

THE ANGLO-FRENCH DECLARATION
OF JANUARY 1896 AND THE
INDEPENDENCE OF SIAM¹

by

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It has become almost a commonplace to include in most accounts of Anglo-French rivalry in Southeast Asia during the last quarter of the nineteenth century some mention of the unique way in which the Kingdom of Siam maintained its independence. The matter is one which has caught the attention of both the imperial or colonial historian and the student of Southeast Asian history. It has, therefore, been inevitable that a variety of reasons have been adduced to explain this singular exception to Western colonial rule depending on the standpoint of the viewer. This paper does not seek to do more than throw some new light on the European and, more especially, British aspects of this question in the hope that several significant factors which enabled Siam to retain her independence might be more convincingly and thoroughly studied. It is based mainly on the contention that at no time in the long history of Siam's relations with the great European Powers was the question of her independence more deeply and deliberately appraised as during the period immediately following the Paknam incident of July 1893. It is important to establish that this exercise in diplomatic imperialism was conducted in London and Paris without any reference to the Siamese Government for it has too often been assumed that the use of Southeast Asian sources, and in the present case, Thai documents, is somehow indispensable to an understanding of the histories of countries in this region during the most acute phase of European imperialism. Both the impressive

1) This is an amended version of a paper that was first presented to the Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, on 30 January 1970. I was then Visiting Lecturer in Southeast Asian History at the Institute and I should like to record here my gratitude to its Associate Director, Ampon Namatra, for the many facilities which he made available to me and for permission to publish this paper.

archives and private papers in England and in France reveal beyond a shadow of a doubt that the question of Siam's independence during that critical interval between 1893 and 1904 cannot be answered on the basis of any other sources. However, there is one other conscious purpose in this paper and that is to indicate how existing Thai sources might be fruitfully used for this period especially because it is difficult to deny that the conclusion of the Anglo-French Declaration of January 1896 must have acted as a powerful impetus to the ruling circles in Bangkok to proceed with great caution in Siam's relations with the great Powers. Moreover, the exceedingly subtle and active role that Siamese diplomatists such as Prince Svasti played in Europe cannot be adequately appreciated on the basis of existing French and British sources and the archives in Bangkok might be illuminating in this respect.

Viewed from the point of view of Siam, the Declaration cast a grave shadow on her territorial integrity because, by implication, it restricted the area over which she could exercise absolute sovereignty. At the same time it ensured that Britain and France would observe a mutually agreed-upon limit on the extent to which they could encroach upon Siamese territory. Furthermore, and perhaps in the long run the more vital outcome of the Declaration was that it guaranteed Siam's sovereignty over this restricted area as Britain and France were pledged not to enter into any agreement with a third Power to intervene within this area. The 1896 Declaration has also to be seen on the larger canvas of European diplomatic relations before the First World War. It acted as a powerful agent to bring Britain and France together at a time when their relations were strained elsewhere in the world and, within the context of their rivalries in Asia, presaged the Entente Cordiale agreements of 1904. As far as Siam was concerned, what the two Powers did in 1904 was nothing more than a reaffirmation of their previous agreement of 1896. Thus, it is not the 1904 Entente Cordiale agreement, as has often been stressed, that secured Siam's future but rather the much-neglected 1896 Declaration. The separate agreements that Siam entered into with France and Britain respectively during the period 1896 to 1909 were direct

by-products of the Declaration. Its enormous value both as a check on Anglo-French rivalry in the heart of Siam as well as a catalyst which freed the colonial governments in Indochina and Malay Peninsula to interfere in the outer regions of the kingdom cannot be exaggerated.

Firstly, it is necessary to show how and where the idea of a joint guarantee of Siam originated and why it was in the end accepted by both Powers. To do this one has to go back as far as 1892 when the French made a desperate last attempt to persuade the British to accept a mutual division of their spheres of influence between Burma and Indochina. The French Government had tried to get such an agreement since 1887 but without any success. They were desperate by 1892 because it was feared in Paris that the British would pursue the territorial claims of their recently-conquered Kingdom of Ava on the left or east bank of the Upper Mekong. Ribot, the French Foreign Minister at that time, and Waddington, the French Ambassador in London, both believed that Lord Salisbury, the British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, was prepared to agree to the French proposal that the Mekong River should be the line of demarcation between the two spheres of influence.² Ribot's Government was no doubt afraid that unless they succeeded in reaching some agreement with Britain the powerful Groupe Coloniale in the French Chamber of Deputies would force them to carry out a more active policy of expansion which might conceivably result in a serious clash between the two Powers. However, Salisbury could not accept the French proposal because the Indian Government objected to it. The Indian Government, supported by the India Office in London, hoped to avoid dealing with the French altogether by handing over the territory which Britain claimed in the Upper Mekong to China and Siam. This

2) See especially memorandum on "Previous attempts on the part of the French Government to obtain some division of the British and French 'Spheres' in Indo-China" by C.S., 29 October 1892, F (oreign). O (ffice). 69 (Siam, Vol.) 147, (Public Record Office, London); D'Estournelles de Constant (French Chargé d'Affaires in London) to Ribot, No. 260, 8 September 1891, No. 6; Waddington to Ribot, No. 53, 16 February 1892, No. 204, D (ocuments) D (iplomatiques) F (rançais) (1871-1914), 1^{re} Serie, Vol.) IX, (Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1938-1957).

would create a belt of territory between British and French possessions from north to south which would be under the control of either China or Siam.³

The Foreign Secretary in the new Liberal Government which came into power in July 1892, Lord Rosebery, was not particularly favourable to France and he, therefore, gave his support to the Indian Government's plan. At that time both China and Siam were regarded as fairly stable Asian Powers and it was felt to be quite safe to leave the territory between British and French possessions in their hands. Unfortunately, before the formal transfer of the territory had been carried out Rosebery rather rashly announced Britain's intentions to France.⁴ There was immediate uproar in Paris and the new French Government, which was heavily dependent on the support of the Groupe Coloniale, declared that Britain had betrayed the French on the Upper Mekong by unilaterally deciding the fate of the territory on the east bank.⁵ The French colonial interest in this somewhat obscure bit of geography was due to the popular belief in France at that time that the Mekong, which was fondly referred to as *Le Fleuve*, would one day serve as a great waterway to the southern Chinese provinces of Yunnan and Szechuan. In the pursuit of this grandiose dream, the French Colonials wanted to control the entire east bank of the Mekong to ensure that they would have the use of the river.⁶ Of course, all this was well known to the British Government as was the secret French desire to grab all the Siamese territory on the east

3) India Office to Foreign Office, 8 June 1892, *F.O. 17 (China Vol.) 1151*, (Public Record Office, London); Foreign Office to India Office, 19 February 1892, and minutes thereon, *Political and Secret History of Correspondence, Vol. 128*, (India Office Library; London).

4) Waddington to Ribot, No. 415, 24 December 1892, No. 72, *DDF/X*.

5) Jules Develle, (French Foreign Minister), to Waddington, No. 23, Confidential, 26 January 1893, No. 140, *DDF/X*.

6) There is an incredible amount of literature on the subject but the following are the more recent academic works: M. Bruguiere, "Le Chemin de Fer du Yunnan: Paul Doumer et la politique d'intervention Francaise en Chine, (1889-1902)", *Revue D'Histoire Diplomatique*, Paris, 1963, in three parts, pp. 23-61; 129-162; 253-278; G. Taboulet, *La Geste Francaise en Indo-Chine*, Paris, 1956, 2 vols.

bank of the Middle Mekong. Sir Thomas Sanderson, an Assistant Under-Secretary at the British Foreign Office, admitted that Lord Salisbury had been willing to accept Ribot's proposal to treat the Mekong as the boundary between the British and French spheres of influence because "it bound them (The French) at all events not to go beyond a certain point". But, according to him, the Indian Government rejected Ribot's proposal "because they thought it implied that she (France) was free to go up to that point".⁷ In other words, Lord Salisbury had thought that it was better for Siam to lose some territory on the east bank in order that she might remain independent but that the Indian Government considered that France had no right to absorb any Siamese territory.

In view of these grave developments, it is not surprising to find that the Siamese Legation in London, through its English Secretary, Frederick Verney, approached Lord Rosebery in November 1892 with a proposal which the Foreign Office described as a request for a British "protectorate of a modified kind" over Siam.⁸ In December the Siamese Legation proposed an Anglo-Siamese Treaty whereby, in return for a Siamese undertaking not to cede any territory to any foreign Power without British approval, Britain should protect Siam against any foreign annexation.⁹ Both these proposals were rejected by the Foreign Office because Rosebery was afraid of the possible French reaction and also because they went counter to traditional British policy in Siam.

Meanwhile, the French began their campaign against Siam, having failed to reach any agreement with Britain. By early 1893 the French Colonial journals such as *Le Matin* and *Figaro* began to publish open attacks on Siam and demanded the annexation of the east bank of the Mekong. The Permanent Under-Secretary at the British Foreign Office, Sir Philip Currie, commented that the French "are working

7) Minute by Sanderson, 18 November 1892, on India Office to Foreign Office, 17 November 1892, *F.O. 17/1152*.

8) Rosebery to Captain Henry M. Jones (British Minister at Bangkok), No. 52, 18 November 1892, *F.O. 17/1152*.

9) Enclosure 5 in Verney to Rosebery, Confidential, 1 December 1892, *F.O. 69/147*.

themselves up into a state of excitement against Siam with a view of plundering her".¹⁰ And Rosebery made it clear to both Waddington and the new French Foreign Minister, Jules Develle, that he would not interfere in any settlement which France might wish to make with the Siamese.¹¹ In demonstrating his cordiality towards them, Rosebery hoped that the French would be satisfied once they had grabbed the entire east bank of the Middle Mekong. Armed with these assurances from London, the French began sending their gunboats up the Mekong and capturing various islands that belonged to Siam in March 1893. As more and more reports of the aggressive French action against Siam reached London it became even more obvious that the British knew what was going to happen and that they had already decided to stay out of the affair. In April 1893, Sanderson wrote privately to Lord Dufferin, the British Ambassador in Paris, that "the quarrel is not one in which Lord Rosebery desires to be mixed up, if we can avoid it".¹² At the same time the British asked the Siamese Government to keep them informed of the demands that France was making and to "be prudent and to do nothing to precipitate a rupture with France".¹³ Finally, the Siamese Legation was told by the British Foreign Office that it was clear that the French were determined "on taking a portion of the left bank of the Mekong" and as "Siam was too weak to stop her" the Siamese Government should give in to the French "and save the rest".¹⁴

By May 1893, however, the British Foreign Office was becoming extremely concerned at the possibility of an open conflict between France and Siam and urged the Siamese to "agree with their enemy quickly".¹⁵ It was feared in London that France might prefer to have a showdown with Siam and that she might make excessive demands. Rosebery suddenly realized that it might not be as simple

10) Minute by Currie on Dufferin to Rosebery, No. 122, 7 March 1893, *F.O. 17/1176*.

11) See footnote 1, p. 262, *DDF/X*.

12) Sanderson to Dufferin, Private, 7 April 1893, *F.O. 17/1177*.

13) Minute by Currie, undated, on Admiralty to Foreign Office, 22 April 1893, *F.O. 17/1177*.

14) Note by Currie, 24 April 1893, *F.O. 17/1177*.

15) Note by Currie, undated but probably 1-5 May 1893 *F.O. 17/1177*.

as he had thought—that the French would merely force the Siamese to give up the east bank of the Middle Mekong and stop there. The Foreign Office also found that there was no reason why the Siamese should make things comfortable for Britain by meekly giving in to the French. Consequently, Rosebery decided to send a couple of British naval vessels to Siamese waters as a precaution and also in order to show the British public that he was not wholly inactive. As is well-known now, on 14 July the French gunboats, *Comète* and *Inconstant*, sailed up the Menam Chao Phya and Siam was presented with a French ultimatum. The next day the Siamese Minister in London asked the British Government about the possibility of naval support against France but Rosebery immediately sent a telegram to the British Minister in Bangkok, Captain Jones, to “dispel any idea that we are contemplating joint action with Siam to defend Bangkok”.¹⁶ Instead of assistance the Siamese Minister received a sharply worded complaint from the Foreign Office that his Government had neglected to follow British advice and was responsible for the whole crisis.¹⁷ On the 17th July Rosebery read a statement in the House of Lords in which he announced that Britain would not involve herself in the Franco-Siamese affair. He did say, however, that the integrity and independence of Siam was “a subject of grave importance to the British and more especially to the British Indian Empire”.¹⁸ A similar statement was read in the House of Commons by Sir Edward Grey, the British Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

On 20th July the French demands were formally presented to the Siamese Government who were given 24 hours to accept this ultimatum failing which the French threatened to blockade the coasts of Siam.¹⁹ News of these demands were too vague for Rosebery to know for certain what exactly the French had in mind and he was once again worried that the Upper Mekong might be affected. His worst fears were confirmed when he heard from the French Chargé

16) Rosebery to Jones, Tel., No. 51, 15 July 1893, *F.O. 17/1179*.

17) Note by Sanderson, 15 July 1893, *F.O. 17/1179*.

18) “Draft of Statement read by Lord Rosebery in the House of Lords and Sir Edward Grey in the House of Commons on 17 July 1893,” *F.O. 17/1179*.

19) Develle to d’Estournelles, Tel., No. 58, 20 July 1893, No. 304, *DDF/X*.

d’Affaires in London, d’Estournelles, that France indeed claimed the east bank of the Mekong right up to the Upper Mekong and that his Government might be willing to consider giving up this claim if Britain did not raise any objection to the annexation of the two provinces of Siamreap and Battambang.²⁰ This was a clever French move which put the British in an exceedingly embarrassing position. Rosebery was torn between the desire to see the French being kept away from the Upper Mekong and the dangerous implications of Siamreap and Battambang falling into French hands. He was not concerned about Siamese territory being annexed so arbitrarily but rather by the proximity of the two provinces to Bangkok. If France ever came so close to the Siamese capital it was feared that the independence of Siam including the great commercial and strategic interests of Britain would be at stake.

At this point it is necessary to go into the details of the famous Anglo-French crisis of 30 July when the two Powers are commonly believed to have reached the brink of war. It is sufficient, however, to say that some valuable information in the private papers of Rosebery and Dufferin seem to indicate quite clearly that the real reason for the crisis of 30 July was the British fear that the French were about to annex Siamreap and Battambang. Rosebery, for one, imagined that the French naval blockade which was announced on that day was meant to serve this purpose. It is mainly to Dufferin’s credit that the two provinces were saved from the clutches of France. Only the threat of war, which Rosebery and Dufferin did not hesitate to use, kept the French from grabbing this vital territory, which, as a matter of interest, the French themselves had accepted as part of Siam in the Franco-Siamese Treaty of 1867. Writing privately to Dufferin on 1 August, Rosebery stated that the French “had certainly gorged the two provinces already” and congratulated Dufferin for “disgorging” them.²¹ It has often been suggested in books on European diplomatic history in the late nineteenth century that it was the French blockade

20) d’Estournelles to Develle, Tel., No. 78, Very Confidential, 25 July 1893, No. 312, DDF/X.

21) Rosebery to Dufferin, Confidential, 1 August 1893, *D (ufferin) P (apers)*, D1071H/02/2, (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.)

that led to the threat of war between Britain and France. As we have seen Rosebery was not all that panic-stricken and his action was taken because he knew precisely what the French were about to do and was able to stop them in time.

The immediate result of this unpleasant experience of French methods of diplomacy caused Rosebery to review his Siam policy in late 1893. For example, he told the Prime Minister, Gladstone, that British interests in Siam were two-fold: to prevent Siam from falling into the hands of France because it would "place another great military Power on our Eastern frontier"; secondly, "as we possess practically a monopoly of Siamese commerce we do not wish to see our trade destroyed by the tariff wall which the French erect around their possessions".²² He felt that one solution would be to get a joint guarantee of Siam by France, China and possibly Germany, although he realized that there would be many difficulties in the way of such an agreement.²³ In fact, in October 1893, Dufferin was instructed to hint the possibility of such a guarantee by Britain, France and China²⁴ and the British pressed it strongly upon the French Government when it was learnt that Prince Svasti had arrived in Paris for some unknown purpose.²⁵ Rosebery could not pursue the matter any further mainly because the Chinese did not even have diplomatic relations with Siam.²⁶

After the British discovered the exact terms of the French demands upon Siam Rosebery insisted that there should be a "Buffer State" between the British and French possessions on the Upper Mekong much to the dislike of the French Government and the French Colonials. Consequently, when the French Government asked for various modifications of the Buffer State proposal Dufferin suggested to Develle that Britain would agree to these if, in exchange, the French Government agreed to a mutual guarantee of Siam.²⁷

22) Rosebery (who was holidaying in Hamburg) to Gladstone, 26 August 1893, *Gladstone Papers*, Add. MSS. 44290, (British Museum, London).

23) Rosebery to Dufferin, Confidential, 1 August 1893 *DP* D1071H/02/2.

24) Rosebery to Dufferin, Private, Tel., 6 October 1893 *DP*, D1071H/02/2.

25) Rosebery to Dufferin, Private, 16 October 1893 *DP*, D1071H/02/2.

26) Rosebery to Nicholas O'Connor (British Minister at Peking), Tel., No. 51, 17 October 1893, *F.O. 17/1186*.

27) Rosebery to Dufferin, Private, Tel. 6 October 1893, *DP* D1071H/02/2.

But although the French Government was initially willing to enter into such a bargain they changed their mind later and preferred to settle the dispute over the Buffer State rather than restrict themselves from further expansion in Siam. Anglo-French negotiations for the establishment of the Buffer State on the Upper Mekong dragged on from mid-1893 for almost two years when they were finally abandoned. Until the middle of 1894, however, we find Rosebery still hoping for a miracle which might result in the fulfilment of the British dream of avoiding direct contact between the British and French frontiers on the Upper Mekong. But by April 1894 even Rosebery began to doubt the French promises because of the emergence of Gabrielle Hanotaux as French Foreign Minister. Hanotaux had a bad reputation among British statesmen of the time because he was regarded as a dangerous colonialist. Dufferin described him as "very quick and intelligent, utterly unscrupulous, as indifferent to truth as are all Frenchmen and very tricky".²⁸

Consequently, British policy became much more subtle and Machiavellian. For example, Rosebery calmly told the French Government that, according to his understanding of Ribot's original proposal to make the Mekong the dividing line between the British and French spheres of influence, Britain was to regard the whole of Siam on the west or right bank as falling within her sphere. However, he went on, Britain would be prepared to give up this claim if the French were to agree "to Siam being neutralised in order to preserve a buffer all along our boundaries".²⁹ The French Government's reaction to this outrageous proposal was to create even more difficulties in the creation of the Buffer State. At this crucial juncture, there was a reshuffle in the Liberal Cabinet in England following Gladstone's resignation as Prime Minister and Lord Kimberley, who was then 68 years old, became the new Foreign Secretary. Kimberley has been dismissed by most historians as only a stop-gap Foreign Secretary, but in the question of British policy towards Siam he was vital. One of

28) Dufferin to Lord Salisbury (Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, 1895-1900, Prime Minister, 1900-1902), Private, 9 July 1895, *S (alisbury P (apers)*, Vol. 114, (Christ Church, Oxford).

29) Rosebery to Dufferin, Private, 15 January 1894, *DP*, D1071H/02/2.

his first tasks after taking over at the Foreign Office was to furnish an explanation of Rosebery's recent claim that the whole of Siam came within the British sphere of influence. The Siamese Legation in London immediately asked what this strange claim meant and Rosebery had to admit privately that his statement "was aimed at France, of course, and not at Siam".³⁰

Before long Kimberley had to deal with the inexperienced Acting British Chargé d'Affaires at Bangkok, J.G. Scott, who had become very worried by the constant inquiries of the Siamese Government as to what Britain was planning to do. He never missed an opportunity to urge the Foreign Office to establish a British protectorate over Siam as the best solution.³¹ The officials in London lost their patience with these wild suggestions and formally warned him in May 1894 that he could not "dispel too strongly the idea that there can be an arrangement between France and Britain with regard to Siam".³² He was also informed that, although Britain hoped that China and France would join her in a mutual guarantee of Siam's independence, there could be no question of a British protectorate over Siam or an Anglo-Siamese defensive treaty.³³

It seems quite possible that there were serious doubts among the senior Siamese officials at Bangkok over the British attempts to reach a settlement with France. They were also naturally very anxious to know what was likely to happen to Siam if the two Powers reached such a settlement. When they received no information in London they tried Paris but it is not known from the sources what or how much they learnt at the Quai d'Orsay. In any case, they used every opportunity that came their way to extract some statement of British and French intentions. But despite the efforts of Prince Svasti and the Siamese Legation in London both Rosebery and Kimberley maintained a strict silence. As will be seen these tactics were much more successful in Bangkok. In June 1894 Scott sent back some

30) Minute by Rosebery, undated, on Note by Sanderson, 28 March 1894, *F.O. 17/1221*.

31) Scott to Rosebery, Tel., No. 17, 2 March 1894, *F.O. 17/1220*; Scott to Kimberley, No. 9, Confidential, 3 April 1894, *F.O. 17/1221*.

32) Kimberley to Scott, Tel., No. 17, Secret, 20 May 1894, *F.O. 17/1221*.

33) Kimberley to Scott, Tel., No. 16, Secret, 18 May 1894, *F.O. 17/1221*.

disturbing reports of the King's failing health and of squabbles among the Princes as to what Siam's future was. Although these reports were true there are good reasons for believing that the Foreign Office suspected that the gullible Scott was fed all these stories by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bangkok in order to frighten the British Government. But even the Foreign Office's unperturbed calmness collapsed on 4 July 1894 when Scott sent a telegram reporting "persistent rumours that Prince Svasti is treating for a French protectorate over Siam, Bangkok to be a free port".³⁴ Kimberley and Sanderson were quite alarmed by this news and immediately warned the French Government that Britain would never tolerate such an arrangement.³⁵ Kimberley also decided that Scott should be replaced by a more qualified member of the British diplomatic service and appointed Maurice de Bunsen as the new British Minister at Bangkok. Besides Scott's sensational telegram, the Foreign Office had also received private information from the recently dismissed Tutor to the Crown Prince in Bangkok, Robert Morant, about the supposedly dangerous state the Siamese Government was in and that the French would be invited "to walk in" soon.³⁶ Sanderson felt that both Scott and Morant wanted Britain "to conclude an intimate alliance with the Siamese and reform them as we have reformed Egypt". He advised Kimberley that as long as Britain was able to obtain a joint Anglo-French guarantee of Siam, an agreement to prevent British commerce from being strangled in Siam and a firm control of the Isthmus of Kra region in the south, "we might contemplate without uneasiness French attempts to reform it (Siam) — if we do not care to take it in hand ourselves".³⁷

However, the events of July 1894 had given Kimberley such a fright that he decided on a fundamental re-examination of British policy and on 23 August he consulted Rosebery on three alternatives. Firstly, Britain could abandon Siam in which case France would "in

34) Scott to Kimberley, Tel., No. 48, 4 July 1894, *F.O. 17/1222*.

35) Kimberley to Dufferin, Tel., No. 50, 11 July 1894, *F.O. 17/1222*.

36) Memorandum on "The present political situation in Siam and the misleading nature of the current reports thereon and the grave condition of her internal affairs" by R.L. Morant, July 1894, *F.O. 17/1223*.

37) Minute by Sanderson, 17 August 1894, on *Ibid*.

all probability get possession of the whole country" while Britain would take over the whole of the Malay peninsula which could not be allowed to fall into French hands. Secondly, Britain could guarantee the integrity and independence of Siam either with China and France or, preferably, with France alone. And thirdly, Britain might establish a protectorate over Siam and improve its administration although it would require a considerable military force. He preferred a joint guarantee but doubted if the French would ever agree to it.³⁸ Rosebery replied that Britain might be able to force the French into a joint guarantee by assuming a more active policy of depending British commercial and strategic interests in Siam.³⁹ Dufferin was, therefore, instructed to warn Hanotaux that Britain meant to protect her interests in Siam whatever the French might think to the contrary. Similar instructions were also sent to Maurice de Bunsen when he arrived in Bangkok in October 1894. These stated that (1) Britain could not allow any foreign Power to interfere in the Siamese possessions in the Malay Peninsula, (2) Britain wished to preserve Siam as an independent Kingdom because she did not want a common frontier with the French colonial possessions, (3) Britain did not want to see her commercial interests in Siam being lost to another Power. (4) De Bunsen should prevent any French attempt to build a canal across the Kra Isthmus, (2) although a joint guarantee was indefinitely delayed Siam should not be allowed to surrender to France, (6) De Bunsen should inform the Siamese Government that, while Britain herself did not want to establish a protectorate over Siam, they should recognize Britain's claim to advise them on their foreign policy and that failure to accept such advice would only "result at no distant date in the more or less complete extinction of Siamese national existence".⁴⁰ These statements of policy seem to show quite clearly that Britain had decided to adopt a tough attitude in her relations with both Siam and France by the end of 1894.

38) Copy of Kimberly's minute of 23 August 1894, Foreign Affairs (1894-95) Box, R[osebury] P[apers], [National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh].

39) Rosebery to Kimberley, Private, 24 August 1894, RP, Letter Book, 1894-95.

40) Kimberley to De Bunsen, No. 65, Most Confidential, 27 October 1894, F.O. 17/1225.

Meanwhile, Britain continued to be unaccommodating to various Siamese requests for diplomatic assistance against the French in several disputes at that time. Prince Svasti was told that Siam's independence did not seem to be in danger and that Siam should not waste her resources in building up her armed forces as she could never hope to resist the French.⁴¹ Despite these rebuffs, Verney came to see Sanderson at the Foreign Office on 5 December 1894 and stated that the Siamese Government intended to request both the British and French Governments "to take Siam under their tutelage and guidance".⁴² The British reply was, of course, negative and Verney was warned that the Siamese Government should never make such requests to France without giving Britain prior notice. Nevertheless, the troubles between France and Siam made Kimberley more and more doubtful that the Buffer State would ever materialise on the Upper Mekong. Moreover he was very worried about what the Siamese would do if the French went on causing trouble and also by the persistent suggestions from the Siamese Legation that while Siam would object to being controlled in the same way as Britain controlled Egypt she would not mind being turned into a Belgium.⁴³ Thus, both the increasing reluctance of Hanotaux to fulfill the Buffer State agreement and the thinly disguised threats of the Siamese Government made Kimberley decide on a deliberate and well-planned strategy.

On 21 March 1895 the Indian Government was forced by Kimberley to send 130 Gurkha troops across the Upper Mekong to occupy the capital of Keng Cheng, Mong Sing, on the left bank of the Mekong.⁴⁴ This secret military advance was formally announced to the French Ambassador in London, De Courcel, on 10 May.⁴⁵ Thus,

41) "Interview between H.R.H. Prince Svasti and the Earl of Kimberley at Lord Kimberley's private house in London, 2 November 1894", *F.O. 17/1226*; Kimberley to Rosebery, Private, 3 November 1894 Kimberley Box, *RP*.

42) Note by Sanderson, 5 December 1894, *F.O. 17/1226*.

43) Note by Francis Bertie (Assistant Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office), 19 December 1894, *F.O. 17/1226*.

44) Lord Elgin (Viceroy of India) to H.H. Fowler (Secretary of State for India), Tel., Secret 21 March 1895, *PSHC/156*.

45) De Courcel (French Ambassador in London) to Hanotaux, Tel., No. 73, 11 May 1895, Ang [*lettre: Correspondance*] Pol [*itique Volume*] 904, [*Service des Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Quai d'Orsay, Paris*].

the veteran Kimberley at last succeeded in outsmarting the French who had been taking advantage of the protracted negotiations for the Buffer State in Paris to improve their own position on the Upper Mekong and in Siam. Kimberley's next step was to inform the helpless and furious Hanotaux that he would like to have a frank exchange of views on the future of Siam.⁴⁶ Kimberley also sought the approval of the British Cabinet for his proposed bargain with the French; that is, the British price for a military withdrawal from Mong Sing would be a joint Anglo-French guarantee of Siam's independence. Although the Cabinet was made aware of the great advantage in a joint guarantee for Britain,⁴⁷ it would cause some inconvenience "inasmuch as the guarantee will include the Siamese States in the Malay Peninsula, which some day, we may want to take".⁴⁸ This statement definitely shows that Kimberley and the Liberal Cabinet did not intend to cast any doubts on the entire extent of the Siamese Kingdom as it existed in 1895 and that they did not envisage a limited guarantee as was eventually agreed upon between Britain and France. The responsibility for that part of the story, on the British side, lies with Lord Salisbury whose Party came into office after the defeat of the Liberal Government on 22 June—before Kimberley could commence formal negotiations with France.

When Lord Salisbury took over the Foreign Office he asked his Parliamentary Under-Secretary, George Curzon, the young, ambitious and well-travelled politician who had visited Siam in 1892, to recommend a policy towards Siam. Sanderson, whom Curzon consulted, advised him to press for a joint guarantee and stated that the only disadvantage for Britain in such an arrangement was that she would be "debarred from any further extension in the Malay Peninsula".⁴⁹ But before Curzon could draw up his proposals for Salisbury De Courcel called on the Foreign Secretary on 14 August and Siam was

46) De Courcel to Hanotaux, Tel., No. 75, 21 May 1895, No. 20, *DDF*XII.

47) "Memorandum upon Baron de Courcel's conversation of May 25, 1895" by Kimberley, Confidential, Printed for the use of the Cabinet, 28 May 1895, *F.O.* 17/1267.

48) Kimberley to Rosebery, Private, 12 June 1895, Kimberley Box, *KP*

49) Sanderson to Curzon, Private, 6 July 1894 *C[urzon] P[apers]*, MSS. Eur. F. 111/87, [India Office Library, London]

discussed. Salisbury formally proposed a joint guarantee of Siam and the conversation ended there because De Courcel replied that he would have to consult his Government first.⁵⁰ Fortunately for both France and Siam, Salisbury more or less committed himself to the joint guarantee in this interview because Curzon later advocated an extremist policy against the French position in eastern Siam and the Siamese position in the Malay Peninsula.⁵¹ Curzon received strong support for the annexation of large parts of southern Siam from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, one of the foremost imperialists of the time.⁵² Hanotaux too was asking threatening questions such as "Quelles sont les limites du Siam?" and saying privately to De Courcel that Bangkok will eventually fall into French hands.⁵³ At the same time the combined efforts of the Siamese Minister in London, Prince Svasti and Rolin-Jacquemyns, the Belgian General Adviser to the Siamese Government who was visiting Europe then, were exerted to obtain a favourable outcome for Siam in the Anglo-French negotiations.⁵⁴

These developments were largely responsible for Salisbury's somewhat rash proposal to de Courcel on 18 October that Britain and France should jointly agree not to penetrate into the valley of the Menam Chao Phya.⁵⁵ Salisbury later admitted that such a limited

50) De Courcel to Hanotaux, Tel., No. 110, 14 August 1895, *ANG/POL/906*; De Courcel to Hanotaux, No. 162, 14 August 1895, No. 128, *DDF/XII*; Salisbury to Howard (Charge d'Affaires at the Paris Embassy), No. 409, 13 August 1895, *F.O. 146/3419*

51) Memorandum on "Siam, France and China" by G.N. Curzon, 13 August 1895, Confidential, Printed for the use of the Foreign Office, *CP*, MSS. Eur. F. 111/87.

52) Chamberlain to Salisbury, Private, 4 September 1895, *SP*, Special Correspondence: Chamberlain,

53) Hanotaux to De Courcel, particuliere et confidentiel, 27 September 1895, No. 157, *DDF/XII*.

54) Memorandum of an interview between the Marquis of Salisbury and the Marquis Maha Yotha, 19 July 1895, No. 9, *F[oreign] O[ffice] C[onfidential] P[rint] - Further Correspondence respecting the Affairs of Siam*, Part VII, [July - December 1895, University of Malaya Library, Kuala Lumpur;] Salisbury to De Bunsen, 9 August 1895, No. 26; 12 August 1895, No. 27, *FOCP/VII*

55) De Courcel to Hanotaux, Tel., No. 123, 18 October 1895, *ANG/POL/908*; No. 223, Confidential, 18 October 1895, No. 177, *DDF/XII*; Salisbury to Dufferin, 18 October 1895, No. 85 *FOCP/VII*.

guarantee "might give the Siamese the impression that all that it did not include was abandoned to the French",⁵⁶ On the other hand he pointed out that it would also leave Britain free to deal later with those parts of Siam in which British interests were involved as in the Malay Peninsula. These facts were equally appreciated by Hanotaux who was delighted to find that the valley of the Chao Phya would not include Siamreap and Battambang and various other places in which the French were actively interested.⁵⁷ There is some evidence that Salisbury had second thoughts about his proposal for when the Foreign Office prepared a draft agreement it referred specifically to Siam's rights in the area outside the valley of the Chao Phya.⁵⁸ But it was already too late as the French absolutely refused to consider any change in Salisbury's original proposal and by November 1895 when Hanotaux had been replaced by Berthelot as Foreign Minister, the British Government was more eager than ever to settle the negotiations. That, briefly, is how the Declaration came to be signed between Britain and France.

Realizing that he had failed to obtain a full guarantee of Siam as it was then constituted, Salisbury attached to the English version of the Declaration a copy of a despatch to Dufferin. In it he took special pains to emphasise that although "it might be thought that we are throwing doubt upon the complete title and rights of the Siamese to the remainder of their Kingdom we fully recognize the rights of Siam to the full and undisturbed enjoyment, in accordance with long usage, or with existing Treaties, of the entire territory comprised within her dominions".⁵⁹ There is no doubt that this was done mainly for public consumption for Salisbury and De Courcel privately agreed that the two Powers had entered into a moral obliga-

56) Memorandum on "Siam Negotiations" by Salisbury, undated but probably 18 October 1895. *CP*, MSS. Eur. F. 111/87.

57) Hanotaux to De Courcel, No. 461, 21 October 1895, No. 178, *DDF/XII*.

58) Draft letter to Baron de Courcel, October 1895, Printed on 31 October 1895, Enclosure in Sanderson to William Lee-Warner (Secretary-designate of the Political and Secret Department at the India Office), 31 October 1895, *PSHC/163*.

59) Salisbury to Dufferin, 15 January 1896, *Sessional Papers, 1896 France*, Despatches, p.1.

tion not to encourage the enterprises of their subjects in those parts of Siam which were adjacent to the possessions of the other Power.⁶⁰ The Siamese Legation in London also discovered the real meaning of the Declaration of putting Salisbury's assurances to the test. Early in February they advertised in the English newspapers for Englishmen to work as Siamese Commissioners in various parts of eastern Siam near the French possessions.⁶¹ The Foreign Office immediately warned the Siamese Government that Britain would not allow its subjects to work in those parts of Siam and one British official asked, "What should we say to a French Commissioner in the Siamese Malay States?"⁶² So much for Salisbury's assurances that the Declaration did not cast any doubts on the integrity of Siamese territory outside the valley of the Chao Phya. Several years later Bertie was to say that the Declaration merely meant that Britain and France would not enter into an agreement with a third Power to intervene militarily or otherwise in the valley of the Chao Phya and that it made no provisions for the two Powers to jointly protect Siam within that area.⁶³ In the final analysis it is difficult to dismiss altogether the verdict of Rosebery who, having read the Siamese view of the Declaration in the London *Times*, "was unable to make head or tail of it" and concluded that "neither seems left to Siam".⁶⁴

Less than ten days after the signature of the Declaration, Salisbury opened negotiations with the Siamese Government through De Bunsen to secure British interests in the Malay Peninsula south of Muong Bang Tapan, the western limit of the neutralized zone. The negotiations resulted in the Anglo-Siamese Secret Convention of

60) De Courcel to Berthelot, Tel., No. 22, 22 bis, 22 ter, 15 January 1896, No. 273, *DDF/XII*.

61) Verney to Bertie, Private, 7 February 1896, with enclosure; 14 February 1896, *F.O. 69/171*.

62) De Bunsen to Curzon, Private, 1 May 1896, *CP*, MSS. Eur. F. 111/81; Memorandum by Bertie, 7 February 1896, *F.O. 69/169*.

63) Minute by Bertie on W. Archer (Charge d'Affaires at Bangkok) to Lord Lansdowne (Foreign Secretary), No. 179, Secret, 29 September 1902 (Received 3 November), *F.O. 69/281*.

64) Rosebery to Verney, Private, 31 January 1896, *Copy, RP.*, Letter Book (1895-).

April 1897 whereby, in return for a Siamese undertaking not to grant any concession or cede any part of the Malay Peninsula without prior British approval, Britain pledged itself to come to the defence of Siamese rights in that region if they were threatened by any third Power.⁶⁵ The Colonial Office under Joseph Chamberlain found an excellent opportunity to obtain a hearing for the old anti-Siamese views of the local Government in Singapore during these negotiations and succeeded, for example, in eliminating any reference to Siam's suzerainty in the Malay States leaving only a bare mention of the King of Siam's "rights" in the final document. Salisbury was by no means inclined to adopt an overtly aggressive attitude towards the Siamese during the negotiations as his intention was mainly to obtain some agreement which would give a measure of security for British strategic interests in the Malay Peninsula. Moreover, he was rather concerned that if Britain appeared to be too coercive it would merely serve as a convenient excuse for the French to resume their pressure against Siam on the eastern frontier. But partly due to the delaying tactics of the Siamese Government which severely tried the Foreign Office's patience and also because of the decision to make the agreement a secret one, Britain was finally able to take advantage of King Chulalongkorn's much publicised European tour to bring about a speedy signature of the Convention just before the King left Bangkok.⁶⁶

The Secret Convention, however, created more problems than it was designed to solve and in the years that followed British concession hunters, the colonial authorities in Singapore, the Colonial Office, the Malay rulers, and the Siamese themselves all had a variety of grievances against it. Consequently, when the French began negotiations with Siam in 1902 and the Foreign Office became alarmed

65) On this see Thamsook Numnonda, "The Anglo-Siamese Secret Convention of 1897", *Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. LIII, Part I, January 1965, pp. 45-61.

66) I am indebted to Professor W. Vella for this information which he found in the Thai National Archives in connection with a proposed visit of King Rama VI soon after the First World War when it was noted at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the last time King Chulalongkorn had embarked on such a visit Siam had been made to sign the Secret Convention by Britain.

at the prospect of a Siamese appeal for an international guarantee of the entire Kingdom by Britain, France, Germany and Russia, which the latter two Powers were suspected of being keenly interested in, the new Foreign Secretary, Lord Lansdowne, took steps to strengthen Britain's position in the Malay Peninsula. Once again, just as the Foreign Office and Lansdowne were on the verge of considering strenuous action to intimidate the Siamese into concluding separate agreements with the rulers of Kelantan and Trengganu for the appointment of British advisers in their states, the prospect of an Anglo-French understanding along the lines of the 1896 Declaration was immediately welcomed as a much better alternative to dealing directly with the Siamese. This, of course, was the beginning of the negotiations between Lansdowne and Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador in London, which led ultimately in April 1904 to the Entente Cordiale agreements. It is often forgotten that the timing of these negotiations and the separate discussions that both Powers held with the Siamese was deliberate and not accidental.

At that time there was much discussion of the terms of the 1896 Declaration at the Foreign Office and Lansdowne himself admitted that "the arrangement under which we guaranteed the Menam [Chao Phya] Valley, but not the rest of Siam, is unpleasantly suggestive of the idea that the outskirts are open to foreign encroachments."⁶⁷ As in 1896-1897 the British were particularly anxious that some rival Power, such as Germany, would take advantage of the absence of any specific Anglo-French guarantee of the Siamese possessions in the Malay Peninsula and encroach upon that area in order to embarrass Britain.⁶⁸ For Siam, too, 1902 was the real turning point in her relations with the two great Powers for it was to be her last opportunity to negate the dangerous implications of the 1896 Declaration by negotiating separate agreements with Britain and France for a reassertion of her influence in the region outside the

67) Lansdowne to Lord Curzon (Viceroy of India), 10 April 1902, *Copy, Lansdowne Papers*, F.O. 800, [Vol.] 145 [Public Record Office, London].

68) See Sir Arthur Godley (Permanent Under-Secretary at the India Office) to Lord Elgin (Viceroy of India), Private, 21 May 1897, *Elgin Papers*, MSS. Eur. F. 84/136, India Office Library, London: Memorandum by Bertie, 9 November 1901, *Lansdowne Papers*, F.O. 800/115.

valley of the Menam Chao Phya. However, the territorial concessions which she made to France in 1903, despite the fact that she received other territorial compensation from France in return, pointed ominously to the extension of British and French political control into these outlying regions in the not too distant future. But the British did recognize that there was some chance of Siam trying to obtain an enlarged guarantee of her territorial integrity with the help of possibly Germany and Russia.⁶⁹ The idea of such an international guarantee was actually bandied about by Rivett-Carnac, the Financial Adviser to the Siamese Government, since February 1900 and by 1902 his public campaign was so serious that Lansdowne asked Curzon to "put a little water into his wine" as it did not seem to the Foreign Office "that his position as financial adviser justified him in writing official essays as to the international relations of Siam".⁷⁰

Finally, two further references during the initial phase of the Anglo-French negotiations which were to lead to the Entente Cordiale agreements of 1904 will suffice to show what the 1896 Declaration really meant for Siam. On 6 August 1902, Paul Cambon made overtures to Lansdowne for an understanding between the two Powers and, among other things, stated "that the effect of the Treaty [sic] of 1896 had been to assign to France and Great Britain respectively spheres of influence in those parts of Siam which were not included within the region guaranteed . . . and he suggested that each Power might well recognize the privileged position of the other within the zone of territory which adjoined its own possessions."⁷¹ At a more advanced stage of the Lansdowne-Cambon conversations, the Viceroy of India, Curzon, who had not been kept informed about the bargain that was being contemplated in Siam, objected strenuously to France being allowed a privileged position in eastern Siam.⁷² Lansdowne's

69) Memorandum by Bertie, 3 August 1902, *F.O. 69/287*.

70) Lansdowne to Curzon, Private, 10 April 1902, *Copy, Lansdowne Papers*, F.O. 800/145. Rivett-Carnac was an Indian Government official loaned to the Siamese Government.

71) Memorandum by Lansdowne, 21 October 1902, *F.O. 69/289*; Cambon to Lansdowne, Private 29 July 1902, *Lansdowne Papers*, F.O. 800/126.

72) Curzon to Lord George Hamilton (Secretary of State for India), Tel., Private, 27 September 1903, *Hamilton Papers*, MSS. Eur. F. 123/67, India Office Library, London.

comment on that occasion is illuminating: "Lord Salisbury's declaration [the 1896 Declaration] . . . is constantly quoted as a charter of Siamese independence outside the Menam [Chao Phya] valley. I have however never been able to see any answer to the argument that when we jointly guaranteed the Menam [Chao Phya] valley, but did not guarantee the rest of Siam, we admitted by implication that foreign influence would make itself felt in the outskirts of the Kingdom".⁷³ Thus, the tacit understanding that the French had prevailed upon a reluctant Salisbury to accept in 1896 was finally received with some relief by a Lansdowne who was tired of dealing directly with Siam and extremely worried of the intentions of Germany and Russia. No doubt, the 1904 Anglo-French agreements did state specifically that neither Power wished to annex any Siamese territory and it is equally true that the French only received additional territory in 1907 through a proper negotiation with Siam. But the British documents do not speak of a territorial advance into the Siamese Malay States at any stage after the Entente Cordiale agreements and it is clearly shown that it was on the offer of the American Strobel, General Adviser to the Siamese Government, of the Malay territories in the south that the Anglo-Siamese negotiations of 1907-1909 began. Perhaps Siamese sources might fill the other side of this general picture although there is some hope of further information on this final episode in some hitherto unused British private papers.

73) Memorandum by Lansdowne, 30 September 1903, *F.O. 69/251*.