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**THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT
AND THE NAVAL DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE
IN GENEVA (1927)****

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Summary

The Naval Disarmament Conference was held in Geneva between 20 June – 4 August 1927 on the initiative of the American President Calvin Coolidge. It was a continuation of the process initiated during the Washington Conference (12 November 1921 – 6 February 1922). It was then that Great Britain, the United States of America, Japan, France and Italy determined the ratio of the naval forces in the class of battleships and aircraft carriers in line with the following: 5 : 5 : 3 : 1.75 : 1.75. During the so-called Coolidge Conference (1927) the American party did its best to conclude an international treaty and consequently achieve parity between the US Navy and Royal Navy in all classes of warships.

The British government accepted an invitation to the Geneva Conference (1927) assuming that their delegation would succeed in forcing through the disarmament plan formulated by the Admiralty. The plan was aimed at modifying the Washington Treaty in order that the British Empire could make savings and at the same time improve her national security. The British plan was aimed at prolonging the service life of battleships

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and aircraft carriers, reducing the displacement and calibre of guns carried by battle-ships, and, last but not least, dividing the cruisers into heavy and light as well as imposing limitations only on the number of the former.

The British plan met with strong objection from the American delegation. Attempts made to reach a consensus over parity between the Royal and US Navy in the class of cruisers were unsuccessful, and the conference eventually turned into a fiasco. Such a state of affairs had to do with strategic, political and economic issues. The Admiralty opposed to reaching an agreement which put the security of the British Empire at a serious risk, and the majority of the British ministers were inclined to believe that the conference breakdown would be lesser evil than agreeing to the American demands. The British diplomats strove for adopting a common stance with the Japanese delegation in order that the responsibility for the conference collapse rested with the American party.

Once the First World War had come to an end, attempts were made to impose limitations on naval armaments undertaken by superpowers under international treaties. It was then that arms limitation and disarmament conferences became a key element of international politics. During the Washington Conference (12 November 1921 – 6 February 1922), the ratio of naval forces of the British Empire, the United States of America, Japan, France and Italy in the classes of capital ships and aircraft carriers was determined in the following way: 5 : 5 : 3 : 1.75 : 1.75.¹

¹ See for more: R. Dingman: *Power in the Pacific. The Origins of Naval Arms Limitation, 1914–1922*, London 1976, pp. 139–219; K.J. McDonald: *The Washington Conference and the Naval Balance of Power, 1921–22*, in: *Maritime Strategy and the Balance of Power. Britain and America in the Twentieth Century*, eds. J.B. Hattendorf, R.S. Jordan, Basingstoke–London 1989, pp. 189–213; M.H. Murfett: *Look Back in Anger: The Western Powers and the Washington Conference of 1921–1922*, in: *Arms Limitation and Disarmament. Restraints on War, 1899–1939*, ed. B.J.C. McKercher, Westport Conn. 1992, pp. 83–103; R.C. Gamble: *Decline of the Dreadnought: Britain and the Washington Naval Conference, 1921–1922*, Ph. D. dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1993; J. Blatt: *France and the Washington Conference*, “Diplomacy & Statecraft” 1993, vol. IV, no. 3, pp. 192–219; B.R. Sullivan: *Italian Naval Power and the Washington Conference of 1921–1922*, *Ibidem*, pp. 220–248; J. Łaptos, W. Rojek: *Francja wobec problemu zbrojeń na konferencji waszyngtońskiej 1921–1922* [France vis-à-vis Armaments Problem at the Washington Conference 1921–1922], “Dzieje Najnowsze” [“Contemporary History”] 1986, yearbook. XVIII, no.1, pp. 5–16; W. Waszczykowski: *Problemy redukcji i ograniczenia zbrojeń morskich w polityce zagranicznej Stanów Zjednoczonych na Konferencji Waszyngtońskiej (12 XI 1921–6 II 1922)* [Problem of Reduction and Limitation of Naval Armaments in the US Foreign Policy at Washington Conference (12 XI 1921–6 II 1922)], “Acta Universitatis Lodziensis” 1986, Folia Historica 28, pp. 35–60; A.M. Brzeziński: *Stanowisko Francji wobec waszyngtońskiej konferencji rozbrojeniowej (12 XI 1921–6 II 1922)* [The Attitude of France towards Disarmament Conference at Washington (12 XI 1921–6 II 1922)], *Ibidem*, pp. 13–33; A. Harasimowicz: *Dyplomacja brytyjska wobec zagadnienia rozbrojenia 1921–1937* [British Diplomacy and Disarmament Problem 1921–1937], Łódź 1990, pp.

Under the Washington Naval Treaty, signed on 6 February 1922, Great Britain had lost its naval supremacy in the aforementioned classes of ships. For political, economic and strategic reasons, so-called “Two-Powers Standard” (that the Royal Navy “should at least be equal to the naval strength of any two other countries”), which since 1889 was considered essential for the British Empire to maintain her naval supremacy, was replaced with “One-Power Standard” (that the Royal Navy “should not be inferior in strength to the Navy of any other Power”).² However, as correctly noticed by John R. Ferris, “Britain had lost its special position at sea in principle while retaining that status in practice”. In fact, the Washington Naval Treaty did not impose any limitation on the number of cruisers and other auxiliary ships, to which France objected. Consequently, the British Empire still enjoyed her supremacy in the aforementioned naval ship classes, which was of major importance to the safety of sea routes and allowed her to develop this part of fleet unrestrainedly.³

The naval disarmament conference held in Geneva between 20 June and 4 August 1927 was convened on the initiative of American President Calvin Coolidge whose main objective was to adopt the Washington ratio (5 : 5 : 3 : 1.75 : 1.75) toward all naval ship classes, and most of all establish parity between the US Navy and the Royal Navy. The conference was a fiasco. The main, yet not the only reason behind such a state of affairs, was an unresolved American-British conflict over parity in the class of cruisers. Although the conference in Geneva formally ended without any consensus and was eventually postponed, international public opinion had no doubts about its outcome. In the USA, irritated President Coolidge, who expected that the conference success will be a major opportunity for Republican Party to improve their image in the eyes of American society, on 2 August 1927 declared he would not stand for re-election in 1928 (famous “I do not choose to run”). Lord Robert Cecil, representing Great Britain at the conference, on 9 August 1927 handed in his resignation to protest against

16–25, 34–53; W. Rojek: *Spory o władanie morzem. Polityczno-dyplomatyczne aspekty zbrojeń morskich w okresie międzywojennym 1919–1939* [Disputes about Ruling the Seas. Political and Diplomatic Aspects of Naval Armaments in the Interwar Period 1919–1939], Kraków 1994, pp. 55–90.

² *Parliamentary Debates. House of Commons. Official Report* [further: PDHC], 4th Series, vol. CCCXXXIII, col. 1171, Lord G. Hamilton, First Lord of the Admiralty, 7.03.1889; *Ibidem*, 5th Series, vol. CXXVI, col. 2301, W. Long, First Lord of the Admiralty, 17.03.1920.

³ J.R. Ferris: *The Symbol and the Substance of Seapower: Great Britain, the United States and the One-Power Standard, 1919–1921*, in: *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s. The Struggle for Supremacy*, ed. B.J.C. McKercher, London 1991, pp. 55–80.

disarmament policy pursued by the British government. Although the conference was held behind closed doors, details were widely publicized. Press coverage was, however, sensational in tone and full of rumours. Journalists created atmosphere of suspicion around the conference. This had a negative effect on public opinion, pressure from whom to some extent affected the governments of countries participating in the conference and did not make it easier for the delegates gathered in Geneva.⁴

The article is aimed at presenting and discussing British government's stance toward the Geneva conference. It was in 1968 that David Carlton, a British historian, outlined in an article published in "Political Science Quarterly" the main objectives of the British during the "Coolidge Conference". It was him who, for the first time, used archival materials (most of all correspondence carried on by Lord Robert Cecil) and referred to the conference as "one of the most dramatically unsuccessful international gatherings of the twentieth century".⁵

From that moment on, the subject matter was addressed by many researchers who analyzed in detail the background of the conference, its course, as well as reasons and consequences following from its breakdown. As far as the British perspective is concerned, the "Coolidge Conference" was discussed mainly by authors devoting their attention to British maritime (armament) policy,⁶ British

⁴ Documents concerning the Geneva conference, in historiography referred to as Coolidge Conference, (i.e. records of plenary sessions, records of committee meetings, records of delegate meetings and proposals put forward by respective delegations) were published by the Americans just after the conference: *Records of the Conference for the Limitation of Naval Armament held at Geneva from June 20 to August 4, 1927*, Geneva 1927 [further: RCLNA], pp. 1–164; *Limitation of Naval Armaments. Records of the Conference for the Limitation of Naval Armament held at Geneva, Switzerland, from June 20 to August 4, 1927* (Senate Document no. 55, 70th Congress, 1st Session), Washington DC 1928, pp. 1–220; On this basis, papers on the Geneva conference were published during the inter-war period. As for the British perspective, of major importance are two publications by authors connected with the Royal Institute of International Affairs: A.J. Toynbee: *Survey of International Affairs 1927*, London 1929, pp. 43–82; J.W. Wheeler-Bennett: *Disarmament and Security since Locarno, 1925–1931. Being the Political and Technical Background of the General Disarmament Conference, 1932*, London 1932, pp. 103–127; Cf. American stance presented in a publication under the auspices of Council on Foreign Relations: Ch.P. Howland: *Survey of American Foreign Relations*, vol. 1, New Haven 1928, pp. 543–553; See also PhD thesis completed in Geneva: R.A. Chaput: *Disarmament in British Foreign Policy*, London 1935, pp. 153–166.

⁵ D. Carlton: *Great Britain and the Coolidge Naval Disarmament Conference of 1927*, "Political Science Quarterly" 1968, vol. LXXXIII, no. 4, pp. 573–598.

⁶ S. Roskill: *Naval Policy Between the Wars*, vol. I: *The Period of Anglo-American Antagonism 1919–1929*, London 1968, pp. 498–516; W.-H. Bickel: *Die anglo-amerikanischen Beziehungen 1927–1930 im Licht der Flottenfrage. Das Problem des Machtausgleich zwischen Großbritannien und der Vereinigten Staaten in der Zwischenkriegszeit und seine Lösung*, Dissertation, Zürich 1970, pp. 40–68; M. Hall: *Anglo-American Relations and Naval Policy 1919–1930*, Ph. D. dissertation, McGill University, Montreal 1990, pp. 290–318; W. Rojek: *Spory o władanie*

disarmament policy⁷ as well as bilateral Anglo-American relations.⁸ These were, however, fragments (chapters) of monographs and unpublished PhD theses, occasionally articles. In her latest article on the matter, Carolyn J. Kitching states that “a definitive study of the Coolidge Naval Conference awaits an author”.⁹

The present paper refers to policy formulated by the British at the Geneva conference, i.e. objectives formulated by the British government and tactic of the their delegation. Therefore, the article is to present and discuss the stance adopted by the British government and respective ministers toward:

- accepting parity between the Royal Navy and the US Navy in all classes of ships,
- reaching consensus over naval arms limitation, since the original British proposal was rejected,
- conference breakdown.

On 10 February 1927, President Coolidge invited British, Japanese, French and Italian governments to take part in the conference devoted to further limitation of naval arms and based on the provisions of the Washington Naval Treaty. The invitation came as no surprise to the British diplomacy¹⁰ since the idea emerged already in 1923, i.e. when Coolidge was elected President after Warren G. Harding had passed away. From that moment on, the press speculated

morzem... [Disputes about Ruling the Seas...], pp. 106–117; Ph.P. O’Brien: *British and American Naval Power: Politics and Policy, 1900–1936*, Westport Conn. 1998, pp. 186–194.

⁷ D.J. Shorney: *Britain and Disarmament 1916–1931*, Ph. D. dissertation, Durham University, 1980, pp. 198–210; Ch. Hall: *Britain, America and Arms Control, 1921–1937*, New York 1987, pp. 44–54; D. Richardson: *The Evolution of British Disarmament Policy in the 1920s*, New York–London 1989, pp. 119–139; A. Harasimowicz: *Dyplomacja brytyjska...* [British Diplomacy...], pp. 62–73; R.W. Fanning: *The Coolidge Conference of 1927: Disarmament in Disarray*, in: *Arms Limitation and Disarmament...*, pp. 105–128; idem: *Peace and Disarmament. Naval Rivalry and Arms Control 1922–1933*, Lexington 1995, pp. 51–80; C.J. Kitching: *Britain and the Problem of International Disarmament, 1919–1934*, London 1999, pp. 97–109.

⁸ M.J. Brode: *Anglo-American Relations and the Geneva Naval Disarmament Conference of 1927*, Ph. D. dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, 1972, pp. 75–121; Ch. E. Newton, *Anglo-American Relations and Bureaucratic Tensions, 1927–1930*, Ph. D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1975, pp. 9–38; B.J.C. McKercher: *The Second Baldwin Government and the United States, 1924–1929. Attitudes and Diplomacy*, Cambridge 1984, pp. 55–76.

⁹ C.J. Kitching: *Sunk Before We Started? Anglo-American Rivalry at the Coolidge Naval Conference, 1927*, in: *Arms and Disarmament in Diplomacy*, eds. K. Hamilton, E. Johnson, London–Portland OR 2008, pp. 91–111.

¹⁰ *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919–1939*, Series I, vol. III, eds. W.N. Medlicott, D. Dakin, M.E. Lambert, London 1970 [further: DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III], no. 333, p. 565, Minute by J.D. Gregory, FO 10.02.1927; The National Archives [further: TNA], Cabinet Papers [further: CAB] 24/185, C. P. 59 (27), “Further Limitation of Naval Armaments. Proposals of the Government of the United States (Communicated by the American Ambassador in London)” 10.02.1927.

about prospective calling by the United States the so-called Second Washington Conference. The issue was discussed by diplomats. The American initiative was, however, frozen and arms limitation was to be analyzed by the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference [further: PCDC] set in 1925 by the League of Nations. The United States accepted invitation to participate in the commission sessions, yet they did not abandon the idea of calling a separate conference gathering the superpowers and devoted exclusively to naval armament and disarmament. They addressed the matter when talks about land, air and naval disarmament, held by PCDC, reached deadlock.¹¹

Nota bene, between 1926 and 1927 the Admiralty began secret preparations for convening analogical conference in London at which they were to present proposals concerning naval arms limitation and, consequently, reduce expenditure on naval armaments, yet not undermining the security of the British Empire. Coolidge's invitation reached London when a narrow circle of British ministers, familiar with the matter, analysed Admiralty's idea. In other words, American President anticipated the British initiative.¹²

Not knowing the stance and plans of the Admiralty, the officials of the Foreign Office recommended caution before taking any decision. Alexander Cado-gan suggested two responses to the invitation, namely unconditional or conditional acceptance, the latter case entailing that Great Britain was willing to take President's proposal into consideration although chances of success were slight since France and other countries would not agree on a separate conference focusing solely on naval arms limitation. Ronald H. Campbell stressed that President Coolidge proposed convening the conference mainly for intrapolitical reasons: "Republican electioneering is bare, and the President must shortly reach decision in the matter of cruiser construction. To build or not to build is becoming the burning question of the hour, and will have an important effect on the party's prospect. (...) The administration probably do not want to embark on an extensive building programme, but they are in position to do so if needs must. If the

¹¹ D.R. McCoy: *Calvin Coolidge. The Quiet President*, New York 1967, pp. 364–366; B.J.C. McKercher: *Wealth, Power, and the New International Order: Britain and the American Challenge in the 1920s*, "Diplomatic History" 1988, vol. XII, no. 4, pp. 430–431; idem: *Of Horns and Teeth: The Preparatory Commission and the World Disarmament Conference, 1926–1934*, in: *Arms Limitation and Disarmament...*, pp. 176–178; W. Rojek: *Spory o władanie morzem...* [Disputes about Ruling the Seas...], pp. 99–106.

¹² S. Roskill: *Naval Policy...*, vol. I, pp. 499–500; T. Kuramatsu: *The Geneva Naval Conference of 1927: The British Preparation for the Conference, December 1926 to June 1927*, "Journal of Strategic Studies" 1996, vol. XIX, no. 1, pp. 104–106.

conference results in the limitation of cruisers on a fixed ratio, the big–navy party is silenced; if no agreement is reached, the case for building is unassailable. In the former event there is the additional credit of having called conference. The Republicans profited enormously as a result of Washington [Conference] and would do so again if Mr. Coolidge were now to succeed where the League had appeared likely to fail”. Campbell also claimed that the British decision about participating in the conference depended on “our own naval policy”. He advised not to accept the invitation unless the Admiralty was ready to accept reduction in the number of cruisers in a ratio 5 : 5 : 3 and the British government was certain about the conference success. Foreign Secretary Sir Austen Chamberlain who made himself acquainted with the Admiralty plans, summed up opinions expressed by his subordinates in the following way: “The American formula (5–5–3) is, I think, unacceptable, but no power has a greater interest in further limitation than ourselves & we could certainly propose an alternative line of advance – if other naval powers could be got into conference”.¹³

Lord Cecil, head of the British delegation in PCDC, called for accepting the invitation and believed that the success of conference might contribute to reducing the risk from naval arms race and consequently budgetary expenditure on fleet development. However, he anticipated that France and Italy would decline the invitation and was afraid that Coolidge’s initiative might ruin chances of reaching consensus over land and naval disarmament.¹⁴

That the British accepted Coolidge’s proposal stemmed mainly from Admiralty’s idea to use the conference for presenting the British plan for armaments limitation.¹⁵ An answer to American President’s invitation was prepared on 15 February 1927 during a meeting attended, among others by: Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Sir Austen Chamberlain, Lord President of the Council Arthur J. Balfour, Chancellor of the Exchequer Winston S. Churchill, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs Leopold

¹³ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 333, pp. 566–568, Memorandum by A. Cadogan, 11.02.1927; ibidem, no. 334, pp. 568–571, Memorandum by R.H. Campbell, 12.02.1927; ibidem, no. 334, p. 571, footnote 3, Minute by A. Chamberlain, 14.02.1927; See also: B.J.C. McKercher: *The Second Baldwin Government...*, p. 61; A. Harasimowicz: *Dyplomacja brytyjska...* [British Diplomacy...], pp. 63–65; W. Rojek: *Spory o władanie morzem...* [Disputes about Ruling the Seas...], pp. 106–107; T. Kuramatsu: *The Geneva Naval Conference...*, pp. 107–108.

¹⁴ The British Library, Cecil Papers [further: BL, Cecil Papers], Add. MSS 5121, pp. 104–107, Note by Viscount Cecil of Chelwood “Disarmament. President Coolidge’s Proposal for a separate Naval Conference”, 14.02.1927.

¹⁵ T. Kuramatsu: *The Geneva Naval Conference of 1927...*, p. 108.

S. Amery, First Lord of the Admiralty William C. Bridgeman and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Viscount Cecil of Chelwood. According to a participant in the meeting: “The problem was how to show sufficient enthusiasm in accepting and yet safeguard our own particular position as well as the susceptibilities of the French and others who are already committed to the League of Nations scheme”.¹⁶ On the following day, once certain amendments had been introduced, reply was approved by the British government. Although agreed to participate in the Geneva talks over naval arms limitation, the British party highlighted their interests and demanded that the conference should be coordinated with the League of Nations sessions held to discuss disarmament issues. According to the British note, the size of the British fleet depended on “the special geographical position of the British Empire, the length of inter-imperial communications, and the necessity for the protection of its food supplies”. Nevertheless, the British government was willing to see “to what extent the principles adopted at Washington can be carried further, either as regards the ratio in different classes of ships between the various Powers, or in other important ways”.¹⁷ After consultations with Dominions, reply from the British government was sent to the Americans on 25 February 1927.¹⁸

Japan was the first to reply to the American proposal (on 19 February 1927) and the only country that did not raise any objections. According to speculations made by the Foreign Office, France boycotted Coolidge’s initiative and argued it violated the principle providing for the interdependence of three kinds of weapon. The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Admiralty and Naval Staff unanimously opposed their participation in the conference. As a member of PCDC, France advocated reduction in global tonnage, not paying attention to classes, and was supported by most countries participating in PCDC against Great Britain, the United States and Japan that, on the contrary, opted for reducing the tonnage in particular classes of ships. Furthermore, France was afraid of being forced to accept parity with Italy, just as at the Washington conference, yet this time in the class of auxiliary ships. Pressed by the USA, France agreed to send an „informant” to

¹⁶ *The Leo Amery Diaries*, vol. I: 1896–1929, eds. J. Barnes, D. Nicholson, London 1980, p. 496.

¹⁷ TNA, CAB 23/54, Cabinet 10 (27), Conclusion 1, 16.02.1927 & Appendix “Proposed answer to invitation from President of the United States of America to a Conference on Naval Disarmament”.

¹⁸ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 340, pp. 576–578, Sir A. Chamberlain to Sir E. Howard, FO 25.02.1927 & Enclosure “Memorandum”.

participate in the conference sessions. Inspired by the French decision, Italy also refused to take active part in the conference and delegated an “observer”.¹⁹

In this event, in March 1927 the United States offered London and Tokyo to organize conference only for the three Powers, which they readily accepted. The meeting was to take place on 20 June 1927 in Geneva, to prove that it was no competition for the League of Nations and PCDC.²⁰ The British consent to participate in the conference without France and Italy entailed that the Admiralty would change its attitude. So far they considered the participation of these two countries in the conference a condition indispensable (sine qua non) for the participation of Great Britain.²¹

In London, the Foreign Office and Dominions Office were actively involved in organizing the procedural side of the conference, while content-related preparation rested with the Admiralty. Memorandum of the Naval Staff, issued on 14 April 1927, included a draft instruction for the British delegation to make sure that naval arms limitation would not put the security of the British Empire at risk. Furthermore, expenditure on “naval defence” was to be reduced through modifying the Washington Naval Treaty and putting its provisions into practice with reference to cruisers, destroyers and submarines.

The amendments were to involve:

- prolonging the service life of capital ships and aircraft carriers,
- reducing the displacement and calibre of guns carried by capital ships and aircraft carriers,
- reducing the number of heavy cruisers (10,000-ton carrying 8-inch guns),
- reducing the tonnage and calibre of guns carried by other cruisers (max. 7,500-ton carrying 6-inch guns).

¹⁹ P.P. Żurawski vel Grajewski: *Zabiegi dyplomacji amerykańskiej na rzecz zwołania Genewskiej Konferencji Morskiej w 1927 roku* [The Action of the American Diplomacy for the Convocation of the Geneva Naval Conference of 1927], “Acta Universitatis Lodziensis” 1995, Folia Historica 53, pp. 96–102; A.M. Brzeziński: *Rozbieżności pomiędzy Francją i Stanami Zjednoczonymi w sprawie rozbrojenia w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym* [Disarmament Differences between France and United States in Inter-War Period], ibidem, pp. 115–118; J.A. Bongiorno: *Fascist Italy and the Disarmament Question, 1928–1934*, New York 1991, pp. 13–14; See also: J. Blatt: *The Parity that Meant Superiority: French Naval Policy towards Italy at the Washington Naval Conference, 1921–1922, and Interwar French Foreign Policy*, “French Historical Studies” 1981, vol. XII, no. 2, pp. 223–248.

²⁰ P.P. Żurawski vel Grajewski: *Zabiegi dyplomacji amerykańskiej...* [The Action of the American Diplomacy...], pp. 103–106.

²¹ T. Kuramatsu: *The Geneva Naval Conference of 1927...*, pp. 108–109.

Provisions of the Washington Naval Treaty were to be extended through:

- determining in the scheme the service life of particular classes of war-ships,
- reducing the number of cruisers, destroyers and submarines,
- reducing the displacement and calibre of guns carried by destroyers and submarines.

The British Naval Staff suggested dividing cruisers into two classes, namely heavy (with a displacement of 10,000 tons and carrying 8-inch guns) and light (with a displacement of 7,500 tons and carrying 6-inch guns).

The British Naval Staff reluctantly accepted the idea of reducing the number of cruisers in the scheme, having in mind their importance to the security of the British Empire. They, however, were aware that placing constraints only on the tonnage and calibre of guns carried by cruisers might lead to no reduction in the number of destroyers and submarines in the scheme.

The number of heavy cruisers, cooperating with capital ships and altogether forming battle fleet, was to be determined for the British Empire, the United States and Japan based on the following ratio: 5 cruisers for every 3 capital ships. On the other hand, the number of light cruisers, used for controlling sea routes, was to be determined on the basis of “the length of the sea routes to be defended and the density of the trade normally using the routes”. Based on these parameters, the Naval Staff was inclined to believe that the British Empire would gain the right to have 70 cruisers, the United States 47 cruisers and Japan 21 cruisers (see Table 1).

Table 1. Number of Cruisers

	Fleet	Trade	Total
British Empire	25	45	70
United States of America	25	22	47
Japan	15	6	21

Source: TNA, CAB 4/16, CID Paper no. 808-B, Memorandum by the Naval Staff “Further Limitation of Naval Armaments” 14.04.1927.

The Naval Staff emphasized that “the needs of the British Empire for protection of trade are absolute and not relative, and that for this reason no reduction on the 45 for this purpose can be accepted”. The number of British destroyers and submarines depended on the strength of other countries’ fleets in the

aforementioned classes.²² If the British proposals concerning the number of cruisers had been forced through at the Geneva conference, the British Empire would have successfully accomplished her strategic objectives and developed her fleet, i.e. this particular class of ships. Furthermore, the United States would have had to implement their plans on a smaller scale, whilst Japan would have had to restrain radically her aspirations toward increasing the number of cruisers (see Table 2).

Table 2. Cruisers of the British Empire, the United States and Japan on the 1st February, 1927

	Cruisers Built		Cruisers Building*		Cruisers Projected**	
	numbers	tonnage	numbers	tonnage	numbers	tonnage
British Empire	48	238,400	14	70,000	9	–
U.S.A.	32	269,425	5	50,000	13***	–
Japan	33	195,601	6	54,200	4	–

*Vessels building includes only those vessels which have actually been laid down or for which money is voted in the current estimates.

**Vessels projected includes vessels authorised or projected, but for which no money is yet voted.

*** 3 only authorised.

Source: Command Paper 2809 (1927), *Fleets (The British Empire and Foreign Countries)*, London 1927; A.J. Toynbee: *Survey of International Affairs 1927...*, p. 32.

On 20 May 1927, the Committee of Imperial Defence advised to accept the suggestions from the Naval Staff as a basis for the negotiations to be conducted by the British delegation in Geneva, with the reservation that they should have “a reasonable latitude in regard to details”. Giving his account of the proposals, Bridgeman emphasized that British acceptance shall enable Great Britain to save over £5,000,000 annually on capital ships and cruisers throughout the period 1931–1940. At the same time, he referred to savings on destroyers and submarines as “problematical”, and stressed a need for including a clause in the scheme to

²² TNA, CAB 4/16, CID Paper no. 808-B, Memorandum by the Naval Staff “Further Limitation of Naval Armaments” 14.04.1927; Cf. Memorandum by Admiralty Plans Division “Limitation of Armaments: Cruisers”, 17.03.1927, in: *Anglo-American Naval Relations, 1919–1939*, ed. M. Simpson, Farnham 2010, pp. 75–77; See also: N.H. Gibbs: *Grand Strategy*, vol. I: *Rearmament Policy*, London 1976, pp. 24–26; E. Andrade Jr.: *Arms Limitation Agreements and the Evolution of Weaponry: The Case of the “Treaty Cruiser”*, in: *Naval History. The Sixth Symposium of the U. S. Naval Academy*, ed. D.M. Masterson, Wilmington Del. 1987, pp. 179–183; D. Richardson: *The Evolution of British Disarmament Policy...*, pp. 119–122; T. Kuramatsu: *The Geneva Naval Conference...*, pp. 112–114; J.R. Ferris: ‘It is our business in the Navy to command the Seas’. *The Last Decade of British Maritime Supremacy, 1919–1929*, in: *Far-flung Lines. Essays on Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman*, eds. G. Kennedy, K. Neilson, London–Portland OR 1997, p. 147.

revise it in case France and Italy developed their naval arms. Bridgeman hoped that the aforementioned states would be positive about British proposals and, with time, join the Geneva scheme. He intended to surprise the American delegation at the conference, and therefore the details of the proposals were to be kept secret until the last moment “in order that they might be launched on men with open minds, unbiased by possible misrepresentation and criticism which might appear in the press should the proposal become known”. Sir Austen Chamberlain pointed out that the United States would certainly demand parity with the Royal Navy. Bridgeman claimed that “the Admiralty would not take a grave view if the United States built to their limit. Admiralty must however, resist a limitation by total tonnage”. Admiral of the Fleet Earl David Beatty the First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff²³ added to the above statement and claimed that the Admiralty was willing to agree on reducing the number of heavy cruisers (10,000-ton carrying 8-inch guns) analogically to capital ships. As for light cruisers, the British delegation was to enter into negotiations “on the principle that it was undesirable for us to impose any limit on the number of small cruisers”. It was settled that, depending on how the situation would develop, the delegates “should be at liberty to accept such a limitation”.²⁴ On 25 May 1927, the British Cabinet approved recommendations given by Committee of Imperial Defence to be followed by the British in Geneva.²⁵

The conference was preceded by no (sic!) preliminary talks among the British, the American and the Japanese parties. The Department of State considered them unnecessary, while the British diplomats did not press the remaining parties to do so, the more so because Chamberlain knew the tactical plan of the Admiralty. They intended to surprise the US delegates in an open forum by presenting their proposals and taking the initiative at the conference²⁶. Prime Minister Baldwin utterly forbade Lord Cecil to inform the American delegates participating in

²³ See: B.M. Ranft: *Admiral David Earl Beatty (1919–1927)*, in: *The First Sea Lords. From Fisher to Mountbatten*, ed. M.H. Murfett, Westport Conn.–London 1995, pp. 127–140.

²⁴ TNA, CAB 2/5, CID Minutes of the 227th Meeting, 20.05.1927; See also: *The Modernisation of Conservative Politics. The Diaries and Letters of William Bridgeman 1904–1935*, ed. Ph. Williamson, London 1988, p. 204; *The Leo Amery Diaries*, vol. I, p. 507.

²⁵ TNA, CAB 24/185, C. P. 159 (27), note by M. Hankey “Forthcoming Conference of Naval Powers at Geneva in regard to the Reduction and Limitation of Naval Armaments” 23.05.1927 & Appendix “CID Draft Minutes of the 227th Meeting, May 20, 1927”; TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 34 (27), Conclusion 3, 25.05.1927.

²⁶ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, No. 350, pp. 588–589, Sir A. Chamberlain to Sir E. Howard, FO 5.04.1927; *ibidem*, no. 350, footnote 2, p. 589, Sir E. Howard to Sir A. Chamberlain, Washington 6.04.1927; T. Kuramatsu: *The Geneva Naval Conference...*, pp. 111–112.

PCDC about the British proposals to be put forward²⁷. The Admiralty did not play it straight with the US representatives, and yet had a positive attitude to a suggestion “that proportional limitation viz. 5, 5, 3, laid down by Washington treaty for capital ships should be extended to the other classes of ship (...) though reserving question of numbers of cruisers etc., that would be required by Great Britain”. The American party interpreted this as a full consent to “the extension of the Washington rations to all categories of vessels”.²⁸

The conference, attended by the three superpowers²⁹ and convened on the initiative of President Calvin Coolidge, opened in Geneva on 20 June 1927 in the boardroom of the League of Nations Council. The British government³⁰ was represented by a delegation headed by William C. Bridgeman,³¹ Lord Cecil³² and Vice-Admiral Sir Frederick L. Field (Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff).³³ As for

²⁷ BL, Cecil Papers, Add. MSS 51080, pp. 194–195, Letter from Lord Cecil to S. Baldwin, 8.03.1927 & Letter from S. Baldwin to Lord Cecil, 9.03.1927.

²⁸ It was in November 1926 and March 1927 that Rear Admiral Hilary P. Jones, expert of the American delegation in PCDC in Geneva, discussed the matter with the Admiralty representatives (DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 338, pp. 574–575, Sir E. Howard to Sir A. Chamberlain, Washington 17.02.1927; S. Roskill, *Naval Policy...*, vol. I, p. 503; B.J.C. McKercher: *The Second Baldwin Government...*, pp. 67–68; Ch. Hall: *Britain, America and Arms Control...*, p. 39).

²⁹ A French *Mission d'Information* and Italian unofficial observers attended plenary sessions and the meetings of the Executive and Technical Committees of the naval conference (DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 366, footnote 2, p. 610, editorial note).

³⁰ Dominions were represented by their respective delegations at the Geneva Conference, which proved that all members of the British Commonwealth enjoyed equal status in line with arrangements made at the Imperial Conference in 1926. Canada: E. Lapointe – Minister of Justice and W.A. Riddell – Canadian Advisory Officer at Geneva; Australia: Sir J. Cook – High Commissioner in London; New Zealand: Sir J. Parr – High Commissioner in London, and Admiral Earl Jellicoe – former British Governor-General of New Zealand; South Africa: J.S. Smit – High Commissioner in London and C. Pienaar – Trade Commissioner in Europe; Irish Free State: K. O'Higgins – Minister for External Affairs, J. A. Costello – Attorney General, and M. MacWhite – Permanent Representative to League of Nations. W. C. Bridgeman acted as representative for India (A.J. Toynbee: *The Conduct of British Empire Foreign Relations since the Peace Settlement*, Oxford 1928, pp. 94–95; *Limitation of Navies. Imperial Delegates to Geneva Conference*, “The Times” 9.06.1927; *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1927*, vol. I, Washington 1942 [further: FRUS 1927, vol. I], pp. 45–46, F.B. Kellogg to H. Wilson, Washington 9.06.1927; *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, vol. III: 1926–1932, eds. R. Fanning et al., Dublin 2002, pp. 132–133, Letter from J.P. Walshe to M. MacWhite, Dublin 17.06.1927).

³¹ For Bridgeman's account of talks and debates held at the Geneva conference see his diary: *The Modernisation of Conservative Politics...*, pp. 205–209.

³² For more on the role of Lord Cecil at the Geneva conference, see: G. Johnson: *Lord Robert Cecil. Politician and Internationalist*, Farnham 2013, pp. 184–189.

³³ For more on Admiral Field, see: N. Tracy: *Admiral Sir Charles E. Madden (1927–1930) and Admiral Sir Frederick L. Field (1930–1933)*, in: *The First Sea Lords...*, pp. 149–154.

the American party, the delegates were Hugh Gibson,³⁴ American ambassador in Brussels, and, already retired, Admiral Hilary P. Jones³⁵ (in the years 1922–1923 Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet). Finally, the Japanese delegation included Admiral Viscount Saitō Makoto (Governor-General of Korea) and Viscount Ishii Kikujirō (Japanese ambassador in Paris).³⁶ In the first plenary session, Gibson was elected chairman and Hugh Wilson (US envoy in Berne) was appointed secretary general of the conference. Once procedural issues had been discussed, respective groups of delegates presented their proposals concerning naval arms limitation.³⁷

Gibson called for applying “ratios and principles of the Washington Treaty” and reducing the total tonnage of cruisers (ships with a displacement between 3,000 and 10,000 tons), destroyers (ships with a displacement between 600 and 3,000 tons) and submarines in 5 : 5 : 3 ratio (see Table 3). The treaty drawn up in Geneva was to be adjusted to the Washington Treaty in terms of validity period as well as procedures for modifying and renouncing its provisions.³⁸

³⁴ For more on the role of Gibson at the Geneva conference, see: R.E. Swerczek: *Hugh Gibson and Disarmament: The Diplomacy of Gradualism*, in: *U.S. Diplomats in Europe*, ed. K.P. Jones, Santa Barbara 1981, pp. 78–79; idem: *The Diplomatic Career of Hugh Gibson, 1908–1938*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1972, pp. 208–218.

³⁵ For more on the role of Jones at the Geneva conference, see: W.F. Trimble: *Admiral Hilary P. Jones and the 1927 Geneva Naval Conference*, “Military Affairs” 1979, vol. XLIII, no. 1, pp. 1–4.

³⁶ See: K. Ishii: *Diplomatic Commentaries*, Baltimore 1936, pp. 192–197.

³⁷ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 363, pp. 605–606, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 20.06.1927; *Limitation of the Navies. Geneva Conference Begun. The Three Schemes*, “The Times” 21.06.1927; *How many Ships, and Why?*, “The Times” 22.06.1927.

³⁸ For more on the American stance at the Geneva conference, see: R.H. Ferrell: *Frank B. Kellogg – Henry L. Stimson*, New York 1963, pp. 91–104; G.E. Wheeler: *Prelude to Pearl Harbor. The United States Navy and the Far East, 1921–1933*, Columbia Missouri 1963, pp. 131–151; E. Andrade Jr.: *United States Naval Policy in the Disarmament Era, 1921–1937*, Ph. D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1966, pp. 129–155; R.W. Dubay: *The Geneva Naval Conference of 1927: A Study of Battleship Diplomacy*, “Southern Quarterly” 1970, vol. VIII, no. 2, pp. 177–199; W.F. Trimble: *The United States Navy and the Geneva Conference for the Limitation of Naval Armament, 1927*, Ph. D. dissertation, University of Colorado, Boulder 1974, pp. 151–341; H.A. Hyde: *Scraps of Paper. The Disarmament Treaties Between the World Wars*, Lincoln, Nebraska 1988, pp. 157–165; R. G. Kaufman: *Arms Control during the Pre-nuclear Era. The United States and Naval Limitation between the Two World Wars*, New York 1990, pp. 108–111; P.P. Żurawski vel Grajewski: *Stany Zjednoczone wobec problemu kontroli zbrojeń w dobie Komisji Przygotowawczej do Genewskiej Konferencji Rozbrojeniowej 1925–1930* [The United States and Arms Control Problem in the Era of the Preparatory Commission for the Geneva Disarmament Conference 1925–1930], Warszawa 2000, pp. 97–154; idem: *Cele i metody negocjacyjne dyplomacji amerykańskiej w dziedzinie kontroli zbrojeń w latach 1925–1930* [The Negotiation Purposes and Methods of American Diplomacy Dealing with Arms Control in 1925–1930], “Dzieje Najnowsze” [“Contemporary History”], 2001, vol. XXXIII, no. 1, pp. 78–83; B.J.C. McKercher: *A Certain Irritation*:

Table 3. American original proposals at Geneva Conference (tons)

	United States	British Empire	Japan
Cruisers	250,000–300,000	250,000–300,000	150,000–180,000
Destroyers	200,000–250,000	200,000–250,000	120,000–150,000
Submarines	60,000–90,000	60,000–90,000	36,000–54,000

Source: A.J. Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1927...*, London 1929, pp. 44–45.

The British proposals put forward by Bridgeman provided for:

- prolonging the service life of capital ships from 20 to 26 years,
- determining the service life in other classes of ships: 24 years for heavy cruisers (carrying 8-inch guns); 20 years for destroyers; 15 years for submarines,
- reducing the displacement of capital ships from 35,000 to about 30,000 tons,
- reducing the caliber of guns carried by capital ships from 16 to 13.5 inches,
- reducing the displacement of aircraft carriers from 27,000 to 25,000 tons,
- reducing the caliber of guns carried by aircraft carriers from 8 to 6 inches,
- adopting the ratio 5 : 5 : 3 in the class of cruisers with a displacement of 10,000 tons and carrying 8-inch guns,
- determining the acceptable number of cruisers with a displacement of 10,000 tons and carrying 8-inch guns,
- reducing the maximum displacement and calibre of guns carried by the projected cruisers to 7,500 tons and 6-inch guns respectively,
- reducing the maximum displacement of destroyer leaders to 1,7500 tons and destroyers to 1,400 tons,
- reducing the caliber of guns carried by destroyer leaders and destroyers to 5 inches,
- reducing the displacement of big submarines to 1,600 tons and small submarines to 600 tons as well as reducing the caliber of guns to 5 inches both in the former and the latter case,
- reducing the number of submarines.

British suggestions provided for applying “the Washington ratio” (5 : 5 : 3) only in the case of heavy cruisers (with a displacement of 10,000 tons and carrying

8-inch guns). In his speech, Bridgeman highlighted the role of navy in ensuring the security of sea routes for the British Empire. He did not, however, define the British “defence requirements” then, i.e. a minimum number of heavy and light cruisers essential for providing the aforementioned security.³⁹

By contrast, Japanese proposals had the most general character. They called for maintaining the status quo, i.e. not launching programmes aimed at fleet development, and imposing limitations on the construction or purchase of ships in the future unless within the global tonnage determined for every country (ships with a displacement of more than 3,000 tons after 16 years, ships with a displacement of less than 3,000 tons after 12 years). The delegation wanted to change the ratio widely criticized in Japan, to be more specific from 5: 3 into 5 : 3.5. They, however, avoided playing it straight from the very beginning of the conference.⁴⁰

On 21 June 1927, the British delegation convened a meeting to analyse American and Japanese proposals paying special attention to the British security and domestic savings. The American proposal (that a displacement of a single cruiser (10,000 tons) should not be reduced) was unacceptable for security reasons since it would oblige the British Empire to reduce the number of cruisers to about 30. Unlike the British proposal, American and Japanese suggestions on the scheme provided neither for reducing the displacement and calibre of guns carried by warships, nor expenditure on the construction of cruisers, destroyers and submarines.⁴¹

³⁹ Command Paper 2964 (1927), *Geneva Conference for the Limitation of Naval Armaments June – August 1927. Speeches in Plenary Session by the Right Hon. W.C. Bridgeman, M.P., First Lord of the Admiralty*, London 1927 [further: Cmd. 2964 (1927)], pp. 2–7; *Geneva Naval Conference. Mr. Bridgeman’s Speech*, “The Times” 22.06.1927; DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 364, pp. 606–608, Notes on British Empire Proposals, Geneva 20.06.1927.

⁴⁰ For more on the Japanese stance at the Geneva conference, see: A.B. Clemensen: The Geneva Tripartite Conference of 1927 in Japanese-American Relations, Ph. D. dissertation, The University of Arizona, 1975, pp. 166–216; S. Asada: *From Washington to London: The Imperial Japanese Navy and the Politics of Naval Limitation, 1921–1930*, “Diplomacy & Statecraft” 1993, vol. IV, no. 3, pp. 162–169; idem: *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor. The Imperial Japanese Navy and the United States*, Annapolis Md. 2006, pp. 111–122; B.J.C. McKercher: *A Sane and Sensible Diplomacy: Austen Chamberlain, Japan, and the Naval Balance of Power in the Pacific Ocean, 1924–1929*, “Canadian Journal of History” 1986, vol. XXI, no. 2, pp. 207–208; M.A. Epstein: *Naval Disarmament and the Japanese: Geneva, 1927*, Ph. D. dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1995, pp. 183–321; I. Gow: *Military Intervention in Pre-War Japanese Politics. Admiral Katō Kanji and the ‘Washington System’*, London 2004, pp. 162–172; idem: *The Royal Navy and Japan, 1921–1941*, in: *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1600–2000*, vol. III: *The Military Dimension*, eds. I. Gow, Y. Hiramata, J. Chapman, Basingstoke 2003, pp. 112–113; T. Kuramatsu: *Britain, Japan and Inter-War Naval Limitation, 1921–1936*, in: *ibidem*, pp. 131–132.

⁴¹ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 365, pp. 608–609, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 21.06.1927; See also: E. Andrade Jr.: *The Cruiser Controversy in Naval Limitations Negotiations*,

After the first plenary session, talks were held behind closed doors in Executive Committee and Technical Committee, as well as during informal meetings called by particular groups of delegates. Japanese party informed Bridgeman they would back the proposal for reducing the displacement and calibre of guns carried by capital ships if they were granted concession in other clauses – among which possible change of the 5 : 3 ratio.⁴² The Americans, taken aback by the British, voiced strong reservations over revising the Washington Treaty and particularly the clause specifying the displacement and guns carried by capital ships. They put forward arguments against taking final decision in the absence of France and Italy, and claimed it was too soon to settle the issue. In fact, under clause 21 a conference could be convened to introduce amendments to the Treaty, yet 8 years later after it had come into force, i.e. in 1931.⁴³

After week-long talks and negotiations, in a report presented to Prime Minister Baldwin, Bridgeman admitted that he was a “little disappointed” with their progress and final outcome. Some sort of success was achieved only in terms of pattern to be followed while imposing limitations on submarines and defining which small vessels would not be subjected to any limitations (depot ships, mine-sweepers, etc.). As for limitations on the displacement and calibre of guns carried by capital ships, Japanese delegates received instructions from Tokyo enabling them to enter into discussion “but not until after agreement had been reached upon the other class of vessel”. The American delegation, on the contrary, was still looking forward to receiving instructions from Washington. Bridgeman anticipated major difficulties in establishing a pattern to be followed while imposing limitations on cruisers. “The problem will be to find some formula which, whilst satisfying the Americans in regard to the Japanese numbers in relation to their own, will at the same time avoid in appearance the 5 : 3 ratio, which is so hateful to the Japanese. Nor (...) will it be easy, in light of the much smaller needs of the United States and of their claim for equality with us, to induce them to admit justice of our claim to the number of cruisers required for the defence of the British Empire”.⁴⁴

1922–1936, “Military Affairs” 1984, vol. XLVIII, no. 3, pp. 113–115.

⁴² DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 367, p. 611, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 22.06.1927.

⁴³ Ibidem, no. 368, pp. 611–612, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 22.06.1927; ibidem, no. 370, pp. 613–614, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 23.06.1927.

⁴⁴ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 379, pp. 621–624, British Delegation to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 28.06.1927 & Enclosure: W.C. Bridgeman to S. Baldwin, Geneva 27.06.1927.

Bridgeman's expectations came true on 28 June 1927 when the Executive Committee joined the discussion. The Japanese delegation was willing to accept "in principle" the British proposal and divide cruisers into two classes (heavy and light). The Americans were, by contrast, reluctant to take a stance not knowing the British "requirements" for cruisers. Consequently, the British had to declare their intentions and inform the US delegation they would make claim to 70 cruisers (15 cruisers with a displacement of 10,000 tons and 55 smaller vessels) with a total displacement of about 600,000 tons. Demanding parity with the Royal Navy, the Americans were "dismayed" by this demand.⁴⁵

Originally, the British delegates were to present "defence requirements" on the class of cruisers in the second plenary sitting, and prove during a public debate that the United States did not have sufficient grounds for claiming parity with the British Empire in this class of warships. The Americans did, however, see through their tactics and made them present their stance behind closed doors. Public opinion learnt from the press about requirements imposed by the British and was given an "appropriate" American comment, owing to which the US delegates avoided discussing a delicate matter in an open forum.⁴⁶

It was on 29 June 1927 that the Geneva conference was for the first time addressed in the British Cabinet session.⁴⁷ A.J. Balfour paid other ministers' atten-

⁴⁵ Ibidem, no. 381, pp. 625–626, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 29.06.1927; Sir Cuthbert Morley Headlam, Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty, providing his commentary on the Geneva negotiations, noted in his diary for 4.07.1927: "Affairs at Geneva do not appear to be going any too well – the Americans are impossible – but what strikes me as being the mistake is to have gone into this conference without any preliminary parleyings and without any one of the 3 Powers knowing what the proposals of the other powers were – of course we had a well thought-out cut and dried scheme – we knew what we wanted and why we wanted certain things – apparently the Americans have no reasons to give for what they are demanding and the Japanese just sit tight and say nothing, quite content with things as they are – I gather that the prospects of a satisfactory agreement are not very bright" (*Parliament and Politics in the Age of Baldwin and MacDonald. The Headlam Diaries 1923–1935*, ed. S. Ball, London 1992, p. 126).

⁴⁶ FRUS 1927, vol. I, pp. 52–53, H. Gibson to F.B. Kellogg, Geneva 1927; Nota bene, British ambassadors in Washington and Tokyo also learned about British demands (70 cruisers with a total displacement of about 600,000 tons) post factum, from the press and other diplomats. Howard and Tilley were completely surprised with these claims and considered them impossible. It was on 6 July 1927 that the Foreign Office confirmed that information concerning the issue was "perfectly correct" (DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 394, p. 635, Sir E. Howard to H.S. London, Manchester Mass. 5.07.1927; ibidem, no. 399, footnote 1, p. 639, Sir J. Tilley to Sir A. Chamberlain, Tokyo, 4.07.1927; ibidem, no. 399, pp. 639–640, Sir A. Chamberlain to Sir J. Tilley, FO 6.07.1927, repeated to Washington).

⁴⁷ According to Th. Jones, secretary of Prime Minister Baldwin, no one expected the issue to be addressed at the session. In his diary for 30 June 1927 he noted: "Hankey gave me an account of yesterday's Cabinet. The question of naval parity with the United States was brought up by

tion to press coverage from which they might learn that the US government “was determined to accept nothing less than a basis of parity with this country [Great Britain] for all units of naval strength”.⁴⁸ Balfour stressed that if “it were the policy of the Government not to oppose parity”, it was necessary “to remove all misunderstanding by a public announcement to this effect”. Sir William Tyrrell, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, representing the Foreign Office during Sir Austen Chamberlain’s absence, confirmed that analogical information was received from the American chargé d’affaires in London⁴⁹ and was reported by ambassador Howard according to whom “United States Government feel they can only continue the Conference on an agreed basis of parity for all units”.⁵⁰ Rear Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff, representing the Admiralty, highlighted that accepting the parity of naval forces “was contrary to previous policy and was believed to be strongly opposed by the Admiralty”. Once the matter had been discussed, the government, however, decided that the British delegates staying in Geneva should be informed that “for diplomatic reasons we think it most desirable to say publicly and at once what we believe to be your view, namely, that while we mean to build cruisers up to our needs, we lay down no conditions limiting [the United States’] cruisers to a smaller number. Do you see any objection?”. The instruction was prepared by Balfour.⁵¹

In his reply to the Foreign Office, on 30 June 1927 Bridgeman stated he did not see any reason why such a statement should not be issued, all the more so because on 29 June in his conversation with Gibson and then with representative of the Associated Press, he opted for denying tendentious news announced by the American press that presented the British proposals concerning naval arms

Balfour without notice, and there was a confused discussion” (Th. Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, vol. II: 1925–1930, ed. K. Middlemas, London 1969, p. 104).

⁴⁸ See: *Future of Sea Power. U.S. and Geneva Conference. Equality with Britain. Washington Claim*, “The Times” 27.06.1927.

⁴⁹ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 377, pp. 620–621, Sir W. Tyrrell to Sir E. Howard, FO 28.07.1927.

⁵⁰ Ambassador Howard, staying in a summer residence in Manchester Mass. believed that it should be made clear to the Department of State that parity in all classes of ships was accepted by Great Britain. “If I could obtain assurance that this will be conceded I would go to Washington and to give to Secretary of State any explanations as to other matters which you think desirable” (ibidem, no. 378, p. 621, Sir E. Howard to Sir A. Chamberlain, Manchester Mass. 28.06.1927).

⁵¹ TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 37 (27), Conclusion 10, 29.06.1927; DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 383, pp. 627–628, Sir W. Tyrrell to H.S. London, FO 29.06.1927; See also: D. Carlton: *Great Britain and the Coolidge Naval Disarmament Conference...*, p. 576; Ch. Hall: *Britain, America and Arms Control...*, p. 45; D. Richardson: *The Evolution of British Disarmament Policy...*, pp. 124–125; C.J. Kitching: *Britain and the Problem of International Disarmament...*, pp. 99–100.

limitation and capital ships displacement reduction as an attempt to revise the Washington Treaty in order that the Royal Navy maintained her naval supremacy.⁵² Furthermore, Bridgeman suggested that, apart from making a statement to the press, ambassador Howard should inform the Department of State formally, yet not necessarily in writing, “that we have no intention or desire to question American claim to parity” and added: “we should prefer it put in general terms applicable to present conference rather than in the form of admission that parity was definitely conceded at Washington [in 1922] as regards all types of vessels”. Bridgeman expected that his suggestions would make it easier for Howard to take measures for convincing the Americans to accept the British proposal for reducing the displacement of capital ships and the calibre of guns they carried.⁵³

Gibson informed Washington that “the idea of absolute parity between the United States and Great Britain has been unequivocally admitted by Bridgeman”. Nevertheless, in an interview given to the Associated Press Bridgeman suggested that the British delegation was not going to waive their claim to 70 cruisers.⁵⁴

On 1 July 1927, the Foreign Office instructed ambassador Howard to confirm in the Department of State Bridgeman’s statement addressed to Gibson and express hope that this would enable the US government to enter into discussion on the British proposal for capital ships. The instruction emphasized that the British government “would greatly regret if Conference convened by the United States Government were to end in failure or partial failure owing to exclusion of capital

⁵² For more see: N.H. Gibbs: *The Naval Conferences of the Interwar Years: A Study in Anglo-American Relations*, “Naval War College Review” 1977, vol. XXX, no. 1, p. 53; D.C. Watt: *Succeeding John Bull. America in Britain’s Place 1900–1975. A Study of the Anglo-American Relationship and World Politics in the Context of British and American Foreign-Policy-Making in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge 1984, pp. 57–59; B.J.C. McKercher: *The British Diplomatic Service in the United States and the Chamberlain Foreign Office’s Perceptions of Domestic America, 1924–1927: Images, Reality, and Diplomacy*, in: *Shadow and Substance in British Foreign Policy, 1895–1939, Memorial Essays Honouring C.J. Lowe*, eds. B.J.C. McKercher, D.J. Moss, Edmonton 1984, pp. 233–238; idem: *Esme Howard. A Diplomatic Biography*, Cambridge 1989, pp. 306–313.

⁵³ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 386, pp. 629–630, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 30.06.1927.

⁵⁴ FRUS 1927, vol. I, pp. 65–66, H. Gibson to F.B. Kellogg, Geneva 30.06.1927; in an authorized interview for the Associated Press Bridgeman stated that “Great Britain has no intention of contesting the principle of parity between the naval strength of the United States and Great Britain. (...) Our policy has been to state frankly what are the British requirements but we never disputed the American claim for parity as established by the Washington treaty. It is true that we think our special needs demand higher number in certain types of vessels but we do not deny the right of the United States to build up to an equal figure in any type of warship she thought it necessary” (ibidem, p. 65, H. Gibson to F.B. Kellogg, Geneva 30.06.1927; Cf. DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 386, footnote 4, p. 629).

ships from the negotiations". On the same day, half an hour later after intervention from the Admiralty, Howard received another telegram recommending not to follow the instructions.⁵⁵

W.S. Churchill was also against Howard's reporting on parity to the Department of State. After the Cabinet session, on 29 June 1927, he submitted a memorandum to set out that "we ought not to let ourselves be netted in a scheme of parity with the United States in cruisers and other ancillaries". Churchill also claimed that "there can really be no parity between a Power whose navy is its life and a Power whose navy is only for prestige. Parity for the former is supremacy for the latter". In his memorandum, he admitted that the United States had funds not only to achieve parity, but also advantage over the British Empire in the class of cruisers. At the same time, he claimed that the US would not soon achieve such a goal since Great Britain continued to enjoy certain supremacy in this respect and the American public opinion would certainly voice their criticism for burdening the US budget. Churchill did not share Admiralty's view that 70 cruisers were "the minimum compatible with security". In fact, he believed that reducing this number and imposing constraints on the Royal Navy development plans would have a calming effect on the US administration and help avoid British-American arms race in the class of cruisers. As for financial perspective and savings, Churchill considered it most essential to limit the displacement of capital ships. He was inclined to believe that the Americans "wish to keep the size of the battleships as large as possible, in order no doubt to be able to cross the Pacific and attack Japan". He also supported the idea of reducing the displacement of battleships regardless of the US protest. "We ought not to hesitate to press our Admiralty proposals into the fullest light publicity, with the result that our interest in this respect will more and more be in harmony with those of Japan [...] Above all we ought not to be disturbed by unjust American irritation, nor let them feel that we shall make haste to obey their will".⁵⁶

⁵⁵ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 389, pp. 631–632, Sir A. Chamberlain to Sir E. Howard, FO 1.07.1927; *ibidem*, no. 389, footnote 2, p. 632; Howard was critical about the instruction and claimed it would be "inadvisable even to hint at possible failure of conference". Furthermore, he expected that presenting their stance on capital ships the Americans would state "that they had never contemplated discussion on this point when issuing the invitation" (*ibidem*, no. 391, p. 633, Sir E. Howard to Sir A. Chamberlain, Manchester Mass. 2.07.1927).

⁵⁶ TNA, CAB 24/189 (27), Memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer "The Naval Conference" 29.06.1927; Sir Maurice Hankey, the Cabinet secretary, also opposed the American claim to parity in the class of cruisers. In his letter to Prime Minister Baldwin and Lord Balfour of 29 June 1927, he argued: "I have been at many conferences with Americans. Time after time

Churchill's memorandum was presented in the Cabinet session on 4 July 1927. It was then that the Cabinet was to decide if Howard should or should not confirm in the Department of State that in Geneva Bridgeman had assumed parity obligation to Gibson. Admiral Beatty paid attention to the fact that Bridgeman's declaration was misinterpreted: "we did not dispute the American claim to parity as laid down in the Washington Treaty. That, however, only referred to the Battle Fleet and did not apply to Cruisers required for the protection of trade. The impression seemed to have been formed that Mr. Bridgeman had said that he was willing to accept parity in all classes".⁵⁷ He also informed the Cabinet that "the Admiralty were prepared to consider parity in regard to Cruisers of the 10,000 tons category, but that they still adhered to the view that it was undesirable to limit the Cruisers necessary for the protection of sea communications and trade". Beatty was therefore against providing Howard with instructions on parity. According to the Admiralty estimates, the British Empire should have 70 cruisers at her disposal, the United States – 47, while Japan 21. Information provided by the British delegates staying in Geneva indicated that the Americans would not abandon equality principle in the class of cruisers, which would enable the Japanese to demand about 50 vessels of this category. Therefore, the British delegation suggested "that endeavours should be made to reach an agreement on basis of limitation of numbers of 8-inch Cruisers with maximum displacement of 10,000 tons, leaving each nation free to build to their requirements in smaller Cruisers with a lower maximum tonnage and smaller guns".⁵⁸

Further discussion held by the Cabinet members revealed the complexity of situation. It came as no surprise that Washington voiced a strong reservation against British approval for parity with the United States in cruiser category and claim to 70 cruisers, in which case the conference would lead to arms development

we have been told that if we made this or that concession, we should secure the goodwill of America. We gave up Anglo-Japanese alliance. We agreed to pay our debts (...). I have never seen any permanent result follow from policy of concession. I believe we are less popular and more abused in America than ever before, they think us weak (...). I would refuse either to be blackmailed or browbeaten, and stand absolutely to our preconceived plan of action" (S. Roskill: *Hankey. Man of Secrets*, vol. II: 1919–1931, London 1972, p. 439; See also: D. Carlton: *Great Britain and the Coolidge Naval Disarmament Conference...*, pp. 576–577).

⁵⁷ Ambassador Howard reported from Washington: "the atmosphere here has evidently been greatly cleared by Mr. Bridgeman's declaration to the press that we are not trying to block American parity in any branch of the navy" (TNA, Foreign Office Papers [further: FO] 800/261, p. 71, Letter from Sir E. Howard to Sir A. Chamberlain, Washington 1.07.1927).

⁵⁸ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 388, p. 631, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 30.06.1927.

and not limitation. On the contrary, if the demanded number of cruisers (70) was reduced, the Admiralty could not “guarantee the protection of trade routes”. Additionally, “if America insisted on building 70 cruisers, Japan would demand 50, in which event the Admiralty would require more than 70 British Cruisers. It was also pointed out that, by securing parity, the American Navy really obtained a great superiority, since British Cruisers had to be spread for the protection of our world-wide communications, whereas the American Cruisers could be concentrated at any point”.

Summing up the discussion, Prime Minister Baldwin stated that despite everything “it appeared desirable to instruct Sir Howard to use the same language to the American Secretary of State as Mr. Bridgeman had used at Geneva”. A new version of instructions for Howard, produced by Sir A. Chamberlain, was approved by the Cabinet.⁵⁹

In a telegram sent on 4 July 1927 to Howard, Chamberlain advised him to confirm to the US government that in Geneva Bridgeman assured Gibson “that while we must build cruisers up to our needs, we lay down no conditions of limiting American Cruisers to a smaller number”. Furthermore, Howard was to express sincere hope that the US government would eventually join the discussion on reducing the displacement and calibre of guns carried by capital ships, as well as assure that the British proposals were not to challenge the Washington ratio in this ship class.⁶⁰

Therefore, attempts made by Churchill and Admiral Beatty to cancel instructions originally sent to Howard on 30 June 1927 were fruitless.⁶¹

In his letter to Lord Cecil staying in Geneva, Sir A. Chamberlain referred to discussion held by the Cabinet members on 4 July 1927 and informed that

⁵⁹ TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 38 (27), Conclusion 5, 4.07.1927 & Appendix – draft telegram to Sir E. Howard (Manchester Mass.), FO, 4.07.1927.

⁶⁰ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 393, pp. 634–635, Sir A. Chamberlain to Sir E. Howard, FO 4.07.1927.

⁶¹ After the Cabinet meeting, Leopold Amery noted in his diary for 4 July 1927: “Cabinet at which (...) we got on the difficult question of Geneva and the American claim to parity. Winston and Beatty both wanted to water down or explain away Willie [Bridgeman]’s latest announcement in such a sense as to meant that if the Americans built as many cruisers as we did we should feel obliged to build more. That may be true for the ultimate strategic needs but would be a fatal thing to say now, would break up the Conference and provoke a general competition in armaments. In the end we decided to tell Howard [British Ambassador in Washington] to repeat Willie’s statement making it clear that we must be free to build what we need in the way of cruisers, but have no objection to America building as many if she needs them. The difficulty I see is that if Japan asks for three-fifths of any total which we may possible consent to in cruisers, or even a lesser proportion, America will feel bound to build level to us” (*The Leo Amery Diaries*, vol. I, pp. 514–515).

Admiral Beatty “showed some irritation about the statement made in Geneva and extreme sensitiveness as to the use of the word ‘parity’. The Cabinet were, however, aware that they must support Bridgeman and yourself, and that to use any other language in Washington than that which you had used at Geneva was unthinkable”. Furthermore, Chamberlain admitted that he himself was concerned over how the Geneva discussion on cruisers might develop. “As far as I can make out, we are in the right on the basis of actual needs. America threatens to build for prestige an equal number, though her needs are not equal. Japan, who might raise no objection to our figure if it stood by itself, will raise her claim if the Americans raise theirs. Then our number in turn becomes insufficient, and we find ourselves moving in a vicious circle in which America and Japan may unite to denounce us as using the Disarmament Conference to start new race of armaments”. Admiral Beatty together with other Cabinet members believed that a way out of tense situation consisted “in confining the new restrictions to the larger class of cruisers and excluding the smaller commerce protectors from the scope of the present agreement”, yet Chamberlain stated clearly he did not have any opinion on the matter.⁶²

Lord Cecil was an enthusiastic advocate of American unrestricted right to parity. In his letter to Chamberlain he admitted: “I was extremely glad that the Government telegraphed urging that we should admit the American claim to parity”. He also argued that it should not be a matter in controversy “since the Americans can obviously always build as many ships of any class we can, it seems to me folly to object to their claim to do what they obviously can do”. Moreover, for the sake of a successful outcome of the conference, Cecil was willing to agree that the United States should have a greater number of cruisers at their disposal than Great Britain, although he was perfectly aware that the Admiralty disapproved such a proposal.⁶³

⁶² DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 397, pp. 637–639, Letter from Sir A. Chamberlain to Viscount Cecil, 5.07.1927.

⁶³ “They (the experts) are now working at a plan with regards cruisers, by which each of the government will state their programme up to the year 1936; that in fact will give us the number of cruisers we require without forcing the Americans to build the same number, and the programme will show a larger tonnage being built each year than ours, though even so they will not have reached anything like parity by 1936. This, plus a formal admission that they are entitled to parity may be enough for American opinion. The only difficulty, as I understand it, is that it might enable the Americans to have a considerably larger number of large cruiser than us. To my heretical mind there would be no very great objection to this, but the Admirals think otherwise and are making their assent to this programme plan dependent on an undertaking by the Americans that they will

Following the instructions, on 6 July 1927, ambassador Howard in his conversation with Frank B. Kellogg, head of American diplomacy, provided his assurance about parity. Kellogg admitted that based on talks between Admiral H.P. Jones and representatives of the Admiralty, prior to Geneva conference, the American party was inclined to believe that the British government would not oppose parity in the class of cruisers. Hence, stance adopted by the British at the very beginning of the conference surprised the Americans which, however, changed once Bridgeman had made his statement to Gibson. Kellogg avoided stating whether or not he discussed in Geneva the British proposals for reducing the displacement of capital ships, and stressed the necessity to consult it with Curtis D. Wilbur (Secretary of the Navy). On the other hand, he considered placing limitations on the global tonnage of cruisers as major problem addressed at the conference. Referring to the matter, he claimed that American proposals were based on the assumption that consensus should impose lower limitations. At the same time, the British party put forward their suggestions providing for higher global tonnage of cruisers. Kellogg investigated Howard whether or not the British would lower their demands upon the class of cruisers and add a political clause to the agreement in order to allow arms development “if anything occurs in the interim to upset general status quo of the fleets in the world”. Howard stated he had not been granted the right to comment on the British proposal in Geneva and was sceptical about the possibility of revising Kellogg’s political clause⁶⁴. During another meeting, on 7 July 1927, Kellogg informed Howard that in principle the Americans were not against talking over the British proposal on capital ships on condition that consensus was reached over all other issues addressed in Geneva.⁶⁵

At the same time, discussion held at the conference over placing limitations on cruisers reached deadlock. The Americans, so far consistently refusing to talk over British proposals, during a session of the Executive Committee on 5 July 1927 presented a document which they referred to as “maximum effort to meet British view point”. To be more specific, they called for reducing the global tonnage of cruisers both in the Royal Navy and the US Navy to reach the same level, namely at the most 400,000 tons by 31 December 1936 (before that the

not build more large cruisers than we shall” (ibidem, no. 392, pp. 633–634, Letter from Viscount Cecil to Sir A. Chamberlain, 2.07.1927).

⁶⁴ Ibidem, no. 401, pp. 641–642, Sir E. Howard to Sir A. Chamberlain, Washington 6.07.1927. Cf. FRUS 1927, vol. I, pp. 72–74, F.B. Kellogg to H. Gibson, Washington 6.07.1927.

⁶⁵ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 409, p. 654, Sir E. Howard to Sir A. Chamberlain, Washington 7.07.1927.

Americans demanded limitations ranging from 250,000 to 300,000 tons). Within the acceptable tonnage of 400,000 tons, the American party did, however, reserve the right to build 25 heavy cruisers with a displacement of 10,000 tons and a global tonnage of 250,000 tons. The remaining 150,000 tons rested with light cruisers which, on the other hand, they wanted to equip with 8-inch guns, analogically to heavy ones. According to Bridgeman, the US proposal was brought forward by Admiral H.P. Jones as an “ultimatum” and there was no chance that the British delegation would accept it. In a report prepared for Prime Minister Baldwin, Bridgeman expressed his opinion: “if we agreed we should be in position either of submitting to inferiority to, and not parity with, America in offensive power, or abandoning number of cruisers we consider essential for the protection of our food supplies. Agreement with his [Jones] plan would also entail ludicrous result that a conference called for limitations of armaments had eventuated in a decision which would enormously increase offensive power of the fleets of the world”.⁶⁶

Situation in Geneva was discussed by the Cabinet members on 6 July 1927. Admiral Beatty, Chief of Naval Staff, set out reasons why American proposal was unacceptable. First of all, it provided the American fleet with advantage in terms of the number of heavy cruisers. Secondly, the maximum global tonnage (400,000 tons) demanded by the US would not enable the British fleet to have at her disposal the number of light cruisers essential “for trade protection”. Therefore, Beatty suggested: “we should agree to the Washington ratio of 5–5–3 in regard to the 10,000-ton class of Cruiser with 8-inch guns, but that for the smaller we should not agree to a limit”, which was approved by the Cabinet.⁶⁷

Bridgeman was informed that the British government considered the situation in Geneva “very grave”. He was advised not to take any decision and postpone any discussion to hold consultations with London, in order that the Committee of Imperial Defence had time to come with instructions.⁶⁸ Bridgeman assured that before receiving new instructions, he would not make any decision, neither to break off the negotiations, nor to cancel the previously made arrangements.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Ibidem, no. 395, pp. 635–636, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 5.07.1927; TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 39 (27), Appendix II (b), H. S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 5.07.1927; DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 403, pp. 644–647, W.C. Bridgeman to S. Baldwin, Geneva 6.07.1927; ibidem, no. 424, p. 670, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 12.07.1927; *The Modernisation of Conservative Politics...*, pp. 206–207; See also: S. Roskill: *Naval Policy...*, vol. I, p. 505; B.J.C. McKercher, *The Second Baldwin Government...*, p. 71.

⁶⁷ TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 39 (27), Conclusion 8, 6.07.1927.

⁶⁸ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 398, p. 639, Sir A. Chamberlain to H.S. London, FO 6.07.1927.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, no. 404, pp. 647–648, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 7.07.1927.

In the session of the Committee of Imperial Defence on 7 July 1927, Admiral Beatty submitted a memorandum to present his arguments for reaching consensus over disarmament. Such consensus would enable the British Empire to build up savings and would consist in:

- 1) reducing the number of heavy cruisers in ratio 5 : 5 : 3;
- 2) reducing the displacement of light cruisers and calibre of guns they carried;
- 3) “increasing lives of ships”⁷⁰.

Once the situation had been thoroughly discussed, paying special attention to the then latest information provided by the British delegation,⁷¹ decision was taken not to send Bridgeman new instructions but “a statement of the British case” prepared by Lord Balfour. Bridgeman was to use it when and how he considered appropriate “for the purpose of making clear to America and the world the strength and reasonableness of our position and the sincerity of our effort to promote further limitation of armaments”. Moreover, he was advised to insist on differentiating “between the larger type of fighting cruisers and the smaller type which we require for the purpose of imperial communications”. This distinction was as significant as “between battleships and cruisers” and had to do with Great Britain’s readiness to accept “equality” with the United States in the class of heavy cruisers, unlike light cruisers in which category the British Empire had to retain “freedom of action”.⁷²

“A statement of the British case”, released by Lord Balfour and sent to Bridgeman in Geneva as well as Howard in Washington, specified to the public why the British Empire could not accept parity in the class of light cruisers (particularly due to her geographical situation).⁷³

⁷⁰ TNA, CAB 4/16, CID Paper no. 818–B, “Cruisers” Memorandum by Lord Beatty communicated verbally to the Committee of Imperial Defence at its 228th Meeting held on July 7, 1927.

⁷¹ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 405, pp. 648–649, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 7.07.1927.

⁷² TNA, CAB 2/5, CID 228th Meeting, 7.07.1927; TNA, CAB 4/16, CID Paper 816–B Revise, Code Telegram to British Delegation at Geneva, no. 102, of July 7, 1927; DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 406, pp. 649–650, Sir A. Chamberlain to H.S. London, FO 7.07.1927; *ibidem*, no. 407, pp. 650–651, Sir A. Chamberlain to H.S. London, FO 7.07.1927.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, no. 408, pp. 651–653, Sir A. Chamberlain to H.S. London, FO 7.07.1927; *ibidem*, no. 411, pp. 655–656, Sir A. Chamberlain to Sir E. Howard, FO 8.07.1927; Having been granted Chamberlain’s consent, Howard presented “a statement of the British case” to the Department of State (FRUS 1927, vol. I, pp. 86–88, The British Embassy to the Department of State, Washington 9.07.1927).

In the session of the Committee of Imperial Defence on 7 July 1927, Churchill stated firmly that “Great Britain should not be over anxious in regard to a possible breakdown of Conference at Geneva. To become entangled in an undesirable set of conditions and limitations would be much worse in effect than a breakdown of the Conference”. Discussion with Chancellor of the Exchequer on the matter was initiated by Sir A. Chamberlain to stress that “everything should be done, compatible with safety, to secure the success of the present negotiations”. He was inclined to believe that the breakdown of Geneva conference might not only lead to the US arms development, but also have a detrimental effect on disarmament negotiations conducted under the auspices of the League of Nations in PCDC.⁷⁴

On the following day, Alanson B. Houghton, American ambassador in London, assuring he had not consulted Washington and acted on his own,⁷⁵ referred to the Geneva conference deadlock in his conversation with Chamberlain. The former pointed out negative consequences following from possible breakdown of the conference such as pressure from “the Big Navy people” to build up the US fleet, a demand that the President found hard to resist. Houghton investigated whether a compromise level “in the neighbourhood of 400,000 tons” in the class of cruisers could be accepted by the Cabinet – a piece of information he could disclose to Coolidge in writing. After he had consulted Prime Minister Baldwin, Lord Balfour and Admiral Beatty, on 11 July 1927 Chamberlain made the following proposal to Houghton: “instead of endeavouring to fix maximum overhead tonnage for all time based on theoretical needs and embracing far larger construction than any of the Powers now had in contemplation, a solution should be sought on lines of an agreement as to the total in each class beyond which each party could not go up to 1936, viz., the date of the expiration of the Washington Treaty, before which the whole subject must obviously be again considered”. Should the above proposal be approved by the US government and included in instructions sent to Gibson staying in Geneva, the British authorities were to send analogical statement to Bridgeman.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ TNA, CAB 2/5, CID 228th Meeting, 7.07.1927.

⁷⁵ In fact, Houghton followed the orders of Kellogg (FRUS 1927, vol. I, pp. 78–79, F.B. Kellogg to A.B. Houghton, Washington 7.07.1927).

⁷⁶ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 412, pp. 656–658, Record by Sir A. Chamberlain of a conversation with the American Ambassador, FO 8.07.1927; FRUS 1927, vol. I, pp. 84–85, A.B. Houghton to F.B. Kellogg, London 8.07.1927; DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 413, p. 658, Letter from Sir A. Chamberlain to Mr. Houghton, FO 8.07.1927; *ibidem*, no. 423, pp. 667–670, Memorandum by Sir A. Chamberlain recording a Conversation with the United States Ambassador on July 11 respecting the Naval Conference at Geneva, FO 11.07.1927; FRUS 1927, vol. I, pp. 97–98,

On 12 July 1927, Chamberlain informed Bridgeman what the talks with Houghton had produced. According to Chamberlain, proposal put forward to the American party was much the same as suggestions made by Bridgeman as to possible way out of the deadlock.⁷⁷ He was, however, afraid that conducting negotiations simultaneously in two locations, namely in Geneva and in London, could involve a substantial risk. "It would be interpreted everywhere that ministers here and particularly Admiralty were not in accord with views of Cabinet whereas in fact we have been working in complete agreement with Foreign Office and government at home from the start".⁷⁸

Nevertheless, Chamberlain's proposal did not enable the parties to achieve the expected breakthrough in negotiations, although at the very beginning Kellogg expressed his readiness to arrive in Geneva if Chamberlain did the same. Talks between ambassador Howard and Kellogg indicated that the US party misinterpreted the British proposal and was inclined to believe that the British delegation had dropped their claim for dividing cruisers into two classes, namely heavy and light. Once Kellogg had been put right, he informed Houghton that the British proposal was "valueless and of no significance to us".⁷⁹

Furthermore, it turned out that Kellogg misinterpreted a statement made by Lord Balfour at the Washington conference in 1921. The former believed that the latter expressed Great Britain's approval for overhead tonnage limitations in regard to auxiliary vessels, namely up to 450,000 tons.⁸⁰ Therefore, the Ameri-

A.B. Houghton to F.B. Kellogg, London 12.07.1927; TNA, CAB 24/187, C. P. 196 (27), Memorandum by A. Chamberlain 12.07.1927; TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 40 (27), Conclusion 4, 13.07.1927; Ambassador A.B. Houghton was not enthusiastic about President Coolidge's initiative on convening a conference and inviting five superpowers to it to discuss naval arms limitation. He was sceptical about the success of the conference from the very beginning and claimed that Great Britain would not approve limitations on the construction of cruises – extremely essential for the British security. He was also afraid that the conference would produce the opposite effect from what all the parties intended, i.e. instead of limiting, the US fleet would develop. He warned the US government against being accused of contributing to the conference breakdown (as its main initiator) and therefore advised Kellogg against going to Geneva as a delegate (J.J. Matthews: *Alanson B. Houghton. Ambassador of the New Era*, Lanham 2004, pp. 172–177).

⁷⁷ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 428, p. 673, Sir A. Chamberlain to H.S. London, FO 12.07.1927; See also: *ibidem*, no. 416, p. 661, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 9.07.1927; *ibidem*, no. 417, pp. 662–663, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 10.07.1927.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, no. 434, p. 676, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 13.07.1927.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, no. 437, pp. 678–679, Sir E. Howard to Sir A. Chamberlain, Washington 13.07.1927; *ibidem*, no. 440, p. 680, Sir E. Howard to Sir A. Chamberlain, Washington 14.07.1927; FRUS 1927, vol. I, p. 108, F.B. Kellogg to A.B. Houghton, Washington 16.07.1927.

⁸⁰ Sir M. Hankey provided complete documentation suggesting that the British delegates at the Washington conference were willing to accept parity only in regard to „Fleet Cruisers” and

cans were surprised by British demands in the class of cruisers uttered in Geneva (c.a. 600,000 tons), the more so because at that time Great Britain had at her disposal cruisers (built and building) with a total of about 380,000 tons.⁸¹

In his conversation with Howard on 14 July 1927, Kellogg stated “he had never heard” of proposal put forward by Admiral H. P. Jones in Geneva. In his memorandum of 5 July 1927, he demanded recognizing the US right to have 25 heavy cruisers at their disposal (with a displacement of 10,000 tons and 8-inch guns, overhead tonnage not exceeding 250,000 tons) within the proposed limit, i.e. 400,000 tons in the class of cruisers.⁸² Chamberlain ordered Howard to inform Kellogg about Jones’s offer since it seemed to him that the Department of State had not been provided with a complete picture of the situation in Geneva. “Fact that State Department were left in ignorance of this paper makes me fear that our position at Geneva has never been fairly reported to them”.⁸³

On 18 July 1927, Houghton reported to the head of British diplomacy that the American party had withdrawn from arranging the meeting between Kellogg and Chamberlain in Geneva. Furthermore, he stated that, according to Kellogg, consensus could be reached at the conference on one condition, namely if Great Britain made concessions “upon the question of total tonnage and on the size of cruisers”. Houghton could not, however, tell what exactly these concessions should involve, and Chamberlain concluded that the best thing to do would be to “leave the matter in the hands of our delegations at Geneva”.⁸⁴

“always insisted on the necessity for additional number for the protection of our Imperial communication” (TNA, CAB 4/16, CID Paper 815-B, “Cruisers. Note by the Secretary on the Proceedings at Washington” 6.07.1927).

⁸¹ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 418, pp. 663–664, Sir E. Howard to Sir A. Chamberlain, Washington 10.07.1927; *ibidem*, no. 427, pp. 672–673, Sir A. Chamberlain to Sir E. Howard, FO 12.07.1927; *ibidem*, no. 433, pp. 672–673, Sir A. Chamberlain to Sir E. Howard, FO 12.07.1927.

⁸² *Nota bene*, documents disclosed by the Americans suggest that Gibson sent Admiral Jones’s proposal to Kellogg already on 5 July 1927 (FRUS 1927, vol. I, p. 71, H. Gibson to F.B. Kellogg, Geneva 5.07.1927), which entails that Kellogg either deliberately misinformed Howard, or was really under-informed on the matter. See historians’ views on the issue: Ch. Hall: *Britain, America and Arms Control...*, p. 46; D. Richardson: *The Evolution of British Disarmament Policy...*, pp. 138–139; B.J.C. McKercher: *A Certain Irritation’...*, p. 848.

⁸³ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 440, p. 680, Sir E. Howard to Sir A. Chamberlain, Washington 14.07.1927; *ibidem*, no. 447, p. 684, Sir A. Chamberlain to Sir E. Howard, FO 15.07.1927; *ibidem*, no. 450, p. 688, Sir E. Howard to Sir A. Chamberlain, Washington 16.07.1927.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, no. 460, p. 696, Sir A. Chamberlain to Sir E. Howard, FO 18.07.1927; FRUS 1927, vol. I, pp. 108–109, F.B. Kellogg to H. Gibson, Washington 16.07.1927; *ibidem*, p. 116, A.B. Houghton to F.B. Kellogg, London 19.07.1927.

At the same time, attempts were made by American and Japanese parties to resolve deadlock over the class of cruisers. With this end in view, a committee of British, American and Japanese junior delegates was formed since it was generally agreed that a plenary session attended by senior delegates would come down to repeating their conflicting opinions and thereby make it impossible to reach consensus.⁸⁵

On 12 July 1927, talks held by junior delegates⁸⁶ produced a draft agreement to be discussed by senior delegates. It provided for:

- overhead tonnage limit for auxiliary vessels (service life of cruisers not longer than 16 years and service life of destroyers not longer than 12 years), namely 550,000 tons for Great Britain and the United States and “approximately” 3/5 of the limit for Japan.

Under the remaining arrangements:

- each country reserves the right to keep an additional 20% of the aforementioned tonnage in “units over age limits specified above”,
- number of heavy cruisers (with a displacement of 10,000 tons) is to drop to 12 units in the British fleet, 12 units in the American fleet, and 8 units in the Japanese fleet,
- “all other cruisers constructed in the future are not to exceed 6,000 tons or mount a gun exceeding 6 inches”;
- British, Japanese and American cruisers exceeding tonnage limits (6,000 tons) and calibre limits (6-inch guns) proposed for new cruisers, will be “scrapped” before 1945.⁸⁷

In his report for the Cabinet, Bridgeman claimed that the “proposed total tonnage would appear to meet our requirements up to 1936 which is the earliest possible date proposed for termination of this agreement and for some years after”. Furthermore, he was inclined to believe that the agreement would enable the British Empire to keep 12 heavy cruisers of 10,000 tons, 60 light cruisers of

⁸⁵ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 422, pp. 666–667, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 11.07.1927.

⁸⁶ The British Empire was represented by R.H. Campbell and captain W.A. Egerton, the United States – by A.W. Dulles and captain W.W. Smyth, and Japan – by S. Saburi and captain T. Hori. Talks were “entirely informal” and were not “in any sense binding upon any of delegation” (FRUS 1927, vol. I, pp. 98–100, H. Gibson to F.B. Kellogg, Geneva 12.07.1927; *ibidem*, pp. 100–101, H. Gibson to F.B. Kellogg, Geneva 12.07.1927).

⁸⁷ Namely 1 British York-class cruiser and 4 Hawkins-class cruisers, 4 Japanese Furutaka-class cruisers, and 10 American Omaha-class cruisers (DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 429, p. 674, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 12.07.1927).

6,000 tons (in which 1 minelayer and 1 light aircraft carrier) and 14 destroyer squadrons. In addition to that, Bridgeman stated that consensus “was reached with great difficulty and appears to offer a possible way out of impasse into which we have drifted” and that it was “entirely provisional”.⁸⁸ In fact, during a meeting organized on 13 July 1927 and attended by senior delegates representing Great Britain, the United States and Japan it turned out that the Americans voiced reservations about reducing displacement and calibre of guns carried by new cruisers (namely 6,000 tons and 6-inch guns respectively), whilst the Japanese “made considerable difficulty on the score that figures under this scheme do not show sufficient reduction all round”. Bridgeman was afraid that “if the Japanese persist in making difficulties over total tonnage figures for auxiliary surface vessels allocated in scheme now under consideration they may well wreck the agreement”.⁸⁹

On 12 July 1927, Chamberlain communicated to the British delegation in Geneva suggestions from the British ambassador in Washington. According to the latter, the delegates of Dominions should voice their strong support for Great Britain’s proposal on cruisers. Sir E. Howard was inclined to believe that such backup would exert “an excellent effect on United States public opinion”.⁹⁰ Because the situation at the Geneva conference had changed, Bridgeman did not consider it necessary to take such measures, yet took such a possibility into account if the Americans again adopted a stiff stance. However, he believed that such a step would create a risky impression “that we are uneasy as to justice of our case” and “that we were dragging Dominions at our heels”. In a session of the Executive Committee, Bridgeman emphasized that Dominions supported wholeheartedly the British stance in a dispute with the United States, of which the Americans were perfectly aware.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Ibidem, no. 430, pp. 674–675, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 12.07.1927; ibidem, no. 431, p. 675, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 12.07.1927.

⁸⁹ Ibidem, no. 435, p. 677, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 13.07.1927; ibidem, no. 436, pp. 677–678, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 13.07.1927.

⁹⁰ Ibidem, no. 425, p. 671, Sir A. Chamberlain to H.S. London, FO 12.07.1927.

⁹¹ Ibidem, no. 432, p. 675, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 13.07.1927; on Australian and Canadian stance see: P. Twomey: *Small Power Security through Great Power Arms Control? – Australian Perceptions of Disarmament, 1919–1930*, “War and Society” 1990, vol. VIII, no. 1, pp. 88–89; B.J.C. McKercher: *Between Two Giants: Canada, the Coolidge Conference, and Anglo-American Relations in 1927*, in: *Anglo-American Relations...*, pp. 81–124; T.W. Harris, *A Treaty is Better than a Battleship: Canada, Autonomy and Interwar Naval Disarmament*, Ph.D. dissertation, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo 2013, pp. 100–132.

On 13 July 1927, the Cabinet ordered the Committee of Imperial Defence to study agreement proposed by junior delegates representing the three powers.⁹²

In a session held on the following day, most members of the Committee of Imperial Defence were against accepting the aforementioned proposal. It was decided that the British delegation should put forward a motion to postpone the Geneva conference sessions and return to London to participate in consultations. According to Beatty, the Admiralty could possibly accept 5 : 3 ratio with Japan, “but should it turn to be 5 to 3.5 the Admiralty would be quite unable to advise Government to accept it, as such arrangement would place us in very dangerous position *vis-à-vis* Japan”. Above all else, the Admiralty was against accepting British parity with the US in regard to cruisers with a overhead tonnage of 550,000. Lord Balfour approved the British-American parity in the class of capital ships and heavy cruisers, yet not in the class of light cruisers. He argued: “owing to the configuration of our Empire and the distribution of its component parts, we must build according to our minimum requirements for defence. If the United States chose build up to equal numbers with us, they would be violating their own principles, but we must not actually announce that we would not concede parity to the United States”. Similar stance was adopted by Lord Salisbury, Churchill, Sir S. Hoare and L. Amery. Only Sir A. Chamberlain did his best to prove that the proposal under consideration had certain advantages to the British. Churchill suggested that the British delegation should return to London and take part in consultations. Prime Minister Baldwin approved the idea since he hoped that landmark decisions on further action in Geneva would be made by the Cabinet members before his departure for Canada.⁹³

On 14 July 1927, Bridgeman was informed that before taking final decision at the conference, he would have to return to London to hold consultations and

⁹² TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 40 (27), Conclusion 4, 13.07.1927; After the Cabinet session, L. Amery noted in his diary for 13 July 1927: “Short Cabinet at which we discussed the further developments at Geneva. What it comes to is that a conference convened by the Americans for the reduction of expenditure on naval armaments is becoming a conference for increasing naval armaments in order to satisfy America’s claim to be equal with us in every class of vessel. The unscrupulousness of the American Press at Geneva has gone beyond all limits. It all confirms me in my own conviction that disarmament conferences are fundamentally wrong and that the only real way to bring about disarmament is peaceful policy” (*The Leo Amery Diaries*, vol. I, p. 516).

⁹³ TNA, CAB 2/5, CID 229th Meeting, 14.07.1927; *Baldwin Papers. A Conservative Statesman 1908–1947*, eds. Ph. Williamson, E. Baldwin, Cambridge 2004, p. 198; after the Committee of Imperial Defence session, L. Amery noted in his diary for 14 July 1927: “CID at which we chiefly discussed Geneva and decided to ask Bridgeman to come home and discuss things with us before he irrevocably committed us to an overhead total” (*The Leo Amery Diaries*, vol. I, p. 516).

therefore Geneva sessions had to be postponed for at least a week. Telegram stated very briefly: “in particular we are concerned about total tonnage limit”.⁹⁴

Bridgeman and Lord Cecil were both amazed and objected to adopting such a solution. They were afraid that postponing the conference for such a long time “would give the impression that we were doubtful of our position, and that possibly we no longer possessed full confidence of our government, which would seriously impair prospect of agreement”. Therefore, Bridgeman and Lord Cecil asked for a detailed explanation as to why they had been invited for consultations to London since so far they had been following the instructions and were not going to agree on any solution without consent from the British government.⁹⁵

On 14 July 1927, the second plenary session was held in Geneva on Great Britain’s initiative.⁹⁶ Particular groups of delegates presented their stances once more. Bridgeman and Lord Jellicoe represented the British Empire, Japanese proposal was put forward by Viscount Ishii, whereas the American one was submitted by Gibson.⁹⁷ According to Bridgeman, “plenary meeting went off reasonably well. Attitude conciliatory all around. Salient feature was that American made it plain that they and the Japanese could reach agreement on total tonnage tomorrow i.e. that we at present are obstacle to agreement. At the end Gibson said: ‘if some basis can be found which is mutually acceptable to British and Japanese

⁹⁴ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 439, footnote 1, p. 679, Sir A. Chamberlain to H.S. London, FO 14.07.1927.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, no. 439, pp. 679–680, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, 14.07.1927. Bridgeman was the more surprised by being invited to London as three days before Chamberlain passed on the following message from Prime Minister Baldwin: “the Government desire to express to you their warm appreciation of the skill, patience and tact with which you and all members of the British delegation and its staff have conducted the difficult negotiations with which you have charged. We are happy to find confirmation in recent telegrams of the complete agreement which is established between the delegation and the government and which has led you to the same conclusions and alternative suggestions as we had reached” (*ibidem*, no. 419, pp. 664–665, Sir A. Chamberlain to H.S. London, FO 11.07.1927).

⁹⁶ According to Gibson, Bridgeman insisted on holding the second plenary session of the conference “in order to state British position as he [Bridgeman] was under serious home criticism on account of the general misrepresentation of the British attitude abroad. Bridgeman assured me that he would confine himself to statement of British case and would take no action which could be considered provocative. He would ask no questions or he might ask certain general questions which would not be embarrassing and which I could answer or not as I chose” (FRUS 1927, vol. I, p. 95, H. Gibson to F.B. Kellogg, Geneva 11.07.1927).

⁹⁷ For more see: RCLNA, pp. 25–34; Cmd. 2964 (1927), pp. 7–12; *Geneva Navy Conference. Plenary Sitting. Frank Statement by Mr. Bridgeman. Lord Jellicoe on Cruisers*, “The Times” 15.07.1927; *Geneva Naval Conference. Mr. Bridgeman’s Speech*, “The Times” 15.07.1927; *Empire’s Need of Cruisers. Lord Jellicoe Defence*, “The Times” 15.07.1927; *Not Without Hope*, “The Times” 15.07.1927.

delegations I feel sure that it will be possible for American delegation to make agreement complete'. This gives an opportunity to arrange with Japanese, if they can meet our requirements. Discussions which we hope may lead to provisional agreement, subject always your approval before any final step is taken, are proceeding and are not unpromising. We are only afraid that interruption at this juncture may throw negotiations back to the point from which they started".⁹⁸

The situation at the Geneva conference was thoroughly analysed and discussed in London during the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Further Limitation of Naval Armaments, formed on 14 July 1927 by decision of the Committee of Imperial Defence. The former was represented by S. Baldwin, Sir A. Chamberlain, Lord Balfour, Lord Salisbury, W. S. Churchill and Admiral Beatty.⁹⁹

The Cabinet Committee on Further Limitation of Naval Armaments discussed the matter on 15 July 1927, and the British delegates received two telegrams from London. The former was a brief message from the Prime Minister informing that the Cabinet had decided there was no need for Bridgeman to take part in the consultations.¹⁰⁰

The latter, sent few hours later, presented major objectives to be accomplished by the British delegation in Geneva. The message also stated that if their actions were in line with the original assumptions, there was not need for them to return to London either. The telegram emphasized: "we have at Washington agreed by treaty to equality of battleships. We are now prepared to agree by treaty to equality of large cruisers. We certainly do not mean quarrel with America if she chooses to build up to any strength which she deems necessary. But we cannot admit by treaty that in regard to small cruisers the case of the British Empire resembles other Powers; or that parity of number means parity of strength. We cannot consent therefore to the insertion in a great international instrument of any provision which could be interpreted as meaning that we had bound ourselves to any arrangement which placed us in a position of permanent naval inferiority". According to arrangements made by the Committee of Imperial Defence on 14 July 1927, the delegates were also instructed that "although therefore ready to agree to a ratio for the 10,000 ton 8" cruisers we could not agree to fixing by treaty a permanent total tonnage limit for all classes of ships whether specified in

⁹⁸ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 442, p. 681, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, 14.07.1927; See also: S. Roskill: *Naval Policy...*, vol. I, pp. 508–509.

⁹⁹ TNA, CAB 27/350, LNA (27), 1st Meeting, 15.07.1927.

¹⁰⁰ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 444, p. 682, Sir A. Chamberlain to H. S. London, FO 15.07.1927.

classes or lumped together”. They were advised to make further attempts to reach consensus “fixing the actual units of the annual programmes of new cruisers for the three Powers” in the following 5 years or “if absolutely necessary up to 1936”.¹⁰¹

Bridgeman and Lord Cecil were surprised and dismayed by the above instructions. On 17 July 1927, in his letter to Chamberlain, Cecil recalled that on 29 June 1927 Bridgeman asserted Gibson that “we accepted to the full their claim for parity in all respects with our fleet”, which Howard confirmed in Washington. Therefore, it was virtually impossible to say to the Americans that “we propose to limit the large cruisers which may be inconvenient to us but we decline altogether to limit the small cruisers because they are the things that matter us”. Cecil was convinced that the Americans would not accept a scheme placing limitations only on heavy cruisers, hence giving them parity with Great Britain in this class of ships, and at the same time giving the latter advantage in the class of light cruisers.¹⁰²

It was on 17 July 1927 that British and Japanese delegations managed to reach consensus over reducing the total tonnage of auxiliary ships in line with the following formula:

1. 500,000 tons for the British Empire; 325,000 tons for Japan (ratio 5 : 3.25).
2. Keeping additional 25% of total tonnage in vessels over age.
3. Reducing the number of 10,000-ton cruisers, namely 12 for both the British Empire and the United States, 8 for Japan.
4. Keeping the undermentioned vessels: the British Empire (1 York-class cruiser and 4 Hawkins-class cruisers), the United States (10 Omaha-class cruisers) and Japan (4 Furutaka-class cruisers).
5. Japan would accept clause under which by 31 December 1936 no cruiser shall be built with a displacement exceeding 6,000 tons and carrying guns with calibre exceeding 6 inches.

¹⁰¹ “As to period of agreement we should much prefer the shorter as it better safeguards our position and affords better chance of agreement. The longer the period the nearer the Americans might come to equality of numbers in practice as distinguished from theoretical right to parity, and (...) equality of number (...) would result in actual inferiority for us” (ibidem, no. 446, pp. 683–684, Sir A. Chamberlain to H.S. London, FO 15.07.1927).

¹⁰² Ibidem, no. 457, pp. 693–695, Letter from Viscount Cecil to Sir A. Chamberlain, 17.07.1927.

7. Within total tonnage of auxiliary ships, limitations on tonnage of cruisers and destroyers shall be determined in per cent.¹⁰³

Bridgeman called for presenting the British-Japanese proposal to the Americans, all the more so because on 14 July 1927 Gibson assured they would accept it. Three days later, Bridgeman informed Prime Minister Baldwin and the government: "If we may proceed on the these lines I have great hope of reaching agreement. If not I see no alternative but breakdown of conference".¹⁰⁴ Ronald H. Campbell, official at the Foreign Office and secretary of the British delegation in Geneva, in his correspondence with his colleague Gerald H. Villiers, claimed that "the scheme seems to give us all we want" and stressed that the Americans "will never sign anything that does not give them now, and at once, a paper equality with us".¹⁰⁵

On 18 July 1927, Bridgeman learnt that the British-Japanese proposal was an issue for the Admiralty that was willing to accept it in a revised version and on condition that "the limits so fixed for small cruisers are only a temporary expedient to secure a working arrangement for the next few years and not acceptance of principle that the needs of United States and ourselves for small cruisers are equal".¹⁰⁶ On the following day, Bridgeman reported that the projected scheme would be valid only by the end of 1936 and considered any attempts to change the British stance on parity "impossible".¹⁰⁷

On 19 July 1927, once another session of the Cabinet Committee on Further Limitation of Naval Armaments had been closed, British delegation read they were awaited in London for consultations and clarifying the Geneva situation. According to the telegram, the Admiralty was against accepting the British-Japanese proposal, whereas the members of the Cabinet Committee on Further Limitation of Naval Armaments did not share Bridgeman's and Cecil's view on recognizing parity between Great Britain and the United States in regard to light cruisers.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, no. 449, pp. 686–687, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 16.07.1927; *ibidem*, no. 455, pp. 690–691, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 17.07.1927.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, no. 454, pp. 689–690, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 17.07.1927.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, no. 456, pp. 691–693, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, 17.07.1927.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, no. 458, p. 695, Sir A. Chamberlain to H.S. London, FO 18.07.1927.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, no. 462, p. 697, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 19.07.1927.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, no. 463, p. 698, Sir A. Chamberlain to H. S. London, FO 19.07.1927; Cf. opinion that Bridgeman recorded in his diary: "The P. M. (Prime Minister) summoned us home for reasons which were rather complicated. Winston (Churchill) had got excited & thought we were giving away too much, Balfour who invented the word 'parity' at Washington thought we had been really mean what it seemed to mean. Beatty was worked up to say that we were conceding too much to

In the Cabinet session on 20 July 1927, Prime Minister Baldwin made it evident to the other ministers that he decided to summon the Geneva delegates for consultations in London and announced he would hold a special sitting of the Cabinet with their participation on 22 July 1927.¹⁰⁹

Leopold Amery (Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs) and Lord Birkenhead (Secretary of State for India), absent in the Cabinet session, presented their views to the Prime Minister in writing.

Having consulted Churchill (on 20 July) and Bridgeman (on 21 July), L. Amery could firmly state that the former was an opponent of accepting British-American parity in regard to light cruisers, which, according to him, was contradictory to statement that Bridgeman had already made to the American delegates. Therefore, he reported to the Prime Minister: “our only chance is to accept parity hoping that the Americans will not build or that the Senate will throw out agreement anyway”.¹¹⁰

Like Churchill, Lord Birkenhead was among ministers expressing stiff opposition to parity between the Royal Navy and the US Navy in all classes of ships. In his memorandum of 21 July 1927, he suggested:

- forcing through, with greater publicity, British proposals for reducing the tonnage and gun calibre on capital ships,
- determining, at a lowest possible level, parity between the British Empire and the United States in the class of heavy (10,000-ton) cruisers,

the Japanese, & some one else thought it a good opportunity for restarting the idea of naval holiday which greatly attracted Winston (Churchill) (*The Modernisation of Conservative Politics...*, p. 209).

¹⁰⁹ TNA, CAB 24/188, C. P. 204 (27), Note by M. Hankey “Further Limitation of Naval Armaments. The Geneva Conference” 18.07.1927; TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 41 (27), Conclusion 1, 20.07.1927; Sir Cuthbert Morley Headlam noted in his diary for 21 July 1927: “This morning I had talk with Willie Bridgeman. He is much annoyed at being summoned home and assures me that if he is asked to eat his words or do anything silly he won’t go back – he means this. Apparently the Cabinet is nervous that he is giving away too much (*Parliament and Politics...*, p. 127).

¹¹⁰ Amery’s diary for 20 June 1927: “He [Churchill] also talked a bit about Geneva on which he is all out for defying the Yanks and saying that we will not allow anyone to build up a parity with us in small cruisers. I do not see how we can say this after what we have made Willie say already, nor can I understand the consistency between this and Winston’s attempt to cut down the Navy Estimates. The only argument I gather is that he thinks that if we tell the Yanks sharply to mind their business and not to presume to compete with us at sea they will take it lying down and we can then afford not to build more than a minimum ourselves”. Amery’s diary for 21.01.1927: “To the Admiralty and had a short talk with Willy [Bridgeman], afterwards writing Stanley [Baldwin] to say that he could not ask Willie [Bridgeman] to eat his words and that anyway our only chance is to accept parity hoping that the Americans will not build or that the Senate will throw out agreement anyway” (*The Leo Amery Diaries*, vol. I, p. 519).

- recognizing, purely theoretical, Americans' right to parity in the class of light cruisers and "the maintenance of our claim to complete freedom in the construction of light cruisers – conceding the like freedom to the United States".

Birkenhead argued that consent to actual parity would entail "an actual disparity" and pose a serious risk to diplomatic standing of the British Empire. In the future, should any conflict with Washington arise, "we become the vassals of the United States". Birkenhead referred to the American proposal for imposing limitations on global tonnage of cruisers as "a dangerous snare" and claimed that "the only safe and sane course is for us to remain faithful to the maritime traditions of our people. These traditions demand that if war break out between ourselves and any other country in the world, or any other reasonably conceivable combination of countries, we shall prove able to maintain the vital arteries of the people whose trustees we are". He was nonchalant about possible breakdown of the conference. "I should not be in the last alarmed if the Americans made a break on this issue. The conference was their child, not ours. If it fails is their failure, not ours. And I would add that they cannot exploit that failure much if we can establish common ground with the Japanese". Furthermore, Birkenhead minimized the risk of possible naval arms race between the United States and Great Britain should the conference turn into a fiasco and claimed that "there are pacifist and Nonconformist forces in America which will not stand for a race in naval armaments if our case is adequately projected over the footlights". Birkenhead concluded by threatening to retreat in case the British government accepted actual parity with the United States in the class of light cruisers.¹¹¹

On 21 July 1927, the fourth session of the Cabinet Committee on Further Limitation of Naval Armaments was attended by Bridgeman and Lord Cecil. It was then that Admiral Beatty recalled reservations voiced by the Admiralty over British-Japanese proposals of 17 July 1927 and stressed that "this scheme, if adopted now, would undoubtedly be used as a precedent when the question came to be reconsidered before the expiration of the Treaty in 1936, and that, by adopting it now, we should be adopting for an indefinite time the principle of parity

¹¹¹ TNA, CAB 24/188, C. P. 210 (27), Memorandum by the Secretary of State for India "Naval Conference" 21.07.1927; P.P. O'Brien mistakenly attributed the authorship of the memorandum to Baldwin and dated his departure for Canada to 21 July 1927 (P.P. O'Brien: *Churchill and US Navy, 1919–1929*, in: *Winston Churchill. Studies in Statesmanship*, eds. R.A.C. Parker, C. Barnett, London 1995, pp. 35; idem, *British and American Naval Power...*, p. 193).

with the United States in the numbers and tonnage of the smaller Cruisers, which in fact, owing to our peculiar conditions, spells inferiority, as well as accepting a ratio for Japan which exceeded that which Admiralty had from the first declared to be the limit of safety”.

Having discussed the matter thoroughly, the Committee members stated that the conference breakdown should be avoided by all means and attempts should be made to reach consensus compatible “with security and economy”. Two alternative suggestions were put forward in the Cabinet session as to a new British stance in Geneva. Needless to say, the Cabinet was to approve only one.

The first alternative involved 1) rejecting British-Japanese proposals of 17 July 1927; 2) making “a comprehensive statement of our policy covering the whole field of naval reduction and limitation of armaments” as a basis for further discussion at the conference, 3) proposing scheme aimed exclusively at:

- reducing tonnage and gun calibre on destroyers and submarines, and prolonging the service life of these classes of ships,
- dividing cruisers into two classes (heavy 10,000-ton cruisers and light cruisers),
- determining the number of heavy cruisers in the British fleet (12 units), the American fleet (12 units) and the Japanese fleet (8 units) as well as prolonging the service life of these classes of ships up to 20 years,
- reducing tonnage (up to 6,000 tons) and gun calibre (up to 6 inches) on light cruisers,
- reducing tonnage and gun calibre on capital ships and aircraft carriers, and prolonging the service life of these classes of ships.

Possible decision on reducing the number of light cruisers and overhead tonnage in the class of destroyers and submarines “should be left to a future Conference”. Should the proposal be rejected by the US delegates, “the Conference would be allowed to break down”.

According to the other alternative, once in Geneva the British delegation was at first to present the objectives of the British policy and if the Americans refused to discuss the matter (which was almost certain), in order to prevent the conference breakdown Bridgeman and Cecil were to suggest British-Japanese proposals of 17 July 1927 as a basis for further talks. Obviously, with the reservation that the arrangements already made in regard to light cruisers would be a temporary

modus vivendi by 1936 and not a precedent for a new treaty to come into force after 1936.¹¹²

Arrangements made by the Cabinet Committee on Further Limitation of Naval Armaments were discussed in the Cabinet session on 22 July 1927. The Prime Minister opened the meeting with presenting Amery's and Birkenhead's views, whilst Sir A. Chamberlain reported the then latest news from Ambassador Howard staying in Washington who claimed that there were slim chances for British-American consensus over cruisers.¹¹³

The Cabinet members were unanimous on the fact that the first alternative provided by the Cabinet Committee on Further Limitation of Naval Armaments would prove unacceptable to the Americans and lead to immediate breakdown of the conference.¹¹⁴ Hence, although some preferred the first variant, the discussion centred on the second one and eventually it was agreed that once in Geneva the British delegation would present it as their major objective. Consequently, Bridgeman informed that the Admiralty would draft amendments to the British-Japanese proposals put forward on 17 July 1927 in order to adjust them to "the indispensable requirements of Imperial Defence".

Negotiations conducted in Geneva so far were based on the assumption that arms limitation scheme would be valid by the end of 1936 (the expiry date of the

¹¹² TNA, CAB 24/188, C. P. 211 (27), Note by M. Hankey "Reduction and Limitation of Naval Armaments. Note on the present position of the Geneva Conference" 21.07.1927.

¹¹³ On 21 July 1927, Kellogg informed Howard that the United States would not accept the scheme for cruisers on British conditions (imposing limitations on the calibre of guns on light cruisers, namely up to 6 inches), and Senate "would never ratify any agreement in this sense, as American naval authorities held positively that owing to lack of naval bases such cruisers would be of comparatively little use for the protection of the American merchant marine in time of war". Howard also mentioned article by "The Times" correspondent in Washington who, quoting an official at the Department of State, reported "insistence by certain Senators on American fleet being strong enough to maintain against all comers 'traditional American attitude towards neutral commerce in war time'". According to Howard, this was the main reason behind "the stiffness of American attitude over cruiser question" and he did not lend credence to any change in their stance. Hence, Howard was inclined to believe that if the British government was not able "to accept something very like American proposals for cruiser tonnage there is little or no hope of any agreement" (DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 466, p. 699, Sir E. Howard to Sir A. Chamberlain, Washington 21.07.1927; *ibidem*, no. 468, pp. 700–701, Sir E. Howard to Sir A. Chamberlain, Washington 21.07.1927).

¹¹⁴ Lord Salisbury (Lord Privy Seal) informed during the Cabinet meeting on 22 July 1927 that at Bridgeman's request he discussed the issue with, present in London at that time, delegates representing Dominions at the Geneva conference. Salisbury met with delegates from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa (representatives of Canada and Irish Free State did not attend the meeting). "Those present had been definitely opposed to the policy set forth in the first alternative, and were unanimously of opinion that the only course was to continue negotiations on the basis of the scheme drawn up by the 'junior naval experts'".

Washington Treaty concluded on 6 February 1922). So were the recommendations from the Cabinet Committee on Further Limitation of Naval Armaments of 21 July 1927. However, in the Cabinet session, on 22 July 1927 Churchill managed to force through that the scheme should be valid throughout “the period covered by our present programme construction”, i.e. only by 1931.¹¹⁵

In the Cabinet meeting convened on 22 July 1927, Lord Balfour presented to the ministers a draft statement on the policy to be followed by the British Empire in terms of naval arms limitation. Needless to say, the statement was to be used by the British delegation in Geneva.¹¹⁶

What Balfour called into question was whether the Cabinet actually strove for revising the Washington conference arrangements in regard to parity between the United States and the British Empire in the class of capital ships. He argued that the British government accepted invitation to Geneva to add to decisions made in Washington “by diminishing yet further naval expenditure while maintaining national security”. Based on the two principles, the British delegates brought forward proposals for reducing the displacement and gun calibre on capital ships, “while leaving unaltered the numbers fixed at Washington”, and suggested that the number and gun calibre “of large fighting Cruisers” should be reduced in line with the Washington formula for capital ships (5 for the British Empire, 5 for the United States and 3 for Japan). In his statement, Balfour proved that analogical formula could not be adopted for light cruisers “employed for policy purposes in times of peace, and for protecting lines of communication in time of war”. He claimed that “such vessels are of more vital necessity to an Empire, whose widely scattered parts are divided from each other by seas and oceans, than to one which is essentially continental; to an Empire whose most populous parts are dependent for their daily bread on seaborne trade, than to one which is self-supporting and self-contained; to an Empire which would perish if it failed to protect its external trade, than to one for whom external trade, however important, was not a matter of life and death”. Balfour highlighted major differences between geographical

¹¹⁵ Churchill was inclined to believe that naval development programme established in regard to British cruisers in 1925 could be modified only by the decision of the Cabinet and after consultations with the Treasury, and should not be affected by decisions taken in Geneva (M. Gilbert: *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. V: *Companion Part I Documents. The Exchequer Years 1922–1929*, London 1979, p. 1028; W.S. Churchill to S. Baldwin and A. Chamberlain, 11.07.1927; Cf: DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 421, p. 666, Sir A. Chamberlain to H.S. London, FO 11.07.1927).

¹¹⁶ TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 43 (27), Conclusion 1, 22.07.1927; B. J. McKercher mistakenly dated the Cabinet session to 20 July 1927 and Baldwin’s departure for Canada to 21 July 1927 (B.J.C. McKercher: *The Second Baldwin Government...*, pp. 74).

situation of the British Empire and the United States and argued that “the sea routes on which Britain depends for her existence lie largely in narrow waters bordered by other States. This is not the case with America, whose most important lines of communications lie either on land within her own frontiers, by sea long her own coasts, or in the great oceans”.¹¹⁷

On 24 July 1927, Lord Cecil in correspondence with Sir A. Chamberlain, referred to the document in the following words: “Further study of A. [rthur] J. [ames] B. [alfour]’s document filled me with misgiving. It seems to me quite certain as it stands to lead to a breakdown of the negotiations”. Cecil was certain that the Americans, demanding parity based on “equal cruiser strength”, would not accept the British-Japanese proposals after Admiralty’s modifications. Hankey shared his opinion and “rather rejoiced at it”, which caused Cecil’s irritation. The latter highlighted that “the document is drafted in language which from its very point and vigour is bound to lead to recrudescence of all the bitterest controversy”. Therefore, Lord Cecil doubted seriously if the Geneva negotiations were successful and objected to announcing “a statement of the British case” of which he was the main promoter. Lord Cecil claimed that the document should not be presented to the Americans unless agreement was concluded or in an amended version. He eventually suggested that Lord Balfour should take his place and represent Great Britain in Geneva.¹¹⁸

Despite reservations voiced by Lord Cecil in his letter to Sir A. Chamberlain, on 25 July 1927, the Cabinet Committee on Further Limitation of Naval Armaments approved the amended statement of the British case.¹¹⁹ Cecil became

¹¹⁷ TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 43 (27), Appendix, 22.07.1927; See also: J.H. Tomes: *Balfour and Foreign Policy. The International Thought of a Conservative Statesman*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 192–194.

¹¹⁸ Lord Cecil concluded his letter with the following words: “I understand that A.[rthur] J.[ames] B.[alfour] says he wishes for an agreement and therefore doubtless thinks he could achieve it on the basis of his document. Perhaps with his great dialectical skill and unrivalled authority he might do so. Why should he not try? I could easily retire – on some health pretext or the like. The public would see in his substitution a perfectly natural wish to send someone with greater authority to whom the Admiralty would be willing to entrust power to speak for them. If he succeed tant mieux. If he did not I could always consider my position!” (TNA, FO 800/261, pp. 143–144, Letter from Lord Cecil to Sir A. Chamberlain, Hatfield, 24.04.1927).

¹¹⁹ Balfour amended the initial version of the statement by emphasizing (in conclusion) that parity could not be accepted in regard to light cruisers since “nominal parity” would mean for the British Empire nothing else but “real inequality” and added “a caveat in regard to the temporary character of the agreement so far as concerns Cruisers other than the large type which works with the Fleet”. “In the opinion of His Majesty’s Government there need be no difficulty in arriving at a temporary arrangement about the immediate future of Cruiser building. But the British Empire cannot be asked to give to any such temporary arrangement the appearance of an immutable

convinced that his resignation would lessen the possibility of achieving consensus at the Geneva conference¹²⁰ and the Committee, having consulted Bridgeman and Cecil, decided that “the best method of giving publicity to it will be by an announcement in both Houses of Parliament”.

Afterwards, the Committee accepted the British-Japanese proposal of 17 July 1927, revised by the Admiralty, that the British delegates were to use as a basis for further negotiations. The only difference lied in overhead tonnage. In the original proposal, total tonnage was determined for auxiliary ships (i.e. cruisers and destroyers), whereas in its amended version overhead tonnage was defined for cruisers, destroyers and submarines. How the granted tonnage would be used rested with signatories to the treaty, with the reservation that the number of heavy (10,000-ton) cruisers would be reduced in line with the following formula: 12 units for the British Empire, 12 units for the United States and 8 units for Japan. Such a scheme enabled the Admiralty to retain the right to build a sufficient number of light cruisers, yet having accepted limitations on the number of submarines. Furthermore, the British intended to divide submarines into two classes (small and large) and reduce the overhead tonnage in the class of large submarines.

At the same time, Admiral Beatty considered it relevant to stress that, even in an amended version, British-Japanese proposals imposed parity between Great Britain and Japan in the class of light cruisers and destroyers in 5 : 3.25 ratio, which was quite risky.

In the Committee session, held 22 July 1927, discussion again centred on the expiry date of the scheme projected for naval arms limitations. The Cabinet was in favour of the year 1931, whilst the Admiralty suggested that the arrangements should be valid through 1936. They argued that the former enabled the United States and Japan to build cruisers equipped with 8-inch guns after 1931 and in this way outclass British cruisers carrying 6-inch guns built between 1927 and 1931. Attention was also paid to the fact that the issue would become a burning question after 1936. Hence, should the treaty expire by the end of 1931, the

principle; for this is liable to be interpreted in the future as a formal surrender of the doctrine of maritime equality. Such temporary agreement must not be treated as a precedent, or deemed to embody a settled principle. Any other course would inevitably be interpreted in the future as involving the formal surrender by the British Empire of maritime equality, a consummation which His Majesty's Government are well assured is no part of the President's [of the United States] policy". (TNA, CAB 24/188, C. P. 212 (27), Appendix I "Second Revise of Draft Statement" 26.07.1927).

¹²⁰ See: *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters*, vol. 2: *The Reform Years, 1921–1927*, ed. R. Self, London 2001, p. 417, Letter from N. Chamberlain to H. Chamberlain, 24.07.1927.

Admiralty opted for waving claim to limitation on the calibre of guns carried by light cruisers (up to 6-inch) and agreeing to equip all cruisers with 8-inch guns, which would entail higher costs of their construction. The Committee members were perfectly aware that adopting a new stance on the matter would encourage the United States to become approbative. Final decision was to be taken by the Cabinet.

Responding to Churchill's request, the Committee adopted a recommendation according to which "programmes of naval construction agreed to at the Geneva Conference should be regarded as a maximum, and the Government of the day should not be held to be bound to build up to them. They must remain free to decide the programme of naval construction in each year according to the needs of the situation and the available financial resources".¹²¹

In a session of 26 July 1927, chaired by Sir A. Chamberlain, the Cabinet¹²² eventually accepted all recommendations from the Cabinet Committee on Further Limitation of Naval Armaments and approved the final version of statement on British policy drawn up by Lord Balfour.¹²³ The amended British-Japanese proposal of 17 July was welcomed. At the same time, Admiral Beatty stressed that such a decision entailed abandoning the original instructions sent by the Admiralty to the British delegates in Geneva. Furthermore, he claimed that the proposal set a dangerous precedent for establishing "a principle of inferiority on the sea with United States" and was incompatible with defence requirements for the ratio

¹²¹ TNA, CAB 27/350, LNA (27), 5th Meeting, 25.07.1927; TNA, CAB 24/188, C. P. 212 (27), Note by M. Hankey "The Geneva Conference on Reduction and Limitation of Naval Armaments" 26.07.1927.

¹²² On 23 July 1927, Prime Minister Baldwin and Prince of Wales undertook an official visit to Canada. During the Cabinet meeting on 22 July 1927, Baldwin asked the ministers "whether, in view of the important national issues involved in the Geneva Conference, it would be advisable for him to postpone his departure for Canada on the following day as the guest of the Canadian Government on a visit for which an elaborate programme had been arranged". The Cabinet members agreed that major objectives to be followed by British delegation in Geneva had already been formulated and therefore "it was indispensable, nor in the public interest, that the Prime Minister should postpone his departure" (TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 43 (27), Conclusion 2, 22.07.1927; See also: K. Middlemas, J. Barnes: *Baldwin. A Biography*, London 1969, pp. 368–371).

¹²³ Lord Cecil stated that "although at the Cabinet Committee he had acquiesced in the Statement and did not wish to dissent from it, in his view the effect of the announcement would be to add to the difficulties of the Delegates at Geneva". Whereas Bridgeman "thought it essential that the substance of the Statement should in any case be communicated by him to the other Delegations immediately on his return, and felt that the hands of the Delegates would be strengthened if this Statement were made as a Cabinet declaration in London and not merely by them in Geneva" (TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 44 (27), Appendix I, "Third Revise of Draft Statement. As approved by the Cabinet on 26th July, 1927").

between British and Japanese cruisers. It was also Beatty who warned the government that if the United States and Japan developed their fleets in line with limits granted in the scheme, the Sea Lords would not be able “with the means left at their disposal, to fulfill the responsibilities resting upon them”.¹²⁴

As for the expiry date of the scheme for naval arms limitation, the majority of the Cabinet members (10 ministers) were in favour of “not terminating before the year 1936, but subject to a provision that the armament of the smaller type of Cruiser must not exceed 6-inch calibre”, which was Cabinet’s conclusion. Only 6 ministers, including Bridgeman and Lord Cecil, “were in favour of giving to the Delegates some latitude (if they could not by any means achieve agreement on the basis of a maximum armament of 6-inch guns) to negotiate in the last resort a *modus vivendi* until 1931 on the basis right to arm the smaller Cruisers with 8-inch guns”.¹²⁵ Ministers representing the majority argued that the government should choose a solution that was “in the interest of economy and national security”, although they knew that the United States might find it unacceptable and consequently the conference might end in a fiasco. Cecil felt so “incensed” by what the ministers said (“to the effect that it would be better have no agreement”) that he asked to minute that “if the Conference (to the success of which he attached the greatest importance) should break down on the question of 6-inch guns, he must be free to consider his position”.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 44 (27), Appendix II, “Final Modified Anglo-Japanese Scheme”.

¹²⁵ According to D. Richardson, treaty in force by 1936 and imposing limitations on the calibre of guns (up to 6-inches) carried by light cruisers, was backed by the following 10 ministers: Birkenhead, Churchill, Cuncliffe-Lister, Gilmour, Guinness, Hoare, Hogg, Joynson-Hicks, Peel and Worthington-Evans; on the contrary, treaty in force by 1931 and providing for the possibility of equipping all cruisers with 8-inch guns, was supported by the following 6 ministers: Balfour, Bridgeman, Cecil, A. Chamberlain, N. Chamberlain and Percy (D. Richardson: *The Evolution of British Disarmament Policy...*, pp. 134–135, 234, footnote 68; See also: T. Kuramatsu: *Viscount Cecil, Winston Churchill and the Geneva Naval Conference of 1927 – si vis pacem para pacem versus si vis pacem para bellum*, in: *Personalities, War and Diplomacy. Essays on International History*, eds. Th. G. Otte, C. Pagedas, London–Portland OR 1997, p. 113).

¹²⁶ TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 44 (27), Conclusion 1, 26.07.1927; *The Modernisation of Conservative Politics...*, p. 209; For more on the sessions of the Cabinet Committee on Further Limitation of Naval Armaments (25.07.1927) and the Cabinet (26.07.1927) see: J.C.C. Davidson’s account (the Chairman of the Conservative Party): “I was very frightened on Monday the 25th, because Austen [Chamberlain] apparently allowed Winston [Churchill] to reopen the whole question of the cruiser programme. Willie [Bridgeman] was not only very worried but exceedingly angry, and at one time was in minority of one. I gather that they pressed him again to go back to Geneva admit that he had exceed his instructions with regard to parity, to which he replied bluntly that he would do no such thing, but that he was quite prepared to announce that the British Government had changed its mind. All these things however, apparently passed off, and now he is going back to

On 27 July 1927, “a statement of the British case” was announced in the British Parliament, to be more precise in the House of Commons by Sir A. Chamberlain¹²⁷ and in the House of Lords by Lord Salisbury.¹²⁸

Commenting on it, Kellogg claimed in conversation with Henry G. Chilton (British chargé d'affaires in Washington) that “United States government would never agree to limitation in one class of cruiser and not in another and that if British delegates returned to Geneva with proposals for limitation of 10,000 ton cruisers and freedom of action with regard to smaller cruisers conference was doomed to failure”.¹²⁹

After he had returned to Geneva, on 28 July 1927 Bridgeman presented British proposal in a session attended by the British, American and Japanese delegates. The proposal provided for:

1. Reducing total tonnage of cruisers, destroyers and submarines to 590,000 tons for the British Empire and the United States, and to 385,000 tons for Japan (ratio 5 : 5 : 3.26).
2. Possibility for every Power of disposing additional 25% of the abovementioned tonnage “in vessels over age”.
3. Possibility of replacing vessels over age with new ones: in the case of 10,000-ton cruisers after 18 years, light cruisers and destroyers after 16 years, and submarines after 13 years.
4. Keeping the undermentioned vessels with a displacement exceeding 6,000 tons (as for the British fleet: 4 Hawkins-class cruisers, 1 York-class

Geneva to stand firm on the six inch gun in defensive cruiser. I have tried to find what happened at the Cabinet last night but apart from the fact that Jix [Sir William Joynson-Hicks] and Winston [Churchill] have got their way, which means I imagine reversing the decision of the Cabinet last Friday [22.07.1927] over which you presided” (M. Gilbert: *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. V: *Companion Part I...*, pp. 1037–1038, J.C.C. Davidson to S. Baldwin, 27.07.1927).

¹²⁷ *Naval Disarmament. Sir A. Chamberlain on British Policy*, “The Times” 28.07.1927; PDHC, 5th Series, vol. CCIX, cols. 1246–1249; Ernest Thurtle (Labour Party) commented on Chamberlain’s statement in the following way: “It is not the case that, if each Power represented at Geneva is going to insist upon the special conditions of its own national security, agreement is going to be utterly impossible, and, in these circumstances, had we not better bring the protracted farce at Geneva to an end at the earliest possible moment?” (ibidem, col. 250).

¹²⁸ *Parliamentary Debates. House of Lords. Official Report* [further: PDHL], 5th Series, vol. LXVIII, cols. 933–936; Ambassador Houghton immediately informed the Department of State that according to Chamberlain’s statement, the British government would not enter into agreement “involving the formal surrender by the British Empire of maritime equality” (FRUS 1927, vol. I, p. 136, A.B. Houghton to F.B. Kellogg, London 28.07.1927).

¹²⁹ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 471, p. 702, H.G. Chilton to Sir A. Chamberlain, Washington, 28.07.1927.

- cruiser and 2 Emerald-class cruisers; as for the American fleet: 10 Omaha-class cruisers; as for Japanese fleet: 4 Furutaka-class cruisers).
5. Dividing cruisers into two classes: a) heavy 10,000-ton cruisers, b) light cruisers with a maximum displacement of 6,000 tons carrying at most 6-inch guns.
 6. Reducing the number of heavy 10,000-ton cruisers – to 12 units in the British fleet, to 12 units in the American fleet and to 8 units in the Japanese fleet.
 7. Dividing destroyers into “flotilla leaders” (1,500–1,850 tons) and destroyers (do 1,500 tons), and placing limitations on calibre of guns carried by this class of ships (at most 5-inch guns).
 8. Reducing total tonnage of “flotilla leaders” to 16% of overhead tonnage in the class of destroyers.
 9. Dividing submarines into two classes (class A with a displacement between 1,000 and 1,800 tons, and class B with a displacement up to 600 tons) and placing limitations on calibre of guns carried by this class of ships (at most 5-inch guns).
 10. Determining total tonnage of submarines, namely 90,000 tons for the British Empire and the United States, and 60,000 tons for Japan (ratio 5 : 5 : 3.3), with the reservation that only 2/3 of the tonnage could be used for class A submarine construction.
 11. Retaining by every Power complete freedom in disposing of the tonnage defined in clause 1 and at the same time accepting restrictions included in clauses 6, 8 and 10.¹³⁰

Gibson, one of American delegates, made it clear that “he had no authority to sign any treaty restricting armament of new construction cruisers to a gun less than 8” calibre” and had to turn to Washington for instructions on the matter. The Japanese were also unwilling to accept this clause, although – according to their declarations – by 1936 they did not intend to have at their disposal more than eight heavy cruisers equipped with 8-inch guns. Nonetheless, Bridgeman got the impression that if the British and the Americans reached consensus over the issue, the Japanese party would do exactly the same. Hence, the United States had the final say. It was crystal clear to Bridgeman that “if their objection to the

¹³⁰ Bridgeman did not present British proposals on limiting the displacement and calibre of guns carried by capital ships and aircraft carriers since they would be discussed once the remaining issues had been settled (ibidem, no. 472, p. 702, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 28.07.1927; ibidem, no. 473, p. 703, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 28.07.1927).

6-inch gun is maintained, Conference must break. Only alternative I can see is an attempt compromise on gun between 6-inch and 7.5 inch which would eliminate argument with which Americans are obsessed about armed merchantmen".¹³¹

Cecil also expressed alarm over the situation in Geneva and referred to it as emergency. The only way to resolve deadlock he saw in a compromise solution, namely in entering into treaty valid only through 1931 "with permission for all parties to build 8 inch gun cruisers". He furthermore was inclined to believe that the British government should change their stance on the issue in order to prevent the conference from breaking down in which case Anglo-American relations would obviously deteriorate and the treaty on naval arms limitation would be nothing else but wishful thinking.¹³²

On 29 July 1927, in the Cabinet session chaired by Sir A. Chamberlain, the British ministers agreed that instructions for their delegates could change not a bit since "nothing has occurred to cause them to alter their previous decision". Hence, the Cabinet did not approve backing compromise solutions mentioned by Bridgeman and Cecil. It was then that Admiral Beatty stated that "the introduction of new type of gun [intermediate between 6-inch and 8-inch, such as 7-inch] would be highly inconvenient and involve increased tonnage and expense". He also argued that the fiasco of the Geneva conference would not result in naval arms race between the United States and the British Empire. The latter, having advantage in the class of cruisers, did not have to respond immediately to possible development of the American fleet and could implement the already established programme. Furthermore, Cecil's proposal (a scheme allowing cruisers to carry 8-inch guns, yet only by 1931) was also considered unacceptable. It was assumed

¹³¹ Ibidem, no. 474, pp. 704–705, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 29.07.1927; Bridgeman on the session: "Throughout this meeting we were struck with the manner in which the attitude of the American delegates had stiffened during our absence in London. We attributed this in part to the exacerbation caused, not unnaturally, by the prolonged interruption of the conference, and in part to effect produced by the ministerial declaration which was interpreted as a qualification of the line previously taken by His Majesty's Government in regard to question of parity" (*British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Confidential Print*, general eds. K. Bourne, D.C. Watt, Part II: *From the First to the Second World War*, Series J: *The League of Nations, 1918–1914*, ed. P.J. Beck, vol. 6: *The Question of Disarmament 1934–1938, and Naval Disarmament Discussions, 1924–1936*, Frederick Md. 1992 [further: BDFP, II, ser. J, vol. 6], Doc. 166, p. 304, W.C. Bridgeman to Sir A. Chamberlain, 6.08.1927).

¹³² DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 475, pp. 705–706, H. S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 29.07.1927.

that once limitation was imposed on the calibre of guns on carriers (the aforementioned 8 inches), it would be extremely difficult to change (reduce) it after 1931.¹³³

Therefore, Bridgeman was informed that if the Americans definitely rejected proposals put forward by the British on 28 July 1927, he was to demand the right to make a statement in a plenary session and refer to the aforementioned proposals, “including Capital Ships, in order to make widely known the large measure of limitation and economy at which they had aimed”. In case the Americans brought forward a counter-proposal, Bridgeman was to provide his commentary and send it to London for government’s consideration.¹³⁴

On 31 July 1927, Gibson reported to Bridgeman and Cecil that the US government did not regard the British proposals of 28 July 1927 as a basis for a possible consensus paying attention to the clause under which the calibre of guns on cruisers was to be reduced. Gibson pledged himself to provide a final answer after consultations with the President and the Secretary of the Navy. Hence, the third plenary session was to take place on 4 August 1927.¹³⁵

In a meeting summoned on 28 July 1927, the American delegation again discussed possible ways of breaking the deadlock over the issue of cruisers. One

¹³³ TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 46 (27), Conclusion 1, 29.07.1927. The then views held by the British ministers are referred to in private correspondence of Neville Chamberlain (Minister of Health): “We had a lot of Cabinet meetings over Geneva which looks now like breaking down. I trust that it will be apparent to the world that the reason for the failure is entirely due to the obstinate insistence by the Americans on conditions which would inevitably have led to increase & not decrease armaments. But they know how to work their own Press; they are entirely devoid of scruples and I doubt if they will allow our case ever to be squarely put in the U. S. A. where they have succeeded in stirring up a bitter anti-British feeling. It is difficult to keep one’s temper with them” (*The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters*, vol. 2, p. 418, Letter from N. Chamberlain to I. Chamberlain, 30.07.1927; See also: TNA, FO 800/261, p. 160, Letter from Jix [W. Joynton-Hicks] to Sir A. Chamberlain, 29.07.1927).

¹³⁴ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 477, pp. 706–707, Sir A. Chamberlain to H.S. London, FO 29.07.1927; *ibidem*, no. 478, pp. 707–708, Sir A. Chamberlain to H.S. London, Geneva 29.07.1927; Chamberlain provided Bridgeman with instructions on final speech: „Press message from United States seem to indicate clearly that State Department is now only considering how American attitude can be stated to greatest advantage and our own placed in most disadvantageous light at (...) plenary meeting. I venture therefore to express hope that you will not confine yourselves to re-stating and justifying British proposals but will also bring out clearly the fact that American proposals as to size of cruisers and guns contradict Gibson’s principles and increase instead of diminishing both cost and aggressive character of navies” (*ibidem*, no. 481, pp. 709–710, Sir A. Chamberlain to H.S. London, FO 30.07.1927).

¹³⁵ *Ibidem*, no. 484, p. 711, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 31.07.1927; Cf. FRUS 1927, vol. I, pp. 142–145, H. Gibson to F.B. Kellogg, Geneva 31.07.1927; William R. Castle Jr., the Assistant Secretary of State, in his conversation with Henry G. Chilton claimed that the then latest British proposals “were not acceptable to the United States Government while the Secretary of State told the press that they were even worse than the original ones” (DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 476, p. 706, H.G. Chilton to Sir A. Chamberlain, Washington, 29.07.1927).

of their proposals was to add a political clause to the treaty in order that it could be revised or abrogated by a signatory if he found out that its terms were breached by any party through launching naval development programme.¹³⁶ The British delegates objected to inserting such a clause and claimed that by doing so the American delegation attempted to make them approve the treaty on American terms (reducing total tonnage of cruisers within one class and open option for installing 8-inch guns on all cruisers).¹³⁷ Bridgeman, however, took another possibility into account, namely of presenting an alternative clause to be added in the treaty on British terms. To be more specific, based on proposals submitted to the Americans on 28 July 1927, a new clause was to provide for limitations on the number of cruisers carrying 8-inch guns, namely up to 12 units in the British fleet and the American fleet, and up to 8 units in the Japanese fleet.¹³⁸

On 2 August 1927, the Japanese delegation took their last attempt to “save” the Geneva conference and put forward a proposal to the other two delegations to conclude the treaty in effect by 31 December 1931 and impose limitations on the tonnage of auxiliary ships according to the following provisions:

- the British Empire and Japan shall be pledged to implement only the approved programmes for auxiliary ship construction,
- number of 10,000-ton cruisers shall not exceed 12 units in the British fleet and the American fleet and 8 units in the Japanese fleet,
- displacement of light cruisers shall not exceed 8,000 tons,
- the United States shall declare they would not develop their naval power beyond that of the British Empire,
- next conference shall be convened no later than at the very beginning of 1931 to address issues unsettled in 1927.¹³⁹

Bridgeman informed the Cabinet about Japanese proposals and provided his commentary: “if Americans accept it we feel that Japanese in view of their desire to avoid breakdown would be seriously hurt at our refusal”. He also claimed that

¹³⁶ According to the British delegates, the clause was proposed by Allen W. Dulles, legal adviser of the American delegation at the Geneva conference. Hence, in British sources it is referred to as “Dulles Clause”. See the content of the clause: *ibidem*, no. 487, p. 713, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 1.08.1927.

¹³⁷ *Ibidem*, no. 486, p. 713, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 1.08.1927.

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*, no. 488, p. 714, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 2.08.1927; See the content of British alternative to “Dulles Clause”: *ibidem*, no. 489, pp. 714–715, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 2.08.1927.

¹³⁹ Substance of the Japanese proposal: *ibidem*, no. 493, pp. 717–718, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 2.08.1927.

should the British government accept the proposal brought forward by the Japanese, the latter were willing to back the British suggestions as to placing limitations on the displacement and calibre of guns carried by battle ships.¹⁴⁰

On 3 August 1927, in the Cabinet meeting chaired by Sir A. Chamberlain, it was agreed unanimously that the American proposal for adding political clause “was altogether unacceptable”. Admiral of the Fleet Sir Charles E. Madden, The First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff (successor of Admiral Beatty),¹⁴¹ stated that also an alternative version of political clause proposed by Bridgeman “would be open to the objection that, if at any point the United States decided to call a new Conference and to embark on a programme 8,000-ton 8” Cruisers, any British 6” gun Cruisers built in the interval would become obsolete, so that the money spent on them would have been to a great extent wasted”.

Giving attention to Japanese proposal, the Cabinet was willing to accept it, yet on condition that certain amendments were introduced in order to make it compatible with British interests since the ministers “were deeply impressed with necessity of keeping in with Japan if possible, and all the more if agreement with America turns out to be impossible”.¹⁴² Bridgeman was informed that the Cabinet would present its final stance on the matter in a meeting on 4 August. If the Americans accepted the Japanese proposal as a basis for further discussion, Bridgeman was to make sure that plenary session of the conference, originally to take place on 4 August, would be postponed. On the other hand, should the Americans reject the Japanese offer and put forward no counter-proposal, Bridgeman was to suggest reaching consensus at least over issues already agreed upon in Geneva (namely 10,000-ton cruisers, destroyers and submarines) and over imposing limitations on the displacement and calibre of guns carried by capital ships.¹⁴³

In the evening on 3 August 1927, in an informal meeting attended by British, American and Japanese delegates, the US party made it clear they would not take Japanese proposal into account without making an additional reservation

¹⁴⁰ Ibidem, no. 492, pp. 716–717, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 2.08.1927; BDFA, II, ser. J, vol. 6, Doc. 166, p. 306, W.C. Bridgeman to Sir A. Chamberlain, 6.08.1927.

¹⁴¹ For more information about Admiral Madden, see: N. Tracy: *Admiral Sir Charles E. Madden (1927–1930)*..., pp. 141–149.

¹⁴² D. Carlton: *Great Britain and the Coolidge Naval Disarmament Conference...*, p. 593.

¹⁴³ TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 47 (27), Conclusion 1, 3.08.1927; ibidem, Appendix III, Draft telegram to Geneva, for consideration at a Meeting of the Cabinet to be held on Thursday, August 4, 1927, at 12 Noon; DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 497, pp. 722–723, Sir A. Chamberlain to H.S. London, 3.08.1927; See also: R.S. Grayson: *Austen Chamberlain and the Commitment to Europe. British Foreign Policy, 1924–1929*, London 1997, p. 156.

about imposing limitations on overhead tonnage of British cruisers, namely not exceeding 400,000 tons. Needless to say, the British considered this unacceptable and hence the Americans refused to continue discussion on the proposal. The only issue left for consideration was how the conference should be closed. Gibson proposed that in the last plenary session “an agreed statement of progress made and difficulties encountered” should be read out and the conference should be postponed “in order that the whole question should be further discussed between governments”. Under pressure from Bridgeman, Gibson eventually concurred that every delegation should have a chance to present their viewpoints, yet without further discussion. “It was agreed that meeting should close in friendly atmosphere”.¹⁴⁴

In the afternoon on 4 August 1927, the Cabinet summoned a meeting, again chaired by Sir A. Chamberlain, to debate possible approval for the amended Japanese proposal.¹⁴⁵ However, just before the session opened, the British government received information from Geneva that the American delegation voted against the Japanese proposal because the British delegation did not accept the US provision under which total tonnage in the class of cruisers was to be reduced to 400,000 tons. Had things taken such a turn, further discussion on the amended Japanese proposal seemed pointless, yet the Cabinet members agreed that “the Admiralty’s views on the Japanese proposal as amended at the meeting on the previous day ought to be placed on record”¹⁴⁶. It was Admiral Madden who read out in the Cabinet meeting a telegram received early in the morning from Rear Admiral Pound who had joined the British delegation to substitute for indisposed Admiral Frederick L. Field. Pound reported: “One of two things must now result. A. Inclusion in treaty of points tentatively agreed upon by Technical Committee. B. No treaty. It is most unlikely America will agree to A.”. Hence, the conference

¹⁴⁴ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 499, pp. 725–726, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva 4.08.1927.

¹⁴⁵ TNA, CAB 24/188, C. P. 219 (27), Note by M. Hankey “Reduction and Limitation of Naval Armaments. The Geneva Conference” 3.08.1927.

¹⁴⁶ The Admiralty objected to the Japanese proposal in its amended (by the Cabinet) version since it would make Great Britain abandon her plans to build cruisers equipped with 6-inch guns. By doing so, the British Empire would be left behind after 1931 when other countries started to build cruisers carrying 8-inch guns. Furthermore, the Admiralty stressed that the USA insisted that overhead tonnage for cruisers should not exceed 400,000 tons. If the British Empire accepted such a formula, she could have only 47 cruisers (12 cruisers of 10,000 tons + 35 cruisers of 8,000 tons) and not 70 cruisers at her disposal (TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 48 (27), Appendix I, Memorandum by First Sea Lord presented to Cabinet 4th August 1927 “Analysis of the Japanese Proposals. Geneva Conference”).

outcome had been foregone and the Cabinet concluded “that no further instructions should be sent to the British Delegation at Geneva”.¹⁴⁷

As expected by Rear Admiral Pound, during a morning meeting on 4 August 1927, the American delegates refused to sign the treaty providing only for 10,000-ton cruisers, destroyers and submarines “without question of cruiser tonnage having been settled”. Bridgeman reported: “Japanese while not raising any objection to British proposals saw no advantage in pursuing question in view of opposition of American delegation”.¹⁴⁸

In the afternoon on 4 August 1927, the last (third) plenary session of the conference took place and Bridgeman, Saito and Gibson took the floor. It was Gibson who read out a joint declaration at the end of the session and the conference was eventually postponed.¹⁴⁹

Subsequently, on 30 July 1927, the Foreign Office sent British diplomats in Washington, Tokyo, Paris and Rome instructions in case of the conference breakdown. According to the guidelines, the British stance was to be presented in a positive light. The British ambassadors were to express “great disappointment of His Majesty’s Governments that they have been unable to achieve reduction in expenditure on naval armaments which they so ardently desire and which their own proposals entailed, owing to rigid adherence of United States to proposals whilst giving Great Britain and the United States an equal tonnage of cruisers would leave us without a sufficient number of them to protect our sea communications,

¹⁴⁷ TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 48 (27), Conclusion 1, 4.08.1927; N. Chamberlain referred to the atmosphere during the Cabinet meetings on 3 and 4 August 1927 in his private correspondence: “When I got to the F.O. [Foreign Office] I learned that the Americans had bust the Conference and we might have spared ourselves all the discussion and all the friction of the day before. For the proceedings had been stormy and Winston [Churchill] had been in the worst possible mood: childish petulant, truculent, impatient & offensive. When he is like that “team work” becomes – well – very difficult. And all for nothing!” (*The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters*, vol. 2, p. 419, Letter from N. Chamberlain to I. Chamberlain, 5.08.1927).

¹⁴⁸ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 500, pp. 726–727, H.S. London to Sir A. Chamberlain, Geneva, 4.08.1927.

¹⁴⁹ For more information see: RCLNA, pp. 35–46; Cmd. 2964 (1927), pp. 12–21; *Failure at Geneva. The Conference “Adjourned”. Suggested Earlier Resumption. Final Survey*, “The Times” 5.08.1927; *The Conference at Geneva. Mr. Bridgeman’s Speech*, “The Times” 5.08.1927; *The Conference “Adjourns”*, “The Times” 5.08.1927; *Geneva. Causes of the Failure. Lack of Proper Preparation. The Political Factor*, “The Times” 6.08.1927; Commenting on the last plenary session held in Geneva, Bridgeman reported to Chamberlain: “You will have observed that, while Mr. Gibson expressed such anxiety lest individual statements should lead to some embitterment of relations, his own speech was the only one of a tendentious nature, containing, as it did, more than one misrepresentation of fact” (BDFa, II, ser. J, vol. 6, Doc. 166, p. 307, W.C. Bridgeman to Sir A. Chamberlain, 6.08.1927; See also: S. Roskill: *Naval Policy...*, vol. I, p. 513).

and by their insistence on building a large number of cruisers with eight inch guns entailing a great increase in armament and cost instead of the reduction in both which we were seeking. Anyone who regards the situation dispassionately and impartially will agree that it would be impossible for His Majesty's Government to agree by treaty to fall below the One Power standard".¹⁵⁰

The attitude of the British establishment toward the Coolidge conference fiasco is revealed in private correspondence carried on between British military, politicians and diplomats. Admiral Beatty in his letter to Bridgeman admitted openly: "I am glad to know that the Conference has come to an end without the Americans having achieved what they undoubtedly set out do: i.e. to achieve command of the sea at no cost. Every nation in the history of the world has only obtained Sea Power as the result of great achievements and the price of many lives and much money. The D --- D Yanks thought they could get it for nothing!! I wish the true story of their ridiculous attitude under the guise of economy and disarmament could be made plain to the World. It would flatten the Big Navy party in the United States for all time. I thank Le Bon Dieu that you were head of our delegates. No one else would have had the patience and clear headedness to have weathered the storm".¹⁵¹

The First Lord of the Admiralty shared Admiral's Beatty view. In his letter to Sir A. Chamberlain on 7 August 1927 he wrote: "It was quite clear when we went back that the American attitude had hardened, but I don't think they ever meant from the beginning to agree to anything which they could not represent at home as having twisted the Lion's tail (...) But I really don't think much, if any, harm has been done. We have not given anything away, and the Americans have been shown to have no reason but conceit for building so many large new

¹⁵⁰ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 482, p. 710, Sir A. Chamberlain to Sir E. Howard, FO 30.07.1927; G.C. Kennedy: *Britain's Policy-Making Elite, The Naval Disarmament Puzzle and Public Opinion, 1927-1932*, "Albion" 1994, vol. XXVI, no. 4, p. 632. The ambassadors received a detailed memorandum on the Geneva conference prepared by News Department Foreign Office: *British Documents on Foreign Affairs. Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*, general eds. K. Bourne & D.C. Watt, Part II: *From the First to the Second World War, Series C: North America, 1919-1939*, ed. D.K. Adams, vol. 18: *Arbitration, Arms Control and Pact of Paris, 1927-1929*, Frederick Md. 1995 [further: BDFP, II, ser. C, vol. 18], Doc. 10, pp. 9-11, "A Memorandum regarding the Attitude adopted by the British Delegation at the Conference on the Limitation of Naval Armaments in Geneva, from June 20 to August 4, 1927" by A. Yencken, FO 17.08.1927.

¹⁵¹ *The Beatty Papers. Selections from the Private and Official Correspondence and Papers of Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty*, vol. II: 1916-1927, ed. B.M. Ranft, Aldershot 1993, p. 355, Letter from Earl Beatty to W.C. Bridgeman, London 6.08.1927.

cruisers (...) I don't think it will lead to any competitive building, and I should not be surprised if there was some reaction in America against the Big Navyites and the Steel Trust's machinations". The leader of the American delegation, H. Gibson, was called "a mean and untruthful twister" by Bridgeman who believed that the American correspondents "got orders from Gibson the first day to discredit and misrepresent our proposals". Referring to a growing number of critical remarks about inadequate preparation for the conference, Bridgeman to some extent agreed with the critics: "No doubt we shall be blamed for not having prepared the ground more fully for the Conference. But I am sure if we had broached our scheme earlier the American press would have been just as bad or worse, and probably the Conference would never have been held and the opportunity would have been missed of exposing the impostures of the American designs and of improving our relations with the Japs". Bridgeman mentioned two positives of the conference, namely close cooperation with the representatives of Dominions and "good relationship" with Japanese delegation.¹⁵²

In his letter to ambassador Howard in Washington, on 10 August 1927 Sir A. Chamberlain admitted that the conference in Geneva was the most problematic issue he had so far dealt with in his career.¹⁵³ "I have been more worried about the Geneva than about anything which occurred since I took my present Office. No doubt a great mistake was made in entering upon such a Conference without a preliminary exchange of ideas, and for this I must take a share of blame. I confess that I did not foresee in any way the rigidity of the American attitude and I was afraid that any enquiry as to the views of the State Department might be regarded as unsympathetic and as dictated by a desire to find a means of declining the President's invitation. I must add that our own Admiralty were as reluctant to

¹⁵² TNA, FO 800/261, pp. 184–186, Letter from W.C. Bridgeman to Sir A. Chamberlain, 7.08.1927; See also: *The Modernisation of Conservative Politics...*, p. 210, letter from W.C. Bridgeman to M.R. Bridgeman, 10.08.1927.

¹⁵³ Sir A. Chamberlain was acting Prime Minister during Baldwin's stay in Canada. At a decisive moment, on 3 August 1927 three ministers, namely Churchill, Joynson-Hicks and Birkenhead, threatened to resign if Great Britain changed its stance on 6-inch guns, and Cecil – if the British stance did not change (R.S. Grayson: *Austen Chamberlain and the Commitment to Europe...*, p. 156); Chamberlain wrote in a letter to his sister: „Well, I have a hectic time. The P.M. [Prime Minister] may find the Cabinet still complete when he returns or he may find it minus the Chancellor of the Duchy – at present I cannot tell which – but at one moment last week I had four resignations threatened, three of them actually in my hands. I told the P. M. [Prime Minister] it was not safe for him to leave until the Geneva Conference was over, & he will never go so far afield again I can prevent him" (*The Austen Chamberlain Diary Letters. The Correspondence of Sir Austen Chamberlain with His Sisters Hilda and Ida, 1916–1937*, ed. R.C. Self, London 1995, p. 317, Letter from Sir A. Chamberlain to I. Chamberlain, 7.08.1927).

disclose their plan in advance as were the Americans themselves, but the result has been a great misfortune since the difference in opinion in regard to cruisers is now no longer a difference between Governments only but has become something of a battle-cry among the public in each country”.

According to Chamberlain, the American stance at the Geneva conference was “wholly unreasonable in itself and contrary to the principles laid down by Gibson in his opening speech at the Conference. The Americans have never contended that they needed the same cruiser tonnage as does the British Empire, and indeed from the first to the last their Delegation at Geneva declined to make any statement and explanation of their needs such as our Delegates gave freely. Their claim was purely and simply that, whatever tonnage we had, they must have also. In other words, they were not thinking of limiting armaments to what was required for national security, but making a claim to build for prestige. Having no need for the small cruiser to police the trade routes, they proposed to use the tonnage which they claimed to build large cruisers with large guns such as are the concomitants of fleets. The effect was and is that they not only render our older ships obsolete, but they oblige other Powers – ourselves – to build in future nothing but larger cruiser armed with 8”guns. As numbers are essential part of our need, this in itself increases our tonnage demand by the excess tonnage involved in each ship constructed over that which would have been required had they seen their way to adopt our proposal to limit the use of the 8” gun”.

Furthermore, in his letter to Howard, Chamberlain agreed with Bridgeman about the leader of American delegation. According to Chamberlain, Gibson was “to small a man to handle so big a Conference” and did not have “much influence with the American naval delegates”. Furthermore, he expressed serious doubts over reports sent by Gibson to the Department of State and wondered if they “gave full or even a fair picture of the British case and attitude”.

However, it was Chamberlain who was inclined to believe that the tone of statements made by the representatives of the US government after the Geneva conference¹⁵⁴ gave hope that the fiasco would not have a negative effect on Anglo-American relations in the future.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ See: *Statement by Mr. Kellogg. Failure Not Final*, “The Times” 5.08.1927; *Feeling in the U.S.A. Mr. Coolidge’s View. No Armament Race*, “The Times” 6.08.1927; *Gen. Dawes on Naval Disarmament. Competitive Building “Unthinkable”*, “The Times” 9.08.1927.

¹⁵⁵ DBFP, ser. IA, vol. III, no. 503, pp. 729–731, Letter from Sir A. Chamberlain to Sir E. Howard, 10.08.1927.

The British government and diplomats hoped that the unsatisfactory outcome of the conference would not have significant repercussions for the aforementioned relations and would not become a subject of a public debate in Great Britain. These expectations were shattered by Lord Cecil's resignation on 9 August 1927 (made public on 30 August).¹⁵⁶ The American press and administration were given an additional argument supporting a hypothesis that the responsibility for the Geneva fiasco rested with the British government. In a memorandum of 17 November 1927, the Foreign Office noted that: "The failure at Geneva has certainly done nothing to improve Anglo-American relations; on the contrary, it has strengthen enormously those elements in the Unites States who are unfriendly to Great Britain, and whose object is to 'show the world' conclusively that, while the 19th century may have belonged to Britain, the 20th century undoubtedly belongs to the United States".¹⁵⁷ During a debate in the House of Lords on 16 November 1927, Lord Cecil revealed a behind-the-scenes discussion held by the British government once the delegates had arrived in London, and claimed that Churchill had beyond any doubt contributed to the conference breakdown. It was Lord Balfour who polemicized on the issue with Cecil.¹⁵⁸ In the House of Commons on 24 November 1927, the Labour Party proposed a motion of no confidence in the government and voiced their criticism over, among other things "the lack preparation by the Government and the military character of the British delegation which seriously contributed to the failure of the recent naval conference at Gene-

¹⁵⁶ For more information see: BL, Cecil Papers, Add. MSS 51080, pp. 209–217, Letter from Lord Cecil to S. Baldwin, 9.08.1927; *Lord Cecil and the Cabinet. A Wish to Resign. Freedom to Work for Disarmament*, "The Times" 29.08.1927; *Lord Cecil Resigns. A Letter to Mr. Baldwin. Differences on Disarmament. Prime Minister Reply*, "The Times" 30.08.1927; *The Cabinet, The League, and Lord Cecil*, "The Times" 30.08.1927; R. Cecil: *A Great Experiment. An Autobiography*, New York 1941, pp. 185–189, 358–366; idem: *All the Way*, London 1949, pp. 190–191; Th. Jones: *Whitehall Diary*, vol. II, pp. 109–110; D. Carlton: *Great Britain and the Coolidge Naval Disarmament Conference...*, p. 594; D. Dutton: *Austen Chamberlain: Gentleman in Politics*, Bolton 1985, p. 277; B.J.C. McKercher: *The Second Baldwin Government...*, pp. 77–79; T. Kuramatsu: *Viscount Cecil, Winston Churchill and the Geneva Naval Conference...*, pp. 118–119; K. Middlemas, J. Barnes: *Baldwin...*, pp. 371–372; S. Roskill: *Hankey...*, vol. II, pp. 441–444; G. Johnson: *Lord Robert Cecil...*, pp. 189–193.

¹⁵⁷ TNA, CAB 24/188, C. P. 244 (27), "Memorandum respecting the effect on public opinion in the United States of Lord Cecil's Resignation from the Government" FO, 11.10.1927; TNA, CAB 24/189, C. P. 292 (27), "Memorandum respecting the future of Anglo-American relations" FO, 17.11.1927; B.J.C. McKercher: *The Second Baldwin Government...*, pp. 77–80.

¹⁵⁸ PDHL, 5th Series, vol. LXIX, cols. 88–100; *U.S. Naval Policy. Effect of British Announcement. Washington and Lord Cecil*, "The Times" 17.11.1927; *Cruisers and Lord Cecil*, "The Times" 18.11.1927; BDFA, II, ser. C, vol. 18, Doc. 24, pp. 26–28, Sir E. Howard to Sir A. Chamberlain, Washington 24.11.1927.

va". The government, represented by Sir A. Chamberlain and Bridgeman, entered a dispute over theses advanced by the opposition, and the motion was eventually rejected by the Conservative Party that constituted the overwhelming majority in the House of Commons.¹⁵⁹

Under pressure from Churchill and against Admiralty's stance, on 11 November 1927 the British government decided to build only one out of three cruisers projected in the programme for a fiscal year 1927–1928 (see Table 4).¹⁶⁰

Table 4. British Cruiser Programme for 1925–1930

	1925–1926	1926–1927	1927–1928	1928–1929	1929–1930
Cruisers Class "A" *	4	2	1	1	1
Cruisers Class "B" **	–	1	2	2	2

* Class A = 10,000 tons carrying eight 8-inch guns; ** Class B = 7,500 tons carrying six 6-inch guns.

Source: Command Paper 2476 (1925), *Navy. Programme of New Construction*, London 1925, p. 2.

On 16 November 1927, Bridgeman reported to the House of Commons that the British government "has decided that, in the light of the situation disclosed at recent Geneva Naval Conference, it is not necessary or desirable to proceed with laying of the other two ships this year"¹⁶¹. In the US, this was considered an attempt to counter criticism against the British government voiced by Lord Cecil.

¹⁵⁹ TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 57 (27), Conclusion 3, 23.11.1927; PDHC, 5th Series, vol. CCX, cols. 2071–2206; *Parliament and Politics...*, p. 134; B.J.C. McKercher: *The Second Baldwin Government...*, pp. 88–91, See also: R.W. Westphal Jr.: *Naval Defence Policy & the House of Commons: A Study of Parliamentary Commentary Over Naval Issues, 1919–1929*, Ph. D. dissertation, University of Exeter, 2005, pp. 274–275.

¹⁶⁰ TNA, CAB 23/55, Cabinet 55 (27), Conclusion 3, 11.11.1927; For more information see: M. Gilbert: *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. 5: *1922–1939*, London 1976, pp. 247–252; D. MacGregor: *Former Naval Cheapskate: Chancellor of the Exchequer Winston Churchill and the Royal Navy, 1924–1929*, "Armed Forces & Society" 1993, vol. XIX, no. 3, pp. 321–322, 326–330; B.J.C. McKercher: *The Politics of Naval Arms Limitation in Britain in the 1920's*, "Diplomacy & Statecraft" 1993, vol. IV, no. 3, s. 45–46; Ch.M. Bell: *Winston Churchill, Pacific Security, and the Limits of British Power, 1921–1941*, in: *Churchill and Strategic Dilemmas Before the World Wars. Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel*, ed. J.H. Maurer, London 2003, pp. 60–61; idem: *Churchill and Sea Power*, Oxford 2013, pp. 120–122.

¹⁶¹ PDHC, 5th Series, vol. CCX, col. 1013; *Cruiser Construction To Be Delayed*, "The Times" 17.11.1927; *Cruiser Construction. Only One To Be Laid Down This Financial Year*, "The Times" 17.11.1927; See for more: R.W. Westphal Jr.: *Politics or Posturing: A Legislative Debate on Naval Expenditures 1925–9*, "Mariner's Mirror" 2004, vol. XC, no. 2, pp. 202–216.

On the other hand, the “Big Navy” regarded this a “bluff” and an effort to foil their plans for developing the US fleet.¹⁶²

At the same time, the Americans did their best to prove they could achieve parity with Great Britain, if not within the proposed scheme for arms limitations, then probably through developing the US Navy. On 14 December 1927, Thomas S. Butler, Chairman of the Naval Committee of the United States House of Representatives, presented a programme aimed at increasing the US fleet by 71 warships in the following 9 years, in which: 25 10,000-ton cruisers, 9 destroyer leaders, 32 submarines and 5 aircraft carriers. The programme cost was estimated at \$740,000,000.¹⁶³

To sum up, it should be stated that with their scheme for naval arms limitation the British wanted to surprise the other delegations participating in the Geneva conference. Their main objective, aimed at building up some savings while complying with their “defence requirements”, ended in failure. American and Japanese delegations refused to enter into discussion on imposing limitations on the displacement and calibre of guns carried by capital ships unless other issues were settled. Furthermore, the US party opposed the British proposal for adding to the treaty a clause under which cruisers would be divided into two classes, namely heavy (with a displacement of 10,000 tons and equipped with 8-inch guns) and light (with a displacement of 7,500 tons and equipped with 6-inch guns), and under which clause only the former would be reduced in number. Since they had not developed as impressive network of naval stations as the British, the Americans preferred heavy cruisers since they carried 8-inch guns and could operate within broader scope than light ones.

Nevertheless, the main reason behind British-American dispute over the issue was a disparity between two doctrines, namely the British “maritime belligerent rights” and the American “freedom of the seas”. Great Britain did her best

¹⁶² *U.S. Naval Policy. Effect of British Announcement. Washington and Lord Cecil*, “The Times” 17.11.1927; *Big Navy Talk. Propaganda in America. The Saner View. Need for Calm Judgment*, “The Times” 22.11.1927.

¹⁶³ T.G. Davis: *A Navy Second to None. The Development of Modern American Naval Policy*, reprint edition, Westport Conn. 1971, p. 326. Sir A. Chamberlain referred to this fact in a letter to his sister: “But what do you say to Prest. [President] Coolidge & his 25 “light” cruisers of 10,000 tons each? What a difficult people they are to live it! It is a really heartbreaking task to improve our relations. We are told that the settlement of the Irish question & the payment of the debt had produced such a greatly improved feeling & now it seems to be as good business as ever to twist the lion’s tail. Ah me! Ah me!” (*The Austen Chamberlain Diary Letters...*, p. 321, Letter from Sir A. Chamberlain to H. Chamberlain, 17.12.1927).

to increase the number of light cruisers at her disposal to monitor sea routes in times of peace and, should the war erupted, to blockade sea trade between her opponents and neutral states. The Americans, on the contrary, preferred heavy cruisers to, as a neutral party, be able to get through the British naval blockade in case of war.¹⁶⁴

After the conference in Geneva had been closed, on the Foreign Office's initiative the British government set up a special committee that was to discuss possible amendments to the British doctrine in order to encourage the United States to waive their claim to parity with Great Britain in the class of cruisers.¹⁶⁵

Before the Geneva conference, the British government assumed that parity between the Royal Navy and the US Navy would be accepted only in regard to heavy cruisers, whilst the number of British light cruisers would be by no means reduced under the treaty. Needless to say, the American claim to parity in all classes of ships left this assumption up in the air. At the end of June 1927, the British party (i.e. the delegates in Geneva and the government in London) attempted to solve the problem by accepting parity with the reservation that the British Empire had to have a specific number of cruisers at her disposal, required for security reasons.¹⁶⁶ The American party did not, however, support the British doctrine referred to as "absolute needs" and demanded "mathematical parity" at a level too low (400,000 tons) from the British viewpoint. Concern voiced by the British government over possible consent from the British delegation to consensus incompatible with the British policy were dispelled when the delegates arrived in London to take part in the consultations.

From that moment on, the outcome of the Geneva conference was foregone. The majority of the Cabinet members advocated the British naval supremacy and

¹⁶⁴ Bridgeman on the Geneva conference in his diary: "They [Americans] never consented to tell us why they wanted so many heavily armed cruisers, but occasionally threw out hints about dealing with our armed merchantmen, which they did not believe in as argument & never used much in plenary meetings. The real object which they came was to try to get 'parity' cheap by forcing us to give up the numbers we require for security, and also to prevent us from intercepting contraband in wartime. They hoped to get a good election cry for Coolidge by saying they had only made a further peace move, but also twisted the British Lion's tail by making him reduce his cruiser strength" (*The Modernisation of Conservative Politics...*, p. 207).

¹⁶⁵ B.J.C. McKercher: *The Second Baldwin Government...*, pp. 69, 92–103; idem: *Belligerent Rights in 1927–1929. Foreign Policy versus Naval Policy in the Second Baldwin Government*, "Historical Journal" 1986, vol. XXIX, no. 4, s. 963–974; idem: *Wealth, Power, and the New International Order...*, pp. 437–438; A. Harasimowicz: *Dyplomacja brytyjska...* [British Diplomacy...], pp. 74–78; Cf. T. Kuramatsu: *The Geneva Naval Conference...*, p. 116.

¹⁶⁶ See: TNA, CAB 63/39, M. O. (27) 6, Memorandum by Sir M. Hankey "Cruisers. The Question of Parity with the United States of America", 21.07.1927.

hence undermined possible negative consequences following from the conference breakdown. Those in favour of consensus and compromise were obviously in the minority. At the same time, it is worth stressing that there were virtually no grounds for reaching consensus. The British government did, however, their best to avoid being accused of contributing to the conference fiasco.¹⁶⁷ Hence, after consultations with the British delegates, at the end of July 1927 the Cabinet submitted proposals that not only protected the British interests, but could also be accepted by the Japanese, which would make the Americans the only party unwilling to arrive at consensus.¹⁶⁸

As for the British ministers who objected to parity with the United States, crucial role was played by Churchill, though not all historians pay attention to this fact.¹⁶⁹ In a memorandum of 20 July 1927, prepared after Bridgeman and Cecil had returned to London to take part in consultations, Churchill presented a complete picture of his views. At the same time, he opposed to:

- accepting Admiralty’s claim about a minimum necessary for the security of the British Empire (namely 70 cruisers),
- entering into disarmament agreement since it posed a major threat to “the Foundations of British Sea Power”,
- recognizing “absolute parity by treaty with the United States”.

¹⁶⁷ As far as historians are concerned, opinions vary as to which party was to the greatest extent responsible for the “Coolidge Conference” breakdown: “a large measure of responsibility for the failure, must rest on British shoulder, and in particular the shoulders of Churchill and Beatty” (D. Richardson: *The Evolution of British Disarmament Policy...*, pp. 138–139), “The blame for conference’s collapse rest almost entirely with the British government” (Ph.P. O’Brien: *British and American Naval Power...*, p. 194), “Although blame for failure can be apportioned to each of the three powers, the United States deserves the lion’s share” (B.J.C. McKercher: *A Certain Irritation...*, pp. 847–850).

¹⁶⁸ Similar views were held by the Americans. President Coolidge, on holiday while the conference was being held, on 25 July 1927 informed Kellogg he was against modifying the American proposals – “if others are unwilling to accept it, we can very well be content with having made a fair proposal and leave others with the responsibility for its rejection” (G.F. Goodfellow, Calvin Coolidge: A Study of Presidential Inaction, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1969, p. 352).

¹⁶⁹ Ph. Towle: *Winston Churchill and British Disarmament Policy*, “Journal of Strategic Studies” 1979, vol. II, no. 3, pp. 336–338, describing Churchill’s negative attitude toward general disarmament in the 1920’s, he did not make any reference to the Geneva conference (1927). S. Roskill: *Naval Policy...*, vol. I, analyzing the conference, he ignored Churchill’s role, and M. Gilbert, Churchill’s official biographer, did not write a word about Geneva. M. Gilbert: *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. 5: *1922–1939...*; However, in a supplement to Churchill’s biography, M. Gilbert disclosed important documents to illustrate Churchill’s attitude toward the conference and parity (idem: *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. V: *Companion Part I...*).

Churchill called for taking a strong line in Geneva to take account of the British interests, regardless of the US response and likely breakdown of the conference. “After all, who called the Conference? Who called it for political motives? Who is most interested in producing something that can be hawked about the American platforms in 1928 as an English submission to American parity, i.e., supremacy? That is surely not our affair [...] The only chance of a good Naval Agreement is that the United States shall accept our considered and sober view. If they want an agreement, let them pay the price for it in fair accommodation. They risk nothing, we risk everything. They are trying to buy the sovereignty of the seas by mere money power, and this has never been done in history of the world. They do not even expect to have to cash the cheque”.¹⁷⁰

The literature on the subject offers two contrary opinions as to Churchill’s stance. According to B.J.C. McKercher, Churchill pursued two conflicting policies simultaneously – on the one hand he was conflicted with the Admiralty and strove to hold down the rate of the British Navy development, and on the other hand he was for the British supremacy at sea. The aforementioned historian is inclined to believe that Churchill was “nothing more than a political opportunist whose every move was designed to bring him closer to the premiership”.¹⁷¹ Contrary view is expressed by T. Kuramatsu according to whom Churchill’s stance was not paradoxical but rather a combination of two priorities, namely a “strategic and economic one”.¹⁷²

Churchill was wrong to assume that the US government would remain passive after the unfortunate outcome of the conference and that, having in mind the American public opinion, would not decide to back the programme aimed at developing the US fleet.

¹⁷⁰ M. Gilbert: *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. V: *Companion Part I...*, pp. 1030–1035, Memorandum by Sir W.S. Churchill “Cruisers and Parity” 20.07.1927. Memorandum, subtitled “Cabinet Memorandum”, was not probably “circulated” officially since it does not appear in the archive records in TNA, CAB 24. Churchill presumably handed it over to the other ministers non-officially. This is confirmed by the memorandum submitted by Lord Birkenhead on 21 July 1927 (see footnote 111). See also: BL, Cecil Papers, Add. MSS 51073, pp. 132–133, Letter from Lord Cecil to W.S. Churchill, 26.07.1927.

¹⁷¹ B.J.C. McKercher: *The Second Baldwin Government...*, pp. 11; idem: *The Politics of Naval Arms Limitation...*, pp. 45–46; idem: *Churchill, the European Balance of Power, and the USA*, in: *Winston Churchill...*, pp. 53–55.

¹⁷² T. Kuramatsu: *Viscount Cecil, Winston Churchill and the Geneva Naval Conference...*, p. 115; see also: P.P. O’Brien: *Churchill and US Navy...*, pp. 32–38; idem: *British and American Naval Power...*, pp. 188–194; Ch.M. Bell: *Churchill and Sea Power...*, pp. 113–119.

Lord Cecil was the only minister who insisted on concluding the treaty on American terms.¹⁷³ Nevertheless, he mistakenly believed that concession from the British Empire on the calibre of guns carried by cruisers would allow to reach consensus with the Americans. At the Geneva conference there were no grounds for the British-American agreement on reducing the global tonnage in the class of cruisers. Therefore, his dismissal was hard to understand for other ministers. Nevertheless, it should be stated that Cecil predicted with accuracy the consequences following from the conference fiasco. Revealed at the “Coolidge Conference”, divergences between the British and the Americans over naval arms limitation scheme contributed to the deadlock in the disarmament negotiations conducted under the auspices of the League of Nations in PCDC.

BRYTYJSKI RZĄD WOBEC MORSKIEJ KONFERENCJI ROZBROJENIOWEJ W GENEWIE (1927)

Streszczenie

Morska konferencja rozbrojeniowa w Genewie (20 czerwca – 4 sierpnia 1927 r.) została zwołana z inicjatywy amerykańskiego prezydenta Calvina Coolidge’a i miała stanowić kontynuację procesu zapoczątkowanego na Konferencji Waszyngtońskiej (12 listopada 1921 r. – 6 lutego 1922 r.). Na konferencji w Waszyngtonie ustalono stosunek sił morskich Imperium Brytyjskiego, Stanów Zjednoczonych, Japonii, Francji i Włoch w klasie pancerników i lotniskowców według ratio: 5 : 5 : 3 : 1,75 : 1,75. Na konferencji Coolidge’a w 1927 roku strona amerykańska dążyła do uzyskania w traktacie międzynarodowym parytetu pomiędzy US Navy i Royal Navy we wszystkich klasach okrętów wojennych.

Brytyjski rząd przyjął zaproszenie na konferencję w 1927 roku wychodząc z założenia, że delegacja brytyjska zdoła w Genewie przeforsować własny plan rozbrojenia opracowany przez Admiralicję. Polegał on na modyfikacji zasad traktatu waszyngtońskiego w taki sposób, aby zapewnić oszczędności finansowe, ale jednocześnie zachować bezpieczeństwo Imperium Brytyjskiego. Głównymi elementami brytyjskiego planu było: wydłużenie okresu pozostawania w służbie pancerników i lotniskowców, redukcja

¹⁷³ In his letter of 17 August 1927 to professor G. Murray, activist of League of Nations Union, Cecil wrote: “any agreement would be have been better than none” (T. Kuramatsu: *Viscount Cecil, Winston Churchill and the Geneva Naval Conference...*, p. 115).

kalibru dział i wyporności pancerników, wprowadzenie traktatowego podziału krążowników na ciężkie i lekkie oraz nałożenie ograniczeń ilościowych tylko na krążowniki ciężkie.

Brytyjski plan spotkał się ze zdecydowaną opozycją delegacji amerykańskiej. Próby opracowania kompromisowego porozumienia w sprawie parytetu pomiędzy flotą brytyjską i amerykańską w klasie krążowników zakończyły się niepowodzeniem, a konferencja zakończyła się fiaskiem. Przesądziły o tym względy strategiczne, polityczne i ekonomiczne. Admiralicja była przeciwna porozumieniu, które narażało na szwank bezpieczeństwo Imperium Brytyjskiego, a większość członków rządu brytyjskiego uważała, że niepowodzenie konferencji będzie mniejszym złem niż kapitulacja przed żądaniami amerykańskimi. Dyplomacja brytyjska dążyła do ustalenia wspólnego stanowiska z delegacją japońską, aby odium za niepowodzenie konferencji skierować na przedstawicieli Waszyngtonu.