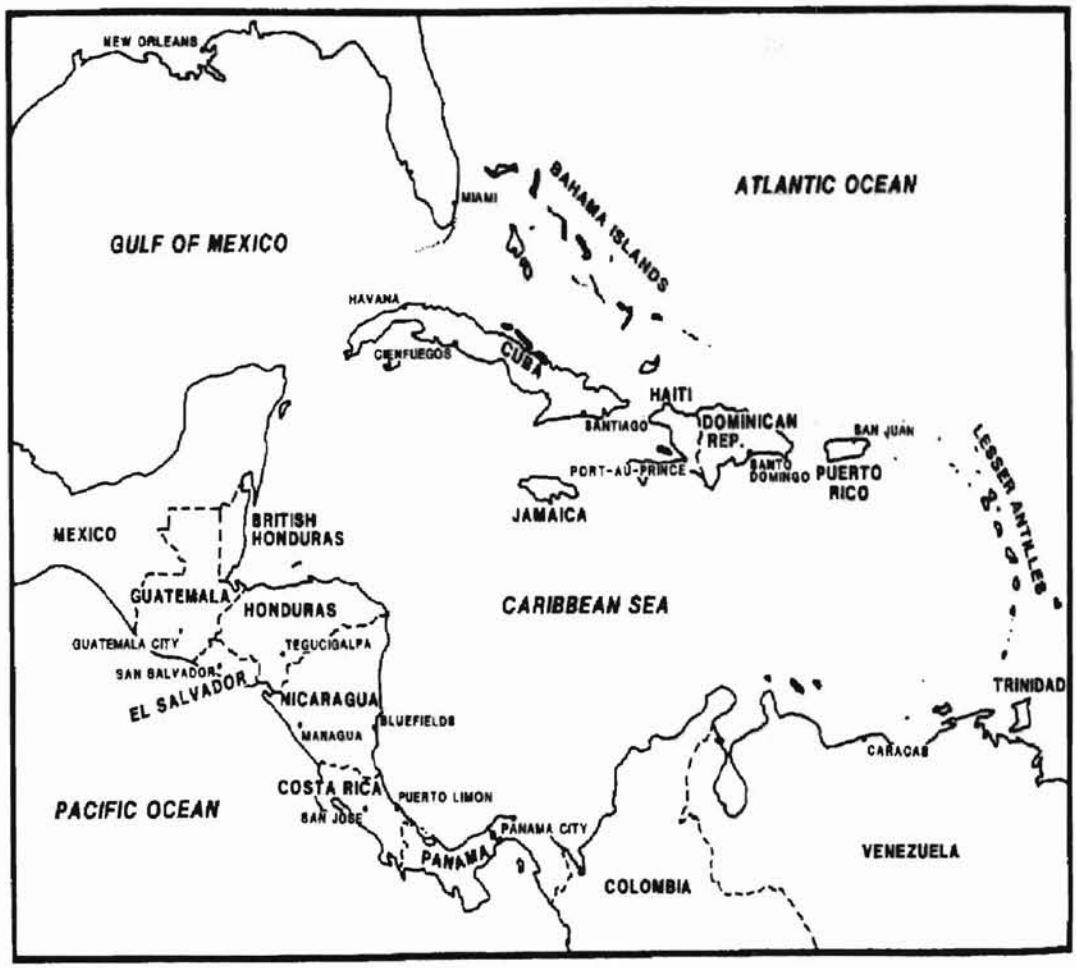
In January 1902, Germany and England began discussion of a possible joint action against Venezuela, beginning in December of 1902. By July, the two powers had formalized their plans. On November 11, the allies formalized the alliance by agreeing not to seek a separate peace with the Venezuelan government during the joint action. On this date, England also notified the United States of its intention to blockade Venezuela in company with Germany.[5]

The official United States response did not object to Germany's coercive methods. John Hay, the Secretary of State, replied that they had defined the United States position in Roosevelt's annual message of 1901, where Roosevelt declared that the Monroe Doctrine only guaranteed "that there would be no territorial aggrandizement by any non-American

power on American soil." This policy "has nothing to do with the commercial relations of any American power" and the United States will not "guarantee any State against punishment if it misconducts itself, provided that punishment does not take the form of the acquisition of territory by any non-American power."[6]

In November 1902, the United States began assembling its fleet at Culebra, off the coast of Puerto Rico, for large-scale naval maneuvers. The first to arrive were the Caribbean squadron of four cruisers and two gunboats. They arrived on November 5, 1902. On the twenty-first, four battleships arrived from the North Atlantic Squadron. By the end of the month the arrival of two more battleships and four cruisers from the European and South Atlantic squadrons augmented the fleet. On November 18, Roosevelt ordered Admiral Dewey, the highest ranking naval officer in the United States Navy, to take command of this impressive fleet. The navy also put ashore a force of six hundred marines at Culebra. Together this fleet numbered more than fifty vessels. This included six battleships, eight cruisers, two gunboats, and seven torpedo boats, all of modern construction.[7]

The two Allies officially notified Washington of their intentions to proceed with a blockade of Venezuela on November 25. Venezuela received an ultimatum from Great Britain and Germany on December 7. Six days later, a memorandum from the German Ambassador, Theodor von Holleben, notified the United States that Germany would blockade Venezuelan ports and occupy its customs houses if necessary, but in no way was considering the occupation of any Venezuelan territory. Again, the United States did not object to the blockade. The Germans believed that the United States had given them a "free hand" to use



The Caribbean

force in Venezuela.[8]

Meanwhile, the combined naval forces of the two European powers had arrived off Venezuela. The entire fleet consisted of twelve vessels, four German and eight British. Most of these were small cruisers or gunboats. On the December 9, after receiving no reply to the ultimatum, Germany and England began to seize the vessels of the Venezuelan Navy. They captured the entire Venezuelan fleet, save one vessel, in two days. Unable to spare any men to form prize crews, or to provide a ship to tow the vessels away, the Germans promptly sank two of the captured ships.[9]

President Castro, deprived of any ability to resist the blockade at sea, began arresting

British and German nationals, "thundered nationalistic speeches, and called his countrymen to arms." The Allies met this resistance with force of arms, on the December 13 a joint force of British and German vessels shelled two forts at Puerto Cabello. That same day, Castro asked the United States to get the dispute settled by arbitration. They immediately dispatched the offer to both blockading powers and by December 18, both England and Germany "had officially informed the United States that they would accept arbitration."[10]

This did not mean an end to the crisis. Germany and England proceeded with their original plans and began a blockade of Venezuelan ports on December 20. Until they reached agreeable terms among all powers concerned, the warships would remain to ensure that Castro would not renege on his agreement. Germany furthur aggravated the situation by demanding an immediate payment of $325,000 before submitting to arbitration. With no shipping traffic due to the blockade, Castro had no means of raising this enormous sum of money. As long as Germany held out for immediate payment, they would prolong the blockade.[11]

The United States was not idle during this period. The planned maneuvers had gone on as scheduled and they had assembled the entire fleet under the command of Dewey on December 8, 1902, the day after the ultimatum to Venezuela by Germany and Great Britain. The sinking of the Venezuelan ships and the shelling of the Venezuelan forts began a wave of anti-German sentiment in the United States, especially in the press. On the eighteenth of December, just before the blockade went into effect, the United States sent four battleships to Trinidad, just off the Venezuelan coast.[12]

Although the Kaiser had at first suggested that Theodore Roosevelt take charge of

the arbitration, the United States preferred submission of the dispute to the international tribunal at the Hague. Herbert Bowen, the United States Ambassador to Venezuela, would act as the official representative of the Venezuelan government at the Tribunal. The talks that began at the Venezuelan Claims Conference in Washington did not end until February 13, 1903, with the signing of the Washington protocols. Venezuela and its European creditors worked out the final details at the Hague. The negotiations continued until February 1904.[13]

During the Washington negotiations, another incident in Venezuela increased international tensions. On January 17, 1903, The German gunboat *Panther*, searching for the last Venezuelan naval vessel, entered the port of Maracaibo, where the fort of San Carlos opened fire on the vessel. The German ship was forced to withdraw. The German Naval commander ordered an immediate reprisal, sending the three larger vessels of his fleet to bombard and destroy the fort at San Carlos.[14]

In Washington, the talks had deadlocked because of German demands for immediate payment. By early February, Great Britain was anxious to end the Venezuelan affair. Public opinion and the British press were as anti-German in sentiment as in America. By the February 7 the British were contemplating voiding their agreement with Germany and signing a separate treaty with Venezuela. The German position, which had remained staunch throughout, suddenly reversed itself and on the February 13 they signed the Washington protocols. All the powers lifted the blockade shortly afterwards.[15]

These are the facts of the Venezuelan blockade and none of these are under dispute by historians of the subject. The major controversies surrounding this affair concern the resolution of the conflict and German intentions. The major issue concerns Theodore

Roosevelt and the use of the "Big Stick," the threat of force, in forcing the Germans to cooperate. The other issue directly concerns the "German Challenge" to the Monroe Doctrine and whether the Germans were really after debt collection or were seeking territorial gain in the Caribbean.

A letter from Theodore Roosevelt to William R. Thayer in 1915 marked the beginning of the debate, with its publication in *The Life of John Hay*.[16] The letter reads as follows:

> There is now no reason why I should not speak of the facts connected with the disagreement between the United States and Germany over the Venezuelan matter, in the early part of my administration as President, and of the final amicable settlement of the disagreement.
>
> At that time the Venezuelan Dictator-President Castro had committed various offenses against European nations, including Germany and England. The English Government was then endeavoring to keep on good terms with Germany, and on this occasion acted jointly with her. Germany sent a squadron of war vessels to the Venezuelan coast, and they were accompanied by some English war vessels. There was no objection whatever to Castro's being punished, as long as the punishment did not take the form of seizure of territory and its more or less permanent occupation by some Old-World power. At this particular point, such seizure of territory would have been a direct menace to the United States, because it would have threatened or partially controlled the approach to the projected Isthmian Canal.
>
> I speedily became convinced that Germany was the leader, and the really formidable party in the transaction; and that England was merely following Germany's lead in rather half-hearted fashion. I became convinced that England would not back Germany in the event of a clash over the matter between Germany and the United States, but would remain neutral. I also became convinced that Germany intended to seize some Venezuelan harbor and turn it into a strongly fortified place of arms, on the model of Kiauchau, with a view to exercising some degree of control over the future Isthmian Canal, and over South American affairs generally.

According to Roosevelt, he then attempted through diplomatic channels to get Germany to accept arbitration. When Germany refused to arbitrate, he assembled the battle fleet and placed it at war readiness. He then called in the German Ambassador, von Holleben.

Roosevelt continues:

> I saw the Ambassador, and explained that in view of the presence of the German Squadron on the Venezuelan coast I could not permit longer delay in answering my request for an arbitration, and that I could not acquiesce in any seizure of Venezuelan territory. The Ambassador responded that his government could not agree to arbitrate, and that there was no intention to take "permanent" possession of Venezuelan territory. [17]

Roosevelt then pointed out that Kiaochow (Germany's Chinese Possession) was also not a permanent possession but under a 99-year lease. The United States would not condone the establishment of a fortified naval base in the Caribbean. He then informed the Ambassador that if the German government did not agree to arbitration "within a certain specified number of days," he would order Dewey's fleet to Venezuela to ensure that Germany did not take possession of any territory. Roosevelt met again with von Holleben a few days later, according to this account, and Holleben informed him that he had received no word from the German Government regarding Roosevelt's request. Roosevelt continues:

> I informed him that in such event it was useless to wait as long as I had intended, and that Dewey would be ordered to sail twenty-fours in advance of the time I had set. He expressed deep apprehension, and said that his government would not arbitrate. However, less than twenty-four hours before the time I had appointed for cabling the order to Dewey, the Embassy notified me that his Imperial Majesty the German Emperor had directed him to request me to undertake the arbitration myself. I felt, and publicly expressed, great gratification at this outcome, and great appreciation of the course the German Government had finally agreed to take. Later I received the consent of the German Government to have the arbitration undertaken by The Hague Tribunal, and not by me.[18]

This explanation, as first revealed in Thayer's book, became the accepted explanation for the Venezuelan Crisis of 1902-1902. In the 1920's, historians such as Joseph B. Bishop and Alfred Dennis accepted the Roosevelt account as genuine.[19] The first critics of the

Roosevelt story were Howard Hill and J. Fred Rippy, who suspected that Roosevelt was off on his details. They believed that Roosevelt could not have delivered his ultimatum to von Holleben, but to his replacement, Baron Speck von Sternburg, a friend of Roosevelt. These writers believe that Roosevelt's ultimatum occurred in the late stages of the crisis, in late January-early February 1903. They also maintained that Roosevelt had been mistaken about German territorial ambitions at this time.[20]

The most scathing rebuttal of the Roosevelt account is the German historian Alfred Vagts. The multi-volume work *Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten in der Weltpolitik* remains the finest study of German documentation of this period to this date. Vagts found nothing in German archives to back Roosevelt's contention that he delivered an ultimatum to Germany. He also finds no evidence of any official German designs on territorial expansion in Central or South America. Vagts claims that this fear was the creation of Roosevelt and supporters of naval building in the United States. Disappointed that Congress had not approved a bill for increased naval expenditures, Roosevelt used the Venezuelan blockade to incite fear into the American people to generate support for a larger navy.[21]

Another critic of Roosevelt is the historian Dexter Perkins. Perkins wrote that Roosevelt invented his account to enhance his own image. It was nothing but "legend" invented by Roosevelt and his admirers. Perkins claims that Chancellor von Bülow had things well in hand. Despite the oft-quoted ranting of the Kaiser and the wishes of Admiral von Tirpitz and the pro-navy crowd, friendly relations with the United States were the primary goals of the German Foreign office throughout this period. According to Perkins, Roosevelt never issued any warnings to Germany and points out, like Vagts, that no documentary

evidence exists to support Roosevelt's contentions.[22]

After World War Two, some historians began to reexamine the Roosevelt story and began to defend the account. In 1946, Seward W. Livermore did a study of United States naval records of the period leading up to and during the crisis and found evidence to support Roosevelt's claim that he had assembled the fleet in response to the German threat. Livermore found that the earliest preparations for the naval maneuvers began in January 1902, shortly after Germany announced its intention to use coercion in Venezuela at some future date. He found that the navy had made preparation to occupy with American troops any possible sites that Germany might be planning to seize. They positioned the fleet close to any possible trouble spots and preparations of the base at Culebra as a forward base of operations months before recieving any orders for the fleet to assemble there. It is Livermore's contention that Roosevelt was responsible for the fleet concentration in December but that it was not a hastily conceived idea, but part of a long-term strategy planned for many months. The fleet acted as leverage, and was the key tool used by Roosevelt to force Germany to accept arbitration.[23]

Livermore's account strongly favors Roosevelt. He states that an actual ultimatum to Germany, despite the lack of archival references, is not out of the question. However, Livermore makes it clear that the presence alone of the fleet in such strength was all the leverage that Roosevelt needed to control the situation. Livermore concludes that while Roosevelt may have been guilty of embellishing some details to favor himself, there is some factual basis to the story as related to Thayer.[24]

Another pro-Roosevelt historian is Howard K. Beale, who also found a factual base

to the Thayer letter. Beale's main argument is that any inaccuracies in the story are the fault of Thayer, who prodded Roosevelt for months to get the story from him. He is also one of the first historians to note that Roosevelt often handled diplomacy himself outside normal channels. Roosevelt, he claims, often ignored the State Department and military commanders and undertook the problems of state privately. In this manner, Roosevelt may have issued a warning to Germany verbally, with no written documentation to prove that it ever happened. Beale believes that in this manner, Roosevelt allowed the Kaiser and Germany to back down on their demands without giving the appearance of weakness.[25]

In 1964, Dana G. Munro resurrected the interpretation offered by Dennis and Bishop in the late 1920's. He believes that Roosevelt did threaten Germany with the use of the United States navy, but that it was in February, not December as indicated in the Thayer letter. Munro writes that even as late as December 26, the situation in Venezuela did not alarm Roosevelt. It was only after all the parties involved had placed demands for immediate payment from the Venezuelan Government and thus threatened to drag the blockade on indefinitely that Roosevelt felt compelled to act.[26]

Paul S. Holbro, in 1969, concluded that Roosevelt did not need to issue a formal ultimatum to Germany. By studying the newspapers of the period, he found that most of the diplomacy of the period was what Holbro calls "public" diplomacy. The press kept the public well informed about every move made during the crisis, including ship movements, discussions with the powers, and the well-documented anti-German sentiment that prevailed throughout the country. Holbro believes that Roosevelt deliberately fed information to the press, knowing that Germany was monitoring the newspapers in both the United States and

England. Roosevelt never needed to send an ultimatum to Germany officially, it was done through "public diplomacy" in the press and through speeches. Holbro's argument is in extreme contrast to historians like Beale, who stress the secrecy with which Theodore Roosevelt often handled affairs of state.[27]

Edward B. Parsons is another defender of the Roosevelt narrative. In 1970, he found that "the essentials of the Roosevelt story are true." Parsons believes that Roosevelt downplayed his role in the crisis, omitting "certain coercive actions" he used to convince Germany that the United States was prepared to go to war over Venezuela. In this account, secrecy is a key factor. Parsons makes note of secret orders to Dewey to keep the fleet ready for immediate action and Roosevelt's secret orders to the Navy to make all preparations for war. Parsons also believes that any ultimatum to Germany was most likely in the latter stages of the crisis, although he does not discount the possibility of an earlier threat. In fact he notes that Roosevelt forced Germany to alter its position on two separate occasions, once in December and again in February. An ultimatum on either or both dates is possible, according to Parsons.[28]

In 1973, Richard D. Challener denied Livermore's thesis of the planned naval response to the German threat. He found the naval build up had nothing to do with Venezuela or its "international difficulties." The presence of the fleet in such numbers was a coincidence which Roosevelt used to his advantage. The fleet became a tool of diplomacy, "a political makeweight," used to apply pressure to Germany. Challener concludes; "Naval records . . . simply support the conclusion that whatever the President may have done about the blockade of Venezuela, his action was, as with so many of his diplomatic efforts, personal

and individual, something he did on his own initiative and responsibility."[29]

Lester D. Langley believes that Roosevelt's account is not "altogether a fabrication" but should be suspect due to "Roosevelt's Germanophobia during the war years and . . . the human tendency to exaggerate things in recounting an incident." Langley believes, like Dexter Perkins, that Germany had no territorial ambitions in Venezuela at this time. Langley stresses the caution that both England and Germany took throughout the affair regarding the United States and the Monroe Doctrine. This was an indication of their deference to the actual military situation in the Caribbean, where the United States held every advantage.[30]

As the arguments over the actual diplomatic events that occurred during this affair attest, the lack of primary sources and actual documentation of the episode is a major problem plaguing every historian who studies the Venezuelan crisis of 1902-1903. Frederick W. Marks in 1979 did the most interesting study of this circumstance. Checking the relevant records of the period, Marks found a serious gap existed in the documents in all three countries involved. An almost complete void of German diplomatic documents for the entire period of the crisis exists. What little documentation there is is unimportant and generally unrelated to the Venezuelan affair. He noted that the memoirs of both the Kaiser and Chancellor von Bülow barely mentioned the blockade at all or made any reference either to the United States or President Roosevelt. Correspondence between top German officials is also scarce during the crisis. Marks also found a similar gap in the records of both the United States and England. Important telegrams from the English Ambassador in Washington were missing. John Hay's papers show only two documents for the month of December, both trivial in nature. The American Embassy in Berlin was contained no files from October 17

to December 11, 1902. Records known to have existed were also found missing from State Department files. Marks concludes from this evidence that there was something there that all three countries were anxious to hide and that such an effort to cover up the facts is evidence to support Roosevelt's narration of events during the blockade. His conclusion is open to skepticism but the problem he confronts is very real to all historians confronting the Venezuelan Blockade. The lack of documentation for the period leaves much room for guesswork and speculation.[31]

David Healy, in 1988, also supports the Roosevelt account. Roosevelt became convinced that Germany was after land in Venezuela and used the presence of the fleet, there by coincidence, as leverage to force an early end to the blockade. Roosevelt met German reluctance to cooperate with the threat of force and a confrontation between the two powers was a possibility. Healy maintains that the diplomacy of Germany, and England, did not change with the end of the blockade but continued to "keep the issues alive in Roosevelt's mind." A year later, in May 1904, the result was the first announcement of the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine.[32]

Nancy Mitchell, like Perkins and Langley, believes that Germany did not have territorial ambitions in the Caribbean at this time. In a 1996 article, Mitchell argues that Germany had no expansionist goals during the blockade, but rather that it was exceedingly cautious and followed the British lead throughout the affair. Roosevelt had made a mistake when he agreed in principle to allow the blockade in the first place. Mitchell believes that the United States did not have the necessary strength to confront Germany militarily in the region. Mitchell claims that Germany had superior naval strength to the United States at this time and

"would have won a naval war waged in that region." Roosevelt's diplomacy was the result of his trying to overcome his original mistake. This led to his sending ambiguous signals to both Germany and England that they could easily misconstrue and possibly created major diplomatic crises with either of the European nations. It is Mitchell's conclusion that far too much emphasis has been placed on the Roosevelt Ultimatum issue and not enough on actual German intentions during the crisis. Germany was not after territorial gain but intended only to improve Anglo-German relations. In the end, they achieved the opposite. The Venezuelan blockade strengthened Anglo-American ties and damaged German relations with both countries irreparably.[33]

In a recent biography, H. W. Brands offers a new argument supporting the possibility that Roosevelt's ultimatum did occur. Roosevelt, he argues, was too tied up with internal problems with the coal industry to "give full consideration of the potential consequences of the German-British blockade of Venezuela." After solving the problems at home, Roosevelt "changed his mind and decided to challenge the kaiser." Brands believed that the press also played a role in Roosevelt's decision: "Roosevelt was accustomed to being accused of being too bellicose; he privately enjoyed it. He *wasn't* used to being called too soft; he didn't like that at all." Once he had decided, Roosevelt called in the German Ambassador, von Holleben, and issued his threat to use the United States fleet as related in the previous chapter.[34]

Despite the lack of archival records, Brands argues, it is "possible that things happened more or less as Roosevelt recalled them." Theodore Roosevelt "wasn't one to launch into histrionics to make a point." He realized that "it would only make future relations more difficult if the German leader were embarrassed by an obvious show of force. The fewer

people who knew about any ultimatum, the better." The lack of any specific orders to the fleet meant "that the maneuvers remained maneuvers; the president's ultimatum, if any, worked."[35]

As demonstrated from the above examples, two sides exist in the historiography of the Venezuelan Blockade of 1902-1903. The pro-Roosevelt theorists believe the German plans to take territory in Venezuela ended with the President's use of the "big stick," in the form of the United States Navy. These authors generally portray Germany as the aggressor with the English duped into cooperation by a scheming Kaiser. The other side usually adopts the stance of Alfred Vagts. No evidence exists of any ultimatum to Germany, there were no German territorial designs in the Venezuelan region, and Britain, not Germany, was the leading member in the coalition.

The truth lies somewhere between the two theories, because both arguments have points that are valid. There certainly is no evidence of German territorial designs in Venezuela in 1902-1903. The work of both Vagts and Mitchell have proved this. Mitchell makes a large mistake in assessing the strength of Germany's navy at this time. As this study will show, the United States battleships of this period were far superior to German contemporaries and German battleships lacked the range to get to the Caribbean to fight a war. Germany did not possess a navy as powerful as the United States and had no way to get its fleet across the Atlantic due to these design and logistical problems. Germany could not support or protect a colony in Central America during 1902-1903.

Evidence is ample that Roosevelt used the presence of the Navy to pressure Germany and England and force an end to the blockade. What primary evidence exists seems to rule

out Roosevelt's ultimatum in December 1902 but a possibility exists that those historians who opt for the February date may be correct. The main problem with the ultimatum theorists is the assumption that this would result in war between the United States and Germany. Roosevelt's account says nothing of war, but that the navy would ensure that Germany took no territory. This may have resulted in a minor naval skirmish, in which the United States Navy completely outclassed the four small German vessels, but a war between the United States and Germany was improbable, if not impossible.

Yet evidence supports the idea that Germany did have more than debt collection on their minds. England may not have been an unwilling dupe, but Germany was manipulating them. Sheltering behind the English Navy, Germany did all it could to hurt relations between Great Britain and the United States, perhaps hoping to revive the anti-English sentiment that existed in America during the earlier Venezuelan boundary dispute in 1896. By weakening Anglo-American relations, they hoped that Germany could foster better relations with the United States itself.

Notes

1. See Holger L. Herwig, *"Luxury" Fleet: The Imperial German Navy 1888-1918*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980) and Peter Padfield, *The Great Naval Race: The Anglo-German Naval Rivalry, 1900-1914*, (New York: David McKay Co., 1974).

2. See Ernest E. Russell, "The Development of Our New Navy," *Public Opinion* 15 (Spring 1893); and W. A. Dobson, "Modern War Vessels of the United States Navy," *The Popular Science Monthly* 44 (Fall 1893).

3. David Healy, *Drive to Hegemony*, (Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 3 - 5.

4. Nancy Mitchell, "The Height of the German Challenge: The Venezuela Blockade, 1902-1903," *Diplomatic History* 20 (Spring 1996): 187-188..

5. Ibid., 190-192.

6. U. S. Congress, House. Roosevelt's Annual Message of 1901, 57th Cong., Ist sess., 1901, H. D. 1, 195.

7. Seward W. Livermore, "Theodore Roosevelt, the American Navy, and the Venezuelan Crisis of 1902-1903," *the American Historical Review* 51 (April 1946) : 45 5-46 1.

8. Mitchell, "Height," 192-193. See also Graf von Metternich an den Auswartiges Arnt, December 15, 1902, *Die Große Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914*, (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschicthe M.B.H., 1924), 17:263.

9. Mitchell, "Height," 196-197.

10. Ibid.

11. Charlemagne Tower to John Hay, December 24, 1902, *Foreign Relations of the United States* 1902, 427.

12. Livermore, "Roosevelt, Navy, and Crisis," 462-465.

13. Mitchell, "Height," 198-205.

14. Ibid., 205-206.

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CHAPTER II

THE GERMAN PROBLEM

Problems between the United States and Germany originated in the Pacific during the Spanish-American War. Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz observed: "Our relations with the United States had undergone a needless change for the worse owing to the appearance of our squadron off Manila."[1] Germany, like the United States, was an emerging imperialist power. Many people in Germany felt that the country had "entered the field of colonial activity too late." It could not afford to pass up any chances that arose to gain coaling stations throughout the world. The Philippines "seemed to offer a rare chance" to gain some territory.[2]

Following Dewey's victory at Manila Bay the future of the Philippine Islands was in doubt. Germany had hopes that they could gain a piece of this territory following the removal of Spanish rule. Ernest R. May writes: "When the Manila battle indicated that Spain might lose the Philippines, the Admiralty made up their minds that Germany should have a naval base in the islands." The Naval Staff also decided to press for territorial rights in the Carolines and Samoa. Germany hoped to turn the disintegration of the Spanish Empire to its own benefit.[3]

Shortly after Dewey's victory, the German Asiatic fleet began sending fleet units to Manila, under the pretext of protecting commercial interests. Germany soon "had a squadron there as large as Dewey's, with more marines on board than there were Germans in the whole archipelago."[4] Problems soon arose between Dewey and the German commander, which led to complaints from the United States to the German Emperor. Kaiser Wilhelm II replied that

"the affairs of the squadron were the business of his navy and not fit subject for comment by diplomats or foreigners."[5] This did not improve the worsening relations between the two countries.

The results of this incident at Manila were much to the detriment of German ambitions. At first the United States was "by no means sure they wanted the Philippines."[6] The "rude gestures at Dewey" by the German navy gave the annexationists in the United States "an additional argument for holding the Philippines after the war." Clearly, if the United States did not take the Philippines, some European power would, and Germany intended to get a share of the islands. The United States eventually decided to annex the Philippines, which resolved the dispute.[7]

Interestingly, Tirpitz had a different slant on this affair. During a visit in 1896, when Tirpitz commanded the German Asiatic Squadron, representatives of the rebels then fighting the Spaniards approached him. The rebels suggested "the idea of establishing a German protectorate" in the Philippines. Tirpitz maintains that "so far as I know, the idea of extending German power to the Philippines was never afterwards seriously considered in any quarter of Germany." Tirpitz makes it appear that Dewey instigated the problems in German-American relations, writing: "Whilst we appeared off Manila with a squadron which was stronger than the American, we maintained ticklish relations between the two navies."[8]

Tirpitz does note that the affair had lasting significance: "There remained in the United States . . . the lasting suspicion that we had made an unsuccessful attempt to poach on preserves which they had discovered first." This idea, helped along by "the English press and diplomacy" increased suspicion in the United States that Germany was "cherishing

intentions on American territory." Tirpitz claims that the United States was "ignorant of European affairs, and sensitive enough with their Monroe Doctrine to believe this kind of nonsense."[9]

Germany's actions in the Philippines do not match Tirpitz' account. The German fleet loitered in Manila Bay, in force greater than the Americans, until two heavy monitors (coastal defense vessels) arrived from the United States. The German fleet then moved offshore, as Tirpitz describes. That did not end Germany's meddling in the Philippines. Even after the peace treaty was signed which ceded the Philippines to the United States, the German Asiatic fleet was trespassing in the vicinity of Cebu, which was held by insurgent forces opposed to United States rule. In February 1899, Admiral Dewey was forced to send troops to Cebu to meet the German threat. This action finally removed Germany from the Philippines.[10]

Tirpitz' assessment of the lasting effects of the Philippine affair is entirely correct, especially in naval circles. Admiral Dewey "never recovered from the acute case of Germanophobia he had acquired when Admiral Dietrichs sailed into Manila Bay in 1898." These feelings were shared by the General Board of the Navy, which Dewey headed. Suspicion of Germany "was a constant in the thinking of the General Board from 1898 to the outbreak of the European conflict in 1914."[11]

The next area of trouble between the United States and Germany occurred in Samoa. The Berlin Act of 1889 had placed these islands, which were independent, under the joint supervision of the United States, Germany, and Great Britain. In 1898, the Samoan chief died and Germany and the United States became embroiled in a dispute over his replacement. When the United States refused to recognize the most popular candidate, a civil war erupted.

Relations between Berlin and Washington became strained. Germany, ever opportunistic, hoped to use this crisis to "secure a long-desired partition of the islands between the three powers."[12]

Bad feelings from the Manila affair were readily apparent. The German Chancellor, Bernhard von Bülow, in a memorandum from March 1899 provides a perfect illustration. Von Bülow very much wanted to pacify the United States. He declares that "we have very great interest . . . in maintaining good relations with that sensitive nation which is so difficult to deal with." United States public opinion was in a "hostile mood" against Germany due to an "aggressive press." The press was "constantly nourished by existing business differences, lying reports about our attitude in the Spanish-American war, and finally by recent events in Samoa." Von Bülow also shows concern that the German navy avoid any conflict with United States warships because the "ships of His Majesty's cruiser squadron are the subject of special resentment in the United States." Germany wished to settle any differences and clear up the Samoan problem in "a friendly manner." A war between the United States and Germany "would be very unwelcome to us just now."[13]

The situation deteriorated when shellfire from United States and British warships damaged the German consulate at Apia on March 15, 1899. Relations between the powers worsened. The appointment of the United States' choice for chief ended the civil war on March 23. To reduce frictions among the three powers, they agreed to divide the islands up, just as Germany had wished. However, this settlement did not dispel the suspicion of Germany that existed in the United States.[14] Americans still felt that "At every disputed strategic point in the Pacific, Germany contested the American wishes during 1898 and

1899."[15]

The dispute between the two countries now moved to the Caribbean. In 1900, a German naval vessel, the *Vineta*, had spent three months surveying Margarita Island off the coast of Venezuela. A United States observer, in March 1901, wrote a report claiming that Germany planned to "acquire Margarita as a foothold on the Northern coast of South America." Germany could use the island as a coaling and supply depot for their navy. Venezuela owed large amounts of money to German interests and might lease the island to Germany for a cancellation of these debts.[16]

These reports disturbed the United States. The State Department made inquiries, receiving a "German denial of any interest in Margarita." Despite the denial, the United States warned the Venezuelan government not to allow any German lease to the island and dispatched American warships to La Guaira to monitor the region. Another vessel arrived to check the accuracy of the original report and its report "satisfied the naval command in Washington" that the findings were accurate. From that moment on, the island of Margarita became the focus of United States war plans against Germany.[17]

The suspicions raised by Margarita Island had the most direct influence on the Venezuelan Blockade. The United States quickly assessed German participation in the blockade as an extension of the earlier incident. Whatever motives Germany may have had, the United States believed that territory was the objective. Germany's failure to assess correctly the degree of suspicion with which its actions were viewed made the Venezuelan Blockade a German foreign policy disaster.

The final crisis before the Venezuelan Blockade occurred in early 1902. A civil war

had broken out in Haiti and Germany became involved in the affair. In May 1902 a provisional government had been set up in Haiti to rule until they could hold elections. The rebellion continued and was further compounded when the leading Haitian admiral chose to join the rebellion, taking with him his flagship, the *Crête-à-Pierrot.* On September 3, 1902, this vessel stopped the German steamer *Markomannia* and confiscated arms and ammunition bound for the provisional government. This government sent a protest to the United States in which they labeled the action "a real depredation, an act of piracy." They hoped that the United States would intervene to "prevent the recurrence" of such actions.[18]

Germany reacted swiftly and before the United States could intervene the German gunboat *Panther* retaliated. On September 6, the *Panther* entered the harbor at Gonaives and ordered the crew to surrender the *Crête.* They rejected this demand, and two more requests to surrender. The *Panther* then opened fire on the *Crête,* eventually hitting her magazine and destroying the vessel. Most of the crew had fled at the first shot, but the sinking killed the rebellious admiral and two of his officers.[19]

The United States responded to this action by reinforcing its fleet units in the area, but launched no protests against the German action. The great surprise is that this affair has received so little attention. This was a clear violation of the Monroe Doctrine. Germany was interfering in the internal affairs of Haiti: supplying guns and ammunition to one faction in an ongoing civil war and using its naval power to aid the cause. A pro-German government on Haiti was a possibility, perhaps giving Germany the port-of-call in the Caribbean they had long wanted.

Attention soon shifted further south. The *Panther* sailed shortly afterward for

Venezuela and joined the German squadron in the blockade of that country. December 1902 marked the beginning of what Nancy Mitchell calls "The Height of the German Challenge"[20]: the Venezuelan Blockade. The events leading up to the blockade had left a lasting suspicion of Germany in the United States, which may have been unwarranted or exaggerated.

By looking at the record of German-American relations, it is obvious where the mistrust of Germany that preoccupied the United States in 1902-1903 began. However the record shows that Germany did not seize territory through force of arms but by international agreements. Germany originally obtained Samoa as a joint protectorate in the Berlin Act of 1899. Germany established colonies there by agreement among the three powers involved. Spain sold the Caroline and Marianas Islands to Germany following the Spanish-American War. Even the occupation and building of the German military base and port of Kiaochow in China was the result of long diplomatic negotiations with Russia, which originally held the rights to the area. The Margarita Island affair in 1901 was a perfect fit to this pattern. If Germany could get a lease of the island in exchange for Venezuelan debts, challenging the legality of the transaction would be very hard. Certainly any country had a right to sell or lease its property to any other. The German government had also been interested in purchasing the Dutch West Indies but the transaction fell through when the United States objected. The United States eventually purchased these islands. The German interdiction in Haiti was an attempt to create a pro-German government in the Caribbean. None of this evidence proves that Germany was likely to seize land in Venezuela during the blockade.

In the United States, public opinion, the press and the President remained convinced that this was Germany's intent. In 1901, Theodore Roosevelt wrote that Germany viewed

the failure of the United States to add to its naval construction program as a sign of weakness and "in a few years they will be in a position to take some step in the West Indies or South America which will make us put up or shut up on the Monroe Doctrine." The Germans, he believed, relied "upon their ability to trounce us" if the United States attempted to defend its position. He was extremely worried that Germany and England might combine forces against the United States. He recommended caution regarding England "from whom we have not the least particle of danger to fear in any way or shape" adding that "the only power which may be a menace to us in the in anything like the near future is Germany."[21]

Roosevelt felt that the threat of Germany was real. In reality, the threat was not there. Germany did not possess a navy that could approach the strength of the United States fleet at this time. It was unlikely that the German fleet could fight the United States on even terms, let alone "trounce" them. If the Kaiser planned to grab territory in Venezuela, the probable outcome was war with the United States. By necessity this would be a naval war. A study of the actual strengths and the strategies of both fleets definitely rules out the idea that Germany was after territorial acquisition during the Venezuelan affair. Claiming that war between the United States and Germany was imminent during this crisis ignores the facts completely.

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CHAPTER III

UNITED STATES BATTLESHIP DESIGN AND NAVAL POLICY

In an age when the Cold War is still a recent memory, military power as an adjunct of foreign policy are an accepted fact. The Cold War is often associated with the policy of deterrence. The belief that by possessing the greatest number of superweapons will guarantee peace is not a product of post-World-War-Two diplomacy. In the late nineteenth century, the ultimate weapon was the battleship. In the 1890s, the United States began building a fleet of these superweapons. Policies primarily defensive in nature inspired this construction. United States strategy did not share the same motivations as other nations, notably England and France. The battleships produced were radically different from those of the European navies and the policies they represented determined their design.

The naval policy of the United States remained unchanged throughout the 1890s and into the early 1900s. This policy emphasized the defense of the United States, and central to the argument was the enforcement of the Monroe Doctrine. The concern for this document grew throughout this period, becoming the central theme of most naval theorists. The movement to build a canal through Central America made the Caribbean even more important to United States interests.

When the United States began building its navy to modern standards in 1883, it lacked the necessary industrial capacity with which to build modern warships. American shipyards used materials purchased overseas to build the firdst new warships. These vessels were smaller types; the largest built were cruisers. The navy established a gun factory in

Washington, D.C. and contracted for armor plate from various steel manufacturers. In response to military imperative, the United States created a shipbuilding industry where none previously existed. This process was slow at first; it took almost seven years to build the cruiser *Chicago*. Yet within ten years, industrial progress was so swift as to allow the United States to build warships equal in construction and fighting qualities to any possessed by foreign navies. In 1893, the United States had launched, or had under construction, six modern battleships, including the *Iowa*, which were superior in power to any vessel then afloat.[1]

It took many years to develop a cohesive naval policy. One responsibility of the navy was to represent the United States overseas. The second was to protect the United States in case of war. Because the navy was too small to fight a general war with the more powerful European powers, war plans emphasized the protection of the coast. The mission of the navy was not to project United States power to foreign waters, but to secure the safety of its own borders. This policy of coastal defense became a fixture of United States naval planning and the United States built the fleet to match this strategy. These two missions of the navy each required a different type of vessel. Overseas duty required long-range cruisers and the security of the country was the responsibility of the battleships.[2]

Another factor that figured into naval planning was the increasing importance of the Monroe Doctrine in United States foreign policy. Ernest E. Russell, writing in 1893, explained that "the maintenance of a navy in some degree commensurate with the interests not alone of the United States but of the American continents was one of the duties devolved upon us by our destiny." The United States must develop the necessary naval strength "to

control any interoceanic ship canal or ship railway between the two Americas." In this manner, United States naval policy encompassed both South and Central America in its planning.[3]

A third aspect that entered naval planning was the idea of deterrence. A powerful fleet of battleships would not only discourage attacks on the country, but prevent a war from occurring. In 1894, Charles H. Cramp, whose Philadelphia shipyard built many United States battleships, declared that the "meaning of sea power to the United States" was "mainly of deterrent significance." The possession of a fleet large enough to confront an enemy battle fleet and menace its commerce "would materially affect the tenor of diplomacy and avert war." He also added that "the absence or insufficiency of such equipment would invite war." Thus, building a large navy was a method to insure peace.[4]

As demonstrated above, the naval policy that emerged in the early 1890s had three major themes that directly concerned the construction of battleships for the United States Navy: protection of the United States coast from a foreign battle fleet, the possible deployment in defense of other American nations, and to present a deterrent to foreign aggression. The United States did not build battleships on the model of those of foreign powers, but instead produced unique designs to match these requirements. From 1893 to 1904, battleship design was a direct product of these three requirements.

The decision to concentrate on coastal defense affected the size and form of United States battleships. Standard battleships and armored cruisers of the foreign powers, most notably England, had a draft exceeding twenty-five feet fully loaded. The United States had very few harbors that exceeded twenty-five feet in depth. If the navy built battleships

exceeding this depth, these vessels could not safely use harbors such as Boston and Newport News. To achieve a designed draft of twenty-three feet, twenty-five fully loaded, the resultant battleships were shorter and had a much wider beam than their European counterparts. The lower draft of these vessels also offered benefits of a defensive nature as United States battleships could "take refuge in our shallow harbors from deep draught foreign battleships." Warships of more than twenty-three feet in draft were at a distinct disadvantage when operating in the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. Every new class of battleship built in the United States prior to 1904 adhered to the designated draft of twenty-three feet. Because of this fact, battleships of the United States fleet had smaller displacements than European battleships. They had distinctive wide beams and less freeboard than those employed by foreign builders.[5]

To gain the desired deterrent effect, these new warships had to be a threat to those of other nations. In 1890, Congress approved the construction of the three first-class battleships. They demanded that "for the same displacement, our ships should be superior to foreign ships in battery power." These *Indiana*-class battleships (see figure 1) could probably face any battleship in the world with a fair chance of winning the confrontation. As designed, these vessels carried thirteen-inch guns in double turrets fore and aft, a full inch larger in caliber than most contemporary battleships. The biggest difference was the heavy secondary armament. The *Indiana* class carried eight eight-inch guns in four turrets, two turrets on each broadside. They also carried four six-inch rapid-fire and twenty six-pounder rapid-fire weapons. This gave the *Indiana*-class battleships a secondary armament equal in power to the largest armored cruisers on each broadside. When added to the thirteen inch

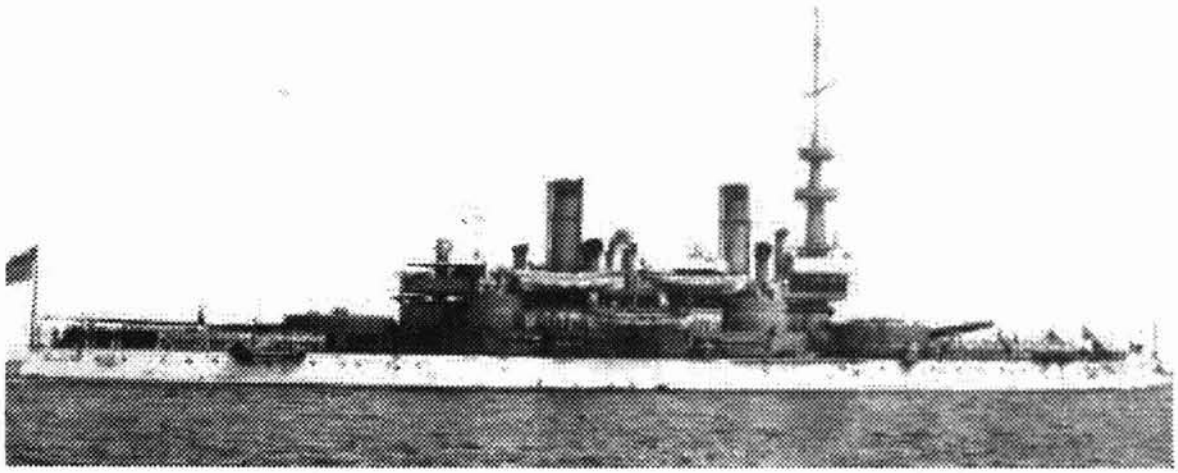

Figure 1. USS *Indiana* Note low freeboard and twin eight-inch guns below smokestack.

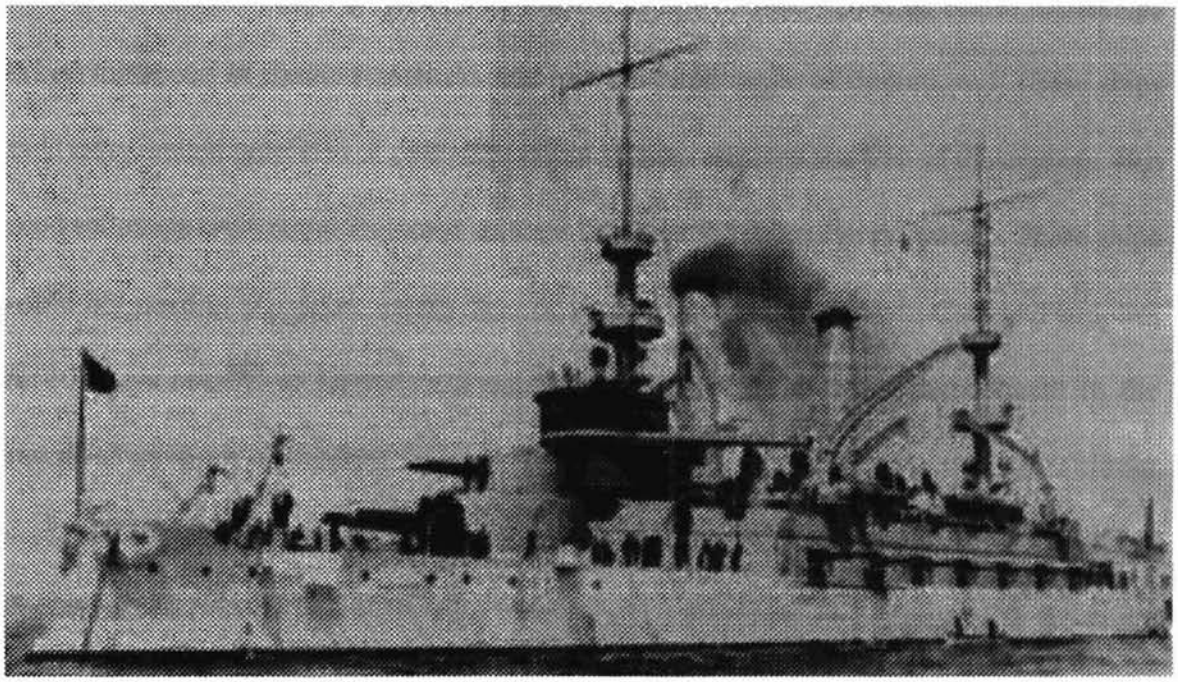

Figure 2 USS *Kentucky* (*Kearsarge* Class) Good view of superimposed eight-inch guns on top of 13" turret

guns, the battery of these vessels was the most powerful carried by any warship in the world.[6]

A premium was also placed on protection. The *Indiana* class carried armor plating of equal thickness to that carried by other nations, 4 inches to a maximum of 7.5 inches on

the main armor belt. This protection became increasingly larger as construction continued through the 1890s. Typically, United States battleships carried armor unequaled in comparable ships produced elsewhere. The *Illinois* class that followed the *Indiana* class had an armor belt of up to 16 inches compared to 9.45 maximum of the German *Deutschland* class battleships. If the guns gave American ships more destructive power, the superiority in armor gave them the advantage of better survivability in battle.[7]

Some sacrifice was necessary to attain the superiority of these ships. Because of the smaller displacement of these vessels, the weight of additional armor, and the space necessary to accommodate the many guns, men and magazines of the battery, United States battleships lacked the speed of their competitors and had a limited range of operations. These ships could carry limited quantities of coal and available space restricted the size of the engines. But speed and range were not as important to ships designed for defensive purposes. These ships would not need to pursue an enemy fleet or venture far from the coast. Coal and supplies were always nearby, so limited coal supplies would not be a serious impediment to the prescribed missions of the fleet.

Another weakness was the low freeboard of these vessels; rough seas hindered the effectiveness of United States battleships. They could not operate the big guns with the decks awash. This left the ship at a disadvantage if confronted by a hostile vessel in heavy seas. In 1898, Navy Lieutenant E. W. Eberle suggested the Navy assign armored cruisers to protect the battleships because they were unable to defend themselves in severe conditions. Still, most observers felt that the flaws in these warships were not critical. The United States built these ships to match the coastal defense policy that was then in effect; some deficiencies were

acceptable to create the vessel best suited for that purpose.[8]

In 1895-96, Congress authorized two more battleships for the fleet. The *Kentucky* and *Kearsarge* (see figure 2) were innovative designs. They used electrical power to operate the auxiliary functions and, in place of the four eight-inch turrets, superimposed two eight-inch guns over each main turret above the thirteen-inch guns. The power of the broadside remained the same, but the savings in weight from the removal of the extra turrets allowed the installation of more armor. These battleships retained the characteristic wide beam due to the requirement of a twenty-three-foot draft. The savings in space from the removal of the additional gun turrets also allowed for a more powerful engine installation. This gave this class of vessels a top speed of almost seventeen knots, which made them the fastest battleships produced in the United States up to that time. When the *Kentucky* and *Kearsarge* entered the fleet in 1899, one writer proclaimed them "the greatest fighting machines afloat."[9]

The most prominent naval theorist of this period was Alfred Thayer Mahan. In 1895, Mahan wrote a short article entitled "The Future in Relation to American Naval Power." He described the changing political and economic situation of the United States in the world. Mahan advocated increased naval spending as necessary for the new world interests of the country: "the commercial enterprise of the people brought our interests into violent antagonism with clear, unmistakable, and vital interests of foreign belligerent states." He did not advocate imperialism, stating that "it is not necessary to acquire territory beyond [the] sea in order to undergo serious international complications." Mahan declared that "The world has grown smaller" and a navy was a requirement as the "only instrument by which the nation can, when emergencies arise, project its power beyond its shoreline."[10]

Mahan emphasized the areas outlined earlier. He noted the importance of upholding the principles of the Monroe Doctrine from which the United States "could not recede without the risk of national mortification." The movement toward building a canal through Central America made the protection of this area even more critical to United States interests. Mahan believed that United States policy "will always be defensive only" and that "we shall seek to secure the peaceable solution of each difficulty as it arises."[11]

As the leading naval authority of the time, and an advisor to Roosevelt himself, this article is a good indicator of the official policy that existed in naval circles in the United States at the turn of the century. The importance of the Caribbean region and the Monroe Doctrine are apparent. The defensive nature of these policies are also clear, and resulted in ship designs better suited to operation in the Caribbean and coastal waters than on the high seas. As the navy did not anticipate initiating a conflict, it had no need for warships with the capability to strike at an enemy overseas.

The writing of contemporary United States naval officers demonstrates how deeply ingrained Mahan's ideas were. Writing in 1896, United States Navy Lieutenant John M. Ellicott addressed the issue of foreign policy. In the first paragraph of his article "The Composition of the Fleet," Ellicott placed the Monroe Doctrine as the first consideration. The author believed that a permanent naval building program was a necessity for the protection of the western hemisphere. To defend its interests, the United States "must have a powerful fleet, and until we build it we are in daily jeopardy of national humiliation by seeing some strong foreign power deliberately ignore our doctrine." Ellicott described the "permanent foreign policy" of the United States as having three aspects: to prohibit

acquisition of territory by foreign powers in the Americas, "to protect American citizens the world over," and finally, "non-interference in disputes between nations on other continents." He was adamant that the United States would "never attempt the invasion of transoceanic territory belonging to another nation."[12]

Ellicott's article confirms that naval policy had determined the range of United States battleships. He believed that the most dangerous enemies of the United States were overseas. Contemporary naval policy would "compel them to send their battle-ships thousands of miles to attack us where we can fight them within easy reach of our own ports." As such, the Navy "can dispense with some coal endurance in our line-of-battle ships and leave room to make them in other respects superior fighting machines to those of the adversary." The fact that Ellicott advocated the building of many monitors, vessels only suited to use within harbors, only further displays the defensive nature of United States naval policy.

Mahan added another contribution to the literature in 1897. In "Preparedness for Naval War," Mahan reemphasized the importance of the Monroe Doctrine in foreign policy. The United States had committed itself to "resort to force, if necessary, to prevent the territorial or political expansion of European power beyond its present geographical limits in the American continents." Mahan believed that the United States was not militaristic and was "indisposed to aggression." Mahan wanted an increase in naval building due to increasing United States commercial interests throughout the world. He advocated the building of more armored cruisers, the favored vessel for this task. The main power of the navy would remain as the battle fleet, stationed in territorial waters to defend the country. Mahan concluded that

"even coast defense . . . , although essentially passive, should have an element of offensive force, local in character." This localized power was the main battle fleet of United States battleships.[13]

Lieutenant-Commander Richard Wainwright's "Our Naval Power," published early in 1898, continues Mahan's arguments. Wainwright's concern was that the United States defenses were inadequate to cover the extensive coastlines, leaving much of both the Atlantic and Pacific seaboards open to attack. He noted that in shipping trade, the United States had few vessels operated in foreign trade but "a very large tonnage engaged in the coastwise trade." As such, United States interests "do not demand protection far from our shores." This article stresses the defensive nature of United States planning. Wainwright wrote that "The policy of our country is not an aggressive one, we only require armed forces for the protection of our country and its interests." This included the Monroe Doctrine, which recognized that "the strong United States is responsible for the protection of the weaker American states." It was imperative to Wainwright that the United States "have command of the Caribbean sea," especially for the proposed construction of the "Nicaraguan" canal. The canal would allow rapid concentration of the fleet in either the Atlantic or the Pacific if war threatened.[14]

This naval policy was followed by the United States Navy throughout the period in question and and the most telling proof of this are the results. The United States established a preeminence in the Caribbean that was unmatched by any foreign power. After the Venezuelan blockade, Germany never again returned to the Caribbean. Even more importantly, England abandoned its fleet operations in the region also.[15] As Livermore and

Langley have found, the United States naval manuevers during the Venezuelan blockade proved that the United States was the dominant power in the region and this was the result of the naval building program that created the fleet.

The navy began to expand as the need for more vessels was apparent. Congress authorized three new vessels of the *Illinois* class in 1896. These ships were notable in their departure from the heavy secondary armament of eight-inch caliber, resorting to more six-inch rapid-fire weapons. The Spanish-American war marked the beginning of an increase in naval expenditures, with Congress providing for the construction of three new battleships similar in construction to the *Illinois* class. The removal of the heavy secondary armament of eight-inch guns was not popular within the navy because this armament had proven itself of great use in actual combat. When Congress approved the construction of five more battleships of the *Virginia* class in 1900, three were to carry eight of these eight-inch weapons in the four-turret configuration. The other two were to carry four eight-inch guns superimposed on the main turrets and two twin turrets on each broadside amidships. All eleven of these warships had similar specifications to those that distinguished the earlier battleships. These battleships were almost equal in draft, freeboard, and endurance and carried the heavy armor plating that characterized American design. The *Virginia* class had an increase in displacement from eleven-thousand tons to almost fifteen-thousand tons, but the basic architecture differed little from prior models. Coastal defense was the priority and modifications for fighting in the open ocean or for overseas duty did not occur.[16]

It was not until 1903, in the aftermath of the Venezuelan crisis, that the United States changed its policies to expand the reach of the navy. The building of the Panama Canal and

the new "American Empire" was the main impetus behind these changes. Theorists began to see that United States battleships had to operate at distances farther from our coast than they had previously done. When the *Connecticut* class of six vessels began construction in 1903, they were the first seagoing battleships the country built. They had the high freeboard and displacement typical of the most modern British vessels. Instead of the superior armor and heavier gun installations that had characterized the earlier United States ships, the new battleships were roughly equal to the foreign models. The fuel capacity was much greater and the implication was that the United States would employ these new warships for more wide-ranging missions. This resulted from the need to protect the Panama canal and interests in the territories gained from Spain. The national interest no longer confined itself to the coast of the country proper, but extended to the Caribbean, Alaska, Hawaii, and the Philippines. As the scope of United States policy broadened, so was the range of United States battleships, with a corresponding alteration in the design of these vessels.[17]

For more than ten years, the policies of the United States governed the construction of battleships. The shallow draft and the corresponding lower freeboard made these ships less efficient in the open sea than foreign competitors. It did allow these vessels to use and protect the shallow harbors that occupied the coastline. These ships were far superior on the defense and carried a much heavier battery than contemporaries. The main armament of the first United States battleships, the *Indiana* class, is identical in form to the *Connecticut* class of 1903. Even the ships produced in the aftermath of the Spanish-American war demonstrate no change in the perceived needs of the navy. The adherence to the similarity in design of these ships is a clear indication of a continuance in the policies that justified their construction.

The elements of this policy were those defined by Mahan. Coastal defense was the primary mission of the battle fleet. The United States was opposed to aggression and did not aspire to territorial conquest. The most important element of naval policy was the protection of the Monroe Doctrine and the importance of Caribbean to the security of the United States..

During the Spanish-American War, the two types of vessels adopted by the United States Navy served American purposes well. Dewey's cruisers won a spectacular victory in the Philippines. The navy confined the battleships to operations off the Cuban coast, in the type of waters they were designed for and well within reach of United States bases. During the conflict, the long voyage of the battleship *Oregon* from San Francisco to operate off the coast of Cuba proved that, if necessary, United States battleships were capable of long-range deployment.[18] It also demonstrated the advantage a canal through Central America would be to the navy. Despite the *Oregon*'s journey, the navy generally employed its vessels for missions they were designed to perform.

The victory over Spain left many legacies that remained in 1902. The United States Navy now had a core of officers and men who were combat experienced. Lessons from the war were put into effect. A study found that only 3 percent of the shells fired by the United States at Santiago Bay were hits. Gunnery training was placed as a priority and a 1902 article proclaimed that "it is beyond question that the United States Navy makes much better practice now than at any time in the course of the war with Spain."[19] Santiago Bay proved the complete inability of even the most modern European cruisers to stand up to the modern United States battleships. It would be fruitless for any nation to attempt any kind of naval venture against the United States in the Western Atlantic or Caribbean region without

including a main body of powerful battleships. A fleet composed of even the most powerful armored cruisers would be quickly destroyed by the American battleships. The main batteries of even the largest cruisers would not penetrate the armor of the American ships and the armor of the cruisers would not withstand even the eight-inch fire of the battleships, to say nothing of the 13-inch main batteries. As a result of the war, the United States also gained possession of two naval bases strategically located in the Caribbean.

During the period of naval buildup prior to the Venezuelan blockade of 1902, the United States shaped the policies and actions that the Roosevelt administration took during the crisis. The first and foremost was the growing importance of the Monroe Doctrine in foreign policy. Any actions at all by European countries in the Western Hemisphere immediately came under scrutiny by the United States government as well as by the press. The new push for the Panama Canal made the Caribbean that much more important to United States policy makers. Their greatest fear, whether real or imagined, was that some foreign power would gain territory in the region that would pose a threat to the canal. They realized a naval power, such as Germany, could actually pose a threat to United States interests if they possessed a coaling station in the West Indies. The Caribbean was a source of great anxiety for the United States. The United States did not realize that their position in the region, militarily, was virtually unassailable by any European power other than England. With a modern fleet perfectly suited to defend the region, strategically placed coaling stations, and short lines of communication and supply, the United States was poised to establish supreme control over the entire region.

Notes

1. See John H. Gibbons, "The Need of a Building Program for our Navy," *The Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute 29* (June *1903) : 321-322;* Ernest E. Russell, "The Development of Our New Navy," Public *Opinion 15* (Spring *1893): 76-79;* and W. A. Dobson, "Modem War Vessels of the United States Navy," *The Popular Science Monthly 44* (Fall *1893): 164-167.*

2. Gibbons, "Need," *322.*

3. Russell, "development," *76.*

4. Charles H. Cramp, "Sea Power of the United States," *North American Review 159* (Spring *1894): 146.*

5. See D. W. Taylor, "A Handicap on United States Battleships," *The Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute 30* (September *1904): 503-504;* H. G. Gillmor, "Battleships of the United States Navy," *Cassier's Magazine 21* (Fall *1901): 475-477;* Richard Wainwright, "Our Naval Power," *The Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute 24* (March *1898): 75;* and H. W. Wilson, "The Navies and Naval Construction Programme of *1898," The Engineering Magazine 15* (August *1898): 716.*

6. See Gibbons, "Need," *322;* Albert Franklin Matthews, "The Evolution of a Battleship," *Century 48* (June *1894): 349;* and Richard Lee Fearn, "The Vitals of a Battleship," *The Chautauquan 27* (August *1898): 473.*

7. Dobson, *"Modern War Vessels," 166-168.*

8. E.W. Eberle, "Some Practical Notes on Battleships," *The Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute 24* (Spring *1898): 537-538.*

9. See Franklin Chester, "The Greatest Fighting Machines Afloat," *Munsey's Magazine 24* (Fall *1900): 20-24;* and "Battleship Kearsarge" *The Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute 25* (June *1899) : 943.*

10. Alfred Thayer Mahan, "The Future in Relation to American Naval Power," *Harper's Monthly Magazine 91* (Spring *1895): 768-770.*

11. Ibid., *772-775.*

12. John M. Ellicott, "The Composition of the Fleet," *The Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute 22* (Spring *1896): 537-538.*

13. Alfred Thayer Mahan, "Preparedness for Naval war," *Harper's Monthly Magazine 94* (Spring *1897) :580-584.*

14. Wainwright, "Our Naval Power," *41-45.*

15. George W. Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press) *36*

16. See Park Benjamin, "Our Ideal Battleship," *Independent* 53 (Fall 1901): 2567- 2572; "New Battleships and Armored Cruisers," *The Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* 26 (September 1900): 593-599; "U.S. Battleships Pennsylvania and Class," *The Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* 26 (September 1900) : 554-555; "The First-Class Battleship Wisconsin," *The Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* 26 (September 1900): 72072 1; and "Proposed Armament of our Three Latest Battleships," *The Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* 25 (September 1899): 661-665.

17. See Homer C. Poundstone, "Size of Battleships for the U.S. Navy," *The Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* 29 (March 1903): 166; John H. Gibbons, "Size of Battleships for the U. S. Navy," *The Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* 29 (March 1903): 43 7; and Asa Walker, "With Reference to the Size of Fighting Ships," *The Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* 26 (September 1900): 516-517.

18. George W. Melville, "Our Actual Naval Strength," *North American Review* 176 (Fall 1902): 387.

19. *The Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* 28 (Spring 1902): 63 2-63 3.

CHAPTER IV

GERMAN BATTLESHIP CONSTRUCTION AND MILITARY CAPABILITIES

On paper, the United States and German fleets of 1902 were almost equal in strength. However, Germany was not superior or equal to the United States in naval power. In actuality, the German battleships of the period were inferior to the United States' vessels in every aspect, from armor to armament. To challenge the United States in the Caribbean, battleships were a necessity. Yet the German battleships also lacked the range to cross the Atlantic and operate in the Caribbean without logistical support that was not at Germany's disposal.

To assess the military threat that Germany posed to the United States in 1902, an appraisal of the actual strength of the German fleet and its capabilities is necessary. In actual numbers of ships, Germany was theoretically almost equal to the United States in naval power. Germany constructed warships, especially the battleships, to fit a specific strategic doctrine, and were limited in size by dockyard facilities and the size of the Kaiser Wilhelm canal. These vessels were very well suited to the missions that German builders designed them for, but their deficiencies were many. The German battle fleet of 1902 was almost completely incapable of deployment in the western Atlantic or Caribbean, and if it had managed to find its way to the region, the vastly superior ships of the United States fleet would have had a tremendous advantage over the German navy.

Germany constructed its first modern battleships from 1890 to 1904. The four ships of the *Brandenburg* class were roughly comparable in size to British designs of the same

period, displacing 10,000 tons. The main armament of six 11-inch guns was superior to that of most other warships. At a time when most battleships carried two twin-turrets, these ships carried three twin-turrets. These vessels carried a very light secondary battery of 4.1- and 3.5- inch guns. Designers gave armor protection a high priority. A full length armor belt was fitted, at the expense of coal storage. As a result, these battleships had a limited cruising range of 4,500 miles at ten knots.[1]

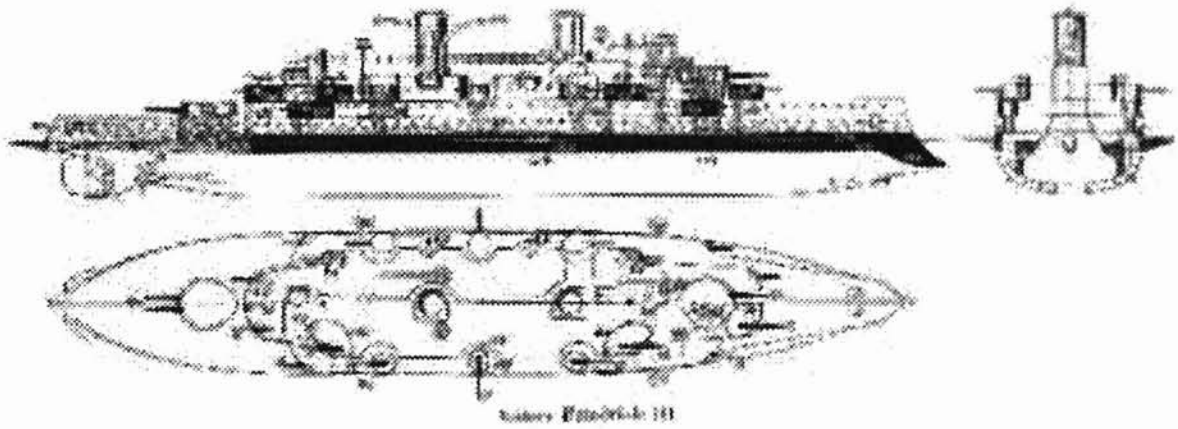

Figure 3. *Kaiser* Class Battleship

The next five battleships produced, between 1895-1902, were a major departure from the earlier models. The *Kaiser* class (see figures 3 and 4) vessels displaced 11,000 tons, but carried a significant reduction in main armament. These ships carried the standard two twin-turrets and smaller guns of 9.4 inches. The secondary armament was upgraded to fourteen 6 inch guns. Germany heavily armored these ships, again at the cost of range, which fell to 3,000 miles at ten knots.[2]

In 1899, Germany embarked upon a naval building program that called for a

systematic building of warships, including a fleet of thirty-eight battleships. The rhetoric of the Kaiser promoted the idea of making Germany a world power in the manner of England. It was true that German economic influence was spreading throughout the world. By 1900, Germany was second only to England in foreign investment. The Kaiser maintained that the only means of protecting these interests was the possession of a powerful fleet, and Germany intended to possess one.[3]

However, despite the rhetoric, Germany did not follow accepted practices in building her "colonial" navy. For this type of naval policy, the preferred type of vessel was the long-range cruiser. Maintaining a pretext of building a fleet for overseas use, Germany intended the navy only for deployment in the North Sea. As Admiral von Tirpitz, the designer of the German Naval plan, explained to Kaiser Wilhelm: "a thorough-going cruiser war and a war on the high seas against England and other great States is altogether excluded by our lack of foreign bases and by Germany's geographical situation." Tirpitz called for building a "battle fleet which can be stationed between Heligoland and the Thames." The German fleet had one objective: to challenge England for control of the North Sea.[4]

Much of the oratory about protecting overseas possessions was nothing but an illusion. Germany did pursue an aggressive colonial policy overseas, but its naval planning differed. Colonial expansion was simply a convenient excuse to justify a huge naval buildup. Peter Padfield notes that "It was simple to argue that the German Navy had not kept pace with the great increases in German overseas trade because it was true." What was hard was trying to relate these interests to battleships "as trade defence was linked in most minds with cruisers."[5] As Tirpitz opined: "For political reasons . . . one cannot directly say that the naval

expansion is aimed primarily against England."[6]

Tirpitz believed that the foundation of naval power rested with a battle fleet. Since this was incomplete, Germany "could not move with any freedom upon the seas of the world and demand equal rights." Germany was "compelled by the threats of the British in the first decade of this century to concentrate our fleet in force in home waters." Tirpitz further notes that "trans-Atlantic expeditions, such as the China Campaign, the action against Venezuela or the Agadir affair seemed . . . altogether undesirable until the battle fleet was completed. Only when the German fleet reached parity with that of Britain were such overseas operations warranted.[7]

Certain aspects of the German naval building plan bear consideration. The first is the idea of the "risk" fleet. This resembles the idea of deterrence that dominated Cold War strategy. The Germans did not delude themselves into thinking that they could build and maintain a fleet as large as that of Great Britain. Yet, the fleet had to be large enough to pose a threat to the English fleet. By attacking the German fleet, the English might win, but such a confrontation would so injure them that they no longer would be the leading sea power. Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz eventually set the standard at a navy three-fifths the size of that of the Royal Navy. This would be no larger than would be "necessary to make an attack on us seem a hazardous undertaking even to the greatest sea-power." This fleet would prevent a war from occurring by its existence alone. The English would never risk their control of the seas, upon which they built their empire, to fight the German fleet. In this manner, Germany built its battle fleet to fight on the defensive. The battle fleet was "never intended for war on the high seas, but solely for the defence of home waters."[8]

Another important part of the fleet-building plan was the creation of what Tirpitz termed "alliance value." Tirpitz writes that "a respectable fleet would also increase our qualifications as an ally." He judged it possible to break the English monopoly of the world's oceans by two methods, the "luck of battle" and "by means of alliances." Thus, Tirpitz placed a high priority on establishing an alliance with another sea power opposing the English. Tirpitz believed that "German trade . . . could no longer be protected by flying squadrons; we had to increase in general power . . . to qualify ourselves for an alliance with the great powers." In 1919, Tirpitz lamented the failure of German diplomacy to achieve this goal: "one single ally worth mentioning would have been of decisive influence" during the war.[9]

German shipyards built battleships to match the policies of Tirpitz. The result was a navy that was extremely capable in a confrontation limited to the North Sea between Germany and England, but not well suited for long-range deployment. They were very seaworthy vessels, having good freeboard and a typical draft of 26-27 feet. These ships were typically smaller than the contemporaries in other navies, with a corresponding decrease in armament, due to the limitations of German shipyards and the size of the Kaiser Wilhelm Canal at Kiel.

The *Wittelsbach* class (see figure 5) of five battleships was begun in 1899 and differed little from the Kaiser class. The displacement of this class was a bit larger, 12,000 tons, but the armament of 9.4-inch guns was retained. Their size was still some 2,000 tons smaller than contemporary battleships of other countries. This was typical of German battleships during the pre-*Dreadnought* period, mainly due to the constraints imposed by existing German dockyard facilities.[10] One journal of the period describes the Wittelsbach class: "Owing to

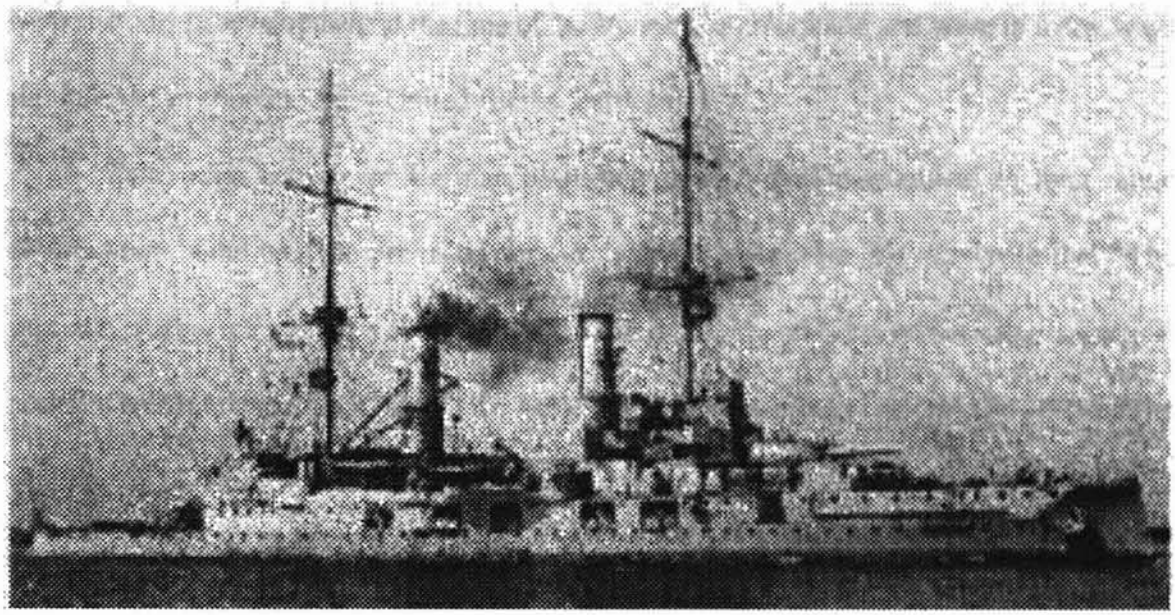

Figure 4 IGN *Kaiser Wilhelm II*

their relatively small displacement the ships have . . . their compensating disadvantage, and this is their small coal supply." By limiting coal supplies, these ships were more than adequate in speed and armor. German designers also incorporated higher freeboard than in vessels of foreign design, which made them particularly well-suited to the waters of the North Sea. There was no mistaking the purpose of these warships, they were "coast defence ships" intended for short-range North Sea operations and not trans-oceanic excursions.[11] Only one of these latest vessels, the *Wittelsbach*, would be completed by the time of the Venezuelan crisis in December 1902, having undergone trials in October of that year. [12]

Subsequent development of German battleship design increased the main armament to four 11-inch guns and saw the operational range extend to over 6,000 miles at 10 knots. These later vessels had sufficient range to cover the distance between the Caribbean and Germany and back again, the distance being approximately 3,000 miles, but these vessels

were still only in development at the time of the Venezuelan blockade and were in many ways still inferior to contemporary United States battleships.[13]

Two other aspects of German battleship design were detrimental to long range deployment. One was the provision for survivability in combat. Tirpitz wrote that "The supreme quality of a ship is that it should remain afloat, and, by preserving its vertical position, continue to put up a fight." To achieve this goal, German shipbuilders adopted the practice of building many watertight compartments below the waterline. This was the standard practice of all the countries building modern warships at this time, but Germany went even further than others. Where other countries had watertight doors installed to interconnect these compartments, German shipbuilders completely dispensed with these. While this proved extremely valuable in combat during World War One, it was an extreme inconvenience to the crews. It was hard to get around below decks and the ventilation was horrible.[14]

The second factor that detracted from long-range use was the fact the designers had incorporated the fuel supply into the protection of the battleship. German testing showed that the effect of an explosive shell "was nullified if we compelled it to pulverize coal in any considerable quantity. This resulted in a special arrangement of a portion of our coal bunkers." Coal bunkers were placed in areas where the armor belt was thin, which would greatly reduce the damage recieved if a shell burst in the area.[15] On short missions in the North Sea, this arrangement would prove useful. As the range increased, as on a trans-Atlantic voyage, these coal supplies would eventually be drawn upon, actually weakening the protection of the ship.

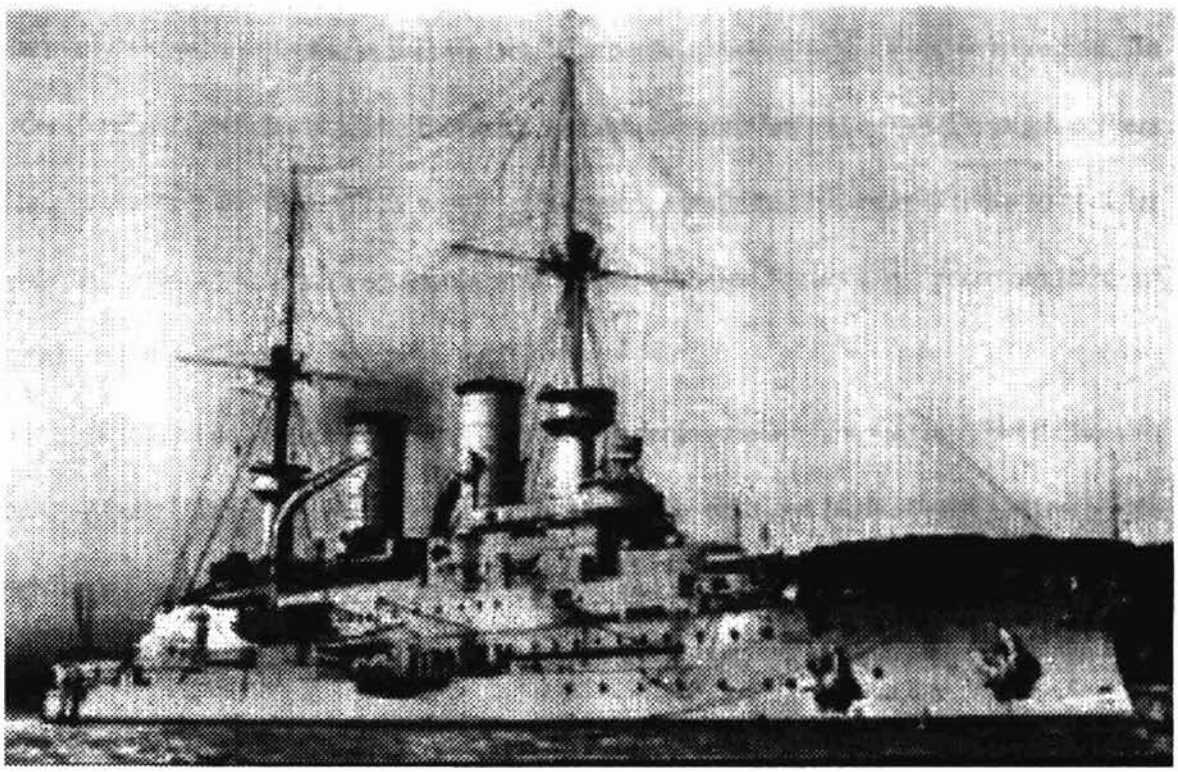

Figure 5 IGN *Schwaben* (*Wittelsbach* Class)

The German Navy, like the United States Navy, designed its warships for a defensive mission. Theoretically, German battleships could be adapted to other missions. They were better ocean-going vessels than United States' designs, due to the higher freeboard, but an attack by the German fleet on the western Atlantic or Caribbean was unlikely, if not impossible at this time. However, American war plans, right up to the First World War, counted on Germany attacking across the Atlantic. Clearly, the United States consistly overrated German naval capability.[16]

John Maurer writes: "The technological constraints of refueling in this era provided limits on the capability of the German battle fleet." The German fleet could not complete a voyage to American waters without refueling. American planners believed that Germany would have to refuel at the Azores and once again when they reached American waters.

Germany's greatest weakness was its lack of a coaling station in the Caribbean region. In order to refuel, Germany would either have to rely on Great Britain or bring enough colliers along to resupply the fleet. They would still require a sheltered location in order to transfer coal, which would have proved problematic with the United States Navy deployed to scout out the German Fleet.[17]

These technical restraints clearly ruled out deployment of the German Battle fleet to the Caribbean. At the time of the Venezuelan Blockade, relations between the United States and Great Britain were such that Germany could not count on England's aid in replenishing their fuel supplies. Creating a vast fleet train to bring their supplies with them would have been a logistical nightmare. In 1912, it was estimated that the German Battle Fleet would require 97 colliers to supply its fleet in the event of an attack on the United States.[18] The United States fleet could defeat the entire plan by simply destroying the colliers intended to supply the battle fleet. Much of the second line of the German fleet would have to deploy in defense of the fleet train, weakening the scouting force needed to spot the enemy battle fleet as it approached, as well as decreasing the support of secondary units to the main Battle Fleet.

Even in the unlikely event that the German fleet did manage to cross the Atlantic, more problems would have to be overcome. The first was the superiority of the United States' Navy in weaponry. On paper, the two fleets were nearly identical in 1902. According to a German Study, the United States had 20 battleships compared to the German 19. The disparity in large cruisers was greater, the United States holding a 16 to 11 advantage. However, only five of the German cruisers could be classified as modern (built after 1887)

and 13 of the United States vessels were of modern construction.[19]

The 20 to 19 ratio in battleships is also deceiving, as the United States' vessels were vastly superior in firepower. The 9.4-inch guns of the latest German battleships were only slightly bigger than the secondary 8-inch weapons carried by many of the United States battleships. The 13-inch main armament of the United States' vessels dwarfed the smaller German weapon. The 8-inch secondary guns of the United States' battleships were capable of penetrating the armor belt of the German vessels, while the 6-inch guns of the German warships were inadequate against the more heavily armored enemy.[20]

Another difficulty for Germany was the actual strategic position of the United States in the Caribbean. Where the Germans had no bases in the region, the United States did have bases as a result of the Spanish-American War. Advanced bases were available to the United States fleet at Cuba and Puerto Rico. The United States had built its battleships to fight on the defense and a German attack in the Caribbean was exactly the type of action anticipated when these vessels were designed. United States battleships would have the advantage of fighting in home waters, short lines of communication and supply, and also the added advantage of the lesser draft, allowing them to retreat into harbors that the Germans could not use if necessary. The German fleet would be fighting a war it was not designed to fight, in waters it was never intended to fight in, against an enemy that held every strategic and tactical advantage. Such a foray by the German fleet would have been highly improbable. No country would risk their fleet, and thereby their national security, on a venture that was almost sure to end in failure. It is a certainty that the United States did not have to fear any action by the German Battlefleet at this point in time.

The evidence presented in this chapter make a good case for the arguments proposed by Vagts. He claims that the fear of Germany was created by Roosevelt and other pro-navy supporters to gain support for further naval funding, which Congress had turned down in 1901. American writers clearly overrated or intentionally misrepresented Germany's naval strength for many years. A simple comparison of the statistics of American and German battleships in Jane's *Battleships of the 20th Century*[21] demonstrate the decisive edge the United States ships had over contemporary German vessels. To claim that German naval power was superior to the United States' in 1902, as Mitchell does, plainly ignores the facts. The fact that Germany was not superior to the United States actually supports Mitchell's assessment that Germany was being cautious throughout the affair. It is very convincing evidence that Germany was not after territorial gain, because it had no way of supporting such a move militarily.

Notes

1. Erich Gröner, *Die Deutschen Kriegsschiffe 1815-1945,* (Munchen: J. F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1966), 68 and Bernard Ireland, *Jane's Battleships of the 20th Century,* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 28.

2. Gr6ner, *Die Deutschen Kriegsschiffe,* 70 and Ireland, *Jane's Battleships,* 28.

3. See Herwig, *"Luxury" Fleet* and Peter Padfield, *The Great Naval Race: The Anglo-German Naval Rivalry, 1900-1914,* (New York: David McKay Co., 1974).

4. Alfred von Tirpitz, My *Memoirs,* 2 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1919) 1: 120. See also Herwig, *"Luxury" Fleet* and Padfield, *The Great Naval Race.*

5. Padfield, *The Great Naval Race,* 55.

6. Herwig, *"Luxury" Fleet,* 37.

7. Tirpitz, *Memoirs, 1:* 197.

8. Ibid., 1: 160-162. See also Herwig. *"Luxury" Fleet* and Padfield *The Great Naval Race.*

9. Ibid., 160, 234-235.

10. Ireland, *Jane's Battleships,* 28 and Gröner, *Die Deutschen Kriegsschiffe, 72.*

11. The Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute 28 (Fall 1902): 636-637.

12. *The Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* 29 (Spring 1903) : 967.

13. Ireland, *Jane's Battleships,* 28 and Gröner, *Die Deutschen Kriegsschiffe,* 73.

14. Tirpitz, *Memoirs,* 173.

15. Ibid., 171.

16. Baer, *"One Hundred Years,"* 49-5 1.

17. John H. Maurer, "Fuel and the Battle Fleet: Coal, Oil, and American Naval Strategy, 1898-1925," *Naval War College Review* 34: 6 (Fall 1981): 66-67.

18. Ibid., 67.

19. The Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute 28 (Fall *1902): 640* see also Modelski and Thompson, *Seapower in Global Politics, 1494-1993.*

20. For U.S. Battleship Construction see D. W. Taylor, "A Handicap on United States Battleships;" H. G. Gillmor, "Battleships of the United States Navy;" Richard Wainwright, "Our Naval Power;" and H. W. Wilson, *"Modern War Vessels," 716.*

21. Ireland, *Jane's Battleships.*

CHAPTER V

THE QUESTION OF INTENT

Alfred Vagts, in *Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten in der Weltpolitik*[1], has done an exhaustive search of German archives and found no evidence of any German designs on Venezuelan territory during the 1902-1903 blockade. Throughout the blockade, and before, Germany did its utmost to assure the United States that this was the case. This study has shown that Germany lacked sufficient naval strength to establish and support such a base in the Caribbean. American military strength in the region was supreme and growing stronger.[2] Vagts goes into great detail denying the Roosevelt narrative and defending Germany from the charges of territorial ambition. He says little about Germany's actual intent in the crisis. In this account, Germany was only after the collection of debts. Mitchell believes that more emphasis needs to be placed on German intent in the blockade; she thinks that better Anglo-German relations were the goal. German actions in the crisis point to a different direction. In fact, the major member of the alliance, England, also had different motivations in the Venezuelan blockade. The stated purpose of the action was debt collection but this might have proved a convenient cover for both England and Germany to achieve other ends.

By comparing the strengths and weaknesses of both the United States and German Navies and the policies that governed the building of these fleets, it is certain that neither fleet had any cause to worry about attack from the other's battleships. Both sides lacked the range necessary to threaten the other's homeland and each country's ships had certain deficiencies

that would prove detrimental if they had attempted such a feat. The deep draft of the German vessels would limit their usefulness in the western Atlantic/Caribbean and the slower speed and low freeboard of the United State's battleships would severely hamper operations in the North Sea. As the primary mission of both navies was defense of their homelands, overseas operations were unlikely.

German naval planning did not rule out future use of the fleet for colonial expansion. Perceptions of the German fleet varied on both sides of the Atlantic. The Germans thought in long-range terms. They did not intend the naval building program to catch up with the rest of the world overnight. The fulfillment of the plan was not to be complete until after a twenty-year period, when the first new battleships would be completed to replace the old ones. This would create a cycle of building that would be set down by law and not open to scrutiny by government bureaucrats. Not until this process was complete did Tirpitz envision embarking on imperialist missions. Germany then could use long-range cruisers, in the manner of England, to establish its will around the globe. The threat of the battle fleet would prohibit any country, even Great Britain, from interfering with German plans.[3]

Theodore Roosevelt viewed the growing German fleet as an immediate threat, a feeling shared by many others. Admiral Tirpitz noted that by "the year 1900 it was universally felt that Germany was about to take the unavoidable step towards a world-policy and to send her flag after her trade as closely as possible." Yet, the Reichstag had turned down the cruisers targeted for foreign service use in 1900. Tirpitz himself declared that he would have "preferred the whole of the foreign-service fleet to be canceled in 1900" to divert funds to building battleships.[4]

In the United States the fear of Germany was very real. As mentioned earlier, the Monroe Doctrine had become central to United States foreign policy. Americans viewed the Caribbean as an area critical to the national interest, and as the Panama Canal project moved closer to implementation, the United States became more determined to uphold the doctrine. The Spanish-American war of 1898 had ousted one European power from the region and the United States had no desire to allow any new powers to gain access to the Caribbean.

When the Venezuelan crisis began, leaders in the United States began to see a threat to the Monroe Doctrine. The first sign of trouble resulted from the sinking of the Venezuelan warships. Colorado Senator Henry M. Teller wanted the United States to intervene in the situation. He believed that "the Monroe Doctrine ought to be extended to prevent the oppression of any of the South American nations by a foreign power and that we should not draw the line upon the acquisition of territory."[5] Senator Cullom, head of the Committee on Foreign Relations, warned "If the troops of the allies should start overland . . . I should deem it the duty of this Government promptly to call a halt on the ground that this would have all the appearance of first steps in the permanent acquisition of territory."[6]

Territorial conquest was not a primary goal of Germany in the Venezuelan crisis. The Germans knew, as the English did, that the United States had fleet maneuvers going on in the Caribbean at this time, which included both the North and South Atlantic squadrons and the Mediterranean Squadron as well. Germany had only four ships in the blockade, a second-class cruiser, two third-class cruisers, and a gunboat. The modern battleships and cruisers of the combined United States fleet would have quickly overwhelmed the assembled fleet of Britain, Germany, and Italy (which had two cruisers participating in the blockade).

Occupying territory would definitely have brought the United States fleet into the region in protection of the Monroe Doctrine. On December 19, the London *Times* reprinted a semi-official statement from the *Cologne Gazette* that said that "Germany has no more idea of seizing tracts of territory in Venezuela than of planting her flag on the mountains of the moon." They recognize that "any such step would be bound sooner or later to lead to a collision with the United States." They cite the fact that Germany was not increasing its naval forces nor making preparations to land ground forces as proof of this claim.[7]

Germany did not attempt to expand its forces in the region. If they planned to grab territory, they needed troops to secure their gains. The ships involved did not have enough manpower to capture and hold even a small part of Venezuelan territory. The *Panther*, for instance, had a crew of only 130 officers and men. The German cruisers carried about the same.[8] When the Germans captured the Venezuelan gunboats, they could spare no men for prize crews and this is why the vessels were sunk. If the Germans could not manage to spare a few men to crew these captured vessels, they did not have any to spare to capture any base in Venezuela. If Germany had planned to take and hold territory, it would have had to supply troops from Germany to accomplish this task.

In 1902, Germany was not prepared for this type of operation. Amphibious doctrine was an idea of the future. In 1902, the method used to transport troops to foreign shores was that used by the United States in the Spanish-American War. They embarked troops in whatever transport was available, moved to the target area and rowed ashore in wooden boats. This worked well when the landings were unopposed, but Germany could be assured that the United States would not idly stand by while they landed troops in Venezuelan

territory. The presence of the entire United States fleet in the Caribbean at this time virtually guaranteed opposition to any such move.

In the past, Germany had experienced problems with this sort of troop deployment. Germany had sent 24,000 troops to China during the occupation of Kaiochow, a move that Admiral Tirpitz opposed. The admiral was extremely critical of the "bungling preparations for the miserable China Expedition" and "the deficient matériel and defective mental qualifications of the Army administration" in matters not concerning a European ground war.[9] It was unlikely that Germany would attempt such an expedition to Venezuela with the existing United States naval superiority in the region.

Germany never contemplated sending troops. This would have required the mobilization of transports and warships to support such a move. At the very beginning of the blockade, Germany determined not to mobilize any more vessels for use in the action. On December 12, they decided that "from a political point of view a further increase of the blockading squadron appears undesirable." The Kaiser stated "I am against sending more of our ships from home! Our flag is represented, so let us leave England to take the first step."[10] Wary of American sensitivity, Germany was not going to risk starting a war with them by sending even a few more warships.

Another possible explanation for German intentions in the blockade is the stated purpose of the mission. Perhaps the Germans were really after the collection of overdue debts. This also seems doubtful considering the actions taken by Germany during the crisis. Only a few days after the blockade began, all of the interested powers agreed to arbitration to settle the debt problem. If debt collection was the purpose, then this should have ended

the joint action against Venezuela. However, Germany prolonged the blockade for months by demanding immediate payments that the Venezuelan Government could not afford.[11]

It is highly unlikely that the German government would have kept up the costly naval operations in the Caribbean if monetary reparation had been the goal. As the earlier examples of German diplomacy of this period show, the Kaiser's government was extremely opportunistic, and would use any event to their benefit. Yet, a military expedition to Venezuela was out of the question at this time because of the limitations of the German navy. Germany ostensibly embarked upon the blockade for the recovery of monetary obligations as did England. Yet debt collection was really only a secondary goal of both governments.

In January 1903, Admiral Charles Bereford of the British Royal Navy commented on the Anglo-German alliance: "No sensible person believed that Germany and England started out to settle a debt. It was an attack on the Monroe Doctrine. England and Germany had an idea that they had a grievance with Venezuela. No doubt they had, but the situation was absurd."[12] Although not an official statement, there is probably some truth behind the words.

The main grievance the British had with Venezuela had nothing to do with debts, but with the seizure of British-owned vessels by the Venezuelan navy. Trouble began over the rights to Patos Island, which Great Britain had claimed from Venezuela in 1901, in direct violation of the Monroe Doctrine. Venezuela did not recognize English sovereignty over the island and Castro's gunboats frequented the waters off Patos harassing British Vessels. England wanted to destroy the Venezuelan navy and debt collection was just an excuse to accomplish this mission.

These events began in January 1901, the Venezuelan gunboat *Augusto* "seizing and

deporting certain British Subjects." The seizure of the English vessels *Buena Fé, Maria Teresa, Pastor, Indiana* and *In Time* followed this incident.[13] In the most flagrant case a Venezuelan warship captured the *Queen*, on a voyage to Trinidad, and confiscated her papers and sails on "a bare suspicion of having carried a cargo of arms to Venezuela." The Venezuelan Ship then destroyed the ship, "the crew being put on shore and left destitute."[14]

The British wanted Venezuela to cease all such activity and to pay reparations to the owners of the ships in question. It was almost an afterthought that claims owed to the British Railway Companies were added to the list of grievances.[15] When Germany defined the grievances of both parties to the blockade, it listed England's primary or "first-class" claims as resulting from "the illegal removal and destruction of English merchant-ships." It listed the demands of the English railways as "second-class" claims.[16] However, the English government was careful not to qualify its demands to Venezuela, although the British acknowledged that the claims for destruction of its shipping were the first priority. Great Britain hoped that the seizure of the Venezuelan gunboats would prove the end of the affair and that no blockade would prove necessary.[17] By December 16, the British press was already calling for arbitration, even before receiving the news of Castro's proposal. From that point on, Germany feared that England might desert the alliance.[18] Great Britain had achieved its main objective with the capture and destruction of the Venezuelan gunboats. This is why England accepted arbitration more readily than Germany. The gunboats were the aim and intent of England in the Venezuelan blockade. This would end Venezuela's ability to harass British vessels on the high seas and to interfere with the territorial claims on Patos Island.

The debt collection was not that critical an issue with Great Britain. The capture of

the warships had spurred Castro to action, in referring the case to the United States for arbitration. England and its investors could expect some sort of arrangement to be forthcoming. This was the goal from the beginning and the British achieved this aim within a few days. Great Britain was forced to continue the action because of the arrangement with Germany to seek no separate peace.

As far as debts, Germany did have some outstanding claims against Venezuela. Count Paul von Metternich, Ambassador to England, listed the claims from the Venezuelan civil war of 1898-1900 at 1,700,000 bolivares, from the ongoing civil war at the time at 3,000,000 bolivares and the claims of creditors, primarily the Disconto Gesellschaft at 41,000,000 bolivares.[19] The total debt was equal to approximately 55,400,000 marks.[20] This was a tremendous amount of money in 1902. Thus, German claims against Venezuela were justified.

However, reasons still exist to suspect that Germany had other motivations. In March 1902, the Kaiser's brother, Prince Henry, visited the United States. Chancellor von Bülow advised the Prince that "The events in South and Central America should not be discussed by Your Royal Highness of your own initiative, and naturally there must be no admission of German intentions in those regions." Any American worries over "acquisition or influence in connection with Central or South America . . . should be dismissed as absurd imaginings."[21] When these comments are added to the statements of Admiral Bereford cited above, German intentions become suspect.

Two other facts raise suspicion about German intent. The first is the cost of the enterprise. Venezuela owed Germany some fifty-five million marks, but the Kaiser estimated

the cost of the military intervention (with just the four small vessels) as between fifty and sixty million marks.[22] If the debts were really Germany's intention, surely there was a less expensive way to recover the funds. The second item is the method employed. Germany was asking for a repayment of debts, but the customs houses of the major ports were the Venezuelan government's major source of income. The blockade effectively blocked all traffic too and from these ports, making the repayment of debts impossible.[23] Territorial acquisition was not feasible and debt collection a dubious claim. Germany must have had other intentions in mind during the Venezuelan crisis.

Notes

1. Vagts, *Deutschland.*

2. See Langley, *"American Mediterranean,"* 186 and Healey *"Drive to Hegemony,"* 102-103.

3. Tirpitz, My *Memoirs,* 142-165.

4. Ibid., 162-163.

5. *New York Times,* December 14, 1902.

6. *The Times* (London), December 15, 1902.

7. *The Times,* December 19, 1902.

8. Groner, *Die Deutschen Kriegsschiffe,* 203.

9. Tirpitz, My *Memoirs,* 145, 215.

10. Wilhelm II, commentary on von Bulow to Wilhelm II, December 12, 1902, *Die Grofle Politik der Europdischen Kabinette 1871-1914,* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft ffir Politik und Geschicthe M.B.H., 1924), 17: 260.

11. Charlemagne Tower to John Hay, December 24, 1902, *Foreign Relations* 1902, 427.

12. *New York Times,* January 15, 1903.

13. Memorandum on existing Causes of Complaint against Venezuela, No. 108, July 20, 1902, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1901-1902,* vol. 45, ed. Richard W. Brant and Willoughby Maycock, (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1905), 1064-1068.

14. Memorandum communicated to the German Ambassador, No. 127, October 22, 1902, *State Papers,* 1076-1078.

15. Ibid., 1077.

16. Memorandum communicated by Count (Paul von) Metternich, No. 137, November 13, 1902, *State Papers,* 1083-1084.

17. The Marquess of Lansdowne to G. W. Buchanan, No. 140, November 17, 1902, *State Papers,* 1085-1086.

18. Mitchell, "Height," 201.

19. Memorandum communicated by Count (Paul von) Metternich, No. 137, November 13, 1902, *State Papers,* 1083-1084.

20. Calculated from exchange rates published in *The Times* (London), October 1, 1902.

2 1. German Note XVII. 243. *German Diplomatic Documents, 18 71-1914,* 4 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers: 1930) 161-164.

22. Wilhelm 11, commentary on Bernhard von Bulow to Wilhelm 11, November 3, 1902, *Grofle Politik,* 17:246-249.

23. Parsons, "German-American Crisis," 447.

CHAPTER VI

GERMAN INTENT IN THE BLOCKADE OF VENEZUELA, 1902-1903

Some reason exists to doubt German intentions during the Venezuelan crisis. As this study shows, Germany was not capable of taking territory at this time. In the work of Vagts and Mitchell, Germany never contemplated such a move. Yet the high cost of the blockade and the methods employed in enforcing it rules out debt collection as the only goal. Defining German intent now becomes problematic. As Marks has discovered, critical pieces of the German diplomatic record are missing from the period in question. No documentary evidence of a systematic plan regarding the Venezuelan crisis exists. The argument over debt collection and territorial expansion originated due to this lack of documentation. Historians on both sides of the controversy have found much circumstantial evidence to disprove each theory. What they have overlooked is a third possibility.

When Germany and England allied to blockade Venezuela in December 1902, it was a strange partnership. Theodore Roosevelt believed that "such a combination would be one of utmost folly for England, because she is certain to have her paws burned, while the nuts would go to Germany."[1] As Roosevelt predicted, the British would encounter problems from this alliance, which, as this study will argue, was the intention of the Germans from the beginning.

Germany's strategy was to downplay their role in the crisis, creating the appearance that Great Britain initiated the action, was in charge of the whole affair, and was therefore at fault if any international repercussions were forthcoming. The Germans then began to employ

aggressive methods in enforcing the blockade, which the British did not agree with, designed to arouse fears within the United States that the Monroe Doctrine was under attack. Simultaneously, the Germans tried to convince the British that the United States's diplomats were intentionally trying to ruin relations between England and Germany.

Much conjecture exists over which country first suggested the joint blockade. British documents point to Germany as the instigator. In July 1902, the German ambassador to England, Count Metternich, approached the British Prime Minister, the Marquis of Lansdowne, and suggested a pacific blockade of Venezuela. Lansdowne agreed to confer with Germany on the matter, but asked for time to consider the matter fully.[2] There is no doubt that Germany first considered the coercion of Venezuela and were prepared to proceed on their own until the British joined them in the venture.[3]

The main concern of Great Britain was its international image. The English government suggested that a seizure of the Venezuelan navy might be "the most convenient form of coercion." Germany readily agreed but still advocated a blockade as well. Lansdowne was concerned that a pacific blockade was not adequate for their purposes, while "a belligerent blockade might involve us in troublesome questions with the powers." Great Britain initially opposed any form of a blockade.[4]

Germany insisted on a blockade and approached the United States government to ask if it had any objections to a pacific blockade. John Hay replied that Roosevelt had defined the United States position in his annual message to Congress in 1901. Roosevelt stated that the Monroe Doctrine only guaranteed "that there would be no territorial aggrandizement by any non-American power on American soil." This policy "has nothing to do with the

commercial relations of any American power" and the United States will not "guarantee any State against punishment if it misconducts itself, provided that punishment does not take the form of the acquisition of territory by any non-American power."[5] The Germans expressed their concern to England that the United States "might raise difficulties if portions of Venezuela remained occupied for some time." This is why they stressed a pacific blockade over a warlike blockade.[6]

The first element of the German plan was to tie the two allies together. Metternich was adamant that each country, when presenting its ultimatum to Venezuela, should "call attention to the claims put in by the other." Each party should agree that "neither Government should be at liberty to recede except by mutual agreement." Later, this agreement would prove troublesome for England as friction arose between the allies and Britain wanted to end the action. England had to support the Germans although its actions went against British policy, Germany bombarding Venezuelan forts and landing troops to ensure their destruction. Any misdeeds that the Germans might commit implicated their British allies.[7] On November 29, 1902, Germany repeated the joint nature of the blockade. The German government "understood that the two powers were to act together until the claims of both had been satisfied." The German Navy had moved four warships into position off the Venezuelan coast and were meeting with the Royal Navy to coordinate operations.[8]

If the seizure of the Venezuelan warships did not prove sufficient to coerce Venezuela, England held the conviction that only two other options were available, a "seizure of customs houses or other important points on Venezuelan territory" or a blockade. The British believed that they should avoid the first option at all costs, because if the occupation

proved prolonged, "troublesome international questions might arise between the Powers involved and the United States Government."[9] Nor did Great Britain agree with the idea of a pacific blockade. They felt that any blockade must necessarily be warlike in nature. They saw a need to "come to an agreement with the Germans as to the explanations which each of us might offer of the measures taken to enforce the blockade by the two powers." England saw these "measures as implying a condition of war." Lansdowne was concerned that Germany might "assert that we have misled them," and wanted to reach an agreement before the opening of the blockade so that they could not "pretend that we have done so." These fears were entirely justified.[10]

When the blockade took effect on December 9, 1902, the Germans began to use aggressive tactics of enforcement. After the capture of the Venezuelan fleet, German warships promptly sank two of the Venezuelan warships. On December 13, they joined in a combined attack on two forts at Puerto Cabello. The German ships moved into close range to ensure the destruction of the forts and their occupants. It was after these preliminary actions that the first signs of trouble with the United States emerged. The Germans were quick to point out to the United States that "Germany was at first inclined to a pacific blockade, but that Great Britain insisted on establishing a warlike blockade." Germany also claimed that "it had been the intention of Germany to confine the combined operations in Venezuelan waters to a peaceful blockade" and it emphasized that "Great Britain had declined a proposal to that end."[11] Germany was attempting to place the blame for their own aggression on the British.

While incriminating their allies, Germany was also trying to keep itself from looking

bad. The Chancellor, von Bülow, was concerned that the Kaiser might send more warships to enforce the blockade. He suggested that they rely solely on the four ships already enforcing the blockade, believing that any increase might cause trouble with the United States. Von Bülow urged that Germany also allow the British to "continue reinforcing her squadrons" to alleviate some negative press "in the British and American press to the effect that Germany was the chief instigator." This had the added bonus of making it appear that Britain was leading the blockade by virtue of having a much larger fleet participating in the action.[12]

Mitchell writes that Germany followed the British lead throughout the crisis and was very cautious in its handling of the United States and the Monroe Doctrine.[13] However, the Germans continued to commit acts guaranteed to antagonize the United States. They landed troops on Venezuelan territory and occupied buildings. On January 17, 1903, the German fleet attacked the fort at Maracaibo. The British commander on the scene was greatly upset. He cabled London: "German Commodore, acting quite independently and without consulting either Montgomery or myself, appears to have commenced bombarding at Maracaybo. I entirely disagree with his action." The British had ordered its ships not to "land men, nor bombard forts, nor sink any ships" without direct orders from the Admiralty. The Germans followed their own agenda, despite pledging to work with the British. The sinking of the Venezuelan vessels, the landing of troops and occupation of Venezuelan property along the independent shelling of the fort at Maracaibo proves that Germany was not following the British lead in any manner.[14]

While practicing actions that could only arouse suspicion and anger from the United

States, Germany informed the British that they would stop creating problems for them. On December 18, the German Government promised that they would "in future treatment of the Venezuelan question, not do anything which might provide more 'ammunition' for use against the British Government." Germany "would spare no efforts in order to dispel the false impressions which had been created, and to disprove the calumnies which had been circulated."[15] The actions of their fleet, especially the bombardment of Maracaibo in January, were in direct opposition to this official statement. The British were enforcing the blockade; the Germans clearly had more in mind. Possibly, the Germans saw the blockade as a chance to bring down its main enemy, Great Britain, and create an opportunity to increase Germany's international position by creating rift between England and the United States.

Germany could gain many benefits by splitting the United States and England. The first would be to compel the United States to step up the building of its fleet. Admiral von Tirpitz explains: "Every warship constructed anywhere in the world except in England was ultimately an advantage for us because it helped to adjust the balance of power at sea."[16] The United States had stepped up construction of battleships after the Spanish-American war, but Congress had voted down a further increase in 1901. If Germany could create a fear of Britain in the United States, the Roosevelt administration would have no choice but to begin a rapid build up of its fleet. This would weaken England's hold on the world's oceans, exactly the result Germany wanted.

One of the main goals of Germany's naval plan was to gain an alliance value with foreign navies. This was not an original concept to Tirpitz. The German Admiralty first conceived the idea in the 1880's. In 1902, of all the naval powers in the world, only one was

not either anti-German or already allied with other powers: the United States. France was a mortal enemy of Germany. Russia might have been a possibility, but France had an alliance with the Czar. Another growing power, Japan, had allied with Britain earlier in 1902. The only major naval powers that an alliance was possible with were the United States and England. Germany had developed their naval bill to challenge England, so the United States had to be the focus of the alliance efforts. It was the only major naval power that had no alliances with any nation. Tirpitz's memoirs suggest that there was a prevailing hope within German leadership, which he did not necessarily subscribe to, that the United States might become "a useful assistant to us against the British dictatorship of the seas."[17]

If one key intention of the German naval plan was to create an alliance value, the United States is the most probable target for such an combination. America had no alliances with other European powers. When England had proposed an alliance with Germany in 1901, the Kaiser turned it down. His first question was "against whom" and the reply was "Russia." Wilhelm II refused to enter such a bargain, since Germany, on the continent and bordering Russia, would face the brunt of the fighting in an event of a war while England, a naval power, could do little to assist them.[18]

Germany wanted a naval alliance. Existing alliances and the political situation of Europe excluded all but the smaller nations, such as Denmark and Holland, from consideration. These countries would be unable to alter the balance of power at sea in any way. Only two naval powers had no ties to Europe in 1902, the United States and Japan. Great Britain successfully negotiated a Japanese agreement in 1902. That leaves only one possible naval power for Germany to ally with: the United States.

Even if an alliance with the United States did not take form, the breakdown in Anglo-American relations would create other possibilities in this area. Territorial gains in South America were not out of the question for Germany later. The Monroe Doctrine only remained intact throughout the 1800s by the good graces of the British. England had unchallenged naval superiority throughout this period, as they did in 1902-1903. If they had wanted to establish colonies in the Americas, the United States could not oppose them. England had taken Patos Island in 1901 without a word of reproach from the United States. Great Britain and the United States had come to an agreement on the Monroe Doctrine because of the Venezuelan boundary dispute of 1895. The English had formally recognized United States hegemony over the region, recognizing the validity of the Monroe Doctrine.

The rest of Europe, Germany included, did not recognize the Monroe Doctrine. A division between England and the United States would remove British support for the United States policy. Germany would not have to fear intervention by the Royal Navy in any colonization attempts. Germany could not lose if their plan succeeded. A split between England and the United States would weaken the British diplomatically and militarily. Th If the United States thought England was a threat, they would be forced to build more warships for protection. The sheer size of the Royal Navy would have made it expedient for the United States to seek naval alliances with foreign countries, which was Germany's hope. Even if an alliance with the United States did not materialize, the action would open possibilities of territorial gain in the Americas for Germany. While no direct evidence of a plan exists, the reconstruction offered here fits well with German long-range goals and its actions during the crisis.

However, Germany underestimated the suspicion with which the Americans and British viewed them. The disputes beginning over the incident at Manila Bay during the Spanish-American war had created problems between the United States and Germany that they had never resolved. The United States viewed the Germans as trying to interfere with their interests and the Venezuelan affair was no different. Britain was equally suspicious of Germany, and the Boer war had left many with a firm hatred of the Germans. When the British allied with Germany in the Venezuelan crisis, that action drew almost immediate criticism from the British press and the public. In such an atmosphere, the German plan, if plan there was, to undermine Anglo-American relations was sure to fail.

In the Venezuelan Crisis, the United States identified Germany as the threat immediately. Sir Michael Herbert, the English Ambassador to the United States, wired London that "there is a growing feeling of irritation in Congress . . . chiefly owing to the bombardment and the sinking of Venezuelan ships." The Roosevelt administration was "not suspicious of us, but it is undoubtedly suspicious of German designs. The impression prevails in Washington that Germany is using us."[19] The British press reported that the United States's "Suspicions, anxiety, demands for the cessation of naval energies are, so far as they exist, directed at Germany."[20] One German newspaper commented on the situation in the United States: "The entire Press makes Germany responsible for the present situation. Spiteful articles everywhere appear with attacks on Germany, while England is praised . . . all the papers assert that Germany intends to obtain colonies in Venezuela, as well as Brazil."[21]

Britain quickly moved to pacify the fears of the United States. On December 16, Lord

Cranborne, a leading member of Parliament, gave his assurance that "no country is more desirous than England to assist the American Government in maintaining the Monroe Doctrine."[22] Throughout the crisis, the English did not take any actions that were in any way a threat to Venezuelan sovereignty. It was their allies, the Germans, who created the trouble with the United States by testing the limits of the Monroe Doctrine. The English actions relieved the United States. On December 29, Herbert wrote to Lansdowne: "It is perhaps satisfactory to note the absence of apprehension about the course pursued by Great Britain and the confidence universally expressed that she has no intention of questioning the Monroe doctrine." Herbert points out that statements by Lord Cranborne and the Prime Minister, when added to the "outcry in the English Press against joint action with Germany" produced in the United States "a revulsion of feeling in favour of Great Britain."[23]

When Venezuela appealed to the United States for arbitration of the dispute, the United States quickly suggested this course of action to the Germany and England. Within days of the outbreak, both powers had tentatively agreed to accept arbitration. The British wanted to get out because they had achieved their aims, and Germany wanted to look good internationally. Both agreed to submit to arbitration, but this action, if fulfilled, would upset the plans of Germany. By stipulating that they would only accept arbitration if the Venezuelan government paid them $325,000 immediately, they managed to prolong the blockade. They knew that with the horrible financial state of Venezuela, President Castro could not come up with this amount of money. The English, due to the promise that they could not agree to terms separately from the Germans, were forced to continue the blockade although they wanted it ended.[24]

By January 1903, German actions were producing the exact opposite of their apparent intentions. Herbert wrote from Washington: "the outburst in this country against Germany has been truly remarkable, and suspicion of the German Emperor's designs in the Caribbean Sea is shared by the Administration, the press and the public alike." He contends that "the friendly relations between Great Britain and the United States, instead of being impaired, have, if anything, been strengthened by the Venezuelan incident." Not only was Germany bringing together the two countries that they wanted to tear apart, but they were gaining an increasingly bad reputation within both the United States and Britain as well.[25]

Rumors increased the ill-will against Germany. In December, the British press reported that German ships were "loitering about the Island of Margarita, which the Emperor was once supposed to covet."[26] This was picked up and amplified in the United States, as were the rumors that circulated in January that a group of German investors posed a threat to the Panama canal project. These investors reportedly sought to "acquire Colombia's interests in the Panama Canal Company."[27] The German government quickly and vehemently denied these reports, and no evidence exists to prove either charge. However, this did little to quell the rising anti-German sentiment in the United States or Britain.

In at least two instances, commentary on the crisis correctly identified the German plan. Sir Herbert, the British Ambassador, noted "the flattery lavished upon" the United States by the Kaiser, and the "persistent attempts made by German Diplomacy to . . . sow dissension between great Britain and the United States."[28] Similarly, the *New York Herald* of December 16, 1902, which stated that "the 'wicked partner' in this affair is the German Emperor." Increasing friendship between the United States and Great Britain "is the cause

of great anxiety to the Kaiser." The real motive behind the attempts to improve German-American relations were to "destroy that cordiality." To achieve this end, "the Emperor has cajoled the British Government into acting with him."[29]

As the German plan began to unravel, its government changed tactics. To show their loyalty to the British as allies, Germany claimed that Venezuela had offered to make a separate settlement with Germany before the blockade, but out of honor, Germany remained loyal to the British. They claimed that this was an attempt by Venezuela to detach the Germans from the allied cause. They then insisted that the British follow their obligation to act in concert with the Germans.[30]

Failing to incite the United States against England, Germany attempted to provoke the English against the United States. Herbert Bowen, the United States Ambassador to Venezuela, was responsible for making the arrangements for arbitration between the powers and Venezuela. He became the focus of German accusations. On February 4, 1903, Metternich informed Landsdowne that "Bowen was apparently attempting to detach Germany from [Great Britain] by holding out separate inducements to [the German] representative at Washington." Germany would not "be influenced by these machinations, and would co-operate loyally" with the British.[31]

Apparently there was much truth to the accusations. Bowen helped the German cause by admitting to the Italian Ambassador that "the main principle of his diplomacy was to create discord" between Germany and England.[32] On February 7, Lansdowne wrote that "Bowen's object appears to be not to facilitate an equitable settlement but to create dissensions between the powers." Yet the real problem was not Herbert Bowen but the Germans.

Germany refused to retreat from its demands. They wanted payments that Venezuela could not make. Ambassador Herbert wrote to London on February 7, 1903, that "a settlement could be reached today if we were alone." The problem was the German conditions. He added that "If we are bound to support the German . . . demands, which are, in my opinion, unfair . . . let Germany propose to break off negotiations, but do not let the proposal come from Great Britain." Herbert felt that they had reached an impasse and that negotiations were about to break down. The British wanted to end the blockade, but their agreement bound them to stay in it until the end.[33]

The United States and especially Theodore Roosevelt also wanted an end to the blockade. This was clear to Herbert. He warned Lansdowne that conditions had changed since December and "our good relations with this country will be seriously impaired if this Alliance with Germany continues much longer. The time has come, in American opinion, for us to make the choice between the friendship of the United States and that of Germany." If German planned to divide the countries, it still had some chance of succeeding, especially if there was much more delay.[34]

Something drastic had to occur for the stalemate to be broken. Ambassador Herbert was sure that no settlement was near on February 7, yet all three powers signed a protocol on February 13, and they lifted the blockade on February 16. Germany had altered its position and backed off on its demands. During that week, something of significance had influenced German thinking. This, as some historians have pointed out, was the most likely moment for Theodore Roosevelt's alleged ultimatum.

The most enduring puzzle of the Venezuelan crisis is this supposed threat to the

Germans. As noted earlier, Roosevelt's version has problems, because Germany readily agreed to arbitration when the United States proposed it in December. It was at that point that they stipulated the large payment from Venezuela as a prerequisite. Arbitration was not the problem that created the stalemate in negotiations, rather it was Germany's stern refusal to back down on its monetary claims. Germany hurriedly dropped its claims during the week of February 7-13, 1903. If Roosevelt did threaten the Germans with the United States fleet, it was surely at this time and not in December.

Another possibility would be that Germany feared that Britain might turn against them. Popular opinion in England had been against the alliance from the beginning. Lansdowne had held fast to his alliance agreement, but in February, Germany worried that Lansdowne might be in trouble with public opinion at home. Metternich wrote to von Bülow that any further deterioration in relations between England and the United States "may be dangerous for him and his ministry." Metternich believed that if Roosevelt insisted on an end to the blockade, "the British Government might fall at once. A fresh ministry, replacing the present one as a result of having co-operated with Germany, would mean a serious danger to official Anglo-German relations."[35] Germany wanted to challenge British superiority at sea, but now was not the time. Their naval building program had barely begun, and Germany wanted to avoid open hostility with England. The realization that any agreement with the United States was impossible at this time may have also influenced the German change of attitude. They had done enough damage to their relations with the Americans. They did not want to damage it any further with Great Britain.

For whatever reason, Germany policy quickly reversed. It was certain by now that

their plans had failed. Instead of improving their position in relation to the United States, Germany had increased the bad feelings that had existed between the two countries since the 1890s. Germany had not successfully divided the United States and Britain. The blockade did not weaken the Monroe Doctrine, but helped to legitimize it. The whole affair was a spectacular failure for German diplomacy.

It has been the purpose here to propose a possible explanation for German intentions in the Venezuelan blockade. In diplomacy, no country does anything without having some motivation behind it. In this instance, the British probably hoped to improve relations with the Kaiser, but Mitchell's contention that Germany sought only to better relations with Great Britain makes little sense. German fleet building and their drive to become a world power focused on weakening England's control of the seas. Germany had much broader goals in mind; their foreign policy was based on undermining British strength in any manner possible. Germany possibly saw in the blockade an opportunity to achieve these ends. The methods that it employed in prosecuting the blockade produced provocation in the United States as intended. Germany attempted to downplay their role and to make it appear that Britain was responsible for the indiscretions. Germany also tried to achieve the same purposes creating problems for the United States with Britain.

The Venezuelan affair is a perfect example of the bad diplomacy that is often associated with Germany under the Kaiser. While no one knew the exact nature of their planning, Germany could not disguise their actions or pass them off on the British. The failure of Germany to recognize how much distrust and suspicion existed against them in The United States and England was the biggest mistake of their diplomacy.

During the three-month period, from December 1902 to February 1903, Germany possibly tried to ruin relations between the United States and Great Britain. There is circumstantial evidence in the documents that cover the period. The object was to weaken the enemy, England, with whom Germany had allied temporarily during the crisis, and to strengthen Germany as a result. The outcome was the reverse of Germany's intentions and they only succeeded in cementing Anglo-American friendship and ruining German relations in both countries. This failure of German diplomacy was to have lasting effects, leaving the United States suspicious of Germany for many years to come.

Notes

1. Theodore Roosevelt to Henry Cabot Lodge, March 27, 1901, *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt,* 8 vols, Ed. Elting E. Morison (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 195 1), 3:31-32.

2. Marquis of Lansdowne to Mr. Buchanan, July 23, 1902, *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914, 11* vols. (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1927), 2:153-154.

3. Mitchell, "Height," 187-188.

4. Marquis of Lansdowne to Sir F. Lascelles, October 22, 1902, *British Documents,* 2:154.

5. Roosevelt's Annual Message to Congress, December 3, 1901, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1901,* (Washington, 1903), ix-liv.

6. Lansdowne to Buchanan, November 26, 1902, *British Documents,* 2:157-158.

7. Lansdowne to Buchanan, November 11, 1902, *British Documents,* 2:15 6.

8. Lansdowne to Buchanan, November 29, 1902, *British Documents,* 2:159.

9. Lansdowne to Metternich, December 2, 1902, *British Documents,* 2:160.

10. Note by the Marquis of Lansdowne, December 8, 1902, *British Documents,* 2:16 1.

11. See Carlemagne Tower to Hay, December 14, 1902, *Foreign Relations 1902,* (Washington, 1903), 42 1; and Tower to Hay, December 17, 1902, *Foreign Relations 1902,* 421.

12. von Bulow to Wilhelm 11, December 12, 1902, *Die Groβe Politik,* 17:258-260.

13. Mitchell, "Height."

14. Commander-in-Chief, North America and West Indies, to Admiralty, January 23, 1903, *British Documents,* 2:165-166.

15. Von Bulow to Metternich, December 12, 1902, *Die Große Politik*, 17:266-268. See also Lansdowne to Lascelles, December 18, 1902, *British Documents*, 2:162.

16. Tirpitz, 1:233.

17. Tirpitz, 244.

18. Wilhelm II, *The Kaiser's Memoirs*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1922), 104-107.

19. Sir Michael Herbert to Lansdowne, December 16, 1902, *British Documents*, 2:162.

20. *The Times*, December 17, 1902.

2 1. Cited in *The Times*, December 20, 1902.

22. Ibid.

23. Herbert to Lansdowne, December 29, 1902, *British Documents*, 2:163-164.

24. Tower to Hay, December 24, 1902, *Foreign Relations* 1902, 427.

25. Herbert to Lansdowne, December 29, 1902, *British Documents*, 2:163-164.

26. *The Times*, December 18, 1902.

27. *The New York Times*, January 15, 1903.

28. Herbert to Lansdowne, December 29, 1902, *British Documents*, 2:163-164.

29. Cited in *The Times* (London), December 17, 1902.

30. Lansdowne to Lascelles, February 5, 1903, *British Documents*, 2:170-171.

31. Landsdowne to Lascelles, February 4, 1903, *British Documents*, 2: 169.

32. Landsdowne to Lascelles, February 4, 1903, *British Documents*, 2: 17 1.

33. Landsdowne to Lascelles, February 4, 1903, *British Documents*, 2: 172.

34. Ibid.

35. Metternich to von Bulow, February 4, 1903, *Die Große Politik*, 17:288-289.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In 1902, both the United States and Germany believed that a fleet of powerful battleships was necessary as a naval power. In a naval war, the battle fleet would engage the battleships of the enemy and decide the outcome of the war. Both countries did possess large battle fleets at the time of the Venezuelan crisis, but the chance of their ever confronting each other was negligible. Germany could not get her fleet across the Atlantic to face the Americans and the United States Navy had a similar situation. The apparent parity of the fleets is also misleading because the United States battleships of the period were far superior to contemporary German battleships in almost every respect. Simple arithmetic does not work here. Germany could have had twice as many battleships as the United States and still have been no threat to the situation in the Caribbean.

Pro-Roosevelt historians would like to believe the story of Roosevelt wielding the "big stick" against the wily Kaiser, but the story is not altogether accurate. No doubt exists that Roosevelt used the presence of the Navy to his benefit in the crisis. No one will probably ever know whether Roosevelt delivered the supposed ultimatum or not. The exact nature of this "ultimatum" needs clarification. In most studies, historians imply that this meant war between the two countries. Yet Roosevelt only claimed to be sending Dewey's fleet to monitor the situation and make sure the Germans did not take any Venezuelan territory.

This study has shown that war between the United States and Germany was not a possibility during the Venezuelan crisis due to the limitations of the warships of these

countries. Americans misjudged the German threat to the United States at the time. Many subsequent historians, notably Mitchell, have done the same. Some Americans knew the reality of the situation. Admiral Dewey, during the height of the crisis, commented on his assembled fleet: "Germany could not possibly get a fleet over here that could fight such an aggregation."[1] This is a very accurate assessment of the situation.

German intent is another aspect of the crisis that warrants more intention. The goal was definitely not territorial gain. The stated purpose, debt collection, is also suspect. This study has suggested another explanation for German intentions that fits not only the situation but the long-range goals of the Kaiser and his government. Germany thought the Venezuelan crisis could help them challenge the British command of the seas. By destroying Anglo-American relations, many opportunities would arise for Germany. This failed because the United States and England viewed Germany with too much suspicion. Germany tried to hide its actions behind its English allies, but from the beginning Germany was singled out in the United States as the instigator and leader of the Venezuelan Blockade. The entire affair was a disaster for German diplomacy, making its own relations worse with both the United States and Great Britain. Relations between the United States and England came out even stronger than before the crisis, completely the opposite of German aims.

The long-term effects of the Venezuelan Blockade were many. Great Britain removed its navy from the Caribbean in recognition of the superior strength of the United States in the region. Germany never mounted another military expedition to the area. In April 1903, as a direct result of the Venezuelan Crisis, Theodore Roosevelt made the first public announcement of his Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. The most lasting effect was

to German relations with the United States. The Venezuelan crisis marks the lowest point in German-American relations to that date. As the German fleet began to expand under Tirpitz' plan, Britain began a naval arms race with Germany that played a large role in starting the First World War. By 1910, Germany had become the second largest naval power in the world. By now, however, no opportunity existed for the alliance that Tirpitz had wanted. The Venezuelan Blockade was only a part, but a significant one, in a series of foreign relations blunders that led to war in 1914.

Notes

1. Quoted in Parsons, "German-American Crisis," 442.

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