PART THREE

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GERMANY AND BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY

Considerable evidence has been presented in Part Two showing the deep-rooted desire of certain colonial officials to expand British control over the entire Malay Peninsula. Here, in Part Three, the discussion focuses on how the Foreign Office dealt with the German question with regard the Siamese Malay provinces. In the final part, Part Four, the strands of the argument will be pulled together to demonstrate that Germany was used to justify and rationalize British expansion in the Malay Peninsula.

British foreign policy did not allow a foreign power to establish a foothold in the area between Tenasserim and Province Wellesley. The Foreign Office wanted to preserve the Siamese Malay states for future British expansion. The pursuance of this policy can be discerned from the numerous British declarations and agreements of the period (Chapter 8).

Contrary to British interests, Siam sought, but without much success, to involve Germany in an international agreement that would guarantee her independence. When Siam prepared to construct a railway line southwards into the peninsula with the help of German engineers, Britain vigorously protested. To get British
saddling out of the way once and for all, Siam proposed a deal which Britain could not refuse. By the Anglo-Siamese treaty of 1909, Britain gained control over Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah and Perlis, while Siam obtained her railway track and some other important advantages (Chapter ).
CHAPTER 8

THE AREA BETWEEN BURMA AND THE F.M.S.

Rumours of German schemes in Siam did not worry the British Foreign Office too much. Their major concern in the 1890s was to keep Siam intact as a buffer state between Britain and France, especially after the threat of French-Russian cooperation in Asia.

The Foreign Office delayed territorial ambitions in the Siamese Malay states to avoid giving France any excuse that might lead to Siam’s dismemberment. The Anglo-French Declaration of 1896 and the Secret Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1897 were designed to secure the Siamese Malay dependencies within Britain’s sphere of influence. To preserve these states for future British expansion, no foreign power was allowed to establish any kind of foothold there.

Carefully avoiding any move that might invite new British demands, Siam declined recurrent German requests for the cession of the Langkawi Islands.

Certain British capitalists tried to use the situation to win over the support of their government. They warned that if their interests in the Siamese Malay states were not protected, Germany would eventually gain an undesirable foothold there.
I. Rumours of Possible German Schemes

As soon as Germany began acquiring colonies in the mid-1880s, stories emerged about Germany being politically interested in Siam and her Malay provinces. There was some speculation that Germany wanted to establish a naval station there. A naval station could be established in several places, but the best location was definitely at Phuket. Other suitable places were at Takuapur, the islands off the coast of Girby, Trang, Pulau Langkawi, Koh Samui, the Bandon Bight, and a few other localities.¹

The well-known British explorer Holt Hallett cautioned the Foreign Office in 1885 that if Britain did not take immediate steps to secure Siam's Malay territories, some other power like Germany might beat them to it. According to Hallett, "Annexation is becoming a rage in this part of the world, and any day these states might be annexed by Germany or France."² A few years later, in December 1889, the British Minister in Bangkok claimed that Germany was supporting Siam against France and Britain.³

Colourful rumours of German designs in Siamese territory were excitedly picked up and disseminated by the

¹C.O. 537/48, No.55, C.O. to F.O., 28 February 1896, confidential; C.O. 273/315, No.39138, Paget to Lansdowne, 7 September 1905, confidential. Phuket was formerly known as Junk Ceylon, and according to different sources, Girby was sometimes referred to as Gherbi, Gerby or Girbi.

²Quoted in Kiernan, "Britain, Siam", p.13.

³Thio, "Britain's Search", p.290.
British press. One such rumour, which appeared in the "Standard" on 10 December 1890, asserted that Germany was aspiring to establish a coaling station on the Siamese coast. Quoting a Bangkok correspondent, the article read:

"The Germans are every day making their influence felt in Siam. Their Consul has been raised to the dignity of Minister, and the construction of the first Siamese railway, the Borapah (Eastern), from Ayuthia to Korat, has been intrusted to a German engineer. The railway material will be ordered in Germany, and German engineers are to be employed on the line. There is also a rumour here that Germany is secretly negotiating for a strip of Siamese territory north of Penang. It is intended to serve as a coaling station and entrepot for her ever-increasing trade to Siam and the East."

Although Captain Jones, the British Minister in Bangkok, was quick to dismiss the rumour as absolutely baseless in a dispatch to Salisbury less than a week later, the news still managed to produce great alarm in London, Bangkok and the Straits Settlements.

In an effort to amplify the fear of German intentions, a certain English businessman, F.S. Clarke claimed in a letter to the Foreign Office, that the German minister in Bangkok had "done his utmost ... to sow

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"F.O.422/30, Inclosure in No.6, Extract from the "Standard" of 10 December 1890, in Lansdowne to F.O., 11 December 1890; Inclosure 1 in No.10, Memorandum by Major J.S. Clarke, 22 December 1890.

"F.O.422/30, No.8, Jones to Salisbury, 17 December 1890, telegraphic.

F.S. Clarke was the Bangkok manager of the Borneo Co. His brother George, later Lord Sydenham, was Secretary to the British Colonial Defence Committee. (N. Brailey, J., (ed.), Two Views of Siam on the Eve of the Chakri Reformation, Whiting Bay, Kinscadale Publications, 1989, p.137.) I was unable to establish if F.S. Clarke was related to A. Clarke.
discord between Siam and England" and was interfering in
the boundary question between British Burma and Siam. F.S.
Clarke continued:

"German influence is being pushed at the present
time in a most determined manner to secure the
construction of the railways now contemplated,
... Germany steps in as the disinterested friend
and points to the danger to Siam from France and
England, and rumour says that Germany will
protect her from both. ... A special
Correspondent writing from Bangkok on the 4th
November states that Germany is secretly
negotiating with Siam for a cession of territory
in the Malay peninsula on the Bay of Bengal for
a coaling station. The district in question is
probably the Siamese Province of [Kedah]."

According to F.S. Clarke, a German settlement in
Kedah "might easily lead to [the] absorption of the
country", an outcome which could prove "disastrous" to the
interests of the Straits Settlements. If Germans
constructed a railway line linking a port on the coast of
Kedah with the Siamese capital, "a much quicker and more
direct route from Europe to Bangkok would be established",
shutting out British trade from Siam. Germany might also
want to cut a canal across the Kra Isthmus to challenge
Singapore's trading position as well as other British
commercial centres in the East.

The prospect of a German naval station interposed
between Tenasserim and Province Wellesley was not a matter

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*F.O.422/30, Inclosure 2 in No.10, Memorandum by F.S.
Clarke, (undated, probably around 20 December 1890).

*Ibid.

*F.O.422/30, Inclosure 1 in No.10, Memorandum by
Major G.S. Clarke, 22 December 1890; No.10, C.O. to F.O.,
16 January 1891, confidential.
to be viewed lightly. The "intervention of Germany" in this area would become "an extremely serious matter". Germany would be able to easily harass British shipping in the Bay of Bengal, endanger the trade route to China, and threaten the safety of India and the Straits Settlements. Penang especially was in danger because Germany would gain "a position within striking distance." Only a few years earlier the War Office had decided to withdraw all British troops, leaving Penang without proper defence.¹⁰

In British political jargon, a naval station was seen as a "foothing" or "foothold" from which further expansion was very likely. "Today a coaling-station, tomorrow something else".¹¹ The news that Germany might establish a foothold on Siam's sea-board prompted the Colonial Office to propose an official intimation to warn the Siamese government against ceding "a port or any part of their territory" to Germany. Such action "might compel [Britain] to consider what steps may ... be taken with a view of safeguarding the interests of this country." Favouring a direct dialogue with Berlin, the Colonial Office also suggested a tripartite treaty between Britain, France and Germany that would guarantee the independence of Siam, or at least the "neutralization of the isthmus

¹⁰F.O.422/30, Inclosure 1 in No.10, Memorandum by Major G.S. Clarke, 22 December 1890.

and of any canal or roadway that may be made across it".\textsuperscript{12}

For Salisbury, however, any agreement or even communication with Germany was not "judicious". The rumour did not alarm Salisbury because Siam's Foreign Minister had assured the British representative in Bangkok that there was absolutely no basis for the "Standard's" allegations. Nevertheless, Salisbury agreed to consider what steps could be taken to induce Siam into signing a separate agreement with Britain not to cede any of her territories to a third power.\textsuperscript{13}

Shortly after, on 26 January 1891, another London newspaper, the "Clove", declared that Germany was about to obtain a strip of territory on the Straits of Malacca somewhere between Burma and Penang. These allegations, however, were quickly repudiated the following day by the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, James Fergusson, when this subject was addressed in parliament.\textsuperscript{14} Upon receiving these rumours via telegram from London, the press in Singapore immediately called for the imposition of a British "Monroe Doctrine" to cover the entire Malay Peninsula.\textsuperscript{15} This article coincided with an India Office

\textsuperscript{12}F.O.422/30, No.10, C.O. to F.O., 16 January 1891, confidential.

\textsuperscript{13}C.O.537/47, No.598, F.O. to C.O., 20 January 1891, confidential; F.O.422/30, No.12, F.O. to India Office, 20 January 1891, confidential.

\textsuperscript{14}F.O.422/30, No.14, House of Commons, 27 January 1891; Cheong, "German Interest", p.36.

\textsuperscript{15}The Straits Times, 29 January 1891.
report confirming the view that the establishment of a German base on Siamese coast was "detrimental to British interests".\textsuperscript{16}

The British Minister in Bangkok, Captain Jones, again found himself refuting the rumours about German intentions on Siamese territory. He explained that most probably these rumours started when a German subject acquired a concession for a coal mine near Girby, opposite the Island of Phuket. Captain Jones also blamed British entrepreneurs and especially the Straits authorities for causing much of the anti-German craze.\textsuperscript{17} He wrote in no uncertain terms that:

"Reports and rumours [about German intentions] of this nature are, for the most part, originated by local traders and concession hunters, who desire to gain the direct support of the British Government for their private ventures and speculations, under the pretext that foreign Powers likewise interfere directly for the personal interest of their subjects. In the neighbouring British provinces there are also certain officials who covet to distinguish themselves by the annexation of fresh districts, and who would gladly find an excuse for the same, whose ... views find expression from time to time in the local press, and occasionally in certain London journals."\textsuperscript{18}

Captain Jones took pains to show that these rumours were attributable to the resentment of certain British

\textsuperscript{16C.O.537/47, No.601, India Office to F.O., 29 January 1891, confidential.}

\textsuperscript{17According to Brailey, (\textit{Two Views}, p.137.), a certain Herr Muller was "the focus of an anti-German scare launched in early 1891 by F.S. Clarke, ... and his brother George".}

\textsuperscript{18F.O.422/30, Inclosure 1 in No.19, Report on the Present State of German Interests and Influence in Siam, in Jones to Salisbury, 18 March 1891.}
businessmen like Andrew Clarke,¹⁹ the former governor of the Straits Settlements. In 1888, A. Clarke had secured a contract to survey some projected railway routes in Siam. When public tenders were invited for the construction of the Bangkok-Korat line (160 miles) late in 1890, A. Clarke was confident that, having concluded the survey, he would obtain the contract for constructing the line, including the contract to supply all necessary machinery, rails, rolling stock, telegraphic material, etc. He was deeply angered, however, when Bethge, the German Director-General of the Railway Department, declared that his department would directly purchase all the material and equipment needed for the railway. Alluding to the unfair British attitude towards Germans in Siam, Captain Jones concluded:

"With some very few exceptions, the British merchants have been the providers of all that Siam has required hitherto from the West, and it is to their morbid jealousy of the pushing, plodding German enterprise that the present cry of alarm is due."²⁰

The British Foreign Office was not really bothered by rumours about German intentions in Siam. France was the power to look out for. Since the early 1890s, Britain's Asian strategy was designed to restrain her two arch rivals, France and Russia, especially after the Franco-

¹⁹Andrew Clarke was Governor of the Straits Settlements from 1873 until 1875, during which time Perak, Selangor and Sungai Ujong came under British control. Later he became involved in railway projects and other commercial ventures in Siam and her Malay dependencies.

Russian Entente in August 1891, their military convention of August 1892, and later the alliance treaty of January 1894. France's ambitions in the Mekong delta were only too obvious, and Russia's advance in the Pamirs was worrying. France and Russia might one day threaten British India's borders simultaneously from the east and from the west, endangering Britain's political position in Europe. The French-Russian menace was a topic of widespread concern in British newspapers. The fear in Britain was so great that an article by Curzon appeared in the press entitled "India between two Fires". The "Straits Times" reminded the Straits community that France was the "neighbour in the East" with an army, while Russia possessed a major naval station not too far away.

Salisbury realized by mid-1891, that to hinder France from gaining more territory from Siam's eastern provinces, it was important for Britain to obtain from the Siamese government an assurance not to alienate territory to any foreign power. However, Britain's unwillingness to pledge any protection against France led Siam to dismiss Salisbury's proposal and instead suggested a tripartite agreement between the powers to guarantee her independence. This was rejected as Salisbury did not wish to give Germany a chance to get politically involved in

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22 The Straits Times, 16 July 1891.
Siam.

Fearing Siam might be pushed into the arms of France, the Foreign Office tried hard to maintain friendly relations with Bangkok, and abstained from challenging Siam's interferences in the internal affairs of her Malay provinces. This explains why Salisbury refused to consider Governor Smith's suggestion in mid-1892 to support the Sultan of Terengganu's opposition to Siamese authority. Smith was furthermore instructed to refrain from meddling in Terengganu's affairs and to avoid any action that might be construed as hostile towards Siam.

Why was Salisbury determined to avert any communication or collaboration with Germany with regard to Siam? The answer seems to lie not so much in Salisbury's fear of how Germany might hurt British interests. Rather, the reason seems to lie in the British Prime Minister's "personal hostility ... to the German Empire and the German Emperor", which was caused by "a brush" with the Kaiser himself. The German Emperor during his first visit to England had tried to discredit Salisbury "in the eyes of his grandmother", Queen Victoria. Salisbury never forgave the Kaiser for slighting

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him. According to Buelow:

"Lord Salisbury found the Kaiser restless and exacting; William II found the British Premier pompous and arrogant. English friends told me that the antipathy of the powerful British statesman to the German Emperor, regrettable and politically injurious as it was, but undeniable and increasing as years passed by, was also attributable to the honest indignation of the Marquis of Salisbury, who in spite of occasional friction, had been an admirer of Prince Bismarck, at the ungrateful and contemptuous way in which William II had got rid of the great Chancellor."

In any case, Salisbury's second Conservative administration, which had begun in August 1886, fell in July 1892 giving way to the new Liberal government led by Gladstone, with Rosebery as the new Foreign Secretary.

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II. Preservation of Future Possessions

The Foreign Office of the new Liberal administration continued the policy of upholding Siam's claims over the Malay states in the peninsula. Desiring as far as possible to maintain cordial relations with Siam, active measures were taken to avoid any unpleasantness. For example, when the Straits Governor made a visit to Kelantan and Terengganu shortly after the beginning of the Siamese-French crisis in 1893, Rosebery was greatly irritated and described the move as "most ill-advised". The British representative in Bangkok, Captain Jones, tried hard to assure the Siamese government that British policy with regard to these states had not changed.27

The Colonial Office, on the other hand, doubted the wisdom of upholding Siam's claims in the peninsula. Ripon, the Colonial Secretary, expressed these doubts confidentially to Rosebery on 22 July 1893. According to Ripon, "as long as we are friends with the Siamese we have no wish to meddle with Trengganu or Kelantan", but in the event France absorbed Siam, then Britain "might find it necessary to take under our Protection or into our own hands the whole of the Malay Peninsula between Tenasserim and the Straits Settlements".28

Rosebery feared for the security of British India and for Britain's interests in the Siamese Malay states. He

28Quoted in Chandran, "The British", p.147.
was especially troubled by the prospect that France might acquire from Siam the two provinces of Siemreap and Battambang. Rosebery's willingness to go to war over France's demands of 30 July to pull back all British warships from Bangkok ultimately succeeded in hindering these two provinces from falling into French hands. At the same time, the Foreign Office warned Siam not to grant any concessions to France near the Kra Isthmus. 

But Rosebery's unwillingness to give Siam more support against France left Bangkok with no other choice than to succumb to French demands. On 3 October 1893 Siam signed an agreement ceding to France her Cambodian provinces east of the Mekong river and certain other privileges. Now suddenly there was a common border, albeit small, between French possessions in Indochina and British possessions in Burma. Fearing France might use her newly acquired territories as a spring-board for further expansion into Siam herself, and dreading the possibility that France might dwarf Britain's dominant commercial position there, Rosebery more than ever understood the importance of keeping Siam's independence and integrity intact. Under no circumstance was France allowed to absorb Siam. Siam was needed to function as a buffer state between the two European powers. It was also critical not to alienate Siam in any way. There was too much at stake. Rosebery finally convinced the French late in 1893 to the

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desirability of maintaining Siam as a buffer between them.\textsuperscript{30}

The Foreign Office was not particularly interested in annexing Siam. When Kimberley became the new Foreign Secretary following a government reshuffle in March 1894, he made it clear that "any arrangement for a British Protectorate of Siam or a defensive alliance is not in our contemplation".\textsuperscript{31} In June 1895, Kimberley agreed with Rosebery, now Prime Minister, that any agreement with France that guaranteed Siam's territorial independence was in Britain's best interests. When Salisbury became Prime Minister again in 1895, he quickly resumed with France the discussions regarding the question of guaranteeing Siam's independence and neutrality.\textsuperscript{32}

Of course, the British empire-builders were not very pleased with the idea of guaranteeing Siam's independence and tried in vain to push for a more active policy. Curzon, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, suggested in August 1895 that Britain should at least acquire from Siam two Malay dependencies, Kelantan and Terengganu, in exchange for British support against France.\textsuperscript{33} Chamberlain, the new Colonial Secretary, urged Salisbury


\textsuperscript{31} Quoted in Chandran, "The British", p.150.

\textsuperscript{32} Klein, "British Expansion", p.55.

\textsuperscript{33} Thio, "Britain's Search", p.295.
in September 1895 to allow France certain privileges in northern Siam in return for French consent that Britain acquire the western part of the Malay Peninsula between Tenasserim and the F.M.S. The former Straits Governor Andrew Clarke recommended that Britain should secure by agreement with Siam the western sea-board of the Malay Peninsula. Otherwise one of the many natural harbours along the coast might one day develop into a "most dangerous vantage ground for France or Germany."

Salisbury, however, refused to consider any schemes which might lead to the dismemberment of Siam. Finally in 1896, and after three years of protracted negotiations, Britain and France signed a joint declaration on 15 January, agreeing to keep Siam intact as a buffer state between them. Neither power would advance their armed forces, or acquire any special privileges or advantages within the region of the Menam Valley, nor invite any third power to do so either.

It is important to point out that this declaration was meant to guarantee the integrity of Siam only, i.e. the Menam basin. Omitted from the agreement were the provinces of Battambang and Siemreap, which fell under France's influence, and the northern Malay states which lay in Britain's sphere of interest. In other words, the

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*Quoted in Thio, "Britain's Search", p.295.

declaration left the rest of Siam open for future British and French expansion. We may agree with Brailey that Britain and France treated "Siam as potential colonial real estate", and that the declaration of 1896 was "a charter for further European encroachment". The British Foreign Office never really abandoned the idea of acquiring Siam's Malay provinces. A move towards that direction had not been possible for fear France might overrun the whole of Siam.

Did Germany influence the making of the Anglo-French Declaration of 1896? There is indeed some indication that this was the case, but only in the sense that Germany was used to hasten its signing. Anglo-German rivalry in Africa, China and the Pacific had been increasing. Britain felt provoked by Germany's growing strength and competition abroad, and by her never ceasing demands for more territories. Britain resented Germany's efforts to get France to obstruct British territorial ambitions in Africa. The incident that might have directly produced the signing of the declaration was the Kaiser's famous telegram of 3 January 1896. The British were furious when Wilhelm II sent a telegram congratulating President Krueger of the Transvaal for successfully rebuffing the Jameson raid. When Salisbury tried to secure cabinet

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approval for the declaration with France, he justified it by saying that "it was felt to be important in the present state of things to settle as many questions with France as possible". The Prime Minister was obviously referring to Germany's support for the Transvaal government."

Almost as soon as the declaration was signed, it was criticized by Colonial Office officials. According to one official, Lucas, the declaration guaranteed Siam from further French encroachments, it also placed the Malay Peninsula under Britain's sphere of influence, but it did nothing to prevent other powers from intervening in the Siamese Malay states. The threat still existed that Germany might find "some pretext for disputing the Siamese claim to overlordship" and secure a foothold on the coast "from some recalcitrant tributary of Siam". Britain possessed no safety mechanism nor legal authority to hinder Germany from acquiring a naval station on Siam's 300 to 350 miles long western sea-board."

This line of argumentation became the position taken by the Colonial Office, i.e. Germany might take advantage of the political situation in Siam and establish a naval base on her coast. Such a development was "quite possible, not only with the will of Siam but also against it". "Whoever holds the peninsula", warned the Colonial Office, "must to a great extent command the route to the

"Quoted in Hargreaves, "Entente", p.75.
"C.O.537/48, No.55, Memo by Lucas on the Anglo-French Agreement, 31 January 1896, secret."
Far East. ... half the value of Singapore would be gone if the north of it, a neck of the peninsula were held by some other power", especially if Germany built a canal or railway across the Kra Isthmus. In the minds of the colonial authorities it was "difficult to imagine any event which could be more disastrous to British interests that in India and the East than a foreign Power should secure a position on the Bay of Bengal between Tenasserim and the Straits Settlements".²¹

The scenario was also brought up that what had happened in south-west Africa might repeat itself in the Malay Peninsula. Back in 1883, Germany was weighing the idea of extending formal protection to the German settlement of Luederitz in Angra Pequena south of Walvis Bay. On 4 February 1883, Bismarck enquired at the Foreign Office in London whether Britain had any claims over this area.²² The British sent this reply:

"although Her Majesty's Government have not proclaimed the Queen's sovereignty over the whole country ... they consider that any claim to sovereignty or jurisdiction by a foreign Power between the southern point of Portuguese jurisdiction at latitude 18 and the frontier of the Cape Colony would infringe their legitimate rights."²³

Bismarck was obviously not satisfied with this vague answer and asked on what grounds the British based "their

²¹C.0.537/48, No.55, C.O. to F.O., 28 February 1896, confidential.

²²Langer, European Alliances, p.292.

²³C.0.537/48, No.55, Memo by Lucas on the Anglo-French Agreement, 31 January 1896, secret; C.O. to F.O., 28 February 1896, confidential.
legitimate rights”. While London was still pondering how best to respond, Luederitz went ahead and declared Angra Pequena a German protectorate on 24 April 1884. **Langer, European Alliances, pp.292-3.**

According to the reasoning of the colonial authorities, a similar response to a German inquiry asking about Britain's status in the Siamese Malay states would also prove ineffective. **Langer, European Alliances, pp.292-3.**

There was also a further possibility. A German base wedged between Tenasserim and the F.M.S. would reproduce another situation in Africa. Britain’s Walvis Bay was in the middle of the German protectorate in south-west Africa, and the Germans were extremely unhappy about it. The situation in Africa, as Lucas pointed out, "might suggest to the German [government] to attempt to gain a footing on the Western side of the Malay peninsula" in order to "play for an exchange." Lucas remembered Salisbury’s intention in 1891 to secure from Siam a formal assurance not to cede any part of her territories to foreign powers. **Langer, European Alliances, pp.292-3.**

The Colonial Office now impressed upon the Foreign Office to attempt what Salisbury had wanted to achieve in 1891. In return for a Siamese promise not to alienate territory, Britain should support Siam, militarily if

**C.O.537/48, No.55, Memo by Lucas on the Anglo-French Agreement, 31 January 1896, secret; C.O. to F.O., 28 February 1896, confidential.**

**C.O.537/48, No.55, Memo by Lucas on the Anglo-French Agreement, 31 January 1896, secret.**
necessary, against any intruders. But no pledge should be
given to Siam that might prevent Britain from annexing the
Siamese Malay states in the future.**

In response to the Colonial Office's prodding, the
Foreign Office pushed through a separate treaty with Siam,
albeit a secret one, on 6 April 1897. Siam agreed not to
cede or let land, or grant any other special privileges to
foreign governments or subjects between lower Siam (south
of Muong Bang Tapan on the 11th parallel) and the F.M.S.
without previous reference to Britain. Britain in exchange
vowed to protect Siam, by the use of her armed forces if
necessary, in the event of outside aggression. In other
words, this treaty confirmed that all territory between
Burma and the F.M.S. was subordinated to Siam, but that no
foreign capital or enterprise was allowed in this area
without Britain's knowledge and permission. With this
treaty the Foreign Office believed that the anxiety of the
colonial authorities regarding foreign intervention was
finally settled once and for all.***

The reason why the treaty was kept secret had mainly
to do with avoiding possible protests from certain powers.
Siam possessed a number of trade treaties with other
countries which included the most-favoured-nation clause.
The Secret Treaty of 1897 was particularly in direct
conflict with Siam's 1862 commercial treaty obligations to

**C.O. 537/48, No. 55, C.O. to F.O., 28 February 1896,
confidential; Thio, "Britain's Search", p. 299.

***C.O. 273/286, No. 3074, Memorandum respecting Siam,
F.O. to C.O., 22 January 1902, confidential.
Germany. French negative reactions could also be expected if the treaty was to become known. The Anglo-French Declaration of 1896 had already angered the French Colonial Party because it obstructed their ambitions in Siam. Salisbury therefore agreed that every possible safeguard should be taken to keep the treaty secret.**

Not even the Governor of the Straits Settlements was told about the contents of this treaty. The Foreign Office feared that any publicity might result in Siam falling "into trouble with the Germans who will contend that it is inconsistent with their Treaty with Siam". Salisbury, therefore, insisted that the Governor should only be informed, in general terms, that Britain had obtained from Siam certain acceptable guarantees in the Siamese Malay states. Salisbury also warned the Straits government against "any action which could in any way be construed by the Siamese government as throwing doubts on the rights of Siam in those States".***

Obviously, the colonial authorities were greatly disappointed with Salisbury's policy of supporting Siam's claims over Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah and Perlis,*** and the Secret Treaty did not escape their criticism. First of all, the treaty did not spell out in exact terms Britain's role in the Siamese Malay states. Secondly, it


***Quoted in Chandran, "The British", p.158.

left untouched the question of authority in these states. Thirdly, the Secret Treaty was indefinite in not specifying what Malay states were to be regarded as within the operation of the treaty.\[^{32}\]

For the colonial authorities, Siam's hold over Kelantan, Terengganu, Patani and Kedah was questionable. Although Siam claimed overlordship over these states, she was weak and unable to resist serious aggression by a foreign power. Moreover, the rulers of Kelantan, Terengganu and Patani refused to recognize Siam's authority. One of these rulers might cede a harbour or coaling station to a foreign power, or grant land concessions to foreigners. A Malay ruler might even revolt against Siam's overlordship, giving a foreign government a pretext for intervention. Britain should make sure that a canal or railway project in the isthmus region would not fall into non-British hands.\[^{33}\]

A closer look at the terms of the treaty will show that the Foreign Office never actually abandoned the prospect of Britain gaining political control over Siam's Malay dependencies. On the contrary, it seems that the British objective behind the treaty was to preserve the Siamese Malay states for future expansion. Higher security

\[^{32}\]This last point was cleared in November 1899 by the British-Siamese Agreement for the delimitation of the boundary between the British protected states of Perak and Pahang, and the Siamese dependencies of Reman, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu. This was supposed to be an indication to third powers that Terengganu and Kelantan were regarded by Britain as dependent on Siam.

\[^{33}\]C.O.537/48, No.65, Memo by Lucas, 17 July 1896.
aims had made it necessary to postpone such a move. Britain did not want to create a precedent that might give France an excuse to march into Battambang and Siemreap. Moreover, Britain did not only possess insufficient military strength in the area to annex Siamese territory by force, but such a move would have been probably both "bloody and expensive". Instead, Britain used a multitude of justifications to slowly introduce measures devised to tighten British control in this part of the peninsula.

Next we turn to examine how the British Foreign Office reacted to the German bid for Pulau Langkawi, and then consider their reaction to Duff’s use of the German "bogey".

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Klein, "British Expansion", p. 56.
III. The Pulau Langkawi Scare

In Chapter 4, the German bid to acquire Pulau Langkawi was discussed focusing mainly on the German side of the story. Now it is time to turn our attention towards Britain's response to the Pulau Langkawi scare.

The British Foreign Office knew nothing about the German application for Pulau Langkawi until an article appeared in the "London and China Express" on 29 December 1899. According to a Bangkok correspondent with "exceptional sources of information", an agreement between a German firm and the Sultan of Kedah for the lease of Pulau Langkawi had been concluded and was awaiting the approval of the Siamese king. The terms of this presumed agreement were recounted as follows:

"That the firm in question shall be granted a lease of Pulau Langkawi for fifty years, at an annual rental of $60,000; that the sum of three lakhs of dollars be paid down, and be repaid in instalments out of the above mentioned sum to be paid annually to the Kedah Government; that the taxes will continue to be collected by the Kedah government officials, but on behalf of the firm in question; and that the sum so collected will be credited off the rent of $60,000 per annum agreed to be paid."

The Sultan of Kedah favoured the agreement because Pulau Langkawi currently yielded an approximate yearly revenue of only 10,000 dollars. However, it was doubted

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*F.O.422/53, Salisbury to Stringer, 23 February 1900, confidential, telegraphic; Boehm, Uberseehandel, p.117.*

*"The Pinang Gazette & Straits Chronicle, 24 January 1900; reprinted from The London and China Express, 29 December 1899.*
whether Britain would welcome such an agreement for several reasons:

"The Anglo-French Agreement of 1896 with reference to Sumatra is more or less an intimation to the world of what Great Britain considers her sphere in the western portion of Sumatra. A suspicion may also arise as to whether there are not at present, or looming in the future, elements of a political nature that may cause disquiet, not only to the British Government, but also to the Government of Holland, whose possessions are, of course, not far off in Sumatra. A German commercial station may develop into a coaling station, which at a critical moment would be used naturally by the Imperial Government. The island and harbour are excellently adopted for such a purpose, and would be a menace to British interests, besides possibly affecting the interests of Penang somewhat prejudicially in the course of a few years."\*\*\*

Hoping that the British government would investigate the matter further, the paper cautiously added:

"We have no desire to display any jealousy at all in the matter, but our interests are such in the approach of the Straits of Malacca that it behoves us to be on the alert."\*\*\*

The true source of this information was not revealed, but it seems certain that it did not come from any British official.

London this time was caught off guard. Salisbury's belated response was probably because he had not been told about this article until sometime in early February.\*\*\*

On 23 February 1900, Salisbury telegraphed the British

\*\*\*Ibid.
\*\*\*Ibid.
\*\*Perhaps it was the dispatch from Stringer: F.0.422/53, No.24, Stringer to Salisbury, 2 February 1900, secret and confidential.
representative in Bangkok, Stringer, to determine whether there was "any foundation for the report" of the "London and China Express". Stringer himself had only heard about the German scheme when a reprint of the report appeared in the "Bangkok Times" on 25 January 1900, under the title "Is it for a Coaling Station?".

The day after, Stringer hurried to Rolin-Jaequemyns, the Western Advisor to the Siamese government, enquiring about the report. He also wanted to know whether the Rajah-Muda was presently in Bangkok trying to obtain Siam's approval for the concession. A further question was about the fate of Kedah's troubled finances. But Rolin-Jaequemyns could not answer because he had been away in Europe and only returned to Bangkok in December 1899. Nevertheless, Stringer left Rolin-Jaequemyns with the assurance that the Siamese government would never approve the German application, and that Kedah's debt crisis had already been settled by a loan from the Siamese treasury.

Although the Siamese government officially announced its rejection of Kedah's draft agreement with a German firm in the "Bangkok Times" of 27 January 1900, Stringer

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*F.O. 422/53*, Salisbury to Stringer, 23 February 1900, confidential, telegraphic.

*F.O. 422/53*, No.24, Stringer to Salisbury, 2 February 1900, secret and confidential; Boehm, *Weserseehandel*, p.117. The same article also appeared in *The Penang Gazette* and *Straits Chronicle* of 24 January 1900.

*F.O. 422/53*, Stringer to Salisbury, 2 February 1900, secret and confidential.
was still not entirely satisfied. Reports had suddenly emerged that the North German Lloyd was taking over a line of British steamers, and that a German syndicate was endeavouring to purchase the docks of Bangkok to make German shipping independent from Singapore.\(^\text{328}\) Stringer then learnt from Scott and Rolin-Jaquémyens, that Behn, Meyer & Co.'s application for a mining and developing concession in Langkawi had already been refused by the Siamese government.\(^\text{328}\)

The Siamese government's prompt rejection of the German application without any reference to the British government indicates that Siam herself was averse to the idea of a German foothold on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula. This is further borne out by Damrong's comments to Rolin-Jaquémyens:

"It is unnecessary to say what danger it will be to grant such Concession, especially to a German Company, which may have political power at its back."\(^\text{328}\)

But reports about Germans wanting an island in the Straits of Malacca did not stop. In June 1900, Scott told Stringer that Epler, a former secretary at the German consulate in Singapore, had recently applied to Prince Devawongse on behalf of the "Deutsche Uebersee

\(^{328}\)Boehm, Ueberseehandel, p.118.

\(^{328}\)F.O.422/53, Stringer to Salisbury, 2 February 1900, secret and confidential; Inclosure in No.39, Damrong to Rolin-Jaquémyens, 24 February 1900; Inclosure 1 in No.39, Rolin-Jaquémyens to Stringer, 26 February 1900; No.39, Stringer to Salisbury, 27 February 1900, confidential.

\(^{328}\)F.O.422/53, Inclosure in No.39, Damrong to Rolin-Jaquémyens, 24 February 1900.
Gesellschaft" for a mining concession on Pulau Langkawi. Approval was however denied."

This was quickly followed by a report that a German syndicate was trying to acquire Pulau Lantar directly from the Sultan of Trang and Pahlen. Pulau Lantar, or Koh Langta in Siamese, lies a short distance north of Pulau Langkawi, and was known for its good anchorage, suitable for a naval base. Archer, the new British Minister in Siam, believed that the report about the island was simply a "confusion of names". Prince Devawongse also dismissed any German schemes for Pulau Lantar. Not a single German had set foot on the island, nor had there been any German requests asking permission to go there. Yet, the idea of acquiring Pulau Lantar by a German group known as the Malacca Syndicate had been in fact promoted in Germany by Captain Rust (see Chapter 4). Captain Rust also tried to get British support for his Malacca Syndicate by offering to disclose what he knew about the "Deutsche Uebersee Gesellschaft". But the British refused explaining that they could not support a project which was exclusively financed by German capital."

By September 1900, the British authorities felt certain that all attempts by Behn, Meyer & Co. for

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"F.O. 422/53, No. 65, Stringer to Salisbury, 6 June 1900, very confidential.

"F.O. 422/53, Inclosure in No. 54, Memorandum by Acton, 8 June 1900, in No. 54, Lascelles to Salisbury, 8 June 1900, confidential; Inclosure in No. 72, Devawongse to Archer, 26 July 1900; No. 72, Archer to Salisbury, 27 July 1900, confidential."
obtaining Pulau Langkawi had ceased.** But further suspicion of German intentions in Siam flared up again in December 1900 when the press in Singapore and Bangkok uncovered the story that Behn, Meyer & Co. had illegally shipped, via Singapore, 37 cases containing 876 Austrian made Mannlicher rifles to the German legation in Bangkok. Apparently the rifles were sent by the German government.

"The 'Straits Times', speaking on behalf of the people of Singapore, would like to know what on earth the German Minister-Resident in Bangkok can want with some hundreds of Mannlicher rifles. ... But there is evidently a suspicion that Mr. von Saldern is raising an army."**

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**F.O.422/53, Inclosure in No.93, Kynnersley to Archer, 26 September 1900, confidential.**

**The Bangkok Times, 10 December 1900.**
IV. Duff and the German Bogey

Kelantan and Terengganu, the two Malay states that refused to submit fully to Siamese control, were of special interest to a certain British syndicate. But the attempts made to secure concessions by their representative, R.W. Duff, proved to be a source of great irritation to the British Foreign Office as well as to the Siamese government.70

The Duff Development Co. was formed in London in early 1900 for the purpose of financing trade and mining projects in Kelantan and Terengganu. Later in the year, Duff, a former Pahang police inspector, acquired by direct agreement with the Rajah of Kelantan all commercial rights within an area of about 400 square miles, almost half the size of that state. Much to Siam's displeasure, this concession was granted without prior reference to Bangkok.71

The Siamese government greatly disliked the prospect of any foreign company meddling in the internal affairs of

70The story of Duff's concession in Kelantan is well documented and there is no need to go into too much detail here. I will only highlight his rhetoric about German intentions in the hope of acquiring British government support against Siam.

71F.O.422/59, No.7, Agreement between the Rajah of Kelantan and Mr. R.W. Duff, 10 October 1900, in Documents and Correspondence in connection with the Duff Development Company's Concession from the Rajah of Kelantan, communicated by Major Wemyss, 10 January 1905; C.O.273/277, No.1518, F. Swettenham to C.O., 13 January 1901, secret; No.45830, Duff to Chamberlain, 23 December 1901.
their Malay dependencies. Because no mention of special privileges to British applications were made in the Secret Treaty of 1897, Bangkok did not distinguish between British and non-British applications for concessions in the Malay states. Siam's reasons for opposing Duff's concession were obvious. If concessions were granted freely by local Rajahs, Bangkok’s control over them might weaken, and potential revenue from these states might be lost.\textsuperscript{72}

When Duff went off on a mineral prospecting expedition in the interior of Terengganu and Kelantan, he was halted by Siamese officials stationed there who insisted that Duff needed to get permission from Bangkok.\textsuperscript{73} In the hope of putting an end to Siam's interferences, Duff sought the assistance of the British Foreign Office to pressure Siam into leaving him and his concession alone. Always working through his syndicate in London, Duff warned that "if British support fails in this instance, then the Rajah of Kelantan will, in self defence, grant concessions to foreign firms whose Governments have not recognized Siamese land rights in that State ... and that Siam would actually secretly support them." Duff also threatened that if British assistance was not forthcoming "then the only course open"

\textsuperscript{72} C.O. 273/275, No.15823, Archer to Lansdowne, 26 March 1901, confidential.

\textsuperscript{73} C.O. 273/275, No.8011, F.O. to C.O. 1 March 1901, immediate & confidential; No.15823, Archer to Lansdowne, 26 March 1901, confidential.
was to sell off the concession "to a foreign company". In
fact, "one of the largest financial houses in Europe" had
already expressed interest in the project.\(^7\)

According to Duff, the Siamese government was not in
a position to hinder foreign concessions from being
granted by the local Rajahs. Applications for concessions
by Germans, Danes and other foreigners for areas
encompassing much of Kelantan had already been submitted
and were about to be approved. The Foreign Office,
however, was unable to lend any assistance. Britain was
bound by the Secret Treaty of 1897 which meant that all
applications for concessions must be submitted for Siamese
approval. Unable to explain why his request for support
was denied, Duff was urged to obtain Siamese ratification
before working his concession.\(^7\)

As already discussed earlier, the Foreign Office did
not want to take any steps that might alienate Siam. This
included abstaining from disputing Siam's right to approve
or reject any concession in these states, even for British
subjects. Thus, the British minister in Bangkok, Archer,
was instructed to uphold Siam's claim to control land
rights in the state of Kelantan. What disturbed the
Foreign Office most at this point was the fact that the
Secret Treaty, instead of denying, actually seemed to

\(^7\)C.O.273/275, No.8011, The Duff Syndicate to F.O.,
Report on Certain Rights Acquired by the Duff Syndicate,
Limited, in the State of Kelantan, 18 February 1901.

\(^7\)C.O.273/275, No.8011, F.O. to C.O. 1 March 1901,
immediate & confidential.
invite the introduction of foreign influence into the peninsula. If Duff got his way and was left alone to work his concession, the Malay Rajahs might feel encouraged to ignore Siam's wishes and grant similar concessions to subjects of third powers. James Alexander Swettenham, the brother of Frank Swettenham, was the first to raise this point. He cautioned:

"If the Mr. Duff may receive a concession in Kelantan without the formal consent of Siam or Great Britain, or both, an awkward precedent may be set, which may quickly be utilized by Russians, French or Germans."

There was also another problem. Concessions obtained by British subjects might still end up in German hands. F. Swettenham suggested that British concession holders should be forbidden to transfer their leases unless approved by British authorities. Siam should also approve concessions only if they were recommended by the Governor of the Straits Settlements, or by the British Minister in Bangkok.

Unhappy with the Foreign Office's response, Duff continued using the German bogey with the intention of manipulating British fears. According to information presented by Duff, Germans were exploring Kelantan while working through a Danish botanical expedition with Siamese approval. Germans were also reported to have purchased several Danish coasting steamers with the intention of

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"C.O.273/275, No.15823, Archer to Lansdowne, 26 March 1901, confidential.

"Ibid."
operating them in northern Malay waters. Duff cautioned that:

"the Germans are working through the Danes to acquire commercial supremacy in the Siamese and Malay States... unless very firm measures are immediately taken to protect British interests in Kelantan, the rich commercial advantages to be gained in the development of that State, will undoubtedly fall to the Germans."

Duff could not understand why the British government declined to support him even though the agreement for the concession was made under the conditions laid down in all published treaties between Britain and Siam. He then resorted to a more intimidating approach. If the concession was not recognized, and if the Foreign Office insisted "on throwing us into the hands of Siam by seeking ratification, then we must, however distasteful the action may be, put ourselves under the German flag." Moreover, Britain's insistence on upholding Siam's suzerain-vassal relationship over Kelantan might upset its Rajah to the point of actually repealing the concession given to Duff. In that case "the Rajah finding himself abandoned by England ... will grant a concession to subjects of a foreign power which has not recognized Siamese sovereignty over Kelantan."

A further message to the Foreign Office pointed to

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*C.O.273/275, No.13892, Duff Syndicate to F.O., 15 April 1901.

*C.O.273/275, No.20998, Duff to Duff Syndicate, 16 May 1901.

*C.O.273/275, No.17459, Duff Syndicate to F.O., 17 May 1901.
the Danish-Chinese expedition, which was comprised
recent visit to Bangkok? On the contrary, it seems safe to say that a German threat to British interests in the peninsula was simply not there. This was at least the opinion of Archer. It might be true that powers like Germany, Russia, or Denmark desired a footing on the Malay peninsula, but, he said:

"there is no reason for presuming that any of these powers are likely to openly alienate Siamese sympathies by espousing the cause of discontented tributary Malay chiefs against the Siamese Government; they will very possibly try to obtain advantages through the Siamese Government; but they will do so in opposition to this Government seems to me exceedingly improbable. I therefore do not take it for granted that Foreign Powers are ready to dispute the suzerainty of Siam over Trengganu and Kelantan. In other words I do not admit that the concession would be worth more to foreign than to British subjects; but on the contrary, I believe that such a concession, worked in the teeth of British and Siamese opposition, would be worth much less."

And yet, it looks as though Duff's constant manipulation of the German bogey, caused the Foreign Office to finally support his concession. After months of diplomatic haggling, and misunderstandings with regard to the interpretation of the Secret Treaty, as well as some other forms of coercion, Siam ultimately agreed to validate Duff's concession in July 1901. F. Swettenham, however, was quick to exact from Duff a guarantee not to

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**C.O.273/275, No.23037, F.O. to Duff Syndicate, 20 June 1901.**

**C.O.273/275, No.27107, Archer to Lansdowne, 22 June 1901, confidential.**
transfer his concession to foreigners.**

But why did the Foreign Office change its policy to assist Duff, undermining Siam's authority over the Malay chiefs? There seems to be no other reason than that the Foreign Office began to realize that by taking up the issue of Siam's apparent weakness to hinder certain Malay rulers from alienating territory and commercial concessions to foreigners, they possessed an excellent instrument for wrestling further privileges from Siam. The following is a further example in support of the above explanation.

Early in 1902, the British Minister, Tower, reported from Bangkok that an American had applied for "a very extensive" mining concession in Terengganu, and that his syndicate planned to introduce "postal and police services", and maybe even train soldiers. Tower also reported that a Singapore Malay had offered to sell his concession of Pulau Redang (see Chapter 7). For Tower, Siam's incompetence at controlling the Malay states was open to "grave danger" from which "serious consequences may ensue". There were no formal agreements between Siam and the states of Kelantan and Terengganu, whose rulers felt free to grant any kind of concessions. These rulers might, displeased as they were with Siamese methods of control, invite foreign protection and interference. Britain would then be obliged under Article II of the

**C.O.273/274, No.34939, Suttenham to Chamberlain, 6 October 1901, ciphered telegram.
Secret Treaty to rebuff the intruding power, militarily if necessary. Lansdowne lamented that the "kind of situation against which the [Secret] Convention was specially designed is therefore in immediate danger of arising."

Seemingly convinced that there was a real danger, Lansdowne instructed Towler to impress upon the Siamese government "that it has become urgently necessary to discover some means of avoiding this danger". The best way to achieve this was for Siam to appoint British advisors to reside in Terengganu, Patani and Kelantan.**

Obviously the Siamese were not at all thrilled with this suggestion. They tried hard to convince the British that the situation in the Malay provinces was under control and that there was absolutely nothing to worry about. The Siamese insisted that all foreigners were carefully monitored, and assured that "means could always be found for hampering any movement which in any way prejudice the rights of Siam over them." To demonstrate Siam's resolve and to prove the extent of her control over these states, Prince Devawongse mentioned the case when the Siamese government rejected a German application for the rights of landing a telegraph cable on Siamese territory. He also cited their refusal of Behn, Meyer &

**F.O.422/56, No.3, Lansdowne to Towler, 7 January 1902, confidential, telegraphic; No.11, Towler to Lansdowne, 27 January 1902, confidential, telegraphic. C.O.273/286, No.9489, Towler to Lansdowne, 10 January 1902, confidential; No.11489, Towler to Lansdowne, 27 January 1902, secret;
Damrong also pointed out that the United States Minister in Bangkok had recently agreed to submit all American applications for concessions in the northern Malay states for Siamese approval. In addition to America, all the other powers agreed to do the same. According to Damrong:

"all countries fully recognized the extension of Siamese rule over the Malay states in question and would in no case support a Concession granted by the Rajahs without previously obtaining the consent of the Siamese Government".**

More than that, Damrong claimed that the Siamese government possessed written documents from both the Rajahs of Terengganu and Kelantan pledging not to grant concessions to foreigners without the previous consent of the King of Siam. In short, the British had nothing to fear because there was practically no threat whatsoever of a foreign power intervening in the northern part of the Malay Peninsula. Siam was in control. On the other hand, the employment of British residents in these states might invite unwanted French resentment and retribution.***

But the British were not satisfied, and when Tower was shown the two documents mentioned above, he simply viewed them as having "in no way borne out the explicit

**C.O.273/286, No.9489, Tower to Lansdowne, 10 January 1902, confidential.


***F.O.422/56, No.11, Tower to Lansdowne, 27 January 1902, confidential, telegraphic.
assurances" made by Damrong. The first document, a memorandum from the Rajah of Kelantan, dated 27 October 1901, stated that the Rajah was ready to seek the approval of the Siamese King before granting any concessions to foreigners. The second document was a letter from the Rajah of Terengganu to Damrong, dated 2 November 1901, stating only that the Terengganu Council would "express their appreciation of His Majesty's wishes". In a further effort to convince the British that there was nothing to fear, the Siamese government issued general instructions to the Malay rulers stating that any foreign applications for concessions must be referred to Bangkok for approval.

British persistence and coercion on this matter continued until Siam finally agreed to sign an agreement on 6 October 1902 appointing British resident advisors in Kelantan and Terengganu. Ironically, this treaty was signed after Archer had again dismissed the German danger. In a dispatch to Lansdowne, he correctly concluded that it was extremely unlikely that Germany would take the risk and effort needed to fend off the tremendous obstacles that would occur by squeezing herself between British and French possessions. He summed up his view this way:

"It may be confidentially presumed that no other

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"F.O.422/56, No.13, Tower to Lansdowne, 31 January 1902, telegraphic.

"F.O.422/56, No.21, Tower to Lansdowne, 11 February 1902, telegraphic.

Power has even considered the question of acquiring territorial political influence in Siam; and it seems extremely doubtful whether any serious effort to this end will be made by any other Power, European, American, or Asiatic, except with the possible, but very unlikely, object of securing a coaling station. The difficult position of a third Power wedged in between the Indian and French Asiatic possessions, would hardly offer a sufficiently attractive field for political ambition to anyone. ... even if (Britain and France) had not made interference next to impossible by their mutual agreement to keep out political intruders ... The probability of annexation of Siam by a third Power is therefore hardly within the range of practical politics."

On the other hand, Archer believed that sooner or later Siam would become a protectorate of one of the major political players in the region, Britain or France."

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*C.O. 273/287, No. 46965, Archer to Lansdowne, 29 September 1902, secret.*