

*The Rhineland Question:
West European Security
at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919*

STEPHEN A. SCHUKER

I

The solution of the Rhineland question at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 left no one happy. Here, in practical terms, lay the cornerstone of the whole diplomatic edifice. Could a peace fashioned through the compromise of fundamentally opposing views prevent Germany from breaking out on the world again or developing the ambition to do so?

Jacques Bainville touched on the nub of the difficulty in his disabused apothegm: the treaty appeared "too gentle for all that is in it which is harsh."¹ Notwithstanding the outcome on the battlefield, the disproportion between French and German power loomed almost as large as ever. France had suffered a demographic holocaust. Ten northeastern departments of the country lay devastated. By contrast, Germany retained the most technologically skilled population in Europe. Its formidable industrial resources remained intact. Could military dispositions provide satisfactory containment?

The French obtained a three-stage, fifteen-year occupation of the Rhineland. But that occupation would lose much of its value as a security guarantee when the Allies evacuated the Cologne zone five years after the treaty took effect. It would end at the latest in 1935, when the French faced their greatest manpower deficit and with the planned reparations schedule still only half fulfilled. The United States and Britain undertook in principle to come to France's aid in the event of a new attack. But neither country promised to maintain the forces in being that would enable them to

¹ *Action Française*, May 8, 1919, quoted in Pierre Miquel, *La Paix de Versailles et l'opinion publique française* (Paris, 1972), 404.

redeem that pledge. President Wilson could not guarantee ratification by a Republican-controlled Senate; Lloyd George conditioned British assurances on ratification by America. Wilson maintained his faith that the League of Nations would eventually provide collective security, yet the Covenant of the League as adopted offered scant support for that vision. The treaty provided for German disarmament and the demilitarization of both sides of the Rhine. Still, military men no more believed in the permanent disarmament of a major industrial nation than they gave credence to the tooth fairy. The Germans, not merely the peace-conference delegation but also those of almost all political inclinations at home, nurtured the flames of resentment. They remained equally unreconciled to border changes, occupation, demilitarization, reparations, or indeed to having lost the war at all. Marshall Ferdinand Foch predicted ominously to Finance Minister Louis-Lucien Klotz when the result became public: "With the treaty you have just signed, you can expect to be paid in monkey tricks."² And so, indeed, it turned out.

Could one really have expected better? A camel, according to the familiar aphorism, is a horse designed by a committee. The Allied victory of 1918 resulted from coalition warfare. The Supreme War Council provided strategic coordination while the battle raged, but the victorious nations did not coordinate their war aims because they did not really agree on policy objectives. Where there exists no settled policy, there can be no effective policy/strategy match.

During the war, President Woodrow Wilson elected to put the problem off. "England and France have not the same views with regard to peace that we have by any means," he noted with malign candor in July 1917. "When the war is over, we can force them to our way of thinking, because by that time they will, among other things, be financially in our hands; but we cannot force them now, and any attempt to speak for them or to speak our common mind would bring on disagreements which would inevitably come to the surface in public and rob the whole thing of its effect."³ In his various war-aims pronouncements, Wilson never directly addressed the question of postwar French security. What compromises would prove necessary where the principle of self-determination conflicted with the dictates of national security and economic rationality remained unexplored.

The eighth of Wilson's Fourteen Points declared that all "French" territory should be freed and the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871 regard-

ing Alsace-Lorraine "should be righted."⁴ What did that mean precisely? In early 1918, no one could say for sure. In fact, we now know that Wilson and his confidential adviser, Colonel Edward M. House, had more difficulty formulating this provision than any other of the Fourteen Points. At first, they inclined toward calling for the freedom and restoration of French territory generally without mentioning Alsace-Lorraine at all. Wilson fretted that this might make a bad impression. Then House suggested the evenhanded formulation: "If Alsace and Lorraine were restored to France, Germany should be given an equal economic opportunity." Yet that wording too, on second thought, seemed likely to suit neither France nor Germany. After reflection, Wilson crafted the final text, following House's counsel to weaken "must be righted" to "should." House's argument for caution was this: "The American people might not consent to fight for the readjustment of European territory; therefore, in suggesting these readjustments, with the exception of Belgium, the word 'should' ought to be used."⁵

Wilson never felt called upon to explain publicly how his homilies would translate into practice. He thought of himself as a sage, using the bully pulpit of the presidency to voice the common aspirations of mankind, not as a legal draftsman preoccupied with mundane details. On the eve of the Armistice, during negotiations among the Allies in Paris, Colonel House assigned the journalists Frank Cobb and Walter Lippmann to prepare an exegesis of the Fourteen Points. No one in the Washington bureaucracy had thought to craft one earlier. Cobb and Lippmann maintained that France should only obtain the boundaries of 1871. Giving that nation the Saar coalfields along with the boundaries of 1814, they noted, would constitute "a clear violation" of the president's principles.⁶

The two journalists correctly interpreted the dispassionate tenor of Wilson's thought. During the Congressional election campaign, the president had cleverly evaded Republican demands for pursuit of the war until the enemy surrendered unconditionally.⁷ "Let us dictate peace by the hammering guns and not chat about peace to the accompaniment of the clicking of

4 Great Britain, Foreign Office, *Papers Respecting Negotiations for an Anglo-French Pact*, Cmd. 2169 (London, 1924), no. 7.

5 Edward M. House diary, Jan. 9, 1918, Sterling Library, Yale University; see also Charles Seymour, ed., *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, 4 vols. (Boston, 1926-28), 3:328-30.

6 Seymour, *Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, 4:197. The decision-making process under Wilson remained surprisingly casual. Under Secretary of State Frank Polk, e.g., considered the Cobb-Lippmann memorandum wholly unsatisfactory as a legal document and observed that "the restoration of France is a question very different legally from that of Belgium." Polk's scathing criticisms, however, were overtaken by events (see Polk penciled memorandum, Oct. 29, 1918, Frank Polk papers 25/248, Yale University Library).

7 Earl S. Pomeroy, "Sentiment for a Strong Peace," *South Atlantic Quarterly* (Oct. 1944): 325-37; also Seward W. Livermore, *Politics Is Adjourned: Woodrow Wilson and the War Congress, 1916-1918* (Middletown, Conn., 1966).

2 René Michel Lhopital, *Foch, l'armistice, et la paix* (Paris, 1938), 233.

3 Wilson to Colonel Edward M. House, July 21, 1917, quoted in Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters*, 8 vols. (Garden City, N.Y., 1927-39), 7:180.

typewriters," Theodore Roosevelt had thundered.⁸ Undeterred by the militant public mood, Wilson consulted only his conscience. He secretly instructed House:

My deliberate judgment is that our whole weight should be thrown for an armistice that will prevent a renewal of hostilities with Germany but which will be as moderate and reasonable as possible within those limits, because it is certain that too much success or security on the part of the Allies will make a genuine peace settlement exceedingly difficult, if not impossible.⁹

The president's reaction to the proposed military conditions foreshadowed his strategic inclinations. He questioned whether the Allies needed actually to occupy Alsace and Lorraine under the armistice. And he strongly doubted the advisability of going so far as to occupy the eastern side of the Rhine, "as that is practically an invasion of German soil."¹⁰

The French, unsure where negotiations were heading, expressed an initial disposition not to accept the Cobb-Lippmann interpretation at all. They proposed instead to formulate their own; the other Allies expressed scarcely less dissatisfaction.¹¹ Eventually, however, the Europeans all decided to back off, especially when House intimated that his chief might have to consider afresh whether to fight on for the principles laid down by the Allies.¹² Taking the hardest of lines, Wilson reiterated his resolve "to fight not only to do away with Prussian militarism but with militarism everywhere."¹³ The French, like the British, decided that they could not judiciously attack the Cobb-Lippmann exegesis frontally. All the Europeans had compelling reasons for winding up the war. They would settle for what they could get at the moment. Clemenceau could count himself lucky that House finally agreed to a temporary occupation of the left bank of the Rhine as a satisfaction for the Chamber of Deputies, notwithstanding Lloyd George's scruples.¹⁴ In the so-called pre-Armistice agreement that encapsulated several days of haggling, the Allies voiced formal reservations to the Fourteen

8 *New York Times*, Oct. 25, 1918; also Elting E. Morison, ed., *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), 8:1380-1. For Lodge's call for unconditional surrender, see Lodge to Roosevelt, Oct. 14, 1918, Lodge-Roosevelt correspondence, box 89, Henry Cabot Lodge papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

9 Wilson to House, Oct. 28, 1918, Arthur S. Link et al., eds., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (hereafter *PWW*), 69 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1966-94), 51:473.

10 General P. C. March to Pershing (relaying the president's views), Oct. 27, 1918, *PWW*, 51:471-2.

11 House to Wilson, Oct. 30, 1918, *PWW*, 51:511.

12 House to Wilson, Oct. 30, 1918, *PWW*, 51:511-13, 515-17.

13 Wilson to House, Oct. 30, 1918, *PWW*, 51:513.

14 House to Wilson, Oct. 30, 1918, *PWW*, 51:516.

Points only in respect to reparations and freedom of the seas.¹⁵ House called the result "a great diplomatic victory," achieved "in the face of a hostile and influential junta in the United States and the thoroughly unsympathetic personnel constituting the Entente governments."¹⁶ Yet clearly the bargaining had just begun.

II

During the war, a strong current of public opinion in France had called for recovering the borders of 1790, seizing the Saar, limiting Germany to the right bank of the Rhine, and setting up one or more French-dominated buffer states on the left bank of the river.¹⁷ But for more sober policy makers, battlefield realities always tempered such ambitions. Whatever schemes might appear in newspapers or even in government planning documents, military dispositions would prove determinative. The plain fact was that German armies stood on French soil from the beginning of the war to the end. No hope existed of getting them off except through coalition warfare. This meant that France's announced war aims could never be more than tentative bargaining positions. The ultimate outcome would inevitably depend on relative strengths at the end of hostilities and what the principal Allies would then be prepared to endorse or at least to countenance.

In January 1917, the Briand government outlined French war aims informally to the British. The language of the despatch hinted at fairly expansive pretensions. France demanded the return of a greater Alsace-Lorraine including the Saar, as it existed in 1790, "before the successive mutilations of our old frontier." This rectification, the French insisted, would not count as a new acquisition in the settlement of accounts; the French were merely "resuming possession" of what had been torn from them against the wishes of the population. In addition, the question of the left bank of the Rhine would necessarily arise. Many of those attached to "the oldest traditions of

15 Note from Allied governments to president of the United States, Nov. 4, 1918, in *Negotiations for an Anglo-French Pact*, no. 7.

16 House to Wilson, Nov. 5, 1918, *PWW*, 51:594.

17 David Stevenson, *French War Aims Against Germany, 1914-1919* (Oxford, 1982); Georges-Henri Soutou, "La France et les Marches de l'Est, 1914-1919," *Revue historique*, no. 528 (Oct.-Dec. 1978): 341-88; Georges-Henri Soutou, *L'Or et le sang: Les buts de guerre économiques de la Première Guerre mondiale* (Paris, 1989). See also Werner Kern, *Die Rheintheorie der historisch-politischen Literatur Frankreichs im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Saarbrücken, 1973); Walter A. McDougall, *France's Rhineland Diplomacy, 1914-1924: The Last Bid for a Balance of Power in Europe* (Princeton, N.J., 1978), 17-32; Gitta Steinmeyer, *Die Grundlagen der französischen Deutschlandpolitik, 1917-1919* (Stuttgart, 1979); and Henning Köhler, *Novemberrevolution und Frankreich: Die französische Deutschlandpolitik, 1918-1919* (Düsseldorf, 1980).

our national policy" demanded reincorporation of the left bank as the lost heritage of the French Revolution, necessary to round out natural frontiers as conceived by Richelieu. The French government, however, abstemiously conceded that some might look upon this as conquest. It therefore asked only for a guarantee on behalf of Europe and a solution that would afford protection for its own frontiers. Germany should henceforth have "but one foot across the Rhine." In short, the organization of those territories, their neutrality, and their provisional occupation should be discussed among the Allies; but France, as the country most directly involved in the territorial status of those regions, should have the "preponderant voice" in the decision.¹⁸

The French demand to the Foreign Office was thus delicately phrased and represented the more cautious current of opinion in the French cabinet and the Quai d'Orsay. By contrast, former premier Gaston Doumergue, operating semi-independently, insisted categorically in negotiations with Russia some weeks later on political and economic separation of the left bank of the Rhine from Germany, its organization as an independent and neutral state, and permanent occupation by French troops until Germany had satisfied all its obligations under the treaty of peace.¹⁹

The several factions in the French government, squabbling ceaselessly with each other, never quite decided how far they ought to push the matter. At any rate, Whitehall determined to take as little notice as possible of these claims. The foreign secretary, Sir Arthur Balfour, describing his conversation with the French ambassador, noted that he had "said nothing to encourage this rather wild project [for the Rhineland], and I do not think that M. Cambon himself had much belief in it."²⁰ When the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia and published inter-Allied discussions on war aims, Balfour affected to know nothing about Doumergue's conversations with the czar. "Never did we desire, and never did we encourage the idea, that a bit of Germany should be cut off from the parent State, and erected into some kind of independent republic . . . on the left bank of the Rhine." "That was never part of the policy of His Majesty's Government," he assured the House of Commons. "His Majesty's Government were never aware that this was seriously entertained by any French statesman."²¹ In May 1918, with the German armies again threatening Paris, Balfour went still further. The idea of a "big-

18 Aristide Briand, president of the council, to Ambassador Paul Cambon (London), Jan. 12, 1917, *Papers Respecting Negotiations for an Anglo-French Pact*, no. 2.

19 Exchanges between Foreign Minister Pokrovski and Russian ambassador in Paris, Jan. 30–Feb. 26, 1917, *Negotiations for an Anglo-French Pact*, no. 4 (i–v). See also Stevenson, *French War Aims Against Germany*, 48–56.

20 Balfour to Lord Bertie, July 2, 1917, *Negotiations for an Anglo-French Pact*, no. 3.

21 Balfour in House of Commons, Dec. 19, 1917, *Negotiations for an Anglo-French Pact*, no. 4.

ger Alsace" with the borders of 1790 or 1814, he insisted, had never become a war aim of the Allies. "It was altogether outside our whole modes of thought on this subject. It was not a subject which we should ever have seriously contemplated, nor do I think it ever was a very fixed or solid part of the foreign policy for any length of time of any French government."²²

While these public statements failed to represent the whole truth, Balfour did not miss the mark entirely in suggesting that the French position remained fluid. Within months of leaving office, Briand became involved in secret negotiations with the guileful German diplomat, Baron von der Lancken, for a compromise peace that would have left most of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany.²³ Although Briand covered his tracks sufficiently to save his political career, the fact remains that a number of influential Frenchmen, as well as a large fraction of the Belgian political class, were sufficiently discouraged to entertain the idea of peace on the basis of the status quo ante in the fall of 1917. After he took over as premier, in the midst of military emergency, Georges Clemenceau paid little attention to dividing spoils that were not yet won. Clemenceau's strength lay in his single-minded focus on waging war.²⁴ Accordingly, although the Comité d'Etudes and the various ministries continued to consider the matter, Clemenceau declined to be pinned down specifically on war aims.

Clemenceau's notable reticence reflected no lack of concern or passion about France's eastern frontiers. Ever since the 1870s the "Tiger" had mourned the loss of Alsace and Lorraine and publicly adjured his countrymen to keep their gaze fixed on the blue line of the Vosges. Yet in a generation when most French leaders spoke no foreign language and felt uncomfortable outside the bounds of the hexagon, Clemenceau knew the outside world intimately and had a realistic sense of the relative weakness of France.

Clemenceau had spent four years after the Civil War in America, and at one time thought of settling there. He spoke English fluently. All his life he retained strong friendships with Americans.²⁵ One admirer had even named an Arizona copper mine in his honor.²⁶ Free from the ethnocentric provincialism that sustained the optimism of his countrymen in the darkest hours of the war, Clemenceau had a brooding sense of France as a nation close to

22 Balfour speech, House of Commons, May 16, 1918, *Negotiations for an Anglo-French Pact*, no. 6.

23 Much, though not all, of the story can be followed in the documents published by J. Scherer and A. Grunewald, eds., *L'Allemagne et les problèmes de la paix pendant la Première Guerre Mondiale*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1966–78), vol. 3.

24 Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Clemenceau* (Paris, 1988), 635–728.

25 *Ibid.*, 66–88.

26 See J. S. Douglas–Clemenceau correspondence in box 50, Lewis W. Douglas papers, University of Arizona Library.

collapse, a land devoid of administration, organization, or sophisticated leadership, and without much prospect of acquiring it.²⁷ France, he felt, could not afford to go it alone in peace any more than it had succeeded in doing so in war. The wartime premier had seen too much of the world to place trust in the lubricious charm of a changeling like Lloyd George, and he remained too much a creature of the nineteenth century to forget how, in the privacy of their clubs and country houses, most Englishmen really regarded Frenchmen. But he nurtured high hopes for the Americans. Woodrow Wilson would doubtless irritate him with the "super-talky talk of his 'League of Nations'" and those "many pointed wisdom teeth that never let themselves be turned aside from their duty."²⁸ Still, he had confidence in the fundamental good intentions of the Americans. He resolved to go the extra mile to retain the bonds of the wartime alliance.

During the months leading up to the Armistice, Clemenceau developed a particularly high regard for Colonel House. The working alliance between the two men gradually deepened into perdurable friendship: throughout the 1920s, House visited the one time premier every summer at his cottage in the Vendée. "A super-civilized escapee from the barbarities of Texas," Clemenceau later described his friend, "a man who sees and understands everything, and, while acting only as his conscience dictates, knows how to make the whole world listen and respect him." He gave House the highest encomium: "a good American, almost as good a Frenchman, a level-headed mind, in every way the classic gentleman."²⁹ In his strategy for winning over Wilson and educating leading Americans to the requirements of European diplomacy, the president of the council placed high hopes in that friendship. To the end of his life, Clemenceau maintained that he had never "acquiesced in defeat" on the Rhineland. He had "fought to the bitter end for the strategic frontier that Marshall Foch judged to be best."³⁰ Yet he did so within the context of a larger strategic design. Unlike the notable Frenchmen who followed him in World War II, indeed quite against the grain of French political thought generally, Clemenceau considered perpetuation of an Anglo-American alliance as the primary objective of policy. Only with such an alliance could a country in demographic and moral decline hope to contain a larger and still menacing neighbor.

27 Clemenceau monologue to Loucheur, Tardieu, and Pichon, Mar. 15, 1919, in Louis Loucheur, *Carnets secrets, 1908-1932* (Brussels, 1962), 72.

28 Georges Clemenceau, *Grandeur and Misery of Victory* (New York, 1930), 148-9.

29 *Ibid.*, 148. See also Georges Wormser, *Clemenceau vu du près* (Paris, 1979), 172-90. Lloyd George also expressed high regard for House's character, but tagged him as an adroit salesman rather than an original thinker; see his *Memoirs of the Peace Conference*, 2 vols. (New Haven, Conn., 1939), 1:157-60.

30 Clemenceau, *Grandeur and Misery*, 233.

Unfortunately for the French cause, House found his influence diminished in Paris owing to the president's loss of confidence in his loyalty. House's earlier role in keeping Wilson focused on the practical requirements of statesmanship can scarcely be overestimated.³¹ Wilson did not think straightforwardly about American security interests, and, partly as a result, he had trouble conceiving that other countries might have legitimate security needs as well.³² As late as December 1916, he had purported to believe that the apparent objects of the belligerent governments were "virtually the same."³³ He had made many other pronouncements that stand up poorly in the pitiless light of history. House had long served the president both as a reality check and as a link to the specialists on the Inquiry who had examined the concrete territorial and economic problems that properly formed the central objects of peacemaking. Largely because of his counsel, Wilson had shown a tendency to moderate his flights of ideological fancy during the period of American belligerency in the service of the war effort.³⁴ With the battlefield victory won, however, Wilson focused ever more obsessively on the empyrean vision that so thrilled the liberal leader-writers who nourished his prodigious self-regard. "In fact," he assured Inquiry members on the ship steaming to Brest, "he could not see how a treaty of peace could be drawn up or how both *elasticity* and *security* could be obtained save under a League of Nations; the opposite of such a course was to maintain the idea of the Great Powers and of balance of power, and such an idea had always produced only aggression and selfishness and war."³⁵

Under the American system of government, the president negotiates treaties, but the Senate must advise and consent. The French could have minimized their risks by exploring a contact with Henry Cabot Lodge, incoming chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee in the Republican-dominated Senate. Lodge had known Ambassador Jules Jusserand since

31 Alexander L. George and Juliette L. George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study* (New York, 1956), esp. 240-67, is still the most balanced source on the break. Inga Floto, *Colonel House in Paris* (Princeton, N.J., 1980), 164-214, is very full but lacks critical distance about the motives animating House's opponents.

32 The classic statement is still the best: Robert E. Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interest in America's Foreign Relations* (Chicago, 1953).

33 Appeal for a Statement of War Aims, Dec. 18, 1916, *PWW*, 40:273-6; note the ringing defense of this note, emblematic of Wilsonian scholarship, by Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (New York, 1992), 107-11.

34 In their desperation, visiting French firemen pounced on every stray comment that Wilson made expressing solidarity with France. See, e.g., notes on a meeting with Viviani and Jusserand, Apr. 30, 1917, in *PWW*, 42:173-4.

35 Isaiah Bowman memorandum on remarks by the president, Dec. 10, 1918, Bowman papers, Johns Hopkins University Library. See also *PWW*, 53:353-6. Arthur Walworth, *America's Moment: 1918* (New York, 1977), 130-6, provides a multisource report on Wilson's monologue, skillfully highlighting what he calls the president's "moral arrogance."

their rambles in Rock Creek Park with Theodore Roosevelt fifteen years before. Lodge counted as a realist internationalist squarely in the Roosevelt tradition; he saw the world, much as did the French, in enlightened balance-of-power terms.³⁶ "The first and controlling purpose of the peace," Lodge wrote to Henry White (the only nonpartisan on the American delegation), "must be to put Germany in such a position that it will be physically impossible for her to break out again upon other nations with a war for world conquest." Lodge favored establishing the Rhine frontier, occupying select provinces until Berlin completed payment of a heavy indemnity, and possibly separating Bavaria and other components of the Reich as well.³⁷ Nevertheless, the French did not seek to open back-channel relations with Lodge. André Tardieu, the intellectually acute high commissioner in Washington, who returned home to advise Clemenceau on peacemaking, seemed to have no idea how much Wilson disliked him.³⁸ Nor did Paris fully register the sea change in American politics that had taken place as a result of the Republican sweep in the midterm elections. Clemenceau placed his faith in face-to-face negotiations with House and Wilson. He would stick with that choice to the end.

III

Clemenceau nurtured a healthy skepticism about British goodwill. His intuition served him well. Not that the British spoke with one mind. Britain, more than the other Allies, still operated through cabinet government. Lloyd George could manipulate that cabinet with skill and dissimulation, but he presided over a fissiparous coalition. Moreover, he had to take account not merely of his colleagues' views but also those of empire representatives whose armies had reinforced His Majesty's forces in the field.³⁹ Right through the war, most British statesmen had expressed greater interest in future dispositions east of Suez and south of Gibraltar than they did in precise arrangements on the Continent.⁴⁰ And in the privacy of the cabinet room, they cultivated a practiced disdain for each of their principal allies.

36 William Widenor, *Henry Cabot Lodge and the Search for an American Foreign Policy* (Berkeley, Calif., 1980), is the only study that treats Lodge with a minimum degree of scholarly dispassion.

37 Lodge memorandum for Henry White, Dec. 1, 1918; additional memorandum, n.d. (Dec. 1918); also Lodge to Paul Herbin, Nov. 18, 1918, box 53, Lodge papers.

38 On Wilson's distrust of Tardieu, see Edith Benham diary, Mar. 28, 1919, Library of Congress, also *PWW*, 56:354-5; further *PWW*, 56:86, Grayson diary, Mar. 19, 1919; and House diary, May 6, 1919.

39 John Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict, 1915-1918* (New Haven, Conn., 1992); Kenneth Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government, 1918-1922* (Oxford, 1979).

40 Victor H. Rothwell, *British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, 1914-1918* (Oxford, 1971).

The British believed that they possessed "the most formidable fighting force in the world." They prided themselves on making the major contribution to victory. The French had thoroughly exhausted themselves; the Americans remained so ignorant of modern warfare that they hardly knew how to feed their troops.⁴¹ It followed that Whitehall should also give a lead at the peace table. The objective was to terminate hostilities in such a way as to achieve optimum results for the British Empire. Yet the problem of achieving that "good peace" bristled with difficulty. Lloyd George wondered on October 26, 1918, whether the Allies should "go on until Germany was smashed"; Balfour countered that, if proper terms could be secured now, sacking Frankfurt would not increase the margin of victory. Lord Curzon fretted portentously about the "wreckage of all civilization and order in the east." Jan Smuts of South Africa made the decisive argument for an immediate armistice: "If we were to beat Germany to nothingness, then we must beat Europe to nothingness, too. As Europe went down, so America would rise. In time the United States would dictate to the world in naval, military, diplomatic, and financial matters. In that he saw no good."⁴²

Not surprisingly, therefore, British negotiators took a tough line on naval terms and their right to reparation, but expressed misgivings over sending troops across French borders eastward. Lloyd George insisted on October 29 that the military terms were already too severe: "He did not approve of occupying the left bank of the Rhine."⁴³ He yielded when Clemenceau pledged to withdraw just as soon as Germany complied with peace conditions, but he voiced the suspicion to the War Cabinet that "the French were treating the situation as a revenge for 1870." The real security problem, the prime minister thought, came from a wholly different quarter. "Marching men into Germany was marching them into a cholera area. The Germans did that in Russia and caught the virus, i.e., of Bolshevism." Winston Churchill seconded the alarm. "We might have to build up the German army, as it was important to get Germany on her legs again for fear of the spread of Bolshevism." The Chief of the Imperial General Staff chimed in that the Rhenish provinces, insofar as possible, should be garrisoned by American troops.⁴⁴ While the British did occupy the Cologne zone, they

41 Field Marshal Haig's assessment in War Cabinet minutes, Oct. 21, 1918, CAB 23/14, Public Record Office; also appreciation by General Sir C. H. Harrington, Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Oct. 26, 1918, CAB 23/14.

42 War Cabinet minutes, Oct. 26, 1918, CAB 23/14, Public Record Office.

43 House diary, Oct. 29, 1918.

44 War Cabinet minutes, Nov. 10, 1918, CAB 23/14.

continued to view security along the Rhine as a small piece of a larger puzzle. Churchill foresaw a future full of darkling shadows. Absent imaginative policies on the part of the victors, a dissatisfied Reich might join hands with Bolshevik Russia to form "a great combination from Yokohama to Cologne in hostility to France, Britain, and America."⁴⁵

Clemenceau and Marshall Foch arrived in London on November 30, 1918, in order to exchange views with their British counterparts before the Americans arrived. Fresh from a rousing public demonstration in Trafalgar Square, Foch turned up at Downing Street to elaborate maximum French demands. Drawing on his prestige as supreme Allied commander, Foch proposed not merely to separate the Rhenish provinces from Germany, but to imbricate the independent states on the left bank in a permanent scheme of military assistance and economic cooperation linking France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Great Britain. The British politicians immediately threw cold water on the scheme. Lloyd George asked whether Foch "did not fear the danger of creating a new Alsace-Lorraine on the other side, which would in course of years result in a new war of revenge." Conservative leader Andrew Bonar Law sourly observed that "we ourselves had tried for years to conciliate the Irish" – with no discernible result.⁴⁶

Undeterred, Foch continued to hammer away over the next weeks in conversation with his good friend, Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, chief of the Imperial General Staff (IGS). Both men shared a long-suffering impatience with the blinkered vision of the "Frocks."⁴⁷ Foch assumed that the United States would withdraw its troops at the rate of 500,000 a month and that the last doughboys would disappear from European shores by the spring of 1919. To counter German demographic preponderance, the Western countries therefore needed both an impregnable defensive line along the Rhine and also three-year military service for an indefinite period.⁴⁸ Wilson joined Foch in considering the League of Nations "idiotic" and believing that the American Wilson's public fatuities betrayed him as both "Boche and Bolshevik," an "academic ass," and either a "knave" or a "fool."⁴⁹ Foch

45 War Cabinet minutes, Feb. 13, 1919, CAB 23/15.

46 Lloyd George, *Memoirs of the Peace Conference*, 1:77–80. Foch's formal memorandum of Nov. 27, 1918, and all essential documentation on the French side may be found in vol. 417, *Papiers André Tardieu* (PA-AP 166), Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (hereafter MAE), Paris.

47 See Foch–Henry Wilson correspondence in HHW 2/24a–b, Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson papers, Imperial War Museum (hereafter IWM), London.

48 Henry Wilson diary, Dec. 1, 1918, IWM.

49 Henry Wilson diary, Dec. 22, 1918; Jan. 12 and 26, Feb. 1, 1919. C. E. Callwell, *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: His Life and Diaries*, 2 vols. (London, 1927), edits out most of the negative references to Americans that suffuse the original. Keith Jeffery, *The Military Correspondence of Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, 1918–1922* (London, 1985), lifts a part of the veil.

suspected that the Americans would "make big Armies and big Navies and then in alliance with the Boches dictate terms to Europe and the world."⁵⁰ The CIGS agreed that the only reasonable plan was to "stick to the line of the Rhine . . . until we have secured the fruits of victory."⁵¹

The British military, however, faced insurmountable problems of their own. In the first week of January 1919, soldiers arriving at Folkestone on leave mutinied and demanded immediate demobilization. The Cabinet dithered. Chaos spread.⁵² At length the prime minister, whom the CIGS also placed squarely in the camp of "stupid fools," agreed to keep conscription for the moment. Still, the War Office realized that it had secured but a short reprieve. Eventually public opinion would compel reversion to a volunteer army. Military planners remained preoccupied throughout the winter with industrial strikes at home and troubles in the colonies. With a volunteer army, Britain could scarcely hope to field the forces necessary to garrison India, Malta, Gibraltar, and Ireland, not to speak of the new territories that would land in the British sphere at the peace conference.⁵³ What would remain for the Rhine? The War Office could scrounge up a dozen white divisions, plus some colonials, to keep a Continental commitment while the Paris conferees completed their labors. When Britain cut its military establishment down to peacetime size, one division and a flag seemed more realistic.⁵⁴

As British army planners mulled over the intractable problem of Western security, they gravitated toward the view that Germany, too, should be forbidden to retain conscription. Henry Wilson agreed with Foch that the Germans could still carry out paramilitary training. "We can no more limit the number of men trained to arms in Germany than the Germans could limit the output of coal in England." Restrictions on German weapons development likewise appeared "impossible" over the long term. On the other hand, cadres without soldiers to command could not do much harm. Finally, despite his affection for Foch, Wilson wanted "a Germany sufficiently strong to be no temptation to the French."⁵⁵ In the end, the CIGS and his advisers came down on professional grounds for a long-service German army and demilitarization of both banks of the Rhine but against a prolonged occupation, which would require Allied forces to hold a line

50 Henry Wilson diary, Jan. 26, 1919.

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Ibid.*, Jan. 4–14, 1919.

53 *Ibid.*, Jan. 12, 26, 1919.

54 *Ibid.*, Jan. 26, 1919.

55 *Ibid.*, Feb. 16, 1919.

eighty miles longer than the Lorraine-Belgian frontier.⁵⁶ Endless palaver by the military men at the peace conference produced a compromise that satisfied no one: a long-service German army that “maddened” Foch and a cap of 100,000 men that Wilson derided as “childish.” “So I got my principle but not my numbers, and Foch has got his numbers but not his principle,” Wilson minuted in disgust. “An amazing state of affairs.”⁵⁷ The larger security problem remained to be solved at a higher political level.

The grandees of British politics, however, did not focus closely on the Rhineland issue as the peace conference got under way. As seasoned practitioners of *Weltpolitik*, they trained their gaze instead on the difficulties of Egypt and India, the complications of the Ottoman and Habsburg successions, and the implications of chaos in the Russian borderlands for the British position in the East. By comparison, they held, settling Germany's western borders ought to prove comparatively simple. Britain stood amply forewarned not to countenance another sore spot like prewar Alsace-Lorraine. Lloyd George and his amanuensis, Philip Kerr, felt certain that if the Reich remained resentful, no lasting peace could emerge. Edwin Montagu and Smuts opined that only a reasonably satisfied Germany could form a bulwark against Bolshevism. Balfour chimed in that the French should count themselves lucky to recover Alsace-Lorraine without a plebiscite; they were “opening their mouths wide” to ask for anything more.⁵⁸

Owing largely to these preconceptions, top-level British leaders expressed remarkably little curiosity about political ferment in the Cologne occupation zone during the early months of 1919. As we now know, significant elements in the Center Party expressed great fear of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils and of the radicalization of economic life in Berlin. They also voiced apprehension about the Socialist government's school policy, which Rhineland Catholics interpreted as an assault on their religion and local autonomy. Events came to a head in a notable meeting held at the Cologne city hall, under the chairmanship of Konrad Adenauer, on February 1, 1919. Even as a local notable, Mayor Adenauer figured as a dexterous rider of political tigers. Adenauer felt his way gingerly toward a subtle *combinazione* that would outflank radical separatists, elaborate an autonomous status for the Rhineland within the Reich, shelter the region from Prussian-Socialist

56 Henry Wilson to Lloyd George, Mar. 6, 1919, F/47/8/7, Lloyd George papers, House of Lords Record Office.

57 Henry Wilson diary, Feb. 19, Mar. 4–5, 10, 1919.

58 See correspondence of Kerr, Montagu, Smuts, and Balfour with the prime minister respectively in F/89, F/40, F/45, F/3, Lloyd George papers, House of Lords Record Office.

dictation, and possibly offer sufficient security to secure milder peace conditions from the Entente.⁵⁹

While the British maintained a studious neutrality on German “internal affairs,” Tardieu and his staff in Paris scrutinized the Adenauer speech and other reports from Cologne intently.⁶⁰ Paul Tirard, the brilliant colonial administrator who had organized Marshal Hubert Lyautey's civil services in Morocco, assumed the post of controller-general of the occupied territories and assembled a first-class team at Marshall Foch's Luxembourg headquarters.⁶¹ But Tirard did not make decisive progress in shaping the situation on the ground. The British continued to run the show at Cologne – the administrative and commercial center of the Rhineland and the gateway to the Ruhr – and they would have no truck with separatism. Generals Charles Mangin at Mainz and Augustin Gérard at Landau, who envisioned themselves as latter-day proconsuls destined to rekindle the glorious traditions of Hoche, Beugnot, and Napoleon, controlled only the lightly populated upper Rhine. Relying on inexperienced intelligence officers with more ideological fervor than good sense, Mangin and Gérard vastly overrated the political legitimacy of the extreme separatists and the prospects of their seizing power.⁶²

Tardieu and his sharp-eyed military aide, Lieutenant Colonel Edouard Réquin, read the optimistic accounts coming from the field with mounting skepticism. Tardieu minuted his sharp dissent on a report in late March claiming that the moderate parties were “already won over” (*acquis dès maintenant*) to the idea of separation.⁶³ Moreover, Tardieu's economic advisers warned that to establish a customs barrier along the Rhine and to turn that region's trade toward France would cause almost insurmountable

59 Karl Dietrich Erdmann, *Adenauer in der Rheinlandpolitik nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart, 1966), 21–48, 212–34; cf. the pejorative interpretation by Henning Köhler, *Adenauer und die rheinische Republik: Der erste Anlauf, 1918–1924* (Opladen, 1986), 47–61.

60 See a collection of these reports, mostly annotated by Lieutenant Colonel Edouard Réquin for Tardieu, in vols. 426–7, *Papiers Tardieu*, MAE.

61 Jacques Bariéty, *Les Relations franco-allemandes après la première guerre mondiale* (Paris, 1977), 34–51. Paul Tirard, *La France sur le Rhin: douze années d'occupation rhénane* (Paris, 1930), 69–101, gives nothing away.

62 J. A. Dorten, “Le Général Mangin en Rhénanie,” *Revue des deux mondes* (July 1937): 39–67; J. A. Dorten, *La Tragédie rhénane* (Paris, 1945), 35–85; L.-E. Mangin, *La France sur le Rhin* (Geneva, 1945), 13–68; Guy de Traversay, “La première tentative de République rhénane,” *Revue de Paris* (Nov.–Dec. 1928): 404–31, 586–614; Général Mangin, “Lettres de Rhénanie,” *Revue de Paris* (Apr. 1936): 481–526; Paul Jacquot, *General Gérard und die Pfalz*, ed. Ritter von Eberlein (Berlin, 1920). Jere Clemens King, *Foch Versus Clemenceau: France and German Dismemberment, 1918–1919* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), carefully recapitulates evidence available at the time of publication.

63 See Paul Tirard/Max Hermant report, Mar. 29, 1919, with marginal comments, in *Papiers Tardieu* 426, MAE.

difficulties: even a wider Franco-Belgian customs union could not absorb Rhenish machine tools, textiles, chemicals, and wine without devastating harm to home production.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, from December 1918 onward French industrialists loudly complained about unfair competition from Rhineland exporters with costs reckoned in depreciated marks; they eagerly sought licenses to sell their own manufactures in the occupied areas, but resisted reciprocal trade.⁶⁵ Marshall Foch and his acolytes might continue to dream about creating a *fait accompli* on the ground. More sober spirits acknowledged that, given the economic and political impediments, they could not do so alone. They realized from the opening of the peace conference that their best hope of success lay in persuading the British and Americans of the justice of their cause.

IV

During the first month of negotiations in Paris, Woodrow Wilson concentrated his "higher realism" on drafting the League of Nations Covenant, which he envisioned as the heart and soul of the peace treaty.⁶⁶ He delegated detailed consideration of such mundane matters as boundaries, military dispositions, reparations, and trade – the possible components of a "preliminary peace" with Germany – to underlings. Nevertheless, he fairly vibrated with indignation when he contemplated French annexationist proclivities. French attitudes were "petty," "stupid," and "insane," the president told a neutral diplomat on February 12; he would "rather be stoned in the streets than give in."⁶⁷

Tardieu did not present his formal paper refining his country's proposals for the Rhine until February 25. But the French left no one in doubt about their desiderata earlier. Indeed, Marshall Foch's memorandum of January 10

64 M. Masson, "Etude sur les conséquences économiques de l'autonomie de la Rive Gauche du Rhin," Mar. 1919, *Papiers Tardieu* 427, MAE.

65 See full documentation on the protests and the meetings at the Commerce Ministry to deal with them in F12/8041, *Ministère du Commerce et de l'Industrie*, Archives Nationales. American officials repeatedly denounced the preferences that French licensing authorities gave to their own exports – some recalled the comportment of Yankee carpetbaggers after the Civil War – but they focused less intently on the more serious problem of finding markets for Rhineland exports. See Keith L. Nelson, *Victors Divided: America and the Allies in Germany, 1918–1923* (Berkeley, Calif., 1975), 99–110; Arthur Walworth, *Wilson and His Peacemakers* (New York, 1986), 266.

66 I take the phrase from Arthur Link, *The Higher Realism of Woodrow Wilson and Other Essays* (Nashville, Tenn., 1971). Link wrote without apparent ironic intent.

67 William Rappard to Swiss foreign minister Hans Sulzer, Feb. 13, 1919, *PWW*, 55:151–4; cf. Rappard's diary entry in *Centenaire Woodrow Wilson, 1856–1956* (Geneva, 1956), 55–6; reproduced out of place in *PWW*, 63:630–1.

foreshadowed every essential feature of the full-blown Tardieu scheme. The Quai d'Orsay had carefully vetted Foch's draft, and Tardieu himself had recrafted it line by line.⁶⁸ Foch denied any wish to annex German territory. However, the democratic countries of Western Europe, hobbled by permanent demographic inferiority, had no choice but to mount the "Watch on the Rhine." The river formed the only possible "natural frontier" to defend against a tank attack as well as the logical maneuvering base to prepare a counter-offensive. After offering a potted history of Prussian wickedness from Frederick the Great through Wilhelm II, the Marshal predicted that a republic built upon the principles of militarism and centralization would prove no less dangerous than a monarchy. The Allies would therefore have to neutralize the right bank of the Rhine, occupy the left bank "under the auspices" of the League, and create autonomous states in the latter area that were self-governing within prescribed limits.

House, the de facto second in the American delegation, met with Foreign Secretary Balfour on February 9. The two statesmen quickly agreed that, once the prime ministers went home, they should put an end to futile plenary sessions and focus constructively on framing a preliminary peace with the Reich. Both self-consciously regarded themselves as eminently pragmatic professionals. Both expressed a "profound sympathy for France and for the unhappy situation in which she finds herself." However, neither could divine a practical way to solve the French security problem. The French did not seem to realize, House recorded, that "to establish a Rhenish Republic against the will of the people would be contrary to the principle of self-determination. . . . If we did such a thing, we would be treating Germany in one way, and the balance of the world in another. We would run the danger of having everything from the Rhine to the Pacific, perhaps including Japan, against the Western powers." House could only hope that the League of Nations would enforce German disarmament and engender a new "spirit" over time.⁶⁹ House elaborated this Texas blarney in a talk with Louis Aubert, Tardieu's deputy, two days later. It would be "bad for France" to impose a wrong upon Germany and would "react against us as the German wrong to France in '71 had reacted upon her."⁷⁰ Moral lessons like these offered cold comfort to strategic planners at the rue St.–

68 Foch memorandum, Jan. 10, 1919, in *Negotiations for an Anglo-French Pact*, no. 9; memorandum of the French Government on the Fixation of the Rhine as the Western Frontier of Germany, Feb. 25, 1919, *ibid.*, no. 10; also in André Tardieu, *The Truth About the Treaty* (Indianapolis, 1921), 147–67. Cf. also Foch's draft of Jan. 5, 1919, with Tardieu's rewrite in *Papiers Tardieu* 422, MAE.

69 House diary, Feb. 9, 1919.

70 *Ibid.*, Feb. 11, 1919.

Dominique. At the very same time, Woodrow Wilson and Lord Robert Cecil were fighting like tigers to defeat Léon Bourgeois's scheme for endowing the League with a General Staff and real military capability.⁷¹

All the same, Clemenceau and his minions longed to turn from debating the Covenant's fine points to making peace with Germany. As Wilson packed his bags for Washington on February 14, House ventured the prediction that he could "button up everything during the next four weeks." He hoped to reduce the German army and navy to a peace footing, delineate boundaries, resolve the fate of the colonies, fix the amount of reparations, and determine economic treatment of the Reich. The president looked startled and alarmed. House quickly backtracked. He planned not to "bring these matters to a final conclusion but to have them ready for him to do so when he returned." House took care to add that it was sometimes necessary to compromise "in order to get things through . . . not a compromise of principle, but a compromise of detail."⁷² Wilson did not reply. Here was a single nimbus cloud, scarcely hinting at the hurricane to come.

During the next weeks, House exercised his fabled skills as a conciliator, cultivating warm relations with Clemenceau as he recovered from an assassination attempt, chatting repeatedly with Tardieu, Balfour, and the Italian Sidney Sonnino, and artfully blurring the hard edges of conflict all around. At the same time, he drove his interlocutors forward with the specter of unforeseen troubles that might make rapid settlement imperative. His experts often expressed frustration at the intricacies of the task. "I thought the British were as crazy as the French," the reparations adviser Thomas Lamont complained one day, "but they seem only half as crazy, which still leaves them a good heavy margin of lunacy."⁷³ House, however, did not despair. He recalled boyhood camping on the wild Texas frontier. "At night I would inevitably tell gruesome stories having to do with murder and lawlessness. I would then roll over in my blanket and go to sleep, feeling quite certain that my companions would be very watchful."⁷⁴ Eventually, House discerned a way to bring the French and British closer on the Rhineland. The French might be authorized to hold the Rhine bridgeheads for a limited period until Germany fulfilled the peace treaty. An autonomous republic would be set up on the left bank, but the people there could exercise self-determination in five or ten years, by which time the League of Nations

would provide effective protection against war. Meanwhile, House leaned on Britain to bail out the failing French exchequer, then assembled his financial team to advise "how and when to bring economic pressure" to further American political aims.⁷⁵

While House remained loyal to the president's deeper purposes, he concluded that the political mood in America and the kaleidoscopic threats to stability in Europe required an active search for compromise. "If the president should exert his influence among the liberals and laboring classes," House reasoned at the time, "he might possibly overthrow the governments in Great Britain, France, and Italy, but if he did, he would still have to reckon with our own people and he might bring the whole world into chaos."⁷⁶ Looking backward a decade later, House strenuously denied that he had undermined a liberal peace along with Clemenceau. Instead, in his retrospective interpretation, "when the president first went to Paris he thought an American peace should be forced upon Europe. Later he came to the conclusion that there was justice in European claims and changed his position."⁷⁷ However one judges House's *apologia pro vita sua*, the adviser certainly came to view himself as indispensable. "There is scarcely a man here in authority, outside the President, who has a full and detached understanding of the situation," he minuted on March 3. "The president himself lacks a certain executive quality which in some measure unfits him for this supreme task."⁷⁸ Lloyd George, who rarely missed an opportunity for manipulative panegyrics, flattered House a few days later by remarking oleagiously that "we four prime ministers can quickly finish up the business that is before us."⁷⁹

On March 10, Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and House agreed to set up a committee composed of three trusted associates – Philip Kerr, Tardieu, and House's brother-in-law, Sidney Mezes – with a mission to explore a settlement of Germany's western frontiers.⁸⁰ In fact, House had badly misjudged the prospects for compromise. The British had not the slightest intention of yielding on matters of substance. The War Cabinet had discussed the subject twice. On February 28 the ministers seemed inclined to participate in a low-budget Rhineland occupation, provided the United States did likewise. Secretary of State for War Winston Churchill struck the

71 Meetings of the Commission of the League of Nations, Feb. 13, 1919, *PWW*, 55:121–40; House diary, Feb. 13, 1919.

72 House diary, Feb. 14, 1919.

73 *Ibid.*, Feb. 21, 1919.

74 *Ibid.*, Feb. 19, 1919.

75 *Ibid.*, Feb. 19, 23, 25, and Mar. 2, 1919.

76 *Ibid.*, Mar. 3, 1919.

77 House to Clemenceau, Mar. 25, 1929, House papers 27/878, Yale University Library.

78 House diary, Mar. 3, 1919.

79 *Ibid.*, Mar. 7, 1919.

80 *Ibid.*, Mar. 10, 1919.

dominant note. "We should show ourselves as sympathetic as possible to the French, for two reasons: first, in order that she might show herself accommodating in regard to our own Eastern policy; and second, to enable us to acquire great influence over France and the peace conference generally, with a view to the adoption of a merciful policy towards Germany."⁸¹

By the March 4 meeting, the mood had turned. Lord Curzon declared on behalf of the Foreign Office that the idea of maintaining a permanent military force on the Rhine was "intolerable." The British might safely profess interest in the idea of a left-bank buffer state in order to divert the French from colonial enterprises, since the Americans would likely block the scheme as a violation of self-determination. The delegation in Paris, however, seemed to have lost sight of larger considerations in India, Morocco, and elsewhere. Curzon regarded it as "an extraordinary phenomenon that the French, with their greatly diminished population, should yet, while they were imploring their Allies to protect them, unfold the most ambitious projects all over the world." Other ministers, leaving aside such tactical considerations, criticized the French proposal from various points of view. The chancellor of the exchequer worried about the costs of garrisoning a buffer state. The Conservative leader Bonar Law doubted that the French would really shoulder the financial burden in generations to come. Lloyd George suspected that France would prove "quite satisfied" with the alternative of an Anglo-American guarantee, but that seemed impossible since the president would not hear of entangling alliances. "Forty years hence," he slyly observed, "might see a re-shuffling of alliances and a fresh grouping of Allies." The prime minister placed his faith over the long haul in demilitarizing the Rhineland, developing the League, and imposing a huge indemnity that would fill British coffers while coincidentally preventing the Germans from spending money on their army. The Cabinet authorized the CIGS to work up a precise scheme that could be brought forth once the Americans had turned down the "extreme propositions" of the French.⁸²

The Kerr-Tardieu-Mezes discussions therefore involved a degree of play-acting.⁸³ Kerr advised his superiors to "resist the Tardieu proposition to the

81 War Cabinet "A" minutes, Feb. 28, 1919, CAB 23/15, PRO.

82 War Cabinet "A" minutes, Mar. 4, 1919, CAB 23/15. It is amusing to note that on the day before this meeting, Professor James Shotwell of the U.S. delegation conferred with a British counterpart about how to correct American public misapprehensions about the "Machiavellian cunning of secret British diplomacy." See J. W. Headlam-Morley memorandum, Mar. 3, 1919, in Sir James Headlam-Morley, *A Memoir of the Paris Peace Conference* (London, 1972), 38-9.

83 Notes of discussion between P. H. Kerr, M. Tardieu, and Dr. Mezes, Mar. 11-12, 1919, in *Negotiations for an Anglo-French Pact*, no. 12.

end."⁸⁴ The British military had no patience for what the CIGS repeatedly derided as Tardieu's "childish" and "ridiculous" paper.⁸⁵ War Office analysts pointed out that rivers had never stopped armies during World War I and that future developments in tank and airplane technology appeared wholly unlikely to enhance the value of a narrow security glacis. Holding the bridgeheads would bring little military advantage, concluded the Director of Military Intelligence, but would "plant so many poisoned thorns in an open sore which it is our business to heal."⁸⁶ Foreign Office advisers on duty in Paris meanwhile emphasized that Britain could not fully trust France. J. W. Headlam-Morley, the chief specialist on Central Europe in the British delegation, who had spent many formative years in Berlin, recalled that Strasbourg had served in the past as a starting point for military expeditions against the Reich. If Germany were disarmed and the left bank demilitarized, Headlam warned, the Germans might plausibly suggest that "it would be impossible to depend upon the pacific attitude of the French government and nation." Far from entertaining thoughts of yet further sureties along the Rhine, Headlam predicted that Germany would refuse to acquiesce in the military disabilities now proposed "unless similar restrictions are imposed upon all other nations on the Continent of Europe."⁸⁷

House's month of stringpulling thus failed to break the logjam. On the afternoon of March 12, a disabused Clemenceau decided to confront Lloyd George. Despite an extensive spy network, the French premier lacked access to the paper flow in the British delegation, yet at age seventy-eight he could read the tea-leaves as well as anybody. Pressed to the wall, the sinuous Welshman confirmed that he would never consent to a Rhineland republic or agree to maintain an army at the bridgeheads indefinitely. He suggested protection in other directions. For example, England would build a Channel tunnel, and he would pledge that, in the event of an invasion, the British army would at once hasten to the rescue. A practiced cynic like Clemenceau could divine the worth of such undertakings. The Frenchman immediately went round to complain to House that Lloyd George had "broken his word in declining even to discuss the Rhenish Republic and the proper protection of France." House soothed the old man and told him

84 Kerr memorandum for Balfour, Mar. 13, 1919, Paper 457a, FO 608/142 (Records of British Delegation to the Peace Conference), PRO.

85 Henry Wilson diary, Mar. 5 and 12, 1919, IWM.

86 Memorandum of Major General Sir William Thwaites, DMI, for Balfour, Doc. 2868, Mar. 4, 1919, FO 608/142, PRO.

87 Headlam-Morley minute, Mar. 14, 1919, Paper 4211, FO 608/128. See also other minutes revealing the development of Headlam's thought during March and April in his *Memoir of the Paris Peace Conference*, 38-91. Agnes Headlam-Morley discusses the Teutonophile atmosphere in her childhood home with touching delicacy in *ibid.*, ix-xlii.

that "we would straighten it out in some way and not to worry."⁸⁸ Clemenceau remained unappeased. He fumed to President of the Republic Poincaré that Lloyd George was a "swindler" and a "liar."⁸⁹ House, too, was whistling past the graveyard. From the USS *George Washington*, President Wilson had sent a perturbed radiogram on March 10: "I hope that you will not even provisionally consent to the separation of the Rhenish provinces from Germany under any arrangement but will reserve the whole matter until after my arrival."⁹⁰

V

Woodrow Wilson disembarked at Brest on March 13 in a truculent mood.⁹¹ What happened precisely when House briefed the president is a subject still shrouded in mystery. House admits that Wilson reproached him: "Your dinner to the Foreign Relations Committee was a failure." He found his chief "very militant and determined to put the League of Nations into the Peace Treaty."⁹² Whether the president upbraided House for his German boundary negotiations remains unclear. Edith Wilson later reminisced that when her husband emerged from the briefing, he had said through clenched teeth: "House has given away everything I had won before we left Paris. He has compromised on every side, and so I have to start all over again and this time it will be harder, as he has given the impression that my delegates are not in sympathy with me."⁹³ Mrs. Wilson and her retainers spent the next twenty years denigrating House and his entourage; hence her account merits skeptical appraisal.⁹⁴ Yet Admiral Cary Grayson, Wilson's doctor and golfing partner, also reports Wilson telling the American commissioners that French claims for a buffer state presented an "embarrassment."⁹⁵ Wilson could not break sharply with House because he relied so greatly on the

88 House diary, Mar. 12, 1919. In suggesting a Channel tunnel, Lloyd George was blowing smoke. When the matter came up for review the next year, the Foreign Office advised that relations with France would probably never be sufficiently stable and friendly to justify construction of a tunnel. See Alan Sharp, "Britain and the Channel Tunnel, 1919-1920," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 25 (Aug. 1979): 210-15.

89 Raymond Poincaré, *A la recherche de la paix 1919 (Au Service de la France, XI)* (Paris, 1974), 245.

90 Wilson to House, Mar. 10, 1919, *PWW*, 55:472.

91 Lord Robert Cecil diary, Mar. 16, 1919, Add. MSS. 51131, British Library, also *PWW*, 55:539.

92 House diary, Mar. 14, 1919.

93 Edith Bolling Wilson, *My Memoir* (Indianapolis, 1938), 245-6.

94 Mrs. Wilson's secular effort to burnish her husband's memory and to diminish House's place in the tradition of American internationalism forms a central theme of her papers at the Library of Congress, as well as the papers of Ray Stannard Baker (Library of Congress) and Bernard Baruch (Seeley Mudd Library, Princeton University).

95 Grayson diary, Mar. 14, 1919, *PWW*, 55:496-8. See also Cary T. Grayson, "The Colonel's Folly and the President's Distress," *American Heritage* 15 (Oct. 1964): 4-7, 94-101.

administrative apparatus that his chief adviser had created for him. Instead, a growing chill crept into the relationship. The president continued to call on House for specific services, but negotiated with the European premiers on the Rhineland and other matters increasingly on his own.⁹⁶

Lloyd George called on Wilson at his assigned residence on the Place des Etats-Unis at noon of March 14. Contrary to George's prediction to the Cabinet ten days earlier, Wilson did not reject a pact of military guarantee. The Anglo-Saxons therefore presented a united front on the western boundary question in a tête-à-tête with Clemenceau later that afternoon. They told the Tiger that they refused any occupation of the left bank, except as a short-term and provisional guarantee for payment of the German debt. On the other hand, they offered an immediate military guarantee against "unprovoked aggression" by Germany against France.⁹⁷ Clemenceau asked for time to reflect, and huddled with his principal aides - Tardieu, Foreign Minister Stephen Pichon, and economics counselor Louis Loucheur - for two agonizing days at the War Ministry.

"We have to choose," the Tiger insisted, "either France on the left bank of the Rhine alone, or France reduced to the frontier of 1814, with Alsace-Lorraine and some if not all of the Saar, with America and England at our sides." Pichon and Tardieu straddled the fence: a paper alliance might not endure, yet who could take the responsibility of refusing? Loucheur favored acceptance: if France maintained three-year military service to guard the Rhine alone, that would mean 250,000 extra men withdrawn from the productive workforce and stifle economic growth. Clemenceau agreed with Loucheur. France needed wholesale reform of its administration and governing structures. He placed no faith in the current political class. A Rhineland occupation stretching onward to the indefinite future posed inordinate risks of clashes abroad and distractions from tasks at home. The best option was to seek a precise commitment from the Anglo-Saxons and

96 Floto, *Colonel House in Paris*, 164-214, may err in emphasizing substantive rather than personal reasons for the break. Edith Galt Wilson had long regarded House as a discomforting rival for her husband's attentions. She awaited a plausible opportunity to stick in the knife. In 1915 House had counseled his chief to postpone his engagement to Mrs. Galt for a year. The Republicans had collected evidence about Wilson's dalliance with a Bermuda socialite while his first wife remained alive and about later payments to help the lady buy a fruit farm. House worried that the story might blow before the 1916 election if Wilson married a woman with a Gibson-girl figure and a fourth-grade education. He relented when he grasped the depths of Wilson's loneliness, though he skipped the wedding ceremony. The bride, one of the most rancorous of women in a country that boasted many of them, neither forgave nor forgot. See House diary, June 24, July 31, Sept. 22, Oct. 1, Nov. 22, Nov. 27, Dec. 15, Dec. 18, 1915.

97 Lloyd George, *Memoirs of the Peace Conference*, 1:265-6; Tardieu, *Truth About the Treaty*, 176-8; General J. Mordacq, *Le Ministère Clemenceau, journal d'un témoin* (Paris, 1931), 3:173-4. No one took notes at these meetings.

to bargain for whatever juridical sureties they could save. The premier thus instructed Tardieu and Pichon to draw up a long memorandum "accepting" the offer of a guarantee treaty but setting forth a laundry-list of conditions. France insisted on the boundaries of 1814 including the Saar and Landau, the extension of the guarantee to Belgium, demilitarization of both banks of the Rhine, permanent enforcement by an Inspection Commission, occupation of the left bank and five bridgeheads for thirty years as collateral for the financial clauses, and the right to reoccupy after that time if Germany violated its military pledges.⁹⁸

For the next five weeks Clemenceau and his team carried on the diplomatic equivalent of trench warfare, fighting on a confusing and smoke-filled battlefield to advance the line foot by foot while facing danger from every side. President Wilson could not stand the chivvying and wheedling of his Gallic interlocutors. "It was intolerable talking to them; it was like pressing your finger into an india-rubber ball. You tried to make an impression but as soon as you moved your finger the ball was as round as ever."⁹⁹ The president nevertheless made strenuous efforts to keep his preternatural rigidity in check and to examine each specific proposal on its merits, insofar as that proved conciliable with his principles. The British, by contrast, thought the French effort to build a barrier on the Rhine fundamentally misconceived. Balfour encapsulated Whitehall's deepest convictions in a prophetic memorandum.

Everyone admired Balfour's exquisite manners, cultural attainments, and evident goodwill. And yet the foreign secretary also had the defects of his qualities. He approached the world, as Foch's chief of staff observed, like a man peering down from the gondola of a balloon, noticing "the little Allied ants fighting the little German ants and wondering at the curiosity of the scene."¹⁰⁰ Balfour declined to accept the view that arms control would fail, that the League of Nations would prove impotent, or that Germany would organize itself for revenge. In any event, he insisted on March 18, the French were looking through the wrong end of the telescope:

If international relations and international methods are, as the French assume, going to remain in the future what they have been in the past, and if what civilisation has to fear is the renewal without substantial modification of German ambition, it is in the East rather than in the West that the storm will first break; and no attempt to

⁹⁸ Loucheur, *Carnets secrets*, 71–3; Tardieu, *Truth About the Treaty*, 178–82. The text of the French note is in *PWW*, 56:9–14. On Loucheur's influence, see more generally Stephen Carls, *Louis Loucheur and the Shaping of Modern France, 1916–1931* (Baton Rouge, La., 1993), 150–71.

⁹⁹ Lord Robert Cecil diary, Mar. 18, 1919, Add. MSS. 51131, British Library, also *PWW*, 56:81; similar comment to Grayson in *PWW*, 56:86.

¹⁰⁰ Maxime Weygand, *Mémoires: mirages et réalité* (Paris, 1957), 2:26.

guard against the danger of the future can be deemed other than narrow and incomplete which concentrates its whole attention upon bridgeheads and strategic frontiers, upon the Rhine and the Treaty of 1814. . . . If Germany is . . . going again to pursue a policy of world domination, it will no doubt tax all the statesmanship of the rest of the world to prevent a repetition of the calamities from which we have been suffering. But the only radical cure for this is a change in the international system of the world – a change which French statesmen . . . regard with ill-concealed derision. They may be right; but if they are, it is quite certain that no manipulation of the Rhine frontier is going to make France anything more than a second-rate power, trembling at the nod of its great neighbours on the East, and depending from day to day on the changes and chances of a shifting diplomacy and uncertain alliances.¹⁰¹

Evidently Wilson did not think through the implications of the Treaty of Guarantee at first. He conceived it as a temporary expedient pending the organization of collective security through the League. It "really amounted to very little more than Article 10 of the Covenant," he confessed to Lord Robert Cecil.¹⁰² Here House again jumped into the breach. For several days the president had kept him out of the loop. No one had informed him about the proposed Treaty of Guarantee. As late as March 17, he was still hawking his plan for a provisional buffer state with a League of Nations decision whether to allow self-determination to be postponed for five years.¹⁰³ On March 20, Clemenceau reopened this valuable channel to the American delegation, and House undertook to "champion" the security of France.

Clemenceau asked House to work out a satisfactory formula for the still fuzzy guarantee. House's staff crafted language that would cover an "invasion" of France; Clemenceau broadened the wording to provide for an "attack," which by implication might even apply to the demilitarized zone. On the whole the French seemed overjoyed. "A monument ought to be erected to you," the Tiger enthused. House deprecated the result. He had his doubts whether the American Senate would accept the treaty. "It is practically promising only what we promise to do in the League of Nations," he minuted confidentially, "but since Clemenceau does not believe in the League . . . it may be necessary to give him a treaty on the outside."¹⁰⁴ The other American commissioners remained wary. They

¹⁰¹ Sir Arthur Balfour, "Memorandum Respecting Control of the Rhine," Mar. 18, 1919, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*, pt. 2, ser. 1/5 (Frederick, Md., 1989), doc. 127. The idea that France remained stuck in the past and that Germany would turn its ambitions eastward rapidly became Foreign Office orthodoxy. See, e.g., Curzon memo of conversation with Paul Cambon, Apr. 2, 1919, *ibid.*, doc. 128.

¹⁰² Loucheur, *Carnets secrets*, 73 (Mar. 18, 1919); Cecil diary, Mar. 18, 1919, *PWW*, 56:81–2.

¹⁰³ Conversation with Sir William Wiseman, House diary, Mar. 17, 1919.

¹⁰⁴ House diary, Mar. 20, 22, 1919. Harold I. Nelson, *Land and Power: British and Allied Power on Germany's Frontiers, 1916–19* (London, 1963), 229–32, clarifies the murky diplomacy of these days.

remonstrated that such a pact would compromise the whole structure of the League; Henry White favored "a definite showdown" with France and opined that, failing agreement, the United States should sign a separate peace.¹⁰⁵ Within the next days, however, the British signed on to House's formulation, and on March 27 the president also accepted it. House felt obliged to warn that some would look upon the guarantee "as a direct blow at the League of Nations," but to his pleasure his chief did not recoil. In a moment of enthusiasm Wilson had committed himself to Clemenceau, and he felt bound by his promise.¹⁰⁶ It remained only to clarify the *casus foederis* and the duration of the guarantee.¹⁰⁷

One vital matter thus approached settlement. Many related ones remained unresolved. Every time the conferees reached an impasse on some issue, an intricate web of previous compromises threatened to unravel. When decisions reached the Council of Four for final disposition, the premiers did not work in harmony.¹⁰⁸ In Bismarck's famous dictum, a statesman is "like a man wandering in a forest who knows his general direction, but not the exact point at which he will emerge from the wood."¹⁰⁹ Wilson and Clemenceau, though often at daggers drawn, at least knew where they wished to head. Lloyd George had no inner compass. That was his fatal flaw. The liberal journalist C. P. Scott had predicted that it would enable Wilson to control events. "George," he wrote, "is not a statesman, he is a pure opportunist, with a good many sound and generous instincts, but an opportunist to the hour. . . . He wants to be nice to France, but at a pinch he will always throw over France for America."¹¹⁰ This proved an optimistic appraisal. As the conference lurched from one crisis to another during April, Wilson found Lloyd George "as slippery as an eel."¹¹¹ House tagged the Welshman "a mischief maker who changes his mind like a weathervane."¹¹² Yet in truth none of the principals

105 Meeting of the Commissioners Plenipotentiary, Mar. 21, 1919, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference, 1919* (hereafter *FRUS-PPC*), 13 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1945-7), 11:131-2.

106 House diary, Mar. 27, 1919.

107 See the conversation of Wilson, Clemenceau, Lloyd George, Orlando, and Tardieu, Mar. 27, 1919, in Paul Mantoux, *Deliberations of the Council of Four (March 24-June 28, 1919): Notes of the Official Interpreter*, trans. and ed. Arthur S. Link, with the assistance of Manfred F. Boemeke, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1992), 1:39-42. The other American commissioners remained unreconciled to the decision and made no secret of their skepticism. General Tasker Bliss whispered to the British CIGS on March 31 that "it was a scandalous thing that the president did not make it clear that neither he nor the Senate nor the people of U.S.A. would form an Alliance with France." See Sir Henry Wilson diary, Mar. 31, 1919, IWM.

108 *Deliberations of the Council of Four*, passim.

109 Heinrich Friedjung, *Der Kampf um die Vorherrschaft in Deutschland 1859 bis 1866* (Stuttgart, 1905), 2:565.

110 C. P. Scott to House, Mar. 16, 1919, *PWW*, 55:545-6.

111 Grayson diary, Apr. 23, 1919, *PWW*, 58:3.

112 *Ibid.*

appraised the others charitably. Lloyd George evaluated Wilson as a badly mixed compound of noble visionary, unscrupulous partisan, and bigoted sectarian.¹¹³ Clemenceau told a newsman that Wilson considered himself "another Jesus Christ come upon the earth to reform men."¹¹⁴ The president classified the Tiger among the "mad men."¹¹⁵ Even House, while praising Clemenceau as "the ablest reactionary" in Paris, declared that it was almost hopeless to deal with him except in ways that "we hope to make forever obsolete."¹¹⁶ This personal dissonance at the top assumed vital importance because, as House justly observed, the other delegates "might just as well be in Patagonia."¹¹⁷

Lloyd George, who had pushed for high reparations and other punitive clauses to benefit the British Empire, precipitated a first great crisis by reversing himself in late March. After closeting himself for the weekend with liberal advisers at Fontainebleau, he presented an alarmist memorandum. He decried all thoughts of occupying the Reich. He conjured up the specter of "spartacism from the Urals to the Rhine" if the Allies failed to offer an equitable peace. He even predicted "a huge red army attempting to cross the Rhine."¹¹⁸ The real agenda here became manifest when Lloyd George read out a letter from Smuts to the Council of Four: "The fact is, the Germans are, have been, and will continue to be, the *dominant factor* on the Continent of Europe, and no permanent peace is possible which is not based on that fact."¹¹⁹ Lloyd George aimed his hardest shafts at the proposed Eastern frontiers; what would wound the Germans most, he said, was the prospect of abandoning millions of fellow citizens to Polish domination. But he also adumbrated a general argument about justice. Clemenceau responded that "what we find fair here in this room will not necessarily be accepted as such by the Germans." The Tiger insisted that the Allies dared not ignore strategic considerations; George retorted in turn that he wouldn't take the advice of a political naïf like Marshall Foch about "how to insure the greatest possible security to nations." The debate went round and round. When the premiers approached specific questions each wound up the gramophone again.¹²⁰

113 Lloyd George, *Memoirs of the Peace Conference*, 1:145-6.

114 *Ibid.*

115 Vance McCormick diary, May 15, 1919, Yale University Library, also *PWW*, 59:173.

116 House diary, Apr. 1, 1919; also further witticisms in *ibid.*, Apr. 28, 1919.

117 House diary, Apr. 5, 1919.

118 Lloyd George memorandum, Mar. 25, 1919, in *PWW*, 56:259-70; Lloyd George, *Memoirs of the Peace Conference*, 1:266-74.

119 Smuts to Lloyd George, Mar. 26, 1919, in *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, ed. W. K. Hancock and Jean van der Poel (Cambridge, 1966), 1:83-7; *Deliberations of the Council of Four*, Mar. 27, 1919, 1:38.

120 Conversation among Wilson, Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and Orlando, Mar. 27, 1919, in *Deliberations of the Council of Four*, 1:38.

The four came near to a rupture on March 28 in discussing the Saar. Clemenceau proposed the annexation of the Saarland as well as the strategic salient of Landau to France. Wilson acknowledged that France deserved the output of the Saar coal mines in compensation for the pits that the enemy had systematically destroyed in the Nord and Pas-de-Calais, but he dug in his heels against additional concessions. "If you try to establish borders according to historical or strategic — and, I will add, economic — considerations, there will be no limit to the claims." The Allies should not interpret their Armistice commitments to self-determination with "a lawyer's cunning." At one point Clemenceau called the president pro-German, and the latter threatened to go home.¹²¹ It took two weeks' hard bargaining until the experts fashioned a compromise giving France ownership of the mines, providing for League government of the Saarland with a plebiscite in fifteen years, and leaving Landau anchored in the Reich.¹²² Discussions did not go smoothly. As the British expert Headlam-Morley remarked, the difficulties arose "not so much from the people at the top, but from the technical experts, who deal with matters of finance and mining and such things; they bargain like Jews and they generally are Jews, and it is they who try to insert all these intolerable petty conditions."¹²³ Yet despite the excursions and alarms, neither side really contemplated a break over the Saar. Early on, House forced Wilson to acknowledge that his own experts advocated a reasonable accommodation of French desiderata, while Tardieu admitted privately to a publisher that it was "silliness" to hold out integrally for the borders of 1814.¹²⁴

Ultimately, prospects for a successful resolution of Western frontiers turned on finding some workable compromise for military defense of the Rhine. Foch made a dramatic appearance before the Council of Four on March 31 and renewed his call for permanent occupation of the Rhine line, on the ground that British and American aid could never arrive quickly enough to stave off a surprise invasion.¹²⁵ Two days later, Tardieu cranked

121 See conversation of Mar. 28, 1919, in *Deliberations of the Council of Four*, 55–68, and the recapitulation of the harsh words not memorialized in the transcript in *ibid.*, 54–5.

122 See Tardieu, *Truth About the Treaty*, 250–79; Nelson, *Land and Power*, 249–81; Headlam-Morley, *Memoir of the Paris Peace Conference*, esp. 55–75; and C. H. Flaskins, "The New Boundaries of Germany," in Edward M. House and Charles Seymour, eds., *What Really Happened at Paris* (New York, 1921), 56–66.

123 Headlam-Morley to George Saunders (Foreign Office), Apr. 13, 1919, in Headlam-Morley, *Memoir of the Paris Peace Conference*, 74–5.

124 See Wilson's acknowledgment in the House diary, Apr. 2, 1919; and Tardieu's Apr. 2 conversation with Jules Sauerwein of *Le Matin* in Poincaré, *A la recherche de la paix*, 310. Note also Wilson's April 8 appeal "not to let world peace be hung up on this question of the Saar," in *Deliberations of the Council of Four*, 194.

125 Foch memorandum in *PWW*, 56:445–9; appearance before the Council in *Deliberations of the Council of Four*, 1:86–9.

out another memorandum that sought to double the depth of the demilitarized zone, fortify inspection procedures, codify guidelines for League review of violations, and bring the guarantee pact into operation if Germany contravened a long list of military stipulations.¹²⁶ Both Wilson and Lloyd George remained wholly unmoved. When the president fell ill with influenza and had to deputize House to sit on the Council of Four, he took care to have his wife telephone the colonel and order him not to make commitments on the question of the Rhine.¹²⁷ On April 12, Wilson despatched a peremptory message saying that he had already made his maximum concession on French security and telling the Tiger to take it or leave it.¹²⁸

Clemenceau, however, retained one more arrow in his quiver. He let fly with exquisite timing on April 14. By a great stroke of luck, the targets all moved into perfect alignment. Reparations discussions had sufficiently advanced so that the conferees had to decide what sureties to require for payment. Lloyd George had left for London to quell a domestic squall. And Wilson had displaced his moral fervor onto the Italians, who were fighting his preferred solution for Fiume and threatening to go home. The Tiger called on House for an ostentatious "love-feast." He proposed to accept the president's terms for protection of France and the west bank of the Rhine. They were "not what he wanted," but he thought them sufficient. He was willing to fight Foch and his other marshals provided the president agreed to a French occupation of three Rhineland zones, the first for five years, the second for ten, and the last for fifteen years. Foch, he added, had "no sense." If Wilson closed the deal, he could "beat his marshals in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate," and he would praise the president's generosity in public. Adding frosting to the cake, he also promised to follow the American lead in Asiatic Turkey and in the neutral revictualing of Russia.¹²⁹

Here was an offer that the hard-pressed Wilson, overwhelmed with eruptions and obstructions from Fiume to Shantung, could not easily refuse. The president made a "wry face," but agreed. House prompted that "we had better do it with a 'beau geste' rather than grudgingly," though graciousness did not come easily to his sternly puritan chief. House left for the rue St.-Dominique to bring Clemenceau the happy tidings. The premier immediately gave the order to a dozen newspapers on the government payroll that "all attacks of every description on President Wilson and the United States must cease"; relations between the two countries were "the very best."¹³⁰

126 Text out of chronological order in *PWW*, 57:295–6.

127 House diary, Apr. 4, 1919.

128 Wilson memorandum, Apr. 8, 1919, *PWW*, 57:130–1; Wilson to House with message for Tardieu, Apr. 12, 1919, *PWW*, 57:295–8.

129 House diary, Apr. 14, 1919.

130 *Ibid.*, Apr. 15, 1919.

By any standard, Wilson had made a remarkable concession. The writer Rudyard Kipling had quipped disparagingly to Republican friends that the conference marked the first time he had witnessed an attempt to apply "the principles of Chautauqua to the practises of Armageddon."¹³¹ The Rhineland deal suggested otherwise. When push came to shove, Wilson studied his dossiers carefully and forced himself to deal. Lloyd George erupted in fury when he returned to Paris, but he failed to shake the president. "You mustn't think that we'll leave British troops in Germany for fifteen years," George warned the Council of Four. Clemenceau shot back: all he required was "one battalion and a flag." On April 22 the bargain was sealed.¹³²

And yet one ragged loophole remained, through which the British and Americans would eventually wriggle out of their commitments. The other American commissioners had never moderated their hostility to the Treaty of Guarantee. Henry White warned Wilson on April 16 that it would evoke passionate criticism at home both from opponents of "entangling alliances" and from advocates of the League. He pleaded with Wilson to separate the American from the British obligation. Wilson replied that he had never contemplated a joint arrangement with Great Britain and had merely pledged to "try" to get a separate treaty through.¹³³ The text approved on April 22, as opposed to the French first draft, provided for separate treaties.¹³⁴

Three days later, seeking to provide for the eventuality that something might go wrong with the Anglo-Saxon undertakings, Clemenceau proposed broad new language. If after fifteen years the guarantees against unprovoked aggression were "not considered satisfactory" by the Allied and associated governments, Germany must consent to accept "such similar guarantees as they may require." Lloyd George immediately labeled this open-ended formulation "dangerous."¹³⁵ Nonetheless, with the legal drafting committee already immersed in its labors, the French continued to push. On April 30, after a discussion so secret that the secretaries Hankey

131 Kipling's views relayed in Prof. Brander Matthews to Henry Cabot Lodge, May 2, 1919, box 54, Lodge papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

132 Lloyd George, *Memoirs of the Peace Conference*, 280-1; Clemenceau memorandum, Apr. 20, 1919, in *PWW*, 57:525; *Deliberations of the Council of Four*, Apr. 22, 1919, 318-19.

133 Henry White to Wilson, Apr. 16, and Wilson to White, Apr. 17, 1919, in *PWW*, 57:416-18, 430.

134 Cf. the wording in *PWW*, 57:525 and *PWW*, 57:592. Mantoux's notes, in *Deliberations of the Council of Four*, 1:318, are vague on this point. However, Sir Maurice Hankey's minutes replicate Wilson's warning that it was "not wise" to have a tripartite treaty and Lloyd George's endorsement of that view. See *FRUS-PPC*, 5:114.

135 Notes of a meeting at President Wilson's residence, Apr. 25, 1919, 6:30 p.m., in *FRUS-PPC*, 5:244-8; omitted from *Deliberations of the Council of Four*. Nelson, *Land and Power*, 243-5, did invaluable work in disentangling the paper trail on this subject, since Mantoux's notes of the Council of Four do not delve into the legal boilerplate.

and Mantoux were ordered to leave the room, the conferees agreed that if guarantees were not considered satisfactory fifteen years hence, evacuation might be delayed to "the extent regarded as necessary for the purpose of obtaining the required guarantees."¹³⁶

At this stage in final drafting, the Big Three (Orlando having departed) were flying by the seat of their pants. Not one of them consulted his military advisers about the practical workings of the occupation, still less of the guarantee. Field Marshal Wilson described Lloyd George as totally "out of his depth." The CIGS deemed the occupation wrongly structured, with the most valuable areas scheduled for evacuation first. Foch denounced all the "Frocks" as "mad."¹³⁷ But events had bypassed the military. With the German delegation already cooling its heels at Versailles, further discussion focused purposefully on the niceties of drafting.

President Wilson argued on May 9 that the conferees' original intention was to have Article 430 concerning reoccupation apply only to the reparations clauses. Clemenceau wearily gave way. The final formulation authorized reoccupation in the event the Reparation Commission found that Germany "refuses to observe the whole or part of her obligations for reparation."¹³⁸ The convoluted drafting history of Article 430 would lead to much debate among legal advisers at the respective Foreign Offices during the coming decade. What did it really allow? At the end of March, Wilson had nobly adjured his colleagues not to "interpret our promises with a lawyer's cunning." Yet in the end, as so often happens in international affairs, naked power and lawyers' cunning is all.¹³⁹

136 *FRUS-PPC*, 5:357.

137 Henry Wilson diary, Apr. 27-May 3, 1919, recapitulated with the juicy bits left out in Callwell, *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson*, 2:184-7.

138 Notes of meetings held at President Wilson's House on May 9, 10, and 12, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, 5:519-20, 541-2, 576.

139 In later years, the participants could not themselves agree on the proper interpretation of their handiwork. For example, in 1928 the Wilhelmstrasse asserted that, because Germany was currently fulfilling the stipulations of the Dawes Plan, the Allies were bound under Article 431 to evacuate the Rhineland forthwith. Article 431 provided textually that "if before the expiration of the period of fifteen years Germany complies with all the undertakings resulting from the present treaty, the occupying forces will be withdrawn immediately." Lloyd George, who by this time had embraced revisionism, volubly supported the German argument. Foreign Secretary Sir Austen Chamberlain disputed it. Privately, Foreign Office professionals who had attended the peace conference joined in outrage against Lloyd George, but bickered about the fine points themselves. Headlam-Morley maintained that Article 431, which the French and Americans had drafted without British input, "has no meaning and probably was intended to have no meaning." Everyone, he insisted, understood that the occupation would continue for a minimum of fifteen years. Legal Adviser Sir Cecil Hurst did not consider the provision meaningless, but read it as requiring the prior discharge of Germany's entire reparations obligation. Notwithstanding a formal opinion by Law Officers of the Crown, the political controversy continued to simmer. See FO 371/12905-12906; C8739/9105/9141/9304/969/18; also House of Commons *Debates*, Nov. 13 and Dec. 3, 1928; and *The Times* (London), Nov. 17, 1928.

VI

From the middle of March onward, Clemenceau had to fight on a second front, one strewn with as many land mines as the perilous Council of Four. President Poincaré, Marshall Foch, and the nationalist wing of the Chamber began to fear that Clemenceau would give too much away and obtain too little in return. The Paris rumor mills worked overtime. Oppressed by the country's sacrifices and sufferings, the critics did not focus gladly on France's economic exhaustion and circumscribed power. Nor did they concern themselves with the need to establish priorities and make disagreeable trade-offs. Anxious and captious pessimists fretted about reparations, trade, Poland, the Habsburg successor states, Syria, and a host of other matters, large and small. Most of all they worried about security on the Rhine.¹⁴⁰

Clemenceau made little attempt to educate public opinion. There were several reasons for this. The Tiger did not wish to make damaging admissions that might weaken his hand with Wilson and Lloyd George. At his advanced age, he also felt compelled to husband his energies. In any case, he nurtured an undissembled contempt for his long-time colleagues at the Palais Bourbon. Lastly, he habitually played a lone game. When asked which generals he considered the greatest, he promptly replied, "none of them."¹⁴¹ He pretended not to remember the name of Foreign Minister Pichon.¹⁴² He failed to extend full confidence even to André Tardieu. While he considered Tardieu an "able fellow" and hoped to tap him as his successor, he feared that this faithful deputy had "no knowledge of men." "France is so short of great men," he confessed to Colonel House, "that I cannot think of anyone who would make a suitable president, or one who would be better than Poincaré, bad as he is."¹⁴³ Not surprisingly, Clemenceau's numerous enemies traded one animadversion for another. When a diplomat reported that the Council of Four would henceforth treat all major matters, Poincaré found the news terrifying. "Clemenceau, owing to his deafness and ignorance, is incapable alone of defending French interests."¹⁴⁴

Scrupulously bureaucratic, fustily legalistic, highly respectful of Third Republic precedents and prerogatives, largely oblivious of the world outside the hexagon, Poincaré figured in many respects as the polar opposite of Clemenceau.¹⁴⁵ Rarely consulted by the premier and hobbled by his own

140 See Pierre Miquel's thorough survey, *La Paix de Versailles et l'opinion publique française*, esp. 215-418.

141 House diary, Apr. 14, 1919.

142 *Ibid.*, Apr. 28, 1919.

143 *Ibid.*, Mar. 10, 1919.

144 Poincaré diary, Mar. 25, 1919, *A la recherche de la paix*, 278.

145 Pierre Miquel, *Poincaré* (Paris, 1961).

belief in limited executive power, Poincaré flustered and fumed at the Elysée with little opportunity to affect events. Busily composing his diary in a scratchy, minuscule hand, Poincaré described the Tiger as morally blind, a catspaw of the Anglo-Saxons, a sleepwalker, a scatterbrain, a swelled head, and a blunderer who had signed the Armistice prematurely and might now be leading the country into the abyss. Day by day he cumulated his imprecations, scoring the premier for bureaucratic confusion, secretiveness, vanity, and refusal to listen to others.¹⁴⁶ On more than one occasion, the two men exchanged juvenile insults, calling each other impudent liars and threatening mutually to resign.¹⁴⁷ Poincaré also kept an open door at the Elysée for those who nourished his anxieties, and many were those who crossed the threshold to criticize or complain. Maurice Paléologue attacked the premier as a regular Calamity Jane (*homme pour catastrophe*).¹⁴⁸ Camille Barrère thought him a soft-headed dodderer who belonged in an insane asylum.¹⁴⁹ Foch denounced the Tiger on April 15 as "a nervous, weak old man" who sought a "lesser France."¹⁵⁰ In the final analysis, however, Poincaré shied away from a *fronde*. Not only did he hold that his constitutional position restricted his maneuvering room. He also feared that, should the Tiger fall, the Chamber might turn to a ministry of "abandonment and liquidation" under Aristide Briand or, perish the thought, Joseph Caillaux.¹⁵¹

All the same, Poincaré saw eye to eye with Foch on the importance of the Rhine line. When Clemenceau told the president on March 27 that he considered demilitarization of the right bank more important than occupation of the left, he could scarcely believe his ears.¹⁵² Poincaré expressed similar incredulity at the moment of Clemenceau's greatest triumph. On the evening of April 15, the Tiger phoned breathlessly to announce Wilson's concession on occupation: "I have the fifteen years. Now I consider that the peace is made!" The president remained stonily unmoved. "Where is the alliance? Where are the precise texts?"¹⁵³

In the second half of April, Foch screwed up his courage and crossed the Rubicon. In France, the principle of civilian control over the military had stood inviolate since the ignominious collapse of the boomlet for General

146 Poincaré diary, Mar. 27, Apr. 6, Apr. 23-5, 1919, *A la recherche de la paix*, 287, 321, 323-4, 368-77.

147 See Poincaré's scrupulously detailed notes on the mutual screaming fit that took place on Apr. 6, 1919, *A la recherche de la paix*, 315-24.

148 *A la recherche de la paix*, Mar. 27, 1919, 287.

149 *Ibid.*, Apr. 26, 1919, 374.

150 *Ibid.*, Apr. 15, 1919, 335.

151 *Ibid.*, Apr. 2 and 24, 1919, 305, 371.

152 *Ibid.*, Mar. 27, 1919, 285.

153 *Ibid.*, Apr. 15, 1919, 337.

Boulanger in 1887. Sophisticated military men transgressed that principle at their peril. They knew that Germany had come to grief in part because, since the days of Moltke the Elder, the Oberste Heeresleitung had thrown the teachings of Clausewitz to the winds and assumed the prerogatives of policy makers.¹⁵⁴ Foch, however, burned with inner conviction. The future of the country hung in the balance. On April 16 he notified the presidents of the Chamber and the Senate that Clemenceau had become a danger for France. "He is tired and doesn't understand the questions. He gives way on everything."¹⁵⁵ Foch demanded convocation of the Council of Ministers and offered himself, if necessary, for the succession. The next day he spoke to Poincaré and others of indicting Clemenceau for treason before the High Court.¹⁵⁶

During the next eight days plotters and counter-plotters, peacemakers and rumor-mongers shuttled back and forth between the Palais Bourbon, the Elysée, and Clemenceau's headquarters on the rue St.-Dominique. This activity, all the same, held less significance than met the eye. The Tiger remained the master of the scene. The president of the Republic, to be sure, sent numerous carping letters to Pichon. After reviewing the texts with a lawyer's gimlet eye, Poincaré warned that the alliances had at best a moral value. There was no guarantee that the Anglo-Saxons would ratify, and no stipulation for the timely despatch of their troops. France risked abandoning the reality of security for its shadow. Moreover, an occupation limited to fifteen years offered inadequate collateral for a reparation schedule that would surely last for thirty. Poincaré proposed, in sum, to delay prescribing any limit for the occupation until the Reich had met all its engagements and the Allies had devised precise military accords.¹⁵⁷ Yet the long-building showdown between Foch and Clemenceau ended with a whimper. At the Council of Ministers on April 25, Foch said his piece and was sent about his business. Poincaré sat silent. While Foch raged on in an antechamber about treason, the ministers unanimously backed Clemenceau.¹⁵⁸

Clemenceau carried the day with a double argument. On the one hand, he maintained that, with the rapid evolution of aircraft and long-range artillery, occupation of the Rhine line no longer retained the strategic importance it had enjoyed in the era of the foot-soldier. On the other, he

154 See Gerhard Ritter, *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk: Das Problem des Militarismus in Deutschland*, 4 vols. (Munich, 1968).

155 *A la recherche de la paix*, Apr. 16, 1919, 338.

156 *Ibid.*, Apr. 17, 1919, 343.

157 Memorandum for Clemenceau, Apr. 23, 1919, *A la recherche de la paix*, 363-7.

158 There is a large literature on this meeting, nicely summarized by King, *Foch Versus Clemenceau*, 61-4. For Foch's side of the story, see Weygand, *Minges et réalité*, 46-8.

predicted that the occupation would go on. Turning to Poincaré, the Tiger proclaimed dramatically: "Fifteen years from now I shall be dead. In fifteen years, the Germans will not have executed all the clauses of the treaty. And in fifteen years, if you do me the honor to visit my grave, I am sure that you will tell me: 'We are on the Rhine, and we will remain there.'"¹⁵⁹

Some scholars incline to the view that in late May and early June, the premier turned a blind eye to General Mangin's machinations on the Rhine in the hope of creating a buffer state through a coup.¹⁶⁰ Clemenceau strenuously denied the charge, and no evidence has turned up in the French archives to support it.¹⁶¹ Doubtless Foch had visited the left bank and given Mangin a wink and a nod; Poincaré urged benevolent neutrality as well.¹⁶² Yet Clemenceau focused intently in early June on preventing Lloyd George from undoing what had already been achieved. Playing the card of Allied solidarity at its highest value, he appealed to the Council of Four in terms that contradicted his earlier assurances to the Council of Ministers: "It is obvious that Germany can't fulfill her commitments in fifteen years. But when she has convinced us that she is truly disposed to fulfill them, and when she has given us the necessary guarantees, I will be ready to evacuate the left bank of the Rhine." He had stopped the fractious generals cold, said the Tiger. He would not yield to political opportunism. He asked his colleagues merely to recall that "in the union between France, England, and America, France herself is absolutely essential."¹⁶³

How did Clemenceau really see the future? The Tiger had lived too eventful a life to believe in the predictability of long-term policy planning. International stability derived from continuing efforts over time. Here lay the true meaning of the balance of power. As he explained in his memoirs, France could only hope to make peace through "the agreement of four governments that did not necessarily . . . share the same views on the best way of creating a Europe of Right." The problem consisted not so much in drawing frontiers as in waiting "for future statesmen and for achievements

159 Although there was no official transcript, several ministers took notes. I follow the account in Mermeix (Gabriel Terrail), *Le Combat des trois* (Paris, 1922), 229-30. Bariéty, *Les Relations franco-allemandes*, 62, relying on the record of Jules Jeanneney, offers a variant rendition: "We have the right to reoccupy or prolong the occupation if we are not paid. I will make a prediction: Germany will go bankrupt and we will remain where we are, with the alliance. Take that down and recall it on my gravestone when I die."

160 See Stevenson's carefully hedged account in *French War Aims Against Germany*, 190-2.

161 See Clemenceau's acerbic dismissal of the Rhineland movement in *Grandeur and Misery*, 205-31; also the account by his young staff assistant, Georges Wormser, *La République de Clemenceau* (Paris, 1961), 343-6, 504-7; and the agnostic analysis by King, *Foch Versus Clemenceau*, 73-104.

162 Foch "Cahiers," May 16-31, 1919, Bibliothèque Nationale; Poincaré, *A la recherche de la paix*, May 23, 28, 30, 1919, 449-50, 463, 466-9; Clemenceau, *Grandeur and Misery*, 223-4.

163 *Deliberations of the Council of Four*, June 13, 1919, 438-41.

of will worthy of those that had enabled us to win the war."¹⁶⁴ Clemenceau had struck the best deal he could for his country under the circumstances. The deal he had struck did not work out. But so it is with many reasonable choices – in diplomacy as in life.

VII

As is well known, the U.S. Senate failed to ratify the Versailles treaty. Wilson could have secured ratification with amendments. But he preferred to see the treaty go down to ignominious defeat rather than allow a single alteration in his handiwork.¹⁶⁵ Until he came under pressure from Capitol Hill, the president did not even submit the special treaty with France for senatorial consideration. Democratic partisans ventured the supposition that "isolationists" would never have accepted the Treaty of Guarantee. Such a claim rests on pure conjecture. Internationalist Republicans like Root, Taft, and Lodge were fully prepared to undertake specific and limited responsibilities consonant with the national interest, even though they repudiated the idea of making an open-ended commitment to the League. Senator Lodge, who managed the treaty fight in the Senate, regretted the president's refusal to disentangle the issues. "It is a great pity that the treaty with France, cutting out the reference to the League of course, should not be ratified," Lodge observed in August. "I hope it may be. But the curse of the League is on it and it is that which has delayed peace, it is that which endangers the treaty with France, despite the fact that everyone feels as I do the profoundest gratitude to her and every desire to do everything we could for her."¹⁶⁶

As the tragedy unfolded, Colonel House labored as best he could from the sidelines for ratification of the treaty with reservations. The collapse of his aspirations for American involvement in world affairs filled him with mortification. "Things have gone badly since we were together," House confessed to Tardieu in July 1920, "and I am deeply humiliated over the turn

¹⁶⁴ Clemenceau, *Grandeur and Misery*, 256–9.

¹⁶⁵ See Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition: The Treaty Fight in Perspective* (Cambridge, 1987).

¹⁶⁶ Lodge to Charles Prince, Aug. 25, 1919, box 54, Lodge papers. Given the depth of bipartisan support for the Treaty of Guarantee, Ambassador Jusserand remained optimistic through the winter of 1920 that the Senate would eventually disavow it from the League and ratify a modified version. Owing to political passions let loose by the larger struggle, that did not happen. William Keylor, the closest student of the subject, describes the delinquency of the Treaty of Guarantee as "mysterious." See his "Rise and Demise of the Franco-American Guarantee Pact, 1919–1921," *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History* 15 (1978): 367–77.

affairs have taken in our country. However, I still cherish the hope that everything will right itself. France has in America staunch and potent friends whose influence is sure to be felt in her behalf in the hour of need."¹⁶⁷ Wilson took a different view. Following the defeat of the League, he sought to have as little contact as possible with Europeans. He declined, to give one characteristic example, to appoint a minister to Bulgaria. "I have found the Bulgarians the most avaricious and brutal of the smaller nations," he notified the secretary of state, ". . . though for a long time my vote was with Roumania."¹⁶⁸ After he retired from office, the crippled ex-president withdrew ever more deeply into an isolationist shell. From his comfortable exile on "S" Street, he hurled thunderbolts at misbehaving foreigners. France drew his special ire. That country had become "the marplot of the world."¹⁶⁹ When Poincaré, now president of the council, occupied the Ruhr in 1923 to enforce compliance with the Versailles treaty, Wilson denounced his old nemesis with language fit to print in the *Kreuzzeitung*. Poincaré, he said, was a "skunk" and a "sneak." He hoped that Germany would "wipe [France] off the map."¹⁷⁰ Thus perished meanly the ideals of the Great Crusade.

France's relations with Great Britain also deteriorated in the postwar world. When the United States dropped the Treaty of Guarantee, Whitehall let slide its undertakings as well. In the next three years, the Cabinet frequently discussed reviving a pact, but rather as a way to control France, and not to protect that country.¹⁷¹ Churchill elucidated the problem with his usual perspicacity in 1921: "The French Chauvinists were in the ascendant, and we might be confronted with a French government bent on attacking Germany in her hour of weakness, with the aid of Poland." That was "a very alarming possibility which we should do our utmost to prevent."¹⁷² Lloyd George decided to offer a security pact in January 1922, in return for a long list of counter-concessions, largely to help the "thoughtful section of French opinion . . . fight the Chauvinist party." Yet the Cabinet now envisioned a substantially broader approach to the problem of European security. "Germany is to us the most important country in Europe not only on account

¹⁶⁷ House to Tardieu, July 15, 1920, House papers 109/3754.

¹⁶⁸ Wilson to Bainbridge Colby, Nov. 15, 1920, *PWW*, 66:367.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Apr. 16, 1922, *PWW*, 68:26.

¹⁷⁰ Wilson conversation with John R. Mott, Dec. 19, 1923, *PWW*, 68:502.

¹⁷¹ Sally Marks, "Ménage à trois: The Negotiations for an Anglo-French-Belgian Alliance in 1922," *International History Review* 4 (1982): 524–52. See also Sally Marks, "Mésentente Cordiale: The Anglo-French Relationship, 1921–1922," in Marta Petricoli, ed., *A Missed Opportunity? 1922: The Reconstruction of Europe* (Berne, 1995), 33–45.

¹⁷² Cab 40(21), Conclusions of the Cabinet, May 24, 1921, CAB 23/25.

of our trade with her, but also because she is the key to the situation in Russia. By helping Germany we might under existing conditions expose ourselves to the charge of deserting France; but if France was our ally no such charge could be made.”¹⁷³ Thirty-eight months after the last troops climbed from their fetid trenches on the Western front, this was indeed a new way to look at security on the Rhine.

173 Cab 1(22), Conclusions of the Cabinet, Jan. 10, 1922, CAB 23/29.

The Treaty of Versailles

A REASSESSMENT AFTER 75 YEARS

Edited by

MANFRED F. BOEMEKE

GERALD D. FELDMAN

and

ELISABETH GLASER

GERMAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE

Washington, D.C.

and



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