

# Harrison and Blaine: Foreign Policy, 1889-1893

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Writing in 1936, more than forty years after Benjamin Harrison stepped down as President, Julius W. Pratt said, "Whoever was chiefly responsible, the Harrison administration adopted an expansionist policy which, though barren of results, foreshadowed in its purposes the 'large policy' of 1898."<sup>1</sup> This may have been the first hint for historians who followed to look beyond Secretary of State James G. Blaine when considering the foreign policy of Harrison's one term in the White House.

Such has been Harrison's fate, however, that only in the 1960s have historians started to consider seriously his role in foreign policy. Walter LaFeber has said, "Many of the administration's ambitious, expansive policies which have been ascribed to Blaine should in fact be more rightly credited to the President. Harrison has never received proper recognition as a creator of the new empire." John A. S. Grenville and George Berkeley Young have credited Harrison with being "the first President since the Civil War who fully recognized the need to coordinate the strategic, diplomatic, and economic factors of policy."<sup>2</sup> Yet the only book length treatment of the foreign policy of the Harrison administration was written in 1927 and its title, *The Foreign Policy of James G. Blaine*, speaks for what it credits to Harrison.<sup>3</sup> A complete reevaluation of Harrison's role in foreign policy is long overdue, and the first aspect to consider is why it has taken some seventy-five years to bring Harrison out of the shadow of Blaine.

Harrison entered the presidency with a severe handicap: his previous career could not begin to compare with Blaine's. The latter had been speaker of the House of Representatives from 1869 to 1875, then minority leader, but failed in his first bid for the Republican presidential nomination in 1876. He moved up to the Senate in 1876 and in 1880 engaged in the historic deadlock with Ulysses S. Grant for the party's nomination, then *switched his support to James A. Garfield. In return, Garfield selected him for secretary of state.* Blaine made a reputation for his bold foreign policy in less than one year, before he had to retire following Garfield's assassination.

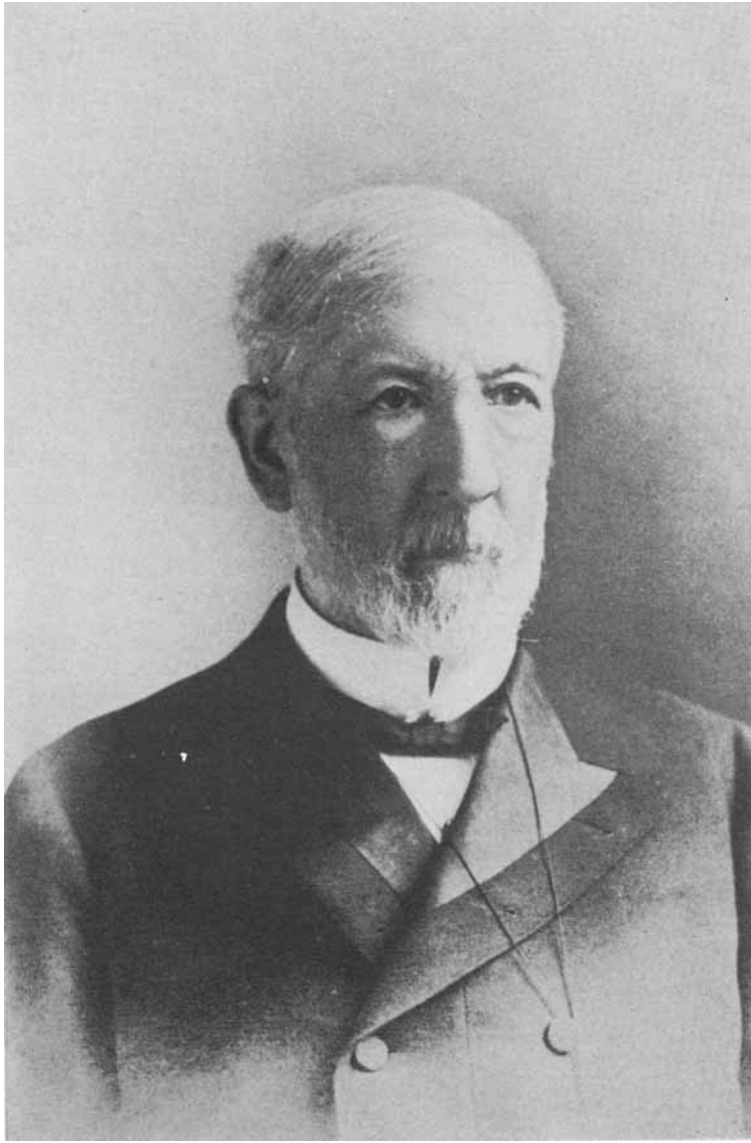
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<sup>1</sup> Julius W. Pratt, *Expansionists of 1898* (Baltimore, 1936), 25-26.

<sup>2</sup> Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca, 1963), 104; John A. S. Grenville and George Berkeley Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873-1917* (New Haven, 1966), 87.

<sup>3</sup> Alice F. Tyler, *The Foreign Policy of James G. Blaine* (Minneapolis, 1927). See also Albert T. Volwiler, "Harrison, Blaine and American Foreign Policy, 1889-93," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, LXXIX (November, 1938), 637-48. Volwiler does not attempt to establish who directed foreign policy during the Harrison administration. He is concerned with demonstrating that the "Empire Days" had their beginnings between 1889 and 1893.



BLAINE'S LAST PHOTOGRAPH, 1892.

Reproduced from David Saville Muzzey, *James G. Blaine: A Political Idol of Other Days* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1935.)

He held no office when he finally won the nomination for President at the 1884 convention, but he lost an extremely close election to Grover Cleveland and returned to private life.<sup>4</sup>

Harrison, in contrast, held no important office until elected to the Senate in 1881, then served only one term, and was defeated for reelection in 1887. He had supported Blaine at both the 1880 and 1884 conventions.<sup>5</sup> At the 1888 convention, however, Harrison emerged as one of the leading contenders for the presidential nomination. Blaine had meanwhile departed for Europe in June, 1887, and did not return until August, 1888.<sup>6</sup> He refused to try for the nomination again and made that decision final in a letter to Whitelaw Reid, owner of the New York *Tribune*, in May, 1888. As Andrew Carnegie reported to Reid from Europe, Blaine favored a Harrison-William Walter Phelps ticket.<sup>7</sup>

Harrison thus found himself already in debt to the influential Blaine. The extremely sarcastic John Hay described how that debt increased during the campaign: "What a magnificent welcome he [Blaine] is to have in New York and everywhere else where the people can get a shot at him. All this vast flood of affection and enthusiasm is to turn the little mill of Brevet Brigadier General Harrison of Indiana. Well, anything to clean out the White House."<sup>8</sup> Harrison had the courage to honor the debt by naming Blaine his secretary of state. Why did it take courage? According to Reid, Harry S. New of the Indianapolis *Star-Journal* predicted Blaine would not be in the cabinet because

"Mr. Blaine stands as the foremost Republican in the United States . . . . It has been asserted persistently that he is the power behind the throne . . . . If Mr. Blaine should be called into the Cabinet it would be regarded by the public as confirmation of these often reiterated but false assertions . . . . There is no doubt that fully 90 per cent of the Republicans of the United States are for Blaine above any man."<sup>9</sup>

Hay spoke for those who looked forward eagerly to having Blaine run foreign policy—and the administration—when he wrote to Reid: "Of course the

<sup>4</sup> David S. Muzzey, *James G. Blaine: A Political Idol of Other Days* (New York, 1934), 62, 112, 115, 171-72, 174, 178, 198-99, 204, 217, 285-86, 322-24. See also Tyler, *Foreign Policy of James G. Blaine*, on Blaine's record in foreign policy in 1881.

<sup>5</sup> Harry J. Sievers, *Benjamin Harrison, Hoosier Statesman: From the Civil War to the White House, 1865-1888* (3 vols., New York, 1952, 1959, 1969), II, 171, 189, 253, 305-306.

<sup>6</sup> Muzzey, *James G. Blaine*, 354, 359.

<sup>7</sup> James G. Blaine to Whitelaw Reid, May 17, 1888; Andrew Carnegie to Reid, June 25, 1888, Whitelaw Reid Papers (Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington). Reid became Harrison's minister to France and ran for vice president in 1892. Carnegie was selected by Harrison to attend the Pan American Conference in Washington in 1889. Phelps, who did not receive the nomination for vice president, had served four terms in the House of Representatives and briefly as minister to Austria-Hungary. He became Harrison's minister to Germany.

<sup>8</sup> John Hay to Reid, August 3, 1888, *ibid.* Hay devoted most of his time in this period to his ten volume biography of Abraham Lincoln.

<sup>9</sup> Reid to "The Blaines," n.d., *ibid.*

great news is old news to you . . . . Blaine is in fine spirits and he and Walter Phelps are scouring the town for a home big and dignified enough for a Prime Minister."<sup>10</sup>

But Harrison had established his relationship with Blaine while still President-elect. Blaine had indicated within weeks of the election that he wanted to be secretary of state. He asked Reid for support: "It has occurred to me that no little mischief was possibly done by [Stephen] Elkins assuming to tell Harrison . . . after his nomination that in no event would I enter the cabinet . . . . I have thought therefore that a line from you simply stating that you knew I would accept the appointment if tendered might be wise."<sup>11</sup> Harrison, however, would not be rushed, and real pressure was brought to bear by Blaine's supporters. Phelps told Blaine in December that the executive committee of the party had unanimously endorsed him for secretary of state and "intimated they would take any practical step to make their opinion operative on Harrison."<sup>12</sup>

Blaine then attempted to force Harrison's hand when he told Reid: "This article was suggested by me and drafted by Walker [Blaine's son] . . . . It is, I think, a most excellent way of giving me a 'boost' as the boys say—far better than a direct endorsement for Secretary of State. I should feel much obligated if you would insert it as an editorial in Saturday's *Tribune*." Yet two months after the election Hay still wrote sarcastically: "He [Blaine] has not yet heard a word from Harrison . . . . Well we have only two months to wait. He must make up his mind by the 5th of March unless he should conclude to ask [Thomas] Bayard [Cleveland's secretary of state] . . . to hold on for a year and let him think."<sup>13</sup>

Harrison did not notify Blaine of his appointment until mid-January. John W. Foster, who succeeded Blaine as secretary of state in June, 1892, has most perfectly described what Harrison had already accomplished:

From the day of his election it had been the intention of Harrison to invite Blaine to become Secretary of State, but he was not in haste to send the invitation, and both Blaine and his friends became restless under the delay. . . . Mr. Blaine . . . frequently talked with me about the other Cabinet places, but I could give him no information as to the intention of the President-elect. He was keeping his own counsel, when Mr. Blaine was expecting to be consulted on the subject.<sup>14</sup>

It seems clear Blaine would never reconcile himself to being just another member of the President's cabinet. Foster explained his own unusual role in the Harrison administration: "I had a difficult part to act in preserving the confidence and esteem of both President Harrison and himself [Blaine],

<sup>10</sup> Hay to Reid, January 26, 1889, *ibid*.

<sup>11</sup> Blaine to Reid, November 27, 1888, *ibid*. Elkins became Harrison's secretary of war in 1891.

<sup>12</sup> William Walter Phelps to Blaine, December 6, 1888, James G. Blaine Papers (Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress).

<sup>13</sup> Blaine to Reid, December 20, 1888; Hay to Reid, January 9, 1889, Reid Papers.

<sup>14</sup> John W. Foster, *Diplomatic Memoirs* (2 vols., Boston, 1909), II, 250.

especially when the tension between them became more and more acute."<sup>15</sup> The two men were natural rivals—with the party's nomination in 1892 an important consideration.<sup>16</sup>

But Blaine could not really challenge Harrison's leadership of the administration. Again Foster accurately described the major factor in Blaine's tenure as secretary of state: "During the greater part of the time that Mr. Blaine was Secretary of State he was in poor health, and often was confined to his bed or room for weeks with attacks of sickness. . . . When I assumed charge [of the State Department] I found the business very much in arrears and several treaties hung up in the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate for want of proper attention."<sup>17</sup>

Blaine evidently depended heavily on his son Walker, who was solicitor of the State Department, to help carry the work load. In April, 1889, Mrs. Blaine wrote: "I suppose he [Walker] is about as hard working a man as there is in Washington but it pays to stand between his Father and the pressure . . . ." <sup>18</sup> Then, early in 1890, Walker died—and Blaine had lost his devoted son and most important aide. And his personal tragedy deepened the following month when his daughter Alice also died.<sup>19</sup> Harrison said of Blaine at that time: "Mr. Blaine . . . seems to bear up with a fine courage, though at times when he is not engaged, his face is a very sad sight to look upon. Still he has . . . already taken up his work and I do not much fear that he will break down . . . ." <sup>20</sup>

But Blaine's spirit and health had been broken. He did not collapse for another year but was frequently ill in 1890.<sup>21</sup> When he did completely fail in 1891, it proved particularly serious because that was the most active year for the administration in foreign policy. In March, 1891, Blaine's secretary told Harrison that Blaine had become "indisposed" and could not leave his bed. He recovered briefly, then collapsed completely. On May 11, Carnegie frankly told Harrison about Blaine's physical condition: "absolute rest and freedom from all work is essential for six weeks . . . he speaks little and with some difficulty . . . ." That turned out to be an optimistic report.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 268. After the passage of the McKinley Tariff in 1890 Foster was in charge of reciprocity matters in the Harrison administration. He tells of two matters involving the Blaine family which contributed to a steadily declining relationship with the President: Harrison's refusal to appoint Walker Blaine, who had been third assistant secretary of state under his father in 1881, as assistant secretary of state, and Mrs. Blaine's hostility to Harrison. See *ibid.*, 251.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 251. The Louis Michener Papers (Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress) and the Reid Papers provide excellent insight into Republican politics in 1892. Michener, who directed Harrison's political fortunes, says Harrison would not have run again if he had not been attacked from within the party.

<sup>17</sup> Foster, *Memoirs*, II, 270.

<sup>18</sup> Harriet S. Blaine Beale (ed.), *Letters of Mrs. James G. Blaine* (2 vols., New York, 1908), II, 259.

<sup>19</sup> Gail Hamilton (pseud. for Mary A. Dodge), *Biography of James G. Blaine* (Norwich, 1895), 695-96.

<sup>20</sup> Harrison to Reid, February 7, 1890, Reid Papers.

<sup>21</sup> Blaine to Harrison, June 30, August 30, 1890, Benjamin Harrison Papers (Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress); see also Foster, *Memoirs*, II, 6.

Blaine personally informed Harrison later that same month he could not get to Washington in any "reasonable time."<sup>22</sup>

Blaine did not, in fact, return to Washington until some five months after his letter had been written. In August, Harrison received a report of Blaine's "progress" from Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Tracy. He said Blaine had suffered from a "sudden, well nigh complete" attack of nervous exhaustion, and his closest friends had been unable to see him for weeks. He concluded: "At his age complete recovery must be counted in years . . . he could finish the term with no strain or excitement . . ."<sup>23</sup>

Blaine finally returned to Washington in November, but he should have given up his post. The correspondence between Harrison and Blaine in late 1891 and early 1892 vividly depicts the secretary's decline. When he broke an appointment with Harrison in a note of December 29, the President jotted on the note that it happened to be the third such appointment not met; Blaine had forgotten the other two.<sup>24</sup> On January 4 Harrison told Blaine he had received no reply to his request for Blaine to call on him at 10 A. M. Blaine replied the same day, explaining he had been suffering from the "grip" for three days, but insisting he had never received the request from Harrison. The next day, however, he told Harrison he had found the note hidden under some papers and felt "mortified."<sup>25</sup> Then in March, Harrison informed Reid: "Mr. Blaine is sick again and perhaps this may account for some delays at the State Department . . ."<sup>26</sup>

Blaine's condition seems obvious, but he made no move to resign. No evidence has been found to prove Harrison ever considered asking him to do so. Such a move by the President would undoubtedly have split the party for the 1892 campaign. But the secretary's health actually brought on the final break between the two anyway. In May, 1892, Blaine sent the President a clipping from the New York *World* which quoted Harrison's son Russell as saying the nomination of Blaine for the presidency had to be "out of the question." According to this clipping, Russell described the secretary of state as "broken down mentally and physically," and "almost as helpless as a child," alleging Harrison had done all his work for two years. Blaine said he never thought such rumors worth noting in the past, but he had not seen a denial or withdrawal of the article. Russell sent such a denial to Blaine the same day.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Sydney Smith to Harrison, March 17, 1891; Blaine to Harrison, May 22, 1891, Harrison Papers; Andrew Carnegie to Harrison, May 11, 1891, Andrew Carnegie Papers (Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress).

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin Tracy to Harrison, August 16, 1891, Benjamin Tracy Papers (Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress).

<sup>24</sup> Blaine to Harrison, December 29, 1891, Harrison Papers.

<sup>25</sup> Harrison to Blaine, January 4, 1892; Blaine to Harrison, January 4, 5, 1892, *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Harrison to Reid, March 10, 1892, Reid Papers.

<sup>27</sup> Blaine to Harrison, May 9, 1892; Russell Harrison to Blaine, May 9, 1892, Harrison Papers.

The next day Harrison responded angrily. He felt Blaine's experience should have led him to discredit such a statement, taken "second or third hand." He said he had always been available for an "open and frank" talk. Blaine's reply merely insisted Russell publish his denial in the *World*. The next day the secretary of state made the situation clear when he told Harrison: "permit me to suggest that talk on such an unpleasant subject would be painful if not impossible . . ." He thought it would be better to handle such matters in writing.<sup>28</sup> Blaine sent Harrison his brief letter of resignation less than a month later,<sup>29</sup> and by June 29 Foster had been appointed his successor.

Blaine had operated at full capacity for perhaps one year, then declined rapidly. Harrison, with little publicity, carried the bulk of the work load for him the rest of the way, particularly in 1891 and 1892. He did, of course, have help. Foster said he was often consulted by Harrison and cited two important assignments he received from the President. In 1891 Foster was chosen to carry on negotiations for the commercial reciprocity treaties authorized by the McKinley Tariff of 1890. The same year, when Blaine fell ill, he took over negotiations with Great Britain to settle the dispute concerning the seals in the Bering Sea.<sup>30</sup> Secretary of the Navy Tracy seems to have been the President's closest advisor, but he too suffered through great personal tragedy. In February, 1890, his wife and a daughter died in the same fire in which he received serious burns. By the middle of 1890 he required lengthy rest periods at regular intervals. He worked closely with the President but never challenged Harrison's predominant position in foreign policy.<sup>31</sup>

The personnel in the State Department included Assistant Secretary of State William Wharton, appointed at the request of Henry Cabot Lodge.<sup>32</sup> His role proved negligible and clearly secondary to the second assistant secretary of state, career member of the department, Alvey Adee. Adee had been appointed in 1886 and served thirty-six years.<sup>33</sup> He handled much of the correspondence and helped Harrison with the work load. Also, party stalwarts Reid, as minister to France, and Phelps, as minister to Germany, worked closely with Harrison. But the President, remaining at his post with

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<sup>28</sup> Harrison to Blaine, May 10, 1892; Blaine to Harrison, May 10, 11, 1892, *ibid*.

<sup>29</sup> Blaine to Harrison, June 4, 1892, *ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> Foster, *Memoirs*, I, 329; II, 20, 250.

<sup>31</sup> Walter R. Herrick, Jr., *The American Naval Revolution* (Baton Rouge, 1966), 67, 77. Herrick establishes Tracy's role in foreign policy but emphasizes that he followed Harrison's leadership. See especially 69, 87, 91.

<sup>32</sup> John A. Garraty, *Henry Cabot Lodge: A Biography* (New York, 1953), 82, 103-104. Garraty, who makes extensive use of the Henry Cabot Lodge Papers (Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston), explains that Lodge supported Theodore Roosevelt for the position, but Blaine had his doubts about Roosevelt. Blaine agreed on Lodge's second choice. Muzzey, *Blaine*, 463, also credits Lodge with choosing Wharton but does not cite a source. Lodge was just beginning his second term in the House of Representatives.

<sup>33</sup> *The Dictionary of American Biography* (20 vols., New York, 1928), I, 106.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE,  
WASHINGTON.

June 4, 1892  
12:45 PM.

To the President

I respectfully beg leave  
to submit my resignation  
of the office of Secretary of  
State of the United States,  
to which I was appointed by you  
on the 5th of March 1889 -

The condition of the public  
business in the Department  
of State justifies me in  
requesting that my resignation  
may be accepted immediately -

I have the honor to be,

Very Respectfully,  
Your Obedt. Servant

James G. Blaine

FACSIMILE OF BLAINE'S ORIGINAL LETTER OF RESIGNATION IN THE  
BENJAMIN HARRISON PAPERS, MANUSCRIPTS DIVISION, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Reproduced from Albert T. Volwiler (ed.), *The Correspondence between Benjamin Harrison  
and James G. Blaine, 1882-1893* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1940.)

little respite for the four years of his administration, vigorously involved himself in every foreign policy problem and clearly determined what the attitude of the United States would be.

Harrison worked hardest during 1891. He told his troubles to Reid in July: "The Executive work of the country is increasing so rapidly that it is now very exacting . . . finding Mr. Blaine disabled I had to conduct the Bering Sea negotiations and the reciprocity matter myself . . ." He wrote again to Reid in October: "The summer has not been restful . . . I had the overburden of State Department work including several important matters." He emphasized Blaine had had six months of rest and was expected back in a week.<sup>34</sup>

In 1891 steadily declining relations between the United States and Chile (the United States had sympathized with the losing side in a civil war) led to the most serious diplomatic crisis of the Harrison administration. The crew of the *Baltimore* became involved in a brawl while on shore leave in Valparaiso in October, 1891, and two sailors died. What really angered Harrison was the possibility that the local police might have participated in the attack on the sailors.<sup>35</sup> Blaine had not yet returned to his post, but Harrison responded quickly. The *Nation* of October 29, 1891, criticized the response and "hinted" at Harrison's responsibility for the decision:

The dispatch of the cruiser *Boston* to Chile . . . and obscure hints about something serious . . . will, we fear, make a good many people look forward with dread to our having a really powerful navy . . . The mysterious somebody who now manages the State Department does not mean to 'stand any nonsense.' . . . But if that Somebody were really a civilized man to say nothing of an American deacon or pewholder he would have studiously avoided the faintest appearance of a resort to force until the resources of negotiation . . . had been completely exhausted . . .<sup>36</sup>

Chile refused to provide quick satisfaction, and full preparations were made to obtain satisfaction by force. Tracy's personal papers include a list of "vessels ready in view of possible service against Chile" and a memorandum comparing the strategy of attacks against either the nitrate port of Iquique or the coal port of Lota.<sup>37</sup> Chile then compounded the problem in December with a most indiscreet dispatch insulting Harrison, Tracy, and Egan—and the dispatch had been read in the Chilean Senate.<sup>38</sup>

A crisis followed in January, 1892. Harrison ordered Blaine to send an ultimatum to Chile on January 21. It said: "I am . . . directed by the President to say that if the offensive parts [of the dispatch] . . . are not at once withdrawn and a suitable apology offered . . . he will have no other

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<sup>34</sup> Harrison to Reid, July 21, October 21, 1891, Harrison Papers.

<sup>35</sup> Captain Winfield S. Schley to Patrick Egan, October 22, 1891, Dispatches from Chile, Volume 39 (Manuscripts Division, Department of State, National Archives, Washington). Schley was captain of the *Baltimore*; Egan was Harrison's minister to Chile.

<sup>36</sup> "Our Treatment of Chile," *Nation*, LIII (October 29, 1891), 326.

<sup>37</sup> "Naval Papers on Chile, 1891," Tracy Papers.

<sup>38</sup> Patrick Egan to Blaine, December 13, 1891, Dispatches from Chile, Volume 40.

course open to him except to terminate diplomatic relations . . . .”<sup>39</sup> On January 25, the day Harrison brought the matter before Congress, Chile’s foreign minister sent a complete apology covering both the incident involving the *Baltimore* crew and the December dispatch.<sup>40</sup> In a comment on January 30 the *Spectator* of London best described Harrison’s attitude toward Chile: “Anglo-Saxon bullying is apt to lack grace and finesse, as has been shown 100 times over in our own history . . . .”<sup>41</sup>

Yet the British had also found themselves on the wrong end of such “bullying” during the long dispute over the seals in the Bering Sea. The United States and Great Britain engaged in a long winded debate over the seals throughout Harrison’s tenure as President, but it was potentially much more serious than that.<sup>42</sup> The situation became extremely volatile after June, 1890, when the American minister in Peru warned Blaine that the British South Pacific Squadron had been ordered to the Bering Sea and “it is rumored that [their] instructions indicate apprehension of a war . . . .”<sup>43</sup> But the British government had no desire for war with the United States, and that crisis passed when the United States agreed late in 1890 to accept the British offer of arbitration.<sup>44</sup> Yet there was a long road ahead, and in 1891 and 1892 Harrison repeatedly lost his patience while handling the negotiations during and after Blaine’s illness.<sup>45</sup>

A crisis developed over Harrison’s proposal to halt killing of seals until the arbitrators could reach a decision.<sup>46</sup> Adee’s long memorandum of May 25, 1891, indicated Harrison’s attitude by that date, when no agreement had yet been reached: “In the judgment of the President further delay was quite impossible . . . . If the agreement to suspend [sealing] were not at once reached the President would be obligated to release our revenue vessels . . . .” Pauncefote had asked if Harrison would wait three or four days and Adee replied that “in the President’s judgment it was now a matter of hours, not days . . . .” Pauncefote said he would send a telegram to the prime minister

<sup>39</sup> Blaine to Patrick Egan, January 21, 1892, Harrison Papers.

<sup>40</sup> Luis Pereira to Blaine, January 25, 1892, *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> “The United States and Chile,” *Spectator*, LXVIII (January 30, 1892), 157.

<sup>42</sup> See *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States . . . 1890* (Washington, 1891), 366-70, for details on the economic interest of the United States in preserving the seals.

<sup>43</sup> John Hicks to Blaine, June 4, 1890, Dispatches from Peru, Volume 49 (Manuscripts Division, Department of State).

<sup>44</sup> Lord Salisbury to Sir Julian Pauncefote, February 21, 1891, Notes from the British Legation in the United States, Volume 119, *ibid.* Lord Salisbury was the British prime minister. Pauncefote was the British minister in the United States.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Harrison to Blaine, April 30, 1891, Blaine Papers; William Wharton to Sir Julian Pauncefote, June 8, 1891; Harrison to Wharton, September 1, 1891, Harrison Papers.

<sup>46</sup> Blaine to Sir Julian Pauncefote, May 4, 1891, Harrison Papers.

to impress upon him the urgency of immediate action.<sup>47</sup> Great Britain agreed by June 15 and Harrison proclaimed the ban.<sup>48</sup>

The two nations went through a repeat performance one year later when Harrison wanted the ban renewed and Great Britain refused.<sup>49</sup> The tone of this message sent by Wharton in March, 1892, is quite similar to that sent the previous year:

[the] President notices with the deepest regret the indisposition of Her Majesty's government to agree . . . this government is now advised that 51 vessels from British Colombia and 16 from Nova Scotia have sailed [for the Bering Sea] . . . certainly the United States cannot be expected to suspend the defense by such measures as are within its power of the property and jurisdictional rights claimed by it . . . .<sup>50</sup>

The ban was renewed by April 18.<sup>51</sup>

Harrison was not merely aggressive in his foreign policy; he most definitely supported the "large" policy referred to by Pratt. Harrison actively sought naval bases in the Caribbean and Pacific. These bases would not only be the seeds of empire, but would be needed if ever a canal was built across Central America. Harrison made his desire for such bases quite clear to Reid in October, 1891: "I . . . have regarded it as very important that in the West Indies, in the Pacific Islands, [and in] South America we should have such [coaling] Stations . . . . Such stations are of little value in time of war unless they are so held and situated that they could be defended from the shore . . . ." <sup>52</sup>

The primary target for a naval base in the Caribbean was Môle St. Nicholas in Haiti and second choice was Samaná Bay in the Dominican Republic. Serious consideration was also given to Chimbote, Peru, on the Pacific coast of South America. The United States obtained none of the three during the Harrison administration, but for understandable reasons. Harrison actually sent naval vessels to Haiti in an obvious attempt to intimidate the government. Yet Haiti steadfastly refused to give in and Harrison, although he never put his thoughts on record, undoubtedly felt he could not resort to the use of force against helpless Haiti. When the United States turned to the Dominican Republic in the search for a base, the terms hoped for by the eager President Ulises Hereaux could never have been realized. He seriously wanted the two nations to form an alliance against Haiti. In a war to follow Dominican forces would capture Môle St. Nicholas and turn it over to the United States. Also the United States had to pass

<sup>47</sup> Adee memorandum, May 25, 1891, *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Harrison to the Treasury Department and the Department of the Navy, June 15, 1891, *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Sir Julian Pauncefote to Blaine, February 29, 1892, Notes from the British Legation in the United States, Volume 120.

<sup>50</sup> William Wharton to Sir Julian Pauncefote, March 8, 1892, Harrison Papers.

<sup>51</sup> *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States . . . 1891* (Washington, 1892), 636.

<sup>52</sup> Harrison to Reid, October 21, 1891, Harrison Papers.

up any chance of obtaining a base in Peru because such action would have further aggravated relations with neighboring Chile.<sup>53</sup>

The boldest move toward empire carried out between 1889 and 1893 took place in the Pacific. The result was the first share in a protectorate for the United States, in distant Samoa, and an attempt to annex Hawaii. The United States participated in the Berlin Conference of 1889, suggested by Germany shortly before Grover Cleveland left the White House, to settle the relations of the two nations and Great Britain in Samoa. Blaine instructed the delegation to the conference in April, 1889, to protect the American interest in Samoa—the United States had held a naval base at Pago Pago since 1878; the other two nations obtained bases in 1879—and to take second place to neither of the other powers.<sup>54</sup>

The United States succeeded. Blaine, ill at the time, told Harrison during the conference: “the form of government will be all we desire . . . .”<sup>55</sup> Samoan “autonomy” was to be afterwards “protected” by the three powers. And Phelps, who served on the delegation as Harrison’s minister to Germany, has revealed Harrison’s complete control of policy at the conference: “24 hours before the [Samoan] treaty was signed it looked as if the Commissioners might need to wait there six months or to go home immediately with defeat. Harrison at the last minute made a slight concession—the only one of any kind that he made during the conference—and the result was the immediate birth of the Samoan treaty.”<sup>56</sup>

Harrison faced a real problem with Hawaii. Blaine emphasized the situation resulting from the action of Congress in allowing sugar from all nations into the United States duty free under the McKinley Tariff: “The Tariff Act of October 1, 1890 does so wound and impair the reciprocal obligations of the existing treaty [with Hawaii] . . . . With its fall would necessarily lapse the Supplementary Convention of December 6, 1884 under which the United States enjoys the valuable concession of the harbor of Pearl River . . . .” Harrison indicated in October, 1891, that he needed no reminder of the relationship of Hawaii to the United States: “the necessity of maintaining and increasing our hold and influence in the Sandwich Islands is very apparent and very pressing.”<sup>57</sup>

By February, 1892, John Stevens, Harrison’s minister to Hawaii, intensified his personal campaign to have the United States annex Hawaii. He

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<sup>53</sup> See Allan Spetter, “Harrison and Blaine: Foreign Policy, 1889-1893” (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Rutgers University, 1967), 233-60, for a detailed examination of the attempts to secure naval bases during the Harrison administration. The discussion is based primarily on Record Group 39, Archives of the United States Department of State; Record Group 313, Archives of the United States Department of the Navy (National Archives), and the Tracy Papers.

<sup>54</sup> *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States . . . 1889* (Washington, 1890), 195, 201.

<sup>55</sup> Blaine to Harrison, May 2, 1889, Harrison Papers.

<sup>56</sup> William Walter Phelps to Reid, August 15, 1889, Reid Papers.

<sup>57</sup> Blaine to Harrison, n.d.; Harrison to Blaine, October 14, 1891, Harrison Papers.

described the situation as feverish and claimed that if the United States did not annex Hawaii, Great Britain would. He "hinted" of what was ahead when he told Secretary of State Foster in November that the monarchy in Hawaii was an "impediment to good government, and an obstruction to prosperity and progress," and again advised annexation.<sup>58</sup> The surprise should not have been too great when Stevens informed Washington in January, 1893, that the monarchy had been overthrown and replaced by a government favoring annexation to the United States.<sup>59</sup>

Representatives of the new government hurried to Washington to arrange "political union."<sup>60</sup> With the administration fast fading into history, a treaty arranging annexation was completed and submitted to the Senate on February 15. Harrison gave his complete support to annexation and emphasized that for the United States to leave Hawaii to the control of any other power would be "inconsistent with our safety and the peace of the world."<sup>61</sup> But he did not succeed in completing annexation. Time ran out and Cleveland returned to the White House.

Harrison was clearly more active than Blaine in foreign policy throughout his four years as President—Blaine was not even in office when the move to annex Hawaii developed—but this has never been clearly established. Instead, Blaine's reputation survived the administration. There seems to be little doubt that contemporaries of the two men refused to believe Harrison could have been directing foreign policy. Even Chauncey Depew, while seconding Harrison's renomination at the 1892 Republican convention, was forced to admit that most people credited Blaine with the administration's foreign policy. He first pointed out that Chile had been "taught a lesson"; Germany and Great Britain had learned in Samoa we had become a world power, and the questions in the Bering Sea had been settled. Then he said: "when I am told the credit for the brilliant diplomacy of this Administration belongs exclusively to the Secretary of State . . . I am tempted to seriously inquire, who, during the last four years, has been President of the United States, anyhow."<sup>62</sup> Perhaps any President would have finished second best in a comparison to Blaine during their own time, but the facts indicate Harrison deserved more.

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<sup>58</sup> John Stevens to Blaine, February 8, 1892; Stevens to John Foster, November 20, 1892, *Dispatches from Hawaii*, Volume 25 (Manuscripts Division, Department of State).

<sup>59</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894*. Part III, *Affairs in Hawaii* (Washington, 1895), Appendix II, 207-209.

<sup>60</sup> Hawaiian Commissioners to John Foster, February 3, 1893, Notes from the Hawaiian Legation in the United States, Volume 4 (Manuscripts Division, Department of State).

<sup>61</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894*. Part III, *Affairs in Hawaii* (Washington, 1895), Appendix II, 197-98.

<sup>62</sup> *New York Times*, June 11, 1892, 1.