**Source Exploration**

*Anglo-German Treaty, or Heligoland-Zanzibar Treaty (July 1, 1890, Berlin)*

**Full source citation**

Das Staatsarchiv, *Sammlung der offiziellen Aktenstücke zur Geschichte der Gegenwart* [The State Archive, *Collection of Official Documents Relating to Contemporary History*]. Leipzig, Verlag von Duncker & Humblot, 1891, vol. 51, p. 151.

**Authors:**

* **Leo von Caprivi**: Chancellor (March 1890-October 1894): administration is associated with *Neuer Kurs,* the “New Course”, reconciling with the Social Democrats and taking a pro-British foreign policy stance.
* **Dr. Richard Krauel**: Legation Councillor at the Foreign Office 1 April 1890-30 June 1890, joined the council of the German Foreign Office in 1884 and before this had been first German *Generalkonsul* in Sydney from 1879 to 1884.
* **Sir Edward Baldwin Malet**: Her Britannic Majesty’s Ambassador Extraordinaire and Plenipotentiary to the German Empire (1884-1895). Served as Secretary of Legation at Peking (1871-73), Athens (1873-75), Rome (1875-78), Constantinople (1878-79), and Consul-General in Egypt (10 October 1879-1883). Close ties with Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II “The Damned” during 1878, year of Treaties of San Stefano (ending Russo-Turkish War) and Berlin (revision of San Stefano Treaty).
* **Sir Henry Percy** (Chief of the African Department of Her Majesty’s Foreign Office).

**Relevant information**

Termed Heligoland-Zanzibar Treaty by **Otto von** **Bismarck. Why?**

* Initially, Bismarck had been opposed to colonisation. In 1884, Bismarck consented to the colonial idea in order to protect trade, to safeguard raw materials and export markets, and to take opportunities for capital investment (Waschausen, 1968, 115). Bismarck favoured “chartered company” land management rather than colonial government due to financial considerations (Waschausen, 1968, 116). The German East Africa Company (GEAC) or Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft was set up in 1884, and in 1891 sold its territory to the German government. The West Africa Company was set up in 1885 (Washausen, 1968, 67-114).

🡪 “Bismarcks Idee eines Kaufmannsregimes” (Christia Staas, “Deutsche Kolonialverbrechen” in *Die Zeit*, Nov 2009,

<http://www.zeit.de/zeit-geschichte/2010/04/Kolonialismus/seite-3>.)

* Bismarck’s terminology suggests his outrage at the loss of trade possibilities in East Africa and implies that Germany had swapped rich African opportunities for tiny Heligoland. The acquisition of Heligoland facilitated Wilhelm II’s Weltmacht goals (Kiel Canal). Paul Liman quoted Bismarck describing this exchange of territory as “Trousers for a button”: ‚Bismarck hatte den deutsch-englischen Betrag, der uns „einen Knopf für eine Hose gab“ bekämpft’ (Liman, 1899, 562). One can speculate that his discontent was the result of the German government/Emperor’s prioritisation of navy/empire over trade. **Who was Paul Liman?** “Historiker stufen Liman als einflussreichen - weil öffentlichkeitswirksam - Claqueur Bismarcks ein” (Stamm-Kuhlmann, Salewski, 2003, 215).

**Chancellor Leo von Caprivi** had a pro-British foreign policy agenda.

* After the 1884/85 Berlin Conference, arguably Germany had already lost the "Scramble for [East] Africa": the GEAC under Carl Peters had acquired a strip of land on the Tanganyikan coast, but had never had any control over the islands of the Zanzibar sultanate.
* In return, Germany acquired Heligoland, strategically placed for control over the German Bight, which with the construction of the Kiel Canal from 1887 onward had become essential to Emperor Wilhelm's II plans for expansion of the navy.
* Therefore, perhaps Bismarck’s terminology was too harsh.

**Public opinion**: colonial acquisitions represented the achievement of nationhood (*Kolonialfreunde* in the press, myriad geographical associations and colonial societies). Hence, this treaty was viewed as **treason** against German colonial interests by the likes of Carl Peters (GEAC) and Alfred Hugenberg(leading figure in nationalist politics, later helps Hitler become Chancellor). Peters and Hugenberg appealed for the foundation of the ***Alldeutscher Verband*** in 1891. The AV’s purpose was to protect Germany from making decisions against German interests, and to protect the ideology of German nationality as a unifying force. In essence, it was an extremist, ultra-nationalist political organization (Perras, 2004, 168-79).

**Historiography**

William L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, **1951**, 118-20.

* + Ceding Heligoland was a desperate measure by Prime Minister Salisbury in reaction to Carl Peters’ treaty with the King of Uganda. “It was essential to save Uganda, and he therefore baited the Germans with the tempting offer of Heligoland, which they eagerly accepted.” (119)

David R. Gillard, "Salisbury's African Policy and the Heligoland Offer of 1890" in *English Historical Review*, **1960**, 631-653.

* + “The Heligoland offer becomes intelligible as a means of protecting Britain's strategic interests in a vital area and, incidentally, of securing a favourable settlement of other African questions.” (632)

Otto von Bismarck, “The Kaiser vs. Bismarck; suppressed letters by the Kaiser and new chapters from the autobiography of the Iron Chancellor New York” in *Bismarck*, AMS Press, **1971**, ch.11 “The Treaty Relating to Heligoland and Zanzibar”.

* + “The renunciation of equal privileges in the commercial city of Zanzibar was a lasting sacrifice for which Heligoland guaranteed no equivalent. Free trade with that one great market on the East African coast was our connecting link with the mainland, which today we can neither dispense with nor replace.” (172) Bit harsh considering Germany got Tanganyika and Caprivi Strip.
	+ “The proposition that England was of greater importance to us than Africa may under certain circumstances be as pertinent as the statement that Germany is of greater importance to England than East Africa; but it was not so at the time when the Heligoland treaty was concluded.” “It was … the desire of possessing Heligoland ad of being complaisant to England that excplained the conclusion of the treaty. The possession of this rock satisfies our sense of national security against a superior French fleet or the necessity of turning Heligoland into a Gibraltar.” (175-176)

John S. Galbraith, *MacKinnon and East Africa 1878-1895; a study in the ‘New Imperialism’*, Cambridge University Press, **1972**.

* + “As the key to the Upper Nile, Buganda had great significance to the British government. By 1890 Salisbury’s previous indifference had disappeared. He had decided that Britain would remain in Egypt for the foreseeable future, and the possession of Egypt involved the corollary that no other great European power should control the Upper Nile. In 1890 the only threat seemed to come from the German sphere in east Africa.” (167)
	+ Main challenges came not from the government at this time but from the Colonization Society, and especially Carl Peters. (168)
	+ “The agreement was favourable to the British.” Mackinnon complemented Salisbury on 20 June 1890 on a “highly satisfactory arrangement which maintains the dignity, influence, and interests of the Empire to a degree which ought to satisfy the whole nation.” (187)

John C.G. Röhl, *Wilhelm II: The Kaiser’s Personal Monarchy, 1888-1900,* Cambridge University Press, August 19 **2004**, 355-356.

* + While there was discontent with the treaty by colonial enthusiasts and advocates of export trade (mostly Free Conservatives and National Liberals), e.g. Pan-German League, the Kaiser was enthusiastic about the treaty because of his enthusiasm for expanding the navy and the “strategic value of Heligoland”. (355)
	+ Wilhelm II confessed that he would have ceded “even more” for Heligoland because he valued it “very highly and he intends to set up cannon or howitzers on it.” The Kaiser instructed the press not to discuss the strategic importance until the treaty was ratified, to keep Britain in the dark of German interests. (356)

Bennett Kangumu, *Contesting Caprivi: A History of Colonial Isolation and Regional Nationalism in Namiba,* Basler Afria Bibliographien, **2011**, 56.

* + Zeller argued that Germany made very far reaching concessions to British interests in East Africa, all for a “small but symbolically and at the time strategically crucial rock in the north sea” (56, quoting Zeller, 2000, 34-35).
	+ However, Germany nonetheless had control over Zembezi, acquired in 1886 in the German-Portuguese Convention, and this was central to the Caprivi Strip – concessions were not that extreme (Kangumu, 2011, 56).

Frank Nägler, Michael Epkenhans, Matthew S Seligmann (eds), *The Naval Route to the Abyss: The Anglo-German Naval Race 1895-1914,* Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Jan 28 **2015**, 388.

* + Letter from Ottley to Churchill: “As a naval officer I can speak with more authority on the purely naval aspects of the question… Mr Fergusson, under-secretary of the Foreign Office, admitted … the island ‘was found to be useful during the closing of German ports in 1800, which were then in French hands… to us this island [Heligoland] is of no material or strategic interest in these days.’ … Mr Gladstone did accept the cession of Heligoland as a proper policy … If Heligoland was found useful during the closing of German ports in the Napoleonic wars, it will be equally, nay, far more valuable for similar purposes today!” (388)
		- Given that now Germany was expanding her navy.
	+ “A wilderness of Zanzibars would not buy Heligoland from Britain, if we had out choices again today. If Mr Asquit wishes to go further into the problem, it will be better to ask the Admiralty and the War Office, but I’m afraid the only useful lesson to be learnt is to cede nothing, at all events without a full consideration of all defence aspects of the question.” (389)

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