CHAPTER 4

PULAU LANGKAWI: ANOTHER KIAUTSCHOU?

Near the end of the 19th century, Germany needed more than ever naval stations in Eastern Asia. But where should these bases be established? Numerous sites were thoroughly examined only to be rejected for not fulfilling certain political, commercial or naval requirements. Finally in 1897 the choice fell on a location in the Shantung Peninsula in northeastern China called Kiautschou,[1] and it was occupied by German forces later that year.

In order to contrive a workable "Weltpolitik", Germany then decided to build a mighty fleet of battleships to act as an instrument of power, and passed two naval bills for that purpose. Until the fleet's establishment, however, military confrontations with other powers were strictly to be avoided, including disputes over maritime bases.

Yet, Berlin did not mind if private German capitalists acquired peacefully locations that could be used as bases for the Flying Squadron. Behn, Meyer & Co.'s attempts to obtain a concession for Pulau Langkawi was therefore welcomed, but no official assistance could be extended.

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[1]Also sometimes referred to as Tsingtou, Tsingtao, Kiaochow, or Kiao-Chow. I will continue using the German word "Kiautschou" in this text.

I. The Flying Squadron's Need for Bases

According to the High Command of the Navy (Oberkommando der Marine, OKM), the ideal naval base (Flottenstuetzpunkt) should be situated in a large and deep natural harbour, outside areas dominated by other powers. In addition to defence possibilities against extended sea and land assaults, the ideal naval station should be strategically located to render speedy protection to German interests. To assist in the keeping of proper facilities for re-coaling and restocking, repair and maintenance, a perfect naval station should possess potential for mercantile development. A coaling station (Kohlenstation) with only storage and refuelling facilities was a narrower definition for a naval base.[2] Although several proposals were made in the 1860s and 1870s for the acquisition of naval bases in Eastern Asia, Germany possessed none until the occupation of Kiautschou in 1897.

During Bismarck's colonial outburst, the navy with its extremely restricted capabilities was not required to perform any crucial part. Germany's territorial acquisitions in the tropics were the result of Bismarck's

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[2]W. Wrabec, "Flotten- und Kohlenstationen unter strategischen, verkehrstechnischen, wirtschaftlichen und rechtlichen Gesichtspunkten", phil. diss., Friedrich-Wilhelms University, Berlin, 1915, p.19; A.H. Ganz, "The German Navy in the Far East and Pacific: The Seizure of Kiautschou and After", in Germany in the Pacific and Far East, 1870-1914, edited by J.A. Moses and P.M. Kennedy, St. Lucia, Univ. of Queensland Press, 1977, p.118; Boehm, Ueberseehandel, p.113.

aggressive political manoeuvring with other colonial powers (see Chapter 2). Germany possessed only a limited number of warships with auxiliary steam power and lacked naval bases abroad for the Cruiser Squadron. Yet planned outright territorial annexations solely for maritime strategic considerations never gained top priority in Bismarck's strategies.[3]

Stosch had strived, as before him Prince Adalbert of the Prussian navy, to increase Germany's naval presence in Eastern Asia for the protection of German trade, and some gains were made in that direction (see Chapter 1).[4] But Stosch was removed from his post because his naval ideas were in variance with Bismarck's plans. General von Caprivi took over the duties of Commander-in-Chief of the imperial navy in 1883 until he replaced Bismarck as chancellor in 1890. Caprivi believed that Germany should strengthen her coastal defense in preparation for a war in Europe. This focus on Europe led to an overall weakening of Germany's naval capabilities in Eastern Asia. Caprivi's tenure as head of the German navy and later as Reichschancellor until 1894 was described by the German naval historian R. Foerster as a "planless" episode in German naval development. During this period, the

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[3]Thio, British Policy, pp.67-8; H.-U. Wehler, "Industrial Growth", pp.75-9; Ganz, "The German Navy", p.116; Schueddekopf, Die Stuetzpunktpolitik, p.30. It is also important to note that it was during Bismarck's era and not that of Kaiser Wilhelm II that Germany acquired most of her colonies before the First World War.

[4]Foerster, Politische Geschichte, p.43.

responsibilities of the Far Eastern Cruiser Squadron remained confined to charting coastal waters, pursuing pirates, and providing assistance to trading vessels under distress.[5]

Crowned on 15 June 1888, Kaiser Wilhelm II exhibited immense interest in the welfare of the German navy. Publications by the American naval historian, Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, attracted much attention in Germany in the early 1890s and profoundly stimulated the Kaiser's ardour for a strong naval arm. One of Mahan's books, "The Influence of Sea Power upon History", discussed the philosophy of naval warfare and its relation to the rise and fall of great powers. Citing historical examples, Mahan stressed that a powerful maritime fleet and a skilled naval strategy were indispensable factors for a nation's ascendancy to greatness.[6]

As much as he supported it, the Kaiser was also responsible for complicating the navy's bureaucracy. In March 1889, he created three independent naval

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[5]H. Hallmann, Der Weg zum deutschen Schlachtflottenbau, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1933, p.18, pp.40-3 and p.48; Foerster, Politische Geschichte, p.39; Ganz, "The German Navy", p.130.

[6]V.R. Berghahn, "Zu den Zielen des deutschen Flottenbaus unter Wilhelm II", Historische Zeitschrift, no.210, Munich, 1970, pp.19-20; Hallmann, Der Weg, p.48 and p.128; Langer, The Diplomacy, p.436, p.441 and p.449. Tirpitz's views on the importance of a strong navy were almost identical with those of Mahan. Anticipating the effect Mahan's writings might have in Germany, Tirpitz personally arranged for their translation. In December 1889, 8,000 copies of the German translation was published under the title "Einfluss der Seemacht auf die Geschichte" (1338 pages). It was published again in 1892.

departments, each with specific responsibilities and jurisdictions. The Imperial Naval Office (Reichsmarineamt, RMA), supervised the navy's overall administration and technical progress. The High Command of the Navy (Oberkommando der Marine, OKM), was responsible for all aspects of planning and the execution of naval operations. The Imperial Naval Cabinet (Kaiserliches Marinekabinett, MK) acted in an advisory capacity to the Kaiser and handled staffing and promotions.[7]

During the last decade of the nineteenth century, the control of strategically located maritime bases in Eastern Asia was becoming essential for several reasons. Technological improvements in ship propulsion had accelerated the shift from sail to steam creating new restrictions. Steam propulsion limited a warship's capabilities in terms of distances covered and time spent at sea depending on the amount of coal carried. In general, steam propelled naval vessels needed to re-coal at least once a week when cruising the high seas, making them more dependent on the availability of stations for re-coaling and maintenance.[8]

Without possessing any naval stations, German warships heading for the Far East relied almost entirely on British bases for re-coaling and provisions: Gibraltar, Port Said, Aden, Colombo and Singapore. The Cruiser

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[7]Ganz, "The German Navy", p.116. In 1899 the OKM was replaced by the Admiralty Staff of the Navy (Admiralstab der Marine, ADM) with narrower responsibilities.

[8]Ibid., pp.116-7 and p.133.

Squadron's three steam-sail cruisers and two gunboats stationed in Eastern Asia since November 1890 were almost completely dependent for essential provisions, repairs, maintenance and coal on Britain's Hong Kong, and to a lesser extent on Nagasaki in Japan. A fourth cruiser was operating from an Australian base. There were several instances when a German warship booked a place in Hong Kong's dockyards, sometimes nine months in advance, only to find on arrival that the reservation had been cancelled.[9] The situation worsened when, in 1890, the Straits government under Frederick Dickson banned the coaling of foreign naval vessels at Singapore without prior authorization.[10]

The swelling vigour of German enterprise in Eastern Asia and the ever growing dependence on overseas sources for food supplies and raw materials led to a renewed interest in naval stations. Between 1873 and 1895, the tonnage of Germany's merchant marine grew by about 150 percent, augmenting German imports and exports by 200 percent.[11] By the mid-1890s, China had become an important market for absorbing German exports like military equipment and sewing needles. Germany's trade with China alone was much greater than the trade with all

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[9]Meyer, "German Interests", pp.42-3; Ganz, "The Navy German", pp.113-4 and p.129; Langer, The Diplomacy, pp.448-9.

[10]Bogaars, "The Effect", p.115.

[11]Langer, The Diplomacy, p.429; Meyer, "German Interests", pp.42-3.

her African and Pacific possessions put together. In 1892, Germany's trade with China was valued at 43,100,000 marks, rising to 48,700,000 marks in 1894. Germany represented the second largest commercial interest in China after Britain.[12]

The need for naval stations in the Far East became even more apparent when relations between Germany and Britain began deteriorating in the mid-1890s. Germany's never ceasing demands for colonies irritated Britain. She felt provoked by Germany's growing strength and competition abroad. Britain's unwillingness to give up any part of her overseas claims annoyed Germany. For example, when Germany wanted to take over the Samoan Islands, Britain vigorously resisted the attempt. Germany felt agitated and criticized Britain for creating obstacles in the recruitment of Chinese "coolies" from Singapore to German New Guinea. Subsequent diplomatic disputes over demands in Africa, China, and the Pacific only increased Anglo-German rivalry. Relations deteriorated even further after the famous Krueger telegram of 3 January 1896. The British government was furious when Wilhelm II sent a telegram to President Krueger of the Transvaal Republic congratulating him for successfully fighting back the Jameson Raid which began in December 1895.[13]

Roughly speaking, the question of establishing naval

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[12]Stoecker, "Germany", p.38.

[13]Holstein Papers, vol.4, p.83; Cowles, The Kaiser, p.132; Langer, The Diplomacy, pp.440-1.

stations in Eastern Asia was taken into serious consideration from the time Hohenlohe replaced Caprivi as chancellor in 1894, and lasted until the issuing of the Second Naval Bill in 1900. With a mind of cutting down the navy's dependency on foreign ports, the Kaiser instructed the new Chancellor in November 1894 to prepare the Far Eastern Cruiser Squadron to explore and study the possibility of acquiring naval stations in the Far East. Comprising of one larger and two smaller cruisers, one corvette, and one gunboat, the Cruiser Squadron began in 1895 a detailed survey of the coasts of China, the Philippines, and some islands in the Pacific. Wilhelm II had assumed that what had happened in Africa would repeat itself in China following the anticipated Japanese victory over the Chinese in their conflict of 1894-5. He was determined that Germany should take part in the partitioning of China.[14]

The Squadron was required to defend Germany's commercial interests in an area stretching from Singapore to **Hakotate** (Jesso) in Japan, a distance of more than 3,000 miles. Because of the large distances involved, the view was held that at least two stations were necessary: one to cover the northern part and another the southern part of Germany's range of interest.[15]

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[14]Schueddekopf, Die Stuetzpunktpolitik, p.32, p.34 and p.37; Ganz, "The German Navy", pp.117-8; Langer, The Diplomacy, pp.448-9.

[15]Grosse Politik, vol.14, no.3646, Hollmann to Marschall, 17 April 1895.

The Kaiser favoured the acquisition of Formosa by a secret agreement with Japan. However, the German Foreign Office strongly opposed the acquisition of Formosa. Apart form the fear that such a move might invite intense opposition from other colonial powers, the occupation of Formosa required a large military force. The RMA and the OKM preferred a pair of bases on the Chinese coast. According to available sources at the time, conceivable locations were the Chusan Islands near Shanghai, Kiautschou and Wei-hai-wei in the Shantung Peninsula, Montebello Island near Korea, Amoy between Hong Kong and Foochow, Mirs Bay near Hong Kong, and the Pescadores Islands off Formosa. Yet, each of these places presented particular difficulties. The Chusan Islands, Amoy, and Montebello Island fell within British, Russian, French, or Japanese spheres of interest. Mirs Bay, Wei-hai-wei, and the Pescadores Islands lacked potential for commercial development. The problem with Kiautschou was the belief that ice blocked its harbour in the winter. Moreover, disagreements between the various departments of the navy, and between its high command, its admirals overseas, the Foreign Ministry, and those with vested commercial interests, inhibited the formulation of a workable naval policy.[16]

In April 1895, the German Ambassador in London, Hatzfeldt, gained the impression that the British liberal

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[16]Schueddekopf, Die Stuetzpunktpolitik, p.34; Ganz, "The German Navy", pp.117-20; Langer, The Diplomacy, p.449 and p.478.

government would not object to a German naval station in China. British newspapers like the "Mercury" and the "Morning Post" had published favourable articles about Germany's intentions, and in Hong Kong, Germany's plans in China were even positively welcomed in the press.[17]

After renewed and thorough investigation, Germany finally selected Kiautschou in north-eastern China as the site for a naval base in the Far East. With Chinese government approval, Russian warships had harboured in Kiautschou in the winter of 1895-6, indicating that the waters there did not freeze during the winter months as was earlier believed.[18] The murders of two German missionaries in China in November 1897 gave Germany the needed excuse for the military occupation of Kiautschou.[19]

British reaction to the German seizure of Kiautschou varied. Whereas public opinion in Britain itself was not entirely favourable,[20] the "Straits Times" of Singapore praised Germany for "opening" Kiautschou to "the commerce of the world" according to the principle of "live and let live".[21] According to the "Straits Times" of 4 January

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[17]Grosse Politik, vol.14, no.3662, Memo by Klehmet, 18 March 1896.

[18]Ganz, "The German Navy", p.121.

[19]A.A. Meusel, Beitraege zur Geschichte des deutschen Imperialismus von 1890-1914, Berlin, 1951, p.45; Meyer, "Das Eindringen", p.110.

[20]Langer, The Diplomacy, p.478.

[21]The Straits Times, 16 and 25 January 1898.

1898:

> "The Germans ... have every reason to be satisfied on the success with which a policy of promptitude and vigour has been rewarded both in China and in Hayti [sic]."[22]

As Hatzfeldt had expected, official British response was mute. Salisbury did not view the German acquisition of Kiautschou as a threat to British interests. Rather, it seems that Salisbury welcomed the move hoping that a German presence in China would put an end to Russia's expansionist push southward.[23] The taking of Kiautschou in November 1897 was a political success rather than a naval one. It strengthened Germany's status as a power to be reckoned with in the Far East.

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[22]The Straits Times, 4 January 1898.

[23]Grosse Politik, vol.14, no.3708, Memo by Hatzfeldt, 17 November 1897; Langer, The Diplomacy, p.478.

II. Official Attitude towards Naval Stations

In order to throw some light on Germany's official position with regard to Pulau Langkawi, which will be discussed in the next section, it is necessary to review the development of Germany's naval policy in general, and consider the question whether Germany intended to establish a series of strategically located naval bases in Eastern Asia in addition to Kiautschou.

Two competing schools of naval strategy in the 1890s split the German naval staff into two camps: those supporting cruiser-warfare (Kreuzer Krieg), and those advocating fleet-warfare (Flotten Krieg). Both schools started from the acknowledged fact that it was impossible to seriously challenge Britain's formidable naval power anywhere in the world, yet they supported different approaches.

Influenced by the French "Jeune Ecole" (Young School), supporters of cruiser-warfare favoured a strategy of disrupting enemy trade routes in times of war through hit-and-run operations by light cruisers. Because this kind of commerce-raiding required only a relatively small number of warships, a policy of cruiser-warfare appealed to the leaders of the RMA, including Vice-Admiral Victor Valois and the State Secretary of the RMA from 1890 to 1897, Admiral Hollmann.[24] The Kaiser, until converted by

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[24]According to Padfield: "Hollmann was a failure. Throughout his tenure of office the 'Reichstag' and the (continued...)

Tirpitz, was also inclined towards cruiser-warfare.[25]

Those who opposed the cruiser-warfare technique called for the construction of a fleet made up of powerful battleships designed to rebuff any frontal attack on Germany's coasts. According to the adherents of this approach, Germany's geographical position and total lack of naval bases abroad required the creation of a fleet of battleships strong enough to determine the outcome of a war between the great powers in Europe. Among the supporters of this strategy were the leaders of the OKM and the MK, including Tirpitz[26] who later became the deciding factor in the official adoption of this policy.[27]

Key changes in both the naval and foreign ministerial offices were responsible for the shift towards a more determined naval policy in favour of the fleet-warfare approach. Alfred von Tirpitz replaced Admiral Hollmann as head of the RMA on 18 June 1897, and Buelow took over Marschall's post as Foreign Secretary on 28 June of the

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[24](...continued)
German people had preserved their land-locked view. He had given them no vision of the power that could flow from a great fleet and consequently no reason to revise their objections to paying more taxes to finance one." (P. Padfield, The Great Naval Race, The Anglo-German Naval Rivalry, 1900-1914, London, Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1974, p.37.)

[25]Berghahn, "Zu den Zielen", pp.61-2; Ganz, "The German Navy", p.117; Langer, The Diplomacy, p.439.

[26]Tirpitz was made head of the OKM in January 1892. (Foerster, Politische Geschichte, p.54.)

[27]Berghahn, Zu den Zielen, p.61-2; Ganz, "The German Navy", p.117.

same year.[28]

Rear-Admiral Tirpitz was instrumental in choosing Kiautschou. After surveying all potential sites with the Cruiser Squadron in the spring of 1896, Tirpitz selected Kiautschou because of its favourable economic potential, its geographic position outside any foreign spheres of influence, the availability of coal, the weak Chinese harbour defenses, and finally, its ice-free harbour.[29]

During his tour commanding the Cruiser Squadron in the Far East, Tirpitz also became convinced that cruiser-warfare was of limited value. The Kaiser, however, had always favoured cruiser-warfare and was about to approve a naval plan in that direction. Hurrying back to Berlin in June 1897, Tirpitz impressed upon the Kaiser that Germany's political and strategic interests lay in building a battle fleet stationed near Germany's coast-line. Germany lacked naval bases and foreign powers easily understood Germany's weaknesses abroad. Tirpitz had been informed from several sources while in the Far East that Germans encountered increasing harassment from British sources. Germans were being expelled and barred from local administrative bodies, and also from British firms and docks. According to Tirpitz, the esteem for "Made in Germany" products was diminishing since the Krueger telegram, and the "flying" squadron was no longer able to afford proper protection to German interests in the East.

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[28]Schueddekopf, Die Stuetzpunktpolitik, p.50.

[29]Ganz, "The German Navy", pp.121-2.

What was required, therefore, was for Germany to increase in overall strength. By possessing a mighty fleet of battleships, Germany could wield it as an instrument of power to influence future alliances in her favour. The first step, therefore, was the creation of a powerful naval fleet. Until then all major conflicts with other powers must be avoided.[30]

Tirpitz then proposed in October 1897 the construction of 11 battleships, 5 first-class cruisers, and 17 smaller cruisers, all to be completed by 1905. After shortening the construction period by one year, and after some other minor modifications, the Reichstag accepted on 28 March 1898 what became known as the First Naval Bill. Officially endorsed by the Kaiser on 10 April, the new bill finally supplied Germany with a framework for naval policy.[31]

German firms in Eastern Asia supported the building program. Behn, Meyer & Co. established in Singapore the "Deutsche Vereinigung" for promoting the acceptance of the bill.[32] The bill, however, did not provide for an increase in the number of cruisers to be stationed abroad. Nor did it assign any further duties to the Far Eastern

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[30]Tirpitz, Erinnerungen, pp.80-91.

[31]Langer, The Diplomacy, pp.433-4 and p.439; Hallmann, Der Weg, p.325. The Straits Times wrote on 24 January 1898: "The agitation [in Germany] for an augmentation of the German naval forces is on the increase." On 30 March 1898 the same paper reported to the Singapore public that: "The Reichstag has finally passed the Bill for increasing the German Navy."

[32]Boehm, Ueberseehandel, p.135.

Squadron such as requiring it for the acquisition of new territories. Rather, the squadron's role remained confined to protecting German interests in the East and keeping trade routes open to important markets and raw materials.[53]

Naval Strength of the Major Powers in 1898[54]

	Battleships	Cruisers		
		Armoured Cruisers		Torpedo Boats
Britain	54	14	104	34
France	29	16	30	19
Russia	15	13	10	8
Germany	14	18	13	4
United States	5	19	21	--

Tirpitz continued his push for a stronger fleet.)oubting whether cruiser-warfare and commerce raiding :ould effectively harm a colonial power like Britain, 'irpitz told the Reichstag in 1899 that "Overseas :onflicts with European nations possessing greater naval trength will be settled in Europe".[55] In February 1900, he RMA officially acknowledged the fact that to trengthen the cruiser fleet while building at the same ime a strong fleet of battleships was not only

[53]E. Raeder, Der Kreuzerkrieg in den auslaendischen ewaessern, vol.1, Berlin, 1922, p.5; Berghahn, "Zu den ielen", p.41.

[54]Schueddekopf, Die Stuetzpunktpolitik, p.63.

[55]Quoted in Ganz, "The German Navy", p.133.

impractical, but also impossible.[36] Tirpitz's building program was expanded by the Second Naval Bill in 1900. Revising the earlier bill, the new law called for the construction of 14 battleships and 38 smaller cruisers within 16 years.[37]

There is disagreement among historians whether these two naval bills were designed with a defensive or offensive objective in mind. Yet, it seems possible to conclude that they were intended to satisfy both aims. On the one hand, the battle fleet was supposed to defend Germany's coast-line.[38] On the other hand, and especially the second bill, the laws emerge as offensive because of the desire for prestige and recognition. The battle fleet was intended to bring acknowledgment to Germany as an equal negotiating partner. By effectively dominating overseas policy, Germany could then expand and strengthen her colonial empire.[39]

The idea of establishing a network of strategically located naval stations in the East was first brought up by the renowned Africa traveller, Eugen Wolf. In a meeting

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[36]Berghahn, "Zu den Zielen", p.67 and pp.69-70.

[37]Dawson, The German Empire, vol.2, p.298.

[38]According to the so-called "risk theory", which Tirpitz had developed in the mid-1890s, German naval power should always be strong enough to pose a serious risk to the attacking enemy.

[39]P.M. Kennedy, "German World Policy and the Alliance Negotiations with England, 1879-1900", The Journal of Modern History, vol.45, March-December 1973, pp.608-9; Berghahn, "Zu den Zielen", pp.41-3, p.45 and pp.66-70; Dawson, The German Empire, vol.2, p.298.

with Chancellor Hohenlohe on 17 March 1896, Wolf explained that Germany's commercial interests in Eastern Asia needed protection. He therefore suggested that Germany should establish a string of naval stations between the Red Sea and China at the following locations: near Aden, close to the western side of the Kra Isthmus, an island between the Dutch East Indies and Singapore, the Chusan Islands near Shanghai, and at Ningpo. He also proposed some territorial acquisitions in Siam and the Malay Peninsula. However, Wolf's suggestions did not have any influence on naval policy formulation.[40]

It appears contradictory that although Tirpitz championed the battle fleet approach, at the same time he was the man responsible for the decision to acquire Kiautschou. Tirpitz, according to Padfield, was a person who "never revealed his hand fully" and deliberately created "an atmosphere of fog out of which he could operate in any direction".[41] The German naval historian A.H. Ganz, explains that acquiring a naval station in China had been a fixed idea among certain naval officers and government officials. To pull out all German cruisers and gunboats from the Far East would have enraged powerful groups with interests in Asia. Moreover, "Tirpitz was very sensitive about his Navy Bill", and he desperately needed support for his otherwise unpopular proposals. He therefore sought to apply the widespread desire for a

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[40]Schueddekopf, Die Stuetzpunktpolitik, pp.26-7.

[41]Padfield, The Great, p.42.

naval base to his political advantage by acknowledging the Cruiser Squadron's desperate need for naval stations and recommending the occupation of Kiautschou.[42] Ganz's conclusion is further corroborated by what the "Straits Times" of Singapore wrote about Germany's acquisition of Kiautschou:

> "This demonstration of the practical value of a strong fleet ready to act at short notice in any part of the world will probably give the 'coup de grace' to the declining opposition to the Navy Bill. The success of German diplomacy wielding the fleet as a weapon, will impress the popular imagination and stimulate the enthusiasm of the supporters of the Bill."[43]

Ganz further maintains that Germany did not strive to establish a chain of naval stations to the East in preparation for cruiser-warfare and commerce-raiding. No formal strategy for securing a series of carefully chosen naval stations had ever been adopted by the navy or even promoted by the German Foreign Ministry. The military seizure of Kiautschou was the only example of a base acquired abroad in German naval history, and it was definitely not seized as part of a chain of naval stations. If such a plan existed, Ganz asks, then why were no such stations erected in the German possessions in the Pacific? "The idea that there existed a Flottenstuetzpunktpolitik' is a tantalizing but illusory one."[44]

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[42]Ganz, "The German Navy", p.120, p.124 and p.135.

[43]The Straits Times, 4 January 1898.

[44]Ganz, "The German Navy", p.124, p.128, p.133, and footnote 28 on p.135.

On the other hand, there are those like German historians Schueddekopf and Boehm, who take the position that Germany in fact intended to establish more naval stations abroad. In April 1898, Tirpitz himself stressed, like the OKM, that Germany needed to expand her colonial empire and that establishing support stations was necessary for the navy. Tirpitz sustained a special interest in the Philippines and contemplated the immediate acquisition of Manila right after its independence from Spain.[45] The OKM had also contemplated a naval station in the Philippines, preferably one at Palawan Island.[46]

In Eastern Asia and the Pacific, Buelow was eager to acquire for Germany Portuguese Timor, the Sulu Archipelago, at least one island in the Philippines (Mindanao), the Caroline Islands, and the Samoa Islands.[47] Moreover, Buelow informed the British government on 21 January 1899 that Germany would consider abandoning her claims in Samoa in exchange for the Gilbert Islands, British New Guinea, and "a coaling station in Malacca".[48]

Germany's intentions in the Philippines is perhaps one of the most confusing aspects of German history in Eastern Asia. Assuming that "Manila would drop like a ripe

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[45]Boehm, Ueberseehandel, p.113; Schueddekopf, Die Stuetzpunktpolitik, pp.59-61.

[46]Meyer, "Das Eindringen", p.111.

[47]Grosse Politik, vol.14, no.3806, Buelow to Hatzfeldt, 8 June 1898.

[48]Cheong, "German Interest", p.47.

fruit into [Germany's] lap", the Kaiser directed Diederich's Far Eastern Cruiser Squadron to Manila at the beginning of the Spanish-American War in 1898. Buelow received a telegram from Kaiser Wilhelm II in April stating that "Tirpitz is as firm as a rock in his conviction that we must have Manila from Spain [,] we must occupy it."[49]

The Kaiser believed that the Spanish authorities would not succeed in putting down the Philippines rebellion. He, however, thought that the Spanish fleet was still strong enough to defeat the approaching American squadron. But much to the Kaiser's great disappointment, Admiral Dewey's ships almost annihilated the entire Spanish fleet in Manila Bay. The German squadron which was nearby watched the battle closely "in order to gain useful lessons" in naval warfare. The Americans, of course, became suspicious as to Germany's real intentions and a souring in American-German relations ensued. Realising it was better to forsake German ambitions in the Philippines for the sake of amicable relations with the United States, the Kaiser asked Buelow to "get the country and himself out of this situation without injury".[50] In any case, during the Spanish-American conflict Germany bought from Spain the Caroline Islands, Palau and the Mariana Islands.[51]

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[49]Buelow, Memoirs, vol.1, p.216.

[50]Ibid.

[51]Carr, A History, p.219.

Yet, and according to documents cited by Ganz, the Kaiser was actually against making the Philippines a German protectorate.[52] Moreover, Tirpitz himself in his memoirs strenuously denied that Germany had any expansionist intentions in the Philippines.[53] Also Buelow later insisted that the only reason why the German fleet was ordered to Manila was "to protect Germany's great economic interests there."[54]

How can we explain these contradicting indicators in German naval policy? Padfield explains that:

> "While [Tirpitz's] immediate aim was for 'a certain measure of sea power', obviously heavy enough to weigh in the European balance to exploit the enmity between Britain and her historic enemies, France and Russia, this was only the first step in a larger design."[55]

The creation of a mighty battle fleet stationed in the north sea was only a short term objective. It was meant to achieve British recognition of Germany as an equal negotiating partner by increasing Germany's alliance value. In the long term, however, a workable "Weltpolitik" required the acquisition of globally dispersed naval stations for the protection of German interests world-wide.[56]

In light of the above discussion, it seems possible

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[52]Ganz, "The German Navy", p.128.

[53]Tirpitz, Erinnerungen, p.359.

[54]Buelow, Memoirs, vol.1, p.413.

[55]Padfield, The Great, p.42.

[56]Boehm, Ueberseehandel, pp.113-4.

to conclude that Tirpitz and Buelow were not against the idea of acquiring naval stations in Eastern Asia. But because Germany was in the midst of constructing a fleet of powerful battleships, any serious confrontation with a major power had to be avoided. The German government, on the other hand, would have welcomed it if naval stations were secured through non-confrontational methods like purchase agreements, diplomatic treaties, or simply "drop like a ripe fruit" into Germany's lap. This conclusion largely corresponds with Tirpitz's and Buelow's attitude towards Pulau Langkawi, which we will now turn to.

III. The Bid for Pulau Langkawi[57]

The island group of Langkawi lies some 60 miles off the west coast of Kedah, and its main island is about the size of Penang. Langkawi's safe anchorage places were well known to seafarers since ancient times, and a coaling station on the largest island was extremely viable. Although conditions for planting tropical crops were quite favourable, there was little agricultural activity on Langkawi except for some padi fields. The islands, however, were prized for their hardwood, an esteemed commodity in the Straits Settlements.[58]

Towards the end of the 19th century, the German government's attention was drawn to Pulau Langkawi and the Malay Peninsula by Eduard Lorenz Meyer and his father Arnold Otto Meyer, whose Hamburg firm was closely connected to Behn, Meyer & Co. of Singapore and Penang. In July 1898, these two prominent German businessmen met with Admiral Tirpitz and told him what they had heard while on a recent visit to Kedah, that the King of Siam viewed with approval a permanent German presence on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula. They recommended Pulau Langkawi as an

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[57]Except when otherwise footnoted, the following account is based on Boehm's findings in Ueberseehandel, pp.114-9. Boehm's use of German archival sources is impressive. Much of the information presented here is not available in English sources.

[58]The Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle, 24 January 1900; reprint from The London and China Express, 29 December 1899; C.O.273/293, no.5759, Swettenham to Chamberlain, 16 January 1903, secret.

especially suitable location for a naval station. They also mentioned as alternative location an island north of Langkawi, as well as Pulau Redang on the east side of the peninsula. The Meyers then suggested that the resident director of Behn, Meyer & Co. in Penang, Eugen Engler,[55] should begin preliminary negotiations with the Sultan of Kedah.

When briefed about this proposal, Buelow announced that he was not against the establishment of a naval station in the Straits of Malacca as long as the navy assessed these places as vital for the protection of German interests. However, he insisted on further on-the-spot investigations, warning that this should be done in utmost secrecy. Any publicity might jeopardize the project from the start. Tirpitz then ordered the commander of the gunboat "Iltis", Captain Lans, to survey secretly Pulau Langkawi and Pulau Redang. A third place was added: Kuala Cassaie, also known as Kaabie or Korbie (probably Girby, opposite the Island of Phuket). Captain Lans was also directed to liaise with Engler at Penang, who, following A.O. Meyer's instructions, had already begun negotiations with the Sultan of Kedah regarding the lease of Langkawi.

In a related development, Sholto Douglas, owner of large mining operations in Austria-Hungary, Brazil,

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[55]Eugen Engler started Behn, Meyer & Co.'s branch in Penang in 1890 with the purchase of Friedrichs & Co. tin smelting works. This branch functioned as general importers, tin refiners, and shipping agent. (Wright and Cartwright, Twentieth Century, pp.801-3).

Togoland and the Cameroons,[60] went to see Tirpitz on 1 February 1899 asking whether the German government was prepared to guarantee naval protection for his syndicate's interests abroad. Sholto Douglas represented a syndicate which planned to invest 100 million marks in trade monopolies, mining concessions, and railway projects in Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil, Bolivia, Angola, Mozambique, Syria, the Persian Gulf, and the Dutch East Indies. Sholto Douglas told Tirpitz that the syndicate was preparing these areas for future German annexation. So as not to create suspicion, the syndicate wanted to operate under different company names and foreign agents. It was hoped that such a strategy would eventually make Germany self-reliant in her petroleum, cotton and wool needs, hitherto dependent for these items on the United States.

Tirpitz was impressed and referred Sholto Douglas to Buelow, who in turn affirmed Germany's "total support" for the syndicate's endeavours abroad. It seems that Sholto Douglas was directed by either the RMA or the German Foreign Office to talk to Arnold Otto Meyer. Sholto became very interested in the Pulau Langkawi project and both men agreed to work closely together towards its acquisition. Behn, Meyer, & Co. became the syndicate's agent.[61]

While all this was going on, the "Iltis" was busy surveying the designated islands under the guise of

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[60] F.O.422/53, Inclosure in No.54, Memorandum by Acton, 8 June 1900, in No. 54, Lascelles to Salisbury, 8 June 1900, confidential.

[61] Ibid.

performing some shooting exercises. In a report sent to headquarters, the commander of the German warship, Captain Lans, described Langkawi as a very suitable location for a naval station and urged its acquisition as soon as possible. He also recommended the annexation of the neighbouring islands of Butong and Teretak (probably Teratau). As for Kuala Cassaie and Pulau Redang, Lans dismissed the possibility of erecting naval bases on these islands.

The captain also mentioned that a Chinese merchant had recently asked an employee of the German shipping firm Jebsen & Co. if Germany intended to purchase Langkawi, and that Behn, Meyer & Co. was aware of this. Furthermore, the director of Behn, Meyer & Co. in Singapore, F.H. Witthoeft had queried Captain Lans whether the navy wanted to acquire Pulau Langkawi for the establishment of a naval station. In an effort to avoid any premature speculations that might give away Germany's real intentions, Lans told Witthoeft that he had reported to his superiors that these islands were worthless to German naval interests. In August 1899, Captain Lans repeated his recommendation that the German admiralty should act soon towards the acquisition of Pulau Langkawi because the British were nurturing their own plans for the islands.

When asked by the German Foreign Office to comment on the importance of Pulau Langkawi, Tirpitz replied that its acquisition was indeed "extremely desirable". Not only was Pulau Langkawi appropriately located to function as a base

in peace times, German warships could effectively use it as a point of assembly, and for restocking, during naval operations in times of war. Pulau Langkawi lies almost half-way between Kiautschou and the German colonies in the South Seas on one side, and German East Africa on the other. Langkawi also possessed commercial potential and private investors could facilitate the construction of port installations needed by the merchant marine as well as the navy. Admiral Tirpitz urged the Foreign Office to quickly effect the acquisition of Pulau Langkawi before Britain beat them to it. Boehm cites this as evidence that Tirpitz's long term plans did in fact include the establishment of more naval stations in Eastern Asia.

The German Minister in Bangkok was instructed to find out if Siam was prepared to cede Pulau Langkawi to Germany. But Saldern, who had been stationed in Bangkok since April 1899, did not think that Siam would voluntarily give up Langkawi. Britain's annexationist intentions were well known, and a German foothold in Siamese territory might invite Britain to annex all of Siam's Malay provinces. He therefore suggested that in exchange for Pulau Langkawi, Germany should offer to guarantee Siam's territorial integrity in the Malay Peninsula against any intruding power, even against Britain. Saldern also brought up the option of occupying Langkawi by force, followed by a coerced treaty ceding the islands to Germany. It was reasonable to believe, Saldern thought, that France and Russia would not object.

Aware of Siam's critical circumstances, Buelow refused to consider any military move on Langkawi. He was conscious of the fact that Britain and France had agreed in the treaty of 15 January 1896 to leave Siam intact to function as an independent buffer state between them. Britain would certainly not view lightly a German attempt to acquire Langkawi by force. Fearing an open confrontation with Britain, Buelow believed that the acquisition of Langkawi was only possible by non-aggressive means. A territorial guarantee as suggested by Saldern was therefore out of the question. This is why Buelow and Tirpitz favoured Behn, Meyer & Co.'s attempts to purchase Langkawi from the Sultan of Kedah. According to Boehm, it is almost certain that the authorities in Berlin were unaware of the Anglo-Siamese secret treaty of 6 April 1897 which required Siam to seek British approval before granting any concessions to foreigners. In any case, the forceful occupation of Langkawi probably would have created a war scare in Europe itself.

In October 1899, when Kedah was in deep financial trouble with a debt of about 700,000 dollars, Behn, Meyer & Co. succeeded in getting the brother of the Sultan of Kedah, the Raja Muda, to sign a draft agreement for the lease of Langkawi. The Sultan was apparently ill at the time. In exchange for all economic concessions for the next 50 years, and without giving up sovereignty over Pulau Langkawi, the Kedah government was to receive a loan

of 1,000,000 marks from the German company.[52] With the intention of raising funds for the loan to Kedah from German shipping and trading companies, the "Deutsche Uebersee-Gesellschaft" was formed with Buelow's and Tirpitz's approval in November 1899. Sholto Douglas became its first director.[53]

The second and more difficult step was to obtain formal approval from the Siamese government. A provision included in the first clause of the draft agreement stated that:

> "[The agreement was made] expressly subject to the confirmation hereof of His Majesty the King of Siam and until such confirmation be testified by the signature and seal of His Majesty's Minister for the Interior these presents shall be of no force and effect."[54]

Accordingly, the draft agreement was forwarded for approval to the Minister responsible for the administration of the Siamese Malay states on 12 October 1899. Obviously irritated, Prince Damrong immediately summoned the Raja Muda to Bangkok and sternly advised him not to sign any agreement granting concessions to foreigners before the Siamese authorities had the chance

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[52] F.O.422/53, No.44, Stringer to Salisbury, 14 March 1900, very confidential; C.O.273/293, No.5759, F. Swettenham to Chamberlain, 16 January 1903, secret; R.N. Bhupalan Rajendram, "British Relations with Kedah, 1880-1909", B.A. Hons. thesis, University of Malaya, Singapore, 1955, p.35.

[53] F.O.422/53, Inclosure in No.54, Memorandum by Acton, 8 June 1900, in No. 54, Lascelles to Salisbury, 8 June 1900, confidential.

[54] C.O.273/286, No.13029, Damrong to Tower, 19 February 1902.

to review the initial application. The Raja Muda was then required to sign a pledge on 16 December 1899 which read:

> "I further beg to state that I can quite see the difficulty in dealing with Europeans so that whenever any Europeans want land in Kedah I will inform Your Royal Highness [Prince Damrong] so as to avoid difficulty."[65]

In a direct dispatch dated 23 January 1900, the Siamese government informed the Sultan of Kedah of its decision to refuse Behn, Meyer & Co.'s application.[66]

The British first heard of the German endeavours to acquire Pulau Langkawi when an article quoting "a correspondent who has exceptional sources of information" appeared in the "London and China Express" on 29 December 1899. The same article was reprinted in the "Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle" on 24 January 1900 and in the "Bangkok Times" of 25 January under the title "Is it for a Coaling Station?" (see Chapter 8).[67] The Siamese government officially announced its rejection of Behn, Meyer & Co.'s application in the "Bangkok Times" of 27 January.

Acting on instructions from Berlin, the German Minister in Bangkok, Saldern, called on the Belgian Advisor to the Siamese government, Rolin-Jaequemyns, enquiring about the reason why Siam declined to approve the Langkawi application, particularly when Siam had

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] F.O.422/53, No.24, Stringer to Salisbury, 2 February 1900, secret and confidential.

already approved numerous British concessions in the Malay Peninsula. Saldern assured Rolin-Jaequemyns that there were no hidden political intentions behind Behn, Meyer & Co.'s application, and that the company would be satisfied with a shorter lease period of 20 years, instead of 50 years as originally applied for. Rolin-Jaequemyns, however, replied that it was out of the question for Siam to think of leasing Langkawi because it "would be equivalent to giving a lease of a Siamese province". Rolin-Jaequemyns immediately informed the British Minister, Stringer, of Saldern's visit.[""]

The Siamese government became very suspicious of any German subjects wanting to visit Kedah and refused to afford them any assistance. For example, when Wartegg, a German journalist and author of a book on Siam, requested a letter of introduction to the Sultan of Kedah from Rolin-Jaequemyns, it was promptly refused. Apparently the request was denied because Wartegg, according to his letter to Rolin-Jaequemyns, had seen the German firm's lease of Langkawi.[""]

Buelow had anticipated Siam's refusal of Behn, Meyer & Co.'s application. He pointed out that according to the Anglo-French treaty of 15 January 1896, Kedah lay in the British sphere of interest. It was well known at the German Foreign Office that Britain wanted to expand

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[""]F.O.422/53, No.44, Stringer to Salisbury, 14 March 1900, very confidential.

[""]Ibid.

northwards into the Siamese Malay states while keeping what was left of Siam as an independent buffer state between her and France. Buelow still declined to endorse any military move on Langkawi as suggested earlier by Saldern. He feared that an attempt to acquire Langkawi by force would lead to a "very sharp conflict" with Britain.

According to Buelow, the only possible way to acquire Langkawi was by the massive introduction of German capital and enterprise in Kedah. Until German commercial interests were prominently established there, a wait-and-see policy should be adopted. The Kaiser agreed to this strategy, but Tirpitz, who had been constantly informed of the developments, began to lose interest. Saldern was warned by his ministry in Berlin not to get Germany directly entangled with Britain over the Pulau Langkawi issue. He was also instructed to do what he could, but without being too assertive, in promoting and assisting German applications for commercial concessions in Kedah.

In the meantime, the German entrepreneurs contemplated several other schemes for acquiring Langkawi. Behn, Meyer & Co. toyed with the idea of bribing the Sultan of Kedah and his advisors to disregard Bangkok's opposition to the concession. Sholto Douglas thought it best to reduce the size of the concession to a private mining lease. Around the middle of 1900, A. Epler, a former secretary at the German consulate in Singapore, applied to Prince Devawongse on behalf of the "Deutsche Uebersee Gesellschaft" for a mining concession on Pulau

Langkawi. The application was accompanied by a recommendation letter from Siam's General-Consul in Hamburg, Pickenpack. Prince Devawongse informed Epler that approving concessions was out of his jurisdiction and that the application should be submitted to the Siamese Mining Department, which Epler did. But Scott, the Director of the Mining Department, told Epler that the King of Siam at present did not wish to open up Pulau Langkawi to foreign enterprise.[70]

Sholto Douglas bitterly complained to the Reichskanzler claiming that the denial of mining concessions to German subjects was a breach of the German-Siamese trade treaty of 7 February 1862 and that the German government should do something about this. The German Foreign Office acknowledged Sholto Douglas's right to protest because according to the German-Siamese trade treaty, all Germans were allowed to undertake mining activity without the need of acquiring prior approval (see Chapter 3). And yet, there were other more important factors which the Foreign Office had to consider. Negotiations for the Yangtze agreement with Britain were almost concluded, and Buelow wanted to avoid as far as possible any obstacles before the signing of this treaty.

The Hamburg firm of Arnold Otto Meyer was becoming increasingly impatient and repeated the call for the use

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[70] F.O.422/53, No.65, Stringer to Salisbury, 6 June 1900, very confidential. According to Boehm it was Engler and not Epler who made this application. Except for the difference in names, the information is the same.

of force.[71] The company held that with the help of the German armoured cruiser "Fuerst Bismarck", which was currently in the region, the German flag could easily be hoisted on Langkawi.[72] A financial compensation could then be secretly awarded the Sultan of Kedah in return for claiming that the islands were settled through a purchase deal. However, the German government refused to apply any kind of direct pressure for the acquisition of Langkawi.

One last attempt was made by Sholto Douglas at the end of 1900. He almost succeeded, through bribery, to obtain a land concession on Pulau Langkawi from a Chinese entrepreneur who had agreed to sell his concession for 29,000 marks. Behn, Meyer & Co. wanted 10,000 marks for their trouble as compensation. According to Boehm, this project also came to nothing. Discouraged and disappointed, Sholto Douglas finally resigned from the "Deutsche Uebersee Gesellschaft" in March 1901.

Parallel to the endeavours of the "Deutsche Uebersee Gesellschaft", a certain Captain Rust and his Malacca Syndicate were also planning to obtain some islands in the Straits of Malacca. Captain Rust, a retired German naval

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[71]In April 1900, the Far Eastern Cruiser Squadron consisted of three large cruisers ("Hertha", "Hansa" and "Kaiserin Augusta"), two small cruisers ("Gesion" and "Irene"), and one gunboat ("Iltis"). (Nauticus Schriften, Jahrbuch, 1901, p.29.)

[72]According to The Straits Times of 2 August 1900: "The German man-of-war 'Fuerst Bismarck', 3,516 tons, 40 guns, 13,000 horse power and carrying a crew of 365, arrived [in Singapore] from Kiel yesterday afternoon, and proceeded to the wharf to coal. She will probably leave for China on Saturday."

officer, claimed that the idea of investing German capital in the Malay Peninsula originated from him. Rust was apparently upset because while he was away on vacation in Italy, the "Deutsche Uebersee Gesellschaft" made use of his idea. In any case, the German Malacca Syndicate was more interested in Pulau Lantar, which lies between 7 and 8 degrees north and belonged to the Sultan of Trang and Palien. Pulau Lantar possessed a sheltered natural harbour suitable for stationing a number of large warships. The Malacca Syndicate believed that sooner or later a canal would be cut across the Kra Isthmus, which would divert trade away from Singapore. According to the syndicate's prospectus, Britain was jealous of German colonial enterprise and negotiations with the Siamese government for leasing the island would achieve little. Instead, the syndicate wanted to obtain the concession directly from the local sultan, insisting that the Malay rulers of the peninsula held the right to grant concessions within their respective territories. In support of the project, the name of the famous Gustav Meinecke, a prominent member of the German Colonial Society and editor of its periodical, appeared in the prospectus. But also this project came to nothing (see Chapter 8).[73]

When the RMA asked at the German Foreign Office in March 1901 about the latest developments regarding Pulau Langkawi, they were informed that the project had been

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[73] F.O.422/53, Inclosure in No.54, Memorandum by Acton, 8 June 1900, in No. 54, Lascelles to Salisbury, 8 June 1900, confidential.

abandoned and that there was no possibility of overcoming the existing difficulties.

The man who replaced Sholto Douglas to manage the assets worth 1.2 million marks of the "Deutsche Uebersee Gesellschaft" was Carl Scheidemantel. Although the company weighed the possibility of declaring bankruptcy in June 1901, it was still interested in Langkawi. In April 1902, Scheidemantel requested the German Foreign Ministry for an update of the current situation in Siam and the Malay Peninsula. Saldern, who was at the time in Germany, was asked by Rat Klehmet of the Foreign Office to comment. Saldern recommended a similar strategy that had been earlier proposed by Buelow - to increase German investments on the mainland of Kedah, thereafter try to expand German capital slowly and carefully into Pulau Langkawi to avoid creating suspicion. Scheidemantel, however, was unimpressed with this extremely slow approach and the "Deutsche Uebersee Gesellschaft" finally dissolved itself.

About three years later, Sholto Douglas renewed his interest in Langkawi when he heard that Kedah was once again totally immersed in debt. But neither the company of Arnold Otto Meyer nor the German government saw the slightest chance of success. This was confirmed by a report from the German Minister in Bangkok who pointed out that the prospects of achieving anything in that direction were extremely bleak. This became especially clear when Siam agreed to cover Kedah's debts in 1905. In an effort

to remove any suspicion, Germany officially issued a "dementi" renouncing rumours that it was trying to obtain a footing on Siamese territory.[74]

In 1908 the German Consul in Bangkok saw a last chance to acquire Langkawi. Britain and Siam were in the midst of negotiating a comprehensive treaty, and the Consul believed that there was a slight possibility that Britain might be willing to leave Langkawi to the Germans. Britain was prepared to give up her extra-territorial rights in Siam in exchange for the provinces of Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah (see Chapter 9). The German Foreign Office, however, believed this was "totally impossible".

The above investigation clearly illustrates the process by which private commercial companies tried to obtain direct support from the German government for their schemes in Pulau Langkawi. The RMA and the Foreign Office, on the other hand, did not mind if this island group was acquired peacefully, but they were not prepared to risk a confrontation with Britain over it.

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[74] The Bangkok Times, 5 December 1905.