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The Concurrent Conferences:
The Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference of 1922

by

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Thesis

Submitted to the Department of History and Philosophy

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in

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Dedicated to my beloved wife, Gabriel, with love and thanks

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ABSTRACT

The Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference of 1922 occurred concurrently and were the first major post-World War I conferences to address post-war issues. The Washington Naval Conference sought to avoid the outbreak of future hostilities by reducing the total tonnage of capital ships in each signatory nation's fleet to only that of a defensive force. The Far Eastern Affairs Conference sought to modify and modernize the relations of its signatories in China to create stability by removing many of potential sources of future conflicts due to conflicted diplomatic privileges. Both conferences had successes and failures diplomatically but both worked concurrently to create a system of treaties that helped create peace and stability in Europe and Asia for a decade. This examination of both conferences is unique because it uses materials from during the conferences and written afterwards to provide a new examination of these events.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1922 the five most influential powers in the world, as defined by military might, economic development, and diplomatic standing, met together in Washington D.C. to create a system of treaties to refine the post-World War I world. These five Great Powers met together in two interlinked and concurrent conferences, the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference. Each conference addressed a specific and focused agenda, and the success of both was vital if a new system of balance between the attending Great Powers were to be successfully created. In 1922 each of these five Great Powers - the United States, Great Britain, France, Japan, and Italy - for the first time since 1919 collectively evaluated the global balance of power between them and sought through diplomacy to avoid future sources of potential conflict. The lessons from World War I were still fresh in the minds of these attending statesmen in 1922. By 1914 nationalist agendas had pushed the Great Powers into a spirit of competition rather than cooperation, and these conferences were part of a series of ongoing diplomatic efforts in the 1920s and the 1930s to avoid those same mistakes that had sparked World War I. This thesis specifically challenges the long-held historical perception that the diplomacy of the interwar years was a complete failure because it did not successfully address the political instability created by the rise of both Japanese militarism and Nazi Germany in the 1930s. It argues that the two major diplomatic efforts of the early 1920s, the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference, were actually both successes because they achieved stability among the major powers, even in the turbulent Far East, that allowed for a decade of peace and international order.

Both conferences began on 12 November 1922 and met continuously until 6 February 1923. The Washington Naval Conference was only attended by delegations of the five Great Powers, while, in contrast, the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was attended by delegations from the five Great Powers plus China, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Portugal. Each of these attending powers had direct interests in China, its surrounding territories, or within the Pacific Ocean. The Washington Naval Conference focused upon the issue of naval armament levels and worked to create a universal treaty that would gradually reduce each signatory's naval capacity over a decade to a fixed comparative ratio of strength. The Washington Naval Conference addressed this goal by reducing the number of capital ships held by each of the Great Powers until their respective fleets would be able to adequately defend their standing territorial interests but also be inadequate for aggressive war. Beyond naval ratios, this conference also addressed other issues of armaments; it formulated a revolutionary treaty on submarine warfare that regulated the conduct of submarines as commerce raiders. These regulations reduced the value of submarines in aggressive war but still allowed their use as a defensive option. The conference also formulated a treaty expanding the earlier prohibition in the Versailles Treaty of 1919 on the use of poison or asphyxiating gases; the Versailles Treaty prohibited their use to Germany and the Washington Naval Conference expanded that ban to all the Great Powers. The Washington Naval Conference was not a unilateral success; it attempted and failed to regulate the use of airplanes in combat and was unable to even open discussions on the topic of reductions in Great Power land forces.¹

¹ James Brown Scott, "Conference on the Limitation of Armament and Problems of the Pacific," *The American Journal of International Law* 15, no. 4 (July 1921): 503 – 505; Charles H. Levermore,

The Washington Naval Conference's treaty regulating the use of submarines as commerce raiders was unique because it required submarines prior to attacking commercial shipping to complete a series of steps to prevent the loss of civilian life. The conference delegates knew that these steps would be impossible to follow and still allow a submarine to serve as an effective commerce raider, so this treaty was seen at the time as an indirect ban on submarine commerce raiding. What was revolutionary though about this treaty was that it held submarine crews and their captains personally responsible for any violations of the treaty terms, irrespective of whether their government or military command ordered the submarines' officers and crew to violate the treaty terms. Any submarine crew captured violating the agreed treaty terms was to be treated as pirates by the capturing nation. This regulatory framework on submarine commerce raiding was the result of a compromise between British, French, and Italian interests regarding submarine regulation versus prohibition; the principle of military figures being held personally accountable for their actions even if acting under orders was a powerful one that would long outlive this initial appearance. Despite this long-reaching success, all the work of the conference, from the submarine treaty to the capital ship ratio treaty, required careful diplomacy and the Great Powers compromising their national interests before any successes were achieved. The Washington Naval Conference did not overcome national tensions or Great Power ambitions, but instead it channeled them into mutually acceptable compromises. What made this conference particularly successful is that despite nationalist drives and competing Great Power goals,

Second Yearbook of the League of Nations: January 1, 1921 – February 6, 1922 (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 1922), 220, 367, 402

the final treaties successfully maintained the global balance of power while also causing far-reaching reductions in the naval power of each signatory nation.²

In contrast to the Washington Naval Conference, the Far Eastern Affairs Conference had a more checkered record of success; most of the agreements struck at this conference simply maintained or broadened existing foreign nations' positions and privileges in China and the Pacific. The Far Eastern Affairs Conference was originally called to defuse through negotiation growing Great Power tensions that were primarily over China. Great Britain, France, the United States, and Japan each had direct commercial interests within China due to past treaties and investments; of these four powers, Japan and the United States were in the most direct diplomatic conflict in 1922 over China's future. Japan, heavily invested in Manchuria and granted in 1919 Germany's former Chinese territorial concessions, was highly interested in maintaining the status quo in China. The United States, in contrast, had an interest in China being transformed from a nation divided into exclusive economic zones, respectively the spheres of influence held by Great Britain, France, and Japan, into a nation entirely and equally open to all foreign trade. Balanced between the ambitions of Japan and the United States was the newly formed Chinese Republic. Beset by civil war and political uncertainty, its delegation at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference attempted through diplomacy to radically challenge the status quo in China. In essence, the Chinese delegation hoped to use the conference to transform China from a near vassal of the Great Powers into a unified and independent regional power. Although the United States supported the ideal of the Chinese Republic gaining greater control over the

² Yamato Ichihashi, *The Washington conference and after; a historical survey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1928), 72 – 77; Levermore, *League of Nations handbook*, 331 – 333.

administration of China, it willingly compromised this ideal to gain its own goal of open trade. For this reason, throughout the conference the United States only used its influence to assist the Chinese Republic in gaining meager additional administrative authority within China.³

The major accomplishment of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was the creation of the Nine-Power Treaty. This omnibus treaty granted the Chinese Republic conditional autonomy over China's mail system and radio communication network: the first contingent on the Chinese Republic ensuring the regular operation of the mail and the second contingent on the Chinese Republic purchasing any radio stations it wished to control. Beyond those two concessions, the Nine-Power Treaty maintained the Great Powers' established privileges within China. The Chinese Republic had requested at the conference that the Great Powers give up their territorial grants within China, but this request was simply ignored by the Nine-Power Treaty. The Chinese Republic requested the Great Powers end extraterritoriality, the Nine-Power Treaty permitted the issue to be studied for possible future action, the study duly occurred, and no changes were ever actually implemented. The Chinese Republic requested that all unauthorized foreign troops stationed in China be withdrawn, the Nine-Power Treaty also left this to future study and possible resolution, and again no change was actually made. The Chinese Republic finally requested the right to control its own taxation of imports, but this request was flatly denied in the Nine -Power Treaty as being contrary to open trade. The Nine-Power Treaty fixed all import taxes in China for the upcoming decade and forced the Chinese Republic to renounce a tax on internal trade in exchange for a limited

³ Ichihashi, *The Washington Conference and after*, 178 – 192; Levermore, *League of Nations*, 260 – 261, 276.

concession, an update to the permitted tariff tables. The only major gain achieved by the Chinese Republic while the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was in session occurred outside the conference proper, the directly negotiated Shantung Treaty between it and Japan, which returned the Shantung Peninsula from Japanese control to the Chinese Republic.⁴

The other major diplomatic accomplishment achieved during the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was also negotiated outside the conference proper; however, its successful negotiation was vital to the success of both conferences. The Four-Power Accord, signed between Japan, the United States, Great Britain, and France created a treaty of mutual assistance between the four signatories applicable to conflicts arising in a specific but broad portion of the Pacific Ocean. This new treaty pledged the signatory powers to mutual consultation, and possible joint action, in the event of any conflict between the signatories arising anywhere within most of the southern and central Pacific Ocean. Although not a full defensive alliance, the Four-Power Accord replaced an older Pacific-oriented defensive alliance between Great Britain and Japan. This new accord was vital because before Japan would agree to any concessions in China or on naval armament levels, it needed a treaty of mutual defense to replace the expiring Anglo-Japanese alliance. In turn, the United States desired a new treaty that would replace the expiring Anglo-Japanese defensive alliance and prevent both of these powers potentially opposing the United States in the event of a future Pacific conflict between America and Japan. Great Britain also wanted this new accord to succeed to improve its diplomatic relations with the United States while at the same time not angering Japan. The final

⁴Raymond Leslie Buell, *The Washington Conference* (London: D. Appleton and Company, 1922), 23-25, 256-261.

signatory, France, was brought into the treaty to increase its defensive value for Japan and because of French interests in Indochina and the Pacific region covered by the treaty. The Four-Power Accord also included practical concessions. All the signatory powers agreed not to build new military fortifications or installments, nor to improve ones already in existence, within the region covered by the new accord. This aspect of the agreement was strongly desired by Japan, and its inclusion further reduced the Japanese government's concern about its position in the Pacific or China being challenged in the future.⁵

To fully understand the work of both conferences, it is useful to understand the diplomatic position of each of the attending Great Powers and some of the major events that occurred from 1919 to 1922 that shaped their relative positions in the world. The next chapter examines each of the Great Powers attending both conferences and their relative strengths and weaknesses, and provides a more detailed overview of the major events of both conferences. The second chapter focuses exclusively upon the work of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference and the intricate diplomacy within and around the conference itself; the third chapter provides a similarly focused examination of the work of the Washington Naval Conference. The fourth and final chapter examines the impact of the work of both conferences and places both conferences' successes and shortcomings within the broader stream of events that made up the later 1920s and the 1930s. When reading each of the upcoming chapters it is useful to remember that for each conference the overriding goal was to maintain stability through a system of treaties, treaties balancing national interests and reducing armament levels.

⁵ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 103 – 134

PRIOR TO THE CONFERENCES: THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

From 1918 until 1921 the great powers - Great Britain, the United States, Japan, France, and Italy - focused almost exclusively upon immediate challenges in their individual spheres of influence. The only international issue they addressed was the spread of Communism. However, in 1921 these same five great powers met in the first large scale international conference since the Versailles Treaty negotiations of 1918 to 1919 to discuss issues that were multinational in scope. This conference, the Washington Naval Conference, was actually two linked conferences simultaneously meeting to address growing issues in China and the Pacific islands and to find a means of mutual arms reduction for all the attending powers. But the Washington Naval Conference of 1921 was far more than a simple meeting of nations to address these immediate issues; it was a continuation of the work begun at the Versailles Treaty negotiations in 1918. As had been begun at the Versailles Treaty through the mandates system and the disarmament of Germany, this conference was a major effort by these great powers to further outline their respective spheres of influence and ensure that the global stability and peace between themselves that arose post-World War I would remain unbroken. At this conference the attending powers by direct negotiation created a series of treaties that enhanced the relative diplomatic stability of the 1920s, creating a decade of peace rather than Great Power tension and regional instability.⁶

The historically better known Washington Naval Conference of 1921 was an effort by the attending great powers through mutual agreement to jointly limit their ability to project naval power aggressively and challenge any other power's sphere of

⁶ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987), 275 – 276.

influence. In the 1920s military planners and political leaders thought any effort by one great power to challenge another's sphere of influence would hinge on each power's relative naval strength. Therefore all the naval arms limitations agreements signed at the Washington Naval Conference were pragmatic agreements between the great powers to confine their ambitions within certain recognized geographic limits. By the end of the conference, the greatest arms reduction success was the agreement between the participating nations to limit the number and fighting capability of their capital ships, which was thought to be a key step to ensuring stability and reducing any risk of war between the great powers. The success of this conference at achieving naval arms limitations was not due to idealism on the part of any participating nation, but to a cold pragmatism that guided each attending nation's delegation. That self-serving pragmatism required that to avoid a ruinous and dangerous naval arms race, each attending nation would have to accept mutual naval limitations. Much of the drama and historically interesting material from the documentation of the Washington Naval Conference records the story of how these mutual limitations were created and agreed upon. Unfortunately this material, and the topic of the Washington Naval Conference, has been neglected by modern historians since post-World War I historical writing has focused more upon causes of World War II rather than the preventative diplomacy of the 1920s.⁷

⁷ The historical work available on the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference is woefully inadequate. No historical works analyzing these conferences have been produced since Buell's 1922 *The Washington Conference* and Ichihashi's 1928 *The Washington conference and after; a historical survey*. Later scholarly work putting the work of both conferences in a broader historical context has been limited as well; few recent academic works utilize any materials produced about the conferences in the later 1920s, and the most recent academic articles analyzing the impact of just the Washington Naval Conference were produced in the late 1980s and early 1990s. No significant scholarly work has emerged in any format that addresses the impact or complexities of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference.

From 12 November 1921 until 6 February 1922, the Washington Naval Conference and the Conference on Far Eastern Affairs, both organized by the United States government, met concurrently. The conferences were both formally opened on 11 November 1921 with the keynote address being given by President Warren G. Harding of the United States.⁸ Overall both of the conferences were dominated by a spirit of cooperation between the attending great powers; several differences in policy between them did not derail this conference as they did many future efforts at disarmament. Negotiations between the five attending great powers were dominated by two major underlying immediate goals; first, arriving at an agreement to contain simmering clashes of interest in the Pacific between Great Britain, Japan, and China; and second, to ensure a naval balance between the great powers that would preclude aggression. Despite some fundamentally clashing national goals, such as the determination of the United States' delegates to support the emerging Chinese republic's efforts at self determination, or the French delegation's efforts to win agreement to their creating a fleet equal to Great Britain's in effective strength, both conferences were successful at forging lasting compromises that superseded nationalist goals. Traditional historical analysis of the Washington Naval Conference's importance has focused solely on its limited material successes, the total number of ships destroyed due to naval disarmament agreements, and the economic impact that reduced fleet sizes had on national budgets of the 1920s⁹; however, naval disarmament was also a diplomatic effort to preserve a delicate balance of power between the Great Powers that appeared likely to destabilize in 1921.

⁸ Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History 1919 – 1933* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), 838.

⁹ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 375-376.

On the issues of naval disarmament and Pacific/Chinese regional stability, France and Great Britain were the two attending great powers with the greatest motivation to preserve the existing balance of power since both stood at the pinnacle of their post-World War I power and global influence in 1921. France in that year regained Alsace-Lorraine, gained access to the industrial wealth of the Saar basin under the Treaty of Versailles, and expanded its colonies by gaining *de facto* control over Syria and Lebanon within the Middle East and Togoland and Cameroon in Africa. Militarily in 1921 France was a dominant power with the largest standing land army, one of the top fleets in tonnage afloat, and an air force equal to that of the other great powers. However, despite its dominant appearance in Europe, France could not hope to sustain this illusion of strength because its economy in prosperity could only just support the French military in 1921. One indicator of this French economic weakness was that by 1921, the French franc had fallen to one fifth of its pre-World War I value. One key reason for France's weak economy, despite its expanded territory, was that France lacked the population reserves to fully rebuild in 1921 due to its losses in World War I. Due to war casualties, France by 1918 had lost one quarter of its male population between the ages of eighteen and twenty-seven, losses far from replenished by 1921. Another key reason France's economy was weak in 1921 was that its northeastern territories had been badly devastated by the conflict. French industrial and mineral production was still below its pre-World War I production levels; by 1921 even the damage of the German invasion had still not been completely eradicated from the countryside. Finally France's international economic position was also weak because it had lost most of its overseas investments during the war, in particular due to the fall of Tsarist Russia, and France was deeply in

debt to the United States. All of these factors combined to require France to attempt to safeguard its global position through diplomacy as it could not do so easily in conflict; economically France was too weak for war or costly arms races.¹⁰

France in 1921 was an important nation on a global scale but it was not in a position to dominate global politics; French arms alone had not proven victorious in World War I and it was unlikely France would triumph alone in any serious future conflict with another Great Power.¹¹ Throughout the early 1920s, French foreign policy centered upon ensuring stability through treaty and diplomacy, including at the Washington Naval Conference. An indicator outside of the Washington Naval Conference of this French foreign policy direction was the series of French diplomatic initiatives in Eastern Europe, in particular their encouragement in 1921 of the formation of the Little Entente, an allied military bloc composed of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania.¹² The Little Entente was created to offset the potential threat offered to France by Germany and thereby ensure stability within Europe itself. In the 1920s the government of France focused primarily upon the potential German menace but also simultaneously worked to ensure the stability and security of its global colonial position as well. France, in its foreign policy drive for stability and safety through diplomacy, mirrored the dominant foreign policy of Great Britain in the early 1920s.

Because of World War I, Great Britain and France diplomatically became closely linked in policies, a joint position maintained on many foreign policy issues in the 1920s.

¹⁰ Richard Overly and Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Road To War* (New York: Random House, 1990), 107-108.

¹¹ James Wilkinson and H. Stuart Hughes, *Contemporary Europe: A History* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004), 150.

¹² Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1998), 66.

Militarily Great Britain in the 1920s had the most powerful fleet in the world, measured by tonnage, a powerful air force, and spent a considerable sum per year to maintain its military might.¹³ France and Great Britain, acting in concert in the early 1920s, would have dominated any conflict militarily, but in July 1919 the British cabinet enacted a policy that all military planning would be predicated on the idea that “the British Empire will not be involved in any large war over the next ten years...” Great Britain’s foreign policy efforts in the 1920s, at least in regards to other great powers, would be achieved through treaty and negotiation, the same tools being used by France.¹⁴ Great Britain and France from 1919 through 1922 respected each other’s colonial spheres of influence but divided on the issue of stability within continental Europe. France wanted Germany to remain weak and economically crippled, while by 1922 Great Britain desired Germany to begin to regain some of its former position within European affairs. Great Britain’s statesmen sought Germany’s recovery to regain a valuable economic market and to offset perceived French continental strength. British popular opinion supported these ideas generally and sympathized with Germany. By 1922 some vocal segments in Britain even supported a readjustment of Germany’s eastern territorial boundaries, returning to Germany some of its land lost under the Versailles Treaty in 1919.¹⁵ Winston Churchill elegantly spoke of the British attitudes towards both Germany and the French demands for security in this period:

The British temper towards Germany, which at first had been so fierce, very soon went as far astray in the opposite direction. A rift opened between Lloyd George and Poincaré, whose bristling personality hampered his firm and far-sighted policies. The two nations fell apart in thought and

¹³ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 826.

¹⁴ Overy, *The Road to War*, 65.

¹⁵ John Golby and others, *War, Peace and Social Change: Europe 1900 – 1955*, Book III, *Between Two Wars* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1990), 238.

action, and British sympathy or even admiration for Germany found powerful expression.¹⁶

Britain's softening attitude towards Germany angered France, straining diplomatic relations between the two nations by 1922. This tension was also fueled when Great Britain bowed out of the possibility of an Anglo-French security accord when the United States rejected the Versailles Treaty in 1920.¹⁷ These existing diplomatic tensions between France and Great Britain colored both nations' actions at the Washington Naval Conference. Although both worked together to broker stability in China and the Pacific, achieving simultaneous global naval stability proved challenging.

Like France, Great Britain's economy from 1919 – 1921 entered a period of comparative decline due to flagging British industrial production, a diminished British share of global trade, and an outflow of government capital to repay British war debts, primarily to the United States. In contrast, though, to France in this period, Great Britain could more effectively utilize its imperial holdings to its economic advantage. Britain's imperial territories throughout the 1920s provided an extensive market for British exports and concurrently a source for cheap raw materials. In 1921 the British Empire in geographic area was three times, and in population density five times, the size of the French Empire.¹⁸ France and Great Britain came into post-World War I economic competition in several areas, mainly in the newly opened markets of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. The growing economic competition between France and Great Britain, and the disparity in their colonial holdings, helped fuel an atmosphere of mutual animosity at the naval limitations negotiations. The French delegation, reflecting this

¹⁶ Sir Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. 1, *The Gathering Storm* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), 12.

¹⁷ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 183.

¹⁸ Overy, *The Road to War*, 63-67.

tension, insisted on fleet parity with Great Britain multiple times during the negotiations on the grounds that both nations were great powers with global reach. The British delegation, considering this a threat to Great Britain's security, in turn throughout the conference actively resisted this demand by the French.¹⁹

In contrast to France and Britain at the Washington Naval Conference, the United States was extremely interested in creating a system of fixed fleet strength ratios between the great powers. Prior to the Washington Naval Conference, the United States was rapidly expanding its capital ship fleet, continuing a policy it had begun in 1916. This policy of fleet expansion by the United States was due to its foreign policy in the period, which was region specific diplomatic engagement or isolationism. From 1919 – 1921 the United States distanced itself from political issues in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa as long as these political issues did not impact United States' trade. However, the United States maintained a keen interest in political affairs in the Americas, the Pacific Ocean, and China. As a matter of economic and political policy, the United States wished to maintain its open access to as many markets around the globe as it could, particularly the Chinese market. Due to the United States' Pacific territorial holdings and its strong presence in the Chinese market, the 1920s was a period of intense Far Eastern focus for United States foreign policy. The United States' rapid naval building program begun in 1916 was undertaken to ensure that the United States, without alliances, could defend its coasts and protect its Pacific regional position, and in the Americas and Asia successfully resist any single foreign challenger. By 1920 the United States, although behind in its

¹⁹ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 183-185.

planned naval construction schedule, was very close to equality with Great Britain in total tonnage and guns afloat in capital ships.²⁰

The United States' extensive naval growth in the 1920s competed directly with Japan's navy; diplomatically in the same period Japan and the United States were competing over influence in China. Although the United States had the larger capital ship fleet of the two, Japan, due to its strong defensive alliance with Great Britain, expected British naval aid in the event of war with the United States, offsetting America's capital ship advantage. Japanese and American strategic planners were unsure of the true balance of power between their respective nations in the Pacific in 1921 and this uncertainty sparked tension between the two nations' political leadership. Japan by 1921 was an emerging great power and a formidable regional power within both the Pacific and northern China. By 1921 already a colonial power, Japan was also a growing financial power due to its rapid economic growth and position as a creditor nation to France and Great Britain. The Japanese domestic economy from the turn of the century to 1921 had performed miracles, but by 1921 it was showing strain due to the demands placed upon it by Japan's naval building. Japan in 1921 came to the Washington Naval Conference looking for a diplomatic compromise; it needed to balance its ambitions within Asia against those of the United States as a direct competition between the two could have ruined Japan's economy. Japan at the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference also needed to ensure its defensive strength within the Pacific because by 1921, Great Britain was wavering in its commitment to the Anglo-Japanese defensive alliance. Due to this, one of the main goals of the Japanese

²⁰ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 375.

delegation at the conference was to create a substitute means through diplomacy of ensuring the safety and stability of Japan's position in the Pacific and within China.²¹

Each of the four great powers attending the Washington Naval Conference reviewed so far can be paired off based on diplomatic rivalries, France in competition with Great Britain and Japan in competition with the United States. The fifth attending great power, Italy, was the odd man out in this regard as it entered the Washington Naval Conference with no initial rivals. Italy was not seen initially as a threat to the other attending great powers because Italy simply could not compete with them economically, militarily, or even politically. Italy avoided conflict at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference because it was not invested economically or politically in the key regions of concern at that particular conference. Italy's delegation at the Washington Naval Conference focused solely on gaining French naval concessions to improve Italy's position in the Mediterranean and therefore became a secondary rival to France diplomatically only after the conference had begun. British and French antagonism in the Mediterranean encouraged Italian ambitions at the Washington Naval Conference. In the Mediterranean, France was finally forced by diplomatic pressure to concede to Italy's naval goals. By the end of the Washington Naval Conference, France, due to its treaty enforced capital ship parity with Italy, was forced to accept a regionally inferior naval position to Italy in the Mediterranean.

For France, Great Britain, the United States, and Japan, the western Pacific and mainland China were the colonial regions that were the most likely potential centers of future conflict. Each of the four great powers' political leaders had uncertainties about the region; France, for example, lacked the military power in the region in 1921 to protect

²¹ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 375-76.

its interests in Indo-China against all aggressors. Therefore, France needed to find a way, through diplomacy, to safeguard its position within the region. Great Britain, in contrast, in 1921 could project military power into the region that was adequate for defense of its interests; however, if Britain was forced to defend its Pacific holdings against the United States or Japan without allies, it was unlikely that it could concurrently ensure the security of its other regional commitments. The United States, with its massive potential for fleet expansion and its powerful fleet in 1921, had the potential to place sufficient military forces into the Pacific to defend its interests against any single aggressor. But American naval planners were unsure of victory if the United States was forced to fight Japan and Great Britain simultaneously, a hypothetical risk due to the Anglo-Japanese defensive alliance still nominally in force in 1921. Therefore, due to the uncertain balance of power in the region, any diplomatic breakdowns had the potential to become nasty and destructive regional wars. Rising diplomatic tension between the United States and Japan in 1921 was therefore a source of concern for all the powers attending the Far Eastern Affairs and Washington Naval Conferences.²² Resolving this growing diplomatic competition between the United States and Japan and ensuring long-term stability within both the Pacific region and mainland China was one of the major goals and major successes of both conferences.

The creation of a treaty-based solution to great power tensions over mainland China and the Pacific region was one of the great accomplishments of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference; it also indicates the position of both conferences as watersheds in early inter-war diplomacy. From 1919 to 1921, many smaller diplomatic conferences

²² Raymond Leslie Buell, *The Washington Conference* (London: D. Appleton and Company, 1922), 51-62.

occurred. In 1921 alone, prior to the Washington Naval Conference, Great Britain and France met four times, along with a varying pool of other powers, to resolve diplomatic issues sparked over the interpretation of the Versailles Treaty and reparations payments schedules for Germany.²³ However, these diplomatic conferences occurring prior to the Washington Naval Conference were limited in focus, called haphazardly, and only France and Great Britain met semi-regularly to attempt to resolve foreign policy questions in a collective manner through direct negotiation. When the Washington Naval Conference and Far Eastern Affairs Conference both convened formally on 12 November 1921, it was the first meeting of all the great powers simultaneously since the Versailles Treaty negotiations. The Washington Naval Conference, like the Versailles treaty negotiations before it, modified the global balance of power by redefining the balance of strength and position between the attending nations. Both the Far Eastern Affairs Conference and the Washington Naval Conference had a profound impact on the diplomacy of the 1920s and were a key component in the establishment of a period of pan-global stability.

The single diplomatic accomplishment that is most prominently associated with the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference is the multi-national accord that agreed to reduce naval armaments. That particular treaty was one of the great accomplishments of both conferences, but the treaty to limit naval growth, formally titled the Five-Power Limitation of Naval Armament Treaty, would not have been possible without the successful negotiation of a series of other treaties first. These other treaties created an environment of diplomatic trust between the attending powers

²³ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 837 (Paris Conference 24-30 January, London Conference 14 March, London Conference 29 April – 5 May, Paris Conference 19 June.)

that was a necessary foundation for successful disarmament. The other major treaties negotiated at the Washington Naval Conference that made up this diplomatic framework were primarily several treaties to normalize the existing conflicting systems of great power privileges within China. Additional key treaties included an accord to regulate submarine warfare and prohibit the use of poison gas in battle, and the Four-Power accord, a treaty requiring the signatories to mediate disputes in the Pacific before resorting to armed conflict. Of these treaties, those dealing with China and the reduction of naval arms obligated their signatory powers to complete a series of clearly defined actions, often to a very specific timetable. Conversely, the Four-Power accord obligated its signatory powers to use a specific philosophy of conduct in their foreign relations, mediation before armed conflict. Although no treaty negotiated at the conference included enforcement clauses, the treaties on China and limiting naval strength were “harder” treaties; non-compliance with these treaties’ terms by a signatory power would have caused negative foreign policy ramifications for the violating nation. The treaties of the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference were negotiated in a new diplomatic spirit, they relied upon the force of moral and popular pressure to ensure compliance, that and the mutually shared benefits enjoyed by all the signatories through global political stability.²⁴

Despite the potentially valuable advantages the Naval Limitations Treaty offered by creating greater political stability, the negotiations for this treaty were generally acrimonious because the signatory nations all found it difficult to compromise their national goals. The primary goal of the Naval Arms Limitation Treaty was to prevent

²⁴ Charles H. Levermore, *Second Yearbook of the League of Nations: January 1, 1921 – February 6, 1922* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 1922), 237-397.

future naval warfare by limiting each nation's total capital ship tonnage and naval military strength. This goal was to be achieved by reducing the capital ship tonnage afloat in 1921 through scuttling, restricting future capital ship construction over the upcoming decade, and limiting each individual capital ship's military power. The scope of this treaty was extensive; the three main signatory naval powers, Great Britain, the United States, and Japan, agreed to scrap 23 capital ships, 30 capital ships, and 17 capital ships, respectively, with Japan further agreeing to abandon its planned construction of an additional four capital ships and four cruisers in the next few years. Although Italy and France were not required to scrap any of the capital ships they possessed in 1921, they were expected to agree to a fixed future naval construction schedule, which in turn would effectively reduce their overall naval strength in comparison with the other signatory powers. By 1932 the treaty stipulated that Great Britain, the United States, Japan, France, and Italy would have capital ship fleets whose strength, respectively by ratio and measured in tonnage, would be 5-5-3-1.75-1.75. The Naval Arms Reduction Treaty planned for this ratio to be achieved gradually over a ten-year span through a controlled schedule of ship refitting, construction, and scrapping.²⁵ Although the Naval Arms Limitation Treaty was successfully negotiated, it required extensive diplomatic work to achieve. The planning of this treaty was filled with acrimony and debate. In the third chapter of this treatise, the controversies are reviewed in depth; however, in general these disputes occurred because each of the signatory nations in turn stalled the negotiations of the treaty due to serious nationalist concerns. The treaty, though, was successfully negotiated despite these initial challenges because its goal of preventing great power

²⁵ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 152-154.

conflicts and promoting regional stability, especially in the Pacific, was too important to the attending signatory powers to allow the negotiations to actually fail.²⁶

Another major treaty formulated by the Washington Naval Conference jointly limited by agreement the signatories' conduct of war. This treaty, agreed upon by all the attending great powers, expanded an earlier ban on the use of poison gas on the battlefield and regulated the use of submarines as commerce raiders. The subcommittee that wrote this treaty discussed limitations on the use of three new weapons of war that originated in World War I: submarines, poison or asphyxiating gases, and modern aircraft. The committee's decision on poison gas was comparatively simple: all the powers agreed to expand and extend the ban on the use of these substances first initiated in the Versailles Treaty of 1918. Conversely, the committee also easily decided that modern aircraft had too much potential as future weapons to be restricted by a treaty, so the effort was abandoned by mutual consent. The committee was decidedly challenged by the issue of submarines as commerce raiders. Formulating a treaty solution to this issue that met the demands of the British and French delegations took weeks of negotiation. Eventually the committee was able to create a series of regulations that forbade submarines to attack merchantmen at sea unless the merchant vessel was first halted, searched, and legally seized, and the passengers and crew taken to safety before any destructive force was used against the merchant ship. Furthermore the treaty stated that any captains of submarines taken prisoner who acted in violation of these rules were to be treated as pirates by the capturing nation, even if the captain was obeying direct orders from his governing nation. The specific text of this treaty will be looked at in greater depth in the third chapter. A final point of interest with this treaty is that it

²⁶ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 152-163; Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 376.

recognized in its own clauses the impossibility of a submarine conforming to these regulations! Therefore this treaty as written was considered by the signatories to be an indirect ban on the use of the submarine as a commerce raider, a compromise that was able to partially assuage British concerns and demands on the issue of submarines and their use, while still allowing the French the freedom to build a submarine fleet for defense.²⁷

One of the two major treaties resolved outside the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was the Four-Power Accord. Although it was negotiated outside the formal conference structures, this treaty was vital to both conferences' success. The Four-Power Accord required that Great Britain, the United States, France, and Japan attempt to avoid future conflicts with each other through mediation of inter-power disputes rather than resorting to armed force. The Four-Powers Accord also specified that in the event of any one of the contracting powers resorting to warfare against another contracting power, the other signatories would "communicate with one another fully and frankly as to the most efficient measures to be taken, jointly and separately, to meet the exigencies of the particular situation."²⁸ The vagueness of these requirements was deliberate and will be analyzed more fully in the third chapter; however, beyond this vague definition of action to be undertaken in the event of conflict, the treaty also had two additional key limitations built into it. First, the Four-Power Accord applied only to disagreements occurring in the Pacific regions covered by the sections on fortifications in the Naval Arms Limitations treaty, and second, the treaty would expire after ten years. Despite these limitations, the Four-Power Accord was vital

²⁷ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 206 – 221; Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 375-376.

²⁸ Levermore, *Second Year Book of League of Nations*, 297.

because it adjusted the balance of power in the Pacific by replacing the more potentially destabilizing Anglo-Japanese defensive alliance of 1904. For Britain, this new treaty proved the means by which it could remove itself gracefully from its no longer politically useful defensive alliance with Japan and yet spare itself the dishonor of abandoning a loyal ally. For the United States, the Four-Power Accord was a significant diplomatic victory because it removed the risk of an Anglo-Japanese defensive alliance in the Pacific and therefore reduced the risk of a belligerent Japan in the region. By allowing Great Britain, the United States, and France the political freedom to check Japanese expansion in the Pacific jointly, the Four-Power Accord also made Japan more cautious in its foreign relations, further promoting Pacific regional stability.²⁹

The major set of treaties and resolutions negotiated at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference focused upon China and key Pacific islands. These treaties were vital to avoiding great power conflict in the Pacific and within China, but were struck at a high cost to China. The Far Eastern Affairs Conference modified tariff law in China and cemented into international law the idea of open markets within China. The treaties also recognized Japan's semi-colonial position within China, a vital concession to ensure the success of the Washington Naval Conference.³⁰ These treaties will all be reviewed in far greater detail in the second chapter, but all of the treaties of the Washington Naval Conference and Far Eastern Affairs Conference are unique because they were some of the first "openly negotiated" accords. None of these treaties were secret understandings between states in the style of older foreign affairs but instead were diplomacy on a public stage; the final decisions reached at this conference were going to be discussed on a

²⁹ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 172-200; Levermore, *Second Year Book of the League of Nations*, 297-298.

³⁰ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 172-200, 240-368.

global scale. Each agreement reached by the conference delegates could be reviewed by each delegate nation's domestic population and was certain to invite controversy and commentary, accolades, and accusations; it was highly likely that few would find these compromises ideal and very unlikely that any would consider the final products perfect. The results of the Washington Naval Conference, along with a brief sketch of the relative positions of each of the powers attending, have been presented in the preceding pages; this broad overview for many post-World War II historians is sufficient attention for both the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference.

However, modern historical work has missed some of the underlying worth of the work of both conferences; many primary and secondary sources on the Washington Naval Conference and Far Eastern Affairs Conference have been neglected by post-World War II historians. Because these conferences failed to prevent the eventual outbreak of World War II, their historical value is denigrated. The work of these two conferences was complicated, often highly technical, and although unsuccessful at preventing aggression in the late 1930s, these two conferences did help prevent aggression in the 1920s. As the next chapter will show, China, for example, was a major source of potential great power conflict in the 1920s, but the work of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference helped defuse that international tension immensely. In China in 1921 the emergence of a new Chinese nationalism, combined with the increasing Japanese presence in Manchuria and the concerns of the United States about rival great powers spheres of influence in China, created the need to establish a new balance of power in the

region.³¹ To achieve this, the delegates at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference had to engage in a series of delicate balancing acts, balancing the demands of various nations on specific issues against an overall goal shared by all the conference delegates to prevent any dangerous power balance changes in China that could provoke a war.

³¹ George Moseley, *China Since 1911* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 33-42; Jean Chesneaux, Françoise Le Barbier, and Marie-Claire Bergère, *China: From the 1911 Revolution to Liberation*, trans. Paul Aster and Lydia Davis (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 33-132.

THE FAR EASTERN AFFAIRS CONFERENCE

The Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference met simultaneously and were intimately linked, the work of one directly impacting the work of the other. Without a successful agreement to contain naval strength, diplomatic efforts to stabilize the situation in the Pacific and within China would have likely failed as the great powers strove to safeguard their Asian positions through armaments increases. Conversely, if the negotiations for the key treaties of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference had failed, specifically the Four-Power Accord and the Nine-Power Treaty, then the Naval Conference would probably in turn have failed as the great powers would have felt it necessary to be well armed due to the risk of instability in Asia. The key issue discussed at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was China, its domestic economy, diplomatic status, and its continued civil war coupled with domestic instability. The newly established Chinese Republic had sent an invited delegation to the Far Eastern Affairs Conference in the hope that this conference would allow China an opportunity to redress some of its grievances and regain greater control over its own affairs. By the end of the conference, though, China found itself only a partial nation, having won pledges from other nations to honor its national sovereignty but with few real gains that would have given its newly recognized independent government any ability to modify the existing status quo in China.

The Far Eastern Affairs Conference was attended by delegations from nine different nations. Attending both the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference were the delegations of the United States, Great Britain, France, Japan, and Italy. In addition, delegations from China, Belgium, the Netherlands, and

Portugal solely attended the meetings of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference. The United States, as the organizing nation of the conference, under the direction of United States' Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, sent out an initial agenda to all attending nations that outlined the goals of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference. It proposed that China's domestic challenges and international status be the central points of interest for the conference, specifically:

... Subjects: (a) Territorial integrity, (b) Administrative integrity, (c) Open door, equality of commercial and industrial opportunity, (d) Concessions, monopolies or preferential economic privileges, (e) Development of railways, including plans relating to Chinese Eastern Railway, (f) Preferential railroad rates, (g) Status of existing commitments³²

This agenda reveals the diplomatic hopes of the United States regarding China and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference, as four of the seven total items directly address economic concerns, and all seven items have a direct impact on China's value as a market for imported goods and foreign enterprise.³³ The third subject of the agenda in particular, the desire by the United States to discuss the Open Door policy, was the cornerstone of American diplomatic plans for China at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference. The Open Door policy, the ideal of all Chinese domestic markets being open equally to international trade, without any special privileges or advantages, was the policy the United States sought to make international law at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference.

Each issue discussed at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was initially reviewed by a specialized subcommittee; the Chinese delegation often did well in these subcommittee meetings diplomatically. However, the actual final negotiated agreements

³²James Brown Scott, "Conference on the Limitation of Armament and Problems of the Pacific," *The American Journal of International Law* 15, no. 4 (July 1921): 504. (Formatting of material varies from original, the text is provided in full)

³³Brown, "Conference on Limitation of Armament," 503-505.

themselves were created by the assembled full meetings of the nine delegations. These meetings, and therefore the actions of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference itself, were dominated by the United States, Great Britain, and Japan throughout the conference. The Chinese delegation expanded the initial agenda of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference by submitting multiple requests for consideration by all the attending powers; however, what gains and losses China actually achieved at this conference lay solely in the compromises reached between the three key delegations just mentioned. Although the Chinese delegation spoke powerfully and received favorable comments from many subcommittees, China's delegation had minimal to no bargaining power at the conference itself.³⁴ The United States, Great Britain, and Japan at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference did make genuine concessions to China, but they were minor concessions to assist China in achieving a slightly expanded administrative autonomy over its own affairs. However, China's delegates started out seeking much more from this conference, and their grander aspirations were either denied or twisted to maintain the political, economic, and territorial privileges already won from China by the other powers in decades past.

China's diplomatic aspirations were outlined on 16 November 1921 at the first meeting of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference. Dr. Soao-Ke Alfred Sze, who was both a leading member of China's delegation and China's minister to the United States³⁵, presented to the other attending delegates a list of ten "general principles" that the Chinese government hoped would guide the labors of the conference. Along with this list

³⁴ Charles H. Levermore, *Second Yearbook of the League of Nations: January 1, 1921 – February 6, 1922* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 1922), 257-288

³⁵ Cyril Arthur Player, *Arms-and the men; intimate personal glimpses of delegates, attachés, and unofficial personages at the Washington conference of armament and pacific and Far Eastern problems* (Detroit: Evening News Association, 1922), 43-45.

of ten principles, Dr. Sze also presented an explanatory statement that expanded on the initial themes of the ten principles by providing concrete examples of what China hoped would be the result of the conference's decisions. The ten principles were broad in scope and had they and the suggested concrete reforms been enshrined in treaties, China's position in the international community would have been greatly strengthened. Broadly, the ten principles specified that the other attending powers first respect China's territorial and administrative integrity; a second principle was that China would accept the Open Door concept as the law of commerce for all of China, but in turn the other powers would include China in any discussions of future treaties that involved it in any way. Third, China sought open declarations of all treaties previously signed between itself and the other powers and their re-evaluation. Finally China expected that its rights as a neutral would be fully respected in future times of war and that future international issues in the Pacific or in regard to China would be settled in conferences.³⁶

The ten "general principles" and explanatory statements submitted by Dr. Sze were written in the hopes of radically redefining China's domestic powers and international standing, as well as reducing Japan's dominating influence within China. To achieve these three broad ambitions, the Chinese Republic sought to achieve five practical goals through its "ten principles" at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference: first to increase governmental revenue to pursue the wars of unification within China, second to protect Chinese industry from foreign competition, third to regain control of Chinese tariffs, fourth to institute a universal rule of law upon all individuals residing within China, and fifth to end spheres of privilege and concession within China held by foreign nations. These five practical goals were critical to the Chinese Republic because in 1921,

³⁶ Levermore, *League of Nations handbook*, 257-258.

China was in reality a patchwork of micro-states more than a single nation. China in 1921 was politically and militarily divided due to the various warlords ruling sub-territories within China and economically divided due to the extensive spheres of influence held by foreign powers. Beyond the immediate needs of the Chinese Republic, the ten principles presented by Dr. Sze were actually an outline defining Chinese national sovereignty and encapsulating all the powers that define a truly independent and functional state. Undisputed control over a region of territory politically and militarily, the ability to regulate its own economy and to control and govern its own means of production and resources, recognition by other states as an equal: these are the key powers that define a state and this is what the Chinese Republic sought from the other powers at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference.

Initially the American delegation at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference had encouraged the Chinese delegation to outline a series of desired principles to guide the work of the conference; however, Dr. Sze and the Chinese delegation went too far with their “ten principles.” The goal of the United States’ delegation at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was reform within China, not revolution in the international order. The United States wanted China opened as a market to the benefit of American enterprise, not to champion China becoming a new regional Asian power. The “Open Door” principle was the only “revolutionary” change that the delegation of the United States wanted to see achieved in China, and this change would also, at least partially, benefit Japan as well as the other nations in attendance. By allowing open competition and free markets throughout China, free markets protected from interference by treaty-mandated low tariffs, the United States sought to increase China’s value economically for all powers

trading in Asia. Any additional concessions made to the demands of the Chinese delegation, especially any which threatened Japan's position within China, could dangerously destabilize the region, potentially even spark a regional war. It is highly likely that if Japan's political and military position in China had been threatened by the decisions made at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference, its government might have withdrawn from both conferences and almost certainly would have been far less willing to adopt treaties opening their concessions to foreign economic competition. The Root Principles, the initial response of the American delegation to Dr. Sze's "ten principles," sharply curtailed the efforts of the Chinese delegation to spark a radical shift in China's international position.

The Root Principles were introduced to the delegates of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference on 21 November 1921 by their author, the Honorable Elihu Root, former United States Secretary of State and current Senator of the United States. Mr. Root was a respected delegate at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference due to his extremely long term of service in politics and international affairs. Because of his stature, Root was able to successfully modify Dr. Sze's initial radical "ten principles."³⁷ Root maintained the philosophic goals of the Chinese delegation but distilled Dr. Sze's principles to remove any threat of radical changes by the Far Eastern Affairs Conference to foreign concessions in China. The initial draft of the Root Principles outlined in four ideas an ideological framework for the current and future interactions between the attending delegates' national governments and the government of China:

³⁷George Foster Pearce, Right Honorable Senator, *Conference on the Limitation of Armament held at Washington D.C., United States of America, from the 12th November 1921 to 6th February 1922: report of the Australian delegate, Senator the Right Hon. George Foster Pearce* (Melbourne: A.J. Mullett for the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1922), 3; Cyril Player, *Arms-and the men*, 15-17; Levermore, *League of Nations Handbook*, 261 and 276.

- ...(1) To respect the sovereignty, the independence, and the territorial and administrative integrity of China.
- (2) To provide the fullest and most unembarrassed opportunity to China to develop and maintain for herself an effective and stable government, overcoming the difficulties incident to the change from the old and long-continued imperial form of government.
- (3) To safeguard for the world, so far as is within our power, the principle of equal opportunity for the commerce and industry of all nations throughout the territory of China.
- (4) To refrain from taking advantage of the present conditions in order to seek special rights or privileges which would abridge the rights of the subjects or citizens of friendly states and from countenancing action inimical to the security of such states.³⁸

The principles presented by Root in this initial draft were deliberately vague; he attempted to straddle a line between China's desire for revolutionary change and the other nations' desire for stability of privilege in China. The first and second principles encompassed the ideal of increased Chinese control over their domestic affairs and a possible revision of China's international commitments. The third principle encompassed the ideals of the Open Door policy for the United States, specifically the goal of open commerce within China. The fourth principle embraced regional stability in China, and the Open Door, by specifically forbidding any of the attending nations from using the current political situation within China to extract any concessions from the Chinese government that would challenge the rights of other powers within China. Overall this initial draft form of the Root Principles focused upon economic matters and maintaining stability in China more than upon revising China's international position; however, Root's principles also offered some opportunity to meet the demands of the Chinese government for review and revision of its domestic situation. At the very least,

³⁸Yamato Ichihashi, *The Washington conference and after; a historical survey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1928), 165.

Root's initial draft acknowledged that the Chinese delegation's "ten principles" touched upon some valid concerns worthy of discussion at the conference.

The other delegates, reacting to their own national interests and the concerns of the Japanese delegation, as expressed by Baron Kato on 19 November 1921,³⁹ made several critical modifications to Root's proposed principles. Due to these modifications, the final version of the Root Principles adopted by the Far Eastern Affairs Conference tightened the broad language in the second and third principles and deliberately focused the Root Principles solely upon China's future international relations:

- (1) To respect the sovereignty, the independence and the territorial and administrative integrity of China.
- (2) To provide the fullest and most unembarrassed opportunity to China to develop and maintain for herself effective and stable government.
- (3) To use their influence for the purpose of effectually establishing and maintaining the principle of equal opportunity for the commerce and industry of all nations throughout the territory of China.
- (4) To refrain from taking advantage of the present conditions in order to seek special rights or privileges which would abridge the rights of the subjects or citizens of friendly States and from countenancing action inimical to the security of such States.⁴⁰

By comparing the final version with the original draft version of the Root Principles the change of intention is clear; the provision in the second principle, that the other powers needed to remember China's unique situation due to its imperial legacy, was struck completely. In essence, by omitting any reference to China's imperial legacy, the delegates at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference refused to review China's past treaties for purposes of revision; only future Chinese international relations would be discussed at this conference. The final version of the third clause moved the agreeing nations away from an expectation of action, "so far as is within our power," to a more reactive

³⁹ Levermore, *League of Nations Yearbook*, 260-261.

⁴⁰ Levermore, *League of Nations*, 276.

expectation that only required the signatory nations to use their “influence” to encourage other nations and their own nationals to comply with this clause’s terms. However, the Chinese government’s efforts to have the conference modify past treaties did not end with this neutered version of the Root Principles; the Chinese delegation attempted past treaty revision multiple future times during the conference.

The adopted Root Principles were not a radical departure from previous international diplomacy regarding China; maintaining stability in China was the central goal of great power diplomacy with China for many previous decades. The Root Principles were a manifestation of that stability, an agreement between all the powers with a diplomatic stake in China to work together at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference to maintain their relative positions of influence within China. The Root Principles set the stage for a gradual transformation of China, an agreement to create treaties at the conference that would permit China to loosen some of the constraints upon it due to past events but only at a pace comfortable to the international powers that in 1921 controlled China’s destiny. Like all the work undertaken at the conference, these principles, which were the framework for most of the treaties to follow, maintained stability and protected the regional status quo. China gained some diplomatic status. Due to the Root Principles, it would no longer see parts of its territory carved away to be ruled under special “agreements” with other powers. China, though, did not gain all it desired from the Root Principles; the desire of its republican government to control China’s economic destiny was not granted at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference.

Inspired by the first Root Principle, the Far Eastern Affairs Conference delegates adopted two minor resolutions that immediately expanded the Chinese republic’s

domestic autonomy: an agreement to cede to China's control unauthorized foreign radio stations located within China and a second agreement ending foreign private postal services operating within China. These two treaties were mainly political in focus but also represented a minor economic concession to the Chinese republic; by allowing China to gain control over foreign held radio stations and ending private postal services, the other powers returned to China two concessions that could be harnessed as minor sources of governmental revenue. Mainly, though, these two accords served as recognition by the other powers that the newly established republican government of China would be able to maintain law and order within its territory and that regular postal service and regular radio communication networks could operate uninterrupted. However, even these minor concessions were not unconditional and carried with them requirements that limited China's freedom of action in taking advantage of her newly gained administrative control.

The resolution ceding to China control over unauthorized foreign radio stations was adopted by the Far Eastern Affairs Conference on 7 December 1921 and signed by the attending powers on 6 February 1922 without modification. This resolution had five articles that outlined the new position of the various foreign owned radio stations within China. The treaty specified first that all radio stations attached to any legations or granted by the International Protocol of 7 September 1901 would be used for only official broadcasts required by the owning legation and would avoid making any commercial broadcasts unless Chinese commercial radio communications were temporarily disrupted. Second, the treaty required that communications by any other authorized foreign radio stations should be limited to the traffic allowed by the governing treaty that originally

authorized that radio station. Third, the treaty permitted the Chinese government to acquire control of unauthorized foreign radio stations within its territory by purchasing them, a topic to be explored in more detail momentarily. Fourth, the treaty specified that any issues involving radio stations in the South Manchurian railway zone or within the French concession in Shanghai would be resolved by direct negotiation between the government in question and the Chinese government. The fifth and final term of the treaty specified that all foreign radio station operators would work with the Chinese Republican government to establish broadcasting standards to avoid overlapping radio frequencies.⁴¹

The third clause of this treaty, which permitted the Chinese government to purchase unauthorized foreign radio stations, is worth a closer examination:

3. In case there be any radio station maintained in the territory of China by a foreign government or citizens of subjects thereof without the authority of the Chinese Government, such station and all the plant apparatus and material thereof shall be transferred to and taken over by the Government of China to be operated under the direction of the Chinese Ministry of Communications upon fair and full compensations to the owners for the value of the installation, as soon as the Chinese Ministry of Communications is prepared to operate the same effectively for the general public benefit.⁴²

This clause is vital because it reveals how constrained this concession actually was due to its requirement that the republican Chinese government buy any unauthorized radio station from its foreign owners at market value and that the Chinese government must then allow the radio station to remain open to public use. The power to domestically license and control access to radio communications was an autonomous power of governments that was well established by 1921. This clause, instead of allowing the

⁴¹ Levermore, League of Nations, 288.

⁴² Levermore, League of Nations, 288.

Chinese government even that minor concession of sovereignty, only allowed the Chinese government to regulate radio stations within its own territory and only to the extent that the government could purchase the privilege. In reality this clause only allowed minor changes to the existing status quo of communications within China, one of which was transfers of ownership. This treaty, like many others signed at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference, maintained stability within China and avoided even minor changes within China that might disrupt great power privileges or China's value to others as an area of investment and commerce.

Regarding the various great power private postal services, the Chinese delegation won one of the few almost unconditional diplomatic victories for China. The agreement ending private postal services was introduced earlier than the agreement on foreign owned radio stations but was ratified later, on 12 December 1921, due to the Japanese government delaying its agreement over the matter of the date of transfer of full postal authority to the Chinese republican government. On 28 November 1921 Henry Cabot Lodge, United States Senator and member of the American delegation⁴³, presented to the fully assembled delegates of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference the resolution ending private foreign postal services within China, provided that a few key conditions were first met. Those conditions were:

- a. That an efficient Chinese postal service is maintained.
- b. That an assurance is given by the Chinese Government that they contemplate no change in the present postal administration so far as the status of the foreign Co-Director General is concerned.⁴⁴

Additionally, during the period of transition when the agreeing four foreign powers transferred their private postal services to the Chinese government, the Chinese Customs

⁴³ Pearce, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, Report, 3.

⁴⁴ Levermore, League of Nations, 279-280.

authorities would be given assistance in inspecting incoming mail to the private postal system for contraband, excepting “ordinary letters” that “upon examination contain only written matter.” What makes this treaty a real diplomatic victory for the Chinese government, even with the restrictions above, is twofold: first, the other attending powers agreed to give up something without any compensation or reward. Great Britain, France, Japan, and the United States agreed to give up their private postal services in full on 1 January 1923.⁴⁵ Second, this treaty actually changed the status quo within China; the Chinese government successfully assumed full control of the postal services and was able to exercise, in a singular field of governmental enterprise, unmitigated power within its own nation. Unfortunately for China’s ambitions these two treaties, foreign radio stations and foreign postal services, were the largest grants of autonomy given to the Chinese government at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference.

One of the major goals of the Chinese government at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was to regain control over its tariff policies, in particular the ability to set its own tariff rates and schedules on imports and exports. In 1921, China’s tariffs were fixed by a series of external treaties at five percent per annum on both incoming goods and exports; however, the price schedules upon which these rates were based were outmoded by 1921. Due to the fixed low rate of tariffs and the undervalued price schedules, the Chinese government had severe difficulties raising effective tax revenue from its foreign trade. The Chinese delegation submitted its request for tariff autonomy on 22 November 1921, and on 5 January 1922 the subcommittee studying the issue recommended to the Far Eastern Affairs Conference delegates that no change be made in how China’s tariffs were controlled. The conference delegates went further than their subcommittee

⁴⁵ Levermore, *League of Nations*, 279-280.

recommended; the terms extended to China to “reform” its tariff situation in 1922 were actually harsher than the tariff terms China operated under prior to the Far Eastern Affairs Conference.⁴⁶

The new Chinese tariff treaty adopted by the delegates at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference modified China’s tax systems and allowed for an update to the tariff schedules, but did not allow any change to the tariff rates. Under this new universal treaty, China was first required to abolish entirely a transit tax on goods moved internally through China, the *likin* tax, removing one source of revenue for the Chinese government. Second, the tariff rate for China was to remain at five percent on all imported and exported goods; however, the schedule of prices upon which the duties were based was to be revised. Third, until the schedule of prices was corrected, the Chinese government would be allowed to increase the tariff on incoming goods temporarily two and one half percent. Fourth, the temporary limited tariff increase, the new tariff price schedule, and the abolition of *likin* were all to be planned by an appointed international oversight committee. Fifth and finally, the treaty required that the five percent Chinese tariff be applied equally on all Chinese foreign trade and that the Chinese government enforce uniformity in tariff collection on all of its borders. The requirement of uniformity in tariff collection allowed for limited variations based on local economic considerations but was in place to force the central Chinese government to discourage local officials from modifying the tariffs. The treaty did require regular revisions of the fixed tariff price schedule, in contrast to previous tariff treaties, but the revision schedule was rigid because it allowed the tariff rates to be recalculated only once every seven years.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Levermore, League of Nations, 276 – 277.

⁴⁷ Levermore, League of Nations, 332 – 335.

The Chinese tariff treaty created at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was a major diplomatic loss for the Chinese government and a major diplomatic victory for the other attending powers and the principle of regional economic stability. By maintaining the Chinese tariff at a fixed five percent rate, the other attending powers ensured that China would remain highly attractive as a market for foreign trade. In addition, by denying the Chinese republican government the ability to modify its tariffs, this treaty ensured trade stability and further promoted the plan of the American delegation to enshrine the American Open Door policy in China into a formal universal treaty structure. Any preferential tariff system is anathema to the concept of a free and open Chinese market that was desired by the American government, and this tariff treaty was a major necessary step to create and protect the open market ideal. The extent of this diplomatic defeat to the Chinese government is best illustrated in terms of tax revenues. Had the conference accorded to the Chinese government its originally requested tariff rates of twelve and one-half percent, the Chinese government would have gained approximately 300,000,000.00 additional dollars in annual tax revenue. The new universal Chinese tariff treaty, due to the revised tariff schedule, would give the Chinese government only approximately \$46,000,000.00 in additional tax revenue annually. Factoring in the loss of revenue due to the abolition of the *likin* tax, the final real tax revenue gained by the Chinese government from these new accords was only around \$19,000,000.00 annually, a fraction of the revenue needed by the Chinese republican government to effectively end China's low intensity civil war.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Raymond Leslie Buell, *The Washington Conference* (London: D. Appleton and Company, 1922), 251 – 253.

The Open Door in China treaty ratified at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was the final extension of a policy pursued by the government of the United States since the 1890s, a policy ensuring that China would be equally open to the commerce of all nations. The government of the United States was interested in achieving this goal mainly for the benefit of American foreign trade, but as a secondary benefit it could also enhance other nations' trade within China as well. The concept of the Open Door policy was first outlined by the United States in 1899 in a diplomatic note to the governments of Great Britain, France, Germany, and Russia:

(1) That it will in no wise interfere with any treaty port or any vested interest within any so-called 'spheres of interest' or leased territories it may have in China.

(2) That the Chinese treaty tariff of the time being shall apply to all merchandise landed or shipped to all such ports within such 'spheres of influence' (unless they be 'free ports'), no matter to what nationality it may belong, and that duties so leviable shall be collected by the Chinese Government.

(3) That it will levy no higher harbour dues on vessels of another nationality frequenting any port in such 'spheres' than shall be levied on vessels of its own nationality, and no higher railroad charges over lines built, controlled, or operated within its 'sphere' on merchandise belonging to citizens or subjects of other nationalities transported through the 'sphere' than shall be levied on similar merchandise belonging to its own nationals transported over equal distances⁴⁹

From its initial proposal on 6 September 1899 to the start of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference in 1921, the United States gained gradual, shifting consent from the other nations for this proposed policy. By the start of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference the Open Door policy supported by the United States was not enshrined in a universal treaty, instead it was based on a ramshackle series of diplomatic notes between other powers and the United States, notes riddled with exceptions and exclusions. From 16 – 18 January

⁴⁹ *United States Foreign Relations, 1899, p.129 and P.J. Treat, The Far East, p. 333 cited in Ichihashi, The Washington Conference and after, p. 182.*

1922 the American delegation at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference successfully ended this ramshackle system and replaced it with a new universal Open Door treaty for China.⁵⁰

The original proposed Open Door treaty suggested by the American delegation and introduced by Secretary of State Charles Hughes laid out four key principles that were to define a new codified Open Door policy in China. The cornerstone of this new universal Open Door policy was outlined in the first proposed principle:

(A) Not to seek, or to support their nationals in seeking, any arrangement which might purport to establish in favor of their interests any general superiority of rights with respect to commercial or economic development in any designated region of China.

(B) Not to seek or to support their nationals in seeking any such monopoly or preferences as would deprive other nationals of the right of undertaking any legitimate trade or industry in China or of participating with the Chinese Government or with any provincial government in any category of public enterprise, which by reason of its scope, duration or geographical extent is calculated to frustrate the practical application of the principle of equal opportunity.⁵¹

This two-paragraph understanding was a masterpiece of commercial and political diplomacy by the American delegation, first because it created a uniform definition of the Open Door policy that all the attending great powers found agreeable and second, and more critically, because it also allowed the commerce of the United States, along with the commerce of other nations, access to China's markets without the expense or political dangers of carving out spheres of influence. This treaty clause, in combination with the tariff treaty, transformed China into a single free market commercial entity and moved international competition in China away from solely political and military influence into the realm of commercial influence as well. This treaty clause also opened the way for the

⁵⁰ Ichihashi, *The Washington Conference and after*, 178 – 192.

⁵¹ Levermore, *League of Nations*, 342 - 343

United States, as a major competitive trading power within China, to assert economic and commercial dominance through its own expanding economic power in 1922. This part of the Open Door treaty did not directly challenge the political status quo within China; instead, it allowed the existing economic balance of power between the great powers in China to become more fluid.

The second and third clauses of the Open Door treaty for China were relatively straightforward. The second clause established the Chinese republican government's willingness to abide by the terms of the first clause of the treaty. The third clause stipulated that an international board of reference would be created and empowered to review any claims of violations of this treaty. The proposed fourth clause of this treaty, however, raised considerable concern among the other delegations; the opposition to this clause was strong enough that the American delegation eventually had to accede to its removal to get the Open Door treaty approved. This controversial fourth clause stated that:

IV. The Powers, including China, represented at this conference agree that any provisions of an existing concession which appear inconsistent with those of another concession or with the principles of the above agreement or declaration may be submitted by the parties concerned to the board of reference, when established, for the purpose of endeavoring to arrive at a satisfactory adjustment on equitable terms.⁵²

The French and Japanese delegations strongly opposed this proposal because it could have disrupted their existing concessions and economic agreements within China established prior to the Far Eastern Affairs Conference. Considering the wording of the clause above, specifically the stated focus upon any "existing concession," the intent by the American delegation that this clause would have been used to modify existing

⁵² Levermore, *League of Nations*, 343.

concessions that limited the commerce of the United States is obvious. At the recommendation of the Canadian delegation the fourth clause was struck, tempering the diplomatic victory of the United States. The future of commerce in China would be, in principle, open to all nations equally, but previously established concessions would remain protected from the open and equal competition desired by the United States.

Market access within China reaches to the heart of one of the issues the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was focused upon. It was a cornerstone of the disagreements between the governments of the United States and Japan. For the Japanese government, it was a matter of policy that China was to become a market dominated by Japanese commerce. Chinese raw materials were to be used to fuel the Japanese economy, and China's growing consumer demands were to be met by Japanese manufactured goods. The Japanese government's territorial concessions in China came from two major sources, its victories in its 19th century wars with China and as a reward for Japan's loyalty to the Allied cause in the First World War. However, the Japanese positions in China ran to a deeper ideological current than just political and diplomatic gains. Japanese citizens had settled and invested in Manchuria, and Japan sought to protect and expand those interests as a matter of national policy.⁵³ The government of the United States wished to follow its long established policy of expanding its national commerce freely throughout China. The inherent conflict between this position and the Japanese government's position could have led to violent confrontation between the two powers. The Open Door treaty and tariff treaty, though, forged a successful compromise between American and Japanese ambitions, defusing the potential for conflict and promoting stability, at least through the 1920s.

⁵³ Ichihashi, *The Washington Conference and after*, 156-161, 188-192.

One of the major goals of the Chinese republican government at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was to achieve an agreement that all future treaties involving China would be written with the participation of the Chinese government in their negotiation. Pragmatically the Chinese government also sought the lesser goal at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference of the publication of all previous and present agreements between the Chinese government and other powers of any sort. The Chinese formally requested on 8 December 1921 that the other attending powers agree to the principle that no treaties should be created in the future that related to China without the participation of the Chinese government. This initiative was challenged by the Japanese and British delegations with the argument that if granted it would impinge too greatly on the sovereignty of action of other nations. Rather than the principle sought by the Chinese delegation, the conference delegates resolved:

That the Powers attending this Conference, hereinafter mentioned, to wit, the United States of America, Belgium, the British Empire, China, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands and Portugal declare that it is their intention not to enter into any treaty with one another or individually or collectively, with any Power or Powers which would infringe or impair the principles which have been declared by the resolution adopted on November 21 by this Committee.⁵⁴

The effort by the Chinese delegation to have the other attending powers agree not to negotiate treaties about China without the participation of the Chinese government was rewarded only with a pledge by the other powers that they would not violate their previous pledges at this conference in future treaties.⁵⁵

On 19 January 1922 Charles Hughes, United States delegate, proposed that all the attending nations at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference agree to publicly list all treaties

⁵⁴ Levermore, *League of Nations*, 296.

⁵⁵ Levermore, *League of Nations*, 295 – 296.

and agreements, past and present, that existed between their governments and/or nationals and the nation of China. The proposal, in this form, was enthusiastically supported by the Chinese delegation but met with resistance from the other delegates attending the conference. The British and Japanese delegations stated that their governments lacked the necessary records to meet this proposal, and the French delegation stated that France had already fully published all its commitments with China in the past. On 20 and 21 January 1922 this issue was debated; the Japanese delegation led the resistance to this proposal on the grounds that any treaty requiring private citizens to divulge their agreements with the Chinese government was improper and violated their citizens' rights. The Japanese delegation's complaint on this matter was supported by the British delegation, which protested that it was "unfair to compel business men to divulge the terms of contracts."⁵⁶

A compromise was reached on 21 January 1922 that placed the burden of publishing the text of all past and present agreements between China and others upon the Chinese government, rather than as a shared responsibility of all the attending nations. This minor change represented the greatest setback to this initiative, because by requiring the government of China to publish future treaties, this agreement diplomatically weakened the Chinese government. This proposal removed from China the chance of private diplomacy unless it violated the concessions it had fought for at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference, and it also made future open diplomacy more easily subject to political pressure from other powers. By forcing the Chinese government to publish past treaties, the compromise resolution did nothing new. It required China to reveal what treaties it could have already revealed but added no new material that might have sparked

⁵⁶ Levermore, *League of Nations*, 345 – 346; *Report of the Australian Delegate*, 3 – 4.

a great power drive for a broader review of former Chinese treaties.⁵⁷ By indirect means such as these used to block China's Open Diplomacy proposals, the Japanese delegation avoided challenges to Japan's position within China. It was one of the goals of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference delegates to avoid destabilizing the situation in China, so no challenges were raised to this sort of side-stepping by the Japanese government.

One of the major practical goals pursued by the Chinese republican government at the conference was to have the international oversight on domestic Chinese railroads ended or reformed to allow the Chinese government greater control over China's solely internal railroads. The Far Eastern Affairs Conference delegates passed only two broad resolutions on the subject of China's railroad system; neither resolution addressed who would have immediate administration over China's railroads. Instead, the conference delegates first created a resolution that applied the principles of the Open Door policy to railroad rates and railroad operations throughout China:

I. The Chinese Government declares that throughout the whole of the railways in China, it will not exercise or permit any unfair discrimination of any kind. In particular there shall be no discrimination whatever, direct or indirect, in respect to charges or of facilities on the ground of the nationality of passengers or the countries from which or to which they are proceeding, or the origin or ownership of goods or the country from which or to which they are consigned, or the nationality or ownership of the ship or other means of conveying such passengers or goods before or after their transport on the Chinese railways.

The other Powers represented at this conference take note of the above declaration and make a corresponding declaration in respect of any of the aforesaid railways over which they or their nationals are in a position to exercise any control in virtue of any concession, special agreement or otherwise.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 301 – 310.

⁵⁸ Levermore, *League of Nations*, 344.

This first resolution clearly limited the power of the Chinese government, along with other signatory powers, to actually regulate the rates of shipping or transit in any manner that could unfavorably affect free trade. In essence this resolution was an extension of the earlier restrictions preventing the Chinese government from assuming control over import tariffs because this resolution blocked any effort by the Chinese government to shelter its domestic industry or create economic favoritism for any particular nation by manipulating freight rates. The second railroad resolution agreed to by the Far Eastern Affairs Conference delegates stated the hope that all future railroad development in China would be undertaken to achieve the future goal of a centralized railway system administered solely by the Chinese government. This resolution, though, was careful to state that such an objective should only be pursued with respect to currently existing agreements regarding Chinese railways and that China, when building its national rail system, would seek out "...such foreign financial and technical assistance as may prove necessary in the interests of that system."⁵⁹

The other major railroad issue resolved by the Far Eastern Affairs Conference dealt with the strategically important Eastern Chinese Railroad, a railroad that linked the South Manchurian and Trans-Siberian railroads into one unified system. The Eastern Chinese Railroad originally operated under Russian control, but during World War I administrative control over this vital railroad was transferred to an inter-allied commission. The Eastern Chinese Railroad faced severe financial difficulties during its World War I operations and by 1921 was also plagued with service interruptions. The conference, after reviewing the request by the Chinese delegation that control of this railroad be given to the Chinese republican government, instead resolved to place a new

⁵⁹ Levermore, League of Nations, 344 – 345.

international commission in charge of administering the railroad, the composition of which was to be resolved later. The Chinese government would be granted only limited administrative control on aspects of the Eastern Chinese Railroad's operations. However, after granting this minor concession, the other delegates added a reservation:

The Powers other than China in agreeing to the resolution regarding the Chinese Eastern Railway reserve the right to insist hereafter upon the responsibilities of China for performance or non-performance of the obligations toward the foreign stockholders, bondholders and creditors of the Chinese Eastern Railway Company, which the holders deem to result from the contracts under which the railroad was built and the obligations which they deem to be in the nature of a trust resulting from the exercise of power by the Chinese Government over the possession and administration of the railroad.⁶⁰

More simply, the international loans that were part of the reason the Eastern Chinese Railroad could not operate profitably were not to be excused or renegotiated, and the Chinese government was expected, in exchange for gaining partial administrative control, to also assume the obligation of meeting the scheduled payments on the loans. Some contemporary analysts saw this resolution and reservation as merely an effort by the other delegates at the conference to prevent the Japanese government from gaining political control over the Eastern Chinese Railroad and therefore further strengthening Japan's position in Manchuria, which might in turn have further degraded regional stability.⁶¹

Another major goal of the Chinese government at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was to get the other attending powers to pledge to remove all foreign troops, excluding those that were part of an embassy's diplomatic guard, permanently from Chinese soil. This request by the Chinese government was mainly aimed at Japan, due to the large number of Japanese military and police forces stationed within the Shantung

⁶⁰ Levermore, *League of Nations*, 388 – 389.

⁶¹ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 297 – 301.

peninsula and Southern Manchuria. On 28 – 29 November 1921 Dr. Sze, head of the Chinese delegation, reported to the Far Eastern Affairs Conference that as of 1921 the Japanese government had more than 16,000 soldiers and police stationed in the Chinese mainland, more than ten times any other power's non-legation forces. The Japanese delegation refused to remove its military forces within China due to "banditry" within China and Manchuria and refused to remove its police forces because they were necessary to maintain law and order in Manchuria among Japanese citizens. Due to extraterritoriality, Chinese courts and police could not enforce the law when the violators were Japanese citizens. No other attending powers with troops in China entered a formal explanation for their military forces in China or ever offered to remove their non-legation military forces.⁶²

The Chinese government's request that foreign troops be removed from Chinese soil was finally resolved with the adoption by the Far Eastern Affairs Conference of two resolutions. The first pledged the attending powers to withdraw any foreign troops present in China not authorized by any treaty and stationed in areas where the Chinese government could protect its citizens. The second resolution pledged the attending governments to:

...associate themselves with three representatives of the Chinese government to conduct collectively a full and impartial inquiry into the issues raised by the foregoing declarations of intention made by the Powers and by China and shall thereafter prepare a full and comprehensive report setting out without reservation their findings of fact and their opinion with regard to the matter hereby referred for inquiry and shall furnish a copy of their report to each of the nine Governments concerned which shall severally make public the report with such comment as each may deem appropriate. The representatives of any of the Powers may make or join in any minority reports stating their differences, if any, from the majority report That each of the Powers above named shall be deemed free to accept

⁶² Levermore, League of Nations, 282 – 286.

or reject any of the findings of fact or opinions expressed in the report but that in no case shall any of the said Powers make its acceptance of all or any of the findings of fact or opinions either directly or indirectly dependent on the granting by China of any special concession, favor, benefit or immunity, whether political or economic.⁶³

This resolution did not pledge the signatory Powers to any concrete action; instead they pledged merely to engage in a fact finding mission upon the request of the Chinese government. The value of the powers even agreeing to meet with the Chinese government on this issue was minimal, as the committee meeting did not need to agree on a single report; each government receiving the report could modify it as they wished, and no government was bound to take any action based upon the contents of the report. However, because the resolution required all the powers to publish the final version of the report publicly and share it with the other signatory powers, it pushed the issue into the sphere of public diplomacy where popular pressure might force governments to change policy. This resolution did not in and of itself challenge the military situation in China; therefore, it met one of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference's goals to maintain the status quo within China. But it also placed at least one issue regarding China under the influence of public opinion, evidence of a slight shift in the attitude of the attending governments in the method by which diplomatic changes could be pursued.

The final major concession requested by the Chinese government at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was over the issue of extraterritoriality. In 1921 the Chinese government did not have judicial authority over most foreign citizens living within China due to concessions granted by China to other powers in previous treaties. On 16 November 1921 the Chinese delegation requested that the Far Eastern Affairs Conference address the issue of extraterritoriality within China, and by 29 November 1921 a

⁶³ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 421 – 423; Levermore, *League of Nations* 335-336, 405.

resolution was adopted by the conference on the issue. The resolution began with a series of preliminary statements that outlined the desire of the other powers to see China achieve a judicial system equal to that of “Western nations” and pledging the other signatory powers to the cause of helping China achieve an end to extraterritoriality. The key clauses of the resolution pledged that:

...the Governments of the Powers above named [United States of America, Belgium, the British Empire, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands and Portugal] shall establish a commission (to which each of such Governments shall appoint one member) to inquire into the laws and the judicial system and the methods of judicial administration of China, with a view to reporting to the Governments of the several Powers above named in their findings of fact in regard to these matters, and their recommendations as to such means as they may find suitable to improve the existing conditions of the administration of justice in China, and to assist and further the efforts of the Chinese Government to effect such legislation and judicial reforms as would warrant the several Powers in relinquishing, either progressively or otherwise, their respective rights of extraterritoriality;

That the Commission herein contemplated shall be constituted within three months after the adjournment of the Conference, with detailed arrangements to be hereafter agreed upon by the Governments of the Powers above named, and shall be instructed to submit its report and resolutions within one year after the first meeting of the committee;

That each of the Powers above named shall be deemed free to accept or to reject all or any portion of the recommendations of the committee herein contemplated, but that in no case shall any of the said Powers make its acceptance of all or any part of such recommendations either directly or indirectly dependent on the granting by China of any special concession, favor, benefit or immunity, whether political or economic.⁶⁴

The conference delegates later extended to the Chinese government the right to appoint a representative to the proposed commission to review the Chinese judicial system. The attending delegates also formally issued a statement that the signatory powers were “sympathetic” to the goal of ending the practice of extraterritoriality within China.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Levermore, League of Nations, 281.

⁶⁵ Levermore, League of Nations, 280 – 282.

The main terms of this resolution mirrored those written to resolve the issue of foreign troops upon Chinese soil, mainly setting up a special investigatory commission. Once more by making the work of this commission advisory and also by not binding any government to use the commission's findings, this resolution was pragmatically of minimal value. This resolution did not even hold out the opportunity of a moral victory for the Chinese government by having the issue of extraterritoriality debated on the public stage like the issue of foreign troops in China; no requirement was included in this resolution that the findings of this commission ever be made public.

As an interesting follow-up, this commission did meet, later than the pledged date at the conference at the request of the Chinese government, but in December 1925 the Chinese government invited delegates from the signatory powers to form the commission of study on extraterritoriality. The commission began its work on 12 January 1926, which included a tour of the Chinese judicial system in action in various provinces, and completed its report on 16 September 1926. The report was extensive in its recommendations but in the end had no significant impact. The Chinese government did not implement the suggested reforms and no signatory powers ended their privileges of extraterritoriality in the 1920s.⁶⁶

The Chinese delegation achieved one of its major goals for modification of the status quo in China while the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was meeting, the negotiated return of the Shantung peninsula to China by Japan; this major diplomatic goal was achieved during the Far Eastern Affairs Conference but outside of the conference itself. The Chinese and Japanese delegations met in private negotiations, facilitated by representatives from the British and United States delegations, from 30 November 1921

⁶⁶ Ichihashi, *The Washington Conference and after*, 220-223.

until 1 February 1922. These negotiations between Japan and China were acrimonious and broke down multiple times; negotiations only moved forward when members of the United States Senate on 20 January 1922 threatened to block the Washington Naval Conference's naval arms reduction treaty being ratified by the United States until the Shantung issue was resolved. The Shantung peninsula issues began due to territorial seizures made by Japan of Germany's concessions within China during World War I and the subsequent recognition of these territorial transfers by the Versailles Treaty in 1919. The specific territorial grant made to Japan in 1919 was Germany's lease of the Kiao-Chau region within Shantung, a vital port of trade and concentration of industry for Shantung, as well as Germany's leases on the railroads and other infrastructure within the Shantung province.⁶⁷

The terms of the treaty successfully negotiated to return the leased Shantung holdings were generally not favorable to the Chinese government. The core of the agreement was that Japan would return the territory of Kiao-Chau to Chinese administrative control within six months of the ratification of the treaty. The Chinese government agreed to pay Japan the full value for any improvements made to public structures within the territory since its occupation by Japan in 1915, but no other compensation would be demanded of the Chinese government for these structures. Japan agreed to a full withdrawal of all its military and police forces from the Kiao-Chau region within six months of the signing of the treaty or, if possible, within three months of that date, dependent upon the Chinese government being able to police the territory effectively. China agreed to purchase the Shantung railway system, referred to in the treaty as the Tsing-tao-Tsinanfu Railway, for a price to be assessed by an international

⁶⁷ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 23-25, 256-261.

commission, and China also agreed that any future expansion of this railway system would be open to international financing. Japanese-owned mines within the region would be opened to partial Chinese ownership on the understanding that Japanese capital within the mines would not exceed Chinese capital within the mines. Japan yielded without charge to the Chinese government two of the submarine cables located in the Shantung waters and built by Germany but retained a third cable for its own strategic purposes. An interesting oddity of the treaty was that the Chinese government would be allowed to buy from private Japanese owners the salt works in Shantung, on the condition that Japan would receive a certain annual shipment of salt from China.⁶⁸

One clause of the treaty is of considerable interest because it reflects one of the larger themes of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference as a whole:

The Japanese government declares that it has no intention of seeking the establishment of an exclusive Japanese settlement or of an international settlement in Tsingtao.

The Chinese government, on its part, declares that the entire area of the former German leased territory of Kiao-Chau will be opened to foreign trade, and that foreigners will be permitted to freely reside and to carry on commerce, industry and other lawful pursuits within such area.

The vested rights lawfully and equitably acquired by foreign nationals in said area, whether under the German regime or during the Japanese military occupation, will be respected.

All questions relating to the status or validity of such vested rights acquired by Japanese nationals shall be arranged by the Sino-Japanese Joint Commission.⁶⁹

This particular clause, titled “Opening of the Former German Leased Territory,” is noteworthy because it reaffirms once more the idea of the Open Door within China. This newly transferred territory, like the rest of China, was required by the principles agreed to

⁶⁸ Levermore, *League of Nations*, 360-364.

⁶⁹ Levermore, *League of Nations*, 363-364.

at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference to be open to foreign trade and commerce, a concession keenly appreciated by the American delegation in particular. The terms of the treaty that covered the transfer were honored by both parties; six months after the conclusion of the treaty, Japan withdrew its garrison and gave administrative control of the territory in full to the Chinese government.⁷⁰

The Chinese delegation asked the other attending powers to consider ending their standing leases of Chinese territory at the same time as it announced that Japan was conceding the Shantung territories back to the Chinese government. The other attending powers with holdings in China responded in a generally positive manner. The French delegation pledged to join in any “collective restoration of territories leased to various powers in China” subject to successful negotiations between each power and the Chinese government to settle the terms of territorial adjustments. The Japanese delegation declined to consider returning any further leased territory in China held by the Japanese government, with a particular emphasis upon maintaining its holdings in Manchuria. Finally the British delegation offered to return to China the British leased Wei-hai-wei territory but at the same time declined to return Kowloon, as the territory was considered vital to the defense of Hong Kong.⁷¹ None of the territorial transfers offered by the British or French delegation occurred during the conference or in its immediate aftermath. By the 1930s no further leases on Chinese territory had been ended voluntarily by France, Britain, or Japan. Even outside the Far Eastern Affairs Conference, the status quo in China was maintained.⁷²

⁷⁰ Ichihashi, *The Washington Conference and after*, 288.

⁷¹ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 268-269; Pearce 3-5.

⁷² Ichihashi, *The Washington Conference and after*, 346.

The various accords, resolutions, and sub-treaties were brought together into two omnibus treaties at the end of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference: the Nine-Power Treaty on the Open Door in China and the Chinese Tariff Treaty. Both were ratified by the sixth general delegates' assembly on 4 February 1922. As their titles imply, these two treaties formally stated the agreements that had been the central diplomatic aims of the American delegation at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference: the agreements to fix China's internal and external tariffs, ban *lichen* taxes (the internal trade tariffs on goods moved within China), and establish an equal field for international commerce within China. The conference also formally adopted six resolutions on 4 February 1922 that were discussed earlier and addressed topics ranging from the administration of China's railways to extraterritoriality to the presence of foreign military and police forces within China.

The Far Eastern Affairs Conference concluded formally on 6 February 1922, with the signatory ceremonies on the treaties and a concluding address by the President of United States, Warren G. Harding. Included in the formal final records of the conference was a full listing of the treaties and resolutions adopted by the conference and agreed upon by the various attending nations; all the resolutions and treaties outlined in this treatise were proudly listed as significant diplomatic accomplishments by the conference delegates.⁷³ In many ways the delegates attending the Far Eastern Affairs Conference had every right to take pride in their labors; several major agreements settling challenging issues had been concluded after long and acrimonious debate. The future position of China within the international framework of nations seemed settled; more critically, it seemed that the originally irreconcilable positions of the Chinese and Japanese governments over the future shape of China had been brought to mutual compromise.

⁷³ Levermore, League of Nations, 404-405.

However this same conference had not radically changed the situation within China nor addressed the new Chinese government's hopes for a radical re-evaluation of China's international position. Instead, the conference had focused on assuring that stability in the Far East would be maintained ahead of any potentially destabilizing reforms.

The Chinese government came to the Far Eastern Affairs Conference hoping to lay out a framework for a Chinese revolution. The Chinese delegation initially presented a list of ten ideals and ten elaborations which, had they been adopted as written, would have transformed China into an independent and potentially powerful nation. Certainly had all the changes requested by China at the conference been adopted, the new Chinese republican government would have found itself, for the first time in over fifty years of Chinese history, as a Chinese government with complete command of China's finances, armies, and traditional national territories. The newly established Chinese government thus empowered would have found itself master of a vastly increased national treasury, freed of many onerous treaties, and able to press its dominance upon the various militant warlords still resisting its authority within China. It is probable that had the original ten ideals outlined by the Chinese delegation been fully and honestly met at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference, the course of history in the 1920s and 1930s in Asia, and from that possibly the world, would have been radically different. But these ten ideals did not spark a revolution of China's position on the international scene; instead they provided a framework for the conference's work and documented the dreams of nationalist China. Within them were encapsulated the problems and challenges that left China weak, divided, and vulnerable to external ambitions. These same national weaknesses eventually led to China becoming the victim of Japanese aggression in the early 1930s.

Had the Far Eastern Affairs Conference adopted much of the Chinese government's idealized vision for China, it is certain the Japanese delegation would have left the conference, and it is possible that a Sino-Japanese war might have occurred in the 1920s. To achieve a desired international stability and to ensure the participation of the Japanese government in the arms reduction treaties being negotiated at the Washington Naval Conference, the idealized goals of China had to be tempered, contained, and molded at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference to fit the realities of the situation. For the Japanese delegation, containing the ambitions of China's republican government was a critical goal due to the high level of political capital invested by Japan in China. However, Japan was not alone in this goal; all the attending great power delegations, for their own individual reasons, sought to keep China's ambitions at the conference limited. Overall China came to the Far Eastern Affairs Conference hoping to redefine its position within the international community of nations; it left the conference with its position only marginally changed.

The Chinese government did achieve a few minimal gains at the conference. First it was able to get solid agreements from the attending great powers to transfer all unauthorized foreign-held wireless stations to Chinese governmental control, with suitable compensation for the stations' owners. Second, the other attending great powers agreed to end a patchwork system of foreign private postal services within China and transfer to the Chinese government total control of the mail. Both of these concessions slightly increased China's recognized autonomy because by ceding limited control over communications, the other attending powers accorded to the Chinese government actual power over one aspect of statecraft. Despite the hopes of the Chinese republican

government, it was not given control over China's trade tariffs. Instead, China was forced to abide by earlier externally limited tariffs on imports and exports. Although a revision of the tables of taxation was permitted, the Far Eastern Affairs Conference by treaty ensured that China was to remain an economically open market for foreign imports and exports. China's position as an open market to all foreign commerce was ensured by the Open Door treaty, which codified previous loose diplomatic understandings into a single firm international agreement. Considering that the conference made no effort to immediately revise extraterritoriality, remove foreign troops in China, or grant the Chinese governmental oversight of the railroads located within China, the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was quite harsh, leaving the new Chinese republican government in a position little better than when it entered the conference.

The new republican government of China went into the Far Eastern Affairs Conference hoping to achieve control over three major aspects of statecraft, control over its own internal administration, sole power of force within its territories, and control of its own national finances. With only limited concrete gains on the first goal, promises of review on the second goal, and no gains at all on the third goal, the Chinese government left the Far Eastern Affairs Conference no stronger. But for other attending powers, the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was a success because Chinese ambitions were contained and the conference settled potential issues in China that might have sparked great power conflict or destabilized the region. The treaties and resolutions settled at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference first expanded the value of China as a market for foreign trade and investment. As for Japan, the conference removed their government's fear that previous treaties signed between Japan and China that had provided advantages to Japan within

China, and acknowledged Japan's economic and political position within Manchuria, would be challenged by the other powers. This concession to the Japanese government - recognition of its special place in China - was necessary so that the Japanese government would, in turn, cooperate with the work of the Washington Naval Conference.

Most critically though, the Far Eastern Affairs Conference stabilized the one region of the world within which in 1921 rebellion, revolt, or conflict might have escalated into a wider war. The major goal of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was to provide a framework of treaties and resolutions within which China could continue to exist as a sovereign nation but also ensure that this sovereign China could threaten no other nation's position or gains within China. The conference delegates masterfully achieved this goal, defusing any danger of the new Chinese government drastically undermining the status quo in China and winning the support of the Japanese delegation for the other work of the conference. On a broader scale, the overall work of the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was to maintain the standing world order and reduce the capacity of the attending nations to wage aggressive war. Removing some of the potential causes of war over privileges in China and Chinese ambitions for change was vital to these goals. The treaties that will be discussed in the next chapter, that reduced naval arms and modified the rules of war, directly hinged upon the work completed at the same time on issues in China. The long-term legacy of the work of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was minimal; none of the accords survived the cauldron of World War II, but two legacies of this conference did impact future events.

First, the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was the first time in more than fifty years that a Chinese delegation was permitted to negotiate with the other Great Powers rather than simply being forced to accept a new treaty without commentary. This acknowledgement by the Great Powers of the growing need to negotiate with China to make treaties represented the beginning of a trend that future events would make a requirement. As the 1920s and 1930s drew to a close, China's national strength grew, a general trend that continued in the decades following World War II, ending with China being recognized as a new Great Power due to its self-achieved growth in national strength and ability. Second, the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was the first attempt by the great powers to recognize that a rising national force needed to be accorded some autonomy, that a nation of those who had been ruled by others in the past might, in the twentieth century, need to be given some respect. As such the Far Eastern Affairs Conference can be seen as one of the first sparks of the future decolonization movements of the post-World War II decades that would radically change the world.

THE WASHINGTON NAVAL CONFERENCE

In contrast to the Far Eastern Affairs Conference, the Washington Naval Conference focused upon a more pragmatic, action-oriented agenda. The Washington Naval Conference proper began on 12 November 1922 and concluded on 6 February 1923 when, with full ceremony, two treaties were signed that sealed the balance of power between the signatories for a decade. The first of these treaties, the Four-Power Treaty, replaced an older long-standing mutual defensive alliance between Great Britain and Japan with a new alliance between four powers that provided a limited form of mutual protection. The Four-Power Accord was a major diplomatic coup by the United States, a triumph further enhanced by a second treaty, the Five Power Limitation of Naval Armament Treaty⁷⁴, in which the five great powers of the world voluntarily agreed to gradually reduce their current fleets' sizes over a decade and maintain constant fleet parity for that same decade. Linked to this naval reduction treaty was an additional five power arms control treaty on the subjects of submarines and poison gas. These treaties set out to create a system that balanced the great powers' global influence and domination and tried to ensure that for ten years no great power alone could challenge another's position by sea - in short, a system that hoped to ensure peace by making war impossible. In essence, these treaties attempted through pragmatic diplomatic action to prevent conflicts, of any sort, between the great powers by removing their capacity for easy or successful aggression anywhere in the world.

The delegates at the Washington Naval Conference hoped that by placing obstacles in the path of aggressive war, peace would be maintained and that their relative

⁷⁴ Charles H. Levermore, *Second Yearbook of the League of Nations: January 1, 1921 – February 6, 1922* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 1922), 220, 367, 402.

global positions of power would remain unchallenged. Stability was the central goal at the Washington Naval Conference, and each power had its own reasons to desire stability. Great Britain and France had global empires they needed to keep secure, and Japan had achieved a position of Pacific dominance she wished to protect. The United States and Italy lacked extensive territorial empires, but the United States sought to ensure its foreign markets and Italy sought to ensure that its position as a great power and its regional position of power in the Mediterranean would remain intact for the upcoming decade. The work of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference was vital to ensuring the success of this goal of a stable world order sought at the Washington Naval Conference. Without a resolution of the issues dividing the great powers in China, any sort of disarmament treaties promoting stability would have proven impossible to negotiate at the Washington Naval Conference. Conversely, the success of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference hinged upon the successful conclusion of the naval reduction treaty negotiated at the Washington Naval Conference. The fruits therefore of both conferences were stability, armed peace, and a voluntary reduction in possibilities, each signatory power yielding up some of its ability to challenge its neighbor's global interests. The Far Eastern Affairs Conference achieved these goals regionally while the Washington Naval Conference achieved them globally.

Of the various treaties successfully negotiated at the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference, those limiting naval armaments negotiated at the Washington Naval Conference captured the greatest public accolades. Treaties negotiated at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference to redress the balance of power in China were welcomed by the public as progressive and useful, but the actual voluntary

reduction of war readiness through arms reductions by the attending great powers was popularly considered a great step towards world peace. One attending member of the press at the Washington Naval Conference, H. G. Wells, captured the popular mood when he wrote a series of essays about the conference that praised the ideals behind its immediate purpose and that found the final success of the Naval Conference a sign of greater things to come. Wells wrote broadly about how from the success of the Washington Naval Conference other conferences would spring up, at which all the remaining issues of tension between the world powers could be successfully resolved in a spirit of compromise and reconciliation.⁷⁵ Ida Tarbell, another attending author at the conference, reflected in her writing on the practical success of the attending great powers in agreeing to a ten-year naval holiday. Beyond this pragmatic success of reducing naval arms, though, Ms. Tarbell spoke of the strongly favorable public reaction to the spirit of the negotiations. The public responded warmly to the perceived enthusiasm with which the attending great powers agreed to reduce their overall naval arms levels. Ms. Tarbell documented in her writing a generally held belief that with this first successful step forward, the goal to bring about an end to war through broader reductions in weaponry was now attainable.⁷⁶ This public hope that the success of the Washington Naval Conference in reducing naval arms would usher in a new era of peace was not naïve; some of the attending delegates felt the same way at the end of the conferences. However, the public reaction and hopes did not take into account the pragmatic realities that underlay the highly visible public success of the conference.

⁷⁵ Herbert George Wells, *Washington and the Riddle of Peace* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 283 – 293.

⁷⁶ Ida Tarbell, *Peacemakers – blessed and otherwise; observations, reflections and irritations at an international conference* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 206 – 217.

The success of the Washington Naval Conference in reducing naval armament levels rested upon a dual foundation: first, the simultaneous success of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference in denying the ambitions of the new Chinese republic for administrative control of all Chinese territory and the removal of unwanted foreign influence within China, and second, the successful negotiation of the Four-Power Treaty. Without this foundation, achieving an agreement to reduce naval arms would have been highly unlikely because the Japanese delegation had to feel that their nation's position within China was in no danger of destabilization before Japan would even consider reducing its naval arms.⁷⁷ This quid-pro-quo requirement by Japan was a major reason for the considerable diplomatic success enjoyed by the Japanese delegation during the Far Eastern Affairs Conference; the other delegates did not want the naval reduction treaty negotiations derailed by other issues. Therefore, because of Japan's diplomacy, the labors of the two conferences were tightly interlinked. From the text of the naval reduction treaties to the terms of the Four-Power Accord, the relative position of China and Japan in Asia was the hinge point for both conferences. The other delegations were willing to compromise so much at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference because the impact of that conference was purely regional while the success of the naval conference would have a global impact. The Nine-Power Treaty achieved a peace in China and the Pacific through enforcement of the status quo, but the Naval Arms Reduction treaty ensured the balance of power by reducing the very sinews of war.

The treaty that most directly links the efforts of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference and the Washington Naval Conference was the Four-Power Accord. The

⁷⁷ Raymond Leslie Buell, *The Washington Conference* (London: D. Appleton and Company, 1922), 147 – 150, 264 – 276, 322 – 327.

Four-Power Accord was initially negotiated outside of both conferences by Great Britain, the United States, and Japan to create a new alliance framework within the Pacific that replaced the existing Anglo-Japanese defensive alliance. The final signatory power, France, was made party to the treaty after its terms were already negotiated; the new Four-Power Accord was announced formally on 19 December 1921.⁷⁸ The Four-Power Accord was not a perfect document; it was broad in its terms and weak in specific pledges of action, but it was a highly successful treaty in meeting the diplomatic demands of its signatory nations. The United States wanted the Anglo-Japanese defensive alliance terminated, the Japanese wanted a defensive alliance of some sort to protect their position in the Pacific, and the British sought to tighten their diplomatic relationship with the United States. The Four-Power Accord was a considerable diplomatic achievement because it met these goals while also replacing a far more solid agreement of mutual defense between Japan and Britain against any third, non-aligned power.

The Four-Power Accord's history began with the signing of the original Anglo-Japanese defensive alliance on 30 January 1902. Great Britain sought out this alliance initially to help protect her Asian colonial possessions, thus allowing Great Britain to focus nautically upon containing the expanding German navy. Japan agreed to the alliance to ensure protection for her territorial gains on the Asian mainland and to prevent other powers from challenging her colonial expansion. Both parties benefited from the treaty, and Japan was well protected diplomatically by this treaty; for example, when she declared war upon Russia in 1904, Great Britain chose to remain neutral in that conflict mainly out of respect for its treaty relationship with Japan. Fighting a diplomatically isolated Russia, Japan triumphed in its war and rapidly expanded its position in China

⁷⁸ Levermore, *League of Nations handbook*, 297.

after its victory over Russia. Japan in 1904 seemed poised to join the ranks of the Great Powers on a par with its European peers; however, the United States during its role as mediator of the Russo-Japanese peace treaty was successful through a mix of diplomacy and indirect intimidation in forcing Japan to lessen its gains from the Russo-Japanese war. This intervention by the United States marked the beginning of a period of growing mutual distrust between the United States and Japan.

The Anglo-Japanese defensive alliance in 1905 was revised primarily to recognize Japan's increased position within Korea and to amend the terms obligating each power to aid the other militarily:

If by reason of unprovoked attack or aggressive action, wherever arising, on the part of any other Power or Powers either Contracting Party should be involved in war in defense of its territorial rights or special interests....the other Contracting Party will at once come to the assistance of its ally and will conduct the war in common and make peace in mutual agreement with it.⁷⁹

Great Britain in turn gained Japan's agreement that their defensive alliance would be expanded to include Great Britain's possessions in India as well as in the Pacific. The revised alliance was binding on both powers from 1905 until 1921. It was because of this treaty that Japan entered World War I against Germany and, while fighting as Great Britain's ally, captured the German territories in China. Great Britain in 1919 stood behind the promises made to Japan when it entered World War I in 1914 with the Triple Entente powers, and the Versailles Treaty awarded to Japan the former German territories in China. By 13 July 1921, when the Anglo-Japanese treaty was set to expire, the Japanese government was committed to the alliance being renewed. In contrast, the government of Great Britain, seeking stronger relations with the United States, wanted to

⁷⁹ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 112.

graciously end this particular defensive alliance due to the concern it was raising within the American government.

In essence, the key concern of American political leaders was what Great Britain would do in the event of an American-Japanese clash in the Pacific, a clash that seemed increasingly possible due to growing Japanese expansionism and militarism. Military planners in the United States, remote as the risk seemed, were concerned that in some possible war scenarios, Great Britain might join Japan in waging war upon the United States. Policymakers within the United States government were aware that Japan had become increasingly belligerent from 1905 onwards in asserting its Pacific diplomacy. The growing belligerency was in part because the Japanese government used its alliance with Great Britain as a counterweight to any other great power's pressure in the Pacific. Great Britain agreed in principle to an extension of the treaty in 1921 but did not sign a formal renewal with Japan, instead delaying on the grounds that a new, broader treaty might be negotiated during the Washington Naval Conference. Japan entered the Washington Naval Conference seeking to have its position within Asia and the Pacific ensured by a defensive alliance, while the United States sought to end the risk posed to its position in the Pacific by the Anglo-Japanese alliance, and Great Britain sought a graceful way out of the entire situation.⁸⁰ The Four-Power Accord was an impressive diplomatic achievement because it provided protection for the status quo in Asia and an assurance of stability through mutual defensive protection without actually pledging any of the signatory powers to take concrete actions in the event of a conflict.

The Four-Power Accord was composed of four main articles and was ratified, with two addendums, on 13 December 1921 at the Fourth Plenary session of the

⁸⁰ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 103 – 134

Washington Naval Conference. The major obligations and requirements of the treaty were outlined in its first two articles. The first article stated:

The high contracting parties agree as between themselves to respect their rights in relation to their insular possessions and insular dominions in the regions of the Pacific Ocean.

If there should develop between any of the high contracting parties a controversy arising out of any Pacific question and involving their said rights which is not satisfactorily settled by diplomacy and is likely to affect the harmonious accord now happily subsisting between them they shall invite the high contracting parties to a joint conference to which the whole subject will be referred for consideration and adjustment.

The second article provided the quasi-defensive aspect of the agreement:

If the said rights are threatened by the aggressive action of any other power the high contracting parties shall communicate with each other fully and frankly in order to arrive at an understanding as to the most efficient measures to be taken, jointly and separately, to meet the exigencies of the particular situation.

The final two articles dealt with administrative matters; the third article pledged the signatories to honor this agreement for ten years and not to terminate the accord prior to the conclusion of the full decade. The third article also established that the Four-Power Accord would continue past the first decade unless one of the signatories, following an involved notification procedure, ended the treaty. The fourth article pledged the signatories to ratify the treaty as soon as possible by each nation's respective constitutional means and also stated that, upon ratification, the Four-Power Accord would terminate the Anglo-Japanese agreement originally signed in 1902 and renewed in 1904 and again in 1911.⁸¹ When the treaty was ratified by the Washington Naval Conference delegates on 13 December 1921, two additional appendices were added. The first stated that although the treaty applied to the Japanese mandated islands in the Pacific, the

⁸¹ Levermore, League of Nations handbook, 297.

United States did not, in signing the treaty, recognize the legitimacy of those mandates. The second appendix pledged that the treaty did not apply to matters “which according to principles of international law lie exclusively within the domestic jurisdiction of the respective powers.”⁸² Both of these appendices were included out of sensitivity to domestic political pressures within the United States that opposed some of the potential ramifications of the Four-Power Accord as initially written.

The first article of this treaty is particularly noteworthy because it pledged each of the four major great powers in the Pacific to mutually recognize each other’s spheres of influence for a full decade. This pledge was critical because it provided the Japanese government with a written assurance that Japan’s special position within China would be respected as well; by placing Japan’s Pacific island holdings beyond war it severely reduced the ability of other powers to use military force in China. This in turn was a major means of ensuring stability within the region because by forcing each of the signatory powers to publicly renounce any concerns or challenges they had with the allocation of territory and resources in the Pacific, the risk of Japan resorting to war to protect its Pacific interests was greatly reduced. The second article of the treaty also had a profound impact on the possibility of stability in the Pacific because it gave the impression, but not the substance, of a mutual defensive military alliance. The article required that if any signatory nation’s rights in the Pacific were threatened by any other power, the signatory nations would “communicate with each other frankly and fully” to find an “efficient” means of resolving the issue. The treaty did not specify what responses this might encompass, or even require any actual action be taken; it just required that all the parties speak honestly and bluntly with each other about a solution.

⁸² Levermore, League of Nations handbook, 298.

What makes this a brilliant piece of diplomatic language is that this article could be seen as a pledge that every signatory power would first rapidly figure out a solution to a regional crisis and then just as swiftly take action. As this action could, in theory, include the possibility of military action by the other signatory powers to contain aggression instigated by one signatory power against another, for the Japanese government the Four-Power Accord was an acceptable replacement to the Anglo-Japanese alliance, not ideal but acceptable.⁸³

For the United States, the Four-Power Accord was ideal because it left America free of any direct military commitments to foreign wars. In 1921 it would have been difficult for the political leadership of the United States to convince its citizens to agree to any treaty that directly pledged American military action in a foreign war. The second article, by only requiring the United States to communicate frankly with its partner signatory nations in the event of aggression, a pledge of moral support, left the United States government completely free to dictate its reaction to any crisis on a case-by-case basis. The addendums to the Four-Power Accord were added first to respect the United States' position opposing any treaty that even potentially infringed on American national sovereignty by restricting the scope of the Four-Power Accord to only non-domestic issues; second, the other addendum to the Four-Power Accord, where the United States refused to recognize the mandates formally but pledged to respect them, was part of the legally delicate international situation caused by the United States not being a member of the League of Nations. The mandates placed on the Pacific islands and awarded to Japan were a direct creation of the Versailles Treaty and the League of Nations. The United States, as a non-signatory to that treaty and a non-member of that assembly, maintained a

⁸³ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 174-181

position throughout the 1920s where it refused technically to recognize certain actions of the League of Nations. Pragmatically, though, this addendum was a concession to Japan because one of the sources of tension between the two nations was the American government's position of non-recognition of Japan's mandates.

The Four-Power Accord overall was, on one level, a diplomatic loss for Japan. Instead of successfully renewing the more militarily useful Anglo-Japanese alliance, Japan gained a position in a broader, but less military, pan-Pacific partnership. To a certain degree, Japan had to accept this new treaty because Britain resisted renewing the older defensive alliance as part of a broader effort to gain goodwill with the United States. However, the Four-Power Accord on another level was a gain for Japan because the Accord formally acknowledged the status quo in the Pacific as it existed in 1921. As the Japanese government at both conferences sought to protect its position in China and the Pacific, the Four-Power Accord was valuable because it theoretically achieved this goal in one of the two concerned spheres. The main success of the Four-Power Accord, though, was that it paved the way towards the successful negotiation of the naval arms reduction treaty. Without some sort of protective alliance, Japan would have been far more resistant to the proposed levels of disarmament out of fear of war.⁸⁴

The treaty for the reduction of naval arms, formally titled the Five-Power Limitation of Naval Armament Treaty, was the cornerstone goal and effort of the Washington Naval Conference. The naval arms limitation treaty got its formal start on 12 November 1921 following the opening address for the conference that was given by the President of the United States, Warren G. Harding. Harding spoke broadly in his

⁸⁴ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 148 – 150; Yamato Ichihashi, *The Washington conference and after; a historical survey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1928), 143 – 146.

speech, calling upon the conference delegates to join in a collective effort to promote peace and move away from conflict and hate. Harding's speech was filled with pleasant generalities, in keeping with diplomatic traditions of the time. The speech immediately following Harding's, in contrast, was a diplomatic explosion as Charles Evan Hughes, conference delegate and Secretary of State for the United States, outlined a detailed plan for massive naval disarmament. After giving a brief history of previous disarmament conferences, Hughes argued that these past efforts failed due to a lack of will by the attending powers, a failure due to timidity. Hughes then outlined four broad, bold principles he felt the upcoming conference should embrace in forming the naval reduction treaty:

1. That all capital shipbuilding programs, either actual or projected, should be abandoned.
2. That further reduction should be made through the scrapping of certain of the older ships.
3. That in general regard should be had to the existing naval strength of the powers concerned.
4. That the capital ship tonnage should be used as the measurement of strength for navies and a proportionate allowance of auxiliary combat craft be prescribed.⁸⁵

Hughes moved directly from this statement of fairly concrete principles to state a series of even more concrete pledges; he declared that the United States was ready to immediately scrap a total of thirty capital ships with a total weight of 845,740 tons. This included scrapping all the ships built since 1916, ships built as part of a massive effort by United States to increase its fleet by ten new battleships and six battle cruisers. The cost of scrapping just this post-1916 construction alone would be \$330,000,000. Hughes then called upon Great Britain to scrap a total of 583,375 tons and Japan a total of 448,928 tons of capital ships, smaller overall sacrifices that included both older existing ships and

⁸⁵ Levermore, League of Nations handbook, 231

new ships under construction. Hughes concluded his initial presentation by outlining specific timetables for the replacement of ships over the next decade; his timetables called for an initial six-year naval holiday during which no new capital ships would be built.⁸⁶

After outlining his proposed initial foundation for a comprehensive naval arms reduction treaty, Hughes concluded his opening speech by reminding the delegates that work still needed to be completed on several issues. Hughes drew the conference delegates' attention to a few key issues: the role of submarines in war, the use of aircraft in war, auxiliary naval craft limits, and the capital ship fleet tonnage allowances for France and Italy. Hughes' initial proposals were meticulously detailed; he even named the specific capital ships the United States recommended that Great Britain and Japan scrap and listed the full complement of American ships that were to be destroyed.⁸⁷ The immediate reactions of the other delegations were enthusiastic, and several pledged support "in principle" to the American proposals outlined by Hughes; the other national delegates formally expressed their initial concerns on 15 November 1921. Speaking for the British delegation, the Right Honorable Arthur J. Balfour, Lord President of the Council, expressed Great Britain's enthusiasm for the plan as outlined but also stated that Britain would have to proceed with caution, due to its globally dispersed imperial holdings. Balfour stressed to the other delegates, in particular the delegates and audience from the United States, that Britain's strategic difficulties and traditional reliance upon the sea as its means of survival required that it be sure any naval arms reduction treaty

⁸⁶ Levermore, *League of Nations handbook*, 222 – 234.

⁸⁷ Levermore, *League of Nations handbook*, 234 – 242.

left Britain secure.⁸⁸ Speaking for the Japanese delegation, Admiral Baron Tomosaburo Kato, Minister of the Marine, formally stated that although Japan agreed in principle with Hughes' proposal, it could not agree to the naval ratios as outlined. Japan would require a slightly higher ratio than the navies of the United States and Great Britain to ensure its security.⁸⁹

Hughes' plan focused primarily upon the reduction of capital ships, specifically dreadnaughts, battleships, and battle cruisers. Naval theory in the 1920s linked a nation's capacity to wage aggressive war with its ability to control sea access. World War I had proven that only a nation or alliance with strong naval power could keep its lines of trade open and block its rival's commerce and that through these measures naval power could shape a broader land war. Furthermore, because in 1922 many great powers saw the Pacific region as a likely source of future conflict, the issue of naval power was even more vital. Any potential war in the Pacific would have to rely quite heavily upon naval forces due to the vast distances involved. Therefore, an unspoken goal of Hughes' proposal was to create a system of regional parity by destroying enough capital ships that aggressive war became far more difficult for any power, alone or in an alliance, to conduct. A key aspect of Hughes' proposal was to strike an equal balance of power between Great Britain and the United States. By making their fleets effectively equal in tonnage, Hughes hoped both nations would counterbalance each other as equal global powers. If Hughes' proposals worked and successfully neutralized the risk of aggressive war, then the naval arms reduction treaty would also simultaneously solidify the political and territorial status quo in the Pacific and around the world.

⁸⁸ Levermore, *League of Nations handbook*, 244 – 250.

⁸⁹ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 155 – 156.

Peace, stability, and naval fleets solely capable of defense were the ideals outlined by the United States at the Washington Naval Conference; however, practical concerns threatened these ideals from the outset. The cornerstone of the proposed system for reducing naval armaments was the scrapping of capital ships, mainly battle cruisers and battleships, and assigning to each signatory power a maximum limit upon capital ship fleet size based upon a comparative tonnage ratio. Hughes' initial proposal called for an initial ratio of 6-5-3 in 1922 that, through replacements and future construction, by 1932 would change to of 5-5-3. In essence, this meant that for every five tons of capital ships possessed by the United States and Great Britain in 1932, Japan would possess three tons of capital ships. Initially the rationale for this was based upon both Britain's and the United States' need to maintain fleets on multiple oceans, while Japan could concentrate its naval defenses solely in the Pacific Ocean. In theory, Japan's smaller fleet in overall tonnage would regionally match either the United States or Great Britain in the event of war. However, this initial proposed set of ratios, and the naval treaty itself, were put into jeopardy almost immediately by the Japanese delegation's demand that the initial fleet and final fleet ratios be set at 10-10-7, respectively. This demand by the Japanese delegation, setting its fleet at seventy percent of the size of the individual fleets of Great Britain and the United States, was felt by the naval experts at the conference to be of sufficient magnitude to allow Japan to wage aggressive war. Admiral Kato, leading the Japanese delegation in this demand, initially challenged Hughes' proposed ratios based upon concerns for Japan's ability to defend itself and then by challenging the pre-treaty fleet sizes calculated by the naval experts.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 154 – 156; Ichihashi, *The Washington Conference and after*, 46 – 50.

On 30 November 1921, the Japanese delegation announced it intended to remain firm on its demand for a modified 10-10-7 capital ship ratio; the naval treaty reached an official deadlock. However, private negotiations continued between Kato, Hughes, and Balfour seeking a compromise where Japan would be willing to accede to the original 5-5-3 ratio. Eventually the beginning of a new compromise was reached; Kato promised Japan's consent to the lesser ratio if, in exchange, Great Britain and the United States would agree to two new requirements. The first requirement was an agreement that no new fortifications or naval base development would occur in the Pacific until 1932. The second requirement was that the Japanese navy be allowed to maintain the *Mutsu*, a newly constructed Japanese super dreadnaught that had considerable sentimental value for the Japanese public. The high sentimental value of the *Mutsu* for the Japanese public first stemmed from the fund-raising conducted by Japanese school children to help pay for its completion and second because it was a powerful symbol of Japanese naval development and national pride. Neither of these new requirements by Japan, though, was agreed to initially even on principle as both Great Britain and the United States felt that these concessions, without certain caveats, would make the naval strengths of the three nations unbalanced.⁹¹

The less complicated challenge that the three negotiating powers had to resolve was the technically advanced nature of the *Mutsu*. To maintain a balance between the three powers' navies, the effective fighting strength of each navy had to be in proportion, as well as the navies' overall tonnage. Ships like the *Mutsu* were referred to officially as "post-Jutland ships," as the 1916 Jutland naval battle had been a major turning point in

⁹¹ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 157 – 159; Ichihashi, *The Washington Conference and after*, 49 – 51.

naval design theory. Prior to the Battle of Jutland, Great Britain had focused upon the construction of battle cruisers, ships with heavy armament and high speed, advantages gained at the sacrifice of armor. Battle cruisers also allowed Britain to rapidly expand its capital ship fleet prior to World War I at reduced expense. After Jutland, naval planners moved towards constructing slower heavier warships, referred to as “super-dreadnaughts,” ships built with more powerful guns and very heavy armor to provide longer protection in battle. In 1921 Great Britain’s naval strength still rested heavily upon ships that had been built prior to World War I, ships that Jutland had shown were vastly outmatched by the newer super-dreadnaughts in combat. The original naval reduction proposal outlined by Hughes allowed Japan, Great Britain, and the United States to retain one super-dreadnaught each, respectively the *Nagato*, the *Maryland*, and the *Hood*. Japan’s insistence that it retain the *Mutsu* in addition to the *Nagato* gave its navy a two-to-one superiority in super-dreadnaughts to the other two powers. However, simply allowing the other two powers to also retain an extra super-dreadnaught each would disrupt the 5-5-3 ratio. Because maintaining a strategic and tactical balance between these three navies was seen as the key to avoiding future wars, a compromise to this problem that was acceptable to all the concerned powers had to be achieved for the treaty to succeed.

On 15 December 1921, the issue was successfully resolved with a modification to the original proposal that re-configured the three nation’s navies to allow super-dreadnaught parity to be achieved and simultaneously maintain the 5-5-3 ratio. Japan would retain the *Mutsu* and the *Nagato*, the United States would in turn finish constructing two new super-dreadnaughts of the *West Virginia* class, and Great Britain

would be allowed to complete two of the four super-dreadnaughts of the *Hood* class it had begun constructing in August 1921. The new plan, though, also required each signatory nation to scrap additional older ships: Japan the *Settsu*, the United States the *North Dakota* and the *Delaware*, and Great Britain four ships of the *King George V* type. Great Britain's additional ship destruction was delayed, though, until the completion of the new Hood type super-dreadnaughts for British naval security to be maintained without interruption. A minor irony of this agreement was that Britain ended up agreeing to spend approximately \$80,000,000 in 1921 dollars on new armaments in the interest of achieving a balanced treaty of disarmament.⁹² With this compromise, the key requirement of parity in effective regional naval strength had been achieved; and with regional parity the United States, Great Britain, and Japan had all effectively limited their ability to wage aggressive war.

The other major compromise required by the Japanese delegation was that Britain and the United States agree that within a defined area of the Pacific Ocean, all three powers would build no new naval facilities or fortifications nor improve existing military structures. This moratorium on building and expanding militarily useful structures would remain in effect from the date of treaty ratification in 1922 until 1932. This compromise was challenging to formulate because all three powers agreed that it would not include their own domestic territories or the dominions of Australia and New Zealand. Firmly defining these boundaries proved difficult. Underneath the surface negotiations, the issue in contention was the ability of Great Britain and the United States to project naval power into the Pacific region; in 1921 the United States lacked any Pacific naval bases with adequate facilities to support large scale fleet operations. Great Britain had one major

⁹² Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 159 – 161.

naval base in Singapore but no other Pacific bases capable of supporting a fleet of the size necessary to challenge the Japanese navy. The United States navy had planned in 1921 to build new naval facilities on Guam and the Philippines, but as a concession to Japan, the United States conference delegation agreed that the proposed construction moratorium would include those two islands and also the Aleutian Islands. Great Britain agreed to a zone of no construction north of Singapore, and the final agreement was codified in Article XIV of the Naval Power Limitation Treaty.⁹³

The actual text of Article XIV itself reflects the complexity of the negotiations necessary to formulate this compromise:

The United States, the British Empire and Japan agree that the status quo at the time of the signing of the present treaty with regard to fortifications and naval bases, shall be maintained in their respective territories and possessions specified hereunder:

(1) The insular possessions which the United States now holds or may hereafter acquire in the Pacific Ocean, except (1) those adjacent to the coast of the United States, Alaska, and the Panama Canal Zone, not including the Aleutian Islands, and (b) the Hawaiian Islands;

(2) Hong Kong and the insular possessions which the British Empire now holds or may hereafter acquire in the Pacific Ocean, east of the meridian of 110 degrees east longitude, except (a) those adjacent to the coast of Canada, (b) the Commonwealth of Australia and its territories, and (c) New Zealand.

(3) The following insular territories and possessions of the Japan in the Pacific Ocean, to wit: the Kurile Islands, the Bonin Islands, Amami-Oshima, the Loochoo Islands, Formosa and the Pescadores, and any insular territories or possessions in the Pacific Ocean which Japan may hereafter acquire.

The maintenance of the status quo under the foregoing provisions implies no new fortifications or naval bases shall be established in the territories and possessions specified, that no measures shall be taken to increase the existing naval facilities for the repair and maintenance of naval forces, and that no increase shall be made in the coast defenses of the territories and possessions above specified. This restriction, however, does not preclude such repair and replacement of wornout weapons and equipment as is

⁹³ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 163 – 171.

customary in naval and military establishments in time of peace.⁹⁴

The final paragraph of this article outlines the key tenet of the agreement: Great Britain, Japan, and the United States agreed to contain their ability to wage war against each other within the Pacific. By both the United States and Great Britain agreeing to the limitations outlined above, any sort of major naval activity within the Pacific would be difficult. In addition, it also made any joint military action between these two powers against Japan difficult. This concession, though, extended beyond preserving the status quo within the Pacific Ocean itself. It also amounted to an agreement between the three key nations that Japan's position within China would be protected from any challenge from the other powers. This unwritten agreement was a requirement critical for the Japanese government to feel safe taking a smaller fleet allotment in tonnage and number than that allotted to Great Britain and the United States. The agreement not to improve military facilities within the Pacific Ocean effectively "sealed" the region for ten years. Should any of the three powers wish to modify their holdings or position within the Pacific Ocean, they would have to do so through diplomacy or politics, not military action or threat of action.

With an accord reached between the United States, Japan, and Great Britain about capital ship ratios, pre- and post-Jutland ships, and fortifications in the Pacific, the three signatory powers then presented their work to the remaining two great powers, France and Italy. The delegations of the United States, Great Britain, and Japan had determined that the fair ratio for France and Italy was 1.75 tons of capital ships each to the five tons of Great Britain and the United States, a ratio that also gave the two powers naval parity. That would have put the total capital ship tonnage ratios at 5-5-3-1.75-1.75, a proposed

⁹⁴ Levermore, *League of Nations handbook*, 372 – 373.

five power ratio that infuriated the French delegates. On 15 December 1921, the French delegation formally demanded that France be granted a capital ship tonnage equal to that of Japan, which meant a total French capital ship fleet of 350,000 tons. In addition the French delegation, its demands spearheaded by Albert Sarraut, Senator of France and French Minister of Colonies,⁹⁵ insisted that as France had suspended its naval construction entirely due to the demands of World War I, it would have to build ten new capital ships of 35,000 tons each. This was a horribly destabilizing pair of demands; not only would it disrupt the agreed-upon capital ship ratios, but it would also give France ten post-Jutland super dreadnaughts, a figure that dwarfed the allotment of modern super dreadnaughts for any other power. The other delegations refused the French demands and the conference deadlocked temporarily until the deadlock was cleared by a bit of diplomatic intrigue.⁹⁶

Hughes on 16 December 1921, in an effort to end the capital ship tonnage deadlock, broke diplomatic protocol and telegraphed Briand in Paris. Hughes directly appealed to Briand, asking him as France's Prime Minister to act in the interest of achieving an agreeable balance and overturn the French delegation's position. Briand, in a personal telegraph back to Hughes, on 18 December 1921 changed France's position formally and agreed to the original proposed capital ship ratio for France and the agreement to temporarily halt all new capital ship construction. However, Briand in the same telegram insisted that France could not agree to any limitation on the tonnage of auxiliary naval ships or submarines, ushering in a new controversy at the conference.

⁹⁵ George Foster Pearce, Right Honorable Senator, *Conference on the Limitation of Armament held at Washington D.C., United States of America, from the 12th November 1921 to 6th February 1922: report of the Australian delegate, Senator the Right Hon. George Foster Pearce* (Melbourne: A.J. Mullett for the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1922), 4.

⁹⁶ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 212-214; Levermore, *League of Nations handbook*, 310.

However, the key agreement needed on capital ship tonnage had been reached, France had conceded to the demands of the conference and accepted parity with Italy and an inferior position to the other great powers in capital ship tonnage. Originally, the French delegation had argued that it needed a capital ship fleet on a par with that of Japan because of France's need to be able to simultaneously protect its global commerce and maintain fleet parity with Italy in the Mediterranean. As the French position on its capital ship needs had not changed, its acceptance of its reduced fleet status was, and was perceived at the time to be, a diplomatic loss. The issue at the heart of the French delegation's stubborn insistence on naval parity with Japan, and later stance on submarines and auxiliary craft tonnage, was based upon what the French military perceived it needed to ensure the stability of France's global position.⁹⁷

M. Briand's reply to Hughes' telegram holds within its text the essence of the next major issues to divide the attending delegates - submarines and auxiliary naval craft:

But so far as defensive ships are concerned (light cruisers, torpedo boats and submarines) it would be impossible for the French Government, without putting itself to contradiction with the vote of Chambers, to accept reductions corresponding to those which we accept for capital ships under this formal reserve which you will certainly understand.

The idea which dominates the Washington Conference is to restrict naval armaments which are offensive and costly. But I do not believe that it is in the program to deny to a nation like France, which has a large extent of coasts and a great number of distant colonies, the essential means of defending its communications and its security.⁹⁸

Treaty-imposed limitations on auxiliary naval craft were limited by the Washington Naval Conference to a series of weak restrictions; auxiliary and support craft built after 1922 were limited only in their total tonnage and gun size, respectively 10,000 tons

⁹⁷ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 212 – 216; Ichihashi, *The Washington Conference and after*, 60 – 71.

⁹⁸ Levermore, *League of Nations handbook*, 314.

standard displacement, and were unable to carry any gun with a caliber exceeding eight inches.⁹⁹ These two limitations were to ensure that any auxiliary craft built after 1922 would be unable to successfully challenge a capital ship in direct gunnery combat. However, Hughes' original proposed plan had set out the idea of limiting each navy's total tonnages of auxiliary craft; this ideal had to be abandoned as the other four signatory nations had little interest in restricting these smaller ships because auxiliary ships were seen simply as cheap weapons of defense. This issue was also directly influenced by the more caustic debate over the limitation or banning of submarines as ships of war; the auxiliary craft category included those ships built to hunt submarines. In the face of a stubborn demand by the French delegation over the right of France to maintain and use unrestricted submarine fleets, the British delegation in turn fully supported allowing unlimited auxiliary craft construction.

The open allowance for auxiliary craft tonnage was not seen by the attending delegates as a failure of the Washington Naval Conference in one of its main objectives, limiting naval arms, but rather as an unfortunate necessity required by the conference's success in reducing capital ship tonnage. The auxiliary craft allowed under the treaty were not considered a tool for offensive wars that might challenge the status quo. Instead they were seen solely as a means for the great powers to maintain their current spheres of influence. British naval experts saw cruisers and destroyers, the most common type of auxiliary craft, as vital to protecting British commercial interests against the threat of submarine warfare. For the French, this open allowance would allow them to build the ships they felt were necessary to protect their global imperial holdings and also allow them defensive parity with Italy in the Mediterranean. Pragmatically, this compromise

⁹⁹ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 376 – 377.

was necessary because it allowed the signatory great powers a means of adjusting their naval strength relative to each other and to face any future changes in the global balance of power, without risking offensive war or starting expensive naval arms races.

At the same time as the limitations on auxiliary ships were agreed upon, the assorted signatory powers also agreed to a set of special, looser rules for future aircraft carrier construction. Aircraft carriers were restricted mainly in total tonnage and the maximum number each fleet could have, under the same body of regulations that covered the signatory powers' capital ship fleets. Aircraft carriers also were restricted in that they could only be built and replaced after 1922 on the same schedule as capital ships; however, beyond that the regulations were greatly relaxed. The signatory powers could replace any or all of their current aircraft carriers that were built or in production by 12 November 1921 because such craft were deemed experimental by the delegates. Aircraft carriers were limited individually to 27,000 tons each, but a signatory power could build up to two new aircraft carriers with a limit of 33,000 tons each, assuming such construction did not exceed their maximum total allowed capital ship tonnage. This provision was in place to allow the signatory powers the option of converting up to two of their current dreadnaughts under construction and scheduled for scrapping into aircraft carriers instead. Finally, aircraft carriers were restricted in only the number and the caliber of guns they could carry; all other details of construction or design were at the discretion of the signatory powers.¹⁰⁰

Aircraft carriers existed to transport aircraft, one of the modern developments of warfare whose impact would later vastly modify the balance of power in naval strength between nations. At the same time that the naval arms reduction treaties were being

¹⁰⁰ Levermore, League of Nations handbook, 370 – 371,

negotiated, a proposal was considered by the Washington Naval Conference to limit the use of aircraft in general as weapons of war, a proposal that was flatly rejected by the reviewing committee. Although the Italian delegation later presented an idea to the conference as a whole, bypassing the aircraft subcommittee, to limit the number of pilots allowed in a nation's armed forces, the conference agreed on 9 January 1922 with its aircraft subcommittee's findings that rules of warfare for the use of aircraft would be a potential matter for a future conference.¹⁰¹ Aircraft were a new weapon of war that had come out of World War I. They were left unregulated as their total potential and threat had yet to be understood; submarines, however, were a better understood and far more controversial threat.

Of all the issues discussed at the Washington Naval Conference, the role of the submarine in future warfare was probably the most acrimonious. The essence of the controversy was that the British delegation sought from the conference a total ban on submarine construction, use, and presence in any of the signatory nation's fleets, while the French delegation pressed hard for the entire issue of submarine regulation to be dropped by the conference. The American delegation initially offered a compromise solution that sought to limit the total tonnage of submarines held by each signatory nation, an extension of their capital ship ratio plan, but this idea was unsatisfactory to both the British and French delegates. The issue of submarines at the conference actually masked a complicated diplomatic struggle between France and Great Britain over regional dominance, the security of naval assets, and the security of commerce from wartime raiding. The British delegation, led by Lord Lee of Fareham, G.B.E., K.C.B., and First Lord of the Admiralty, contended that submarines had no practical value as

¹⁰¹ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 209 – 211, 236.

weapons of war, in that submarines could not adequately defend a nation's coastlines from naval assault and during World War I had proven ineffective at attacking vessels of war. Instead, the British delegation argued, the submarine was most useful as a commerce raider and in engaging specifically in surprise raids on unsuspecting commercial shipping.¹⁰²

While this issue was being debated by a dedicated subcommittee on 30 December 1921, Lord Lee, to bolster Britain's position, read excerpts from a French article that seemed to justify British concerns. The article, on submarine warfare theory, was written in January 1920 by Capitaine de Freygate Castex, a high ranked naval officer in the French Mediterranean Fleet and an instructor in the French naval academy. The article appeared in *La Revue Maritime*, a journal with an emphasis on historical matters in naval warfare and a semi-official organ of the French navy. In his article Captain Castex argued, according to Lord Lee, that the unrestricted use of the submarine by the Germans in World War I had been a tactically sound strategy and had produced valuable results. Furthermore, Lord Lee stated, Captain Castex also contended in his article that the tactic of launching torpedo attacks upon merchantmen without first giving warning was not unsound or even deplorable when considered against other tactics of modern war. Lord Lee closed by reading to the subcommittee a powerful quote of Captain Castex directly from his article:

After many centuries of effort, thanks to the ingenuity of man, the instrument, the system, the martingale is at hand which will overthrow for good and all the naval power of England.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Pearce, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, Report, 3; Cyril Arthur Player, *Arms-and the men; intimate personal glimpses of delegates, attachés, and unofficial personages at the Washington conference of armament and pacific and Far Eastern problems* (Detroit: Evening News Association, 1922), 27 – 30; Ichihashi, *The Washington Conference and after*, 73 – 74.

¹⁰³ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 222.

The controversy sparked by Lord Lee's presentation required many weeks of further negotiations to resolve. The French government initially denied the intent of the author and then denied that the article represented French naval strategy. As the French denied the article's impact, the British delegation contended that this article revealed the true feelings of the French government regarding the British navy and amounted to a French plan to use submarines to cripple Britain if necessary.¹⁰⁴

The French delegation during those weeks of controversy, led on this issue by Albert Sarraut and his French naval experts, argued that submarine fleets were a vital option for naval defense for weaker nations and a useful means of guarding long communication lines for an imperial power. Hughes attempted two compromises based on tonnage limitations. First, he created a plan of submarine fleet tonnage limits based on the same ratios as the capital ship ratios. This proposal was blocked by the British delegation as it would have allowed most of the attending powers to increase the overall size of their submarine fleets rather than destroy submarines.¹⁰⁵ Second, he restricted submarine tonnage proposal, presented following Britain's rejection of the first proposal, which limited the United States and Great Britain in total submarine tonnage and restricted the other signatory powers to only their currently constructed submarine fleet sizes. This proposal failed to gain support. Italy objected because it was not given parity with France in submarines, and Japan objected on the grounds that it gave the Japanese navy a ratio of submarines in comparison to Great Britain and the United States that was inferior to its granted capital ship ratio.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Buell, *The Washington Conference*, 228 – 239.

¹⁰⁵ Ichihashi, *The Washington Conference and after*, 72 – 76.

¹⁰⁶ Ichihashi, *The Washington Conference and after*, 77.

However, the various delegations finally were able to create an agreeable compromise that was also unique diplomatically, a treaty that regulated the use of a weapon in warfare. Rather than attempting to restrict submarines through technical or numeric limitations, the conference delegates instead created a set of laws of conduct that would govern submarine attacks on commerce. The agreed rules of war specified that a submarine could attack or seize a merchant ship only if the submarine first warned the ship to halt and second searched the vessel to determine if it was a legitimate target; only then could it sink the merchant ship and only if the crew and passengers were taken to safety first. Militarily, such a set of rules made commerce warfare practically impossible, a fact recognized formally by the conference:

The signatory powers recognize the practical impossibility of using submarines as commerce destroyers without violating, as they were violated in the recent war of 1914- 1918, the requirements, universally accepted by civilized nations for the protection of the lives of neutrals and non-combatants, and to the end that the prohibition of the use of submarines as commerce destroyers shall be universally accepted as part of the law of nations they now accept that prohibition as henceforth binding as between themselves and they invite all other nations to adhere thereto.¹⁰⁷

The signatory nations also agreed that any individuals who violated these rules of conduct, whether or not they were acting in the service of a nation or under orders, were to be tried for piracy. The specific wording of the treaty article did not specify submarines but instead applied the rules to all vessels of war; however, the target of these accords were submarines and their use in commerce raiding. These regulations on commerce raiding, defining legal conduct of war, were critical because they introduced a

¹⁰⁷ Levermore, League of Nations handbook, 331-332.

new diplomatic approach for regulating or reducing certain aspects of war, rules of conduct on combat.¹⁰⁸

These new rules on submarine warfare would ideally limit the impact of submarines on future conflicts by eliminating their use as commerce raiders, considered by many naval experts at the time to be their most valuable use in war. These regulations met the needs of the British delegation and, as a result, the British dropped their demand that submarines be banned outright. As the regulations also allowed France and any other nation that wished to maintain submarine fleets the freedom to do so, the compromise was acceptable to all. But beyond these immediate geopolitical concerns, the lasting value of this agreement was the concept it enshrined: that individuals could be held personally responsible for war crimes even if they acted under the orders of their government. This concept, which would be used initially in the Nuremburg trials at the end of World War II, was first outlined in this treaty. Finally these regulations on submarine warfare were written both to protect commercial shipping and to meet the moral expectations of the signatory nations that civilian life would be protected in war. This agreement at the Washington Naval Conference represents one of the rare moments when morality and diplomacy successfully meshed together. Because of this treaty throughout the 1920s, policymakers' concerns about the submarine as a force that could undermine the global balance of power were alleviated, contributing to a decade of relative peace.

The final major noteworthy accomplishment of the Washington Naval Conference was the agreement banning the use of chemical agents in war. Agreed upon on 6 January

¹⁰⁸ Levermore, League of Nations handbook, 332-333.

1922, after a report by the weapons experts subcommittee, the attending delegates stated simply:

The contracting parties agree to abstain from the use of projectiles the sole object of which is the diffusion of asphyxiating or deleterious gases.¹⁰⁹

The attending delegates formally acknowledged that the Versailles Treaty prohibited the nation of Germany from using gas weapons, but the delegates felt a more universal ban on chemical weapons was necessary. Banning poison gas in warfare was in part another means of helping to ensure that the global balance of power would be maintained. The attending delegates understood that cheap weapons that caused heavy casualties on large areas of a battlefield could have modified France's position of land dominance on the European continent, which, in turn, might have provoked increased French militarism. More broadly, though, this type of warfare was considered amoral and was prohibited on humanitarian grounds, one of the few almost purely humanitarian decisions reached by the Washington Naval Conference's attending delegates.¹¹⁰

Besides the Four-Power Accord, which was signed outside of the conference proceedings, the Five-Power Limitation of Naval Armament Treaty with all the provisions described above, filled with technical language and strict timetables, was signed on 1 February 1922. The treaty on submarine warfare and poison gas was sent to the attending nations for ratification in late January 1922 and was ratified after the conference concluded.¹¹¹ But on 1 February 1922, the single greatest work of the Washington Naval Conference was concluded, a treaty that would restrict and regulate naval armaments for the next ten years, a treaty that enshrined stability and the status

¹⁰⁹ Levermore, *League of Nations handbook*, 337.

¹¹⁰ Levermore, *League of Nations handbook*, 336- 337.

¹¹¹ Levermore, *League of Nations handbook*, 386, 388.

quo. The delegates who assembled in the city of Washington to negotiate this treaty, after considerable work and diplomatic effort, created a document that at its heart sought to avoid conflict by making aggressive war impossible. The delegates created a treaty that allocated to the world respective spheres of influence and commerce, a treaty in which the five greatest nations of the 1920s mutually agreed to limit their ability to fight with each other at sea. In doing so the Naval Arms Limitation Treaty did more than prevent war; it did more than restrict the signatory nations' ability to use violence upon each other. It forged a period of global stability.

World War I had ended in 1919 with the signing of the Versailles Treaty, but the global peace of the 1920s was agreed upon in 1922 in the city of Washington, when the five greatest nations of the world agreed to limit themselves to a period of defensive focus rather than offensive spirit. Expansionism occurred in the 1920s, war broke out in the 1920s, but the five great powers of the world from 1922 until the end of the treaty in 1932 did not jostle each other, did not assault each other, and respected their relative zones of strength. In 1922, with the signing of these treaties, a new order in the world was created, an order that maintained peace and stability for a decade. In the next, concluding chapter, the overall impact that these treaties had, both for China and the world, will be reviewed in a study of what this decade of peace meant and how it shaped the 1930s and the lead-in to another global war.

AFTER THE CONFERENCES: THE DECLINE TO WAR

By the end of January 1922, both the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference drew to a close having, in combination, created a treaty system for peaceful international relations that would be valid for at least the next decade, if all the nations abided by their agreements. The Washington Naval Conference had first produced treaties that restricted the use of certain weapons in warfare, and second produced the Five-Power Naval Treaty, which reduced the total tonnage of capital ships in existence and placed restrictions on the armament, size, and armor of future capital ships. The Far Eastern Affairs Conference produced a set of treaties and resolutions that mainly attempted to stabilize the Great Power situation within China; the most critical of these was the Nine-Power Treaty, which attempted to provide for an overall administrative and privileges framework in which China would gain some limited autonomy and cease to be a source of international friction. Finally, negotiations outside of the conferences proper, but critical to their success, created the Four-Power Accord, which designed a new type of mutual defensive system within the Pacific region between Great Britain, the United States, Japan, and France. This new defensive treaty was based upon collective consultation and an agreement to preserve the status quo in the Pacific at the time of the agreement. The overall goal of all these concurrent diplomatic efforts was to attempt to create a unified framework to promote peace, stability, and order within the world at large and specifically within the Pacific, and until the early 1930s, these efforts largely succeeded.

The goal of total disarmament, though, was not achieved at the Washington Naval Conference itself. Pacifists and those favoring disarmament felt more work was needed

to create a system that would allow global harmony to exist through reduced arms. The Five Powers Naval accord, which restricted naval armament levels, was written to expire within a decade. The original plan formulated at the Washington Naval Conference was that a series of subsequent diplomatic conferences would be held to further extend the work of the Washington Naval Conference treaties. Ideally, from 1922 to 1932, it was hoped that a series of additional diplomatic efforts would both further reduce armaments levels on the seas and begin the work of reducing armaments on the land as well, and through greater disarmament further reinforce the decisions made at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference and allow China to remain a bastion of stability.¹¹² Although further efforts were made from 1922 to 1932 to expand the disarmament system of the Washington Naval Conference, these efforts failed due to a greatly changed diplomatic scene within Europe. Concurrently in 1931, the situation in the Pacific rapidly destabilized as well, due to Japanese expansionism, which, in turn, made the work of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference irrelevant, further diminishing the odds of success for any new disarmament initiatives. However, the basic reason that both treaty systems failed to remain relevant after only one decade was not any failure of their design or implementation but the series of major political events that occurred from 1929 – 1932, which greatly modified the global diplomatic scene, making these treaties swiftly inapplicable. But from 1922 – 1929, new efforts to extend disarmament and avoid aggressive war failed mainly due to the same challenges that had nearly caused the original Washington Naval Conference to fail several times in 1922.

¹¹² Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History 1919 – 1933* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), 378 – 379.

Great Britain, the United States, France, and Italy all grasped the nettle of general disarmament; from 1926 to 1932 all four spearheaded planning a great disarmament conference that was supposed to create a unified treaty system for universal land and sea disarmament. Initially this conference was to take place in 1927; the League of Nations established a Preparatory Commission in May 1926 to create the draft treaty for universal disarmament to be considered by all the conference participants. A total of nineteen nations sent delegates to serve on this Preparatory Commission, delegates who represented all ten members of the League of Nations council, six key European nations, and three critical non-member nations; both the United States and the Soviet Union participated in this last category. To summarize the work of this Preparatory Commission is unfortunately simple; it continually delayed the start of the general disarmament conference for six years because the attending delegates could agree on very few basic points upon which to begin work on a draft treaty. On naval issues alone, the Great Powers were sharply divided due to the same concerns that were barely circumvented at the Washington Naval Conference in 1922. For example, France and Great Britain still would not accept universal limitations on cruiser construction. The United States did not wish to establish two classes of cruiser as suggested by Great Britain and France, one light and one heavy, that would be regulated differently because doing so would require the United States to modify its naval construction plans to compete in a new cruiser naval arms race. Italy, in turn, still refused any new ratios or limitations of any sort that did not give it naval parity with France, and France concurrently still refused any new treaty limitations that forced it into naval parity with Italy.¹¹³ These tensions within the Preparatory Commission reflected a broader increase

¹¹³ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 565-568.

in tension within Europe due to a major change in Europe's diplomatic universe, the return of Germany to the diplomatic fold of Europe as a "reformed" power.

By 1926 Germany had both signed the Locarno Agreements, through which it agreed permanently to seek no future territorial adjustments on its western borders, and joined the League of Nations as a full member. In doing so Germany became a "reformed" power, which raised an uncomfortable diplomatic issue for France since the requirement in the Versailles Treaties that Germany vastly disarm also required that the other signatory nations eventually disarm to a similar level. After joining the League and signing the Locarno Agreements, Germany began to insist on arms parity between all the Great Powers, in line with the requirements of the Versailles Treaty. From 1926 onwards, it proved impossible to find a diplomatic balance between German demands for armaments parity with the other Great Powers, either through German rearmament or universal disarmament, and France's insistence it needed more armaments than Germany to remain secure. French demands that its land forces be maintained at a level higher than Germany's to ensure France's security, despite even the Locarno Agreements, made compromise on the issue of land armaments nearly impossible. As a naval power, Germany had been reduced in 1919 to such a low level of armament that no other Great Power in 1926 remotely considered lowering its naval strength to match Germany's.¹¹⁴ Fortunately for the other powers, Germany did not pursue equality in naval matters; it focused its diplomatic efforts solely upon achieving parity in land armaments. However, the spirit of concern caused by the German demands for equality on land further complicated the work of the Preparatory Commission and caused the Great Power

¹¹⁴ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 394-426, 575-583; Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987), 288 – 291, 303-310.

tensions that derailed the private naval disarmament talks taking place in the late 1920s to expand the Washington Naval Conference system.

The first effort to update and expand the naval disarmament system created at the Washington Naval Conference occurred from June to August 1927 with a series of naval conversations between the original Washington Naval Conference signatories. This 1927 naval conference, which was sponsored by the United States and ran concurrently with the work of the Preparatory Committee, initially succeeded in creating a tentative agreement to limit submarines, destroyers, and some other classes of auxiliary ships. This naval conference, though, collapsed over the issue of cruisers. Great Britain and the United States were not able to agree over limitations based on either number or type of cruisers. Great Britain wanted to expand its cruiser fleet under the proposed treaty, while the United States sought no significant increases in cruiser fleet size. Japan attempted to mediate this conflict between the two but proved unsuccessful; the cruiser issue also forestalled the 1927 conference having to address Japan's stated desire to increase its own permitted capital ship allowance under the Washington Naval Conference system. In 1928 an attempt was made to mediate the cruiser conflict. An agreement was negotiated between Great Britain and France that separated cruisers into two classes, based on gun caliber alone. This treaty limited so-called "heavy cruisers," which mounted guns greater than 6" in caliber, and allowed unlimited construction of "light cruisers," those carrying 6" or smaller guns. The United States was invited to join this accord but rejected it for the same reason it had refused to compromise in 1927: the separation of cruisers into two classes still permitted some form of unlimited cruiser

construction, creating a new naval race the United States opposed.¹¹⁵ The final major effort at a multi-power naval compromise occurred in April 1930 when the five original Washington Naval Conference signatories agreed to a treaty that extended the Washington Naval Conference limitations treaty on capital ships for another three years; limited cruiser strength to a similar ratio as capital ships, with the exception of Japan, which was allowed to increase its cruiser fleet strength to 69% of British and American cruiser strengths; and removed all restrictions on submarines. This treaty, though, and naval disarmament with it, was a dead letter by 1932 as Germany and Japan simply began to ignore the specified limitations on naval construction, both in capital ships and cruisers, a policy followed by Great Britain, France, and the United States in turn as the 1930s progressed.¹¹⁶

The diplomatic difficulties faced by the Preparatory Committee beginning in 1926, plus the failed naval disarmament conferences of 1927 and 1928, were symptomatic of a slow shift by the Great Powers away from disarmament as a concept. This slow shift in the 1920s, grounded in both nationalist motivations and low-intensity Great Power rivalry, became much more rapid amidst the diplomatic tumult that erupted in the early 1930s due to the economic collapse of the Great Depression. This unprecedented economic disaster, which occurred concurrently with increased Japanese aggression in China, undermined the entire set of assumptions upon which the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference had been based. Up to the Great Depression, the issues delaying further naval and land disarmament were

¹¹⁵ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 571-572; Charles Cheney Hyde, "The Anglo-French Accord on the Limitation of Naval Armaments," *The American Journal of International Law* 23, no. 1 (January 1929): 112- 116.

¹¹⁶ Alan Schom, *The Eagle and the Rising Sun: The Japanese-American war, 1941-1943, Pearl Harbor through Guadalcanal* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 42-44.

merely extensions of the original challenges faced in 1922 at the Washington Naval Conference. But because of the Great Depression, the early 1930s saw major changes in the balance of power between the Great Powers, which, in turn, drastically and radically changed the global diplomatic landscape. Because of both of these factors, the treaty systems created in 1922 did not precisely fail; more accurately, events made them utterly irrelevant. The impact of the Great Depression on the diplomatic global order was one of the two key reasons the work of the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference collapsed entirely in the 1930s. As some of the stronger Great Powers of 1922 reeled and weakened in the early 1930s, other powers saw an opportunity to gain through rearmament and aggression.

One of the key impacts the Great Depression had on the diplomatic relations between the Great Powers was its impact on international trade between them. As national economies contracted, each Great Power had to seek new trade arrangements to maintain steady sources of imported raw materials and export markets for its goods. The Great Powers met this challenge mainly by moving away from an international open-market perspective on trade and instead focused upon building regional or currency-based trade blocs to meet their needs. Through a system of reciprocal trade agreements, priority trade agreements, and favored nations agreements, four major trading blocs emerged: a dollar bloc dominated by the United States and encompassing much of the western hemisphere, a pound bloc dominated by Great Britain and composed of its dominions, a yen bloc based around Japan and the Asian mainland, and a gold-standard bloc made up of France and several minor European nations. Even with these trade blocs, international trade and economic productivity for each Great Power remained

diminished in the early 1930s, and with economic decline came falling national tax revenues. Because of that, each Great Power faced a challenging choice: to reduce its government expenditures for armaments to economize and thereby lower the tax burden on their economies or invest heavily in armaments and boost their economy in the short-term at the risk of future, more severe, economic problems.¹¹⁷

Japan by the early 1930s was forced into the armaments approach. Unable to meet its basic needs for imported goods through its trading bloc, it still had to rely upon imports provided by other Great Powers, in particular imports of petroleum and scrap steel from the United States. Japan in the early 1930s was also facing internal challenges due to a rapidly increasing domestic population, which, when coupled with systemic inefficiencies in its financial systems, corruption within its government, and agricultural production challenges, created severe internal political instability. Japanese civilian government in this same period was undermined by domestic unrest caused by Japan's military junior officer corps. By 1932, the civilian government of Japan was no longer in effective control of Japan's armed forces. Due to this, the Japanese military was able to gain significant budgetary increases and follow a semi-independent agenda of massive armament increases, military aggression, and colonial inspired conquest. It was because the Japanese armed forces had become semi-autonomous, and the Japanese civilian government weak, that Japan undertook the first major act of aggression of the 1930s, an act that signaled the end of the treaty system established by the Far Eastern Affairs Conference in 1922.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Kennedy, *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 275 – 291; Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 635 – 706.

¹¹⁸ Kennedy, *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 298 – 303; Piers Brendon, *The dark valley: a panorama of the 1930s* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2000), 203 – 213.

The specific act of aggression was the infamous Mukden incident, which began on 18 September 1931 at 10:20am with a staged attack upon the Southern Manchurian railroad. This event, and the subsequent coordinated invasion and conquest of Manchuria, was orchestrated by junior officers of the Japanese Kwantung army. The Kwantung army had been stationed in Manchuria since the 1920s to protect both Japanese citizens living in Manchuria and the Southern Manchurian railroad. The Kwantung army, of all the Japanese military forces in the early 1930s, was the most resistant to control by the civilian government of Japan and carried out its campaign in Manchuria in direct defiance of orders to halt issued by Japan's political leadership. In a swift campaign the Kwantung army occupied all of Manchuria, organized a new "independent" nation within its recently gained territory, named its new creation Manchukuo, and placed Henry Pu Yi, the last Manchu Emperor of China, in place as its puppet ruler. The Japanese government, after both a furious bout of direct orders demanding that the Kwantung army cease its actions and several failed efforts to control this rogue army through the Japanese military's higher command, eventually recognized the political actions of the Kwantung army rather than admit it had lost effective control of Japan's armed forces. Japan went before the other Great Powers and announced that the recent actions of the Kwantung army were actually in support of local agitation by the Manchurian population to gain their independence from China.¹¹⁹ This incident was the immediate event that began the unraveling of the treaties created at the Far Eastern Affairs Conference in 1922; it began the rapid collapse of the League of Nations and the ideal of "collective security" as well.

¹¹⁹ Brendon, *The Dark Valley*, 203 – 225; Steiner, *The Lights that Failed*, 707 – 722.

The response of the other Great Powers to Japan's conquest of Manchuria was not particularly strong. The matter was presented to the League of Nations, which sent an investigative committee to review the situation and determine if Manchukuo was an actual creation of the Chinese residents of Manchuria. The final official report of this inquiry, called the Lytton Report after the man who led the investigation, was diplomatic in language but bluntly stated that the Kwantung army had created Manchukuo as a puppet state and that the Chinese residents of Manchuria had not revolted to form Manchukuo; they placed ultimate responsibility for these events upon the Japanese government. In response, Japan formally resigned from the League of Nations on 24 February 1933, having rejected a League of Nations proposal to create "an independent Manchuria under Chinese sovereignty." By resigning from the League of Nations, Japan was defying the expressed will of its collective membership and more critically the will of the two strongest Great Powers perceived in the League in 1932, Great Britain and France. Japan defied these two formidable nations, ignored the moral condemnation of the United States, and nothing further happened.¹²⁰ No other nation's armed forces intervened in Manchuria to force Japan to vacate the territory, no effort was made to cut Japan's foreign trade, the other Great Powers publicly decried Japan's action but effectively accepted it as a *fait accompli*. The Great Powers' acceptance of the events in Manchuria had a variety of reasons: national paralysis due to the economic situation, low public enthusiasm for a new potential war in Great Britain and France, and lack of military strength to actually take action against Japan in 1932.

Prior to the Kwantung army's conquest of Manchuria, most of the signatory nations to the treaties formulated at the Washington Naval Conference had actually

¹²⁰ Brendon, *The Dark Valley*, 226 – 229; Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 722 – 751.

avoided replacing outmoded ships as was permitted to them under the agreed-upon treaties. Right after the Five Power Naval Accord was ratified by all the signatories, the government of the United States sharply reduced the American navy's budget, its manpower and tonnage afloat, to the absolute minimums the American navy considered safe for national defense. In 1922 right after the treaty was signed, the American navy had to undertake an extensive dedicated lobbying effort to avoid having the United States Congress reduce it to a mere token force. Although the American navy successfully avoided this fate, the initiative itself reflected an attitude by America's political leadership that ensured the United States laid no new major keels from 1922 until the mid-1930s. The United States' government reduced the number of ships in the American fleet per the terms of the treaty but failed between 1922 and 1932 to build any of the replacement ships allowed to the United States under the Five-Power Naval Treaty.¹²¹

The United States was not alone in its choice not to build replacement ships. By 1931 Great Britain, France, and Italy had all failed to complete their allowed naval construction under the Five-Power Naval Treaty of 1922 and the subsequent naval agreement of 1930, an agreement that actually increased the overall replacement allowances of 1922. In contrast, by 1931 Japan reported that it had fallen slightly behind its 1930 treaty approved replacement schedule, but officially informed the other signatories to the 1930 accord that although Japan would not necessarily complete its full replacement allotment by 1936, it intended to maintain construction towards those limits no matter what future treaties were signed regarding naval reductions or disarmament.¹²²

¹²¹ William Reynolds Braisted, *The United States Navy in the Pacific, 1909 – 1922* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 667 – 688; Schom, *The Eagle and the Rising Sun*, 17 – 19.

¹²² Richard V. Oulahan, "Naval Powers Lag In Treaty Building", *New York Times* (New York), 14 September 1931.

Japan was not alone in its determination to expand its navy to the allowed 1930 treaty limits. Under Mussolini, Italy after 1931 began an ambitious naval construction program of its own to publicly increase the Italian fleet to the limits allowed under the new naval accord of 1930. In fact Italy built beyond those limits as the 1930s progressed and simply underreported its ship tonnages.¹²³ This growing naval imbalance between the Great Powers, due to the decline in overall fleet strength of Great Britain, France, and the United States from 1922 to 1932 while in contrast the naval strength of Japan, and, to a lesser degree, Italy, grew in the same period, undermined the very stability that was the original goal behind the Five-Power Naval Treaty. The balance of power created globally in 1922 at the Washington Naval Conference collapsed because three of its principle signatory nations did not allocate enough national resources to create the naval strength necessary to keep that balance in existence. This growing discrepancy was only further reinforced by the complete failure of the World Disarmament Conference when it finally met in 1932.

The final international effort of the 1930s to achieve general disarmament began on 2 February 1932 with the opening in Geneva of the World Disarmament Conference. Sixty-four nations were invited to attend, and of those, fifty-nine sent delegations; all five of the 1922 Great Powers were represented at the conference. The conference opened with considerable popular support; various politically active groups around the world, including the British League of Nations Union, France's assorted socialist parties and pacifist groups, and American pacifist organizations, all pressured the major democracies to use this conference as a means of preventing further war. The success attributed by

¹²³ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 769; Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 291 – 298.

these groups to the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 “outlawing” war as a means of national policy, and the earlier Locarno Treaty signed between Germany and France, fueled a popular idealism that this world disarmament conference would succeed in ending aggressive war. Many people felt that if an extension of the compromises that had seemed to work so well in 1922 at the Washington Naval Conference could be brought to these proceedings, and if the attending governments could meet together again in the same spirit as 1922, a new treaty system to prevent conflict through mutual disarmament could be achieved. Unfortunately for this optimism, the world by 1932 was quite different from what it had been even in 1928, and the Great Powers attending the conference in Geneva were unable to even begin to agree on a basic framework for any sort of general or specific disarmament negotiations to proceed.¹²⁴

The World Disarmament Conference officially met from early February 1932 until late January 1933. During its twelve months meeting, its work was shaped by many external events and internal diplomatic maneuvers, but the key external event that derailed the conference’s work took place in Germany when the Nazi party, on 31 July 1932, rose to their highest pre-dictatorship political prominence. Prior to that date, the tone of the conference had been set by the moderate German delegation that had demanded, as it had in the late 1920s, that the other attending nations either disarm to military parity with Germany or Germany be allowed to rearm to military parity with its neighbors. This German demand was completely unacceptable to the French delegation, which demanded that at the end of this conference France’s domestic security be completely ensured against “foreign aggression.” The disparity in strength between the economic and military potential of Germany and France guaranteed that the attending

¹²⁴ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 755 – 763.

French delegation, and the French government, could not agree to military equality between France and Germany. Another problem inhibiting the conference's progress was the rivalry between Italy and France over naval limits, worsened now that Mussolini as Italy's dictator had embarked upon a major program of Italian naval expansion that he, and therefore Italy's attending delegation, was unwilling to halt or diminish.¹²⁵

In the first six months of the disarmament conference, attempts to meet Germany's demands by disarming were dominated by proposals to remove "offensive" weaponry from national arsenals. Many nations' delegations presented different proposals to attempt to define and plan this ambitious objective. Each effort failed because none of the attending delegates could agree what constituted "offensive" weaponry. After the political triumph of the Nazi party in July 1932, the German delegation, under considerable domestic political pressure from the triumphant Nazis, became very rigid and would accept only those proposals that allowed Germany to achieve armament parity with the other Great Powers; the German delegation argued this was the only proper and fair course of action. By December 1932 the conference had deadlocked over German rearmament and no effective disarmament negotiations were occurring, with Hitler's appointment to the Chancellorship in Germany on 30 January 1933 the conference finally collapsed. Although by December 1932 the conference was no longer remotely effective, one of Hitler's first actions when in power was to withdraw Germany's delegation. Without German participation, the entire conference effort became pointless and the conference delegations dispersed.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 763 – 784.

¹²⁶ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 784 – 796.

The 1932 World Disarmament Conference marked the end of international efforts at disarmament, and the speedy process of arming for future wars began anew, a development that effectively ended the Washington Naval Conference system. Beyond causing the failure of the World Disarmament Conference, though, the events of 1932 signaled the end of international disarmament as a diplomatic goal because the political situation that had existed in 1922 was no longer present in Europe or Asia. In 1922 Germany had been recently defeated in the first global war, disarmed by treaty, and became a diplomatic pariah. Italy had not yet fallen to Mussolini's much vaunted march on Rome, and fascism was a political movement but not yet a system of government. Japan was headed by a civilian government that was in control of its own armed forces and was more interested on co-existence than belligerence. But even in 1922, rivalries at the Washington Naval Conference nearly halted the successful negotiation of the naval disarmament treaties, and the subsequent events that blocked disarmament efforts in the later 1920s were rooted in those same national rivalries of 1922. So although the great economic collapse of 1929 to 1932, the successful Japanese take over in Manchuria, and Hitler's Germany rearming rather than using diplomacy to address the disparity between its armaments and those of its neighbors marked the formal end of disarmament diplomacy, the end of disarmament diplomacy as a tool that could prevent war or maintain stability actually began right after the Washington Naval Conference in 1922.

In 1933 Japan further expanded its territorial conquests when the Kwantung army moved into the Chinese province of Jehol, located adjacent to Manchuria, conquering it and gaining control of all Chinese territory north of the Great Wall. An unsuccessful attempt was also made in late 1932 by the Japanese navy to seize Shanghai. This effort

failed due to stiff Chinese military resistance and Japan withdrew its forces from Shanghai after international mediation. However, both the conquest of Jehol and the assault on Shanghai were undertaken by Japan's armed forces without authorization from the Japanese government, which further eroded the Japanese civilian government's authority. By 1937 the Japanese government was completely dominated by Japan's military elites, and on 7 July 1937, Japan began a major offensive south of China's Great Wall, attacking Peking and the northern plains of China. This attack marked the beginning of Japan's broad war of conquest within China itself, a war backed by most levels of Japanese society and one that did not end until Japan's defeat by the combined might of the Allied nations in 1945.¹²⁷ But it was the actions of the Kwantung army from 1931 onward within China that marked the beginning of the end of the treaty system created by the Far Eastern Affairs Conference in 1922. From the Root Principles to the Nine-Power Treaty the work of that conference ended with Japan's territorial expansion into Manchuria. By 1933, all the treaties created by both the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference had crumbled to the point that they were no longer effective. The broad war begun by Japan in 1937 simply marked the point when even the ideal of disarmament could no longer play a role in diplomatic relations between the now feuding Great Powers. As a second world war began to take shape from 1937 – 1941, the various powers of the world, strong and weak, were forced to navigate a rapidly occurring cascade of diplomatic crises and gird themselves for a seemingly inevitable conflict.

For the modern historian, looking back over the 1920s and 1930s, one key question is what impact the work of the Washington Naval Conference and the Far

¹²⁷ Brendon, *The Dark Valley*, 219 – 227, 457 – 464.

Eastern Affairs Conference actually had on the course of events in the interwar years. Unfortunately, this question defies any simple definitive judgment because the answer depends on the perspective in which the diplomatic work of both conferences is reviewed. Looking upon the events of the 1920s and 1930s solely from the perspective of how they all led to or delayed the outbreak of the Second World War, the work of both conferences seems a failure. From this perspective the treaties created at both conferences were to ensure that the Great Powers remained stable and balanced, but by 1939 the balance of power between the Great Powers was hopelessly uneven and the diplomatic situation badly destabilized, which in turn led to war. As both conferences were ultimately called to prevent war and war still occurred, they both failed. This viewpoint raises valid criticisms; while the treaties of the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference covered specific agreements of conduct, the underlying spirit behind them was to prevent war, in the end the system they created and the later work they inspired did not prevent future wars. But viewing the work of these conferences from solely that perspective is also inappropriate because it puts an unfair burden upon the treaty systems created by both conferences. They had been created in 1922 to address a completely different diplomatic situation, and within that situation they were a success.

The Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference were called in 1922 in large part because there was a real fear of imminent war between the United States and Japan and a real concern about the effect unlimited naval construction would have upon global peace. The delegations meeting in Washington at both conferences were not negotiating to prevent a possible war in fifteen years; they were

negotiating to prevent a possible war in the immediate future. The Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference picked up where the Versailles Treaty ended; it was the first attempt by all the Great Powers still standing in 1922 to come together collectively and establish peace through compromise. For almost a decade, the work of both conferences proved successful; peace and stability were maintained. It was not a tranquil peace; nationalist tensions marred future diplomatic relations between the Great Powers, regional wars erupted, and despite these efforts and the work of the League of Nations, many key issues of the era that would spark future conflicts were left unresolved. The Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference combined to attempt to establish a system that would allow for peace and stability, that would allow nations to reduce their arms, that would create a chance for peace and development in China and the Pacific. For a decade this system worked, not elegantly, not perfectly, but functionally, and it did so because the nations that had created it stood behind their work. The treaty systems created at both conferences only truly failed in the 1930s because the nations that had originally framed them abandoned them, either by direct action or by neglect.

They did not abandon them overtly; the World Disarmament Conference of 1932 indicates that, but all the signatory Great Powers abandoned the Washington Naval Conference and Far Eastern Affairs Conference treaty systems gradually through inaction. Treaties, no matter how good the intent behind them, only have meaning if their signatory nations abide by them and take action against those signatory nations that cease to abide by their agreements. Japan in 1932 broke multiple treaties it had signed in 1922, but beyond moral condemnation, nothing was done to chastise Japan for these actions.

When diplomacy fails, it is because the threat of force behind it - moral force, economic force, or military force - ceases to be a factor. When in 1932 the other Great Powers used no force against Japan, this, in turn, encouraged other powers to act aggressively, further undermining the spirit of disarmament and compromise. It encouraged nations to seize and squeeze rather than negotiate and balance. It ushered in an era in which strength and audacity mattered more than diplomacy and compromise; it ushered in a period of war that the nations involved allowed to take place. The Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference succeeded in maintaining the peace and ensuring stability, only until all the signatory powers that had created these treaty systems showed, through action or inaction, that they no longer wanted the systems. At this point no treaty system, no matter how skillfully written or carefully negotiated, can survive or have any further meaningful impact.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has challenged, and hopefully displaced, the long standing historical perception that the diplomacy of the interwar years failed utterly because it was unsuccessful in addressing the political instability caused in the 1930s by increasing Japanese militarism and the rise of Nazi Germany. As proof, this thesis has closely examined two of the largest diplomatic efforts of the 1920s, the Washington Naval Conference and Far Eastern Affairs Conference, and shown they were both highly successful in defusing the tensions of the early 1920s, including those in the Far East, and were vital in creating a decade of peace and international stability.¹²⁸ But by 1933 the Five-Power Naval Accord and the Nine-Power Treaty were both no longer useful for maintaining stability because the world for which they had originally been framed had ceased to exist. Both treaty systems in 1922 had created an international system that, at its core, strove to balance the Great Powers, limiting their naval strength to being defensive in nature and removing causes for war in China. Both conferences in 1922 sought to provide stability and prevent aggressive war. For nearly a decade they were successful in this objective, but by 1933 both treaty systems had unraveled completely. There is no single event that triggered both treaty systems' failure; instead, their failure came about due to a slowly amassing aggregation of events that negated the assumptions under which the treaty systems had been created. By 1933 the conflict and instability that the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference had avoided for a decade became simply unavoidable; no treaty system could have contained the increasing global instability that was roiling the international diplomacy of the 1930s.

¹²⁸ Piers Brendon, *The dark valley: a panorama of the 1930s* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2000), 226 – 229; Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History 1919 – 1933* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), 722 – 751.

The diplomatic scene had drastically changed by 1933, but the change began in earnest in 1926 with the signing of the Locarno Treaty, in which Germany and France pledged to respect each others' borders and Germany renounced all claims for territorial adjustments to its western borders. Germany in the same year joined the League of Nations. Both of these events, in combination, changed Germany's international status; now a "reformed" power Germany began to participate in the various attempts to create new broader disarmament treaties in the late 1920s. Germany, when attending these efforts, insisted that the full terms of the Versailles Treaty be honored, that equality in land armaments be achieved between all the Versailles Treaty signatories, by either their disarming or Germany being allowed to rearm. Although it officially abided by the terms of the Versailles Treaty, Germany's demand for armaments equality was unacceptable to France. France in the late 1920s relied upon its arms superiority over Germany to offset Germany's superior economic strength and population base, creating an artificial equity that French leaders saw as vital for France's security.

This incompatibility in views on land disarmament, German equality versus French security, was mirrored by incompatibility between British and American views on the subject of cruiser limitations. This divisive spirit on issues of disarmament did not create the impending drastic changes in the international situation alone, however, which took a major catalyst of change in the shape of the massive economic contraction beginning in 1929 and known today as the Great Depression. The Great Depression forced every Great Power to deal with a rapid decline in economic productivity, and for several of the Great Powers, this economic decline caused severe domestic political instability. For one of the Great Powers, Japan, the Great Depression coupled with

already existing domestic instability to create a political atmosphere in which part of Japan's armed forces, the Kwantung Army, undertook an independent campaign of conquest within China and successfully conquered Manchuria.¹²⁹

This rogue military campaign by the Kwantung army resulted in more than a sudden expansion of Japan's colonial presence in China. By removing Manchuria from Chinese administrative control, territory that was recognized by the other Great Powers as Chinese, Japan undermined the system of balance created in 1922 by the Far Eastern Affairs Conference. The Nine-Power Treaty and the Root Principles had called for the Great Powers with interests in China to avoid seizing additional Chinese territory; the signatories were only to maintain their existing holdings in China. Japan seizing Manchuria clearly violated this principle; in addition, Japan undermined the American diplomatic ideal of the Open Door for trade within China by closing Manchuria to foreign commerce. The Nine-Power Treaty was further eroded by Japan's successful campaign of conquest in Jehol and its unsuccessful attempt to capture Shanghai. None of these three colonial campaigns were authorized by the Japanese civilian government, but in the end that made no difference. The Nine-Power Treaty by 1933 was no longer a treaty that could govern the Great Powers' relations with each other regarding China, and because of this, China again became a possible touch-point for conflict. Japan's campaigns in China, and other aggressive campaigns by Italy in the 1930s, also marked the end of the ideal of disarmament.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 394-426, 575-583, 635 - 706; Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987), 275 – 291, 298-310; Brendon, *The Dark Valley*, 203 – 225; Charles Cheney Hyde, "The Anglo-French Accord on the Limitation of Naval Armaments", *The American Journal of International Law* 23, no. 1 (January 1929): 112- 116.

¹³⁰ Brendon, *The Dark Valley*, 219 – 227, 457 – 464.

The work of the Washington Naval Conference depended on the work of the Far Eastern Affairs Conference; disarmament as a diplomatic ideal only worked in an environment in which the disarming powers felt relatively safe from aggression in their respective spheres of influence. As Japan undertook its campaigns of conquest in China, even if reluctant on a governmental level to do so, the other powers faced the real prospect of a war in China due to increasing Japanese militarism. The failure of the World Disarmament Conference in 1932 to create any disarmament treaties was due in part to Japanese militarism but also to Germany's demands for equity in arms with all the other Great Powers. This forced France to refuse to consider disarming due to the risk posed to its security by a Germany militarily equal to it, a concern that only grew more pronounced when Germany withdrew from the World Disarmament Conference in 1933 with Adolph Hitler's rise to power. The World Disarmament Conference failed to regulate land armaments because of these tensions. It also failed to achieve any extension of the system of naval limitations created at the Washington Naval Conference due to two growing naval rivalries, one between Great Britain and the United States on the issue of cruisers, and another between Italy and France on the issue of Mediterranean naval parity.¹³¹

The failure of the World Disarmament Conference in 1933 was only the beginning of a period when Great Power relationships degraded and an increasing number of powers chose to increase their spheres of influence through aggression rather than diplomacy. This degradation of Great Power diplomacy reflected a growing imbalance in strength between the Great Powers that began in the mid-1920s and lasted until the mid-1930s, the point at which all the Great Powers began programs of rapid

¹³¹ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 755 – 796.

armament increases. From the mid-1920s through the Great Depression, the United States, Great Britain, and France each chose not to expand their navy's capital ships up to the limits allowed under the Five Power Naval Accord. Instead, each of these three Great Powers had only removed older capital ships and allowed their overall fleet strength to decline. In contrast, Japan and Italy from the mid-1920s onwards had both expanded their navies beyond limits allowed to them in the Five Power Naval Accord. Because of these respective policies, the Great Powers were no longer truly balancing each other in naval strength by the mid-1930s, a situation that encouraged the aggressive actions of Japan and Italy because for any other Great Power to wage war against these two powers effectively it would have to raise considerable air, land, and naval strength. Furthermore, this imbalance of power further weakened the treaty systems established in 1922 by both the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference. Both treaty systems were based upon mutual respect between the signatory Great Powers, respect based upon an equality of strength between them. Once this equity was undermined, aggression by stronger powers became more feasible, and it was this possibility of aggression being used successfully that really sparked the final collapse of international diplomacy that culminated in the outbreak of World War II.

The events of the mid to late 1930s leading to war are well documented. The broad 1937 Japanese offensive into China mentioned in Chapter Four is widely recognized as the beginning campaign of World War II, but other events from 1936 onwards marked the march towards global war. Germany, after resigning from the World Disarmament Conference, announced its intention to rearm to parity with the other Great Powers and renounced the constraints of the Versailles Treaty. In practice,

Germany expanded its military capacity beyond that of any other Great Powers in the late 1930s. The litany of territory Germany gained through intrigue and threat of war documents the collapse of an independent central Europe. Germany gaining the Rhineland, Austria, and then Czechoslovakia only added to its economic and military strength. The actual outbreak of European war in 1939 over Germany's actions in Poland marked the point at which other Great Powers ceased to accept Germany's growing domination of Europe. Italy's conquests in the 1930s of Ethiopia and Albania marked its growing expansionism, while Japan's war in China combined with Germany's gains to engulf most of the globe in warfare. It was not until 1945 that the imbalance of military power between the Great Powers that began in the mid-1920s was finally resolved with the subjugation of each of the original aggressive powers.¹³²

From the perspective of preventing conflict, the Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference could be considered failures due to the outbreak of the war that began in 1937 and embroiled the globe by 1939. However, by that standard, every major diplomatic creation and effort of the inter-war years must be seen as a failure, from the Versailles Treaty of 1919 to the League of Nations to the Locarno Treaty to even the Munich Pact of 1938, but this is a flawed perspective from which to judge these two conferences. The Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference had both created treaty systems that their creators had hoped would prevent war and create stability, but not for all future time. Both treaty systems created at these two conferences were designed to provide practical and workable solutions to issues that threatened to provoke war and create Great Power instability in 1922. Just one decade later the world had drastically changed, and efforts to modify the solutions created

¹³² Kennedy, *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 275 – 343.

by these two conferences could not help but fail. By 1932, the Great Powers' differences could no longer be resolved by diplomatic measures like disarmament or mutual negotiation. The balance between the Great Powers by 1932 would have to be forged anew through conflict, the differences in strength and position settled by violence. The Washington Naval Conference and the Far Eastern Affairs Conference had both originally created a system of diplomatic balance and stability; they had worked in combination to contain Great Power conflicts for a decade. Both conferences should be seen as diplomatic successes, they did not fail but the world around them changed so drastically as to make them irrelevant.

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