

# The British Press and Opposition to Lord Salisbury's Ultimatum of January 1890

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*"Memorandum given to Senhor Barros Gomes, at his request, January 11, 9 p.m.*

Her Majesty's Government cannot accept as satisfactory or sufficient the assurances given by the Portuguese Government as they interpret them. Her Majesty's Acting Consul at Mozambique has telegraphed, on the authority of Major Serpa Pinto himself, that the expedition was still occupying the Shiré; and that Katunga, besides other places in the territory of the Makololos, were to be fortified and would receive garrisons. What Her Majesty's Government require, and must insist upon, is the following: —

Telegraphic instruction to be sent to the Governor of Mozambique at once that all and any Portuguese military forces which are actually on the Shiré, or in the territory of the Makololos, or in the Mashona territory, are to be withdrawn.

The Government consider that without this the assurances given by the Portuguese Government are altogether illusory.

Mr. Petre is compelled by his instructions to leave Lisbon at once, with the members of his Legation, unless a satisfactory answer to the foregoing intimation is received by him in the course of this evening, and Her Majesty's ship "Enchantress" is now at Vigo waiting for his orders.

*January 11, 1890."*

— Text of the ultimatum of 11 January 1890 as given to the Portuguese foreign minister, Barros Gomes, by the British Minister in Lisbon, George Petre.<sup>1</sup>

Portuguese commentators on the crisis in Anglo-Portuguese relations provoked by Lord Salisbury's Ultimatum of 11 January 1890 have tended to emphasize the enormous power on the British side. Basílio Telles, writing in 1905, used the phrase 'forte e opulenta Inglaterra' and in 1971 Joel Serrão referred to 'a poderosa Inglaterra'.<sup>2</sup> In strictly military terms,

<sup>1</sup> Source: 'Correspondence Respecting the Action of Portugal in Mashonaland and in the Districts of the Shiré and Lake Nyassa', *Parliamentary Papers*, 1890 [c.5904], II, p. 278.

<sup>2</sup> Basílio, Teles, *Do Ultimatum ao 31 de Janeiro: Esboço de História Política*, 2nd edn (Lisbon: Portugália Editora, 1968), p. 7; Joel Serrão, 'Ultimatum', in *Dicionário de História de Portugal*, ed. by Joel Serrão (Lisbon: Iniciativas Editoriais, 1971), IV, pp. 219–24 (p. 222). For background on the Ultimatum and Anglo-Portuguese rivalry in Africa, see Eric Axelson, *Portugal and the Scramble for Africa, 1875–1891* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1967); David Birmingham, *Portugal and Africa* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 110–21; Robert Blake, *A History of Rhodesia* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977); António Enes, *O Ultimatum visto por António Enes, com um Estudo Biográfico por F. A. Oliveira Martins* (Lisbon: Parceria A. M. Pereira, 1946); *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference 1884–1885 and the Onset of Partition*, ed. by Stig Förster, Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Ronald Robinson, ([Oxford]: German Historical Institute London / Oxford University Press, 1988); Ângela Guimarães, *Uma Corrente do Colonialismo Português: A Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa, 1875–1895* (Lisbon: Livros Horizonte, 1984); R. J. Hammond, *Portugal and Africa, 1815–1910: A Study in Uneconomic Imperialism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966); A. J. Hanna, *The Story of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland*, 2nd edn (London:

this is undoubtedly correct. In the months leading up to the Ultimatum, the Royal Navy had over 70 armoured and 185 unarmoured ships. In contrast, the Portuguese Navy had one armoured ship, the *Vasco da Gama*, launched in 1876, plus 21 corvettes and gunboats.<sup>3</sup> While Salisbury's orders to the Admiralty were for ships from the Cape and Zanzibar squadrons to prepare to occupy the island of Mozambique, reports of the movement of armoured warships and rumours that the Channel Fleet was on its way to Lisbon increased the pressure on the Portuguese government to yield.<sup>4</sup>

This overwhelming military superiority, however, belied a much weaker political position on Lord Salisbury's part. British politics at the time were dominated by the question of Irish Home Rule. The Liberal Party had split over Gladstone's proposals to give political autonomy to Ireland and, following the General Election of June 1886, Salisbury had come to power at the head of a minority Conservative government which was kept in power by the Liberal Unionists. One of the latter, G. J. Goschen, had become Chancellor of the Exchequer following the attempted coup by Lord Randolph Churchill and controlled the finances of the government. Although this turned out to be the beginning of a twenty-year period of Conservative ascendancy, Salisbury's position was by no means secure and indeed he went on to lose the following General Election in 1892. In January 1890, the Irish Nationalists, led by Charles Parnell, still commanded considerable influence in Parliament, since the Pigott letters published by the *Times* had been exposed as forgeries and details of the O'Shea divorce case, which was soon to ruin Parnell and split the Nationalists, were only just coming to light. British politics were thus polarized. On one side, there was a pro-Home Rule alliance of Liberals and Irish Nationalists headed by the Leader of the Opposition, Gladstone. While the Irish Nationalists were mainly Catholics, the Liberal

Faber and Faber, 1965), pp. 96–117; Peter Henshaw, 'The "Key to South Africa" in the 1890s: Delagoa Bay and the Origins of the South African War', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24 (1998), 527–43; H. V. Livermore, 'Lord Salisbury's Ultimatum', *British Historical Society of Portugal Annual Report and Review*, 24 (1997), 147–71; H. V. Livermore, 'The Anglo-Portuguese Crisis of 1890: Another Look at the Ultimatum', *Studia*, 56–57 (2000), 23–59; Malyn Newitt, *Portugal in Africa: The Last Hundred Years* (London: C. Hurst, 1981); Charles E. Nowell, *The Rose-Colored Map: Portugal's Attempt to Build an African Empire from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean* (Lisbon: Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar, 1982); Ronald Robinson, John Gallagher and Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 210–53; D. M. Schreuder, *The Scramble for Southern Africa, 1877–1895: The Politics of Partition Reappraised* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); *The Zambesian Past: Studies in Central African History*, ed. by Eric Stokes and Richard Brown (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966); Nuno Severiano Teixeira, *O Ultimatum Inglês: Política Externa e Política Interna no Portugal de 1890* (Lisbon: Alfa, 1990); Pilar Vazquez Cuesta, *A Espanha ante o Ultimatum* (Lisbon: Livros Horizonte, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> *The Naval Annual 1888–89*, ed. by T. A. Brassey (Portsmouth, [1888–89]), pp. 246–69, 328–30.

<sup>4</sup> Axelson, pp. 221, 224, 229–30.

Party drew much of its strength from Nonconformists or Dissenters, such as the Presbyterians, who were Protestants opposed to the official Anglican Church or Church of England and were particularly strong in Scotland, Wales and some parts of Northern England. On the other side, the Conservative Government, in which Salisbury was both Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, was committed to maintaining the Union between Britain and Ireland with the support of the Liberal Unionists.<sup>5</sup>

Salisbury had worked as a journalist in his youth but as Foreign Secretary he generally preferred to conduct his diplomacy in secret.<sup>6</sup> In the case of the dispute with Portugal over East Africa, however, he seems to have almost courted publicity. It was the publication in the official *London Gazette* and then in the *Times* of his dispatch of 21 November 1889, protesting against the creation of the new Portuguese district of Zumbo on the Zambezi, which alerted the British public to the impending crisis.<sup>7</sup> Within a week of the Ultimatum, Salisbury published some of the correspondence in the *London Gazette* and more was included in a Blue Book published on 12 February 1890 to coincide with the opening of Parliament.<sup>8</sup>

During the crisis, Parliament was in recess and Salisbury was ill with influenza at Hatfield and made no speeches, so the press was the most important vehicle for making political comment and assessing the impact on public opinion.<sup>9</sup> The main British interests at stake were clear to contemporary commentators and were well rehearsed in the press. These interests were both religious and economic. The Protestant missions, both Anglican and Scottish Presbyterian, established around Lake Nyasa (now in Malawi) since 1875, were regarded as the heirs of David Livingstone, particularly in Scotland, and had a long history of conflict

<sup>5</sup> D. G. Boyce, *The Irish Question and British Politics, 1868–1996*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 34; Peter Davis, 'The Liberal Unionist Party and the Irish Policy of Lord Salisbury's Government', *Historical Journal*, 18 (1975), 85–104; D. A. Hamer, *Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery: A Study in Leadership and Policy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Alan O'Day, *The English Face of Irish Nationalism: Parnellite Involvement in British Politics, 1880–86* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977); Andrew Roberts, *Salisbury: Victorian Titan* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999); David Steele, *Lord Salisbury: A Political Biography* (London: UCL Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Roberts, pp. 508–15.

<sup>7</sup> *London Gazette*, 26 Nov. 1889, pp. 6499–6500; *Times*, 27 Nov. 1889, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> *London Gazette*, 17 Jan. 1890, pp. 273–88: the correspondence covered the period 16 November 1889 to 13 January 1890: excerpts were reprinted in the *Times*, 18 Jan. 1890, p. 6; 'Correspondence Respecting the Action of Portugal in Mashonaland and in the Districts of the Shiré and Lake Nyassa', *PP* 1890 [c.5904] li: the correspondence covered the period 22 June 1887 to 28 January 1890: excerpts were reprinted in the *Times*, 13 Feb. 1890, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> For the Victorian press, see: *Newspaper History, from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day*, ed. by George Boyce, James Curran and Pauline Wingate (London: Constable, 1978); Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press in England, 1855–1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1976); *Papers for the Millions: The New Journalism in Britain, 1850s to 1914*, ed. by Joel H. Wiener (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988).

with the Portuguese on the coast.<sup>10</sup> Further south in Mashonaland (now Zimbabwe), the newly chartered British South Africa Company was anxious to make good its claims based on the somewhat dubious Moffat Treaty and the Rudd Concession, which had been made with the Matabele (Ndebele) king, Lobengula, in 1888.<sup>11</sup> The company's most energetic backer, Cecil Rhodes, was providing finance for the journey of Consul Harry H. Johnston into the interior, which led to the clash with the Serpa Pinto expedition, the chief catalyst of the crisis.<sup>12</sup> In addition, a wide spectrum of public opinion, ranging from liberals to extreme imperialists, demanded the upholding of British prestige.

The crisis was a major news story for around three months from the end of November 1889 to the middle of February 1890.<sup>13</sup> Reports of the armed clashes between the British and Portuguese and their supporters along the Shiré river were vague and confused because messages had to be carried to Mozambique or Zanzibar before they could be telegraphed to Europe. Two such telegrams from missionary sources were published in the London press on 14 December and 6 January, the second ending with the inflammatory words 'War is imminent', fuelling the newspaper debate already in progress on the diplomatic dispute.<sup>14</sup> Different viewpoints were put forward in the press through articles, letters and interviews by spokesmen for the interested parties. On the British side, the correspondents to the *Times* included William Ewing and James Stevenson of the Glasgow-based African Lakes Company, Horace Waller and John Kirk, who had both worked with Livingstone as missionaries and explorers, and F. C. Selous, a big game hunter who at the time was working for the British South Africa Company. Though given much less space, the Portuguese position was also set out in the pages of the *Times*, which printed the despatch of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Barros Gomes, of 29 November 1889, representing the fullest official statement of Portugal's case, and a lengthy letter from the Consul in Newcastle-

<sup>10</sup> H. Alan C. Cairns, *Prelude to Imperialism: British Reactions to Central African Society, 1840-1890* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), pp. 126-32; James W. Jack, *Daybreak in Livingstonia: The Story of the Livingstonia Mission, British Central Africa* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1901); Roland Oliver, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa*, 2nd edn (London: Longmans, 1965).

<sup>11</sup> John S. Galbraith, *Crown and Charter: The Early Years of the British South Africa Company* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); Arthur Keppel-Jones, *Rhodes and Rhodesia: The White Conquest of Zimbabwe, 1884-1902* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1983); Robert I. Rotberg, *The Founder: Cecil Rhodes and the Pursuit of Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> Harry H. Johnston, *The Story of my Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1923); Roland Oliver, *Sir Harry Johnston & the Scramble for Africa* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957).

<sup>13</sup> The opinions of the newspapers mentioned in this article were set out in editorials and comment published between these dates. I have given citations for quotations and references to specific editorials and articles referred to in the text.

<sup>14</sup> *Times*, 14 Dec. 1889, p. 9; 6 Jan. 1890, p. 8.

upon-Tyne, Jaime Batalha Reis. The *Daily News* published an interview with Barros Gomes and individual British friends of Portugal wrote to the press with letters of defence, such as the plea for understanding from a Briton who signed himself 'Torres Vedras', which was published in the *Manchester Guardian*.<sup>15</sup>

The impact of the Ultimatum crisis on the press and public opinion in both Portugal and Britain has been discussed by Amadeu Carvalho Homem and Maria Teresa Pinto Coelho.<sup>16</sup> Teresa Coelho's works summarize well the arguments put forward in defence of the Ultimatum and convey the chauvinistic tone of much of the British press. Undoubtedly, these represent the predominant reaction in Britain to the crisis. Her conclusion, however, that 'The press merely supported official policy' overlooks a significant minority in Britain who actively opposed the Ultimatum as well as the misgivings of those who reluctantly accepted it as a *fait accompli*.<sup>17</sup> The reaction of British public opinion, as represented in the press, was more nuanced than at first appears, foreshadowing many of the arguments raised during the Boer War ten years later.

Editorial comment on the Ultimatum fell into three main camps, largely reflecting political allegiances. On one side were the daily newspapers which supported the government, such as the *Times*, *Standard*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Morning Post* and the pro-Liberal Unionist *Daily Chronicle*. These generally applauded both Salisbury's position and his tone, urging him to defend what they saw as British rights with varying degrees of belligerence. The *Times*, which had cause to be grateful to Salisbury for his support over the Pigott forgeries and was a strong supporter of Rhodes's British South Africa Company, took a particularly hard line, thundering against Portugal in its editorials. When the diplomatic correspondence was published, the *Times* concluded 'Never was an *ultimatum* more thoroughly provoked'.<sup>18</sup> The *Standard*, *Daily Chronicle* and the *Daily Telegraph* were also hostile, with the latter referring to the Portuguese case as 'this impudent claim'.<sup>19</sup> The *Morning Post*, although supporting government policy,

<sup>15</sup> *Times*, 27 Dec. 1889, p. 9; 22 Jan. 1890, p. 8; 20 Dec. 1889, p. 12; 7 Jan. 1890, p. 7; 6 Jan. 1890, p. 8; 7 Jan. 1890, p. 7; *Times*, 9 Dec. 1889, p. 6; 2 Jan. 1890, p. 4; *Daily News*, 24 Dec. 1889, p. 5; *Manchester Guardian*, 14 Jan 1890, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Amadeu Carvalho Homem, 'O "Ultimatum" Inglês de 1890 e a Opinião Pública', *Revista de História das Ideias*, 14 (1992), 281–96; Maria Teresa Pinto Coelho, '“Pérfida Albion” and “Little Portugal”: The Role of the Press in British and Portuguese National Perceptions of the 1890 Ultimatum', *Portuguese Studies*, 6 (1990), 173–90; Maria Teresa Pinto Coelho, 'British and Portuguese Attitudes towards the British Ultimatum of 1890', *British Historical Society of Portugal Annual Report and Review*, 21 (1994), 12–28; Maria Teresa Pinto Coelho, *Apocalipse e Regeneração: O Ultimatum e a Mitologia da Pátria na Literatura Finissecular* (Lisbon: Edições Cosmos, 1996), pp. 61–75.

<sup>17</sup> Coelho, 'Perida Albion', p. 189.

<sup>18</sup> Roberts, pp. 453; *Times*, 22 Oct. 1889, p. 9; 1 Nov. 1889, p. 9; 18 Jan. 1890, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 28 Nov. 1889, p. 7.

adopted a more restrained tone towards Portugal, 'the old ally and friend of this country'.<sup>20</sup>

The well-informed London evening paper *Pall Mall Gazette* was firmly behind the Government, as both its editor, W. T. Stead, the man credited with creating the New Journalism and at this time an ally of Rhodes, and his assistant, E. T. Cook, were pro-imperialist.<sup>21</sup> The *PMG* welcomed the Ultimatum under the headline 'A clear field for Messrs. Rhodes and Johnston'.<sup>22</sup> The evening *St James Gazette*, the *Spectator* and *England and Primrose Chronicle*, both weeklies, and the *Sunday Times* all supported Salisbury's position. The *Sunday Times* even urged sending a fleet up the Tagus, but more commentators saw the crisis as an opportunity to get hold of Delagoa Bay (Maputo), whose award to Portugal in 1875 by the French President MacMahon still rankled.<sup>23</sup>

The second group was formed of the pro-Gladstone Liberal papers, notably the *Daily News* and *Manchester Guardian*. After some initial hesitation, during which they warned of the dangers of war, they also backed Salisbury's stance, although they were critical of his harsh methods. The *Daily News* summed up its opinion when it concluded that 'a strong case was spoilt by the undue and too peremptory harshness with which submission was extracted from a weak Power already on the point of yielding to more rational weapons'.<sup>24</sup> The London evening *Echo* and two Sunday papers, the *Observer* and *Lloyd's Weekly News*, adopted similar views, supporting the Government but urging a measure of restraint.

The lead of the London press was followed by the provincial papers. In Bristol, for example, the *Bristol Mercury* argued for a hard line against Portugal whilst the *Bristol Times and Mirror* took a more moderate pro-government stance and the *Western Daily Press*, though supporting the British position, urged great care in how it was presented. In Scotland, home to many of the Protestant missionaries in Nyasaland, both the pro-Unionist *Scotsman* and the liberal *Glasgow Herald* supported Salisbury's demands and welcomed the Ultimatum.

This apparent unanimity was not total, however. Surveying the state of British public opinion immediately after the Ultimatum, the *Times* noted that the Opposition had not joined in the foreign attacks on British policy 'if we except the very dregs of an unpatriotic faction, without credit or

<sup>20</sup> *Morning Post*, 23 Dec. 1889, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Later, they were on opposite sides in the Boer War debate, after Stead turned against Rhodes: Joseph O. Baylen, 'W. T. Stead and the Boer War: The Irony of Idealism', *Canadian Historical Review*, 40 (1959), 304–14; Rotberg, pp. 281–82; J. Saxon Mills, *Sir Edward Cook K.B.E.: A Biography* (London: Constable, 1921).

<sup>22</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 Jan. 1890, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Sunday Times*, 22 Dec. 1889, p. 4; 29 Dec. 1889, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Daily News*, 18 Jan. 1890, p. 4.



influence among the people'.<sup>25</sup> This 'unpatriotic faction' formed the third strand of public opinion and comprised mainly British Radicals and Irish Nationalists, who were violently opposed to the Ultimatum. A correspondent writing to the *Scotsman* singled out the *Star* and *United Ireland* as the main representatives of this viewpoint but a number of like-minded papers followed their lead.<sup>26</sup> The Radicals, who in Parliament formed one wing of the Liberal Party, had a long tradition of dissent in foreign policy and were generally hostile to imperialist expansion and the concomitant jingoism of the press.<sup>27</sup> The Irish Nationalists saw parallels with the situation in Ireland, which had been subjected to the policy of Coercion under Salisbury's nephew, A. J. Balfour.

The most vehement opposition to the Ultimatum came from the *Star*, a new campaigning London evening paper which had been founded in 1888. Its innovatory style and halfpenny price attracted a lower-middle and working class readership and it rapidly achieved wide popularity, claiming a circulation of 279,000 by the summer of 1889. Its editor, T. P. O'Connor, MP for the Liverpool Scotland constituency, was prominent both as a Radical and a supporter of Home Rule for Ireland, while the assistant editor and chief leader-writer, H. W. Massingham, was later to become one of the most prominent critics of the Boer War.<sup>28</sup> The *Star* was initially hostile to the Portuguese but as the press campaign to seize Delagoa Bay gathered pace, it changed its mind and became the most bitter opponent of government policy. In impassioned language it denounced the interests which supported action against Portugal, particularly newspapers such as the *Times* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and the missionaries, whom it blamed for causing the trouble, referring scathingly in its columns to 'Presbyterian busybodies', 'soup-ticket mission-station negroes', 'Jingo missionaries' and 'the colossal greed, the cantankerous stubbornness of the Glasgow Lakes Company and its missionary supporters'. A 'well-informed correspondent' pointed out that seizing Delagoa Bay would 'shatter the immemorial friendship and alliance between ourselves and Portugal' and listed the British economic and strategic interests which were at risk.

<sup>25</sup> *Times*, 15 Jan. 1890, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> *Scotsman*, 13 Jan. 1890, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. by John M. MacKenzie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); S. Maccoby, *English Radicalism, 1853-1886* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938), pp. 343-63, 405-08; Bernard Porter, *Critics of Empire: British Radical Attitudes to Colonialism in Africa, 1895-1914* (London: Macmillan, 1968); A. J. P. Taylor, *The Trouble Makers: Dissent over Foreign Policy, 1792-1939* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1957).

<sup>28</sup> L. W. Brady, *T. P. O'Connor and the Liverpool Irish* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1983), pp. 103-17; Alfred F. Havighurst, *Radical Journalist: H. W. Massingham, 1860-1924* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 18-40; John Goodbody, 'The *Star*: Its Role in the Rise of the New Journalism', in Wiener, pp. 143-63.

On 7 January, in an editorial headed 'On the eve of a crime', the *Star* argued that 'So far as there are any European "rights" in the land for which a pack of rival traders are squabbling, and dignifying their quarrels with talk about national honor, they are those of discovery and exploration, and they belong to Portugal'. The *Star* bitterly denounced the Ultimatum and its newspaper supporters under the headline 'Brazen, Brutal, and Cynical': 'If Portugal had been a nest of Chinese pirates, given to torturing prisoners, instead of an historic European ally, she could not be treated with more summary dispatch and with more arbitrary brutality'. It continued its attack in two further editorials, complaining that 'Every bad quality of Jingoism — its real want of manliness, its vulgar pretence of manliness in the presence of a weaker foe, its exaggerated patriotism, its indifference to all moral considerations, its egotism, its incapacity to see two sides of a question — is represented in the present attitude of England towards Portugal'. Reviewing the events of the Ultimatum a week later, the *Star* summed up its disgust, concluding: 'The old Romans had a noble maxim for foreign policy — *Parcere dejectis et debellare superbos*. "To spare the fallen and beat down the arrogant". We have reversed the maxim. We beat down the fallen and we spare the proud. Noble Minister! Exalted policy!' <sup>29</sup> The *Star's* high moral stance was unpopular in other sections of the press. The *England and Primrose Chronicle* commented 'The *Star* [...] writes as if it were a paid Portuguese agent in this country'. <sup>30</sup>

Other radical newspapers followed the same line as the *Star*. *Reynold's Newspaper*, a popular Sunday paper with a large circulation among the working class, denounced Salisbury's action under the headline 'Bullying the Portuguese'. It opened with a reference to his 'insolent and imperious ultimatum' and attacked him for usurping the functions of a weaker power. 'The supremacy of might has once more been blatantly asserted in the face of a wondering and indignant Europe, and the British character for fair play foully traduced by the Prime Minister.' The editorial reviewed other recent diplomatic disputes where Salisbury was conciliatory towards strong powers and then, referring to 'the violent methods adopted', 'the heinousness of the crime' and 'the cowardice and criminality of the action', it attacked Salisbury for rejecting arbitration. The editorial then went on to condemn the frequently made accusation that Portugal favoured the slave trade as 'a scandalous libel on an ancient ally' and lamented 'the humiliating position this country has been reduced to by the bullying tactics of the Premier'. *Reynold's Newspaper* concluded that

<sup>29</sup> *Star*, front page editorials on 16, 17, 23, 24, 27, 30 Dec. 1889, 3, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18 Jan. 1890, 3 Feb. 1890, all p. 1. The quotations are from 7, 14, 16 and 18 Jan. 1890, all p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> *England and Primrose Chronicle*, 11 Jan. 1890, p. 4.



'Lord Salisbury has blundered, and blundered wilfully. His indecent display of England's power to terrorize a weaker nation has dragged the name of Englishman through the gutter'.<sup>31</sup>

The *Northern Echo*, a radical paper published in Darlington, was equally hostile, arguing consistently for arbitration. After the Ultimatum, it noted how Lord Salisbury was truculent towards weak powers like Portugal but subservient towards strong powers such as Germany. It accused him of 'high-handed inflictions on others' and using 'the highwayman's argument' and concluded 'For our part we regard this coercing of a friendly though feeble Power as a stain on England's reputation abroad [...] If foreign Ministers were to conduct controversies with each other in the dictatorial tone adopted towards Portugal by Lord Salisbury, we should have perpetual war'.<sup>32</sup>

The other main opposition to British policy came from the Irish nationalist press in Dublin. In an editorial on 9 January, the daily *Freeman's Journal* gave an account of the 'squabble' and, referring to a notorious indiscretion of Salisbury, noted that the 'natives were never consulted about the matter — Lord Salisbury's contempt for black men, Hottentots, and Irishmen has been manifested before now'. Meanwhile, the Portuguese were proceeding to make good their claims to the region and thereby 'came into collision with a land-grabbing British expedition'. The crisis appeared to be getting serious until the *Times* reported that German engineers were sinking submarine mines in the Tagus for the reception of any British fleet which might be sent to level its guns at Lisbon. The *Freeman's Journal* thought it was 'quite another matter to risk a difference with the greatest military Power in Europe' and 'the honest broker at Berlin' would have something to say about it. 'These German engineers have made peace' and the Jingo papers in London would moderate their war cries. After the Ultimatum it commented that Lord Salisbury had acted upon 'the principle that the spoil belongs to the stronger of two claimants' and that he 'has successfully applied to international policy the ethics of the highwayman'.<sup>33</sup>

The weekly *United Ireland* was even more scathing, noting that Lord Salisbury seemed 'likely to land the British nation, not into a little war, but into a pretty big one'. It applauded the report that German engineers were engaged in the 'sensible task' of laying down torpedoes in the Tagus to welcome the British fleet. Referring to the general suspicion that Bismarck was using Portugal as a pawn, it wondered what the outcome

<sup>31</sup> *Reynold's Newspaper*, 19 Jan. 1890, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Northern Echo*, 7, 9, 15, 27 Jan. 1890, all p. 2; the citations are from the editorial of 15 Jan. 1890, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 9 Jan 1890, p. 4; 14 Jan. 1890, p. 4.

would be if the regiment of German guards, of which Queen Victoria was Colonel, 'were to be found charging against her Majesty's own troops in South Africa, or mayhap, South Kensington'. After the Ultimatum, under the ironic headline 'A glorious victory', it accused Salisbury of a piece of 'big bullying' but went on: 'There is no more equity in the case on the part of Great Britain than there is on the part of Portugal. Both Powers are engaged in filibustering enterprises on a grand scale in South Africa'.<sup>34</sup> The more moderate Dublin paper *The Nation* also dismissed the affair as a case of bullying.

Outright opposition to the Ultimatum did not extend far beyond the Radicals and Nationalists. On the Left, *Justice*, the weekly paper of the Social Democratic Federation, a Marxist organization led by H. M. Hyndman, opined a fortnight after the Ultimatum, under the headline 'The Rival Filibusters': 'We don't pretend to have the slightest sympathy with Portugal. Major Serpa Pinto is an unscrupulous filibuster of the most brutal type.' It thought that as state policy and international law went, England was in the right and Portugal in the wrong, and criticized the Liberal papers for defending Portugal because it was a small, weak power.<sup>35</sup> In contrast to the Dublin papers, the main English Catholic journals such as *The Tablet* and the *Weekly Register* supported Salisbury's action.

The preferred alternative for those who opposed government policy was arbitration. This was advocated by the International Arbitration and Peace Association, through its journal *Concord*, and the International Arbitration League in its monthly *Arbitrator*. The *Arbitrator's* position was very weak, however, as it openly stated that the British Government was in the right, which led to criticism from its continental readers.<sup>36</sup> The Radical *Northern Echo* consistently called for arbitration and the Liberal *Daily News* and *Manchester Guardian* initially favoured this solution in some form but neither pursued it once the dispute became critical. The call for arbitration was taken up by the maverick Radical MP Henry Labouchere in his sensationalist weekly *Truth*, which had a reputation for critical comment. Labouchere was one of the few commentators who was prepared to see beyond the Eurocentric debate, stating that 'The disputed territory in reality belongs neither to us nor to the Portuguese, but to the native inhabitants', and argued for arbitration both in *Truth* and in Parliament, but to no effect.<sup>37</sup> The supporters of arbitration sent a letter to Salisbury before the Ultimatum and held a meeting in London a

<sup>34</sup> *United Ireland*, 11 Jan. 1890, p. 1; 18 Jan. 1890, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Justice*, 25 Jan. 1890, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Concord*, 18 Jan. 1890, pp. 2-3; 17 Feb. 1890, pp. 17-18; *Arbitrator*, Dec. 1889, pp. 2-3; Jan.-Feb. 1890, pp. 1, 3; March 1890, pp. 13-14, 16-22; April 1890, p. 25.

<sup>37</sup> *Truth*, 2 Jan. 1890, p. 12; 16 Jan. 1890, p. 106; 23 Jan. 1890, p. 158; 30 Jan. 1890, p. 209; the quotation is from 2 Jan. 1890, p. 12.

month afterwards but both the government and its supporters in the press remained adamantly opposed to the idea.<sup>38</sup>

Even the conservative press was initially taken aback by the strength of the popular response in Portugal and showed some sympathy. As the street demonstrations and boycott of British goods continued, however, this soon turned to contempt and by early February, the *Speaker* complained that they were 'rapidly destroying the feelings of sympathy that were at first apparent among some sections of the English Liberal party'.<sup>39</sup> Press comment in each country was reported in the other, leading to mutual recrimination and what the *Times* correspondent later referred to as a 'newspaper war' between the British and Portuguese press, which lasted into February.<sup>40</sup>

The Ultimatum occurred suddenly and Parliament was in recess at the time, so there was little opportunity for opponents to mobilize public opinion. Gladstone waited for over a week before making any comment and then, in a speech at Chester on 22 January 1890, dismissed the matter in four sentences, refusing to 'condemn or even to question' the proceedings of Lord Salisbury.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, the Government moved to make political capital out of the crisis. Even before the actual Ultimatum was delivered, the conservative press had begun to sense an opportunity. On 23 December 1889, the *Daily Telegraph* wrote:

It is, perhaps, fortunate that the missionaries who have done so much good in the Nyassa and Shiré districts are Scotchmen and Presbyterians. The facts of the case, therefore, are well known and thoroughly felt in that part of Great Britain which is most opposed to Lord Salisbury's Administration, and which on other occasions is inspired by party prejudice to attribute to Toryism an excessive eagerness for extended empire. Thus the Prime Minister will find at his back, if he has to adopt a policy of reprisals, a body of the staunchest Gladstonians in the United Kingdom. [...] A Tory Prime Minister and Churchman resenting insults and outrages directed against Presbyterian missions cannot be denounced from all the Dissenting pulpits in the land.<sup>42</sup>

The *Spectator* came to the same conclusion, noting that 'Lord Salisbury has, in fact, a free hand'.<sup>43</sup>

After the Ultimatum, the Liberal Unionist Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Goschen, rammed home the message in a speech on 22 January, quoting from the 'Gladstonian' *United Ireland's* suggestion that the British fleet might be attacked with German torpedoes in the Tagus and continuing, to cheers: 'I commend it to Scotch Radicals and friends of the

<sup>38</sup> *Daily News*, 30 Dec. 1889, p. 6; 13 Feb. 1890, p. 6; *Times*, 14 Feb. 1890, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> *Speaker*, 8 Feb. 1890, p. 134.

<sup>40</sup> *Times*, 28 Feb. 1890, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> *Times*, 23 Jan. 1890, p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 23 Dec. 1889, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> *Spectator*, 11 Jan. 1890, p. 41.

Irish. I commend it to those who, while Home Rulers as regards Ireland, are associated with those missionary enterprises in the centre of Africa.’<sup>44</sup> The electoral dividend was demonstrated in early February at a by-election in Partick near Glasgow, where a pro-government Liberal Unionist was trying to hold the seat against a Gladstonian Liberal backed by prominent missionary supporters. The Gladstonian candidate invited T. P. O’Connor, the editor of the *Star*, to appear on his platform. O’Connor was heckled with cries of ‘Portugal!’ and was obliged to repudiate the attacks on missionaries in the *Star*’s editorials. Against expectations, the Liberal Unionist managed to retain the seat, a result which the *Times* attributed to ‘the resentment of the Scottish electors at the unpatriotic rancour with which some of Mr Gladstone’s Irish and English allies have reviled Lord Salisbury for his firmness in dealing with the Portuguese difficulty’.<sup>45</sup>

Ever since the Ultimatum, writers have criticized Salisbury for his harsh attitude towards Portugal. Even a sympathetic recent biographer refers to the episode as ‘Bullying Portugal’.<sup>46</sup> Possible causes suggested have included the effects of influenza, a wish to humiliate the Portuguese or a desire to resolve the crisis before Parliament met in February.<sup>47</sup> These may well have been contributory factors and Salisbury certainly had no love for Portugal, referring to her in private as ‘a most tiresome little Power’.<sup>48</sup> However, as both Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister at the head of a minority government which was due to face general elections within a couple of years, he was acutely aware of the domestic repercussions of foreign relations. Although strategic and geopolitical concerns were clearly uppermost in what was essentially a diplomatic crisis, the publicity which Salisbury encouraged suggests he was also keeping an eye open for political advantage at home.<sup>49</sup>

Whether the diplomatic dispute worked out quite as Salisbury planned is more debatable. In May 1889, he had met a delegation of prominent Scottish religious leaders who presented an 11,000-strong petition protesting against the proposed treaty negotiated by Harry H. Johnston in Lisbon, which would have placed the Nyasaland missions under Portuguese jurisdiction. He appears to have encouraged this movement to strengthen

<sup>44</sup> *Times*, 23 Jan. 1890, p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 3 Feb. 1890, pp. 8, 12; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 7 Feb. 1890, p. 6; *Times*, 12 Feb. 1890, p. 9.

<sup>46</sup> Roberts, pp. 518–23.

<sup>47</sup> Hammond, p. 129.

<sup>48</sup> Salisbury to Lord Harrowby, quoted in Roberts, p. 520.

<sup>49</sup> This publicity was sometimes tendentious: the officially published correspondence does not contain documents relating to Johnston’s unofficial negotiations in Lisbon in April 1889 and, as the *PMG* pointed out, Salisbury glossed over this episode in the Parliamentary debate on the Ultimatum crisis: 341 *H.L./H.C. Deb.* 3s. 11 Feb. 1890, cols. 34–35; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12 Feb. 1890, p. 2.

his negotiating position by showing the Portuguese that he also had to take account of public opinion.<sup>50</sup> At that time, he had assured the church leaders categorically that the 'suggestion that the Portuguese authorities will lay violent hands upon any of your mission stations seems to me an entirely groundless and impossible hypothesis. I should as soon expect to be told that there was a danger that Portugal would go into Table Bay and annex Cape Town. There is no danger of any such thing.'<sup>51</sup> Both the *Times* and the *Scotsman* reminded Salisbury of these words when the reports from Africa seemed to suggest that Serpa Pinto's expedition was doing precisely that.<sup>52</sup> The anger of the conservative press and the brusqueness of the Ultimatum may partly be explained by the political embarrassment caused by this upset. In the event, however, the outcome of the crisis not only bolstered support for Salisbury in Scotland but drove a temporary wedge between his opponents on the main political issue of the day.

British public opinion as represented in the press was by no means unanimous in its reaction to the Ultimatum. Although the political repercussions were far more serious and long-lasting in Portugal, there were also consequences in Britain. Critics of the Ultimatum were motivated more by opposition to British government policy than by any love or understanding of Portugal. The Ultimatum foreshadowed the Fashoda crisis with France in 1898 and the bitter divisions surrounding the Boer War of 1899–1902, where British Radicals and Irish Nationalists again opposed imperialist expansion at the expense of a white people and the accompanying jingoism of the press. This time, however, the Liberal press was divided and the *Manchester Guardian* in particular, under its editor, C. P. Scott, sided with the opponents of the war.<sup>53</sup> In the case of the Ultimatum crisis, its short duration, the prestige of the missionaries in religious and humanitarian opinion, and the fact that the Portuguese were engaged in a similar imperialist enterprise effectively ruled out the possibility of mobilizing any popular support for Portugal in Britain.

<sup>50</sup> W. P. Livingstone, *A Prince of Missionaries: The Rev. Alexander Hetherwick of Blantyre, Central Africa* (London: James Clarke, [1931?]), pp. 51–52.

<sup>51</sup> *Times*, 18 May 1889, p. 9; *Glasgow Herald*, 18 May 1889, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> *Times*, 17 Dec. 1889, p. 9; 28 Dec. 1889, p. 7; *Scotsman*, 4 Jan. 1890, p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> For press comment on the Fashoda crisis and the Boer War, see M. Hugodot, 'L'opinion publique anglaise et l'affaire de Fachoda', *Revue d'histoire des colonies*, 44 (1957), 113–37; Arthur Davey, *The British Pro-Boers, 1877–1902* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1978), pp. 162–66; John S. Galbraith, 'The Pamphlet Campaign on the Boer War', *Journal of Modern History*, 24 (1952), 111–26; *The Boer War: Direction, Experience and Image*, ed. by John Gooch (London: Frank Cass, 2000); Deian Hopkin, 'Socialism and Imperialism: The ILP Press and the Boer War', in *Impacts and Influences: Essays on Media Power in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by James Curran, Anthony Smith and Pauline Wingate (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 9–26; *The Pro-Boers: The Anatomy of an Antiwar Movement*, ed. by Stephen Koss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. xxx–xxxii; *The South African War Reappraised*, ed. by Donal Lowry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

Nevertheless, while most commentators supported the Government's policy, there was widespread criticism in Britain of the brutal manner in which it was carried out.

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